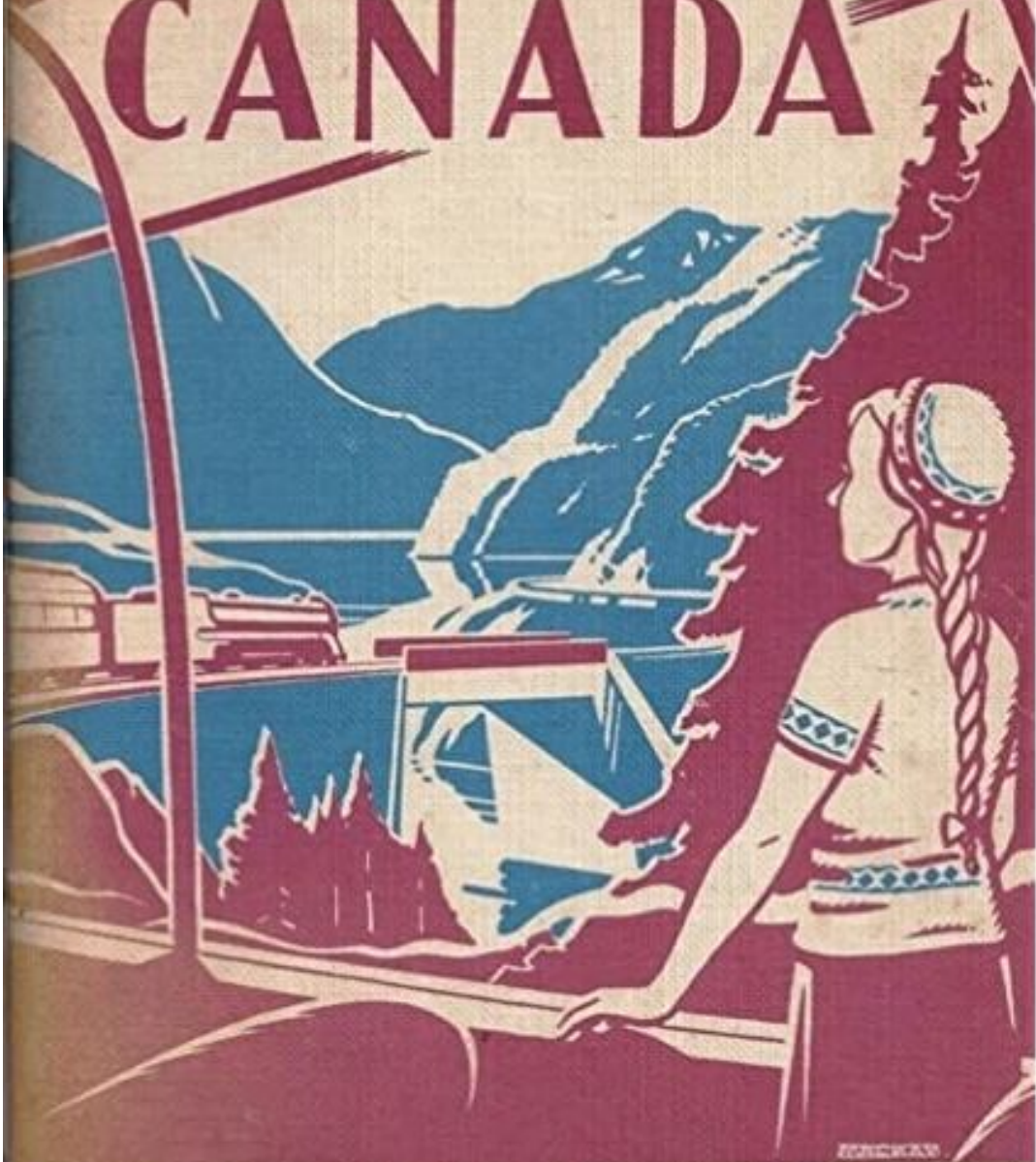


Bess on her own
in
CANADA



EDWARDS

Elinor M. Brent-Dyer

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Bess on Her Own in Canada

By

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

First published by W. & R. Chambers Ltd. in 1951.

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MAP OF WESTERN CANADA



Chapter I. BESS SETS OFF

“Are you sure you can manage, Bess? I don’t like having you go like this, but . . .”

The slim, fifteen-year-old looked down from the height of her five foot six inches into the troubled eyes of her mother, who came just beyond her shoulder. “I’ll say I can! I’d be a disgrace to us all if I couldn’t! Besides, who else is there to go? I don’t see Peter or Stuart managing, do you?”

Mrs Mackinnon gave a worried laugh. “Oh, it can’t be helped; I know that. Just the same, I wish there were anyone else to send. I shan’t have an easy moment until you get back again, so don’t delay unless you just can’t help it.”

Bess tried to look as confident as she could. “Now, Mum, what’s the good of talking like that? I’ve just *got* to go, and that’s all there is to it. Besides, you’ve all the worry you can cope with between poor Dad and the boys. Now,” she went on, changing the subject, “let’s just go over my errand. I’m to go to Victoria to Cousin Angus and tell him what’s happened, and ask if he or one of his boys can come out for the summer and take hold for us. That right?”

Mrs Mackinnon nodded. “That’s right. The thing that worries me so is not having the proper address. I wish Angus had written or had one of the boys write to let us know they were removing. But if they’re still in Victoria you should find them all right.”

“Well, the address business doesn’t make it any easier, but it can’t be helped,” Bess said with easy philosophy. “I expect they meant to write to Dad when they moved, but each one left it to the others and it never got done. Don’t you worry, though. I’ll find the nearest Y.W.C.A. and put up there. Then I’ll go to the Post Office and go through the directory for all the Angus Mackinnons in the city, and ring them if they have the ’phone. If not, I’ll ask the lady superintendent, or warden or whatever she calls herself, if it’s a likely place, and I can’t go far wrong if I do that. Don’t you worry, little Mum! I’ll write you as soon as I get there, and it’s a pretty straight journey so far as that goes—the train to Vancouver City, and then the steamer to Victoria. I’m fifteen, and if I haven’t any sense now, seems to me I never will have. Hello!” she added in a different tone. “What’s that?”

The pair turned to look eastwards along the shining railway lines that stretched as far into the distance as the eye could see. A distant greyish cloud floated up against the pale blue of the sky where the late afternoon sun shone down on the wide prairie lands, now sodden with

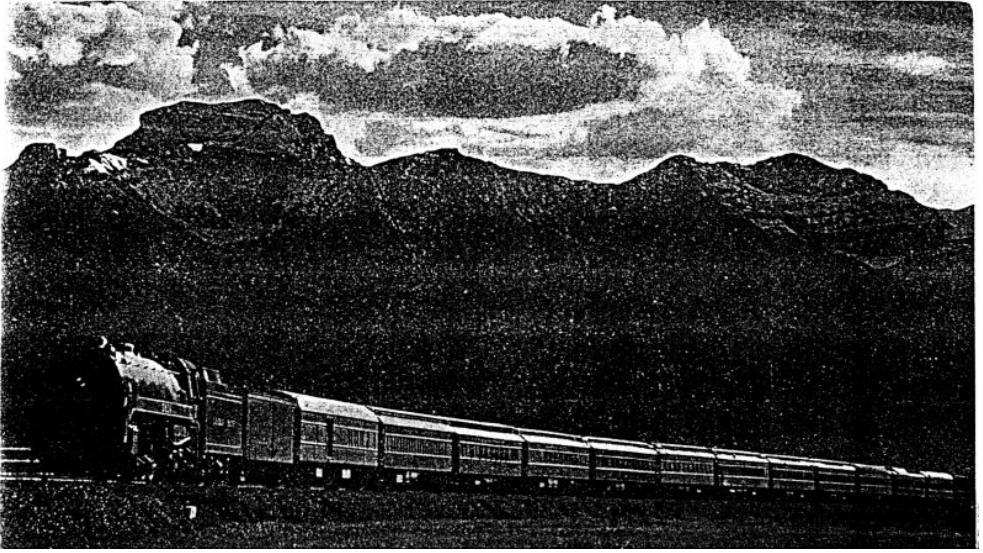
the departing snows of winter. Near the station with its cluster of wooden houses were a few tamarack bushes, forlorn-looking as yet, though another two or three weeks would see them beginning to veil themselves in young green. All the same, it was desolate enough, as the interval between winter and spring must always be in such surroundings.

“Here comes the train!” Bess tugged at the bag strapped over one shoulder. “Where are my grips?” She moved back to the two grip-bags standing behind them, and picked them up. Then she bent to kiss her mother. “Now try not to worry. I’ll let you know what’s happening as soon as ever I can. Send Johnny for the mail in—let me see—five days from now. That’ll be plenty of time for me to get some bearings. And mind you let me know how Dad goes on. Write care of the post office, and I’ll get it, for I’ll be haunting the place each day for news.”

For the first time, Bess’s lips quivered; but she was no baby and she knew her mother had enough on her mind without the additional anxiety of seeing her girl go off on this errand in tears. She gave a little gulp, even as the snorting monster racing along the rails began to slow up before the little station set here in the lonely heart of the prairie, and with a final kiss, and a gay “Be seeing you!” she ran for the steps leading to the nearest car. There was no time to lose, for the train would delay only long enough for her to board it. On the platform, she turned to nod a gallantly smiling goodbye before she passed into the steam-heated car to find a seat. The engine gave a preparatory snort, and then drew out of the station, gathering speed with every turn of the wheels as it once more sped on its way across the prairies, making for Vancouver City on the far side of the great Rockies.

Mrs Mackinnon waved her handkerchief after it as long as her straining eyes could see it; then with a heavy heart she turned to seek the horse and trap which had brought them from their lonely farm where she had left behind two riotous small boys and a husband severely crippled by a fall from a slippery ladder three months ago. She had not ventured to bring the old Ford, for most of the way lay over a mere track, now thick and sticky with mud, and she could not risk being bogged down miles from anywhere. Simon the horse was slow, but he was sure, and a very wise beast into the bargain.

Meanwhile, Bess had found a seat beside a middle-aged lady, and after seeing to the safe stowing of her bags, had settled down for the long journey through the mountains into British Columbia. From Vancouver City she must take one of the steamers that ply between there and Vancouver Island, making for Victoria; which was the last address they had for Cousin Angus Mackinnon. The doctor who had come to her father had told them that he would recover in time from the injury to his spine, but it would be some months before he could hope to leave his bed, and, in the meantime, work on the farm must not stand still. So here she was, off on a hunt for his cousin, to see if that gentleman or one of his five sons would come to them to take charge for the time being.



CANADIAN TRAIN PASSING THROUGH THE ROCKIES

At first she had a little struggle with the tears that would keep pricking at the back of her eyes; but whatever else she did, Bess Mackinnon was not going to cry before a car-load of strangers, so she fought them back, and presently gained the mastery. Then she looked about her. She had two days at least in this train before she reached Vancouver City, so it might be as well to have some idea of her companions.

In all her fifteen years, Bess had never been farther away from home than the thirty odd miles that divided the farm from the nearest small town, and inwardly she shrank from the prospect of having to scour a big city like Victoria all alone. Only the direst necessity could have persuaded her mother to let her make this journey; but when the letter to Cousin Angus appealing for help in this crisis had been returned to them with a curt "Not known here" stamped across it, there had seemed nothing else to do. Spring was close at hand, and with it would come the rush of work always to be expected in the grain-growing country of the prairie province. Mrs Mackinnon and Bess herself would have been prepared to work their hardest, but even with the help of Johnny Somreys, the hired man, there would be far, far more than they could tackle. The neighbours would have done what they could, for neighbours count for a great deal in Canada, especially on the plains where they may be few and far between, but their help would be needed just when they themselves could least be spared from home. Bess and her parents knew that they *must* have help. When the harvesters came, they would need a man in charge. Johnny was well-meaning enough, but he could not take the lead among the men, sometimes rough fellows, who worked in the harvest fields. Therefore, as soon as Mr Mackinnon's first severe pain had subsided, and he was able to plan, he had asked his wife to write to his cousin, and the returned letter had been a dreadful disappointment.

Mr and Mrs Mackinnon and Bess had talked it over when the two small boys were safely in bed, and it had been Bess who had found what seemed to be the only way out of the difficulty. She insisted that she should be allowed to go to Victoria to hunt for the missing

cousins, pointing out that it would be the quickest way of finding them, and that there was no one else who could go.

“You must stay at home, Mum, to look after Dad and the boys,” she had said. “I could fix the boys, but Dad is beyond me at present. Besides, you’re ‘the Missus’ to Johnny. He thinks of me as still a kid. And you couldn’t send *him*. He’d be worse than no use at all.”

It had taken several evenings of talking before she had brought them round to her point of view, but she had done it at last, and here she was, on her way to a part of her great country that she had never seen before, to look for cousins she had never known except by a few letters. It was a state of affairs to have daunted most girls of her age. Bess, however, was a self-reliant young lady, and had her head well screwed on, so they had given in to her at last, as it seemed the only thing to do, and now she had to make her plans as best she might.

The early part was simple enough; but suppose Cousin Angus and his family had left the city, and do one knew where they had gone, what should she do next? Go to the post office and make inquiries, she supposed. The Mackinnons were none of them good correspondents, and in any case they were only cousins. Bess could well believe that if Cousin Angus had decided to leave Victoria, it might be some time before he thought of letting his cousin Robert know. Mrs Angus had died some years before, and there were only sons in the family. Judging from her own small brothers, Bess did not imagine that they were likely to bother much with letter-writing.

“It’s a real adventure!” she said aloud to herself when she had reached this point in her thoughts. “I may have to go goodness knows where before I’m done!”

The lady sharing her seat jumped. “Did you speak, my dear?” she asked, and her accent gave her away at once. She was English.

Bess turned to her with the ready friendliness of the Canadian. “Well, I guess I was thinking aloud just then,” she said frankly. “I was just thinking that if I couldn’t find my father’s Cousin Angus in Victoria I might have to do quite a bit of touring around before I did get hold of him.”

The lady’s eyes were on the long pigtail dangling down Bess’s back, and she gasped. “Do you mean—my dear, at *your* age!” she protested. “Surely you can’t be meaning to travel about by yourself?”

“Well,” said Bess, “it seems that’s all there is for it.” Then, seeing the interest in the lady’s face, she explained briefly the family problem.

The lady was full of sympathy for her, but she still seemed to be unable to understand how any parents could let a girl of Bess’s age go off on such a vague chase all by herself. She explained that she herself was on her way to visit a married sister on Vancouver Island. She insisted on giving Bess the name and address, and begged her, if Cousin Angus were not to be found in Victoria, to come to them for help and advice.

“I’m sure my brother-in-law, Mr Pottinger, will be delighted to give you any help he can,” she said. “I am Miss Andrews, by the way.”

“And I’m Bess Mackinnon,” Bess informed her. “It’s very good of you, Miss Andrews. If I find myself in difficulties, I’ll surely do as you say. I know Mum would feel much happier about me then.”

During the day they became quite friendly, and Bess learned that Miss Andrews had spent her life taking care first of her parents, and then of an invalid aunt. Now she had no further ties in England, and as the aunt had left her some money so that she would be independent,

she had yielded to her only sister's appeals, and agreed to come to Canada for a year's visit to see how she liked the life, with the idea of settling down with the Pottingers if she felt like it.

"Well, I surely hope you will," Bess said cordially when she had heard all this. "I'm free to bet you do like our country, and Vancouver Island is a fine place from all I've heard of it."

"Well, we shall see. I am not young, and really, I feel you need youth on your side to make such a big change as this would be," Miss Andrews replied.

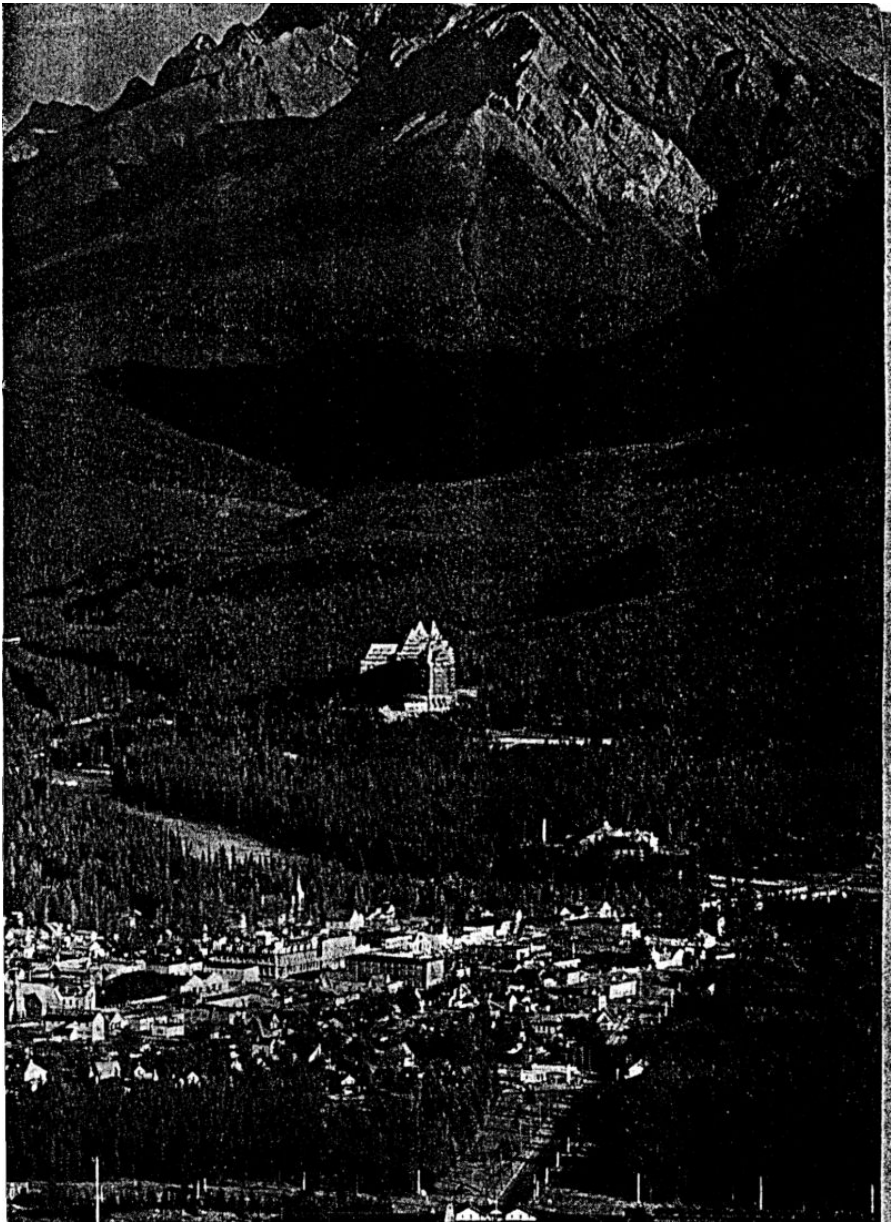
She seemed to have taken a fancy to the girl, and Bess, for all her pluck, was quite glad to be with her. It was less lonely that way. Miss Andrews had lived near Windsor, and had often seen the Royal family. Bess, like most Canadians, took a deep interest in them, especially the two Princesses, and she plied Miss Andrews with eager questions about them. When night came, and it was time to part, they were fast friends, and Bess's last thought as she curled up in her blankets was that if only Mum could know about Miss Andrews, she would be saved a great deal of worry.

"I'll write tomorrow, and maybe I could mail it at one of the stations on the way," she thought drowsily as she closed her eyes and fell fast asleep.

Chapter II. THROUGH THE ROCKIES.

When they awoke next morning, Bess cried out with delight after her first peep through the window. During the night, they had left behind the wide, spreading plains, and were now among the foothills of the Rockies. This was her first sight of any mountains, and it seemed to her as if she could never see enough of them.

She had missed the sight of dawn over the rolling hills, and already they had passed through Morley, and were heading for Banff, the big vacation centre of the southern Canadian Rockies, where tourists from all over the world arrive for holiday-making of all kinds. In the summer, the visitor can climb, fish, go swimming, or enjoy the hot springs baths, both medicated and fresh water. In the winter, the sports are ski-ing, skating, and tobogganing, while as an extra, there are trips by dog-team into the woods where, under the trees, the snow takes on a strange green tint. In the open spaces it makes a white world, sparkling under the winter sun, and dappled with shadows of palest mauve, purple, blue, and indigo.



National Film Board

BANFF, ALBERTA

Part of the way, the line ran past a pine forest, with the trunks rising up the slopes in gloomy splendour, while at the other side a river, brown with flood waters, fought its way down between the steep walls of its banks, its churning eddies crested with a yellowish yeasty foam.

“Ah,” said a tall man sitting across the aisle, “you ought to see this in early summer when the grass is golden under the sun, and the wild flowers make it look the dandiest patchwork quilt in the world. You’d be thrilled with it then all right.”

“I’m thrilled with it now,” Bess told him in her frank, friendly way.

“What is the river’s name?” she asked.

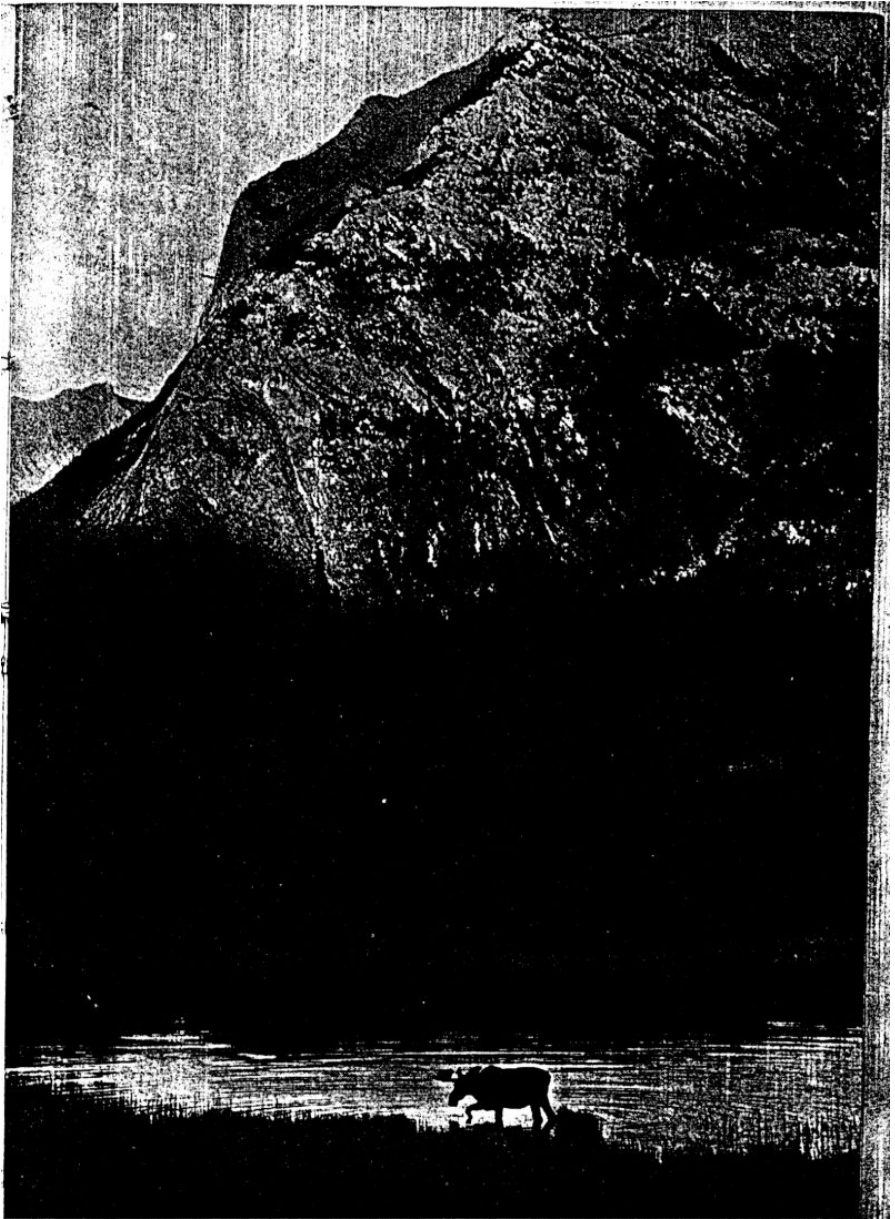
“That’s the Bow River.” Suddenly he pointed. “See there! There—among those rushes!”

Bess looked eagerly. A huge bull moose with a spread of noble horns had just lifted its head and was watching the train as it roared past. “How wonderful!” Bess exclaimed. “He didn’t seem a bit afraid, either!”

Her new acquaintance chuckled. “I guess not. Those fellows are accustomed to trains by now.”

Bess nodded her thanks to him, and then turned to speak to Miss Andrews. After breakfast, however, nothing would serve her but to go to the observation car so that she might see everything she could. In awed silence she gazed upwards at the flashing peaks catching the morning sun. Eddies of early morning mists still floated round the lower slopes, so that the solitary heights took on the appearance of another world. Bess gazed her fill in silence, Miss Andrews at her side being no less awed.

The call down the car of “Banff—Banff is the next stop!” sent some of the passengers scurrying to collect hand-baggage in readiness, and Bess and Miss Andrews were nearly alone to see delightedly the animal paddocks where buffalo, elk, big-horn sheep, and Rocky Mountain goats roam about in complete freedom.



National Film Board

A BULL MOOSE

The engine drew up at the platform with a mighty snorting, and the travellers bound for winter sports poured out of the cars, to be met by the smartly uniformed chauffeurs of hotel buses. Then the train was off again, and as Miss Andrews confessed to feeling chilly, Bess went with her to their seats, where they sat looking out of the windows and chatting. To the south of Banff, they could see Mount Rundle; while to the north stood the grey Cascade

Mountain. Farther on they saw the queer, wavy ridge of Sawback, with snow-crowned Mount Massive behind it. Then, between, there came into view the Vermilion Lakes, with their red waters, through which meanders the lazy river which provides a strange contrast with its rich translucent green. So up, up, up, until they reached the spiral tunnels of the famous Kicking Horse Pass, with its great rock said to resemble a restive horse, and which has given its name to the Pass.

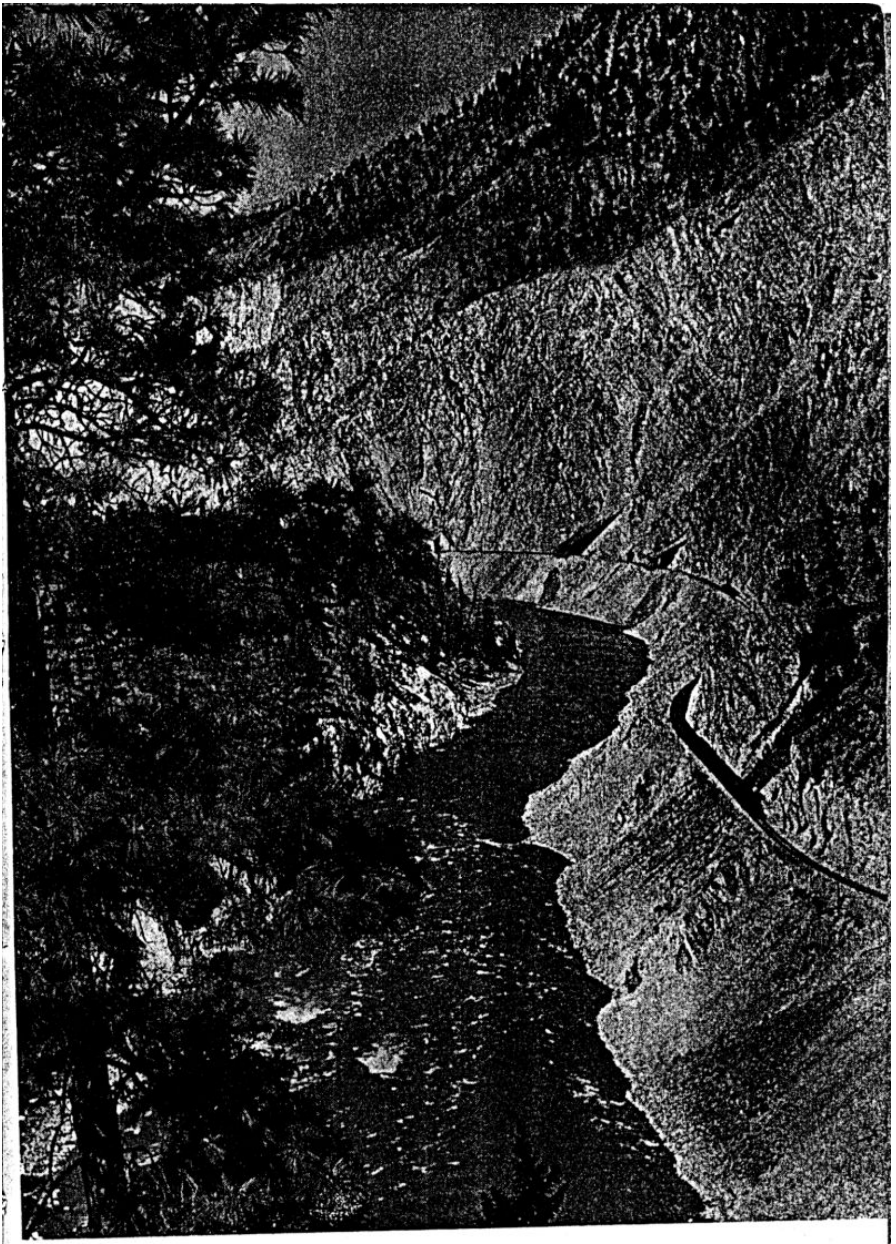
By this time, dusk was falling, and they could see only dimly, for the moon had not yet risen. The lights in the cars had been switched on, and Bess and Miss Andrews turned away from the windows at long last, and began to chat again.

“Say,” Bess asked impulsively, “what do you think of Canada, Miss Andrews? You’ve seen quite a good deal of it now.”

Miss Andrews looked thoughtful. “Briefly put, very large, very lovely in some ways, and—very empty, except in places,” she said.

Bess considered. “Well, I suppose you might call our prairies empty,” she agreed. “Why, our nearest neighbours live twenty-two miles off. In Ontario, though, and the Maritimes, the country is pretty full. The cities aren’t exactly empty, either.”

“I know,” Miss Andrews said. “Perhaps it’s because I come from a small country where we reckon the population of our big towns by the hundred thousand that it seems empty to me—that, and the fact that at home, except in a very few places, you rarely get away from the universal sign of man’s habitation. I mean, smoke.”



National Film Board

THOMPSON RIVER CANYON

“Our teacher told me that one reason why we haven’t many towns in the prairies is the lack of water,” Bess said. “We have to sink wells sometimes for hundreds of feet to get it. Where *we* live there aren’t any lakes or big rivers, and we don’t get so much rain either. Teacher told us that was because the winds from the Atlantic drop their moisture over the

Maritimes and the east coast, and are almost dry when they reach us. The Pacific winds are dry, too, because the Rockies bar the way. Luckily, we do have our snows in winter; only, when the thaws come, the water sinks fast into the ground, especially where it has been used for grain. That's why many of the farms around are being planted with trees in places, because the trees give shade so that the land won't dry too quickly. The roots help to keep the water near the surface for a while, too, and when we get the awful winds from the north the trees act as wind-breaks."

"That's a very good thing," Miss Andrews said meditatively. "They will help to keep the winds from blowing away the good top soil."

"Oh, I know a bit about that," Bess told her. "Did you know that someone has invented a new cultivator which stirs the top soil and piles up the earth in little ridges so the wind can drive off less dust than if the ground were level? It puts the weeds and rubbish on top, too, and that helps to keep the moisture in the ground. We haven't one yet, of course; but one of our neighbours has, and he says it does fine work and will soon pay for itself."

"I hadn't heard of it," Miss Andrews said with interest. "I should imagine that the inventor of such a machine will have earned the heartfelt thanks of every farmer who uses it. I think such a man has served his generation better than the inventor of the most powerful bomb in the world."

"That's what Dad says," Bess assented.

"What does your father grow?" Miss Andrews asked presently.

"Oh, wheat, of course. Sask. is one of the wheat Provinces. But we have some cows, and a few sheep, and Mum and I have a vegetable garden. That's because the Government have asked farmers to go in for such things a little as well as having most of their acreage under wheat—or barley—or oats. You see, if it's a bad grain year—well, that's just too bad for the man who has all his land under one crop. If you have a cow or two, and some sheep and vegetables, you can manage to make out till the next harvest. If you've nothing but the grain, well, you go pretty short of some things."

Miss Andrews listened to her talk, fascinated by the common sense shown by this brown-eyed schoolgirl. Bess, however, had been taken into the family councils very early, and was grown-up in many ways.

When the moon had risen, they wrapped up, and went to the observation car once more, and Miss Andrews gazed in silent awe and wonder at the magnificent scenery through which they were passing as the train made its way steadily to the west. Indeed, she could have stayed there most of the night, but Bess began to yawn, so they withdrew to seek their sleepers, and when they awoke next morning, it was to find that they were running through the Fraser Valley, with New Westminster the next stop, and were due in Vancouver City about 8 a.m.

"The boat for Victoria leaves at 9.30," Bess said as, breakfast over, they sat looking out of the windows at as much of the landscape as they could, for a wild rainstorm that came lashing down in a silver mist hid most of the surrounding country. "We should reach Victoria round about 1.45 p.m. I'm looking forward to that part of the trip. The nearest I've ever been to the sea has been a lake. I imagine I've a treat coming to me when I do see it."

Miss Andrews smiled. "I hope it will be a treat," she said. "You'll enjoy it if only it isn't rough. With a four hours crossing, I should think it quite possible to have an unpleasant time if it is stormy."

"Oh, I think I ought to be a good enough sailor," Bess said confidently. "Anyway, it isn't exactly a *crossing*. We hunted it up on the map when we talked it over, and the steamer runs

right down between the coasts, and outside a whole lot of small islands before it reaches Victoria Harbour. If only this rain would stop, we would have a fine view.”

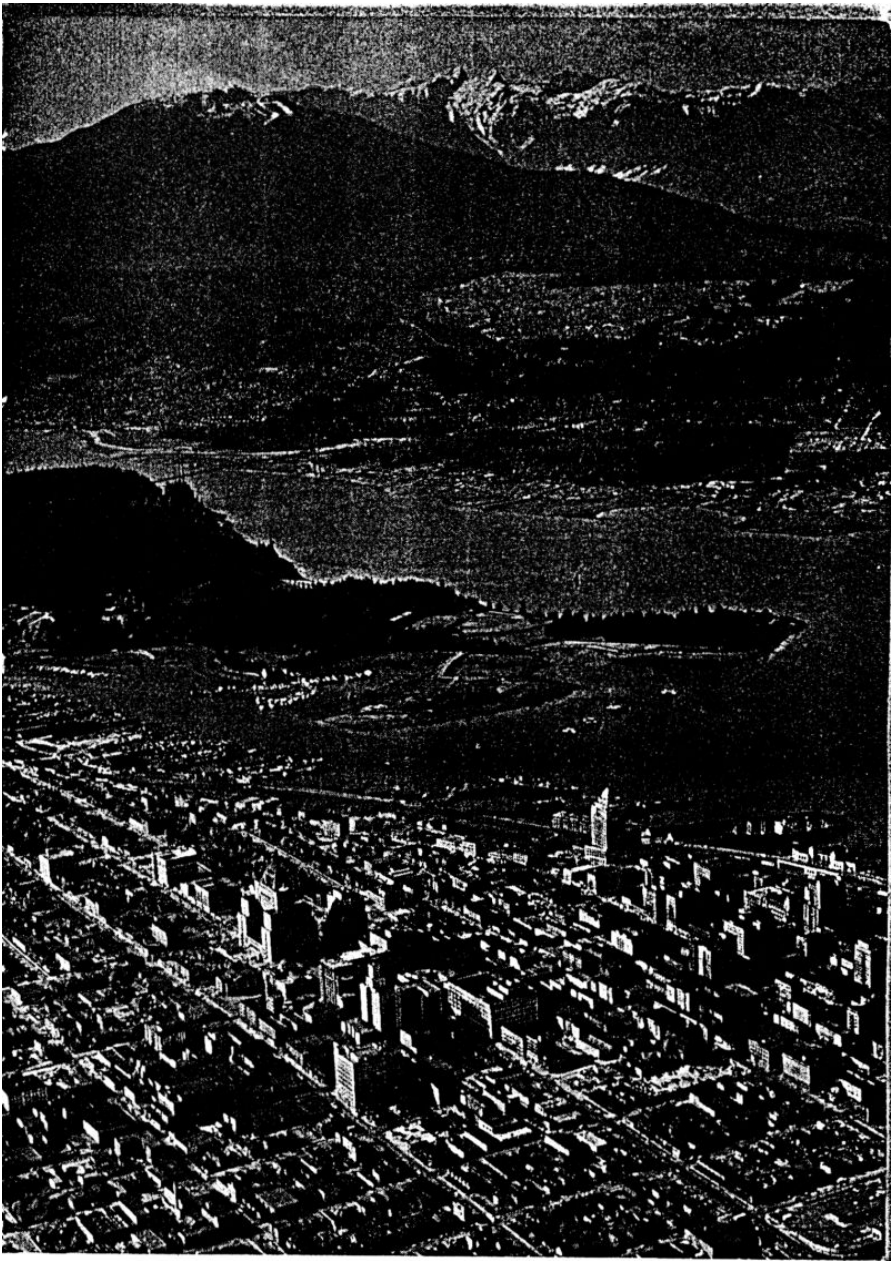
The train pulled in to Vancouver City on time, and when they had collected their baggage, Miss Andrews suggested that they should find somewhere to have coffee before they boarded the steamer. Bess was quite agreeable, and by the time they left the milk bar where they had found their coffee, the rain had ceased, and the sun was out, drying the streets with the help of a fresh breeze.

It was the first time Bess had ever been in a city of this size, and she gazed round with wide eyes at all she saw, though she held her tongue. Miss Andrews guessed what she was feeling, however, and wondered to herself how the girl was going to manage her quest when they reached Victoria. She was more than ever glad that she had made Bess promise that, in the event of her not finding her cousins there, she would come to the Pottingers for advice.

“It’s all very well knowing that she is a steady, reliable girl,” the kindly lady thought as they made their way to the quay, “but she is only a child, when all’s said and done, and hundreds of miles away from home. We must do what we can for her if need should arise.”

By this time they had reached the place where the steamer was waiting, and in very little time, they had boarded her. Twenty minutes later, the cables holding her to shore were cast off, and with a loud hooting the *Princess Elizabeth* slowly swung round, and began making her way out of the harbour, claimed by Canadians to be second only to Sydney Harbour, Australia, for beauty.

Bess was surprised to find how warm it was. In British Columbia, spring comes much earlier than it does on the prairies, especially in the south, and where Bess had left mud and slush, here she found everything already green with the promise of spring.



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VANCOUVER FROM THE AIR

Once they were out in the Strait, however, the breeze coming from the ocean made them glad of their wraps as the *Princess Elizabeth*, meeting the swell running up from Juan de Fuca Strait, heaved gaily over the blue waters, while the waves tossed foamy white crests which

slapped the steamer's sides. If she had not been so thrilled by her first sight of the sea, there is no telling how Bess might have felt, for the water was anything but smooth. Luckily for her, however, her excitement settled her stomach, and Miss Andrews, herself an excellent sailor, was glad to see that the girl's colour only deepened beneath the whip of the wind, and her eyes sparkled as she looked excitedly from side to side, calling her companion's attention to one thing after another—the indented coastlines—the sea-birds that flapped round the vessel—the flash of the sunlight on the swinging waters—the other boats of various kinds and sizes that they passed. It was all so new to her, and she was enjoying it so much, that she almost forgot her errand for the time.

At last they swept round the last of the Canadian islets which guard the coast of Vancouver Island here, and with a grand swerve, sailed into Victoria Harbour, and up to the quayside. There, amid the throng awaiting the steamer's arrival, Miss Andrews espied her sister and brother-in-law. Quickly she turned to Bess.

"My sister and her husband are there," she said hurriedly. "I know you want to set out on your errand as quickly as possible, my dear; but please wait first till we can ask Mr Pottinger if he has heard anything of your cousins. He is in business in Victoria, you know, though they live outside the city. He may quite well know how you can best reach them, and it may prove quicker in the end."

"Very well," Bess agreed. "It's good of you to bother about me like this, Miss Andrews. My folk will have plenty of thanks for you when I get home again and tell them how kind you've been to me."

There was no time for more, for already the steamer had stopped, and the gangways were being lowered. Followed by the girl, Miss Andrews disembarked, and was seized at the earliest possible moment by her sister, who hugged her excitedly. Mr Pottinger and Bess stood to one side, but it was only for a minute or two. Then Miss Andrews turned to receive Mr Pottinger's equally hearty, though quieter welcome. That over, she laid a hand on Bess's arm, and drew her forward.

"This is Bess Mackinnon," she said. "She has come in search of her cousin Mr Angus Mackinnon. Bess, these are Mr and Mrs Pottinger." Then, as the Pottingers welcomed Bess, she added, "Mrs Mackinnon's letter to their cousin has been returned, so Bess has come to find him. Frank," she turned to Mr Pottinger, "I wonder if you know anything about him?"

"Know anything about Angus Mackinnon? I'll say I do!" Mr Pottinger ejaculated. "You're rather behind the fair, young lady. Angus Mackinnon—that is, if you're after Angus Mackinnon the exporter—had a bad illness two years ago, and the doctors advised him to give up his business, or, rather, leave it in the hands of young Angus. He's up in the Okanagan country now, living with Ian, who went in for fruit-farming. If that's the man you want, you'll have to go back the way you came to Vancouver City, and go from there to Kelowna. You'll get word of them there."

Bess's face fell. All this journey, and now she had to go back! Mrs Pottinger saw it, and her warm heart opened at once.

"Yes, she must certainly do that—but not today," she said. "You're coming home with us for today, Bess. Tomorrow my husband will take you across and put you on the train for Kelowna. Today you're coming home with us, and having a bath, which I'm sure you'll want after the long railway journey, and a day's quiet. Don't object, please! I'm sure your mother would say it was the best thing to do. Frank, collect the baggage and bring it to the auto while I take these people and get them settled. Only half an hour, Margie, and we'll be home and

having a good meal. Then we can talk things over with Bess, and while she has a look round Wenda—that's our village—you and I can have a chat. Come along—come along!" Bess found herself being led willy-nilly across the quay to a roomy car, and before she knew where she was, the baggage had been stowed away, Mr Pottinger had taken the wheel, and they were running through the streets of Victoria, headed for the country.

Chapter III. OFF TO THE OKANAGAN

“Goodbye, Bess, goodbye! Don’t forget we’re expecting you to come to us for a little vacation once the harvest’s over, if you can be spared from home. We’ll be looking forward to having you!”

“Goodbye, my dear. Please send me a line as soon as you find your cousin, and another when you have reached home again, so that I know you are safe. I hope you will find your father has made great progress while you’ve been away.”

“Oh, I will, Miss Andrews. Thank you for all your kindness, everyone. Goodbye—goodbye!” Bess hung out of the car window, waving frantically as Mr Pottinger started up the car, and they moved off on the next stage of her quest. When the house was out of sight round a curve of the road, she sank back in her seat with a little sigh. Then she turned to give her host a grin which he answered with another.

“Pity you couldn’t have stayed a bit,” he remarked as he deftly steered the car to join the stream of traffic that was racing down the highroad to the city.

Bess turned a shocked face to him. “Oh, I couldn’t do that! My job is to find Cousin Angus and fix up with him or one of the boys to come to our place to take charge.”

He laughed. “I should think I know that! You questioned me hard enough last night. Well, I hope you prove successful.”

“I ought to after all your kindness,” she replied. “You’ve made it much easier for me. Maybe I’d have had some trouble finding out about them if you hadn’t been able to tell me straight off just where Cousin Angus is.”

“Not you! You’d have found the office—why, I’d forgotten! It’s just come back to me that young Angus went off to Australia before Christmas to find out what the prospects were for opening a branch office in Sydney, and he won’t be back till the summer. You’re right, things mightn’t have been all that easy. I doubt if young Angus’s partner could have told you much; He might not have even been there.”

“There’s one thing I don’t understand,” Bess told him. “Why didn’t the folk at the office send on the letter to Kelowna?”

“Probably it never reached the office. How was it addressed?”

Bess stared. “Why, to ‘Mr A. Mackinnon, 1255c, King’s Road, Victoria, B.C.,’ of course. That was his home address.”

“There you are then. When old Angus—not that he’s really old, though; about my own age, I should say—well, when he gave up the business, he also gave up the flat where he and young Angus had been living ever since his wife died. The boy went to a hotel, and his father, as I’ve said, joined Ian somewhere up in the Okanagan. That was two years ago. That flat may have changed hands a dozen times since then. Probably no one round there remembers who had the flat all that time back!”

“I see. It certainly has been a muddle all through,” Bess sighed. Then she brightened up. “Anyway, I’m on the right road now. I can’t begin to tell you how grateful I am to you folk.”

“Ah, forget it!” he said hastily. “It isn’t likely any of us would see a youngster like you in a mess of that kind without trying to help.”

Seeing that he meant this, Bess gave up trying to thank him for all the kindness she had met with among them, and devoted herself to taking in as much as she could see of the great

western city which they were just reaching. Mr Pottinger pointed out the Legislative Buildings to her as they turned down a street and reached the harbour. Here, after Mr Pottinger had garaged the car, they went immediately to the boat. Twenty minutes later, it steamed out of the harbour.



It was a fine day, with a very light breeze, so that the trip up the Strait of Georgia was a very smooth one. A night's rest in a comfortable bed, following on a luxurious bath and shampoo, together with a change of clothes, had made Bess feel fit for anything, and she watched the changing scene with eyes that sparkled with interest. Not that she had forgotten the sad state of things at home. That always lay at the back of her mind like a heavy shadow; but it wasn't in schoolgirl nature not to enjoy such a day and such very new experiences. Mr Pottinger was delighted with the intelligent interest she showed, and pointed out one object of interest after another as the boat steadily ploughed her way through the pale blue waters of the strait.

When they reached Vancouver City, he took complete charge, making all inquiries for her. After a little, he came back to announce that a train was leaving for the Kelowna district in about two hours' time, so he proposed to give her a good meal and then show her a little of the great port. It could not be very much, as they must not risk her losing the train, but he would do what he could; and when, as they hoped, she came to Wenda for a vacation, they would have a day or two visiting Vancouver City so that she might really see it.

"If I can come," Bess said soberly. While he had been gone, she had had time to feel again the tremendous importance of her errand, and she was wondering how things were going at home.

He glanced quickly at her. "Worrying about your mail from home?" he said cheerily. "Don't do that. One of us will go and make inquiries at the post office for you, and as soon as you can let us have an address, your letters will be forwarded to you. You're likely to be in the Okanagan a day or two, anyhow—quite long enough to get your mail safely. Now we'll turn

in here and see what they can do for us in the way of a meal. Then we'll have a quick look at the shopping centre. After that, it'll mean the station. As for your vacation, why, if you can't come this year, you'll maybe come next. I hope so, anyway."

Bess cheered up under his kindness, and was able to do justice to the excellent meal set before them. Then came a quick trip round one or two of the main shops, where Mr Pottinger provided her with a couple of new books—a great treat, since there was little money to spare for story-books at the farm—and the biggest box of candies Bess had ever owned. Finally they reached the station, where he put her on the train with strict injunctions to telegraph to Wenda at once if she found herself in any difficulty.

"I'll come to you myself if it's possible," he promised her, "so you needn't feel far away from all your friends. If I can't, my wife or sister-in-law will come. By the way, Marjorie is writing to your mother today, so don't you worry about that until you've got to Ian's place. It's quite likely you won't have time till then. Now remember, you've promised to let us know how you get on. Give my regards to your cousin when you meet him, won't you?"

"I will," Bess promised. "And once more, thanks for everything. You'll be hearing from Mum soon, I expect—Dad, too, if he feels well enough."

"Time you were taking your seat," he interrupted her. "They'll be pulling out in a minute or two now. Off you go, and let me see you settled!"

Bess bade him goodbye, entered the car, and sat down in the seat he had already chosen for her. He stood under the window, smiling at her and waving as the wheels began to revolve, and the train, after a wild screech, moved majestically away. She waved back to him gratefully and then sat back as he passed out of sight. She was on her way once more, and this time with a definite goal.

She had nearly four hundred miles to travel, and knew that she could not reach the Kelowna district till between eight and nine next day. There was no pleasant Miss Andrews to share her seat this time. She had it to herself at present. In front of her sat two big, elderly men, talking earnestly, and the seat across the aisle was occupied by a discontented-looking young woman who cast one glance at her, and then turned her back, so that it was clear no companionship could be expected in that quarter.

"Oh well, who cares?" thought Bess, settling herself more comfortably. She gazed out of the window at the suburbs of the city through which they were passing, particularly interested in the Chinese with their big straw hats, hard at work in the gardens bordering the railroad. "What a huge place Vancouver City is! I shouldn't care to live here—nor in Victoria, for that matter, though Wenda is a pet of a place! I do love the Pottingers' house, too—so easy to work! I wonder how long it will be before they bring electricity our way. It would be a boon to us! Life would be all that much easier if we hadn't oil lamps to clean, and could have a vacuum like Mrs Pottinger's to take up the dust and crumbs. Then there's the iron, and all the other gadgets! We shan't know ourselves!"

By this time, they had left the outskirts of the city, and were speeding through farmland, varied by clumps of trees which grew ever more closely together as they went on, until finally they were running through forest. When she tired of looking out of the window, Bess turned to her books for amusement, and by the time she was ready to seek her sleeping-berth, she was halfway through the first.

Bess was young and healthy, so despite all the trouble on her shoulders, she was able to fall asleep almost as soon as she lay down. When she awoke, it was to find that they had left the forests behind them, and were now in the beautiful Okanagan Valley, running smoothly

along between orchards which, early in the year as it was, were green with young leaves, though no blossom was to be seen as yet. A bright sun shone down from a cloudless sky, and then Bess gave a little cry of delight as a sudden curve in the line gave a glimpse of water flashing in the sunlight. She glanced at the little old wristwatch her father had handed to her before she set off, with instructions to be sure that she altered it when necessary. She gave an exclamation as she saw that it was nearly half past seven, and she ought to reach her destination in about an hour's time. Quickly she set to work to make herself ready for the day. She brushed and combed her hair, plaiting it with deft fingers. She put on her clothes quickly, and washed face and hands. Then, refreshed and ready, returned to her seat in the day car. She looked quite calm and self-contained, but inwardly, she was feeling very excited, and a little trepidation mingled with her excitement. What was Cousin Angus like and what would he say in reply to her request?

It really seemed a very short time before the train rolled into the station, and she stood up, picking up her bags, and left the car with a stream of other people. She gave up her ticket and left the station. Then she stood looking about her rather anxiously. She knew exactly what to do. She had to find the post office, and inquire if they could tell her where Mr Ian Mackinnon's ranch was. If they could not, then she must seek out the police station and apply there. The trouble was, she had no idea where either was to be found. Once she knew where the ranch was, she felt she ought to have little difficulty. She would ask them the best way of reaching it, and if it meant travelling all day and arriving late at night, she had promised the anxious Miss Andrews that she would try to break her journey halfway and stay somewhere for the night. She must now find out what was the best thing to do. What she did not know yet was that as soon as he had seen her off, Mr Pottinger had called the police at Kelowna on the long distance telephone, and had explained matters to them. They had assured him that no one called Mackinnon lived in their area so far as they knew, but they would make inquiries in the meantime, and be ready for the girl when she arrived.

As she stood outside the station looking round, a kindly woman noticed her, and guessing that she did not know the place, came to ask if she could help in any way.

"Well, if you could tell me how to find the post office," Bess said with her frank smile, "I guess I could manage after that."

"Why, of course I will," her new friend replied. "Come along! It's not so very far." Then, as they turned, she added with a gesture to the wheel basket she was pushing, "Why not put your bags on this? I expect you'll be tired if you're just off the train. Have you come far?"

"From Victoria yesterday morning," Bess said as she gratefully squeezed one bag into the basket, and then picked up the other, saying that she could manage it quite well.

"My! That's quite a journey! Well, we turn here."

Escorted by the lady, who gave her name as Mrs Parkinson, Bess went to the post office, only to find that wherever her cousins were, it was not here. Nor could the authorities tell her where to seek them.

"What will you do now?" Mrs Parkinson asked.

"Go to the police," Bess said with determined cheerfulness.

"Come along then. They'll help you all right."

She was quite correct. The police had made inquiries, and had found that Ian Mackinnon's ranch was right at the other end of the lake, near Lake Vaseaux. Bess must take the lake ferry to Penticton. Arrived there, she was to go to an address which they gave her, and someone would run her out to Fair Havens, the Mackinnon ranch.

“They told me that my friend, Mr Pottinger, got them on long distance yesterday,” she informed Mrs Parkinson with the friendly frankness that was so much a part of her. “They’ve found out all they can, and this morning they tried to ring Fair Havens, but they couldn’t get any answer. I expect everyone was out at work in the orchards. Anyhow, it’ll be pretty plain sailing now. I can manage to get to Penticton all right, and I’ll soon find the address they’ve given me. After that it’s just a motor ride.”

Mrs Parkinson nodded. “Well, you’ve just missed a ferry, so you’d best come home with me for dinner. You’ve plenty of time. Then you’ll have something in your stomach, anyway, for the trip up the lake. Of course you must come! I’ve two girls about your age, and I wouldn’t like to think of either of them making a trip like yours and landing in a strange place, with no one to give them bite or sup. Come along!”

She would take no refusal, so Bess gave way, and went with her to the pretty bungalow where two girls of sixteen and eighteen came to the door to greet them. Mrs Parkinson introduced them as Pat and Vera, and they took Bess off to the fresh-looking bedroom they shared to tidy up before they all sat down to a bountiful dinner. They were full of friendly interest in her journey and its reason, and then at last Bess was aboard the ferry, heading for Penticton, sixty-nine miles away.



National Film Board

LAKE OKANAGAN AND APPLE ORCHARDS

Chapter IV. FAIR HAVENS AT LAST!

Much later on, someone asked Bess what she thought of Lake Okanagan. After thinking for a minute, she replied, "I think it's the bluest thing I've ever seen. You can't get a word blue enough to describe it."

She revelled in it as the ferry chugged its way up the lake. It was now the end of March; the next day would be the first of April. At her prairie home the last traces of winter would still be in evidence but here it was early spring. The sun shone down gaily, and though it was breezy, it was warm enough for her to sit on deck, wrapped in her cloth coat, with her head bared, and the wind running light fingers through her hair. In the still lake waters near the shore, the cliffs and hills were mirrored with a clearcut loveliness that made her almost catch her breath, and as her beauty-loving eyes scanned the landscape, she exclaimed aloud, "This is one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen in my life!"

An elderly man standing near, hands in pockets, pipe in mouth, and fine white head as bare to the breezes as her own, heard her, and turned with a smile. "That's good hearing," he said heartily. "I'm by way of thinking the same thing myself. I'm seventy tomorrow—an April Fool, you see!—and though I've visited a good many lovely places in my life, I always come back here with a feeling of satisfaction."

"I can believe that," Bess told him thoughtfully.

"Yes; it's a good place to live in," he assented. "This your first visit to the Okanagan?"

Bess laughed. "Until a few days ago, I'd never been out of Saskatchewan in my life—and I shall be sixteen in October."

"Until I was twenty, I'd never left England," he replied; "Then my father died, and we boys had to turn out. My eldest brother was in a bank, and our mother went to live with him, taking the two youngest with her. The brother next me had had the offer of a job in an office in New Westminster, so he proposed that I should come with him. Office life wasn't my idea at all, but I came, and two months after we reached New Westminster, I fell in with a man who was taking up a lot here and going in for fruit-farming. He asked me if I'd join him. *Join him!* You couldn't see my heels for dust when I left the city. He was older than I, and had had some experience on a fruit farm down east. I stayed with him for five years. Then I pushed out, bought a lot of my own, and since that day I've never looked back."

Bess gave him a look of keen interest. "Is your farm near here?" she asked. "What do you grow?"

"Fruit *ranch*," he corrected her. "My place is near Paradise Ranch—over yonder." He waved his hand towards the eastern shore. "As for what we grow, well, peaches mainly. Oh, apples and plums as well; but mainly peaches." He pointed to the hills, sloping upwards from the lake in broad terraces. "Most of our farms are on those 'benches' as we call them. I've been in Italy and seen the same sort of thing there, though their benches are narrower than ours. I saw you come aboard at Kelowna. Did you have time to see the vineyards?"

Bess explained that she had reached Kelowna only that morning, and had had no time to see anything like vineyards.

"Well, they do grow grapes there. Round Kelowna there are a good many vineyards. What's more, they grow vines as the Italians do."

“How is that?” Bess inquired, pricking up her ears. She was all for picking up all the information she could, and this sounded interesting.

“Well, the vines are supported on stout wires strung between upright posts, and never allowed to grow taller than three or four feet.”

“I’d love to see them when the grapes are ripe,” Bess said. “They must look lovely, with the great purple bunches hanging among the vine-leaves.”

“Pretty enough! That’s not what the growers think of, though. They think much more of the wine they can produce. Kelowna has good wineries and sends the product all over the Dominion, as well as exporting some.”

“What happens to the other fruits—apples, peaches and plums, didn’t you say? Do you can them?”

“Oh, the Okanagan produces more than that,” he assured her. “Pears, raspberries, apricots, cherries; we grow all those round here, and they do well. Quite a lot of the fruit is canned, but more is packed and sent to the big cities. It’s taken to the cold storage plants as soon as it has been graded and packed, and ought, as a rule, to reach the markets in prime condition. Mostly, it does.”

“All that is done at Kelowna, I suppose,” Bess said. “What about Penticton?”

“Much the same goes on, except that Kelowna is very much more industrialised. It has a logging centre with four saw-mills. That also means a furniture factory. Then there’s a cement factory where they make blocks of cement that likewise are sent away; and—something that will please you much more than cement or furniture—candy factories. You like candies, don’t you?”

Bess laughed outright. “I guess I do,” she said frankly. “I’d be a queer kind of girl if I didn’t. But I never knew before that maybe some of the candy I’ve bought came from Kelowna.”

He gave her a humorous look. “Pity we didn’t meet sooner, and I could have treated you to some of the special Kelowna brands. Now look over there,” he added, suddenly pointing eastwards, and Bess obediently turned to look. “Paradise Ranch is over there—not that I’m leaving the boat there. I’m going up to Penticton first, to finish my business, and shan’t get home till tomorrow night. If you drive north along the road, you’ll come to Paradise Ranch on the shore of the lake. Leave your car there, and hike a short way off, and you’ll come to some original Indian sign paintings well worth the trouble, so I hope you’ll find time to do it. Let me know if you do, and call in at our place on your way back. Peach Groves, it’s called; and my wife and I will have a welcome for you, and a good meal thrown in. No peaches, though. You’ve come at the wrong time of year for that, I’m afraid.”

Wondering how many more people were to hear her story, Bess explained why she was in that part of the world at all, and promptly received unexpected help.

“Ian Mackinnon? Why, I saw him in Penticton only three weeks ago. You’re Ian Mackinnon’s cousin, are you? And seeking help from him or his father? Well, well! You’ve come to the right place. Everyone at this end of the lake knows the Mackinnons. They’ll do a good turn for anyone. Maybe Ian can’t manage it. Our busy season is beginning, too, and he’ll have his hands full. It wasn’t a new ranch they began, but one that the owner was selling because he’d made all he wanted and meant to sit back and take his ease for a bit. The place was in prime condition, and Ian Mackinnon is a real Scot for work, and has made improvements. But it means work, and being on the spot, so *he* may not be much use to you. His dad, now, is different. He was in pretty bad case when they came here, but this last six

months or so he's pulled up amazingly and he's a fit man again. He'll help you alright. But Fair Havens is away off to the south—by Lake Vaseaux. How do you intend to get there from Penticton?"

"The police at Kelowna gave me an address to go to, and they said the folk there would drive me out," she replied. "Here it is."

He took the slip and glanced at it. Then he gave a chuckle. "I can do better than that for you, Miss Mackinnon. See here, now. I was in Penticton the day before yesterday. Then I found I had to go to Kelowna in the course of my business to have a word with a fellow who was passing through and wouldn't touch Penticton. My car needed an overhaul, so I left it, and they promised to have it ready today. We'll call for it as soon as we quit the ferry, and I'll run you out to Fair Havens myself, and beg a bed for the night. I've got to finish up in Penticton tomorrow before I go home. You'll be with your cousins before supper tonight."

Bess flushed. "Thanks a lot," she said earnestly. "I was scared when I first set out to come here, but I certainly needn't have been. Everyone has been so kind to me, and helped me so much. But what shall I do about this man?" she added with a glance at her slip.

"Oh, that's easily settled! We pass his house anyway, so we'll just drop off to tell him you're all okay, and to let the Kelowna folk know that you're with me. My name's Wilberforce, by the way. I'm pretty well known in this area."

Bess felt overwhelmed, but she could only thank Mr Wilberforce again. He pooh-poohed it, however, and then directed her attention to the orchards growing along the eastern shores.

"Ten miles of them," he boasted. "A pity you weren't a week or two later to see them in blossom. That's a sight you wouldn't forget, I can tell you. Maybe if Ian's dad can go off at once to your home you could come to Peach Groves and stay a bit with Mother and me, eh?"

Bess shook her head. "It's good of you, and I'd love it, but they need me at home. Even if Cousin Angus comes, it's the outside work he'll take charge of. Mum and I will have to see to the inside. Dad's an invalid—poor Dad! Besides all that," she added with an irrepressible chuckle, "I've two small brothers of eight and ten."

"And as bad as they come?" He joined in the chuckle. "Oh, well, another time, maybe. We'd be glad to have you. We've two girls of our own. Mary—she's married and living in the States—is thirty-two now; and Peggy, who's married to a man with a pineapple plantation in the Philippines, is twenty-eight; but they're still girls to us. We don't see much of them, as you may guess, and Mother loves girls; so mind you come. Here's the address." He scribbled it on a leaf of his pocket-book, and gave it to her. She put it into her purse with thanks, and an inward wonderment as to how she was to manage all these visits, for the Parkinsons had also given her a hearty invitation to come and visit them some time.

It was drawing towards evening when at last they tied up at the wharf at Penticton. Mr Wilberforce allowed no dallying. Bess found herself off the ferry, and hurrying along a street busy with people going home from the packing houses near the wharf, or from the various shops and offices. She glanced from side to side as they went down Main Street, until Mr Wilberforce pulled up at a big car depot. They went in, secured his car, and ten minutes later were driving slowly through the town. Once they were out on the high road, however, and after they had called at the address Bess had been given, where Mr Wilberforce arranged matters in a trice, they quickly gathered speed.

Before long, they were running along by the side of a much smaller lake, and Bess was informed that this was the Dog Lake, famous for its fishing. The road ran round the western

shore, Mr Wilberforce explaining that this was the 5-6 Highway which went directly to the States.

“We turn off just beyond Kaleden,” he explained, “and get on to Highway 3.”

They rounded the ten miles of the lake, and turned eastwards, and were soon passing the beautiful twin Okanagan Falls. They had no time to stop, but Bess could hear the organ music of the water as it thundered down on either side of the great dividing rock, to hurl itself through Dog Lake (the Indian name for which is Lake Skaha) on to Lake Okanagan. They still had twenty miles to go before they reached Lake Vaseaux, and Fair Havens was a few miles farther along the lake.

By this time, Bess was very tired. Also, she was beginning to worry about what might be happening at home. Suppose, after all, Cousin Angus refused to come? She would have had all this long, costly journey for nothing, and what could they do about the harvest? In short, she was physically almost worn out, and her mind began to play tricks on her, as minds do when our bodies are fatigued. On the whole, she was a thankful girl when the car pulled up before a long, low bungalow, and she was able to stumble out on to the path leading to the door.

Mr Wilberforce sounded his horn loudly, and then followed her, and a moment later the door was flung wide open to let a stream of light pour out over the dark garden. A young man appeared in the doorway.

“That you, Ian?” Mr Wilberforce called.

“Wilberforce!” exclaimed the young man, coming out to greet him. “Hi—Dad! Here’s Wilberforce—and someone else!” he added as he caught sight of weary Bess standing there, clinging to her bags. “Come right in, both of you!”

An exclamation from behind Ian made that young man move to one side even as Mr Wilberforce took Bess by the arm, and drew her into the house.

“Good gracious!” cried another man’s voice as the owner came out of a room at the side, and fixed keen dark eyes on Bess. “Who’s this?”

“Mackinnon, I’ve brought your young cousin. Bess, this is your Dad’s cousin, Angus Mackinnon, and this lad is his boy, Ian. This is Miss Mackinnon, you two.”

“Miss Mackinnon, indeed!” the elderly man exclaimed as he took hold of Bess and pulled her into the room he had just left. “Why, it’s Rob’s girl! Come away in! How are all the folks at home? What fair wind blew *you* here? Come and tell us all the news!”

Chapter V. BESS HAS HER ANSWER

Bess found herself in a wide pleasant room. The walls were colour-washed sunshiny yellow, and the wide bay window was curtained with flowered cretonne. There were two or three copies of paintings by MacWhirter and Farquharson, all pictures of Scottish lochs and mountains. The furniture was good old mahogany, brought to a fine polish by plenty of beeswax and elbow-grease. A big bookcase filled one wall, and was crammed with books. A glowing stove sent out a cheerful warmth for which Bess, tired and chilly, was very grateful. The room was lighted by electricity, and she found later that there was electricity over the whole bungalow, and out in the yard. As Ian remarked later on, there was plenty of water power in the Okanagan Valley, and even the farms high up on the "benches" could have it if they wanted.



Cousin Angus pulled her over to a large armchair where he sat her down. Then he gave her a keen look. "Aye; you may have your mother's colouring, but yon's a true Mackinnon face," he said with a smile. "I should have known you for one of us anywhere. Tired to death, poor lassie! Ian, what about supper? Isn't it ready?"

"I'll bring it in, Dad," Ian replied. "You show Cousin Bess where to take off her things, and I'll get supper on the table while you're gone."

Cousin Angus picked up the two bags Bess had set down beside her chair. "Come away," he said. "It'll be a wash and brush-up, then supper and a chat, and then away to bed with you! This way, my dear."

Under his guidance, Bess found herself in a whitewashed bedroom, where he pulled curtains of the same gay cretonne as she had seen in the living-room, and then set himself to undo her bags while she took off her coat and cap, and hung them up in the curtained-off

corner he pointed out to her. Then he showed her a door next her own, telling her it was the bathroom, and left her to prepare for supper.

When he had gone, Bess looked longingly at the bed. She was too tired to feel hungry, much less to want to talk, and the only thing she felt like doing just then was disrobing completely, slipping under the covers, and sleeping. However, she knew that that could not be done yet, so she roused herself to take up the towel and soap lying on a little corner stand, and go to the bathroom, where a thorough wash freshened her up considerably. Back in the bedroom, she gave her hair a hard brushing, and then tied it back loosely at the nape of her neck. Quite refreshed by the vigorous splashing in the soft, cool water—she had not been very sure how to use the electric heater, so had left it severely alone—she returned to the living room. Someone had spread a clean checked cloth on the centre table, and laid it for supper. As she stood there, the door opened and her cousin Ian came in, a big brown dish in one hand, and a plate containing a pie in the other. After him came his father bearing a pile of plates and a big coffee pot, and Mr Wilberforce brought up the rear with a huge platter of cookies.

“Come away to the table, Bess,” Mr Mackinnon said cheerily. “You’ll feel better after a good supper. Sit here by me and the coffee pot. Wilberforce, you take that other chair.”

Ian had seated himself before the brown dish, and when he lifted the lid a savoury odour stole forth which revived Bess’s appetite considerably. The dish contained a stew of vegetables and meat with a rich gravy, and she found it tasted as good as it smelt. Two cups of coffee and a large piece of rhubarb pie with thick cream—“We have two cows and plenty of cream,” Cousin Angus told her—topped it up. When they rose from the table, and she and Cousin Angus sat by the stove while Ian and Mr Wilberforce cleared away, she felt quite able to sit for a while and explain her errand.

Cousin Angus listened carefully. After she had finished her story he asked her a few questions, and Bess answered them as well as she could. When this was over, he sat back, thinking deeply before he spoke. Meanwhile, the other two had come back to join them, and had lit their pipes.

At last Cousin Angus talked. “Well, now I know pretty well all the story, I guess. This’ll need thinking out, though. Now don’t you run away with any silly ideas that I won’t help,” he added as he saw Bess’s expressive face. “I’ll do that, of course—and Rob Mackinnon my own first cousin! I’ll help all right; but it’s no good going headlong into it. Hurried work is work ill-done, as our old grandmother used to tell us. Now let’s see. What day of the week is this? Friday, isn’t it? Mphm! We can’t do anything tomorrow or next day. We must leave it till next week. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Bess. I’ll send your father a telegram to say I’m coming shortly, and you’ll come with me. That will put a stop to their worrying, both about you and about how the work’s to be done in the summer. Dear knows how I’ll make out, though, for I’ve never had much to do with wheat before. Still, I’ve been accustomed to handling men, and I’ve lived on this ranch for the last two years. Then I can always ask your father for any information I want, and I’ll need a bit, let me tell you. Yes, I think I can see my way to it. We’ll make it all right in the end.” He turned to his son. “Ian, is yon bed in there ready? It is? Good! Away with you, Bess, and see and get a good night’s sleep—you can do with it.”

Bess turned a relieved face to him. “I shall sleep good and plenty now I know I haven’t taken this journey for nothing, and you’ll come and help us out. Thanks a million! Goodnight, Ian; goodnight, Mr Wilberforce; goodnight, Cousin Angus.”

He laughed as he stooped his iron-grey head to kiss her. “Goodnight, my dear.”

Bess left the room, and found her bedroom, where she lost no time in undressing and washing. She stumbled into bed, and was asleep almost before her head touched the pillow.

“Poor tired lassie!” said her kindly cousin. “Ian—oh, you know all about it already, do you?”

Ian nodded. “Wilberforce has been telling me. She’s a plucky youngster to take such a journey alone. You’ll be taking over for them, won’t you, Dad? I’ll miss you, but we can spare you in such an emergency. Someone must go, and you’ll be best. When do you reckon to set off?”

“Middle of the week, I think. That girl needs a few days to rest before she starts out on her travels again. Anyway I’ll have to get my things put together, and that can’t be done all in a minute. This will mean staying five or six months at the very least—maybe longer. I’ll need to take most of my clothes and so on. Let’s see.” He mused for a minute or two, while the other men sat smoking their pipes, and all were wrapped in a silent contentment, the only sound the crackling of the wood in the stove.

Presently Ian stood up and stretched. “I’d better go the rounds now. You think it out while I’m gone. Staying with Dad, Wilberforce, or coming with me?”

“I guess I’ll come with you. I want to run the car into the garage if I may. Won’t do to leave it out all night.”

“Okay; come on, then. We won’t be long, Dad.”

The two went out, and Cousin Angus was left to ruminate alone. Presently he got up and went to the big roll-top desk that stood in a recess by the window. From it he took a sheaf of pamphlets which he sat down to study thoughtfully, jotting down notes from time to time, and when Ian and Mr Wilberforce came back, he was ready for them.

“I’ve got it worked out,” he announced as they settled down to the stove and their pipes once more. “Bess must have two or three days’ rest as I said, or she’ll likely be sick by the time she gets home, and that won’t be a help to anyone.”

Ian laughed. “That needn’t make it too long before you two get there. You’ll go by airplane, won’t you, Dad? I know you!”

“Well, what do *you* think, son? See here: airplane from Penticton to Swift Current. Then we can pick up the train to that place—what’s-its-name?—where they drop passengers if they know in advance. That’ll be quickest. I’ll write to Rob tomorrow, and ask him to have someone meet us with the car. Yes; I reckon that if we start off on Thursday, we should be there by Friday night, barring accidents. That’ll give Bess plenty of time to rest and see something of these parts, too.”

“Now I’ll tell you what I’d like,” Mr Wilberforce began persuasively. “Let her visit Mother and me on—let’s see—Tuesday. Mother would be tickled to death to meet her, once I’ve told her what the child’s done, and I’d like to take her to Paradise Ranch and show her those sign paintings. They’ve nothing like them round her way. I’d ask you to let me take her back with me tomorrow—”

He got no further. Cousin Angus shook his head firmly.

“Oh, no, Wilberforce! She may come to you for a visit on Tuesday, and welcome. I’d like her to see those paintings myself. But we must have her these first two or three days, to get well acquainted. D’ye know that she is the first of my Cousin Rob’s children I’ve ever seen? He and I were almost like brothers when we were young, but he went to Saskatchewan to farm on the prairie, and I came further west. Though we’ve written to each other, it hasn’t been at short intervals, and we’ve not set eyes on each other since long before I was married. We can’t

spare Bess to you just yet; but I'd like her to make you a little visit before we go east. Monday, I plan to take her into Penticton. She'll want to buy a few trifles to take home to her mother and the little lads, maybe. Tuesday, she shall come to you. Wednesday—well, maybe we'll take her along to the Indian Reserve, and Thursday we'll be off. Now that's settled." He glanced up at the grandfather clock, placidly ticking the moments away in the opposite corner of the room, and got to his feet. "It's just on ten, and I'm away to bed. Mind and see the stoves are safe, Ian. Goodnight to you both; goodnight!"

"I'm for bed myself," Mr Wilberforce said, knocking out his pipe on to the hearth, and then stooping to sweep up the ash. "I'm not so young as I was, and I've had quite a day. The same room as I had last time, you said, didn't you, Ian? Good; I'll be off, then. Goodnight, and pleasant dreams."

He departed, and Ian, left alone, covered the glowing faggots with thick ash, pushed in the dampers, and shut the stoves up tightly to smoulder through the night, so that they would require just a raking out in the morning, and fresh wood, before the fires would be burning brightly in short order. It was necessary to be very careful, for the bungalow, like many Canadian houses, was built of wood. Some day, Ian meant to put up a stone house, but that could not be just yet. The ranch had been a good buy, but it had taken most of his capital, and he was forced to go slow as yet. The house was pretty enough, and well-planned, but all the same, some day he hoped for the stone on which he had set his heart.

The stoves attended to, he deftly spread the kitchen table with a cloth, and proceeded to lay it for breakfast. The porridge had been set at the back of the kitchen stove, and would be ready by the morning. Two years of doing most of the domestic tasks with a little help from an elderly woman who came two or three times a week to tidy up, and bake puddings, pies, cookies, and bread for himself and his father, had taught him to do many things, and he prided himself on keeping the place neatly and pleasantly. When it was all done, he switched off the lights, and went to his own room, grinning as he passed Mr Wilberforce's door. That gentleman was a loud sleeper, and the volume of his snores was truly amazing. Ian Mackinnon was moved to wonder if it would alarm his young cousin, but on thinking the matter over, he decided that Bess was probably far too deeply asleep to rouse for anything short of a hurricane or an earthquake. He passed on, and before long he too was sleeping soundly.

Chapter VI. AT FAIR HAVENS

Bess slept soundly all night. She never blinked, even when the men arose, and the life of the house began to stir once more. She had been as tired as a girl could be, and the sun had been up a good two hours and more before she turned over, opened drowsy eyes, and yawned widely as she stretched. Then she sat up, suddenly wide awake. Whatever time was it? The sunlight was pouring through the chink in the curtains where she had opened them a little before tumbling into bed the night before, and she could hear voices, the sound of someone piling faggots into a stove, and the clank of milkpails accompanied by the tread of heavy feet. With a bound, she was out of bed and picking up her watch from the table where she had left it the night before.

“Half-past eight!” she exclaimed in horror. “I must have nearly slept the clock round! It’s more than time that I was up and doing.” She picked up her towels, and made a dive for the bathroom, where she had a quick splash. Then, glowing from the tang of the water, she hurried back to her room to finish dressing. She stripped the bed, opened the lattice windows widely, and then made her way to the living room where she found her cousin Ian on his knees, wrestling with the stove. He looked up as she entered.

“Hello,” he said. “Had a good sleep?”

“I’ll say I had!” she returned with emphasis. “Why didn’t someone call me sooner? You’ll think me a real lie-a-bed!”

“We thought you a real worn-out girl,” he told her with a friendly grin. “I’ll bet you’re a hungry one this moment. You go to the kitchen and get your breakfast. Dad has it all ready for you. By the way, Wilberforce had to go. He told me to tell you goodbye for him, and he’d be looking forward to seeing you on Tuesday.”

“Tuesday?” Bess looked blank. “Why, on Tuesday I’ll be on my way home—nearly there, in fact.”

“Not at all!” he retorted.

“But I must! I’ve been away almost five days, and it’ll surely take me three to get back, and—”

He interrupted her. “Now don’t start arguing with me! Dad looked in earlier, but you were dead to the world. He wanted to know if you have the ’phone at home. If you have, he’s going to get your folk on long-distance as soon as he’s through with his work, and let them know you’ve arrived safely, and help will be coming next week. We might have had the gumption to ask you last night, but we were kind of bowled over when you turned up with Wilberforce, and it got missed out. If you want to argue,” he added with another of his friendly grins, “go and argue with Dad. It’s *his* fixing. He’s in the kitchen—through that door there. You can have a go while you eat your breakfast. You’re coming out with me after that.”

Bess looked at him and sighed. She realised that for all his good temper, Ian Mackinnon possessed a stubborn streak. She turned and went slowly to the kitchen where she found Cousin Angus frying bacon—and how good it smelt! She found she was desperately hungry now.

He had heard her talking to Ian, and already a bowl of porridge steamed on the table where only her place was laid now, the men having had their meal earlier.

“Come away, lassie,” he said in his hearty voice. “Well, well! Looking as fresh as the morning! Sit down and eat that porridge and then this lot will be ready for you.” He gave the rasher a last careful turn, and slid it expertly on to a plate keeping warm at the back of the stove, and then set to work to fry an egg to go with it.

Bess sat down. “It looks lovely, Cousin Angus. I’ve had a real good sleep, and now I’m hungry enough to eat you out of house and home!”

All the same, there was no laughter in the candid brown eyes, and he gave her a questioning glance as he spooned the boiling fat over the egg. Bess ate her porridge with its thick cream, and sprinkle of salt. When she laid down her spoon, she looked at him.

“Cousin Angus, how soon can I get a train, and do you know how I must go? I’ll have to change somewhere, I guess.”

“You and I are flying from Penticton next Thursday,” he said as he slipped the egg on to the plate beside the bacon and brought it to her. “Coffee? Give me your cup. And try that bread.”

When she was served, he sat down beside her. “Now listen to me, my dear. You’ve had a good night’s sleep, but travelling is tiring, even when it’s for pleasure alone. You had all the worry of your Dad’s illness and trying to find us on your mind as well. You’ve been going for nearly five days, and you’re much more weary than you think. You’re staying here till Thursday, and then you and I are flying to your home. No!” for she gave him a mutinous look, and opened her lips to speak. “Wait till I’ve finished, like a good girl. You’re going to take a little vacation these next few days, and have a good rest, then you’ll go home, fit and ready to take hold. I can’t be ready to go before then, and you’re not going without me. Now tell me, have you the telephone?” Bess nodded. “Good! Then we’ll get the work out of the way, and about noon when we’re pretty sure to find your mother in the house, we’ll get them on long-distance and explain. We’ll abide by what she says after that. More coffee?”

Bess gave him her cup. “It’s good of you, Cousin Angus, but how can I leave Mum alone to cope with everything?”

“Maybe it hasn’t come to that. Maybe some neighbour is coming in to lend a hand.” He gave her the cup again, refilled, and got up to go on with his work.

Bess could say no more. It was a relief that he was going to telephone to her home. She had not dared to spend the money herself for she had had no idea how far her little stock must go, and a long-distance call was an expensive affair. She felt sure that her mother would want her to return as soon as possible, now that her errand was done, but it was clear that Cousin Angus meant the subject to be dropped. She finished her breakfast while he brought the potatoes from the cellar for roasting, and sliced onions to be fried with slices of salt pork.

As she sat watching him and drinking her coffee, he told her that when he had been recovering from the long, serious illness which had brought him with Ian to Fair Havens, he had begun to help out with the domestic chores as that was all he was fit for at first. Nowadays he could lend a hand in the orchards in the busy season, but he still prided himself on his housekeeping.

“I was trained up in as neat and dainty a home as anyone’s,” he explained, “and when my wife, your Cousin Agnes, was living, she kept the place like a new pin. I couldn’t bear to live as some men do when they’re left alone. Mrs Gregg comes three days a week to wash, and clean, and bake for us, and I manage for the rest. Finished? Then bring your dishes and put them in the sink. Then if you go and make your bed, I guess Ian will be ready to take you round the orchards.” He glanced up at the old wall clock. “Ten past nine now. You’ll have two

hours or so to see something, and learn how we farm here. Then you'll come back, and we'll see about that long-distance call and have dinner. After that, we'll show you something else, and then tea and early bed for you again. Tomorrow there's church in the morning but in the afternoon we'll go up to the benches and let you see what you can there. Early bed again, and then, I guess, you'll be more like yourself."

Bess brought her dishes to the sink. "Let me wash them, Cousin Angus. It won't take a minute."

"No—no! You be off, and don't get in my way," he said, chasing her out of the kitchen.

Seeing that he meant it, she did as she was told, and when Ian arrived, she was ready for him. He took her out by the back door, and down a little path to a gate which he opened for her, and she stood in the first orchard she had ever trodden. She looked round curiously. The first thing that struck her was that all the trees seemed to be of the same shape and size. Look where she would, she could see none taller than its neighbour. There was grass underfoot here, but she was to learn that this was the exception rather than the rule. A couple of mild-looking cows cropped it at the farther end of the orchard, and she knew now where that rich cream had come from.

She looked up at Ian. "How do you manage it?" she asked.

"Manage what?" he asked, staring.

"Why, to get them all the same shape and size like that."

He chuckled. "Oh, I see. I wondered what was biting you. Well, it's this way. When you put your trees in, you prune them once they're firmly settled—cut them down to a foot or so, though some folks give them a foot and a half. I tell you, a peach orchard hereabouts is a funny-looking sight then. With the next few prunings, one each year, you decide the shape of the tree by cutting out any side branches you don't feel are needed. Each tree is treated in the same way, so that you can get them uniform. Furthermore, no one here lets peach trees grow too high. You head them when necessary, and so get a low-growing bushy tree which bears a heavier crop of fruit than a tall one with straggling branches. Our main shoots are about three or four feet from the ground—not as in England, where they let the trees grow high, and can walk under their main branches."

"Why is there the difference?" Bess demanded. "How long is it before your trees bear fruit?"

"I wouldn't know the why of it," he retorted. "Maybe it's because the British like to do things the way their fathers and grandfathers did! I reckon we keep our trees low because it makes picking easier. A peach tree may bear in the third or fourth year, but I wouldn't advise harvesting much until the fifth or sixth."

Bess considered. "Isn't it a slow sort of crop to start on, then?"

"Oh, well, you grow other crops between the rows of young trees: clover for hay; raspberries and other soft fruits; tomatoes, melons and green vegetables. All these do well in the market, and so a man has money to come and go on while he waits for his peaches."

"But *you* didn't do that? I mean these trees don't look so very young. How did you manage?"

"Oh, I bought a well-matured ranch, so I haven't needed to do that, though we do have soft fruit and greens in one of the farther orchards. We supply all we need ourselves, and the surplus—quite a fair one—goes to the market. You ought to taste our tomatoes—and our musk-melons, too!"

Bess looked down the long rows of healthy-looking trees. “Is it very hard work?” she asked.

“From now till the end of September you may surely say it is,” he told her solemnly, as he led her between two of the rows. “You see, Bess, we’re in what is known as the dry belt of British Columbia. That means we don’t get much rain to speak of, and the peach is a thirsty kind of tree. Luckily, though we haven’t much rain, we’ve plenty of other water, and we can irrigate. The water comes from the mountains by means of flumes. These are big wooden channels, supported on trestles, and during the hot months—from April to September—you have to open the flumes to carry water to the trees once in every three or four weeks. You don’t do it oftener or you might waterlog the ground, not to speak of taking more than the Government would approve. It’s a pretty hard job, I can tell you.”

“What has the Government to do with it?” Bess asked as they neared the orchard fence, and she gazed across it. Then, before he could reply, she exclaimed, “Why, you’ve got your trees on ploughland here!”

Ian answered her question first. “At first, farmers did their own irrigating or not, as they chose. It’s an expensive job, as you can guess, what with keeping the flumes in order, and digging the ditches and so on, and a good many just couldn’t stand up to it. So the Government took over. They see to the flumes and the big ditches, and we pay them so much an acre. Up at Kelowna, where the water has a much shorter distance to travel, it comes cheaper than here—something like \$6 an acre against our \$14.”

“I see. And what else have you to do besides keeping the irrigation going? And why haven’t you grass in this orchard like the last?”

“All of a question point, aren’t you?” he said good-humouredly. “Well, you’re never done hoeing during the growing season. Got to keep the ground clear of weeds so the trees can get all the good of it. That answer goes for your second question, too. It’s only here and there you’ll find orchards with grass underfoot. Mostly we plough down the rows, and then keep the hoe going. You see, you’ve got to keep the moisture in the ground below, so when we hoe, we make a kind of mulch with fine dust to keep the sun from evaporating it.”

Bess laughed. “I guess a fruit ranch is as hard work as a wheat farm.” Then she added, “What happens if you let your trees get too dry?”

“All kinds of things—red spider, for one. Then you’ve got to watch out for peach-curl—a kind of fungus attacks the leaves, and makes them curl and bulge. If you get that badly, there’s only one thing to do—cut your trees down, stump your ground and disinfect it with sprays, plant again, and wait for the fruit. But if you’ve any sense, you spray for that early on with Bordeaux mixture. The other pest we have to fight is black fly. However, if you syringe thoroughly—we use quassia-water here—you can get clear of it in plenty of time. Now come on and see the rest.”

He took her a brisk round, and then they went back to the house where they found Cousin Angus had started to put his call through. He gave them coffee, and they had just finished when the telephone rang. Cousin Angus took the call, though he beckoned to Bess to come close and listen in, and she had the joy of hearing her mother’s voice after all this time.

“Hello! This is Mrs Robert Mackinnon speaking.”

“And this,” he said with a chuckle, “is Angus Mackinnon! How’s Rob now, Mary?”

Bess heard her mother gasp before she said quickly, “Angus? Has Bess found you, then? Where are you—Victoria?”

“Bess arrived last night, safe and sound,” he said. “You can stop worrying, Mary. I’m coming on as soon as I can—next Thursday, maybe. I’ll take hold for you, provided I don’t have to be too technical.”

“Thank goodness for that! Rob will get better if he hasn’t to worry about the harvest any more. It’s the anxiety that’s been holding him back. But where are you, Angus? Why didn’t you get my letter?”

“Mainly because we’d left the Island, I suppose. We’re a good way from there now—in the Okanagan Valley. Listen, Mary! I’m keeping Bess here till I can bring her with me. She was all in last night, poor girl! She’s had a good sleep, and looks better, but still more tired than I like. I can’t come along till Thursday, so make up your mind to manage alone till the end of next week. We’ll be with you then, I hope. We’re flying from Penticton about twenty miles or so away, and will join the train at Swift Current. Can’t tell you the exact time yet, but I’ll find out and let you know when the train reaches that one-horse place near you. Have a car or something to meet us there. Bess wants a word with you, so goodbye now. Here you are, lass.”

He handed the receiver to Bess, and she had a breathless two minutes’ talk with her mother, in the course of which she learned that her father was slowly improving, and that Peter and Stuart had been very helpful about the house, and work was going on quite well. Their time ended then, and they had to ring off.

Bess turned to Cousin Angus with a glowing face. “It’s all right, Cousin Angus. Mum says the boys are helping, and I’m to wait and go home with you.” She drew a long breath. “Oh, I *am* so glad! I—I really dreaded having to set off again. Maybe I’ll like the idea of travelling about after a while; but just now I’m too tired of trains even to want to see one.”

Cousin Angus patted her shoulder. “You’ve plenty of time now to get over that. It’s just what I told your mother—you’re far more weary than you knew. Now come and help set the table for dinner. When we’ve had it, you shall do some more exploring—see our lake, and tell me if you don’t think it quite as beautiful as Okanagan, even if it is much smaller. Come away, now.”

Bess laughed, and went to take the cloth from him and spread it over the table. All the same, thanks to the relief of knowing that she need not start on her travels again till Thursday, she was a good deal nearer tears than she had ever been throughout the whole trip.

Chapter VII. PENTICTON

Sunday began with a heavy mist; but by the time they came out of church, a breeze had sprung up which had chased it away, and to her great delight Bess was taken in a boat on Lake Vaseaux, where Ian, a keen bird-watcher, pointed out to her numerous birds which made use of the sanctuary. She quite agreed that the lake, though so much smaller than Okanagan, was equally beautiful. On the Monday, Cousin Angus reminded her of his promise to take her to Penticton so that she might see something of how fruit is prepared for marketing. The manager of one of the packing houses was a friend of his, and he knew that he could get permission for his young cousin to see over it.

“Of course, this is too early,” he told her as they set off in the car. “You should be here in June or July, or September when the apple season is in full swing. That’s the right time to see the packing houses. However, we can show you something now, and we’ll hope to have you with us next year at the proper time. Be ready by nine, and I think I can promise you an interesting day.”

By nine o’clock, therefore, Bess, fresh and fit once more, was waiting for him at the gate. Very neat and smart she looked in her skirt and cardigan, her coat over her arm. It was a warm morning for early April, but one never knew what might happen to the weather later in the day.

“Now,” said Cousin Angus when he had brought the car round, and settled her in, “we’re off to a good early start. We’ll have a look at the Okanagan Falls on our way. Twin falls they are, split in two by a rocky islet, as Niagara is split by Goat Island. Of course, they are babies beside Niagara; but fine babies, for all that.”

“I’ll just love to see them,” Bess assured him. “Which way do we go?”

“Through the township, Okanagan Falls, and then Highways 5 and 3 running to the west of Dog Lake—maybe Wilberforce gave it the Indian name to you on Friday, Lake Skaha? Aye; I thought he might—and through Kaleden on the lake shore. We won’t hurry, but take our time. There’s all the day before us.”

Bess quite agreed that there was no need for hurry. It was a beautiful day, with no wind, and a sky of baby blue, flecked with tiny white clouds. The valley was gay with the tender green of young foliage, and here and there patches of delicate colour showed where the shy spring wild-flowers were already in bloom. The birds were singing merrily, and as a deep bass accompaniment to it all came the sound of the Okanagan river as it flowed along to the Dog Lake. At the Falls themselves, Cousin Angus drew up for a few minutes, and Bess jumped out and ran along the road to get the best view of the rapids swirling under the long bridge which crosses the Okanagan at this point. The waters become more and more furious, till they take their final leap round the scrub-grown rocky islet in the centre of the river, to plunge headlong to the lower level. The sunlight, gleaming on the white waves surging and boiling over the edge, tinged them with rainbow hues, and the thunder of the Falls filled the air. Bess stood watching them in silence. She had been far too tired on Friday night even to be curious about them, and now she was fascinated by the beauty unrolled before her eyes.

“Come along, Bess,” Cousin Angus said at last. “We’ll never reach Penticton at this rate. You’ll have other chances of seeing the Falls, I hope, now you’ve found us; and we have a deal to do, even though the day’s young enough yet. Come away to the car.”

Bess came back obediently, and scrambled into her seat, still gazing, with her brown eyes full of wonder, at the glory of the scene. Then she drew a long breath. "Oh, Cousin Angus! I never even imagined anything so beautiful! I've seen dozens of pictures of waterfalls, of course, but this is the very first I've been really close to."

He smiled, well-pleased at her delight. "Like it, then?"

"Oh, yes!" Bess could say no more at the moment.

He gave her a satisfied look as he let in his clutch, and they set off again. Down the ten-mile stretch of the Dog Lake they ran, where the road has been built just under the benches above the lake, and Bess feasted her eyes on the long steep sandhills running down to the shore, gold against the turquoise blue of the water. Cousin Angus said nothing until they had reached the farther end of the lake. Then he nodded to the west. "That's the Indian Reserve road over there," he said. "You knew we had big Indian Reserves round here, didn't you? Now look over there. That's the airport. This is where you and I will be coming on Thursday."

Bess looked with interest at the great flat area with its concrete runways, on which two or three planes were to be seen. Cousin Angus pointed out a large building as the place where tickets were bought, and where they would be weighed with their luggage. There was a restaurant, and a rest room. Then, even as they looked, they heard the sound of engines, and they waited long enough for Bess to see a plane come zooming in, touch down, and speed swiftly up the long runway, before coming gently to rest at the far end.

"Most of our fruit goes that way—by freight plane," he said as he started up again. "However, you'll hear all about that at the packing house. Here we come to your old friend, the railroad—the station's over to the west. The golf course is further on along the same way. Now look to your right. Those are our schools. Rather bigger than yours, eh?"

Bess laughed. "Oh, ours is just one of the little red school-houses. But at that we're luckier than some," she added. "I was at school with Jean MacCartney whose folk lived miles from anywhere, and until she came to stay for a couple of years with her aunt, Jean and her brothers and sisters had had to depend on the mobile schools that tour around. She'd be crazy about places like those." She nodded back at the fine buildings which housed the schools.

"This is Main Street," resumed Cousin Angus. "It runs right down to Lakeshore Drive and the bathing beaches. You'll see them presently. First I want to put the car up, and then maybe we'll have time for a sundae and a coca-cola at the drug store."

They carried out this programme before they strolled down Main Street to let Bess see Penticton's shopping centre. They called at the post office, halfway down, and Bess was thrilled to find that she had a share in the mail, for Cousin Angus had called the Pottingers on long distance the night she had reached Fair Havens, to let them know she had accomplished her errand, and they had written by airmail. There were letters from Mrs Pottinger and Miss Andrews, both repeating the invitation to visit them next year, and a slip from Mr Pottinger, enclosing a cheque for ten dollars!



National Film Board

MAIN STREET, PENTICTON

“I hope you’ll accept this little present,” he wrote. “Buy some gifts for the home folks, and a book for yourself, and remember you’ve friends in Vancouver as long as we are there.”

Bess turned to her cousin with a glowing face. “Look, Cousin Angus! Isn’t it kind of them? Can you cash it for me?”

“Yes, they’re good friends,” he said when he had read the slip. “I know Pottinger, and he’s a fine fellow. Come away with me to the bank, and you shall have your money at once. Then we’ll get along to the packing-house. After that we’ll have dinner, and then you can do your shopping.”

The cheque was cashed, and when Bess had added the ten dollars to the scant store she had left in her bag, he led her down Main Street, past the Municipal Hall, to the wide, beautiful Lakeshore Drive that encircles Lake Okanagan. Bess gazed out across the lake, as blue and sparkling in the sunshine as their own Lake Vaseaux, or Dog Lake. She felt that for once she was having her fill of beauty.

Cousin Angus pointed to the east. “Packing-houses over there, near the wharves, you see. If you take the westward road, you go through Peachland, Summerland, and Naramata, some of the finest fruitlands we have.”

“What pretty names!” Bess said as she walked by his side with her springy step. “Naramata? That’s an Indian word, isn’t it?”

“Yes. It means ‘the Smile of God’.”

“Oh, how beautiful!” Bess stopped to gaze again at the lovely lake. “How beautiful the lake is, too! All the same, don’t think that our prairies haven’t their own beauty. It’s not like this, of course; but in the summer, when the wheat is ripening to gold, and you get the deep-blue sky overhead, anyone would say it was worth looking at, even if we haven’t any lakes or mountains handy. Still, I’m free to confess this is one of the loveliest places I’ve ever seen.”

By this time, they had reached the packing-houses, and Cousin Angus took her into one where he led the way to the office. Bess looked with interest at the clerks sitting behind the glass barrier, some of them tapping away at their typewriters for dear life. One was carrying off two big wire baskets, piled high with sheets of typescript, and another was at the telephone, which, Cousin Angus explained, was merely one connecting the various parts of the building. There was a special office for outside messages, with three telephonists always hard at work. Then a pleasant-faced woman of middle age came to the desk to inquire their business, and they were soon led into a sunny room where a tall, grey-haired man rose from behind a big desk.

“Hello, Mackinnon!” he exclaimed. “Didn’t expect to see *you* here today. Come right in and sit down.” He turned questioning eyes on Bess.

“Hello, Maddison,” Cousin Angus replied, shaking hands cordially. “This is my cousin’s girl from Saskatchewan. She’s only here for a few days, and I’ve brought her to get some idea of what happens to our fruit after it’s been picked. That okay with you?”

“Oh, sure—sure! Pleased to meet you, Miss—Mackinnon? Same name? Good! This your first visit to B.C.? You’ll find it measures up well enough beside your own Saskatchewan, eh? I suppose I mustn’t ask you that yet, though. Sit down, both of you, and have a cup of coffee with me, and then we’ll see what we can show you, Miss Mackinnon. Pity your visit wasn’t a bit later, though, when we’re doing the heavy packing. Still, I guess we can show you enough to give you some idea of what we have to do.” He pressed a button, and a girl came, to be sent for coffee and doughnuts which arrived so quickly that Bess guessed it was the usual time for a little mid-morning lunch.

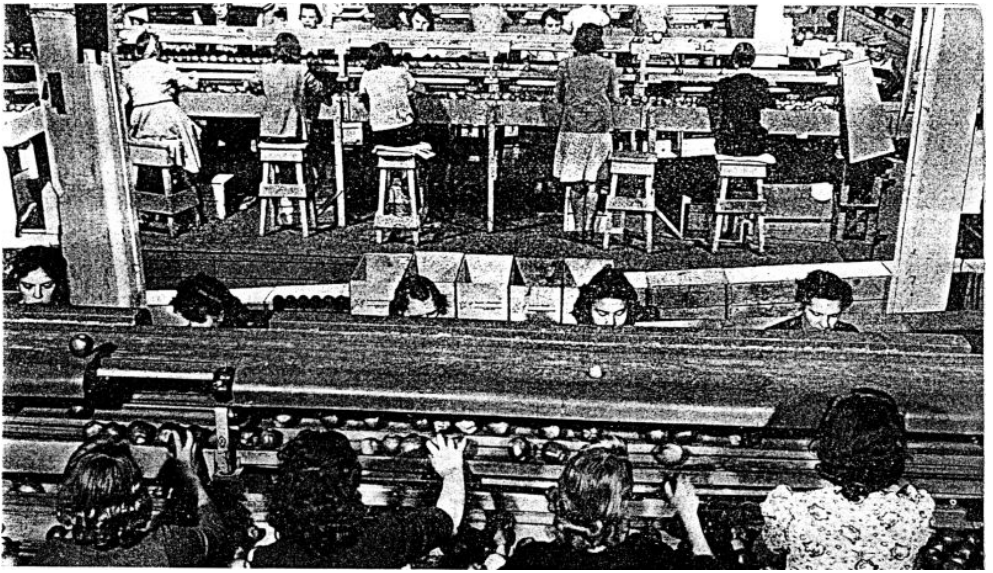
While they enjoyed the tiny meal, Cousin Angus told him as much as he felt was needed to explain the briefness of Bess’s visit, and Mr Maddison looked sympathetic.

“I’ve a couple of girls of my own about your age,” he told Bess, “and I wouldn’t want them to have to tackle what you’ve done if it could be helped. Next time you come, I hope you’ll meet them and make friends. Pam and Di will be interested to hear about your trip. It’s certainly a pity you’re paying such a short visit. However, we’ll show you what we can now, and if you come next year, mind you make it later in the season, and then you’ll see us in full swing. April is rather early.”



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APPLES IN AN OKANAGAN ORCHARD



National Film Board

GRADING THE APPLES

When they had finished their coffee, Mr Maddison took them off, first to the grading room, where he pointed out the long rows of belts on which the fruit was placed and moved slowly round while the graders picked out the first-class fruit, sending the rest on to the graders of the second-class, and so on. The fruit was then piled into round plywood trays which, Mr Maddison explained, were made at Kelowna. These trays were taken to the packing room, where the packing girls wrapped each apple or peach or whatever it was, in tissue paper, and then tucked it into a big cardboard carton, each carton holding the same approximate weight. From there, the cartons were taken to the weighing department where they were weighed, and the weights noted and checked before they were sealed. Finally, they were loaded on to light hand-trucks, and wheeled away to cold storage to await marketing.

“Where are they marketed?” Bess wanted to know.

“At Kelowna. That’s the headquarters of the B.C. Fruit Board, and the B.C. Interior Vegetable Marketing Board,” Mr Maddison explained. “Those are our two organisations which control—under the supervision of the growers, of course—the production and marketing of fruit and vegetables throughout the interior of British Columbia. The coast growers have their own organisations. The sealing is done by B.C. Tree Fruits Limited, and it is from them that our fruit and vegetables eventually find their way to all the markets of the world.”

Bess was keenly interested, and her eyes opened widely when she saw the cases upon cases of chilled fruits waiting in the cold storage chambers.

“Not frozen,” her host said, “just chilled. Thanks to this process fruits and vegetables can be sent anywhere in the world, and, barring accidents, arrive in just as perfect condition as when they were picked. Mostly they go by freight plane, though we still send some by road or rail. Plane’s faster, though, and better for such perishable stuff.”

“I should think picking must be a pretty tough job,” Bess remarked.

“We use mechanical pickers on fruit like apples and pears,” Cousin Angus told her. “The more delicate fruits like peaches and apricots have to be picked by hand, though, to keep the bloom as perfect as possible. It’s a skilled job, that, I can tell you.”

“What happens to the fruit that goes overseas?”

“All fruit freighters have cold chambers where it is stored. Oh, that’s seen to all right,” Mr Maddison told her.

“I don’t see any grapes,” she said as she paused to read the names stencilled on the cases.

“Grapes hereabouts are grown for wine. We never handle them,” Mr Maddison explained. “They go to the wineries at Kelowna. Dessert grapes come from other valleys. We don’t touch the tobacco, either,” he added.

“Do you grow tobacco here?” Bess sounded surprised.

“Some; not a great deal. It does quite well, though, in certain places.”

“What a wonderful place this is!”

“Yes; it’s all that,” Cousin Angus agreed as he glanced at his watch. “Why, Bess, look at the time! Maddison, we’ve taken up most of your morning.”

Mr Maddison laughed. “Well, you could hardly hope to see over in less time, even out of the season. I hope that if Miss Mackinnon comes next year when we’re busy she’ll pay us another visit, and then she can see for herself just what the work is like. At present,” he gave Bess a pleasant look, “she’ll just have to rely on my descriptions.”

They said goodbye after that, and while Mr Maddison hurried back to his office, Bess and her cousin sought a lunch counter where they enjoyed a good meal before he reclaimed his car, and took her for a short run along the Lakeshore Drive, and then brought her back to Main Street for her shopping. She looked delightedly at the golden sands where safe bathing was to be found, and Cousin Angus told her that rowboats and motor boats could be hired for pleasure on the lake.

“This is a fisherman’s paradise, too,” he said as he turned the car in the direction of Penticton.

“What kind of fish do you get?” she asked.

“Oh, trout, bass, eels, carp, ling—we could do without that!—and, of course, salmon. I remember when we were boys your dad was mighty fond of fishing. Maybe when his back’s better we can coax him and your mother to pay us a visit while you see to things at home.”

Bess laughed. “I just wish you could! I’m afraid, though, he won’t come. Who would see to the outside chores and the farm?”

“Ah, well, time will show. And talking of time, Bess, what about that shopping you wanted to do? Come away now. You’ll be seeing plenty of the lake tomorrow. You’re going to the Wilberforces’, and their home is right in view of it.”

He had stopped the car to let her have a last view for that day. Now he started again, and they were soon in Main Street. Bess’s shopping had to be a modest affair. After all, she had under twenty dollars to spend, and five people—including Johnny Somreys—to buy for, so she couldn’t be too choosy. She found two table games for the boys, and a twist of the Okanagan tobacco for Johnny. Then she bought a book she knew her father had longed for, and the remainder all went on a tiny tea-service for one for her mother, who had a passionate love of dainty china.

“What about that book you were to buy for yourself?” Cousin Angus demanded.

Bess laughed. “I’ve had all the fun of seeing everything. Anyway, Mr Pottinger gave me two books in Vancouver City, and I haven’t finished the first. I guess those’ll do me. Anyway,

Mum loves pretty china, and she hasn't much. So *I'm* satisfied."

He said no more, but his eyes were very kind as he looked at her. "Well, come away home now, or Ian will think he won't get any tea tonight."

"Can't he get it for himself?" Bess demanded as they shot out of the town and along the highway.

"He can—but it's my chore as a rule. After Thursday, he'll have to manage along with Mrs Gregg. She can't come to stay, but she'll be up most days to tidy up the place for him, and see he has a couple of decent meals. The rest he'll manage for himself. We brought up all our lads to be useful, and they aren't sorry now. Malcolm's the only one married, and Angus lives in a suite when he's at home. Charlie does the same; but Jamie has to fend for himself—he's logging up in North Vancouver. Some day I hope you'll meet them all."

"I'd like to," Bess assented, as she watched the blue waters of Dog Lake. "If they're all as nice as Ian, I'll be very glad to know my cousins."

He burst into a hearty roar of laughter. "They're all different, but they're good lads. Some day you must know them all."

There was little talk after that. Cousin Angus was anxious to get home, and Bess was eagerly studying the landscape, and noting how different it all looked in the late afternoon. Just as they neared the gate of the bungalow, however, she heaved a deep sigh.

"Tired?" her cousin asked.

"Oh, no! I was only thinking when such a little bit of the world is so beautiful, what must the rest be like, and there seemed such a lot of it, I felt almost frightened."

"Ah, well," her cousin said as he steered the car in at the open gate, "you can't look at more than one place at a time, and this is the first time you've seen anything but your home and round about. I expect you'll see plenty more before you've done. Now here we are, and my stomach says tea and plenty of it; so while I put the car away, you jump out and see if Ian has set the kettle on the stove."

Chapter VIII. HOMEWARD BOUND

“Sure you’ve got everything, Bess? You’ll have to see to things like that, you know. Dad’s one of the best, but if he *can* leave anything behind, he does; so keep your eye on him.”

Bess broke into delighted laughter. “I think it’s all safe. I’ll count, though. My two bags; Cousin Angus’s three; the lunch basket, and that parcel; two rugs; that’s all. Oh, Ian, I wish you could have come too. I’d love to show you our farm, and I know Mum and Dad would like to have you. You must come some day and see us all.”

Ian nodded. “I’m coming—but it’ll have to wait till the fruit harvest is over. Maybe I’ll come to fetch Dad if he stays that long with you: We’ll see. But this isn’t goodbye, Bess. Don’t you think it. Now we know you, we’re not going to lose sight of you again. Besides, you’re coming out here for a vacation next summer.”

“Maybe you think folk on a wheat farm don’t have to work at all?” Bess flashed.

“We’ll look forward to your next visit, anyway,” he replied. “No harm in that, is there?”

“No; it’s no harm. But I don’t want to get discontented, and I do love my home. I’m delighted to think I’ll be seeing them all by tomorrow. I *have* enjoyed my visit with you, but home’s home.”

Ian glanced over the baggage piled into the back of the car, and settled the roll of rugs again. Cousin Angus came out of the house at that moment, ready for the journey.

“Ready, Ian?” he asked. “Then get in, Bess, for we mustn’t be late. You’ll be coming into Penticton tomorrow, Ian, and I’ll leave the car at Jones’s place for you to pick up. I’ll get you on long-distance as soon as we reach your Cousin Rob’s place. Goodbye.”



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HEADING FOR HOME

“’Bye, Dad. Be good! ’Bye, Bess! Remember what I said. If you don’t come some time before early summer next year, I’m coming after you, so watch out!”

Bess laughed again as she gave him her hand in a farewell grip. “I’ll watch out. Anyway if you come for Cousin Angus it won’t be so long before we see you. I’ll look forward to that.”

“So will I,” he said. “Goodbye, Bess. All the best!”

“Goodbye—goodbye!” she cried, leaning out of the window to wave to him as long as he was in sight. That was not long, however, for the road curved quickly, and they were soon humming along the highway, bound for the airport. Here, Cousin Angus would leave her to amuse herself while he went on to Penticton to leave the car with a friend until Ian could collect it on the morrow. Bess had hoped that her young cousin would be able to come to see them off, but work was beginning to pile up on the fruit-ranch, and he preferred to make his farewells at home, in any case. She sat in her corner, watching the landscape with dreamy eyes. What a lovely little corner of the world it was, this valley with its orchards, its lakes and its hills, and the mountains looming up in the distance!

The thunder of hurtling waters roused her from her thoughts, and she leaned forward to gaze on the rapids, and then hung out of the car window for a last look at the Okanagan Falls. After that, it seemed no time before she was in the restaurant at the airport, having a sundae to pass the time until Cousin Angus should return.

He was not long. She had just finished her sundae when he came to call her to come and be weighed with her bags. They were taking the afternoon plane, so as to spend the night at Swift Current. They would go on from there by the first train next morning, and ought to be home by teatime. Bess chuckled to herself at the thought as she stepped off the scales, and followed Cousin Angus out to the sunlit airfield. The next moment, she found that friends had come to see them off, for there were Mr Maddison and two jolly girls of her own age, and Mr and Mrs Wilberforce, too. This was something she had not expected, and she thought once more how very kind everyone was. Then she was surrounded, and Mr Maddison was introducing Pam and Di who seemed to be as jolly as they looked, and Mrs Wilberforce was handing her a small parcel.

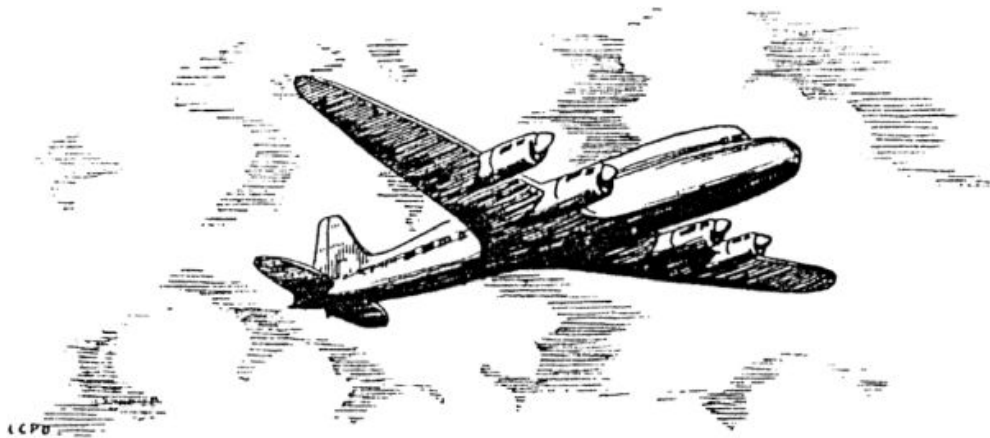
“It’s just a couple of jars of my spiced peaches,” she said, “but I’d like your mother to taste them.”

Mr Maddison had brought a small carton of fruit, too, and Mr Wilberforce presented her with an album filled with snapshots of the district so that she could show them to the home folk.

It was all so unexpected, that Bess could only stammer her thanks, and say how much she liked the Okanagan Valley, and its inhabitants. Fortunately for her, there was no time for more, for they had to take their seats in the plane. The others stood below, waving, and she waved back. Soon the engine roared, and the plane began to move. Almost before Bess knew, they were rising above the lake, above the orchards, above the benches, and so, still rising, headed eastward for Home!

She turned and smiled at Cousin Angus, and he grinned back. Then he picked up the pad before him, and scribbled something before he handed it to her. Bess took it, and a minute later was doubled up in fits of laughter, for this was what he had written:

“Bess-on-her-own came out alone,
But home she goes, *not* Bess-on-her-own!”



[The end of *Bess on Her Own in Canada* by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]