O. DOUGLAS

ANN AND HER MOTHER

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CHAPTER I

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Mrs. Douglas and her daughter Ann sat together in their living-room one November night.

It was a wonderfully comfortable room, brightly yet softly lit, and warmed by a noble fire. There was a pleasant space and emptiness about it, an absence of ornaments and irrelevant photographs; each piece of furniture, each of the few pictures, was of value.

Mrs. Douglas had a book in her lap and in her hand a half-finished stocking, for she considered that she was wasting time if she did not knit while reading.

Ann sat on a stool by the fire, poring over a seedsman's catalogue, a puzzled frown on her brow.

"I wish," she said, without looking up, "I do wish I knew more about gardening. I can't make out from this what will grow best with us.... Don't you think, Mother, it is almost *lèse-majesté* to call a rose Queen Mary, and describe it as 'a gross feeder? Oh, and this! *Mr. Asquith*, 'very compact in form, rosy in colour.' What humourists the compilers of seedsmen's catalogues are! And what poets! Where was it we read that article about catalogues? It said that the very names were like a procession of princes—'amber and carmine Queens, and Princes' Feathers, and Cloth of Gold.' The names tempt one simply by the glory of the sound. 'Love-in-a-Mist ... Love-Fire, a rich cream with a faint suggestion of apricot primrose in petal'—and with a drop one learns that this beauty can be bought for the sum of tuppence! ... Delphiniums we must have—dozens of them. I

can picture us next summer lying on the lawn in deck-chairs on hot, sunny days, looking between tall, blue delphiniums to green hilltops. Won't it be lovely, Mother?"

"H'm," said her mother in a dry voice, "at present you have only the hilltops. I haven't imagination enough to picture the hot sun and the lawn and the blue delphiniums."

"*Mother!*" said Ann, wheeling round on her stool and facing her parent, who was knitting with provoking calm, "there's nothing sporting about you at all. It always rains in November, but that's nobody's fault, and you might at least try to look as if you didn't mind. Nobody ever said a glen was a cheery place in winter, but, myself, I like it frightfully. When Uncle Bob left me the Green Glen for my very own I determined that somehow or other I would manage to build a house in it—a little white-faced house among the heather. Not big, but big enough to hold us all—six good bedrooms, one big living-room, a hall we could sit in, a smaller room to feed in. You all made objections—all except Charlotte, who encouraged me. You pointed out all the disadvantages: six miles from a station, a steep hill road, carting difficult! You told me that building in these days was only the pastime of a millionaire, but—the house is built and, because the architect was a man of sense and listened to what I wanted, it is exactly the house I meant it to be in my dreams, so 'Dreams' it will be called."

"I thought you hated new houses?"

"So I do, except when it is my own house in my own Green Glen. And you will admit that it is comfortable."

"It's very bare," Mrs. Douglas said.

"Well, I like it bare. And your own room is far from bare. It is more like a museum than anything else, with so many mementoes of other days hung on the walls, and photographs of us all at every age and in every attitude, and shelves and shelves of devotional books, not to speak of all the little stucco figures you have cherished for years. Their heads have been gummed on so often they fall off if you look at them. Davie was always being entreated by you to mend them, and he found, finally, that Moses' head (or was it Eli?) would only remain on if turned the wrong way about—so his beard was down his back! ... To return to 'Dreams,' I admit the garden is still unmade, and the road a mere track, but wait and you will see it blossom like the rose. We shan't have any fences—there is no need for them among the hills, and the heather will grow to the edges of our shaven lawns, and we'll have herbaceous borders as gay as a carnation ribbon, and beds of mignonette..."

Mrs. Douglas laid down her stocking and looked at her daughter. "No fences? And rabbits nibbling the mignonette—it's a thing they have a particular fancy for; and sheep eating the vegetables..."

"Go on with your stocking, Motherkin, and don't try to be crushing. We'll have fences then, and wire to keep out the rabbits, and we'll cover the fences with rambler roses—the bright red single kind; I don't like Dorothy Perkins. And there's simply no end to what we can do with the burn; it would make any garden fairyland, with those shining brown pools fringed with heather. *What* luck to have a burn! Before the house we are going to have a paved bit, so that you can go out and take the air without getting your feet wet. There

will be no 'gravel sweep,' and no one will be able to come to our door except on their own feet, for the road will stop a long way from the house."

Ann clasped her hands round her knees, and rocked herself in joyful anticipation.

"I remember," she went on, "hearing as a child some one praise a neighbourhood with the phrase, 'It is full of carriage people.' I wondered at the time what kind of people they were, and if they perhaps had their abode in a carriage, like a snail in its shell! When 'motor people' come to Dreams they will have to leave their motors and walk. We shall say to them, like True Thomas, 'Light down, light down from your horse o' pride.' ... But, Mother, is this really going to bore you terribly? Do you miss so badly the giddy round of Priorsford? The pavements? The shops? The tea-parties?"

Mrs. Douglas gave a long sigh. "I don't want to grumble, but, you know, I always did say it was rash to attempt to stay a winter in the Green Glen. It's well enough in the summer (though even then I would prefer to be nearer civilisation), and fine for the children, but in November, with the fields like sponges, and the road a mere Slough of Despond, and the hills covered with mist most of the time, and the wind coming down the glen howling like an evil spirit, and the station six miles away, and only a pony trap between us and complete burial; Mark and Charlotte in India, and Jim in South Africa, and the children in Oxfordshire with their other grandmother, I feel like a pelican in the wilderness. I told you I would, and I do."

"Poor dear, but..."

"Through the day it isn't so bad. I admit the mornings are rather beautiful, and when it happens to be fine I can potter about outside, and Marget is always a divert. In the afternoon when it rains (and it has rained practically every day for three weeks) I sew and write letters and read, and there is always tea to look forward to. But in the evenings—and the curtains have to be drawn now about four o'clock—when there is no chance of a ring at the bell, no postman, no telephone-call, no stray callers, and the owls hoot, and my eyes get tired with reading, and one can't knit for ever even with four wild grandchildren to knit for, well——"

"But, my dear," said her daughter, "just think how you will appreciate Priorsford when you get back. We are very much alone just now—it was an odd chance that sent Mark and Charlotte to India and Jim to South Africa the same winter—but don't let's have to remember it as the winter of our discontent.... We must face facts. Neighbours we have almost none. Mr. Sharp, at the Manse, is practically the only one, and he is so shy that speaking to him is like trying to carry on a conversation with a very young rabbit in a trap. The Scotts aren't so very far away as the crow flies, only over the other side of the hill, but it is five miles round by the road. It's an unpeopled world, but the great thing to remember is that any moment you please you can have a case packed, order the pony trap, drive to the station, buy a ticket, and in about two hours you would be in Glasgow, in the Central Station Hotel, among all the city gentlemen, feasting your eyes on people, forgetting the owls in listening to the Glasgow accent, eating large meals, frequenting picture houses...."

Mrs. Douglas dropped both her book and stocking in her indignation.

"Ann, you know I *never* enter a picture house, and I haven't the least desire to go to Glasgow in the meantime."

"I tell you what," Ann cried, "go in for a course of reading and improve your mind. It's an opportunity that may not occur again."

"I'm too old to improve my mind; besides, it isn't very nice of you to suggest that it needs improving."

Ann studied her mother with her head on one side. "You're sixty, aren't you? Sixty's nothing. The late Mr. Gladstone learned Arabic when he was eighty. Besides, you are the most absurd person for sixty I ever saw. Your hair is as soft and brown as it was when you were thirty, and you have a complexion that is the envy of less fortunate women. And the odd thing is, I believe you hate to be told so. I believe you want to look old."

"Last summer," said Mrs. Douglas, "I overheard Rory say to Alison, 'Alis, Gran is nearly sixty; I heard her say so,' and Alis, with a depth of pity in her voice, replied, 'Oh, poor Gran!' But when I think I'm only sixty I feel like pitying myself. In the *Times* last night there were six people among the 'Deaths' who were over ninety. It frightens me to think that I may live to a great age, and, perhaps, see you all go before me—and I get so wearied sometimes for your father and the boys...."

Ann laid her hand on her mother's. "I know," she said, "I know. But, Mother, are those who are gone so much more dear to you than we who are left? As Pharaoh said to Hadad:

'What hast thou lacked with us, that, behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country?'"

"Ah, my dear, *nothing*, but..."

"The old answer," said Ann. "Nothing, nothing—'howbeit let me go in any wise.' ... Well, we have wandered from our subject. What do you say, Mums, to reading Robert Louis right through? We have the Edinburgh edition here. He will teach you to love the moorlands."

Mrs. Douglas recoiled in horror from the suggestion.

"Oh no! No. No. The very name of R.L.S. makes me think of the eternal crying of whaups, and we are fairly beset with the creatures here. Really to appreciate Robert Louis you must read him immersed in a town with no hope of a holiday, or on the burning, shining plains of India, or on the South African veldt. To read there of 'a great, rooty sweetness of bogs' and 'the infinite, melancholy piping of hill-birds,' and 'winds austere and pure' is like water in a thirsty land. But when one is seated in the bogs, and deaved by the hill-birds it's only an irritation. I'd rather read Ethel M. Dell, and warm myself with the thought of heroes whose eyes are like slumbering volcanoes, and heroines who generally manage to get a flogging from some one before they win through to happiness."

Ann laughed. "It's quite true. Here we must read books hot with life, full of intrigues and sensational developments. We have all the simplicity we want in the Green Glen."

Her mother sighed. "I'm not really discontented, Ann, though I'm afraid I sound so. But I seem to lead such a useless life here. A few letters to sick and sad people is all I accomplish. If there were some people about the doors

whom I could visit and, perhaps, help a little. Once a minister's wife always a minister's wife. I can't get out of the habit of trying to help. But there's only old Geordie's cottage, and he hasn't even a wife, and he wouldn't thank me for a visit."

"No," laughed Ann. "He is very proud of being able to fend for himself, and hopes to die without being beholden to any woman. He was telling me a sad tale the other day about an old friend of his who lived alone until he was eighty, and then fell ill and had to have the district nurse, who insisted on his remaining in bed. 'To think,' said Geordie, 'that a man should live to be aichty and be overpowered by a wumman in the end.' But I can quite see that the lack of people to comfort and help is a great lack to you—born minister's wife that you are."

"Ah, well, I made many mistakes, but my heart was in my job. It was a real pleasure to me to know every soul in the church, and to listen to all they cared to tell me of their trials and their troubles, and to be asked to share in their merrymakings; to have the right to laugh and cry with them. The wives used to say when your father intimated visiting, 'I wish the mistress wad come wi' the minister, she's a graund cracker.' Your father was sometimes ill-off knowing what to talk about in the different houses; he wasn't one of those glib men with a fund of easy phrases, but when they got to know him they liked him the better for his quietness, and valued his few words more than other people's eloquence. How he would have enjoyed this, Ann! He loved the Green Glen, and the burn, and the whaups crying."

There was a silence, and Mrs. Douglas sat looking into the fire. She was far away from the little house among the hills. She was young again, and the husband of her youth was once more at her side. Pictures, softened and beautified by time, unrolled themselves before her eyes. Children played in a garden among flowers, their laughter and shouting came to her ears, she could see their faces lifted to hers; but no beckoning could bring them to her, for long ago they had grown up and gone away; they were but dream children who played in that garden.

Ann watched her mother with a soft look in her grey eyes. "I've been thinking, Mums, you ought to write your *Life*."

Mrs. Douglas came back to the present with an effort. "Write my life? But I did—don't you remember? On that yachting cruise we went, when the sea never stayed calm except for a few hours. There was nothing much to do, so I wrote my life in a twopenny pass-book, with a pencil, and none of you were at all encouraging about it. I read it aloud to you somewhere about the Azores, when you were lying seasick in your berth, and you said it made you feel worse; and Charlotte cried from the next cabin, 'Ann, what is wrong with Gran that she is making that curious, whining sound?' and Mark printed on the cover, 'The Life of auld Mistress Douglas written by herself,' and then it got lost."

"I remember," said Ann. "But this time it must be done properly. You'll tell it to me and I'll write it down, and we'll have it typed and perhaps printed, so that the children when they grow up will know what a queer little grandmother was theirs. Let me see—we'll be here alone until the Moncrieffs

come about the middle of December; that will give us a month to work at it. Two hours every night, perhaps more. Does that please you, Motherkin?"

"Ann, you are trying to humour an old woman. I don't suppose the children would ever trouble to read my *Life*, except perhaps Alison—that child has a strong sense of duty; but I must say I would enjoy remembering it all.... Here are Marget and Mysie."

The two servants came into the room accompanied by a large Persian cat, grey, the colour of a November sky. This beautiful creature had been named by Ann the "Tatler," because his genius for falling into photographic attitudes reminded her, she said, of those ladies, fair and fashionable, whose pictures adorn the weekly pages of that popular journal.

Marget seated herself majestically. She was a tall woman, with a broad, honest face, and hair pulled straight back and covered by a cap—not the flippant scrap of muslin with a bow generally worn, but an erection of coffee-coloured lace, with touches of crimson velvet, which she alluded to as a "kep," and which gave her almost a regal air.

Marget had been thirty-five years with the Douglas family, and was so thoroughly a Douglas that there was never any thought of keeping her in her "place." Mysie, who was her niece, she kept under iron control, but she allowed herself much latitude. No one knew Marget's age. It was a subject on which she had always been excessively touchy. When the Census came round she had said, "I'll no' pit it doon till a' the bairns are oot, an' naebody but the maister'll ken, an' he'll no' tell."

She met all questions with "I'm as auld as ma little finger an' I'm aulder than ma teeth." In revenge the Douglases had intimated to their friends that they had inside knowledge that Marget was at least eighty.

After prayers Mysie left the room, but Marget generally remained for a "crack," delighting to bandy words with "Miss Ann"—a diversion which to-night ended in Ann being called "a daft lassie."

"*Lassie!*" cried Ann.

"Ye'll aye be a lassie to me," Marget told her; "but," turning to her mistress, "is it true, Mem, that she's gaun to write yer *Life*? I never ken when Miss Ann's speakin' the truth and when she's juist haverin'.... It wad be rale interestin'. Ye wad need to pit in aboot thon daft man wha cam' to see the maister and the pollis efter him, an' that awfu' fricht we got wi' the big fire in the linoleum factory, and aboot the man wha drooned hissel in the Panny Pond and floatit...."

"Yes, Marget," said Ann, "we'll need your help to decide what is to be put in. One thing, of course, must go in—your age."

Marget rose from her chair with a we-are-not-amused look, put the Bibles back in their proper places, dropped her delightful, old-fashioned curtsey, walked to the door, and said before she closed it behind her:

"Ye wadna daur. An', what's mair, ye *dinna ken it*."

CHAPTER II

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Two nights later, when the stars had come out to look down at the Green Glen and the curtains were drawn in Dreams, Ann sat down before a small table on which lay a pile of paper and a fountain-pen, and told her mother that she was now ready to write her *Life*.

"But how do you begin a *Life*?" Mrs. Douglas asked. She was sitting in her favourite low chair, doing what she called her "reading." Beside her was a pile of devotional books, from each of which she read the portion for the day. Nothing would make her miss this ceremony, and she carted the whole pile about with her wherever she went.

"Shall I give you the date of my birth and say that I was the child of poor but honest parents? I seem to remember that beginning."

"No," Ann decided, "we'll leave dates alone; they are 'chiels that winna ding.' The point is, what style would you like me to write it in? We might begin like *The Arabian Nights*—'It is related (but God alone is all-knowing, as well as all-wise and all-mighty and all-bountiful) that there was in ancient times a fair virgin, Helen....' But I think, perhaps, your history is too tame and domestic for such a highly coloured style."

"I should think so, indeed," said her mother, as she laid down *Hours of Silence* and took up *Come ye Apart*.

"What about the Russian touch?" Ann asked, waving her pen. "Like this: 'She turned upon her pillow, tearing at its

satin cover with her nails, then, taking a spoonful of bromide, she continued——'"

"Oh, Ann—don't be ridiculous!"

"Or shall I dispense entirely with commas, inverted and otherwise, and begin without a beginning at all, as the very best people do? It does make Aunt Agatha so angry, that sort of book, where no explanations are offered, and you suddenly find yourself floundering among a lot of Christian names. Anyway, it's much too clever for me to attempt! I'm afraid we must confine ourselves to a plain narrative, with no thoughts, only incidents. I think I'll begin: 'In my youth I wasna what you would ca' bonnie, but I was pale, penetratin', and interestin'.' How is that?"

Mrs. Douglas shook her head. She had reached *From Day to Day*, and would soon be at the apex of the pile, *Golden Grain*. "If you are going to describe my appearance you might at least be accurate."

"Well," said her daughter, "I only know you from a very old photograph as a moon-faced child with tight curls, and then, later, with two babies and a *cap*! What were you really like?"

Mrs. Douglas sat very upright, with a becoming pink flush on her face and a little smile at the corners of her mouth. "I can see myself the day I met your father for the first time. I had on my first silk dress—royal blue it was—and a locket with a black velvet ribbon round my neck, and my hair most elaborately done in what was called a 'mane,' some rolled up on the top, some hanging down. My hair was my best point. It was thick and wavy, and as yellow as corn. Your

father always said he fell in love with the back of my head. Who would believe it who saw me now?"

"'Faigs, ye're no' bad,' as Marget would say," Ann comforted her. "As one gets older looks are chiefly a matter of dress. When you take pains with your clothes no woman of your age looks better; but when you wander out in a rather seedy black dress, with a dejected face under a hat that has seen better days, you can't wonder at what my friend Mrs. Bell said after meeting you one wet day: 'Eh, puir auld buddy; she's an awfu' worrit-lookin' wumman; it fair makes me no' weel to look at her!'"

"Yes, Ann, but you shouldn't have laughed. I don't like that Mrs. Bell. She's a forward woman, and you spoil her."

"Oh, I told her you weren't really old, but those women are so surprisingly young. They have grown-up families and hordes of grandchildren, and you think they are at least seventy and they turn out to be fifty. Of course, it was rather disrespectful of her to call you 'puir auld buddy,' but the 'awfu' worrit-lookin'' was such an exact description of you doing good works on a wet day in your old clothes that I had to laugh. But we're not getting on."

"It's absurd to talk of writing my life," Mrs. Douglas said. "There is nothing worth telling about. I asked Alison last summer what she was going to be, and she tossed back that yellow mane of hers, and said earnestly, 'Well, Gran, I did think of being a poet, but I've decided just to be an ordinary woman with a baby.' That's all I ever was. An ordinary woman with several babies and a man and a kirk to look after—a big handful for any woman. I'd better begin where, for me, the world first began, at Etterick. You remember the

old house, don't you, with its white-washed walls and high pointed roof, standing at the end of the village? When I think of it it always seems to be summer; the shadow of the house falling black across the white road, a baker's van standing in the village, and one of the wives holding out her white apron for loaves, a hen clucking sleepily, the hum of the bees among the flowers in the old garden, the *clink-clink* from the smiddy at the burnside, my mother in a thin blue dress standing in the doorway with a basket on her arm—the peace of a summer afternoon! And the smell of it! New-mown grass drying in the sun, indescribable sweet scents from the flower-thick roadsides, the smiddy smell of hot iron sizzling on big hoofs, wafts from the roses in the garden—those most fragrant, red, loose-petalled roses that now I never see. Inside the house was cool and dark, with drawn blinds. D'you remember the parlour? I can tell you where every bit of furniture in it stood. The bureau behind the door, and along the wall the old, wide sofa. I've often told you about the upholsterer from Priorsford, who came to prescribe for it when its springs began to subside? He had a lisp, and after the examination was finished he said simply and finally, 'The thofo's done.' How we laughed over that, and the 'thofo' held on for another twenty years, never getting much worse. Yes, the piano came next to the sofa, and then the wide window with all the little panes. The tea-table stood there in summer, and one could see all who passed by. 'The day the chaise and pair gaed through Caddonfoot' was a saying in the countryside, but Etterick boasted carts and carriages in some profusion. I wonder if my mother's teas were really better than anyone else's? The

cream so thick that it had to be helped out of the jug with a spoon! And the 'thin' scones coated with fresh-churned butter! My dear Robbie revelled in them. He wrote from India, you remember, that when camping they ran short of bread, and the cook said he would bake some *chupattis*. 'And,' wrote Robbie, 'by the grace of God the *chupattis* turned out to be my grandmother's "thin" scones!'"

"I remember," said Ann. "He introduced me to them when I went out. Wasn't the house at Etterick an inn once?"

"Yes, and all the rooms had numbers painted on the doors. No. 8 was your nursery when we used to spend the summer there. And the playroom was called 'Jenny Berry'—why, I don't know; the reason for the name is lost in the mists of antiquity. It was the first place you all rushed to the moment you arrived, in a fever to see if your treasures were safe, and you always found them just as you left them. My mother was a very understanding woman with children. She wasn't, perhaps, a very tender grandmother as grandmothers go now, and you children held her in some awe; but you valued her good opinions, and you knew her to be absolutely just. She seldom praised, but, on the other hand, she never damped your enthusiasms. 'Never daunton young folk' was one of her favourite sayings. Yes. I'm afraid she was somewhat intolerant, poor dear. She had a great contempt for the gossiping, crocheting, hen-headed female that abounded in her day. 'A frivolous woman,' she would say after a visit from such a one, 'fit for nothing but fancy work and novelettes.' Good looks appealed to her enormously, and she was glad all you children had what she called 'china' faces; swarthy people she could not abide. We

took Mrs. Alston to see her when she was staying with us one summer at Caddonfoot—dear Mrs. Alston, with her dun skin and projecting teeth and her heart of gold! Your grandmother was the frailest little body then, only her indomitable spirit kept her going, and Mrs. Alston fussed over her and deferred to her in the kindest way. But the blandishments were all to no purpose; she looked coldly at the visitor, and afterwards, when I told her what a fine woman Mrs. Alston was, and what fine work she had done in the mission-field, all the answer I got was, 'Oh, I dare say, but I never took my tea with a worse-looking woman.'"

"I remember that," said Ann. "I remember how Father shouted when you told him. Granny was often very amusing, but what I remember most about her was her sense of comfort."

"Yes, if I've any notion how to make a house comfortable I got it from my mother. She was great in preparing for people. If we had only gone to Priorsford for the day she made of our return a sort of festival. Out on the doorstep to meet us, fires blazing, tea ready, and such a budget to tell us of the small events of the day. Some women are so casual with their children, they don't *thirl* them to themselves. They let them go and come, and seem to take very little interest in their comings and their goings, don't even trouble to be in the house when the boys come home for the holidays; suppose vaguely that this one or that one will be home to-day or to-morrow, never think of preparing a welcome. And then they wonder that their children have no love for their home; that when they go out into the world, they don't trouble to write except at infrequent intervals;

that sometimes their lives drift so far apart that they cannot hear each other speak."

"Mother," said Ann, "you speak wisely, but how much of this is to go down in your *Life*? At present I have only got that you had yellow hair and a royal blue silk dress and a locket. Oughtn't I to say something about your childhood and what influenced you and all that sort of thing? Do try to remember some thoughts you had; you know the sort of thing these 'strong' novels are full of—your feelings when you found they had drowned your kitten—and weren't you ever misunderstood and driven to weep floods of tears in secret?"

Mrs. Douglas shook her head. "No, I never was clever enough to think the things children think in modern novels. And I don't remember being misunderstood, except that I was always considered rather a forward child when really I suffered much from shyness. One morning, with a great effort, I managed to say to old Sibbald, It's a fine morning,' as I passed him. 'What are ye sayin' noo wi' yer impertinence?' was his most uncalled-for response. I think my childhood was too happy to have any history. One of a big family, with freedom to roam, and pets in abundance, I never had a dull minute. And Etterick was a very interesting village, full of characters."

"Wasn't there somebody called 'Granny' you used to tell us stories about?"

"My mother's nurse. She died before you were born. The very wee-est woman that ever was—I used to pick her up and carry her about—and so bonnie, with a white-goffered mutch framing her face. We all loved that little old woman.

She lived in a tiny house at the top of the village with Tam, her husband; all her family were up and married and away. 'Granny' was our refuge in every kind of storm—indeed, she was everybody's refuge. And she had a great heart in her little body. It was told of her that when her eldest boy ran away to Edinburgh and enlisted, she made a pot of broth and baked a baking of scones for the children left at home, strapped the baby on her back, walked into Edinburgh, bought the boy off, and walked back again—fifty-six miles in all! We have almost lost the use of our legs in these days of trains and motors. She never asked anything from anybody. I can remember her face when some well-meaning person offered her charity. 'Na, na, thank ye kindly. I may be sodger-clad, but I'm major-minded.' And there was old Peggy Leithen, who gave a ha'penny to every beggar that came to the door, murmuring as she did so, 'Charity covereth a multitude of sins,' and graphically described her conversion: 'I juist got the blessin' when ma knee was on the edge o' the bed steppin' in ahint Geordie.' And there was Jock Look-Up—but I could go on for hours. I think I was thirteen when I went to a boarding-school. I enjoyed that, too—all except the getting up to practise on winter mornings. I can feel now the chill of the notes on my numb fingers. I was going back to school for another year when I met your father and got married instead."

"Seventeen, weren't you?"

"Seventeen, and childish at that. I never had my hair up till my marriage day. Your father was twenty-six."

"Babes!" said Ann.

"It's odd how things come about," said Mrs. Douglas, as she put the last of the text-books on the pile, and took off the large, round-eyed tortoise-shell spectacles that she wore when doing her "reading." "Dr. Watts, our own minister, was ordered to the South of France for the winter, and your father, who had just finished with college, came to take his place. We were used to fine ministers in Etterick. Dr. Watts was a saint and a scholar, and the parish minister was one of God's most faithful servants—both were men of dignity and power. But your father was so young and ardent; he went through the district like a flame. He held meetings in lonely glens where no meeting had ever been held before. He kindled zeal in quiet people who had been content to let things go on as they had always gone; it was a wonderful six months. Your Aunt Agatha, who, being older, had left school before I did, wrote to tell me of this extraordinary young man; indeed, her letters were so full of him that I made up my mind to dislike him at sight. And after I did meet him I pretended to myself and to Agatha that I thought him a very tiresome young man. I mimicked the way he sang hymns and his boyish, off-hand manner, so unlike Dr. Watts' grave, aloof ways. I wish I had words, Ann, to give you some idea of the man your father was in his youth. As he grew older he grew not less earnest, but more tolerant—mellower, perhaps, is the word. As a young man he was like a sword-blade, pure and keen. And yet he was such a boy with it all, or I never would have dared to marry him. I had absolutely no training for a minister's wife, but I went into it quite blithely. Now, looking back, I wonder at myself. At the time I was like the little boy marching bravely into a dark room, his

bigger brother explaining the phenomena with 'He hasna the sense to be feart.'"

"There's a lot in that," said Ann. "But think what a loss to the world if you had remained a spinster—it hardly bears thinking of! Well, we haven't got very far to-night. To-morrow you must tell me all about the wedding. I know Alison would like to hear about the tiny, white, kid lacing shoes with pale blue rosettes that I used to look at in a drawer. I believe they finished up in a jumble sale."

"Yes," Mrs. Douglas confessed. "It was the first one we ever had, and you know the sort of madness that seizes you when you see people eager to buy. I rushed home and looked out everything we could do without—my wedding slippers among the lot. And poor old Mrs. Buchanan, in a sort of ecstasy of sacrifice, climbed up to her kitchen shelf and brought down the copper kettle that in her saner moments she cherished like saffron, and threw it on the pyre. The sale was for Women's Foreign Missions, and when at the end of the most strenuous evening any of us had ever spent the treasurer and I lugged our takings home in a cab, her husband met us at the door, and, lifting the heavy bag, said, 'I doubt it's Alexander the coppersmith.' But it wasn't; it was fully £100. Dear, dear, the excitements of a ministerial life!"