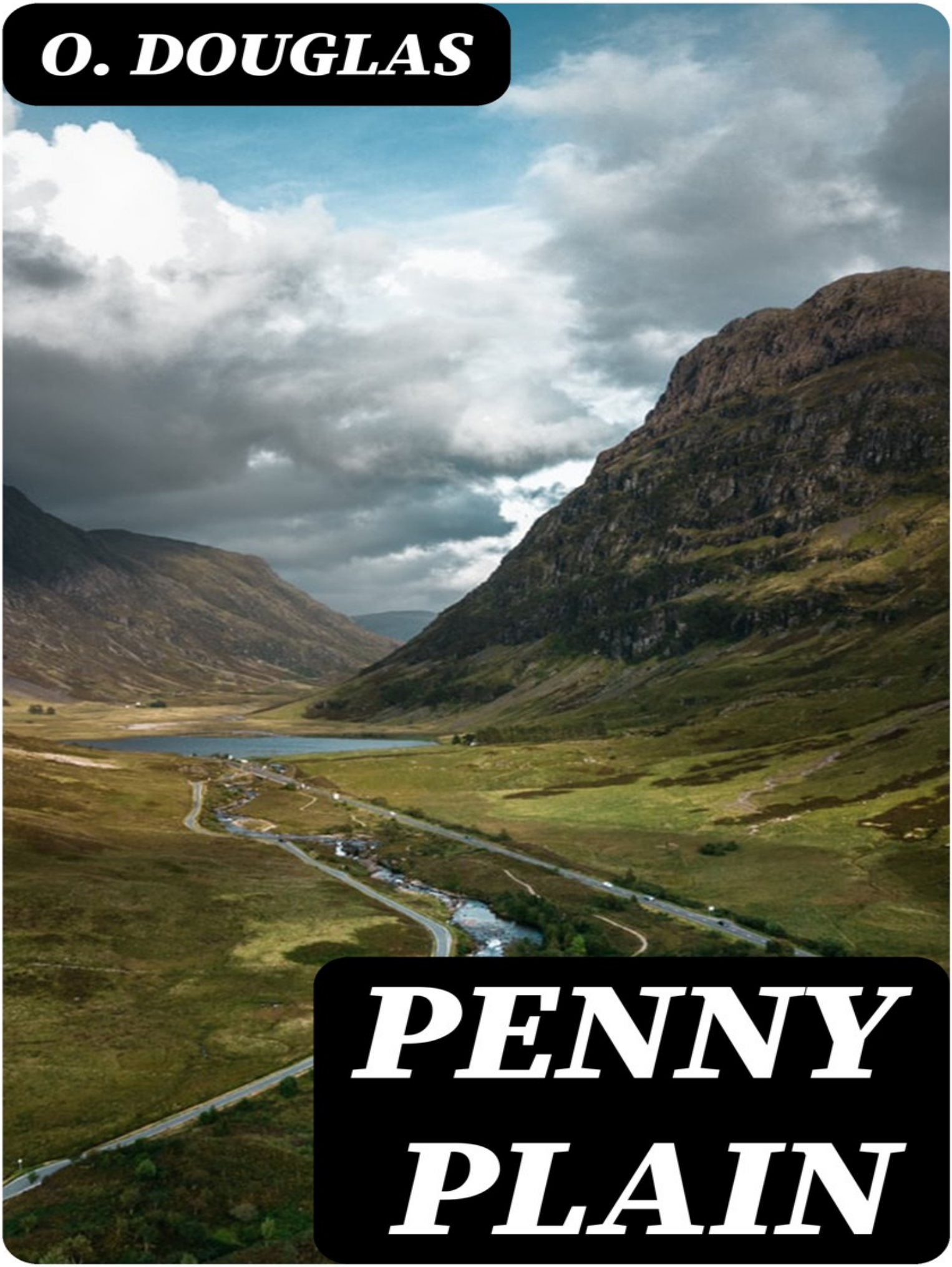
O. DOUGLAS



PENNY PLAIN

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Penny Plain

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CHAPTER I

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"The actors are at hand,
And by their show
You shall know all that you are like to know."
Midsummer Night's Dream.

It was tea-time in Priorsford: four-thirty by the clock on a chill
October afternoon.

The hills circling the little town were shrouded with mist. The wide bridge that spanned the Tweed and divided the town proper—the Highgate, the Nethergate, the Eastgate—from the residential part was almost deserted. On the left bank of the river, Peel Tower loomed ghostly in the gathering dusk. Round its grey walls still stood woods of larch and fir, and in front the links of Tweed moved through pleasant green pastures. But where once ladies on palfreys hung with bells hunted with their cavaliers there now stood the neat little dwellings of prosperous, decent folk; and where the good King James wrote his rhymes, and listened to the singing of Mass from the Virgin's Chapel, the Parish Kirk reared a sternly Presbyterian steeple. No need any longer for Peel to light the beacon telling of the coming of our troublesome English neighbours. Telegraph wires now

carried the matter, and a large bus met them at the trains and conveyed them to that flamboyant pile in red stone, with its glorious views, its medicinal baths, and its band-enlivened meals, known as Priorsford Hydropathic.

As I have said, it was tea-time in Priorsford.

The schools had *skailed*, and the children, finding in the weather little encouragement to linger, had gone to their homes. In the little houses down by the riverside brown teapots stood on the hobs, and rosy-faced women cut bread and buttered scones, and slapped their children with a fine impartiality; while in the big houses on the Hill, servants, walking delicately, laid out tempting tea-tables, and the solacing smell of hot toast filled the air.

Most of the smaller houses in Priorsford were very much of one pattern and all fairly recently built, but there was one old house, an odd little rough stone cottage, standing at the end of a row of villas, its back turned to its parvenu neighbours, its eyes lifted to the hills. A flagged path led up to the front door through a herbaceous border, which now only held a few chrysanthemums and Michaelmas daisies (Perdita would have scorned them as flowers for the old age), but in spring and in summer blazed in a sweet disorder of old-fashioned blossoms.

This little house was called The Rigs.

It was a queer little house, and a queer little family lived in it. Jardine was their name, and they sat together in their living-room on this October evening. Generally they all talked at once and the loudest voice prevailed, but to-night there was not so much competition, and Jean frequently found herself holding the floor alone.

David, busy packing books into a wooden box, was the reason for the comparative quiet. He was nineteen, and in the morning he was going to Oxford to begin his first term there. He had so long looked forward to it that he felt dazed by the nearness of his goal. He was a good-looking boy, with honest eyes and a firm mouth.

His only sister, Jean, four years older than himself, left the table and sat on the edge of the box watching him. She did not offer to help, for she knew that every man knows best how to pack his own books, but she hummed a gay tune to prove to herself how happy was the occasion, and once she patted David's grey tweed shoulder as he leant over her. Perhaps she felt that he needed encouragement this last night at home.

Jock, the other brother, a schoolboy of fourteen, with a rough head and a voice over which he had no control, was still at the tea-table. He was rather ashamed of his appetite, but ate doggedly. "It's not that I'm hungry just now," he would say, "but I so soon get hungry."

At the far end of the room, in a deep window, a small boy, with a dog and a cat, was playing at being on a raft. The boy's name was Gervase Taunton, but he was known to a large circle of acquaintances as "the Mhor," which, as Jean would have explained to you, is Gaelic for "the great one." Thus had greatness been thrust upon him. He was seven, and he had lived at The Rigs since he was two. He was a handsome child with an almost uncanny charm of manner, and a gift of make-believe that made his days one long excitement.

He now stood like some "grave Tyrian trader" on the table turned upside down that was his raft, as serious and intent as if it had been the navy of Tarshish bringing Solomon gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks. With one arm he clutched the cat and assured that unwilling voyager, "You're on the dangerous sea, me old puss. You don't want to be drowned, do you?" The cat struggled and scratched. "Then go—to your doom!"

He clasped his hands behind him in a Napoleonic manner and stood gloomily watching the unembarrassed progress of the cat across the carpet, while Peter (a fox-terrier, and the wickedest dog in Priorsford) crushed against his legs to show how faithful he was compared to any kind of cat.

"Haven't you finished eating yet, Jock?" Jean asked. "Here is Mrs.
M'Cosh for the tea-things."

The only servant The Rigs possessed was a middle-aged woman, the widow of one Andrew M'Cosh, a Clyde riveter, who had drifted from her native city of Glasgow to Priorsford. She had a sweet, worn face, and a neat cap with a black velvet bow in front.

Jock rose from the table reluctantly, and was at once hailed by the Mhor and invited on to the raft.

Jock hesitated, but he was the soul of good nature. "Well, only for five minutes, remember. I've a lot of lessons to-night." He sat down on the upturned table, his legs sprawling on the carpet, and hummed "Tom Bowling," but the Mhor leaned from his post as steersman and said gravely, "Don't dangle your legs, Jock; there are sharks in

these waters." So Jock obediently crumpled his legs until his chin rested on his knees.

Mrs. M'Cosh piled the tea-things on a tray and folded the cloth. "Ay, Peter," she said, catching sight of that notorious character, "ye look real good, but I wis hearin' ye were efter the sheep again the day."

Peter turned away his head as if deeply shocked at the accusation, and Mrs. M'Cosh, with the tea-cloth over her arm, regarded him with an indulgent smile. She had infinite tolerance for Peter's shortcomings.

"Peter was kinna late last night," she would say, as if referring to an erring husband, "an' I juist sat up for him." She had also infinite leisure. It was no use Jean trying to hurry the work forward by offering to do some task. Mrs. M'Cosh simply stood beside her and conversed until the job was done. Jean never knew whether to laugh or be cross, but she generally laughed.

Once when the house had been upset by illness, and trained nurses were in occupation, Jean had rung the bell repeatedly, and, receiving no answer, had gone to the kitchen. There she found the Mhor, then a very small boy, seated on a chair playing a mouth-organ, while Mrs. M'Cosh, her skirts held coquettishly aloft, danced a few steps to the music. Jean—being Jean—had withdrawn unnoticed and slipped upstairs to the sick-room much cheered by the sight of such detachment.

Mrs. M'Cosh had been eight years with the Jardines and was in many ways such a treasure, and always such an amusement, that they would not have parted from her for much red gold.

"Bella Bathgate's expectin' her lodger the morn." The tea-tray was ready to be carried away, but Mrs. M'Cosh lingered.

"Oh, is she?" said Jean. "Who is it that's coming?"

"I canna mind the exact name, but she's ca'ed the Honourable an' she's bringin' a leddy's maid."

"Gosh, Maggie!" ejaculated Jock.

"I asked you not to say that, Jock," Jean reminded him.

"Ay," Mrs. M'Cosh continued, "Bella Bathgate's kinna pit oot aboot it.
She disna ken how she's to cook for an Honourable—she niver saw yin."

"Have you seen one?" Jock asked.

"No' that I know of, but when I wis pew opener at St. George's I let in some verra braw folk. One Sunday there wis a lord, no less. A shaughly wee buddy he wis tae. Ma Andra wud hae been gled to see him sae oorit."

The eyes of the Jardines were turned inquiringly on their handmaid. It seemed a strange reason for joy on the part of the late Andrew M'Cosh.

"Weel," his widow explained, "ye see, Andra wis a Socialist an' thocht naething o' lords—naething. I used to show him pictures o' them in the *Heartsease Library*—fine-lukin' fellays wi' black mustacheys—but he juist aye said, 'It's easy to draw a pictur', and he wouldna own that they wis onything but meeserable to look at. An', mind you, he wis richt. When I saw the lord in St. George's, I said to masel', I says, 'Andra wis richt,' I says." She lifted up the tray and prepared to depart. "Weel, he'll no' be muckle

troubled wi' them whaur he's gone, puir man. The Bible says, Not many great, not many noble."

"D'you think," said Mhor in a pleasantly interested voice, "that Mr. M'Cosh is in heaven?" (Mhor never let slip an opportunity for theological discussions.) "I wouldn't care much to go to heaven myself, for all my friends are in"—he stopped and cast a cautious glance at Jean, and, judging by her expression that discretion was the better part of valour, and in spite of an encouraging twinkle in the eyes of Jock, finished demurely—"the Other Place."

"Haw, haw," laughed Jock, who was consistently amused by Mhor and his antics. "I'm sorry for your friends, old chap. Do I know them?"

"Well," said Mhor, "there's Napoleon and Dick Turpin and Graham of
Claverhouse and Prince Charlie and——"

"Mhor—you're talking too much," said David, who was jotting down figures in a notebook.

"It's to be hoped," said Jean to Mrs. M'Cosh, "that the honourable lady will suit Bella Bathgate, for Bella, honest woman, won't put herself about to suit anybody. But she's been a good neighbour to us. I always feel so safe with her near; she's equal to anything from a burst pipe to a broken arm.... I do hope that landlord of ours in London will never take it into his head to come back and live in Priorsford. If we had to leave The Rigs and Bella Bathgate I simply don't know what we'd do."

"We could easy get a hoose wi' mair conveniences" Mrs. M'Cosh reminded her. She had laid down the tray again and stood with her hands on her hips and her head on one side,

deeply interested "Thae wee new villas in the Langhope Road are a fair treat, wi' a pantry aff the dining-room an' hot and cold everywhere."

"*Villas*," said Jean—"hateful new villas! What are conveniences compared to old thick walls and queer windows and little funny stairs? Besides, The Rigs has a soul."

"Oh, mercy!" said Mrs. M'Cosh, picking up the tray and moving at last to the door, "that's fair heathenish!"

Jean laughed as the door shut on their retainer, and perched herself on the end of the big old-fashioned sofa drawn up at one side of the fire. She wore a loose stockinette brown dress and looked rather like a wood elf of sorts with her golden-brown hair and eyes.

"If I were rich," she said, "I would buy an annuity for Mrs. M'Cosh of at least £200 a year. When you think that she once had a house and a husband, and a best room with an overmantel and a Brussels carpet, and lost them all, and is contented to be a servant to us, with no prospect of anything for her old age but the workhouse or the charity of relations, and keeps cheery and never makes a moan and never loses her interest in things …"

"But you're *not* rich," said Jock.

"No," said Jean ruefully. "Isn't it odd that no one ever leaves us a legacy? But I needn't say that, for it would be much odder if anyone did. I don't think there is a single human being in the world entitled to leave us a penny piece. We are destitute of relations…. Oh, well, I daresay we'll get on without a legacy, but for your comfort I'll read to you

about the sort of house we would have if some kind creature did leave us one."

She dived for a copy of *Country Life* that was lying on the sofa, and turned to the advertisements of houses to let and sell.

"It is good of Mrs. Jowett letting us have this every week. It's a great support to me. I wonder if anyone ever does buy these houses, or if they are merely there to tantalize poor folk? Will this do? 'A finely timbered sporting estate—seventeen bedrooms——'"

"Too small," said Jock from his cramped position on the raft.

"'A beautiful little property——' No. Oh, listen. 'A characteristic Cotswold Tudor house'—doesn't that sound delicious? 'Mullioned windows. Fine suite of reception-rooms, ballroom. Lovely garden, with trout-stream intersecting'—heavenly. 'There are vineries, peach-houses, greenhouses, and pits'—what do you do with pits?" "Keep bears in them, of course," said Jock, and added vaguely—"bear baiting, you know."

"It isn't usual to keep bears," David pointed out.

"No, but if you *had* them," Jock insisted, "you would want pits to keep them in."

"Jock," said Jean, "you are like the White Knight when Alice told him it wasn't likely that there would be any mice on the horse's back. 'Not very likely, perhaps, but if they *do* come I don't choose to have them running all about.' But I agree with the White Knight, it's as well to be provided for everything, so we'll keep the pits in case of bears."

"They had pits in the Bible," said Mhor dreamily, as he screwed and unscrewed his steering-wheel, which was also the piano stool, "for Joseph was put in one."

Jean turned over the leaves of the magazine, studying each pictured house, gloating over details of beauty and of age, then she pushed it away with a "Heigh-ho, but I wish we had a Tudor residence."

"I'll buy you one," David promised her, "when I'm Lord Chancellor."

"Thank you, David," said Jean.

By this time the raft had been sunk by a sudden storm, and Jock had grasped the opportunity to go to his books, while Mhor and Peter had laid themselves down on the rug before the fire and were rolling on each other in great content.

Jean and David sat together on the sofa, their arms linked. They had very little to say, for as the time of departure approaches conversation dies at the fount.

Jean was trying to think what their mother would have said on this last evening to her boy who was going out into the world. Never had she felt so inadequate. Ought she to say things to him? Warn him against lurking evils? (Jean who knew about as much of evil as a "committed linnet"!) But David was such a wise boy and so careful. It always pinched Jean's heart to see him dole out his slender stock of money, for there never was a Jardine born who did not love to be generous.

She looked at him fondly. "I do hope you won't find it too much of a pinch, David. The worst of it is, you will be with

people who have heaps of money, and I'm afraid you'll hate to feel shabby."

"It's no crime to be poor," said David stoutly. "I'll manage all right. Don't you worry. What I hate is thinking you are scrimping to give me every spare penny—but I'll work my hardest."

"I know you'll do that, but play too—every minute you can spare. I don't want you to shut yourself up among books. Try and get all the good of Oxford. Remember, Sonny, this is your youth, and whatever you may get later you can never get that back." She leaned back and gave a great sigh. "How I wish I could make this a splendid time for you, but I can't, my dear, I can't.... Anyway, nobody will have better china. I've given you six of Aunt Alison's rosy ones; I hope the scout won't break them. And your tablecloths and sheets and towels are all right, thanks to our great-aunt's stores.... And you'll write as often as you can and tell us everything, if you get a nice scout, and all about your rooms, and if cushions would be any use, and oh, my dear, *eat* as much as you can—don't save on food."

"Of course not," said David. "But several nights a week I'll feed in my own room. You don't need to go to Hall to dinner unless you like."

He got up from the sofa and went and stood before the fire, keeping his head very much in the air and his hands in his pockets. He was feeling that home was a singularly warm, kind place, and that the great world was cold and full of strangers; so he whistled "D'ye ken John Peel?" and squared his shoulders, and did not in the least deceive his sister Jean.

"Peter, me faithful hound," said the Mhor, hugging the patient dog.

"What would you like to play at?"

Peter looked supremely indifferent.

"Red Indians?"

Peter licked the earnest face so near his own.

The Mhor wiped his face with the back of his hand (his morning's handkerchief, which he alluded to as "me useful little hanky," being used for all manner of purposes not intended by the inventor of handkerchiefs, was quite unpresentable by evening) and said:

"I know. Let's play at 'Suppose.' Jean, let's play at 'Suppose.'"

"Don't worry, darling," said Jean.

The Mhor turned to Jock, who was sitting at a table with his head bent over a book. "Jock, let's play at 'Suppose.'"

"Shut up," said Jock.

"David." The Mhor turned to his last hope. "*Seeing* it's your last night."

David never could resist the Mhor when he was beseeching.

"Well, only for ten minutes, remember."

Mhor looked fixedly at the clock, measuring with his eye the space of ten minutes, then nodded, murmuring to himself, "From there to there. You begin, Jean."

"I can't think of anything," said Jean. Then seeing Mhor's eager face cloud, she began: "Suppose when David was in the train to-morrow he heard a scuffling sound under the seat, and he looked and saw a grubby little boy and a fox-terrier, and he said, 'Come out, Mhor and Peter.' And

suppose they went with him all the way to Oxford, and when they got to the college they crept upstairs without being seen and the scout was a kind scout and liked dogs and naughty boys and he gave them a splendid supper——"

"What did he give them?" Mhor asked.

"Chicken and boiled ham and meringues and sugar biscuits and lemonade" (mentioning a few of Mhor's favourite articles of food), "and he tucked them up on the sofa and they slept till morning, and got into the train and came home, and that's all."

"Me next," said Mhor. "Suppose they didn't come home again. Suppose they started from Oxford and went all round the world. And I met a magician—in India that was—and he gave me an elephant with a gold howdah on its back, and I wasn't frightened for it—such a meek, gentle, dirty animal—and Peter and me sat on it and it pulled off cocoanuts with its trunk and handed them back to us, and we lived there always, and I had a Newfoundland pup and Peter had a golden crown because he was king of all the dogs, and I never went to bed and nobody ever washed my ears and we made toffee every day, every single day…." His voice trailed away into silence as he contemplated this blissful vision, and Jock, wooed from his Greek verbs by the interest of the game, burst in with his unmanageable voice:

"Suppose a Russian man-of-war came up Tweed and started shelling
Priorsford, and the parish church was hit and the steeple fell into
Thomson's shop and scattered the haddocks and kippers

and things all
over the street, and——"

"Did you pick them up, Jock?" squealed Mhor, who regarded Jock as the greatest living humorist, and now at the thought of the scattered kippers wallowed on the floor with laughter.

Jock continued: "And another shell blew the turrety thing off The Towers and blew Mrs. Duff-Whalley right over the West Law and landed her in Caddon Burn——"

"Hurray!" yelled Mhor.

Jock was preparing for a further flight of fancy, when Mrs. M'Cosh, having finished washing the dishes, came in to say that Thomson had never sent the sausages for Mr. David's breakfast, and she could not see him depart for England unfortified by sausages and poached eggs.

"I'll just slip down and get them," she announced, being by no means averse to a stroll along the lighted Highgate. It was certainly neither Argyle Street nor the Paisley Road, but it bore a far-off resemblance to those gay places, and for that Mrs. M'Cosh was thankful. There was a cinema, too, and that was a touch of home. Talking over Priorsford with Glasgow friends she would say, "It's no' juist whit I wud ca' the deid country—no juist paraffin-ile and glaury roads, ye ken. We hev gas an' plain-stanes an' a pictur hoose."

When Mrs. M'Cosh left the room Jock returned to his books, and the Mhor, his imagination fermenting with the thought of bombs on Priorsford, retired to the window-seat to think out further damage.

* * * * *

Some hours later, when Jock and Mhor were fast asleep and David, his packing finished, was preparing to go to bed, Jean slipped into the room.

She stood looking at the open trunk on the floor, at the shelves from which the books had been taken, at the empty boot cupboard.

Two large tears rolled over her face, but she managed to say quite gaily, "December will soon be here."

"In no time at all," said David.

Jean was carrying a little book, which she now laid on the dressing-table, and, giving it a push in her brother's direction, "It's a *Daily Light*," she explained.

David did not offer to look at the gift, which was the traditional
Jardine gift to travellers, a custom descending from Great-aunt Alison.
He stood a bit away and said, "All right."

And Jean understood, and said nothing of what was in her heart.

CHAPTER II

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"They have their exits and their entrances." *As You Like It*.

The ten o'clock express from Euston to Scotland was tearing along on its daily journey. It was that barren hour in the afternoon when luncheon is over and forgotten, and tea is yet far distant, and most of the passengers were either asleep or listlessly trying to read light literature.

Alone in a first-class carriage sat Bella Bathgate's lodger—Miss Pamela Reston. A dressing-bag and a fur-coat and a pile of books and magazines lay on the opposite seat, and the lodger sat writing busily. An envelope lay beside her addressed to

THE LORD BIDBOROUGH,
c/o KING, KING, & Co.,
BOMBAY.

The letter ran:

"DEAR BIDDY,—We have always agreed, you and I (forgive the abruptness of this beginning), that we would each live our own life. Your idea of living was to range over the world in search of sport, mine to amuse myself well, to shine, to be admired. You, I imagine from your letters (what a faithful correspondent you have been, Biddy, all your

wandering life), are still finding zest in it: mine has palled. You will jump naturally to the brotherly conclusion that *I* have palled—that I cease to amuse, that I find myself taking a second or even a third place, I who was always first; that, in short, I am a soured and disappointed woman.

"Honestly, I don't think that is so. I am still beautiful: I am more sympathetic than in my somewhat callous youth, therefore more popular: I am good company: I have the influence that money carries with it, and I could even now make what is known as a 'brilliant' marriage. Did you ever wonder—everybody else did, I know—why I never married? Simply, my dear, because the only man I cared for didn't ask me ... and now I am forty. (How stark and almost indecent it looks written down like that!) At forty, one is supposed to have got over all youthful fancies and disappointments, and lately it has seemed to me reasonable to contemplate a common-sense marriage. A politician, wise, honoured, powerful—and sixty. What could be more suitable? So suitable that I ran away—an absurdly young thing to do at forty—and I am writing to you in the train on my way to Scotland.... You see, Biddy, I quite suddenly saw myself growing old, saw all the arid years in front of me, and saw that it was a very dreadful thing to grow old caring only for the things of time. It frightened me badly. I don't want to go in bondage to the fear of age and death. I want to grow old decently, and I am sure one ought to begin quite early learning how.

"'Clear eyes do dim at last
And cheeks outlive their rose:

Time, heedless of the past,
No loving kindness knows.'

Yes, and 'youth's a stuff will not endure,' and 'golden lads and girls all must like chimney-sweepers come to dust.' The poets aren't at all helpful, for youth—poor brave youth—won't listen to their warnings, and they seem to have no consolation to offer to middle age.

"The odd thing is that up to a week or two ago I greatly liked the life I led. You said it would kill you in a month. Was it only last May that you pranced in the drawing-room in Grosvenor Street inveighing against 'the whole beastly show,' as you called it—the freak fashions, the ugly eccentric dances, the costly pageant balls, the shouldering, the striving, the worship of money, the gambling, the self-advertisement—all the abject vulgarity of it? And my set, the artistic, soulful literary set, you said was the worst of all: you actually described the high-priestess as looking like a 'decomposing cod-fish,' and added by way of a final insult that you thought the woman had a kind heart.

"And I laughed and thought the War had changed you. It didn't change me, to my shame be it said. I thought I was doing wonders posing about in a head-dress at Red Cross meetings, and getting up entertainments, and even my neverceasing anxiety about you simply seemed to make me more keen about amusing myself.

"Do you remember a story we liked when we were children, *The Gold of Fairnilee*? Do you remember how Randal, carried away by the fairies, lived contented until his eyes were touched with the truth-telling water, and then Fairyland lost its glamour and he longed for the old earth he

had left, and the changes of summer and autumn, and the streams of Tweed and his friends?

"Is it, do you suppose, because we had a Scots mother that I find, deep down within me, that I am 'full of seriousness'? It is rather disconcerting to think oneself a butterfly and find out suddenly that one is a—what? A bread-and-butter fly, shall we say? Something quite solid, anyway.

"As I say, I suddenly became deadly sick of everything. I simply couldn't go on. And it was no use going burying myself at Bidborough or even dear Mintern Abbas; it would have been the same sort of trammelled, artificial existence. I wanted something utterly different. Scotland seemed to call to me—not the Scotland we know, not the shooting, yachting, West Highland Scotland, but the Lowlands, the Borders, our mother's countryside.

"I remembered how Lewis Elliot (I wonder where he is now—it is ages since I heard of him) used to tell us about a little town on the Tweed called Priorsford. It was his own little town, his birthplace and I thought the name sung itself like a song. I made inquiries about rooms and found that in a little house called Hillview, owned by one Bella Bathgate, I might lodge. I liked the name of the house and its owner, and I hope to find in Priorsford peace and great content.

"Having been more or less of a fool for forty years, I am now going to try to get understanding. It won't be easy, for we are told that 'it cannot be gotten with gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.... No mention shall be made of coral and pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies.'

"I am going to walk on the hills all day, and in the evening I shall read the Book of Job and Shakespeare and Sir Walter.

"In one of the Jungle Books there was a man called Sir Purun Dass—do you remember? Sir Purun Dass, K.C.I.E., who left all his honours and slipped out one day to the sun-baked highway with nothing but an ochre-coloured garment and a beggar's bowl. I always envied that man. Not that I could rise to such Oriental heights. The beggar's bowl wouldn't do for me. I cling to my comforts: also, I am sure Sir Purun Dass left himself no loophole whereby he might slip back to his official position whereas I——-Well, the Politician thinks I have gone for a three months' rest cure, and at sixty one is not impatient. You will say, 'How like Pam!' Yes, isn't it? I always was given to leaving myself loopholes; but, all the same, I am not going to face an old age bolstered up by bridge and cosmetics. There must be other props, and I mean to find them. I mean to possess my soul. I'm not all froth, but, if I am, Priorsford will reveal it. I feel that there will be something very revealing about Miss Bella Bathgate.

"Poor Biddy, to have such an effusion hurled at you!

"But you'll admit I don't often mention my soul.

"I doubt if you will be able to read this letter. If you can make it out, forgive it being so full of myself. The next will be full of quite other things. All my love, Biddy.—Yours, PAM."

* * * * *

Three hours later the express stopped at the junction. The train was waiting on the branch line that terminated at

Priorsford, and after a breathless rush over a high bridge in the dark Pamela and her maid, Mawson, found themselves bestowed in an empty carriage by a fatherly porter.

Mawson was not a real lady's maid: one realised that at once. She had been a housemaid for some years in the house in Grosvenor Street, and Pamela, when her own most superior maid flatly refused to accompany her on this expedition, had asked Mawson to be her maid, and Mawson had gladly accepted the offer. She was a middle-aged woman with a small brown face, an obvious *toupée*, and an adventurous spirit.

She now tidied the carriage violently, carefully hiding the book Pamela had been reading and putting the cushion on the rack. Finally, tucking the travelling-rug firmly round her mistress, she remarked pleasantly, "A h'eight hours' journey without an 'itch!"

"Certainly without an aitch," thought Pamela, as she said, "You like travelling, Mawson?"

"Oh yes, m'm. I always 'ave 'ad a desire to travel. Specially, if I may say so, to see Scotland, Miss. But, oh, ain't it bleak? Before it was dark I 'ad me eyes glued to the window, lookin' out. Such miles of 'eather and big stones and torrents, Miss, and nothing to be seen but a lonely sheep—'ardly an 'ouse on the 'orizon. It gave me quite a turn."

"And this is nothing to the Highlands, Mawson."

"Ain't it, Miss? Well, it's the bleakest I've seen yet, an' I've been to Brighton and Blackpool. Travelled quite a lot, I 'ave, Miss. The lydy who read me 'and said I would, for me teeth are so wide apart." Which cryptic saying puzzled

Pamela until Priorsford was reached, when other things engaged her attention.

* * * * *

There was another passenger for Priorsford in the London express. He was called Peter Reid, and he was as short and plain as his name. Peter Reid was returning to his native town a very rich man. He had left it a youth of eighteen and entered the business of a well-to-do uncle in London, and since then, as the saying is, he had never looked over his shoulder; fortune showered her gifts on him, and everything he touched seemed to turn to gold.

While his mother lived he had visited her regularly, but for thirty years his mother had been lying in Priorsford churchyard, and he had not cared to keep in touch with the few old friends he had. For forty-five years he had lived in London, so there was almost nothing of Priorsford left in him—nothing, indeed, except the desire to see it again before he died.

They had been forty-five quite happy years for Peter Reid. Money-making was the thing he enjoyed most in this world. It took the place to him of wife and children and friends. He did not really care much for the things money could buy; he only cared to heap up gold, to pull down barns and build greater ones. Then suddenly one day he was warned that his soul would be required of him—that soul of his for which he had cared so little. After more than sixty years of health, he found his body failing him. In great irritation, but without alarm, he went to see a specialist, one Lauder, in Wimpole Street.

He supposed he would be made to take a holiday, and grudged the time that would be lost. He grudged, also, the doctor's fee.

"Well," he said, when the examination was over, "how long are you going to keep me from my work?"

The doctor looked at him thoughtfully. He was quite a young man, tall, fair-haired, and fresh-coloured, with a look about him of vigorous health that was heartening and must have been a great asset to him in his profession.

"I am going to advise you not to go back to work at all."

"*What!*" cried Peter Reid, getting very red, for he was not accustomed to being patient when people gave him unpalatable advice. Then something that he saw—was it pity?—in the doctor's face made him white and faint.

"You—you can't mean that I'm really ill?"

"You may live for years—with care."

"I shall get another opinion," said Peter Reid.

"Certainly—here, sit down." The doctor felt very sorry for this hard little business man whose world had fallen about his ears. Peter Reid sat down heavily on the chair the doctor gave him.

"I tell you, I don't feel ill—not to speak of. And I've no time to be ill. I have a deal on just now that I stand to make thousands out of—thousands, I tell you."

"I'm sorry," James Lauder said.

"Of course, I'll see another man, though it means throwing away more money. But"—his face fell—"they told me you were the best man for the heart.... Leave my work! The thing's ridiculous Patch me up and I'll go on till I drop. How long do you give me?"

"As I said, you may live for years; on the other hand, you may go very suddenly."

Peter Reid sat silent for a minute; then he broke out:

"Who am I to leave my money to? Tell me that."

He spoke as if the doctor were to blame for the sentence he had pronounced.

"Haven't you relations?"

"None."

"The hospitals are always glad of funds."

"I daresay, but they won't get them from me."

"Have you no great friends—no one you are interested in?"

"I've hundreds of acquaintances," said the rich man, "but no one has ever done anything for me for nothing—no one."

James Lauder looked at the hard-faced little man and allowed himself to wonder how far his patient had encouraged kindness.

A pause.

"I think I'll go home," said Peter Reid.

"The servant will call you a taxi. Where do you live?"

Peter Reid looked at the doctor as if he hardly understood.

"Live?" he said. "Oh, in Prince's Gate. But that isn't home.... I'm going to Scotland."

"Ah," said James Lauder, "now you're talking. What part of Scotland is 'home' to you?"

"A place they call Priorsford. I was born there."

"I know it. I've fished all round there. A fine countryside."

Interest lit for a moment the dull grey eyes of Peter Reid.

"I haven't fished," he said, "since I was a boy. Did you ever try the Caddon Burn? There are some fine pools in it. I once lost a big fellow in it and came over the hills a disappointed laddie.... I remember what a fine tea my mother had for me." He reached for his hat and gave a half-ashamed laugh.

"How one remembers things! Well, I'll go. What do you say the other man's name is? Yes—yes. Life's a short drag; it's hardly worth beginning. I wish, though, I'd never come near you, and I would have gone on happily till I dropped. But I won't leave my money to any charity, mind that!"

He walked towards the door and turned.

"I'll leave it to the first person who does something for me without expecting any return.... By the way, what do I owe you?"

And Peter Reid went away exceeding sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

CHAPTER III

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"It is the only set of the kind I ever met with in which you are neither led nor driven, but actually fall, and that imperceptibly into literary topics; and I attribute it to this, that in that house literature is not a treat for company upon invitation days, but is actually the daily bread of the family."—Written of Maria Edgeworth's home.

Pamela Reston stood in Bella Bathgate's parlour and surveyed it disconsolately.

It was papered in a trying shade of terra-cotta and the walls were embellished by enlarged photographs of the Bathgate family—decent, well-living people, but plain-headed to a degree. Linoleum covered the floor. A round table with a red-and-green cloth occupied the middle of the room, and two arm-chairs and six small chairs stood about stiffly like sentinels. Pamela had tried them all and found each one more unyielding than the next. The mantelshelf, painted to look like some uncommon kind of marble, supported two tall glass jars bright blue and adorned with white raised flowers, which contained bunches of dried grasses ("silver shekels" Miss Bathgate called them), rather dusty and tired-looking. A mahogany sideboard stood

against one wall and was heavily laden with vases and photographs. Hard lace curtains tinted a deep cream shaded the bow-window.

"This is grim," said Pamela to herself. "Something must be done. First of all, I must get them to send me some rugs —they will cover this awful floor—and half a dozen cushions and some curtains and bits of embroidery and some table linen and sheets and things. Idiot that I was not to bring them with me!... And what could I do to the walls? I don't know how far one may go with landladies, but I hardly think one could ask them to repaper walls to each stray lodger's liking."

Miss Bathgate had not so far shown herself much inclined for conversation. She had met her lodger on the doorstep the night before, had uttered a few words of greeting, and had then confined herself to warning the man to watch the walls when he carried up the trunks, and to wondering aloud what anyone could want with so much luggage, and where in the world it was to find room. She had been asked to have dinner ready, and at eight o'clock Pamela had come down to the sitting-room to find a coarse cloth folded in two and spread on one-half of the round table. A knife, a fork, a spoon lay on the cloth, flanked on one side by an enormous cruet and on the other by four large spoons, laid crosswise, and a thick tumbler. An aspidistra in a pot completed the table decorations.

The dinner consisted of stewed steak, with turnip and carrots, and a large dish of potatoes, followed by a rice pudding made without eggs and a glass dish of prunes.

Pamela was determined to be pleased.