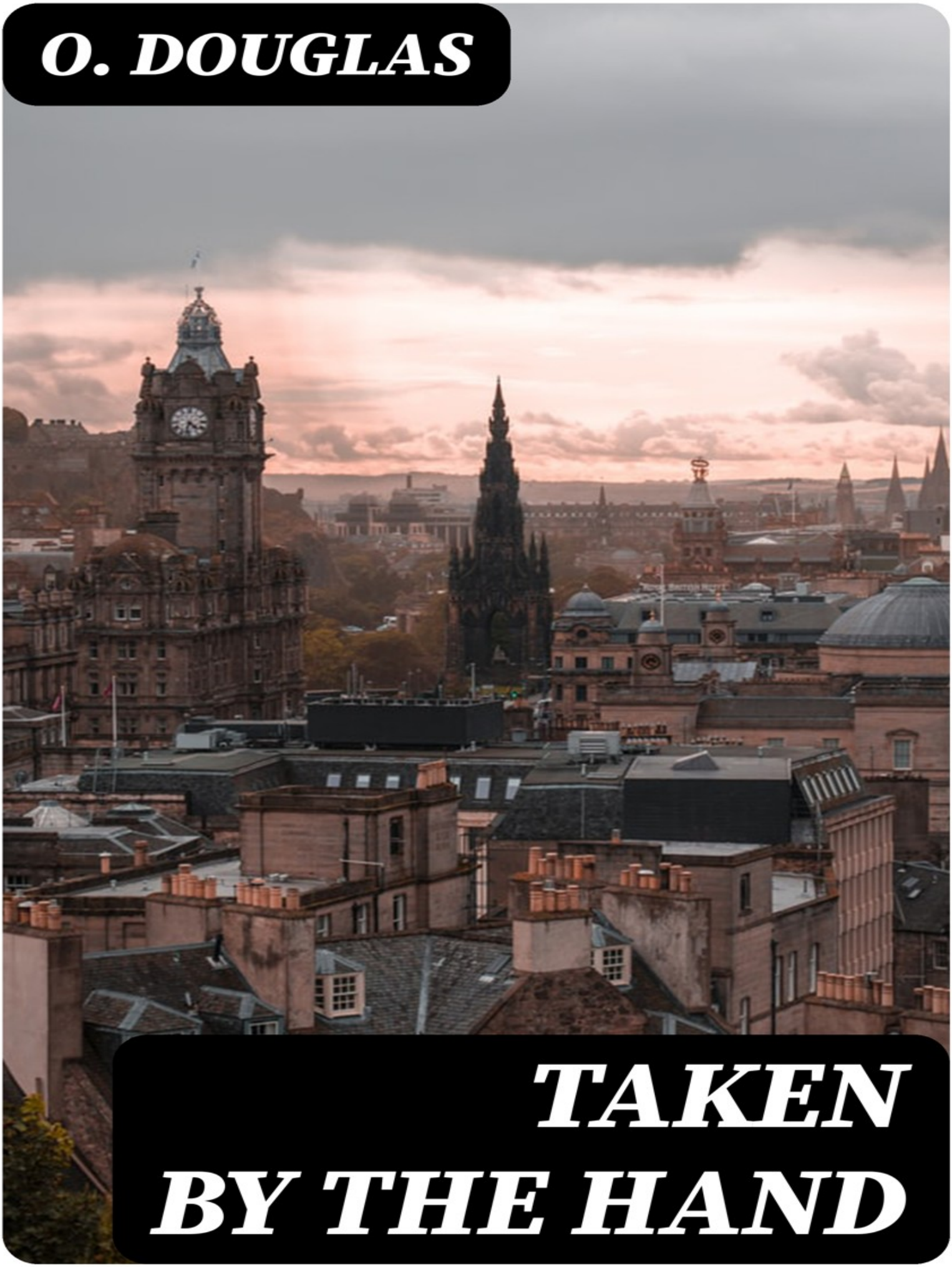
O. DOUGLAS



TAKEN BY THE HAND

O. Douglas

Taken by the Hand

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DEDICATION

TO
CLEMENT BRYCE GUNN

FOR NEARLY FIFTY YEARS DOCTOR OF MEDICINE
IN THE TOWN OF PEEBLES

“Those who must journey
Henceforward alone
Have need of stout convoy
Now Great Heart is gone.”

The characters in this book are entirely imaginary,
and have no relation to any living person

CHAPTER I

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"*Finish, good lady: the bright day is done* . . ."

Antony and Cleopatra.

Two ladies stood on the doorstep of 14 Park Place, Glasgow. They had not been asked into the house—had not, indeed, expected to be; they were there merely to enquire. First they had parleyed with a maid, then a nurse passing through the hall had been brought to speak to them, and now, satisfied that they had heard all they could hear, they were withdrawing. They were both a little more than middle-aged, stout, comfortable-looking women, obviously well-to-do, with Persian-lamb coats, expensive handbags, and hats of the type known as "matrons" set high on their heads.

In silence they came down the handsome flight of steps from No. 14 and only began to talk when they had got well away from the house.

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. Murray, the older and the stouter of the two. "Poor Mrs. Dobie! Who would have thought it? Such a healthy woman and so full of life. I don't think I ever met anyone more 'on the spot' as they say. It was a treat to see her get things into shape at a bazaar or anything like that. Just the way she turned herself—so purpose-like. Of course, as a minister's daughter you may say she was brought up to that sort of thing, but still . . ."

"I'm awfully sorry," said the younger woman, with a note of genuine feeling in her voice. After a pause she went on: "She was Janie Boyd. I was at school with her, and a wild girl she was, minister's daughter or no minister's daughter! The

pranks she used to play! And her father such a saint! I'm sure St. Luke's thought the world of him."

"Not only St. Luke's but the whole of Glasgow. He was a good man. . . . Wasn't Mr. Dobie an elder in St. Luke's, Mrs. Lithgow?"

"He was. D'you not remember him? A tall man with a beard. His first wife was a Duthie. She had a lot of money. I expect it all went to her only child—Samuel, Sir Samuel now. . . . Mr. Dobie would be sixty when he married again, and Janie Boyd wouldn't be very young either, thirty-five, mebbe. I never knew why she married him, he was so like a waxwork, and a beard and all, and fussy wasn't the word. Peggy would tell me that waxworks aren't fussy, but, well, you know what I mean. But, anyway, Janie seemed quite happy with him. It was wonderful how she managed to keep him contented, and yet get her own way in everything that mattered. But since he died—it must be ten years ago! Fancy!—and she had all the money at her disposal—she's come out wonderfully. I'd hardly have given her credit for so much organising power. How many things is she president of, I wonder? And it's always a pleasure to see her on a platform. She not only speaks well but she looks well. I always wondered where she got her hats; they're so becoming. She'll be greatly missed. I'm sorry for Be'trice, poor thing."

"Yes," said Mrs. Murray mournfully, "it's Be'trice who's to be pitied. . . . She's a friend of your Peggy's, isn't she?"

"Oh, well, they played together as children, and the two families have always been intimate, but I wouldn't call them great friends. To tell you the truth, Mrs. Murray, Peggy can't be bothered much with Be'trice; she says she's too *deprecating*. Did you ever? I'm sure if she is it's a good fault, for most of the girls I know are impudent hussies. I said that to Peggy, but she just laughed. . . . I like Be'trice because she's so civil, it's a relief to find a girl pretty-mannered in these days, but perhaps she is a little inclined

to be listless and—and unenterprising. She never seems to want to do anything but stay at home beside her mother."

"Mebbe," said Mrs. Murray, panting a little with the walk, "mebbe the girl's shy."

Mrs. Lithgow turned to give a beaming bow to a passing acquaintance, then said: "Have you noticed, Mrs. Murray, that a very energetic mother has often a tired kind of daughter? Just as a very sort of diplomatic mother will have a disconcertingly honest girl?"

The older woman laughed. "I daresay you're right. Well, anyway, you've got a very satisfactory daughter in Peggy. So clever in the house and yet so good at games, and a fine, upstanding creature! I'm sure you and her father must be proud of her."

"Oh, we are. I don't deny it. She's a good girl, Peggy. And what d'you think? She's just got engaged! It's not out, but I'm telling you because you've always been so kind about Peggy. Harry Lendrum. Yes, Aitkin & Lendrum. The eldest son. Yes, isn't it nice? 'A neighbour's bairn' as Granny says; they've grown up together. And I'll have her beside me—that's the best of it. I hope I wouldn't have made a fuss, but I'd have been very vexed to let her away to India or Kenya or any of those places—though she'd go like a shot. Nothing dauntons our Peggy. . . . You're tired, Mrs. Murray: I hope you haven't walked too far?"

"No, no. I'm just a—wee thing—wheezy. I walk too little. Indeed, Mr. Murray sometimes tells me I'll soon lose the use of my legs! That's the worst of a car. I'm awfully pleased to hear about Peggy. I wonder what she'd like for a present?"

"Oh, anything will be acceptable. They've got to furnish from the foundation, so to speak."

"That's fine. If it's a widower with a house furnished already, or a bride going abroad, you feel so cramped in your choice, don't you? We'll have to think of something specially nice for Peggy. . . . It won't be for a time yet?"

“In the beginning of the year, we thought, but there’s nothing fixed. Well, here we are at your own door, and I do hope you haven’t felt the walk too far.”

“It’s done me good, Mrs. Lithgow. Now you’ll just come in and have a cup of tea with me. You’re a good wee bit from home yet.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Murray. I’ll be glad of my tea, for I’ve got a great blow this afternoon. Poor Janie Dobie. I can’t get over it at all.”

They went in together, through the hall, up the handsome staircase, to the large and richly furnished drawing-room, where a tea-table stood invitingly near the fire.

Tea was brought up at once, and Mrs. Murray, busying herself at the tea-tray, sighed. “Dear, dear, it seems no time since poor Mrs. Dobie was sitting in that chair you’re in. . . . She always admired that fire-screen, and I said ‘I’ll leave it to you in my will, Mrs. Dobie,’ just for a joke you know. How little I thought. . . . How d’you like your tea, Mrs. Lithgow?”

“Both, please, and a good kitchen cup. I’m old-fashioned, I suppose, but I must say I get tired of the people who say, ‘Two spoonfuls of milk and hot water,’ or ‘Neither sugar nor cream, and very weak. . . .’ Yes, it’s the way we must all go, Mrs. Murray. D’you know, I sometimes find myself wondering why the world was made so full of interesting things and beautiful places, and why we’re allowed to get so fond of each other when we’ve got such a short time in it. And Janie Dobie was enjoying life so *heartily*. She always did everything with such gusto. I can’t picture her ill and weak. . . . I’ll call again to-morrow and ask to see poor Be’trice. It must be so lonely for her with only strange nurses, though, of course, there’s always Fairlie. She was nurse, you know, and stayed on as sewing-maid, housekeeper, a bit of everything, and she’s devoted to Be’trice. . . . I don’t know of any relations on the Boyd side: Janie was an only child; and I don’t know of any on the Dobie side either, except the

step-son Samuel, *Sir* Samuel. Did you ever meet his wife, Mrs. Murray?”

“Never,” said Mrs. Murray firmly. “Does she come here much?”

Mrs. Lithgow pursed her lips. “She used to come years ago, and she was glad enough to send her children—she has a son and daughter—when she and her husband wanted a holiday on the Continent, but now she’s too busy ascending the social ladder—you see her name and her photograph often in the papers, in connection with charity balls and things—to trouble about the humble connections in Glasgow. I’m told she says Glasgow’s so common.”

“Poor thing,” said Mrs. Murray, quite sincerely. “And will Be’trice have to make her home with her?”

“Well, I don’t know what else she could do. It isn’t as if she was a girl with a lot of spirit and enterprise. At her age—she’s nearly twenty-five—with plenty of money she could give herself a splendid time, travel and see the world, or take up some special work, there’s no end to what she might do. It’s what the girl of to-day’s always asking, freedom to live her own life, but I doubt if poor Be’trice’ll see it in that light. It’s the way she’s been brought up. If she’d been sent to a good school where she’d have got to know all sorts of girls, and got accustomed to the rough and tumble of life, instead of going about with a governess, for all the world like a cloistered nun. I’m sure Janie Dobie meant it for the best, but she didn’t show her usual good sense in bringing up her girl. She taught Be’trice to depend on her for everything—and now what’s to happen?”

* * * * *

Mrs. Dobie lay in her large, comfortable bedroom, surrounded with gifts from her many friends—flowers, books, baskets of fruit. It was the same room she had shared for fifteen years with her husband, and every day of

the fifteen years she had wished in her heart that she could get rid of every article of furniture it contained. The first Mrs. Dobie had had a sombre taste in bedrooms, and everything was dark and heavy, and so good that there was no hope of its getting shabby in reasonable time.

His first wife had been a favourite topic with Joseph Dobie. Her portrait hung above the dining-room mantelpiece (a tall woman in a Liberty gown of olive green) and his eyes often sought it at meal-times while he recalled some instance of her philanthropic zeal. Indeed, so much was said of “Isabella’s” excellencies that her successor, half-irritated, half-amused, sometimes felt that it would have evened things a little had she had a first husband whose portrait she could have hung above the drawing-room mantelpiece and whose virtues she could have extolled. But, untroubled by jealousy, Janie Dobie bore no grudge to the dead women either for her excellencies or her taste in furniture; all the same when Joseph Dobie died she wasted no time in reforming her bedroom.

Ten happy years had followed. She enjoyed the importance that her position as Joseph Dobie’s widow gave her. In a small way she blossomed into a personage. Other women recognised in her the makings of a leader. When she spoke she was listened to. When some one was wanted to plead a cause, or preside at a function, Mrs. Dobie’s was often the name suggested. As one of her friends said: “Mrs. Dobie has both common sense and mother-wit, she’s easy to look at, and there’s a sort of cosy you-and-me-ness about the way she addresses people that puts any meeting in a good humour, and then—she’s a good woman.”

When first she realised she was ill Mrs. Dobie had been inclined to be resentful. She, the healthiest of women, who hardly knew what it meant to have a headache or a common cold, who had always pitied half-contemptuously her feebler sisters as they coughed and ached their way through a Glasgow winter! Why, she *enjoyed* the cold

weather, she often said, and always began the winter with eagerness. Summer was all very well and it was delightful at Greenbraes, their house on the west-coast, but how exhilarating to get back to Glasgow in the end of September, back to all her friends and interests, back to a telephone that was always ringing—*Mrs. Dobie: Mrs. Dobie*; she seemed in request everywhere. Her engagement book was full, she dove-tailed engagements, she had rarely one hour all day to herself, and when people in wonder asked her how it was done, she would laugh, and say with perfect truth, “I *like* it!”

It was in June that she first began to feel that all was not well with her; she became conscious of a feeling of malaise, something quite intangible yet oddly compelling, and she told her friends that she was “run down,” and smiled wryly as she said it—that she should own to such a thing! And all her friends agreed that what she needed was a real rest. Mrs. Dobie worked far too hard, they said, put far too much of herself into everything she did; no wonder she was tired out. “What about a voyage?” they asked. She ought to get right away from every one and recuperate in new scenes.

Mrs. Dobie listened to them and appeared to be weighing the advantages of this scheme and that, but all the time she was saying to herself, “I won’t go anywhere; I’m too tired to start; all I need is to get into my own comfortable bed at Greenbraes and lie there till I’m rested.” But to her great disappointment she found that she was just as tired in bed.

In the middle of September she came back to the house in Park Place to be X-rayed, and when the result was known she asked only one, question. It was answered truthfully, and she began to set her house in order.

One day she was lying thinking over matters. Having always had a tidy mind and methodical ways she had not now to wrestle with a mass of things left in confusion, but there was some money of her own which she wanted to go where it would be most needed. Beatrice would have more

than she could easily spend, the old servants were provided for, but Mrs. Dobie knew of several people to whom a hundred or two would make all the difference in life. She thought of them as she lay there propped up with pillows, and, reaching out to the table beside her for a pencil and block, wrote down some names and addresses.

There was that poor man George Clark with the delicate wife. He had come back from the War to find his little business ruined, and she had interested herself in him, and got him started again. He was working day and night to keep a footing: he deserved encouragement. And the boy with hip-joint disease whom she visited in his eyrie in a gloomy tenement near the river: the doctors said if he were kept in the country he might be cured. And Alice Wilson who had given her youth to an invalid mother, and for long years had kept herself with sewing, she was now in deadly fear that she would break down before she could claim the Old Age Pension—how good to set her free from anxiety. There were others, too . . . she would think of them later, and what was left would go to the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund and the Indigent Gentlewomen.

It was with something of her old briskness that, having decided this, Mrs. Dobie laid down the pad and pencil. She had forgotten for the moment why she was doing it, and the realisation flooded over her like the shock of a cold wave. Surely it was impossible: she was only sixty. And such a young sixty! The obituary columns were full of people, eighty, ninety, even a hundred. Some one had said not so long ago that ninety now was what seventy used to be, and she had agreed and thought comfortably that she had a long way to go.

And had she not? Doctors were often mistaken; another might take quite a different view of the case, but even as she doubted something told her there had been no mistake. She had the sentence of death in her own body, that healthy body in which she had taken such pride, that had

never let her down. . . . She looked round the room with a smile that was a little bitter. Carnations by the dozen, roses, violets, great curly chrysanthemums; so much money spent in these hard times. Well, she told herself, at least invalids were a blessing to the florist, to the chemist, to the doctor, if they were a weariness to themselves!

But how much she had to be thankful for. She was in her own house—that in itself was much; she had good nurses, a doctor she both liked and trusted, and if the days seemed long and the nights troubled and confused, the pain so far was not excessive and her mind was clear. There was really only one thing that worried her greatly, leaving Beatrice: and, lying there, heavy thoughts came to her about her girl. Always a timid, shrinking child, it had been her mother's instinct to shelter her. But had she done right? Would it not have been better had she hardened her heart and sent the child to school, trusting that the society of other girls of her age would make her a normal, self-confident schoolgirl? One thing she could not regret, that Beatrice and she had been so much together, had meant so much to each other. As a baby she had never given Beatrice over to the rule of a nurse. Fairlie, good soul, had understood and had welcomed her mistress to the nursery at any time. Later, the governess, Miss Taylor (christened "poor Miss Taylor" after the adored instructress in Miss Austen's *Emma*), had been content, when necessary, to be the shadowy third in the trio. What happy times they had had all learning together! The long motor tours through foreign countries, the winters in Rome and Florence, when pictures and churches were studied in leisurely manner and enjoyed, not gulped down like a nauseous dose.

Beatrice had loved every minute of those years. It was later, when they had settled down in Glasgow, Mrs. Dobie told herself, that the real mistake had been made. She herself had become so interested in public work that she had not realised what was happiness to her daughter. She

should have seen to it that Beatrice was more with other young people, playing games with them, acting, dancing, interesting herself in Guides. But it was so difficult, for the child was bookishly inclined, shy, retiring; it was positive misery to her to be sent out with a laughing band of young people. Having lived her life in a middle-aged atmosphere she hardly seemed to speak the same language as her contemporaries, and certainly did not understand their jokes. She went to dances to please her mother, charmingly dressed and most willing to be pleasant, but she always returned from them with the same plea—couldn't she stop going to dances? And she seemed so happy at home that the mother had weakly acquiesced, rather proud, perhaps, that she was so all-sufficient to her daughter, when other mothers complained that they hardly ever saw their girls.

But now—when Beatrice no longer had a mother, to whom could she turn? They had so few relations. Samuel, Beatrice's step-brother in London, was the nearest. Mrs. Dobie had written to him when she realised that her illness was serious, and he had replied very kindly, saying that his house was always open to Beatrice, and he was sure that Betha his wife would do everything she could for her. But Janie Dobie's heart was not at rest, and as she lay there the tears she would have scorned to shed for herself flowed for her daughter.

The days passed, and the disease which for a time had seemed quiescent now began to develop rapidly. Mrs. Dobie found it difficult to avoid showing her suffering and she tried to arrange, with the help of the nurses, that Beatrice should be as little as possible in the sickroom. But Beatrice was not to be kept out.

"Your Mamma," said the night-nurse, who was middle-aged and Victorian, "thinks it isn't good for you to sit so much with her. She's happier when she knows you're out taking the air."

“The air can wait,” said Beatrice. “As if I wouldn’t a hundred times rather be in her room than anywhere else!”

Beatrice was in the habit of reading the newspapers to her mother—the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Bulletin* in the morning, *The Times* when it came in later, but one evening when she was about to begin as usual the patient said:

“I think we won’t bother with *The Times* to-night; I want to talk to you, darling.”

There was a pause while she rallied her failing strength—then, “Beatrice,” she said, “we must think what you are to do. . . . I’m not getting better. No,” as the girl protested, “one knows oneself, and my mind would be easier if we decided on a plan. . . . Would you care to stay on in Glasgow? This house and the furniture go to Samuel; Greenbraes is yours—but you never cared much for Greenbraes; besides, it’s too lonely in winter. We have so few relatives; no one who could come and live with you. . . . What do you think of going to London with Samuel? I know . . . I know . . . we’ve got out of touch with Betha—I blame myself for that. I was too taken up with the work I was trying to do; I neglected your interests. Forgive me, darling.”

“Forgive!” said Beatrice, staring at her mother with misery in her eyes. How small and grey her face had grown even in the last few days. Other people’s mothers, she thought resentfully, went on living to any old age. And her mother had been like a girl, almost; a big happy girl, with her rosy face unlined, her brown hair with hardly a grey thread, her erect carriage. It had been so delightful to have a mother who did the work and the talking, leaving her to dream. Beatrice quite realised that she was an anomaly in this age of competent young women. She liked to look on at life, and the very thought of driving a car, or gliding, or indeed doing anything on her own, terrified her. But what was to happen to her if she lost her bulwark? If this mother so big and strong and dear was going to leave her she was

lost indeed—But this was not a time to think of her own plight; she must try to calm her mother's fears.

Janie Dobie had drifted away for a minute in a half doze, and when she opened her eyes Beatrice was smiling at her.

"You're not to worry about me, Motherkin. What you've got to do is to set your mind on getting well. Here comes Nurse to get you ready for the night. While she's removing the flowers—how many offerings to-day, Nurse? Oh, film stars haven't a look in with you, my dear—let me smooth your forehead and perhaps it will make you more inclined to sleep. When I used to get hot and nervous and off my sleep, you would come up after dinner to the night nursery and stroke my hair, and sing *Rothesay Bay* until I forgot all my troubles. Do you remember?"

The girl lay on the bed with her left arm under her mother's head while with her right hand she softly stroked her brow, and the nurse walked backwards and forwards, carrying out the flowers to a table on the landing.

When she had tidied the room and put on a "standing" fire, she came to the bed with a basin of water and a sponge to freshen her patient before she began another night. Beatrice slipped carefully from the bed and bent and kissed her mother. "Good-night, precious. If you're not sleeping let me come and have a cup of tea with you. May I, Nurse? I often wake about two and lie for an hour or so."

"You're too young to lie awake," her mother told her. "Shut your door to-night and never give a thought to me till morning. We have very comfortable nights, haven't we, Nurse? Run away now, dear, and listen to the wireless. Have you an interesting book? Good-night, good-night."

The nurse looked after the girl.

"It's lonely for Miss Dobie," she said. "I was one of six myself."

"Have you sisters? Three. How rich you are. If only my girl had a sister!"

“Yes,” said the nurse, “it would make a difference. Not,” she added, “that my sisters have ever done anything for me. We had all to go out and fend for ourselves, earn a living the best way we could. But we like well enough to meet at a time; blood does count for something. Is that comfortable? There’s quite a touch of frost in the air to-night: I hope it doesn’t bring the fog.”

She turned off the lights and went in to the dressing-room to arrange things as she wanted them for the night. The servants had brought her up sandwiches and cake, and she had a kettle and teapot and little pan, so could make tea or heat soup when she pleased. She was sorry for the handsome, kindly woman who lay dying next door; sorry, too, for the girl who would soon be left alone, but she had a comfortable chair, a good fire, an exciting book, and some of her favourite chocolates, so life at the moment, she told herself, wasn’t too bad.

* * * * *

Mrs. Dobie lay still, watching the firelight, till a sound made her raise her head.

Fog on the river!

How often she had lain in bed and heard through the misty night the hoarse hooting of some ship. It had always given her a vaguely excited feeling . . . ships bound for far-away ports going down the Clyde; stars hanging like lamps in tropical skies; life; adventure; wonderful things she was missing.

Again from the river came the distant sound.

The sick woman heard it, but the drug she had been given was taking effect, and she only thought drowsily that everything was going on—ships sailing, men working, boys and girls rejoicing in their youth. . . . What was it she had to think of? *Beatrice*—she must plan for Beatrice. But she was so tired, too tired to plan, too tired to pray, almost too tired

to care. . . . “Surely” she thought, as she turned her head on the pillow, “surely some one will take her by the hand. . . .” Then she slept.

CHAPTER II

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“ . . . *We shall be rich ere we depart*
If fairings come thus plentifully on.”

Love’s Labour’s Lost.

All through the five-and-twenty years of her daughter’s life Janie Dobie had striven to make plain paths for her feet, and Beatrice found that her mother, in dying, had not failed her. Plans had been carefully made so that everything would be as easy as possible.

It was to be a private funeral, with no flowers. “For,” as Mrs. Dobie had told her lawyer, “it’s no use bothering busy people to come to a funeral; ask the few that it would hurt not to be asked. As for flowers it would simply mean that numbers of people who couldn’t afford it would order wreaths; I hate a mass of decaying vegetation anyway. I know I have my friends’ good wishes on my journey and that’s all I want.”

On the evening of the funeral day Beatrice was ashamed to find herself conscious of a distinct feeling of relief. These dreadful days were past, days of drawn blinds and hushed voices, dressmaker’s boxes and masses of crinkling paper; herself standing before a mirror which reflected an unfamiliar black-clad figure with a blanched scared face; the arrival of her step-brother Samuel, the difficult conversation, the length of the meals; the terror of the nights when sleep kept far off and she lay and listened for she knew not what, thinking all the time of the voice that all her life had fallen so comfortably on her ears: “*Are you all right, darling? Mother’s here.*”

Surely, thought Beatrice, the worst was over. Samuel was going away in the morning, the blinds would be pulled up, life would begin again. There was even a vague feeling of anticipation, for now that she was on her own she would be able to do exactly what she pleased. Clothes, for instance. Her mother had always chosen things for her, or, at least, had advised, and sometimes Beatrice had not had the things she liked best. And her hair. Mrs. Dobie had thought it a pity to cut the wavy golden fleece. She had said, “It’s too soft, my dear; not thick enough to shingle, you’d look like a canary!” Beatrice had not believed it, and now she could make sure.

But even as she made up her mind to change things, desolation flooded over her at the thought of what she had lost. How could she find her way in a cold world, deprived of the personality that was like the sun in its warmth and cheer?

They sat together, Sir Samuel Dobie and his step-sister, at dinner. It was a good dinner, for the cook had been many years in the house, and knew exactly what her mistress would have ordered, the waiting was perfect, and Sir Samuel was feeling mellow. He looked at Beatrice in her black lace dress, with her shining hair smoothly combed into a loose knot, with approval. He told himself that she looked lady-like. Of course it was an absurd thing to look in these days—he had a highly-coloured wife and daughter at home, so he knew—but still, it was rather nice. Poor little thing! She must be feeling lonely. He had told Betha when the telegram came summoning him to Glasgow that he would have to ask his step-sister to come to them at Portland Place. Betha had replied, “*Must* you?” in no very cordial tone, and had rushed off to her next pressing engagement. But Betha must understand that in this matter he was master in his own house. After all, blood counted for something, and this was his father’s daughter; he was her trustee and nearest relative, and it wasn’t as if the girl was

not well dowered; with her looks and the money she would soon be somebody else's responsibility. . . . He thought kindly, sitting there, of his step-mother. A sensible woman. They had always got on well together. She had been no trouble to him in life, nor, as it happened, in death, for it suited him quite well to be in Glasgow at this time. Not, of course, that he would have grudged coming up on purpose, but still. . . . He was truly sorry that she should have died in the prime of life—why she was only five years older than he was!—but there was no blinking the fact that the money that would now come to him would be very welcome. True, he was a wealthy man, but these were anxious days, and he had an expensive household, a terribly expensive household. Really Betha seemed to have lost all sense of the value of money. It was ridiculous, because it wasn't as if she had been brought up in luxury. Quite the reverse. He had rather stooped, he always felt, in his marriage, but Betha had had taking ways as a young girl, and he was only human after all. She had made a good wife too, up to her lights, but she had always insisted on over-indulging the children, and now the boy and girl absolutely ruled the house; the place was turned upside down at their pleasure. . . . He turned his head and studied the face of the lady in the velvet gown above the mantelpiece. What would his mother have thought of her granddaughter?

He sighed, then realised that he was eating an excellent bit of fish.

"Very good salmon," he said.

Beatrice, deep in her own thoughts, started slightly.

"Yes," she said, "we always get good fish."

"The best of everything in Glasgow, eh?" said Sir Samuel jocularly. "Well, there are worse places. After London, of course, it's provincial, but quite a good place to live in. The people are easy to know, and pleasant to deal with. Your poor mother seems to have been quite a personage. Yes,

you would have been gratified at the tributes paid to her by old friends whom I spoke to at the funeral."

"Yes," said Beatrice, trying not to mind the condescending tone, "mother did a lot of public work. She liked it."

"And was well fitted for it," said Sir Samuel, handsomely. "Ah, yes, women are coming more and more into public life. It seems ungallant to object, but one wonders, one wonders."

Beatrice looked rather hopelessly at the slice of roast beef on the plate laid before her, as she said, "Don't you think women are as capable as men of doing most things?"

Sir Samuel was helping himself to mustard, and paused with the large Georgian silver pot in his hand, pursing his lips at his step-sister.

"I think not," he said finally. "Many of them have a superficial cleverness, but they don't last the course, if you understand the expression."

"But," Beatrice protested, not because she cared, but merely to keep the ball of conversation rolling, "surely there are many women who are much more than superficially clever. The Duchess of Atholl, for instance, Maude Royden, and, and, oh, dozens more."

Sir Samuel smiled kindly. "Those are merely the exceptions that prove the rule. What, I ask you, have women done in the House of Commons?"

Beatrice was about to reply, but realising in time that it was a rhetorical question she laid down her knife and fork, drank a little water, and prepared to study her step-brother while he addressed her.

He was a tall man, with a large smooth face, a high, slightly receding forehead and a fluent-looking mouth with slightly protruding teeth. He was good-looking and very well dressed, and his appearance always predisposed an audience in his favour. As her mother had reminded Beatrice he was her nearest relative, almost, in fact, her

only one. She sat, hardly listening, wondering what he was like, this large man, in his own house, what his wife thought of him, if his children believed in him. . . . She hardly knew Lady Dobie. There was nothing to bring the lady to Glasgow, and when Beatrice and her mother had passed through London it was generally holiday-time and the house in Portland Place was in the hands of caretakers. When the children were quite small they had been sent for several summers to Greenbraes, the house at the coast, and she, Beatrice, had adored the funny, sophisticated little Londoners, and had played with them by the hour. But that, she reminded herself, was years ago. They would be very different now. Why, Elaine was twenty and Stewart was at Oxford.

The dinner, which had seemed to Beatrice endless, was drawing to a conclusion. Sir Samuel, who had passed the sweet, was having a second helping of savoury, explaining as he did so, “I’ve no use for sweets; leave them to the ladies. Sweets to the sweet, as the immortal William said. . . . I hope you’re fond of poetry, Beatrice? I used to read reams. Poetry’s good for the young. Browning, now. I used to write papers on Browning. But the cares of the world, you know. Ah, yes, yes. ‘*Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be.*’ I hope so, I’m sure, but really one has little time to think of anything but the things of the moment. . . . All week I rush between the office and the House; on Sundays I like a round at golf and a rest, but Betha and Elaine have generally other views. But tell me about yourself. Did you help your mother in her various activities? Or have you branched out on a line of your own?”

Beatrice shook her head. “I’m afraid,” she said, “that I’m not really much good at anything. I don’t seem to have been given any special talent, so I do the listening.”

“Delightful,” said Sir Samuel. “And so necessary! So many people want to talk and so few to listen. Your popularity must be great.”

“I haven’t noticed it,” said Beatrice. “No, I don’t think I’m a success in any way. It didn’t matter when I had mother. I helped her, and basked in her popularity, but now——”

Sir Samuel made a grave face. “Ah, yes, this is indeed a sad blow to you. . . . Have you thought at all what you would like to do? I don’t suppose you would care to stay on here? No, I thought not. I mean to sell this house, in fact I’ve had an offer for it. Yes, it’s remarkable in these days when large houses are going for an old song, but of course it’s a very good position, and your mother kept it in such a beautiful state of repair. As you know, Greenbraes is yours. Would you care to live there for a bit? No—no, there’s no hurry in making a decision. You must look on my house as home in the meantime. You will come to us when you finish up here. It will only be a case of packing your own belongings, and disposing of your mother’s personal effects. . . .” He looked round the room. “If there is anything that you have a special liking for just let me know and it’ll be arranged. I’ve forgotten what’s in the house. If you’re not too tired d’you mind if we go over it to-night? I shall have to leave after breakfast—and get my business done and catch the midday train to London. No, no,” as Beatrice sprang up, prepared at once to do as was suggested, “let’s have our coffee in comfort; the house won’t run away. . . . Yes, it really is exceedingly fortunate to find a purchaser just to my hand, so to speak. And did I tell you he’s willing to take the furniture if we can come to an arrangement? I gathered it was wanted for a club or something of that sort. It’s none of my business so long as the money’s forthcoming.”

He laughed, and Beatrice smiled as seemed required, but she was almost dazed at the sudden way things were happening.

When they had drunk their coffee Sir Samuel rose, saying, “Well, Beatrice, shall we go through the house now? If a thing’s got to be done get it done at once. That’s a good

rule in life—whether it means getting out a tooth or an appendix, or anything else unpleasant."

Sir Samuel laughed aloud at his little joke; and Beatrice politely echoed the laugh, while she said to herself: "Mother's funeral day and I'm *laughing*!"

She rang the bell and told the maid who answered it that Fairlie was wanted, and presently Fairlie appeared.

She was a short, stout woman with a comely face and the manner of a privileged old servant.

Beatrice said, "You remember Fairlie, don't you, Samuel? She knows what's in the house much better than I do."

"Oh, yes." Sir Samuel beamed in his best "constituency" manner and shook hands heartily, remarking: "I remember you in my father's time."

"So you will," said Fairlie, encouragingly. "I came here when Miss Be'trice was one month old, and Mrs. Dobie was the best friend I ever had or am like to have. What we've lost! And not only us but dozens of folk she kept on their feet; it's as if we'd all lost a shelter and a support."

Beatrice turned quickly away, and Sir Samuel said, "Quite so. Mrs. Dobie was a splendid person in every way. . . . Ahem . . . I was telling Miss Beatrice that I thought perhaps we should go through the house together while we have time. To-morrow I must get back to London. . . . It seems you can tell us about things. You'll have an inventory?"

"No' me," said Fairlie. "We never had any use for such a thing; we never let the house. But I've looked after the napery and silver and everything for years, and I can tell you what's in the house almost to a towel."

"Ah, yes, but everything will have to be gone carefully over by a valuator. What about the silver? Is it any good? I've forgotten. We might look at that."

"Ay," Fairlie agreed. "It's quite handy in the chest in the pantry. You just sit down and I'll get some one to give me a hand with it."

Beatrice and her step-brother sat down as directed, and Beatrice, looking across at the face of the first Mrs. Dobie over the fireplace, said, “You will take that picture, won’t you?”

Sir Samuel walked over and studied the portrait.

“It’s large,” he said, “and dull. I can’t think where I’d hang it in Portland Place. Elaine wouldn’t let it into the drawing-room, and it would be hopelessly out of place in the dining-room. It’s well painted though—that velvet. . . . If you’d care to have it, Beatrice . . . ?”

The girl hesitated, but before she could speak Sir Samuel hit on a plan.

“I’ll tell you what,” he said. “Let’s send it down to Greenbraes. It would look very well in the dining-room there. That sort of large coast villa is the proper setting for that sort of portrait. Besides, I remember my mother was very fond of Greenbraes, so it’s quite fitting that her portrait should find a home there—I suppose you’ll let the place? There’s no point in having it stand empty.”

“It isn’t empty exactly,” Beatrice said. “A couple live in it as caretakers, and in the spring and autumn mother used to send people down who needed a rest. She called it her private holiday-home.”

Sir Samuel was looking at the other pictures. “Ah, yes,” he said, “that was very nice of your mother. She had a large heart and—I may add—a large income. My father left his widow exceedingly well provided for, and she had full control of everything.”

“I expect,” said Beatrice, flushing pink, “I expect he knew he could trust mother to use the money as he would have wished. He was generous too.”

“Quite, quite,” Sir Samuel’s tone was conciliatory. “They both belonged to a generous age. People could afford to give in my father’s day. Those were solid secure times. Now everything is uncertain. It’s no joke, I can tell you, Beatrice,

to have large responsibilities in these days—Ah! here comes the family plate."

Fairlie, assisted by a housemaid, carried in the chest, which she unlocked solemnly, and proceeded to exhibit its contents with pride.

Sir Samuel picked out a spoon. "About 1875," he said, "when my father married."

"There's three dozen of each of these," said Fairlie, "soup-spoons, dessert-spoons, forks, big and little, and further down there's awful bonnie thin plain ones—Georgian, I think, my mistress called them. She liked them best, though of course they hav'na the look of the heavy ones. . . . And then there's three tea-and-coffee services. Oh! and ongtray-dishes and a silver soup-tureen, and trays and salvers galore. I aye wanted the mistress to keep them in the bank, the world's that lawless turned."

"Yes—well, I might keep the Georgian stuff, but the rest had better be sold. Thank you, Fairlie; lock it up again. I'll see that an inventory's made at once. . . . Now, Beatrice, shall we go to the drawing-room? Excuse my going first," and he ran like a boy up the stairs.

Beatrice followed slowly, wondering what her mother would have said to her stepson's interest in his new possessions. She would have been amused, Beatrice thought. She wondered if her mother could see them now. Did she notice, perhaps, that the new black lace dress that Beatrice wore did not fit? It was part of the "mourning order" she had given to the shop where she and her mother had been in the habit of getting most of their clothes. The head dressmaker had come herself—tightly encased in black satin, and sniffing mournfully, for she had sincerely liked the cheerful, considerate customer who had been so easy to dress—and advised Beatrice as to what she would need.

"Just a nice morning frock, and mebbe a coat and skirt, and something for the evening is all you need to begin with.

Black is not worn as it used to be. I remember when it was a year's deep black for a parent, but now it's black and white or grey from the very start, and every vestige off before the year's out. But I'm sure, Miss Be'trice, you'll want to wear real mourning for your Mamma, for she was a dear soul." She slipped a frock over the girl's head. "Yes, I used to feel that the sun had come out when she dropped in. She always asked after my mother, and wanted to know how my neuritis was keeping before she began about her own affairs. Ucha, that's not bad, Miss Be'trice. You're stock size and that's a great help at a time like this. . . . Look in the glass. D'you like it yourself? You can wear black with your hair and skin, and you should be thankful, for some people look awful! Though it's wonderful, too, what you can do with a touch of white, and there's this about black, I always say it subdues ladies who are too what you might call rash in their colours. You'd be surprised at the trouble I have, to keep high-coloured, full figures away from puce, and even bright red. Some of them seem to have no control over themselves with regard to colour—just like some people with drink—so it's a mercy in a way, though of course it's a pity for the reason, when they're compelled to wear black. Yes, I don't think you could do better than that. Will you try this lace dress? I thought it would be nice and soft for you and younger than satin or crepe de chine. You suit the cape at the back. Isn't it awful graceful?"

But it was the cape at the back that was the trouble, and Beatrice almost imagined she could feel the twitch her mother's hand would have given it to make it hang properly.

Sir Samuel looked round the drawing-room with an appraising eye, and Beatrice watched him. This was the most familiar place in life to her. Here she had played as a child while her mother wrote letters, for she had never been kept strictly to the nursery. She had often done her lessons here too, and painted pictures, and made up stories and games. Here, later on, she had helped her mother to

entertain, making anxious conversation with middle-aged gentlemen and their comfortable, complacent ladies. And what happy evenings they had had when they were alone, reading aloud, listening to the wireless, talking, laughing, never tiring for a moment of each other's company.

"I remember this room when I was a child," said Sir Samuel, "in my mother's lifetime. It had a sort of terra-cotta silk panels then and was considered very magnificent. I'm afraid there's nothing of any particular value in it." He peered at the china in a cabinet. "There may be some good things here; we'll know when they're valued. I remember my father was keen about china. Some of these rugs might go to Portland Place; I wish I could find room for that bureau and those chairs, for there's no market for antiques at present. . . . Anything here you'd like to have as a keepsake?"

Beatrice had an impulse to gather the room in her arms and cry, "You can't take it from me; it's mine because of its memories." But what was a room when the spirit that had made it home was gone? So she replied, "I think not, thank you."

"It seems you're no sentimentalist," said her step-brother. "Perhaps it's as well. There's no place for sentiment in the modern world. What a hard world it is I hope you'll never know. I've been blessed—or cursed—with a feeling heart, and when I've got to tell men who've been all their lives in the business, who thought they were safe for life, and were educating their children well, and buying their little suburban villas, that we can't afford to keep them on and must replace them by younger, cheaper men—I assure you, Beatrice, it makes me utterly wretched."

"But *must* you dismiss them?" Beatrice asked. "Couldn't you keep them on—perhaps at a lower salary—till you see if things improve? It's too dreadful to think of those men and their wives and families left stranded—for how could they save when they had to buy their houses and keep their