

They all giggled like mad again and offered to show me the house. I was delighted. I have always enjoyed being shown anything that anyone has to show me.

One way and another, I spent the whole morning with the Miss Boyds and became quite interested in them, giggles, vases of pampas grass in the parlour and all, and agreed to carry home a letter to my grandmother telling her how much butter and eggs they would like to have each week. I even agreed to make a special delivery to them myself each week, apart from the normal one by the trap on Fridays, but 'not on Wednesdays', I said, 'for that is Tom's and George's and my soldiers' evening'.

In 1915 Lady Lydia—the wife of Sir Torquil—had turned part of the Big House into a convalescent home for wounded soldiers who were well enough to move about on crutches or with their arms in slings, and they roamed about the Poyntdale policies and Home Farm in their light-blue suits and red ties and were all very pleasant and cheerful. On Wednesdays my aunt spent a large part of the day baking scones, which were then packed into big baskets under white cloths, and Tom, George and I drove down in the trap to Poyntdale with them on Wednesday evenings. But although I told the Miss Boyds all about this, I did not tell them about the Big Secret about which no one but Tom, George and I and certain soldiers knew. This was the letter in my *kim-ob-no* pocket which I had to give to a certain soldier when nobody was looking. It was tremendous fun, and very easy to do, for all the soldiers would pull me close and give me a hug and all I had to do was whisper to the chosen one: 'It's in my pocket,' and he would pick out the paper like a flash. I could deliver the letter unbeknownst with Lady Lydia, the Matron or a nurse standing right beside me and the chosen soldier, and Tom said I was 'real clever' at it.

It was about ten years later that my father told me how he used to shudder when Lady Lydia would come up to Reachfar and would say to my grandmother: 'I cannot *think*, Mrs Sandison, how the boys are getting the whisky. Not that I mind, but Matron makes such a fuss and it makes her furious to know that they are getting it against the rules and under her very nose. After all, no one is allowed in the wards except the visitors she passes herself, and the boys are never allowed out without an orderly with them. Can they have some arrangement with that rascal Jock Skinner who comes for the swill, do you think?'

'Och, poor Jock!' my grandmother would say sanctimoniously. 'He's a rogue in many ways, but I wouldn't put *that* on him.'

Matron never found out, however, that the smugglers were George and Tom, on whom she doted, and that I, to whom she was always so kind, was their go-between-in-chief. I am a little irritated even now when I realise that even *I* did not know exactly what I was doing, but feel better when I realise that the cunning of Tom and George was too much for people far cleverer than I shall ever be.

Although I did not tell the Miss Boyds a word about the secret letters, however, they were very, very interested in 'soldiers' evening' and said that they would like to have one too, so I told them that if they had some cakes or something to bring I was sure the soldiers would like to see them some evening, and that they would like the soldiers, and, having arranged their special delivery for Tuesdays, I took my way back to Reachfar.

I reached home in time for dinner at half-past eleven, and after my grandmother had asked where I had been all this time My Friend Tom asked how I had 'got on' with the Miss Boyds, so I told the members of my family who were present all about

my morning. No. That is not true. I did not tell them *all*—I reserved my views about the giggles and nudges for private discussion with Tom or George or both.

‘But, Janet,’ my mother said, ‘you must not take orders for butter and eggs like that. Granny may not be able to supply them.’

‘Och, the poor craiturs!’ said my grandmother. ‘I’ll manage to give them a little, anyway. The hens are doing very well.’

‘Granny, they are *not* poor! They have plenty of pennies in a black purse and a parlour with South American grass in vases and a black clock on the mantelpiece!’

‘Never mind that,’ said my grandmother. ‘Eat your pudding.’

‘And Jock Skinner was there and got pennies for coal, so I told them they must get it direct from the boat and not from that rascal.’

‘Janet Sandison!’ said my grandmother. ‘That tongue of yours will be the disgrace of us all!’

‘It’s your *own* tongue that’s in it, Mistress,’ said my grandfather. ‘If the bairn had never heard it, she wouldn’t say it. Now, be done of your blethers and give Tom and me a little more of that pudding.’

During the afternoon, when I went out to help Tom and my grandfather with the hay, there was plenty of time while riding up and down from field to stackyard in Dick’s cart to go further into the matter of the Miss Boyds with Tom.

‘They are very, very different sort of people, Tom.’

‘Are they now? What way would that be, could you be telling me?’

‘They don’t do any work—no cleaning or baking or anything—just sit there laughing and nudging one another and it the middle of the morning.’