

‘bother’ for them about the things I had seen in the cave but which had since been removed. We ‘chust did not speak of these things, in the house, or to the family, or to anybody at a-all.’

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By the beginning of October the Miss Boyds’ name was enjoying a rest from people’s tongues at school, in the village and on the hills around, for we now all had something else to think about, which was the Poyntdale Harvest Home, which I was to be allowed to attend for the first time in my life. I was delighted and, at the same time, amazed to think that I was to be allowed to penetrate this annual mystery.

‘But I thought it was a Big People’s Thing, Mother.’

‘So it is, but every time you have a birthday you grow to be a bigger person,’ my mother said, ‘and you are big enough now to go to the young people’s part of it. But you can’t stay all night, like Auntie Kate and Tom and George, of course. You and I will come home after supper.’

This seemed to me ‘only reasonable’, and I went away with Fly to the Thinking Place to give consideration to this idea of growing to be a Bigger Person every year which made you able to go to more and more Things. By the time I was as old as my grandmother, I concluded, there would not be a Thing in the Whole Wide World that I had not been to or did not know about, and the world was a very wonderful place indeed.

The Harvest Home was to be on Friday, and on the Saturday of the week before Danny Maclean came to Reachfar with his fiddle. I loved Danny. He was a strange, mysterious person, who lived all alone at the bee croft away west on the Dinchory moors, with his dog called Rory and his millions of bees. He had black, lank hair, and queer, brownish, leathery skin on his

face and hands, and a big smiling mouth full of big white teeth, and bees loved him. They would settle all over him when he had caught a queen and never think of stinging him, and when he was not working with his bees he would be playing his fiddle. He very seldom left his bee croft. He came down to Dinchory once a week to pick up his groceries, tobacco and copy of the local newspaper which were left with the Dinchory shepherd, and occasionally he would come to Reachfar to see us when the heel of the sock he was knitting for himself would not come right, and then he would bring us some sections of his honey and have his fiddle with him. Since I learned to knit several years ago, I knitted a pair of socks for Danny now and again, and in return he taught me to dance the Highland Fling and the Sword Dance, only, not having a sword, we used the poker and tongs from the kitchen fireplace instead. Danny said I had a 'grand sense o' time and could put a fine lift in it', and when I had learned all the steps he would stand against the dresser, long and lean and that brownish colour of his, and say: 'One-two-three-four!' and off we would go. It was easy to 'put lift into it' to Danny's fiddle. As Tom said: 'Danny could play to make a cat dance', and Tom had a very low opinion of cats.

On this evening, when Danny arrived, my mother took me to her room, brought a cardboard shoe box out of her wardrobe and took out of it a pair of proper dancing pumps that were just my size. Until now I had always danced bare-footed.

'When you go to the Harvest Home on Friday,' she said, 'Lady Lydia wants you to dance for the people.'

'Oh, Mother, no!' I wanted to run away to the moor and hide. The dancing was just for Danny and me and my family and I could imagine with terror those *hundreds* of people at the Harvest Home all *looking*. 'Mother, *no!*'

She laid the beautiful fine leather pumps down on her bed.

‘When you go to a thing like the Harvest Home, Janet, you don’t go just to eat the good supper and take everything you can get for nothing, like Jock Skinner’s bairns coming to school on Christmas Eve just to get their apples and oranges. If there is something you can do that people may enjoy you have to do it. And Lady Lydia thinks that her visitors may like to see you and Danny at your fiddling and dancing.’

‘Danny will be there?’

‘Of course! It wouldn’t be a Harvest Home at all without Danny with his fiddle and Bill the Post with his melodeon and your father with his pipes.’

‘Dad plays the pipes for them?’

‘Every year. Everybody does something—those that *can*, anyway.’

‘What do *you* do, Mother?’

‘Lady Lydia usually puts me to sit with her visitors from the South so that I can explain our local ways and customs to them and answer their questions. Wouldn’t you like to try your dancing with the pumps on?’

‘Yes—but, Mother—what if people laugh at me?’

‘Well, what of it? If they’ll be laughing, they’ll be happy, and the Harvest Home is a happy thing. You wait till you hear them laughing at Tom and George doing their reel to the pipes!’

I began to laugh myself, then, at the very thought, for George and Tom at their reel were enough to make a cat laugh, but I had never known that they did it anywhere except in the privacy of the Reachfar barn. I put on the lovely shoes with the leather tassels on the ends of the long laces that tied up round my ankles and went through to the kitchen where the big table