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THE AFFAIR AT THE INN

Jane Findlater

The Affair at the Inn

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Jane Helen Findlater

The Affair at the Inn

An account of certain events which are supposed to have occurred in the month of May 19 – , at a quiet inn on Dartmoor, in Devonshire; the events being recorded by the persons most interested in the unfolding of the little international comedy.

The story is written by four authors, each author being responsible for one character, as follows:

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Miss Virginia Pomeroy, of Richmond, Virginia, U.S.A., *by Kate Douglas Wiggin*, Author of 'Penelope's Experiences,' etc.

Mrs. MacGill, of Tunbridge Wells, *by Mary Findlater*, Author of 'The Rose of Joy,' etc.

Miss Cecilia Evesham, Mrs. MacGill's companion, *by Jane Findlater*, Author of 'The Green Graves of Balgowrie,' etc.

Sir Archibald Maxwell Mackenzie, of Kindarroch, N.B., *by Allan McAulay*, Author of 'The Rhymer,' etc.

I

VIRGINIA POMEROY

*Dartmoor, Devonshire,
The Grey Tor Inn,
Tuesday, May 18th, 19 —*

When my poor father died five years ago, the doctor told my mother that she must have an entire change. We left America at once, and we have been travelling ever since, always in the British Isles, as the sound of foreign languages makes mamma more nervous. As a matter of fact, the doctor did not advise eternal change, but that is the interpretation mamma has placed upon his command, and so we are for ever moving on, like What's-his-name in *Bleak House*. It is not so extraordinary, then, that we are in the Devonshire moorlands, because one cannot travel incessantly for four years in the British Isles without being everywhere, in course of time. That is what I said to a disagreeable, frumpy Englishwoman in the railway carriage yesterday.

'I have no fault to find with Great Britain,' I said, 'except that it is so circumscribed! I have outgrown my first feeling, which was a fear of falling off the edge; but I still have a sensation of being cabined, cribbed, confined.'

She remarked that she had always preferred a small, perfectly finished, and well-managed estate to a large, rank, wild, and overgrown one, and I am bound to say that I think the retort was a good one. It must have been, for it silenced me.

We have done Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, and having begun at the top of the map, have gone as far as Devon in England. We have been travelling by counties during the last year, because it seemed tidier and more thorough and businesslike; less confusing too, for the places look so alike after a while that I can never remember where we have been without looking in my diary. I don't know what will come after England, – perhaps Australia and New Zealand. I suppose they speak English there, of a sort.

If complete ignorance of a place, combined with great power of appreciation when one is introduced to it, – if these constitute a favourable mental attitude, then I have achieved it. That Devonshire produces Lanes, Dumplings, Cider, Monoliths, Clouted Cream, and Moors I know, but all else in the way of knowledge or experience is to be the captive of my bow and spear.

It is one of the accidents of travel that one can never explain, our being here on this desolate moor, caged, with half a dozen strange people, in a little inn at the world's end.

In the hotel at Exeter mamma met in the drawing-room a certain Mrs. MacGill, who like herself was just recovering from the influenza. Our paths have crossed before; I hope they'll not do so too often. Huddled in their shawls, and seated as near to the chilling hotel fire as was possible, they discussed their symptoms, while I read *Lorna Doone*. Mrs. MacGill slept ill at night and found a glass of milk-arrowroot with a teaspoon of brandy and a Bath Oliver biscuit a panacea; mamma would not allow that any one could sleep worse than she, but recommended a peppermint lozenge, as being simple, convenient, and efficacious. Mrs. MacGill had a slight cough, so had mamma; Mrs. MacGill's chest was naturally weak, so was mamma's. Startlingly similar as were the paths by which they were travelling to the grave, they both looked in average health, mamma being only prettily delicate and Mrs. MacGill being fat and dumpy, with cap ribbons and shoulder capes and bugles and brooches that bespoke at least a languid interest in life. The nice English girl who was Mrs. MacGill's companion in the railway train, sat in the background knitting and reading, – the kind of girl who ought to look young and doesn't, because her youth has been feeding somebody's selfish old age. I could see her quiet history written all over her face, – her aged father, vicar of some remote parish; her weary mother, harassed with the cares of a large family; and the dull little vicarage from whose windows she

had taken her narrow peeps at life. We exchanged glances at some of Mrs. MacGill's reminiscences, and I was grateful to see that she has a sense of humour. That will help her considerably if she is a paid companion, as I judge she is; one would hardly travel with Mrs. MacGill for pleasure. This lady at length crowded mamma to the wall and began on the details of an attack of brain fever from which she had suffered at the Bridge of Allan thirty years ago, and I left the room to seek a breath of fresh air.

There is never anything amusing going on in an English hotel. When I remember the life one lives during a week at the Waldorf-Astoria or the Holland House in New York, it fairly makes me yearn with homesickness. It goes like this with a girl whose friends are all anxious to make the time pass merrily.

Monday noon.— Luncheon at the University Club with H. L. and mamma.

Monday afternoon.— Drive with G. P. in a hansom. Tea at Maillard's. Violets from A. B., American Beauty roses from C. D. waiting in my room. Dinner and the play arranged for me by E. F.

Tuesday.— One love-letter and one proposal by the morning mail; the proposal from a Harvard Freshman who wishes me to wait until he finishes his course. No one but a Freshman would ever have thought of that! G. H. from Chicago and B. C. from Richmond arrive early and join us at breakfast. B. C. thinks G. H. might have remained at home to good advantage. G. H. wonders why B. C. couldn't have stayed where he was less in the way. Luncheon party given by G. H. at one. Dinner by B. C. at seven.

Wednesday.— Last fitting for three lovely dresses.

Thursday.— Wear them all. The result of one of them attention with intention from the fastidious A. B.

And so on. It would doubtless spoil one in time, but I have only had two weeks of it, all put together.

The hall of the hotel at Exeter was like all other English hotel halls; so damp, dismal, dull, and dreary, that it is a wonder English travellers are not all sleeping in suicides' graves. Were my eyes deceiving me or was there a motor at the door, and still more wonderful, was there a young, good-looking man directly in my path, — a healthy young man with no symptoms, a well-to-do young man with a perfectly appointed motor, a well-bred, presentable young man with an air of the world about him? How my heart, starving for amusement, rushed out to him after these last weary months of nursing at Leamington! I didn't want to marry him, of course, but I wanted to talk to him, to ride in his motor, to have him, in short, for a masculine safety valve. He showed no symptom of requiring me for any purpose whatever. That is the trouble with the men over here, — so oblivious, so rigid, so frigid, so conventional; so afraid of being chloroformed and led unconscious to the altar! He was smoking a pipe, and he looked at me in a vague sort of way. I confess I don't like to be looked at vaguely, and I am not accustomed to it. He couldn't know that, of course, but I should like to teach him if only I had the chance and time. I don't suppose he knew that I was wearing a Redfern gown and hat, but the consciousness supported me in the casual encounter. Naturally he could not seek an introduction to me in a hotel hall, nor could we speak to each other without one.

His chauffeur went up to him presently, touched his hat, and I thought he said, 'Quite ready, Sir — Something'; I didn't catch the name.

Well, he bowled off, and I comforted myself with the thought that mamma and I were at least on our way to pastures new, if they were only Dawlish or Torquay pastures; or perhaps something bracing in the shape of Dartmoor forests, if mamma listens to Mrs. MacGill.

The owner of the motor appeared again at our dinner-table, a long affair set in the middle of the room, all the small tables being occupied by uninteresting nobodies who ate and drank as much, and took up as much room, as if they had been somebodies.

It is needless to say that the young Britisher did not, like the busy bee, improve the shining hour — that sort of bee doesn't know honey when he sees it. He didn't even pass me the salt, which in a Christian country is not considered a compromising attention. I think that too many of Great

Britain's young men must have been killed off in South Africa, and those remaining have risen to an altogether fictitious value. I suppose this Sir Somebody thinks my eyes are fixed on his coronet, if he has one rusting in his upper drawer awaiting its supreme moment of presentation. He is mistaken; I am thinking only of his motor. Heigh ho! If marriage as an institution could be retained, and all thought of marriage banished from the minds of the young of both sexes, how delightful society could be made for all parties! I can see that such a state of things would be quite impossible, but it presents many advantages.

MRS. MACGILL

*Exeter, Devonshire,
Rougemont Castle Hotel,
Sunday, May 16th, 19 —*

I have made out my journey from Tunbridge wells in safety, although there has been a breakdown upon the Scotch Express, which is a cause of thankfulness. There were two American women in the same carriage part of the time. The mother was, like myself, an invalid, and the daughter I suppose would be considered pretty. She was not exactly painted, but must have done something to her skin, I think, probably prejudicial like the advertisements; it was really waxen, and her hair decidedly dark – and such a veil! It reminded me of the expression about 'power on the head' in Corinthians – not that she seemed to require it, for she rang no less than eight times for the guard, each time about some different whimsey. The boy only grinned, yet he was quite rude to me when I asked him, only for the second time, where we changed carriages next. Cecilia spoke a good deal to the girl, who made her laugh constantly, in spite of her neuralgia, which was very inconsistent and provoking to me, as she had not uttered a word for hours after we left Tunbridge Wells. The mother seemed a very delicate, sensible person, suffering from exactly the same form of influenza as myself – indeed many of our symptoms are identical. They happened to be going to this hotel, too, so we met again in the afternoon. I had a bad night. Exeter is small, but the Cathedral chimes are very tiresome; they kept me awake as if on purpose; Cecilia slept, as neuralgic people seem often able to do.

Somehow I do not fancy the idea of Dartmoor at all. It may brace Cecilia, but it will be too cold for me, I'm sure. I must send for my black velvet mantle – the one with the beads at the neck, as it will be the very thing for the moor. At present I have nothing quite suitable to wear. There is a great deal of skirt about Americans, I see. Even the mother rustled; all silk, yet the dresses on the top were plain enough. As I had nothing to read in the train, I bought a sixpenny copy of a book called *The Forest Lovers*, but could not get on with it at all, and what I did make out seemed scarcely proper, so I took up a novel which Mrs. Pomeroy (the American) lent me, by a man with a curious Scriptural name – something like Phillpotts. It was entirely about Dartmoor, and gave a most alarming account of the scenery and inhabitants. I'm sure I hope we shall be safe at Grey Tor Inn. Some of the wilder parts must be quite dangerous – storms – wild cattle roaming about, and Tors everywhere.

MRS. MACGILL

*Dartmoor, Devonshire,
The Grey Tor Inn,
Tuesday, May 18th, 19 —*

I wish I had brought winter flannels with me. It is all very well to call it the middle of May on Dartmoor, but it is as cold as the middle of winter in Aberdeen. There may be something odd about the red soil that accounts for flowers coming out in spite of it, for certainly there are primroses and violets on the banks, a good many, – very like flowers in a hat.

We met Miss Pomeroy, the American girl, in the lobby of the hotel. She said that her mother was resting in the drawing-room. Like me, she seems to suffer from shivering fits. 'I can't imagine,' I said, 'why any doctor should have ordered me to such a place as this to recover from influenza, which is just another form of cold.' The windows look straight out on Grey Tor. It is, of course, as the guide-books say, 'a scene of great sublimity and grandeur,' but very dreary; it is not mountain, and not what we would call moor, either, in Scotland – just a crumpled country, with boulders here and there. Grey Tor is the highest point we can see – not very lonely, I am glad to say, for little black people are always walking up and down it, like flies on a confectioner's window, and there is a railing on the top.

There is a young man here, who, I was surprised to find, is a nephew of the uncle of my poor brother-in-law, Colonel Forsyth, who died in a moment at Agra. Sir William Maxwell Mackenzie used to be often at the Forsyths, before his death. This young man's name is Archibald, and he drives a motor. I sat next him at dinner, and we had quite a pleasant little chat about my poor brother-in-law's sudden death and funeral. Miss Pomeroy ate everything on the table and talked a great deal. Cecilia said she wasn't able to come down to dinner, but, as usual, ate more than I could, upstairs. Like me, Mrs. Pomeroy finds the Devonshire cream very heavy. The daughter and Sir Archibald finished nearly the whole dish, although it was a large china basin.

SIR ARCHIBALD MAXWELL MACKENZIE, Bart

Grey Tor Inn

I must get away from these women at all costs. People may say what they like, but there's no question that nothing is more destructive to comfort than the society of ladies. A man cannot smoke, nor wear the clothes nor use the language that he wants to when they are present, – so what is the use of pretending, as some fellows do, that they add to the pleasantness of life? I certainly thought that by coming to these out-of-the-way parts in the motor, with no one but my servant, I should be free of the women; but no such luck! In the hotel at Exeter there was a batch of them, – some Americans, of course, particularly a girl, so deuced lively she could not be ignored. I dislike the whole girl-tribe with all my heart, and I dislike the kittenish ones most: they're a positive pest.

This is a rum sort of country, – a sort of inferior Scotland, I should call it; but if you were to say that to the artist chaps and writing fellows you meet about here, they would murder you. There is a lot of rot talked about everything in this world, but there's more and worse rot talked about scenery than anything else. For instance, people will yarn away about 'the blue Mediterranean,' but it's not a bit bluer than any other sea, – the English Channel, for example; any sea will be blue if the sky is blue. I suppose it earns somebody's living to talk and write all this sort of stuff, and get idiots to believe it. Here they are always jawing away about 'giant monoliths' and wonderful colossal stone-formations on the moor, till you really think there's something rather fine to be seen. And what are the giant monoliths? Two or three ordinary sorts of stones set up on end on a mound! What rot!

This is a goodish hotel, and the roads so far have been all right for the motor; we have come along fairly well; Johnson can drive a bit now, and understands the machine.

The country was pretty decent for a while, before reaching this; plenty of trees, no good for timber, though, and there was a lot of that rotten holly – I'd have it all up if it grew on Kindarroch. And the gorse, too, was very bad. There was a fellow at Exeter – a sort of artist, I conclude, from the nonsense he talked – who said he was coming up here to see the gorse, – came every year, he said. To see the gorse! To see a lot of dirty weeds that every sensible man wants to root up and burn! O Lord!

This morning it was rather fine, and I was having a smoke after breakfast in the hall, when that American girl – the one I saw at Exeter – came down the staircase, singing at the top of her voice. I knew she was here, with a mother in the background; she had been fooling around the motor already, asking a lot of silly questions, and touching the handles and the wheels – a thing I can't bear – so we had made acquaintance in a kind of way. The artist at Exeter, I remember, asked me if I didn't think this girl remarkably pretty, and I told him I hadn't looked to see, which was perfectly true. But you can't help seeing a girl if she's standing plump in front of you. Of course these Americans dress well – no end of money to do it on. This one had a sort of Tam o' Shanter thing on her head, and a lot of dark hair came out under it, falling over her ears, and almost over her cheeks – untidy, I call it. She wore a grey dress, with a bit of scarlet near her neck, and a knot to match it under the brim of her cap. I can notice these things when I like. She has black eyes, and knows how to use them. I don't like dark women; if you must have a woman about, I prefer pink and white – it looks clean, at any rate. The name of these people is Pomeroy, Johnson told me; they appear to have got the hang of mine at Exeter; trust women for that sort of thing.

'Good morning, Sir Archibald,' said Miss Pomeroy now, as pat as you please. 'It's a mighty pretty morning, isn't it? Don't you long for a walk? I do! I'm going right up to that stone on the slope there. Won't you come along too?' A man can hardly refuse outright, I suppose, when a thing is put to him point blank like this, and we started together, I pretty glum, for I made up my mind I must give up my after-breakfast pipe, a thing which puts me out of temper for the day. However, Miss Pomeroy said she liked smoke, so there was a kind of mitigation in the boredom which I felt was before me.

Grey Tor, as the guide-books call it, is just above the hotel, a sort of knob of rock that is thought a lot of in these parts. (We make road metal of the same kind of thing in Scotland; I'd like to tell the chaps that who write all the drivel about Dartmoor.) There's an iron railing round the top of this Tor, to keep the tourists from falling off, though they'd be no loss if they did. Coach loads of them come every day, and sit on the top and eat sandwiches, and leave the paper about, along with orange and banana skins – same as they do at the Trossachs at home. There's a grassy track up to this blessed Tor, and Miss Pomeroy and I followed it; American women are no good at walking, and, in spite of her slight figure, she was puffing like a grampus in no time, and begging me to stop. We sat down on a rock, and soon she had breath enough to talk. The subject of names came up, I forget for what reason.

'I like your kind of name,' Miss Pomeroy was good enough to say. 'I call it downright sensible and clear, for it tells what you're called, and gives your background immediately, don't you see? Now, you couldn't tell what my Christian name is without asking – could you?'

'No, I couldn't,' I agreed, and was silent. I am no hand at small talk. She gave me rather a funny look out of her black eyes, but I took no notice. She seemed to want to laugh – I don't know why; there's nothing funny on Dartmoor that *I* can see. We got on to the Tor presently, and nothing would satisfy a woman, naturally, but climbing all over the beastly thing. She had to be helped up and down, of course. Her hands are very white and slim; they were not at all hot, I am glad to say, as she wore no gloves, and I had to clutch them so often. There was a very high wind up there, and I'm blessed if her hair didn't come down and blow about. It only made her laugh, but I considered it would be indecent to walk back to the hotel with a woman in such a dishevelled state.

'I will pick up the hairpins,' I said seriously, 'if you will – will do the rest.' She laughed and put up her arms to her head, but brought them down with a flop.

'I'm afraid my waist is too tight in the sleeves for me to do my hair up here; it'll have to wait till I get down to the hotel,' she said gaily. I suppose she meant that she tight-laced, though I couldn't see how her waist could be tight in the sleeves. I was quite determined she should not walk to the hotel in my company with her hair in that state.

'I will stick these in,' I said firmly, indicating the hairpins, of which I had picked up about a bushel, 'if you will do the rolling up.' It got done somehow, and I stuck in the pins. I never touched a woman's hair before; how beastly it must be to have all that on one's head – unhealthy, too. I dare say it accounts for the feebleness of women's brains. Miss Pomeroy's cheeks got pinker and pinker during this operation – a sort of rush of blood, I suppose; it is all right as long as it does not go to the nose. She is not a bad-looking girl, certainly.

We got back to the hotel without any further disagreeables.

CECILIA EVESHAM

Grey Tor Inn, Dartmoor

If a policeman's 'lot is not a happy one,' neither is a companion's: I lay this down as an axiom. I have lived now for two years with Mrs. MacGill, and know her every frailty of character only too well. She has not a bad temper; but oh! she is a terrible, terrible bore! Not content with being stupid herself, she desires to make me stupid along with her, and has well-nigh succeeded, for life with her in furnished apartments at Tunbridge Wells would dull a more brilliant woman than I have ever been.

Mrs. MacGill has lately had the influenza; it came almost as a providential sending, for it meant change of air. We were ordered to Dartmoor, and to Dartmoor we have come. Now I have become interested in three new people; and that, after the life I have lived of late in Mrs. MacGill's sickroom, is like a draught of nectar to my tired fancy. We met these three persons for the first time in the train, and at the hotel at Exeter where we stopped for the night; or rather, I should say that we met two of them and sighted the third. The two were a mother and her daughter, Mrs. Pomeroy and Virginia Pomeroy by name, and Americans by nation; the third person was a young man, Sir Archibald Maxwell Mackenzie, of Kindarroch, N.B. The Americans were extremely friendly, after the manner of their nation; the young man extremely unfriendly, after the manner of his. We found that the Pomeroyes were coming on to this inn, but the Scotchman whizzed off in his motor car, giving us no hint of where he intended to go. I thought we had seen the last of him, but it was to be otherwise.

The morning after our arrival at the Grey Tor Inn Mrs. MacGill assumed a Shetland shawl, closed the window of the sitting-room, and sat down to do a bit of knitting. I sat by the window answering her little vapid remarks and looking out. As I sat thus, I heard a puffing noise and saw a scarlet motor steam up to the door of the inn. It was, of course, Sir Archibald.

'What is that noise, Cecilia?' asked Mrs. MacGill.

'It's a motor car,' I replied.

'Oh, how curious! I never can understand how they are worked,' said she.

I was beginning to try to explain some of the mysteries of motoring when the door of the sitting-room opened, and Miss Virginia Pomeroy came in. Her appearance was a delight to the eyes; tall and full grown, yet graceful, and dressed to perfection. She had none of that meek look that even the prettiest English girls are getting nowadays, as if they would say, 'I'm pretty, but I know I'm a drug in the market, though I can't help it!' No, no, Virginia Pomeroy came into the room with an air of possession, mastery, conquest, that no English girl can assume. She walked straight up to the window and threw it open. 'How perfectly lovely!' she exclaimed. 'Why, there's a motor; I must have a ride in it before very long.' She turned pleasantly to me as she spoke, and asked me if I didn't adore motoring.

'I've never tried,' I said.

'Well, the sooner you begin the better,' she said. 'Never miss a joy in a world of trouble; that's my theory.'

I smiled, but if she had known it, I more nearly cried at her words; she didn't know how many joys I had missed in life!

'I'll go right downstairs and make love to the chauffeur,' she went on, and at this Mrs. MacGill coughed, moved the fire-irons, and told me to close the window. Miss Pomeroy turned to her with a laugh.

'Why!' she said, 'are you two going to sit in this hotel parlour all the morning? You won't have much of a time if you do!'

'I have had the influenza, like Mrs. Pomeroy,' announced Mrs. MacGill solemnly, 'but if Miss Evesham wishes some fresh air she can go out at any time. I'm sure I never object to anything that you choose to do, Cecilia, do I?'

I hastened to assure her that she did not, while the American girl stood looking from one of us to the other with her bright, clever eyes.

'Suppose you come down to the hall door with me then, Miss Evesham,' Miss Pomeroy suggested, 'and we'll taste the air.'

'Shall I, Mrs. MacGill?' I asked, for a companion must always ask leave even to breathe. Mrs. MacGill answered petulantly that of course I might do as I liked.

The motor stood alone and unattended by the front door, both owner and chauffeur having deserted it. It rested there like a redhot panting monster fatigued by climbing the long hill that leads up to Grey Tor Inn.

'Isn't it out of breath?' cried Virginia. 'I want to pat it and give it a drink of water.' The next minute she skipped into the car and laid her white hand on the steering-wheel.

'Oh, don't! Do take care!' I cried. The thing may run away with you or burst, or something, and the owner may come out at any moment – it belongs to that young man who was at Exeter, Sir Archibald Maxwell Mackenzie.'

'I should like it very much if he did come out,' said Virginia, looking over her shoulder at me with the most bewitching ogle I ever saw, and I soon saw that she intended to conquer Sir Archibald as she had conquered many another man, and meant to drive all over Dartmoor in his motor. Well, youth and high spirits are two good things. Let her do what she likes with the young man, so long as she enjoys herself; they will both be old soon enough!

II

VIRGINIA POMEROY

*Dartmoor, Devonshire,
Grey Tor Inn*

The plot thickens; well, goodness knows it was thin enough before, and it is now only of the innocent consistency of cream sauce. For myself I like a plot that will stand quite stiff and firm; still the Exeter motor is here and the Exeter motor-man is here. I don't mean the chauffeur, but the owner. He doesn't intend staying more than a day or two, but he may like it better as time goes on, – they often do, even these British icebergs. It is, however, a poor climate for thawing purposes. There are only six people in the inn all told, and two, we hear, are leaving to-night.

I was glad to see the English girl standing at the window when we arrived. She brightened, as much as to say that we two might make life more cheerful by putting our heads together. Mrs. MacGill is a good companion for mamma, but could not otherwise be endured for a moment. I find it very difficult to account for her on any ordinary basis; I mean of climate or nationality or the like. The only way I can explain her to my satisfaction is, that some sixty years ago her father, a very dull gentleman, met her mother, a lady of feeble mind and waspish disposition; met her, loved her, married her, – and Mrs. MacGill is the result of the union.

Her conversation at table is aimless beyond description, often causing Miss Evesham to blush, and Sir Archibald to raise his eyebrows. It doesn't take much to produce this effect on Sir Archibald's part; when he was born they must have been slightly lifted.

Mrs. MacGill asked me, at dinner, my Christian name, not having heard it, as mamma often calls me 'Jinny.' Here is the colloquy.

Jinny. My name is Virginia; it is one of the Southern States, you know.

Mrs. Mac. Oh, I see! how curious! Is that a common habit of naming children in America?

Jinny. Oh yes; you see it is such an enormous country, and there are such a number of children to be named that we simply had to extend the supply of names in some way. My mother's middle name, which is my own also, is something really quaint – 'Secessia.'

Mrs. Mac. Secessia! What an extraordinary name! Has it any significance?

Jinny. Yes, indeed! My mother was born in the early days of the Civil War, at the time of the secession, and her father, an ardent Southerner, named her Gloria Secessia.

Mrs. Mac. Let me see, I don't seem to remember any secession; were we mixed up in what you call your Civil War?

(Here Sir Archibald caught my eye and smiled, almost a human smile it was.)

Jinny. No, but you had a good deal to do with the War of Independence. That was nearly a century before. (Sir Archibald was honestly amused here. He must know American history.)

Mrs. Mac. I thought your last war was called the War of Independence, because it made the negroes independent, but I must have got the two confused; and you've just had another small one, haven't you, though now I remember that we were engaged in only one of them, and that was before my time. It seems strange we should have gone across the ocean to help a younger country to fight its battles, but after all, blood is thicker than water. I had a nephew who went to America – Brazil, I think, was the name of the town – a barrister, Mr. George Forsyth; you may have met him?

Jinny. I think not; I seldom go so far from home.

Mrs. Mac. But you live in South America, do you not?

Jinny. I live in the south, but that is merely to say in the southern part of the United States.

Mrs. Mac. How confusing! I fear I can't make it out without the globes; I was always very good at the globes when I was a child. Cecilia, suppose after dinner you see if there is a globe in the inn.

Poor Miss Evesham! She is so pale, so likeable, so downtrodden, and she has been so pretty! Think of what is involved when one uses the past tense with a woman of thirty. She has fine hair and eyes and a sweet manner. As to the rest, she is about my height, and she is not dressed; she is simply clothed. Height is her only visible dimension, the village mantua-maker having shrouded the others in hopeless ambiguity. She has confessed to me that she dresses on fifteen pounds a year! If she had told me that her father was dead, her mother a kleptomaniac, and she the sole support of a large family, I should have pitied her, but a dress allowance of fifteen pounds a year calls for more than pity; it belongs to the realm of tragedy. She looks at thirty as if she never had had, nor ever expected to have, a good time. How I should like to brighten her up a bit, and get her into my room to try on Paris hats!

She and I, aided by Sir Archibald, have been to Stoke Babbage to try to secure a pony, sound, kind, and fleet, that will drag Mrs. MacGill up and down the hills. She refused the steeds proffered by the Grey Tor stables, and sent Miss Evesham to procure something so hopelessly ideal in the shape of horseflesh that I confess we had no expectation of ever finding it.

The groom at the Unicorn produced a nice pony chaise, well padded and well braked, with small low wheels, and a pony originally black, but worn grey by age, as well as by battling with the elements in this region of bare hills and bleak winds. Miss Evesham liked its looks particularly. I, too, was pleased by its sturdy build, and remarked that its somewhat wild eye might be only a sign of ambition. Sir Archibald took an entirely humorous view of the animal, and indeed, as compared with a motor, the little creature seemed somewhat inadequate. We agreed that for Mrs. MacGill (and here we exchanged wicked glances) it would do admirably, and we all became better acquainted in discussing its points.

Miss Evesham and I offered to drive the pony back to Grey Tor, and Sir Archibald saw us depart with something that approached hilarity. He is awfully nice when he unbends in this way, and quite makes one wish to see him do it oftener. From all our previous conversations I have come away with the sort of feeling you have when you visit the grave of your grandmother on a Sunday afternoon.

I don't know the number of miles between Stoke Babbage and Grey Tor. The distance covered cuts no actual figure in describing the time required for a drive with the new pony, whom I have christened Greytoria. The word 'drive' is not altogether descriptive, since we walked most of the way home. I hardly think this method of progression would have occurred to us, but it did occur to Greytoria, and she communicated the idea by stopping short at the slightest elevation, and turning her head in a manner which could only mean, 'Suppose you get out, if you don't mind!'

Having walked up all the hills, we imagined we could perhaps drive down. Not at all. Greytoria dislikes holding back more, if anything, than climbing up. We kept our seats at first, applied the brake, and attempted a very gentle trot. 'Don't let us spoil the pony,' I said. 'We must begin as we mean to go on.' Miss Evesham agreed, but in a moment or two each issued from her side of the chaise, and that without argument. Greytoria's supports are both stiff and weak – groggy is Sir Archibald's word. She takes trembling little steps with her forelegs, while the hind ones slide automatically down any declivity. The hills between Stoke Babbage and Grey Tor being particularly long and steep, we found that I was obliged to lead Greytoria by the bridle, while Miss Evesham held the chaise by the back of the seat, and attempted to keep it from falling on the pony's legs; the thing, we finally discovered, that was the ruling terror of her life.

Naturally we were late at luncheon, but we did not describe our drive in detail. The groom at the stables says that the pony can drag Mrs. MacGill quite safely, if Miss Evesham is firm in her management. Of course she will have to walk up and down all the hills, but she doesn't mind that, and Mrs. MacGill will love it. It is bliss to her to lie in slippered ease, so to speak, and see all the people in her vicinity working like galley slaves. We shall be delightfully situated now, with Greytoria, Sir Archibald's motor, and an occasional trap from the stables, if we need other vehicles.

Sir Archibald as yet does not look upon a motor as a philanthropic institution. There are moments when he seems simply to regard it as a means of selfish pleasure, but that must be changed.

Item. Miss Evesham looked only twenty-nine at luncheon.

MRS. MACGILL

Last night I slept so badly that I could not go down to the dining-room this morning. Cecilia, in spite of her neuralgia yesterday seemed well and bright. I asked her to send me up some breakfast, but could scarcely eat it when it came; the tea was cold, the bread damp and tough, and the egg fresh enough, but curious. Cecilia never came near me after breakfast. When I came down about eleven o'clock, very cold, I found no one in the sitting-rooms. Hearing voices, I went to the door and found Cecilia talking to the American girl, who had a great deal of colour for that hour in the morning. Sir Archibald came up, grinding round the drive in his motor. It is quite unnecessary to have brought a motor here at all, for I observe that the hillsides are covered with ponies. There must have been a herd of twenty-five of them outside my window this morning, so a motor is quite out of place. The doctor here recommends me to try driving exercise, but some of the animals are so very small that I scarcely think they could pull me up these hills. Cecilia says the smaller ones are foals. Many of them kick, I see, so we must select with care. I wish we could procure a donkey. The feeling of confidence I have when in a donkey-chair more than makes up for the slowness of motion.

Like me, Mrs. Pomeroy was kept awake by the wind – it never stops here. When I remarked on this, Cecilia said in her patronising way, 'Don't you remember Borrow's famous line, —

'There's always the wind on the heath'?

'I see nothing clever in that,' I said; 'there *is* always wind on the heath here, and I particularly dislike it.'

When we came into the drawing-room Miss Pomeroy was saying, 'I've discovered a piano!' The piano, to my mind, was the largest object in the room, so she must be short-sighted, if she had not seen it before; pride probably prevents her wearing glasses. She sat there singing for quite a long time. She wouldn't finish her songs, but just sang scraps of a number of things. Sir Archibald came into the room and stood about for some time. I asked him several questions about his father's sister, whom I used to know. He replied so absently that I could make nothing of it. Miss Pomeroy has a clear voice. She sang what I suppose were translations of negro songs – very noisy. When she afterwards tried one of Moore's exquisite melodies, I confess to admiring it. It was a great favourite with Mr. MacGill, who used to sing it with much feeling: —

'Around the dear ruin, each wish of my heart.'

What a touching expression that is for a middle-aged woman – 'the dear ruin'!

Grey Tor is certainly very bleak. The guide-books speak of 'huge monoliths' (I suppose they mean the rocks on the moor), 'seeming to have been reared by some awful cataclysm of nature in primordial times.' I hope there will be no cataclysms during our stay on the moor; the accounts of tempests of which I read in some of the novels quite frighten me, yet I can scarcely think there is much danger about this tor – 'a giant, the biggest tor of all,' the guide-books say. It is so fully peopled by tourists with luncheon-baskets that one loses the feeling of desolation. Miss Pomeroy has been up to the top already – twice, once alone. Cecilia means to go too, though nothing can be worse for neuralgia than cold wind. She will always say that nothing hurts her like sitting in hot rooms. I should be very glad to have a hot room to sit in! She has got a nice, quiet-looking animal at last, and a low pony chaise, so I hope to have some drives.

Neuralgia is one of those things one cannot calculate on. Cecilia will be ill all day, and then suddenly able to come down to dinner. I have suffered a good deal from *tic douloureux* myself, but

was never able to eat during the paroxysms, as Cecilia seems to be. After having five teeth pulled, I once lived exclusively on soup for three days.

Miss Pomeroy, I suppose, is what most people would call a pretty girl. Hot bread and dyspepsia will soon do for her, though, as for all American women. The bread here is tough and very damp. She is dark, very dark in hair and eyes, in spite of her white skin, and she describes herself as a 'Southerner.' I should be inclined to suspect a strain of negro or Indian blood. I heard her discussing what she called 'the colour problem' with Cecilia, and she seemed to speak with a good deal of bitterness. Yet Mrs. Pomeroy is evidently a lady. The girl dresses well in the American style, which I never attempt. She has, I suppose, what would be called a fine figure, though the waist seems of no importance just now. Her feet, in shoes, look small enough, though the heels she wears astonish me; it is years since I have worn anything but a simple cloth boot, neat but roomy. I have seen her glance at my feet several times, as if she observed something odd about them.

SIR ARCHIBALD MAXWELL MACKENZIE

Grey Tor Inn

Isn't it a most extraordinary thing that when people are in a comfortable house, with a good roof over their heads, solid meals served at regular intervals three or four times a day, and every possible comfort, they instantly want to go outside and make themselves not only thoroughly uncomfortable, but generally ill besides, by having a picnic in the open? Ever since I had that walk with Miss Pomeroy, she has done nothing but talk about a picnic at some beastly little village in the vicinity where there is a church that the guide-books tell the usual lies about. As to churches – a church to my mind is a place to go to on Sundays with the rest of the congregation. It is plainly not constructed for week-days, when it is empty, cold, and damp, and you have to take your hat off in the draughts all the same, and talk in whispers. As to picnics – there's a kind of folly about *them* that it is altogether beyond me to understand. Why such things ever take place outside the grounds of a lunatic asylum, goodness only knows; they ought to be forbidden by law, and the people who organise them shut up as dangerous. However, I see I am in for this one. Miss Pomeroy wants the motor, but she won't get the motor without me. Heaven be praised, the weather has broken up in the meantime, which is the reason I am staying on here. Motoring on Dartmoor in a tearing nor'easter is no catch. My quarters are comfortable, and but for the women I should be doing very well.

The worst of it is, there is a whole batch of them now. A Mrs. MacGill and her companion are here, and these two and the Americans seem to have met before. The two old women are as thick as thieves, and the fair Virginia (she told me her name, though she might have seen, I am sure, that I was simply dying not to know it) seems to have a good deal to say to the companion, though the latter doesn't appear to me much in the line of such a lively young person. There's no rule, of course, for women's likes and dislikes, any more than for anything else that has to do with them. The unlucky part of it is that Mrs. MacGill seemed to spot me the moment she heard my name. She says my father was her brother-in-law's first cousin, and her brother-in-law died in Agra in a fit; though what that has to do with it, goodness knows. It means I have got to be civil and to get mixed up with the rest of the party. A man can never be as rude as he feels, which is one of the drawbacks of civilisation. So I have to sit at their table now, and talk the whole time – can't even have a meal in peace. The old woman MacGill is on one side, the American girl on the other. The companion sits opposite. *She* keeps quiet, which is one mercy; generally has neuralgia, – a pale, rather lady-like young woman with a seen-better-days-and-once-was-decidedly-pretty air about her. The American girl's clothes take the cake, of course – a new frock every night and such ribbons and laces – my stars! I'd rather not be the man who has to pay for them. I'm surprised at her talking so much to the humble companion – thought this sort of girl never found it worth while to be civil to her own sex; but I conclude this is not invariably the case.

'I'm afraid your neuralgia is very bad up here,' I heard her say to Miss Evesham (that's the companion's name) after dinner last night. 'You come right along to my room, and I'll rub menthol on your poor temples.' And they went off together and disappeared for the night.

The weather has cleared up to-day, though it is still too cold and windy, thank the Lord, for the picnic to Widdington-in-the-Wolds. I took the motor to a little town about four miles off, and overtook the fair Virginia and Miss Evesham, footing it there on some errand of Mrs. MacGill's. I slowed down as I got near, but I soon saw Miss Pomeroy intended me to stop; there's no uncertainty about any of *her* desires.

'Now, Sir Archibald,' said she with a straight look which made me understand that obedience was my *rôle*, 'I know what you're going to do this very minute. Miss Evesham's neuralgia is so bad

that she can scarcely see, and you've got to take her right along in your motor to the Unicorn Inn, and help choose a pony for Mrs. MacGill. Just a man's job – you'd love doing it, I should think.'

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