

**A HIMALAYAN SUNSET**

**"Of joys departed, not to return,  
How painful the remembrance".**

**By Daphne Gordon**

## NAINI TAL - CRAIGLANDS

Sitting in my Norfolk garden, I am haunted by the ghosts of the past, the past which has been dead in its grave for over half a century. Krishna, the bearer, is shouting, "Baby Missahib, Baby Missahib. Juldi, juldi, hurry, hurry, the tonga garri is going without you!"

I was running around the compound with my friend Rhundi, whose father had been our gardener before he died, and whose mother was blind and had been allowed to live on in the servants quarters, and was given a small pension by my father. Rhundi and I built houses under the sweet lime tree or in the branches of the guava trees, and made pots, cups and plates out of mud and water and put them in the scorching sun to dry out. Rhundi always wanted us to make-believe we were important - rajahs and ranis and princesses living in palaces. I, on the other hand, wanted to pretend that I was Maid Marion awaiting Robin Hood and his merry men, and would supposedly be collecting herbs for the venison that the hunters would bring home. Every morning Rhundi would take her mother's hand and lead her to where the Government House servants lived. There she would winnow atta - a coarse wheat - for a few pice and a handful for herself and child.

The tonga had been ordered to take us to the station. We were leaving the hot plains for Naini Tal up in the hills. It was here that we went to school, and it was in the foothills of the Himalayas that European women and children escaped for a few months from the heat. The servants were to follow in a tekha garri - a black box without springs on wheels, drawn by a half-starved horse. Shutters kept out the dust and also the light. It smelt of paraffin, leather and hay. Sometimes, my brother would be allowed to go with the servants in the tekha garri, so that he could sit on the top with the driver. The heavy luggage, including the piano which would have been reduced to powder by the white ants if left behind, was stacked in crates on to a bullock cart or perhaps two.

To reach Lucknow City Station we had to drive through the bazaar and, in the days before electricity, the shops and stalls were lit by paraffin lamps. The peasants, squatting on their haunches behind baskets piled up with fruit and vegetables, would use little earthenware saucers filled with mustard oil and a piece of string as a wick to light up their wares. The air was always thick with smoke and smelt strongly of pungent spices, hot ghee and paraffin. The sacred cow roaming in and out of the traffic, thin as a skeleton, eating what it could find, would block one's way. The pariah dogs, three-quarters starved, tails between their legs would slink around searching for morsels and letting out a piercing yelp as they were caught in the ribs with a kick or had a brick thrown at them. Beggars were everywhere, cripples, lepers and emaciated children, swarming around the tonga when it slowed down or had to stop, crying, "Buckshee, buckshee".

The journey from Lucknow to Naini Tal lasted nearly two days. For the train one always took one's own bedding in a valise which was unrolled on to a bunk. There were usually six bunks in a carriage - three up and three down, with a bathroom and lavatory attached. When the train stopped at a station which it did throughout the night, the peasants would flock round the windows shouting out their wares which were piled in baskets balanced precariously on their heads - sweets, fruits, cigarettes, hot spicy food, tea and toast, the latter made on charcoal fires on the platform. Even as a child I hardly slept all night. Not only was the compartment hot and stuffy, but at each station when the train stopped, a coolie with a lantern and hammer would come and make an awful din as he struck the wheels. My mother once put her head out of the window to ask why he was making such a noise. He replied, "This is my work. I'm paid by the Railway to knock the wheels, but God knows why!" Later, I learned it was to check for metal fatigue or cracks in the wheels.

On the second morning, at dawn, the train stopped at a station called Boojepura and there was a lot of shunting backwards and forwards. The engine was filled with water and the train stayed about an hour without anyone getting in or out. A second engine had to be connected for the journey as from here it was all uphill. In the distance a faint tracing on the horizon would mean that we were gradually approaching the mountains. The air had changed drastically from being unbearably hot to decidedly chilly. The scenery had also changed from scorched fields with peasants tilling and buffaloes drawing water from wells, to a dense jungle - the Terai - which stretched along the foot of the Himalayas. Tiger roamed through the tall elephant grass and was often stalked and shot. We would lean out of the window to catch the grass, but it was a dangerous game as spikes were sharp and could cut deep. As the Terai was left behind, tilled fields of a different nature came into sight. There were orchards of oranges, lemons and grapefruit. Pineapples flourished in a dark rich soil.

The train slowed to almost a walking pace as it climbed higher and higher, the whistles blowing incessantly to drive straying animals off the line. With a lot of creaking and groaning the train eventually stopped. This was Kathgodam, the end of the line. The remainder of the journey, about twenty miles up a zigzagging road, was made by car.

In the days before the motor road was built the journey from Kathgodam to Talli Tal or Chota Bazaar, the terminus, was made by tonga with two horses pulling instead of the usual one. There would be regular stops when fresh horses would be brought out. The tonga could only go as far as Bhreebutti. The remaining eight or ten miles to Naini Tal were made in a dandy by my mother, brother and I. A dandy is a kind of chair and footstool in one, attached to poles and carried by jampanis or coolies on their shoulders. My father and two sisters who were older rode on hired hacks. About half-way, one always stopped for a drink at what we children called the Cow's Mouth. Out of the mouth of the carved head of a cow flowed an icy cold silver stream into a trough. We would cup our hands and drink while the horses would drink from the trough. The servants had to walk up with the luggage which was carried on the backs of dutials - coolies or sherpas from Nepal. These men were renowned for their strength and have been known to carry up a piano by themselves. They supported the baggage on the back with a piece of webbing or rope which passed round the forehead and acted as a sling. They usually walked in convoy and often had spiked staves with bells jingling round the top to ward off wild animals and as protection against decoits (bandits). Often one would see them sitting by the road, stripped to the waist looking for body lice. It is said that they bathed thrice - once when born, again when married and finally at death.

Naini Tal was a small town built on the slopes of the Himalayas. The local range encircled a lake from which a river flowed. A dam was built at the head of the lake to keep the river in check, and it was through this pass in the mountains that the road was cut down to Kathgodam at the base of the Hills. Naini Tal was the Hill Station for the United Provinces (now called Utta Pradesh) and the summer seat for the Governor and his secretariat.

Many years previously there had been a landslide and part of the hill had slipped into the lake reducing its size. This area was later flattened and Malli Tal, or the Burra Bazaar, was built. There was also a sizable piece of ground called "The Flats" which was used as a parade ground on Empire Day, and for inter-school football, hockey and cricket matches. It was also used as a polo pitch and, on one occasion, when my mother while out for a ride on Rabbit, her polo-trained pony, stopped to watch a chukka, the ball suddenly rolled towards them. Rabbit immediately pricked up her ears, switched her tail and joined in the chase. My mother, taken completely by surprise, was thrown from her mount, and with one leg still in the stirrup, her habit billowing about her and her long hair streaming, she was dragged along. The chukkas was stopped and, of course, the usual sympathetic crowd gathered around. My mother was taken to Chandlers the Chemist but, apart from severe bruising, was not seriously hurt, although pregnant at the time and expecting me. In those days, women rode side saddle.

A temple had been built at the head of the lake to the Goddess Naini. The roof was pagoda shaped and had bells hanging all around. Each afternoon a colourful procession of hill women in their bright full skirts and sleeveless jackets and chuddas (head covering) together with their rosy-cheeked children, would make a pilgrimage to the Goddess carrying rice and sweetmeats decorated with rose petals. The food was for the Sadhus - the priests of the Temple. Before they entered, the procession would walk round ringing the bells and the tinkling noise would be borne over the hills and down the lake.

Our lovely home called Craiglands had been built on a piece of land scooped out from the hillside, a part of which was covered with deodars which sighed and wailed day in and night out, and from here the edge of the garden dropped into eternity. There was a fall of about 500 ft or more on to the cart road and then the hillside continued to roll away. A thin silver stream could be seen winding its way around boulders and, on the horizon, amidst the greens and browns of the Hills, a little lake, sometimes emerald green, sometimes slate grey but more often sapphire blue, shimmered in the rays of the sun. Three large deodar trees stood on the side of the garden behind our summer house. These trees could be seen from the cart road and when driving up to Naini Tal, as the car rounded the corner we would lean out and shout, "Look! Look! there they are." We were nearly home.

Sometimes an army of baboons would climb up the hillside and leap on to the branches with little babies clinging to the tummies or backs of their parents. I was always terrified of these huge

grey creatures with thin black faces. I had nightmares about them but they only stayed for a few hours and seldom came more than once a year.

During the winter months wild beasts, driven by hunger, and unable to hunt for food in the frozen jungle, would search for easier prey which was always to be found round human habitation. A goat or cow grazing near a village, or a dog or a child or even a peasant cutting grass was easy game; and once an animal realised how easy hunting was near a homestead, then it became a "man-eater". My mother often heard a leopard lapping at the rainwater tub outside the bedroom. Sometimes, it would sit on an overhanging rock panting, and on moonlit nights one could see it quite clearly. It came after our little Maltese terrier - Gypsy - who would go frantic and tear up the coconut matting when it sensed the creature prowling around. On one occasion my brother, when running home from school after prep saw a leopard lurking under the trees by the puckduddy (footpath). He stopped and looked at it but it did not move, just stared at him back. Terrified, my brother picked up some stones which he threw and the beast slunk off. Jackie came into the house white and trembling. Then there was the time when Dulwa the bearer was bringing the dinner round (Indian kitchens are always built away from the house) and saw a leopard pounce from behind a thick bush of heliotrope on to Brindle, a little grizzled Sealyham dog which was taking its final walk before retiring. The beast let the dog slip as the dinner struck it and vanished, but poor little Brindle ran round the house yelping pitifully and, when finally she came in, she was shaking all over. It was several days before she would leave her basket to go out even in broad daylight. She had to be forcibly carried out for just the necessary job and then would race back indoors. One morning when the Ayah brought in our chota-hazri (early morning tea and toast), she said that a leopard had pounced on the rabbit hutch and killed all but one of our pet rabbits. We had about a dozen or so. My father decided to sit up and see if he could shoot the animal if it returned to its kill. The rabbits had been removed so as not to sadden us children, so my father used as a bait the dinner joint - to my mother's great annoyance. But the creature did not return. Weeks later Buchwa the cook was seen with his seven sons walking crocodile fashion down to the bazaar all wearing rabbit skin caps.

During the winter in Naini Tal, there was a very beautiful phenomenon which we called the "Winter Line". As the snow fell on the mountain peaks a faint pink line appeared on the horizon as if encircling the world. As the peaks got whiter the line got darker, and by the time we went down to the plains it was a deep red.

Swimming in the lake in Naini Tal was rather exciting. The water was freezing cold, the lake being fed from glaciers and melting snows, but there were also warm currents and although these were pleasant, they did make the cold colder. In the "twenties" women did not swim in the lake and it was not easy to buy a swimming costume. I designed my first. It was made by the durzi (tailor) who used to sit cross-legged on the verandah sewing dresses, mending linen, making our school outfits and carrying out any other needlework required. My costume was made of green drill bound with orange and the legs were gathered rather like a child's romper. Proudly, I took it down to the lake wrapped in a towel and prepared to swim in the raft. This was a sunken pen supported by empty barrels at the four corners and it was used by St. Joseph's College to teach their pupils to swim. When I jumped into the water my costume bulged like a balloon and the weight made movement impossible. I redesigned it very rapidly.

One hot, sultry day with not a breath of air, my brother and I decided to go swimming. As we were splashing about Ronny, a friend, rowed up in a hired boat and took us out into the middle of the lake, where the current was warm but the depth unfathomable. While we were swimming there, the sky grew darker and suddenly a squall blew up with little warning, the waves growing in size as the water churned. Quickly, Ronny and Jack rowed back to the lake edge. The bank was slippery and no sooner did one manage to get one's foot on to a hold when a wave would drive the frail little boat away and back into its bottom one would fall. Ronny, however, was lithe and agile and managed to leap out and haul my brother and I to safety. We were all afraid, there were now loud claps of thunder which echoed round the hills and forked lightning darted through the sky. I had an even greater fear, a secret one. Whilst Ronny and Jack were rowing, I had taken off my wet costume and put on my dress. I had had not time to pull on my underwear. At every blow of the wind, at every movement of the boat my dress flew up and I had to hold it down even when scaling the bank. I was very modest and I was horrified in case I shamefully displayed my nakedness, especially before Ronny who was a few years older than I.

Coming home from school one summer's day when the cloudless sky was a sheet of blue, I became aware of an alarming noise which was increasing in intensity. It was like the clattering of

pots and pans, shouting and bangings. I stopped, looked round and on the horizon I saw moving steadily a strange cloud coming up the valley. It was twinkling with powdered stars, little lights darting in and out of the grey mass. I raced home only to find all the doors and windows shut tight. I called to the bearer and asked him what was happening. "Look Missahib", he said pointing to a stray locust. The cloud was a locust swarm, and their transparent wings through which the sun shone, made a whirring noise as they came nearer. Soon we were enveloped. They crawled through chinks and crevices. They crawled up the curtains, into the bed, into one's shoes, up into the sleeves of one's coat, up the leg of the chair and suddenly there would be a "crunch" as one was squashed. In the bath they would be floundering, the dog chased them, the cat ate them. Soon every leaf of every tree had been stripped. They fell in their millions into the lake which looked like a moving carpet. The noise that I had heard earlier was the villagers trying to frighten off the swarm from their crops. As they fell and rotted before being scooped away, "I counted two and seventy stenches, All well defined, and several stinks". (Coleridge)

The most important event for us children in the Hills was the Children's Party at Government House. There was a chute into the ballroom down which we would all slide. I had a photograph of myself, in fancy dress, coming down with Sir Harcourt Butler who was the Governor at that time. His nephew was the late RA Butler. Lord Meston, Sir James Meston as he was when a Governor, used often in later years ask me down to Hurst Park, his home in England. He would send me a First Class Return railway ticket and meet me himself with his chauffeur. We would talk about India, the India he loved, and had had to leave in the middle of the 1914 War as his term of office was complete, and the India I knew and had left so recently. We talked too of the friends we both knew.

When we were very young, before I was old enough to go to school and my sisters had a governess, we would go up to the Hill Station in the Governor's Special Train. Everything went up in the Special. Horses, cows, our pony Nancy, and all the servants. In the morning Francis the butler would tap on the carriage window and ask my mother whether she wanted fresh milk as they were now milking. The Governor always walked to his compartment on a red carpet.

Once when we were going up to the hills, but not in the Special Train, my mother had a hen sitting on eggs which she put in the guards van. By the time we arrived at Kathgodam, the chicks had hatched and there was a great argument as to what my mother should pay and from where. I think the rate was a quarter fare for each chick and there were over a dozen of them.

I remember our gardener called Culloo, who was a Hindu and worshipped a pair of pythons at the foot of our garden. He would put out food for them and they would come and eat. I had forgotten about these snakes until one day Dulwa called me and said, "Look Missahib, look at that snake". And there in the lower garden where the grass had not been cut for a long time, and where under myrtle tree our little dog Gypsy had been buried, there with its head swinging from side to side was a python. I became paralysed with fear because playing, often barefooted, in the long grass just where the python was swaying was one of my pleasures.

During the 1914 War when my father had enlisted and gone to France, we had to vacate Craiglunds, as it was Government property and was being occupied by my father's deputy. We went to live with a friend - Mr. Tivy in a large house called Ardmore. Ardmore had been divided and on the top half lived the Fleury's. There were four of them: Peggy, Ronny, Eleanor and George. Eleanor was a baby and George was as yet unborn. Peggy and Ronny were nearer my sisters' and brother's ages. I was sometimes allowed to join in when they were building houses amongst the ringalls (a kind of bamboo), but when picnics were planned I was often excluded because being younger they thought I would tire. On these occasions I would hide and wait until the party had turned a corner and then follow only showing myself when I thought it was too far to be sent home. My sister Sheila was always on my side and would allow me to accompany the party; not so Beryl. She would be adamant that I should go home. A quarrel often ensued when thumps, and fists, and hair pulling, and even kicking would be resorted to. Sheila usually won because she had a temper that matched her red hair and we were all frightened when she got into one. Ronny often intervened saying that he would carry me if I could not keep up, and so, Beryl had to give in.

These were happy days until calamity struck us friends. It happened one evening when my mother was going down to the Burra Bazaar shopping. At the gates of Government House from where a road led to St. Nicholas, the Parish Church, my mother met Mrs. Yates, the Vicar's wife, calling "Pussy, pussy". She came up to my mother who was in her dandy and said, "Have you seen my little kitten?" It just happened that as my mother was leaving Ardmore, Mrs. Fleury came up to

her and said, "Look, see what I've found", and she showed my mother a dear little kitten that had strayed. Naturally, my mother told Mrs. Yates that Mrs. Fleury had found a kitten and Mrs. Yates gratefully went to see her. When my mother returned, Mrs. Fleury came down in a furious temper and accused my mother of deliberately "telling on her". From then onwards, the Fleury children were forbidden to speak, play or have anything more to do with us, the Mores. This unjust sanction sealed our friendship. There were clandestine meetings, strange messages would appear on the trunks of trees, letters were hidden in the crevices of walls; life became much more exciting as we children ate of the "forbidden fruit".

After the war when my father returned from the Front, we went back to live in Craiglunds and our friendship with the Fleury children continued. My mother always like Ronny and Peggy and never attempted to stop us seeing each other.

I recall at this time, a picnic that had been planned for us to visit the stream that we could see in the far distance from our garden. Nancy, our pony, was loaded like a pack-horse with food we had hoarded for days. Pocket money had been saved and food gradually disappeared from the larder of both houses. We set off immediately after breakfast, not saying a word of this to any of the parents. We got down to the cart road and then had to slide down the khud (hillside). Nancy was on her back haunches most of the time while we children sat on our bottoms and slid down on the shingle avoiding nettles and prickly bushes until we reached the stream. Hot and thirsty, we drank of its icy water and then decide to bathe in the nude. Ronny and Jack were sent down stream while we looked for a deep enough pool into which we could flounder. Later, putting clothes on to a cold, wet and goose-flesh body, was extremely unpleasant but we soon warmed, finished up our food and prepared to return home. The journey back took much longer than expected. Nancy was the only creature that seemed to manage the shingle, we all took turns hanging on to her tail. When we reached the cart-road, I was put on her back. By this time it was nearly dark and, as we approached the Cow's Mouth for a rest and a drink, the Fleurys saw their servant coming towards them. He had been sent out to look for the two children. "The Sahib and Memsahib are very angry" he said. And how true it proved to be as they were both caned and put to bed when they got in, but we Mores were let off with a scolding and made to promise we would never go far.

When my sisters were sent to school in England, Peggy and I continued our friendship and although she has been in Sao Paulo for over the past fifty years, we still correspond twice yearly. During the weekends, we would ramble over the hills wooded half to the peak. We would gather wild flowers - lily of the valley, dahlias, primulas, forget-me-nots, poppies, but never the ubiquitous Indian marigold for its scent was too pungent and strong. Sometimes we would come across a tree stripped of its bark by the brown Himalayan bear, or see the droppings of the Neilguy deer, or, maybe even the pug mark of a leopard. Perhaps we would decide to follow a narrow path which twined round the hillside only to find that it was the track of a wild goat and ended as mysteriously as it had begun. We would then slip and slide and slither down the steep khud, scratching ourselves on shrub and shingle, tearing our clothes and, with bleeding hands and knees, would drop on to the cart road, a goodly distance from home. Sitting on a boulder smarting with pain we would discuss whether it were preferable to scramble up the steep hillside again or to walk on the cart road through the bazaar and up a long winding road. We never tired of exploring, for we loved coming off the "feather bed of civilisation". After scrambling through thickets we would find a secluded haunt where a wild deer would suddenly appear silhouetted against a mountain peak. We would sit on a rock jutting out over the mountain with our legs over hanging the side and gaze into the distance, where smoke curled from villages buried in wooded valleys, and we would call out "cooe", and wait for the echo. It was there that Peggy's brother once shot a leopard.

During the War my mother started a dancing class. At first she would teach little children to dance for charity concerts concerned with the War. Later, her classes became very popular and she was appointed the visiting dancing mistress for the schools. Even St. Joseph's College, a Christian Brother School for Boys, asked her to instruct the boys for their concerts. She taught them a Toreador Dance and Scottish reels and these were used every year. As a young girl in France, my mother had attended a School of Dancing at Belle Vue run by Mrs. Mary Wordsworth, friend and pupil of Isadora Duncan. Later, she became a Member of the Institute of Dance Teachers, and it must have been they who gave my mother's address to a young pair of Russian dancers who were touring India. Unfortunately, the ballerina fell ill and my mother received a telegram asking if she could take her place. My mother was delighted and the rest of the tour was with my mother using a nom de plume. She danced in places where there were family friends and she was very amused to

receive flowers, chocolates and surreptitious invitations to dinner or supper with men, whose wives she met socially.

In mid-Summer, the temperature could soar to about 100 F and, as Naini Tal was in a valley, the heat was insufferable. Dust storms rolling up from the plains were not unknown. Suddenly, one would be enveloped in a cloud of gritty dust like a fog but much thicker and more suffocating. Everything would be covered in a pale brown blanket and this dust, together with the scorched leaves, would remain until ominous signs would foretell the coming of the Monsoon.

Dark clouds would gather and disperse and sometimes there would be thunder and lightning, followed by a still hot silence. Then one day the heavens would open and torrential rain would beat down without respite. The drains and gulleys became raging rivulets; birds stopped singing and, from everything and everyone, there was the tell tale dripping of water. The roofs of the houses were corrugated iron so the noise both day and night was unbearable. Worst of all, the terrifying scorpion would make his appearance. Once my sister, Sheila, cried out to my mother, "Come and see this horrible thing looking at me from the bottom of the bed." It was the largest scorpion my mother had ever seen. She caught it with a glass and plate, placed it on the floor and, in a flash with the flick of its tail, it threw off the glass and vanished! My brother and I were once locked in the bathroom by the Ayah because we had been fighting and I can remember the terror of seeing a scorpion lurking in the corner. We climbed on the lavatory seat and yelled in unison until the Ayah came.

The fungus that grew everywhere was very unpleasant. Sunday shoes would be green with mildew. The dhobi (laundry man) would bring back the washing with everything damp and smelling of mould. Often I would get to school wringing wet, and remained in these clothes until I came back home or they dried on me. The rain trickled off the mackintosh into the wellingtons and one squelched around. Children frequently broke out in sores (brasathy sores). Two school friends of mine, Maureen and Joyce, were special victims and they would be bandaged from heel to thigh.

As suddenly as the monsoon came, it moved on. At first the sun shone with a sickly paleness, but gradually it became brighter and stronger. The trees shook their dripping leaves and looked up; and the birds dried their sodden feathers and sang loudly, especially the Kastura (the Indian nightingale). Ferns grew everywhere - on the trunk and in the forks of trees, in all nooks and crannies. Fresh green, soft moss crept over the rocks and boulders delightfully concealing the hard, cold, grey granite. A second brief Spring had come, but very soon Autumn with its hues of gold, red and rust would begin to colour the hillside. The distant peaks grew white, as the icy winds blowing off them stung the face, and chapped the hands, and as the nights drew in, we knew that winter was near.

During the hot weather, before the Monsoon broke, my Grandmother would come and stay with us in the Hills, returning to her home only when the rains had stopped and it was cooler on the Plains. Her visits were a great joy to me - I was her favourite grandchild and I held her in deep affection. I can remember her as a tall, erect woman with a sallow complexion, slate-blue eyes, wavy iron-grey hair, beautiful teeth - small and even - and lovely hands. She would say to me, "If you rub a little vaseline into the cuticles and press the skin back your nails will look like mine." She was stern and the servants were afraid of her. Immediately she arrived, she took over the housekeeping from my mother.

My grandmother's maiden name was Christina Henrietta van Meppin. She was of Dutch origin, her father having been the Governor General of Dutch India, and she was born in Vizagapatana, the capital. My mother first met her in an hotel in London whilst on holiday from France - where she was studying dance with the Isadora School. My grandmother was at that time visiting my two aunts in England. My mother, never having known a mother of her own as hers died when she was very young, quickly warmed to the kindness of this elderly lady and close friendship developed. My father wrote thanking my mother for her care and they began to correspond. A few years later when my mother was 21 and inherited her own money, she accepted an invitation to visit her aunt and uncle in India. Uncle Percy Cochrane was at that time Harbour Master in Calcutta. It was during this visit that my father met my mother and they married. My mother and grandmother were always very close to each other and my grandmother was with us at Craiglands when she died. I remember her sitting in a corner of the verandah crocheting me a dress and cap to match. When the boxman came round - a peddler carrying bales of material on his back and often accompanied with a coolie likewise laden - my grandmother would call me and ask me to choose a dress length which the



durzi would make up for me. She sympathised at my resentment at always having to wear my sisters' cast-offs and out-grows.

Our favourite picnic spot was down the slopes of a pine forest where ran a clear cold stream over stones whose edges were razor sharp and cut our feet when paddling. It was the "Pines" that I first learned the delight of pure water. We had been eating rich, sweet food and drinking fizzy lemonade from bottles which had glass balls as stoppers. On the way home, I became very thirsty, my throat sore and dry. My mother ordered orange juice at a small, family restaurant called "Mrs. Barnes". I wanted nothing sweet, just glass upon glass of pure, cold water. I was made to drink the orange juice before my mother would ask for the water. I can even now recall the delicious sensation as it ran down my parched throat. I was about five or six at the time - a tender age to learn that "There is no trifling with nature".

After Miss Kerna, our governess, left and my sisters and brother were going regularly to the Convent, it was decided that I, too, should attend for the mornings only. The Ayah would take my hand and together we would walk down the hill, she singing India hill songs to me and relating stories about her village situated in the mountains beyond the horizon, or so it seemed, a week's journey by foot she told me, with wild animals crossing one's path and decoits lurking in the jungle awaiting some unsuspecting traveller. Once on returning from leave - perhaps she had gone to a marriage or a burial - she brought her nephew back with her, a young, handsome boy still in his teens, who later became our bearer, Dulwa.

My mother sent us to a Convent school because she was under the impression that the gentle, kind nuns had a refining influence on our character and behaviour. Little did she know that from time to time the Reverend Mother would come into the classroom with a strap hanging from her girdle. The teacher then called out the girls who had to receive it, and we would go forward, stretch out our hands and feel its biting effect. Our hands would swell up sometimes and be sore for quite a while. Whenever the Reverend Mother came to our dancing class we would have to go up to her chair and curtsey. If we were running and saw her in the distance, we would have to stop immediately and wait for her to pass, before carrying on.

I felt very grown up going to school, and resented being referred to as "the babies", such being the name used for the kindergarten children. It was the practice that the babies had to rest for half an hour before break by putting their heads on the desks. I disliked this session, fidgeting and wriggling with boredom until the bell rang, but the little boy who shared my desk invariably fell asleep. Sister Ucharia, my heroine, was full of praise for him and told us we should try and be like him.

When we went to bed in the winter, we had to kneel on the hard polished floor of the dormitory whilst icy winds off the snow-clad peaks sneaked in through the chinks and cracks to torment us. The prayers were long and drawn out - Hail Mary's, Our Father's, Glory to Be's, Magnificat's, and the De Profundus. When I cannot sleep at nights, I repeat my school prayers over and over again instead of counting sheep! With or without results!

One was not allowed to strip to the waist, but only to the armpits. My durzi-made vests buttoned up right to the neck. They were of thick woollen material and if I washed my neck, I would have to sit all day with a wet ridge around my neck. So, my neck was only washed on a Saturday when we bathed.

Listening to my sisters and their criticisms of the nuns, I became aware of the differences in religion - we Mores being Church of England. I used to say to Sister Ucharia, "But Sister, you really are a Protestant and not a Catholic, aren't you?" and she would reply, "I hope and pray, my child, that you will one day become a good Catholic", but once she did confess that she was a convert and knowing this, I became less disquieted at her Catholicism.

One of the other teachers took a particular interest in me. She would wait by the grotto on the road going towards the school gate and when I passed with the Ayah, she would take me into her room and give me cold, hard toast and butter. She must have saved this from her breakfast many hours earlier, and sometimes she added sugar for me. I was too polite, frightened or shy to refuse despite its unpleasantness.



The Convent had a couple of dozen little boys who were looked after by Mother Bignia - a hard-faced German disciplinarian who ruled them with a rod of iron. It was quite common to see the little fellows polishing their shoes before being lined up two by two, holding hands before setting off for their walk. Alas, one day Mother Bignia was bitten by a rabid dog. She lay in the Infirmary howling like a wolf. The girls used to sneak up on to the playground which adjoined the Infirmary to hear these awful screams and roars. I never had the courage.

When she died she was replaced by Mother Pauline. Mother Pauline was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Her bluest of blue eyes shone, her features were perfect and she had a serene, sweet expression. She rivalled all the madonnas which had graced the grottoes and walls of the Convent. Today, many, many years later, I can still recall her. Whilst taking the little boys for a walk, an ADC of the Governor saw her and fell in love. He would wait and then follow her on her walk before forcing her to listen to him. He would push bits of paper into her hand. But Mother Pauline remained loyal to her vows. Soon the Governor and his staff returned to the Plains.

The brother school to the Convent was St. Joseph's College which was run by Irish Christian Brothers. When my brother came to see me on a visiting day, he had to bring a note from his teacher confirming who he was. A little pupil would then be sent off to the playground to find me. If by chance we sat in front of friends and I turned round to say "hullo" to my friend's brother, my brother would be sent back to school immediately and he would not be allowed to visit me again. I was only 11 or 12 at the time, long before adolescence raised its inquisitive head. Although at home during the holidays we all played together, under the aegis of the nuns anything male was taboo. I reacted later by sending my son to Bedales!

In the Hills the school term lasted nine months, from March to November due to the long train journeys that many of the pupils had to undertake. I enjoyed school when young and was an alert and bright pupil coming at the top of the class. My interest was gradually to wane, partly due to my mother who would bring us up from the plains a month after school had started and take us down again before the end of term. It became more and more difficult to catch up with lessons and with my mother always saying as I grew older, "Men don't like blue stockings", or "your health comes first", when she wanted me to accompany her for a walk round the lake instead of doing my homework. My diligence faded and I gradually slipped into the rearguard of the class. I seemed to have lost the power of concentration and in its place my imagination ran riot. From time to time, I would earnestly try and amend my ways and harness my wandering thoughts. I would take up my books, walk great distances in search of a beautiful, quiet spot where I could resolutely settle myself to study. With gaining impetuosity, my dreams would flow in and I would return home to supper cold and hungry without any work having been completed and a feeling of guilt, depression and fear for the morrow. Sometimes I would rise at dawn, but with the same futile result. I remember once learning a poem at daybreak. The spring air was cool and sweet with the scent of wild flowers, the leaves shimmered as the rising sun caught the resting drops of dew. The poem was Browning's "Pippa Passes",

The year's at the spring,  
And the day's at the morn;  
Morning's at seven';  
The hill-side's dew pearled;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn:  
God's in his heaven -  
All's right with the world!

As I paced up and down the path trying to memorise this poem, I suddenly realised its meaning and beauty. It was so attuned to this very morn that my child-heart gladdened as I learned a new joy - the love of poetry.

On days when I was afraid of going to school without any homework being done and punishment looming, I would sometimes persuade Peggy to play truant. On one occasion we forced Eleanor (her younger sister) to join us. As we sat in a field, awed at the fate that might befall us the next day if our truancy were found out, we noticed to our terror a herd of cows advancing and lowing as they came. We fled with Eleanor trailing behind crying and protesting. She liked school and resented being kept away.

I ended my school life a failure and rebel, but I did manage to scrape through the Cambridge School Certificate examination. When the results came out I felt that this was an answer to my very earnest prayers rather than to application. There and then I dedicated my life to the Lord, but alas! I am ashamed of the frailty of my nature, and I soon forgot that dedication. Never in retrospect have I looked upon my school days as the golden days of my life.

Up in Naini Tal, a family named the Bobbs lived not far from us. They had two boys, Vernon who was a contemporary of my brother, so that being three years younger than them, I was pushed off when they were playing. Then there was Austin who was much older at 16. Austin seldom appeared. However, one day whilst my father was mowing the lawn, he came down to see him. As he was about to go, I called out to him and said I would show him our hiding place. This was a large hole cut into the side of the hill with a dangerous drop if one missed one's footing. From here one could see range upon range of the mountains where perhaps a small light flickered or a spiral of smoke twirled up marking some village or other. Austin was very silent and on turning round to see if he were alright, I saw him standing with his phallus exposed, but did not know its purpose or its power. I was mortified, nauseated, repulsed. The little native boys ran around naked with a piece of string around their waist. I think this had a religious connection. I was aware of the difference between the sexes. I scrambled out and raced towards the house. My father called out after me as I passed saying, "Are you all right?", to which I replied, "Yes", before I fled on.

Some days later, Mrs. Bobb came down to have a chat with my mother. She said, "I am so worried about Austing". She then looked at my mother and turned to look at me, before returning to look at my mother. My mother took the hint and sent me away to play. The drawing room opened out on to the verandah so I crept in and hid behind the curtains. Mrs. Bobb was saying, "He is so thin, Dr. Baboo Sahib says he has a tapeworm. He has been given all sorts of medicine including large doses of castor oil, but nothing seems to work. The doctor said that the only thing to do is to starve Austin; put him to bed, prop up his mouth and put a steaming bowl of porridge or soup on the pillow. When the worm crawls up to eat, then one must get hold of its head". I sneaked away as my mother was calling the servant to bring some coffee. Now at last I knew what I had seen in the hide-out. It was Austin's tapeworm which had crawled out to get some air, and had twisted its body into that terrifying shape!

One autumn my father, while pottering in the garden found himself being pelted with stones. The playground of my brother's school was up on the hill overlooking the garden. Some little boys could not resist the temptation of chucking stones over the fence and, of course, my father was a good target. In a furious rage, my father rang up the Principal, Brother Connolly, to complain. They were good friends and often sparred and joked with each other. Several days later on a cold, drizzly evening, while the family were sitting round a blazing fire having tea - homemade cakes, scones, sandwiches - a knock came on the verandah door. I went out and saw four miserably cold, little boys shivering with fright each trying to push the other forward as spokesman. I stared at them and then one spoke, "Please may we see Mr. More?" My father overheard and called them in. They entered, stood in a row behind the tea-table, eyes fixed on the food and said in unison, "Please Sir, we are sorry we threw stones at you, Sir. Brother Connolly says you will cane us yourself, Sir", and one of them handed my father a cane. Brother Connolly was not Irish for nothing, and he had scored off my father this time. The rascals returned to school, pockets bulging with food leaving only the empty table behind.

In Naini Tal Father Amadeus, the Roman Catholic parish priest, would call. He had a white hill pony which had a small trot and you would see the good Father bouncing along. He was very fat, with an enormous paunch which would wobble when he laughed. He smoked cigars and liked his drink. He spoke with a strong Italian accent. He was great fun. One day we heard that he and his pony had been pushed down the khud (hill) by some hill men. One never knew the cause. However, about this time we met the Gilbys'. They had been to England to adopt a little girl. Mr. Gilby was exceedingly thin and emaciated-looking, so it would seem from his appearance that he was the barren one. Many years later, I heard that Mrs. Gilby had turned a Catholic and later still, I learned that she had four huge sons with a decided Italian look! I put two and two together and felt that Father had been pleasuring some Indian women and that this had been the cause of him being pushed down the hill.

One cold, wet winter's evening in November when the sun had come out for only an hour or two, perhaps just to bid goodnight to the retiring day, I met Mrs. Ludovic, a family friend whose husband was the music master at my brother's school, at the top of the hill. I was breathless as I had



been hurrying up the steep road when she stopped me and said, "Daphne, look at that wonderful sight". I turned and saw the pink horizon tinged with a rosy flame, the mountains were cloaked with golden mantles, the puddles on the broken road were pools of fire, the drops of rain from the overhanging trees were transparent gems. They glistened with the colours of the rainbow as they clung to the branches before falling away. Phoebus had emptied her jewel casket as she coursed through the dark blue-grey sky. I stood beside Mrs. Ludovic for probably less than five minutes and then we turned and walked together down the road. I was awkward, shy and bewildered at her raptures over a mere sunset. There was one yesterday or the day before, and surely there would be many more, tomorrow or the day after; but then I had been reared amidst beauty and my years were still in single digits. Spent memories and pleasures are often best enjoyed in retrospect.

There was another sunset that returns to me in quieter hours. I was then living in Ione Villa, a house overlooking the lake. Sitting at the edge of the garden doing my homework, I suddenly noticed that the lake was covered with a sheet of beaten gold, the skyline was one ray of red fire, the mountains engirdling the lake grew dark and sullen as they put on their evening shroud to mourn the death of a day. "The beating of my own heart was all the sound I heard".

My life at Craiglands came to a very sudden end. My father, who had been taken ill some months earlier, was now away with my mother in a hospital in Kasouli, undergoing radium treatment. Radium was the miracle healer and my father was expected home and well (I was too young and too innocent to realise the incurable dreaded cancer for which radium was used in 1926). Cousin Dolly was staying with Jack and I until the schools broke up. As I walked back to school after tiffin (lunch), I saw the telegraph boy coming towards me. I stopped for a moment, looked at him and was on the verge of asking whether he had a telegram for us, but refrained. No one ever sent us telegrams. Sometimes Daddy received them in connection with his work or a friend or relative would wire to say they were arriving; but no one would come in November. As I walked on my heart began to thump. What if there was bad news, what if Daddy was not indestructible? Then the school bell began to ring. I would be late again if I did not hurry. I forgot about the telegraph boy as I raced down the hill. Soon we would all be in Lucknow - Daddy, Mummy, Jack and I. At school everyone seemed so kind to me. I remember sitting on a bench in the playing field with Peggy and she put her arm around me. Never before had we shown any outward affection for each other - we just belonged.

I slipped into the school Church on the way home to pray to St. Rita to restore my father's health and, as I came out, the Headmistress, the Reverend Mother Florian Wier, called me into her office and asked, "Have you been home yet, Daphne?"

I replied, "No."

She said, "Hurry along and don't play on the way".

Peggy and I always went home together and as we got to the top of the hill looking down to the garden, I saw my brother and Dolly. They were walking together backwards and forwards on the lawn. Dolly had got a handkerchief to her eyes and she looked as if she were crying. I rushed down the slope and when I reached them, Dolly said, "Daddy's dead, Daddy's dead". I remember running away to the bedroom, picking up my doll and saying, "Daddy's dead, Daddy's dead". I could not cry; I felt frozen as if there was nothing inside me, just something hard. Night after night I dreamed of Daddy. One recurring dream was seeing some men digging a hole and I said, "What are you doing that for?" and they replied, "This is for your father, it is his grave". Again, another dream that kept torturing me was Daddy standing by a hole and he said to me, "Goodbye. Be a good girl, look after your mother, I'm going to die".

Next morning I was later for school, and when I walked into the classroom everyone turned round and then turned back quickly. For once I was not reprimanded and went to my desk. I felt terribly sick and I could feel my pulse throbbing. *They* knew then. When the bell went the room emptied in a flash, no one spoke to me for I think they were embarrassed. I just couldn't join them. My legs wouldn't support me. As I sat at my desk the door opened, and one of the girls came in. It was Roy Sharpe. "I know how you feel", she said, and sat beside me. About three months earlier Roy's own father had died. He was something to do with the Indian Police or Indian Forestry, and Roy was brought up in a village high up in the Himalayas.

My mother knew her mother and the reason why Roy was given a boy's name was because Mrs. Sharpe had wanted a boy very much. The layette had been sent out from England, and everything had the name Roy embroidered on it. When the baby turned out to be a girl, she was still christened Roy. Mrs. Sharpe died when Roy was very young. Roy's father brought her up, taking

her back to England for holidays but otherwise schooling her himself. After his death, she came to the Convent for a while before being sent back to England.

I remember her well, sitting at Prep with one leg under her and rubbing her tunic with her finger and thumb as she studied. She used to rub holes in it. Roy had a very agreeable round face with short golden hair and a lovely singing voice. I admired her tremendously and would listen to her singing folk songs, and tunes from the hills in the vernacular. She could imitate the song of the birds, the cry of a wild beast. I was fascinated by the stories she told of the villagers. They had never seen a white face before her father was posted to their area. Years later I read in one of the daily papers that Roy Sharpe was the only woman to compete in some aeronautical competition. I felt sure it was the Roy Sharpe I knew. I cut out the notice, but alas, with my usual haphazardness I lost the scrap of paper. I once looked through the telephone directories to see if I could trace her. The Roy Sharpe I found was a man.

November was nearly over, crimson Autumn was gradually fading into the dark, drab, icy-greyness of Winter. The house was cold, the rooms bare as Cousin Dolly packed everything into crates. Nothing was to be left behind as we were leaving Craiglands forever. Craiglands was Government property and went with my father's job. As soon as the school exams were over, we would go down to the plains for the holidays.

When we returned to Naini Tal after my father's death, we went to live in a house called Helvellyn for a few months, and finally settled in Ione Ville, the house overlooking the lake. Many a day I would go back to Craiglands and sit on the verandah. Mrs. Jones, whose husband had my father's job, was very kind; she never turned me away. She never stopped me when I roamed through the house. I loved walking down the drive and as I approached the house, I would recapture happy days spent there. The family would come back once more - my father, my sisters who were now in England at school, and my beloved Grandmother. I somehow felt that Craiglands really was my own home, but that Mrs. Jones was only staying there because my father was dead. No! no!, it wasn't her home - it was mine, and so I had a right to roam about. One day as I was paying one of my uninvited visits, I saw my father's lawn being torn up by coolies with pick axes. It was to be made into a hard tennis court. My father had tended that lawn with such care. He would walk round with his hands behind his back and suddenly he would stop, put his feet together and attempt to pull up a weed. It was the lawn I learned to walk on; it was the lawn that he was mowing in his dressing gown when the Doctor Baboo came down from Government House to look at a small, persistent and painful sore on his gum. That was the last time he mowed the lawn. After the doctor's visit he was rushed into the Ramsay Hospital where the Civil Surgeon operated on him and after several weeks sent him home with his face and jaw mutilated. After the lawn was dug up, I avoided Craiglands. I would go to see my friend Peggy through a more roundabout way. But my love for Craiglands has never died.

LUCKNOW

When we left the Hills soon after my father's death, my mother met us at Lucknow Station. She stood alone on the platform, a small, thin, white-faced woman with dark hollow eyes. My throat felt dry and I was trembling and trying very hard not to cry. We drove in a tonga to No.9 Havelock Road, our Lucknow home. But this, too, had had to be vacated, and when we went round the rooms they were bare, the walls showing the outlines where pictures had once hung, the uncarpeted floors echoing our footsteps. The flowers outside were wilting. The bheesti (Gunga In) no longer came to throw water on to the dusty path surrounding the house and on to the flower beds. He used to come regularly every evening with his flayed goatskin sack slung over his back.

My father was always there to meet us when we came down from the Hills. It was impossible to believe it was all over, that this was no longer our home. His spirit was everywhere. In the house, on the verandah, among the flowers - the flowers he loved so much, and he scolded my mother when he saw her picking them. Every morning a mali (gardener) from Government House would come with fresh flowers for our rooms and my father would fill the vases.

In the days before my father's death, Lucknow was my paradise. School, homework and exams were over. The cold biting winds from off the snow-capped mountains had been left behind. Here the warm sun shone day after day. The drive from the gate to the house was round a heart-shaped lawn, the grass was green, the roses lining the borders were in full flower, their fragrance was strong and sweet. The rustic arches leading on to the two side lawns were covered with the bluest of blue convolvulus. Syringas, hollyhocks, canners, hibiscus, and poinsettias were in full bloom and around the house like a girdle encircling the walls were multi-coloured verbenas. The verandah was lined with crotons and ferns.

Down on the plains we children always bathed in the afternoon. Cotton dresses were changed for tussore silk or embroidery anglais frocks with coloured sashes matching the ribbons in our hair. We would then be taken for a walk to Winfield Park. The four of us being escorted by four servants - Krishna, the bearer, who would push Jack and I, sitting back to back in a yellow and red go-kart with long shafts; Durga, the Ayah who carried the coats (in India darkness falls suddenly, for there was no twilight, and a chilly breeze would blow up); Rhugbi, the mali who held the reins of our pony, Nancy, which Beryl and Sheila shared; and finally, our governess, Hetty Kerna.

As soon as we reached the park we children would run round looking for our friends. The servants would separate themselves into groups. The ayahs all squatted together on their haunches as did the bearers and syces, each batch quite separate. The nannies would sit in a marble pavilion on hard rustic benches painted green. We kept as far away as possible from our guardians. Occasionally, a servant would be sent to see what we were up to. Climbing trees and playing hide and seek were our favourite games.

When my mother had guests for tea we children, preceded by Beryl the eldest and ringleader, would sneak into the dining room to see what cakes the grownups were going to have. We would mark our favourite one by licking it, thus making sure that none of the others would grab it. When the guests had had their tea my mother would send for us. All four would troupe into the drawing room, eyes glued to the trolley. After shaking hands and sitting gauchely on the edge of our chairs answering boring questions, my mother would say, "You may take a cake and then run along and play right outside", knowing only too well how we would moan and groan as we left the room, "Some greedy pig ate the one I bagged", or "No one took mine, I had it".

My mother occasionally made a drink called milk punch. No-one has ever heard of it, and where she got the recipe from I do not know. It consisted of milk, brandy, and numerous other ingredients. The lot was put together and then strained through very thick material. The residue resembled porridge. I suppose it was the curdled milk. This stuff was thrown onto the compost heap in the back garden. On one occasion, the next day the servant came to my mother and said that our four ducks were dead. They had eaten the residue. The following day, my mother saw three of the ducks waddling from side to side, whilst the fourth was trailing behind semi-nude. The servant had thought that they were dead, but in fact they were drunk and he had only realised this when he started to pluck one of them. Gradually of course, they came round.

In Lucknow the Fleurys' lived in the house next to ours. A wall separated our gardens. I would spend hours sitting on the wall talking to Peggy. We would plan cycle rides. Our favourite one was to the Residency - a relic of the India Mutiny. My parents were friendly with Mr. Hylton, the last survivor. I think he must have been a mere babe at the time of the siege, the siege now immortalised by Jessie Brown's dream and the song written about it, "The Campbells are coming, hurrah, hurrah". Poets, including Tennyson, have also extolled it.

"She lay on the ground, in her Scottish plaid, and I took her head on my knee:  
"When my father comes hame frae the plough", she said, "Oh! then please awaken  
me....."

There Jessie Brown stood listening, till a sudden gladness broke  
All over her face, and she caught my hand and drew me near, as she spoke;-

.....  
The Hielanders! Oh dinna ye hear the slogan far awa? The McGregor's? Oh! I ken it  
weel.....God bless the bonny Hielanders! We're saved, we're saved". "Saved by the valour of  
Havelock, saved by the blessing of Heaven! Hold it for fifteen days! we have held it for  
eighty seven".

When the Prince of Wales (Duke of Windsor) visited Lucknow, it was Mr. Hylton who conducted him round the Residency. The whole town had been adorned for this visit. The roads through which the Prince was to drive were cleaned and repaired. The trees lining the highways had coloured electric lights entwined in the branches and little native children, dressed up especially for the occasion, were ordered to play by the wayside. I hope His Royal Highness was impressed by how prosperous and well-administered were his father's dominions especially Lucknow. There was an amusing story circulating at the time of the Prince's visit. Apparently, when playing polo, HRH always chewed a particular brand of chewing gum called Juicy Fruit. His secretary, realising that there would not be enough for the second chukka, sent the chauffeur off to buy some more. The car returned laden with the choicest fruits from the bazaar but alas! no gum.

To me, Mr. Hylton was an exceedingly old man with a long white beard. He often called round in his phaeton to take us for a drive. Once it was during the festival of Dhwali - the Goddess of Light. We drove to the bazaar which was a spectre of dazzling lights quite outrivalling the starry heavens above. Along the way every house and mean mud hut had its light or lights twinkling from earthenware saucers filled with crude oil. When Mr. Hylton died he was given a military funeral. His coffin, draped with the Union Flag, was borne on a gun carriage, followed by troops doing the slow March to the throb of muffled drums and Chopin's Funeral March. Lining the route were soldiers standing with their rifles pointing to the ground. The Governor, the chief mourner, followed in his white Wolseley flying the Union Flag.

On one of our cycle rides, we took Georgie, Peggy's little brother with us. Peggy was riding a very small boy's bike, and I was riding my father's large Humber cycle. The gear was big, the bell was lost, and there were no mudguards or brakes. When one wanted to stop or slacken, one had to put a foot on the front wheel tyre and press. My legs were too short to go round with the pedals, so I had to push down hard and with the other foot ease up the pedal and push very hard again. This made me waddle on the saddle and my bottom became very sore. Despite these handicaps it was on my crossbar that wee Georgie Porgy sat. We cycled for hours down a dusty road, sat by the wayside under some mango trees and ate our sandwiches, passing cars covering us with dust. It was on the way home that the happy day turned sour. A bridge which we had crossed was humped back and, as I was freewheeling down the far side, I saw a herd of cows coming towards me. They looked threatening, with their large horns, their udders heavy with milk, lowering as they advanced. They pressed me in on all sides; I could not dismount. So, with my foot on the front tyre of the wheel, my tongue dry with fright, steering from side to side, I threaded my way down to the bottom. Georgie enjoyed his ride immensely but I was cautious never to repeat it.

It was in the river Gumti in Lucknow that I learned to swim. My brother, Jack, and Ronny his friend, had found an islang in the middle of the river where they used to swim, and I persuaded them to take me along. One had to wade out quite a distance downstream, avoiding quicksand and passing enormous turtles with outstretched necks and beady eyes. I feared that they would attack and bite me, but Ronny assured me they were harmless and, indeed, they never made any movement towards us, and simply swam away. Ronny had to hold my hand from time to time as, being much smaller, I would sink up to my neck if there was a sudden dip. The Gumti is a very wide and powerful river especially during the Monsoons when it is in full spate. At this time it was at its

lowest ebb and our goal was an island in the middle with fine, burning, hot, silver sand surrounding a pool of clear, fresh hot water, blue as the sky. There in comfort I wallowed, floated, relaxed and eventually swam. If our parents had known of our excursions on the river they would have been extremely vexed as the Gumti had already claimed a school colleague of my brother's - Aubrey Braybrooke.

My father was very keen on shooting and he and my brother would go with an all-male party crocodile shooting. I was never taken and there were loud and laboured sobbing, but all in vain. I have today a crocodile writing case which either Jack or my father shot. However, parties were made up to go wild duck shooting. These I found very exciting. One had to rise before dawn, take a tiffin basket packed for the whole day, and set off motoring miles through sleeping villages where only the pariah dog stirred and barked. When one arrived at the geel - a reeded shallow lake, one sat on a raft made of rushes which was kept afloat by six enormous chatties roped on to it (a chatty is an earthenware round bowl with a small neck used to keep water cool and for storage). The raft would be pushed through rushes by a villager standing up with a long pole. No one spoke and the only noise was the wishy noise of the raft as it parted the rushes. Then, suddenly, with a whirling and swirling of wings a flock of wild duck would rise from the water and immediately the rifles would crack and spit, and there would be splashes as the dead and wounded birds fell back on to the geel. If they were wounded, their necks were broken by being twisted round and round.

The greatest of all the shoots was the Kukra shoot. My father was friendly with the Rajah of Kukra and he allowed us to shoot in his forest. We went by a goods train with a carriage shunted onto it - a painfully slow, smelly, creaking journey which finally stopped at Kukra station. As my father had gone ahead with the Shakiri to organise the pitching of the tents, my mother, brother and I found ourselves alone on a deserted platform. Villagers calling out their wares would have been very welcome here but Kukra was off the map and there were none. We waited hour upon hour on the burning hot platform for the rattle of the bullock cart which was sent to pick us up. It was a very uncomfortable journey, sitting on a floor of planks being bumped over ditches and furrows. The tents we reached were in a circle around a huge bonfire. The shakiri told me that the fire was to keep the wild animals away at night. We never saw any except for a wild boar and its brood running down to a stream, and a wild deer or two, but there were plenty of wild peahens, peacocks, and peafowl which all our shot yielded. The Rajah had very kindly lent us one of his elephants. As we rode through the jungle, the mahoot (driver) would instruct the elephant to uproot a sapling that was on the path, or get it to break off a small branch of a tree and with this in its trunk, it would fan us and keep off the flies. Before we left, we pulled a hair out of Moti's tail as a souvenir - I have long since lost it, although it had been a treasure.

As a young bachelor, my father and about half a dozen other young men, lived together in what they called their "Chummery". One of these men, named Freddie Samuel, fell and sprained his back rather badly. The doctor ordered massage treatment and a rota system was drawn up. On one of the nights when it was my father's turn to massage Freddie, he had to go to a Masonic dinner. Returning late and, no doubt, slightly irresponsible, my father took down the bottle of embrocation from a shelf, uncorked it, smelt it, shook it and gave Freddie the massage of a decade! Next morning when the bearer brought in the chota-hazri, he said, "More Sahib. Samuel Sahib is indeed very ill; he has gone black; his flesh looks as if it were rotting". My father rushed into the room and there was Freddie lying in bed, feeling considerably better, but a most alarming hue. During the consultation someone noticed that the sheets had remarkably dirty patches. My father had used the liquid black boot polish which has a very similar smell to Elemans Embrocation. This was the time before electricity and my father was too overspent after his banquet to bother to light the oil lamp.

In later years, when the Chummery broke up and most of the friends had married with homes and families of their own, Freddie who remained a bachelor, became a great favourite of ours. He used to fine his servant if the man forgot an order or made some mistake, and one pay day as his servant stood waiting for his wages, Freddie said, "What do I owe you this month?"

"Sahib", said the bearer, "this month I owe you money".

Freddie lived with his widowed mother who was a small, delicate little woman with a very sharp tongue towards the servants. One day when Freddie came home from the office he found his mother collapsed on the bed in a trauma.

"What is the matter?", he asked.

"Oh! I've passed about half a dozen gall stones. I'm so weak. Call Dr. Baboo. I've told the mather (the man who cleans the commodes - there was no flush system in those days) not to



empty the pot".

Freddie went into the bathroom to take a look for himself and then returned to the bedroom in fits of laughter.

"Those stones", he said to his mother, "are prune stones which I spat out".

Mrs. Samuels was furious and poor Freddie was scolded for giving her such a fright.

When we children first met the flush system it was in Lucknow. On coming down from the hills and going into the bathroom, we were delighted with this novelty. All the servants were summoned to see this wonder of wonders and Beryl, never at a loss to take advantage and make the most of an opportunity, decided that Jack should have his hair washed in the pan. So, in his head was pushed while Sheila pulled the chain and the rest of us looked on.

On of my mother's visits to England to see my sisters who were now there in school, Jack and I were sent to stay in Gorakpur with the Shaus. I think my father had to go at the same time on tour with the Governor. The Shaus were old family friends and had a family contemporary with us. We travelled alone with a Chaprassi who sat in the Third Class compartment. We had the windows of the carriage down and our tiffin basket open on the seat when the train stopped at a station called Gonda. In the branches of the peepal trees flanking the platform there were a group of monkeys and, as soon as the train came to a halt, they made straight for our compartment, climbed through the windows and with teeth bared, jumped onto the seat and helped themselves to every crumb of our lunch. We sat, terrified, unable to call the servant as the monkeys barred our way to the window and anyway, his compartment was too far away for him to hear us calling. These unwelcome and frightening creatures stayed with us until the train began to pull out of the station.

When we reached Gorakpur and the Shaus met us, Aileen, my friend, said that we had been invited to a fancy dress party. I was to go as a jester in a lovely red and yellow costume with little bells hanging from the peaked cap, from the sleeves and round the ankles. I cannot remember what Jack wore, but after tea when the games started and we played "hide and seek", I had to sit by myself on the verandah because the bells on my costume tinkled so loudly as I ran that I was always caught and none of the others wanted to partner me. Jack and I were taken round the compound the next day to climb the highest tree, jump over a wide ditch, hang and let ourselves drop from a swinging branch - all to prove our worth. These exploits achieved, we were accepted as equals.

During my mother's absence, Cousin Dolly kept house for my father, Jack and myself. It was at this time while Rhundi and I were playing in the scorching sun with mud and water, that Rhundi suddenly turned to me and said,

"Look Missahib, there is a tonga coming up the drive".

"Who is it?" I asked.

"I don't know. There are two sahibs and a memsahib", she answered.

We continued playing with our mud pies when Rhundi again said,

"Missahib, the bearer is looking for you. Can't you hear him calling?"

"It doesn't matter. I'm too dirty. Don't listen to him".

I knew I could not go in as I was. When the bearer saw me he walked faster, caught me by the hand, and led towards the house.

"The Sahib wants you quickly. Juldi, juldi. I've been looking for you all over the compound".

"Why? Who are those people?"

"I don't know. Come, come, awo, awo".

As I approached the house, Dolly came out of a side door. She grabbed my hand and pushed me into the bathroom. My dress was wrenched off, and I was scrubbed with the loofer - my face, my hands, my knees, and feet. She put a clean dress on me, tore the comb through my knotted hair, and pushed me towards the drawing room. On the way she said,

"Now, don't forget your manners. Shake hands properly, and don't hand your head or put your tongue out from the corner of your mouth when spoken to, and for goodness' sake, stop wiping your nose on the back of your hand".

My eyes were smarting, my skin felt tight and itchy, and my nose was tickling with the soap that had not been washed off. Parting the curtains, Dolly pushed me before her and with a sycophantic smile and in mellifluous tones said,

"This is little Daphne".

I stood and I stared at the strange strangers. One was known to me. It was Mr. Liebenhall, the manager of our local cinema cum dance hall cum skating rink cum theatre. The other man and

woman were quite different from any of my parents' friends. The man was large, had bovine blue eyes in a hot flushed face. The woman was heavily made up and smelt like an herbaceous border. They belonged to a travelling company just out from England and were looking for a child to take the part of Little Willie in East Lynne. My brother refused and ran off, but I was trapped. My father bribed me by offering one rupee (1/6d or 32p today) if I would agree, and I was too frightened to refuse. The Producer was absolutely delighted at having found someone and I was put into the tonga and taken round to the cinema to be shown to the rest of the cast. The rehearsals were very tedious, but Dolly loved every minute of them. Little Willie was a consumptive child who had been deserted by his mother, who later returned disguised as a nanny when she learned that her child was dying.

After the performance when the curtain was raised, I was told to get up and bow. Standing on the bed I bowed, then I was led to the front of the stage where I bowed again and was presented with a box of chocolates. When the curtains fell the cast came over and kissed me. My part was a very small one, but nevertheless I felt the heroine of the day. Proudly I joined my father, Dolly and my brother, but my pride was soon deflated by Jack who said sarcastically, "You looked silly bowing to everyone when you were supposed to be dead, and you had your socks on in bed, and you had my pyjamas on too - I never said you could take them. Why were you wearing my school tie. I will get into trouble for that when I go back."

Years later, when I was once listening to the Home Service on the radio, this same producer came on the air and he related experiences he had had when taking his company abroad. He mentioned East Lynne and said that sometimes the only children he could find were corpulent adolescents or ebony maidens with crisp, curly crops of hair. "But once", he said, "I did find the ideal child - a pale, skinny little girl, who captured our hearts". Do you think he was referring to me?

Betty Johnstone who was in the same class as me came to live in Lucknow, and we would often play together. Once when I had been invited for the day, Betty and I took the zinc tub out of the bathroom and carried it down to a pond at the end of the garden. It was only about waist deep. We got a pole and tried to punt our way across but all we succeeded in doing was going round in circles. Finally, we decided that one would sit in the tub whilst the other pulled it along taking turns. When Mrs. Johnstone called us in for tea we were caked in slimy mud almost up to our chins. Betty's mother was more amused than annoyed, and turned the hose on to us. However, what we did not reckon on were leeches - huge, black, fat ones. To pull of a leech is dangerous as they, or these ones, had suckers and the more they were pulled, the deeper they buried themselves into the flesh. They could also leave sores which could go septic. The best way to get rid of them was to apply salt which caused them to eventually melt off.

There were some beautiful Mogul buildings in Lucknow. The Palace of Lights was a splendid, glistening white building, with a fountain in the middle of a large lily pond; a lake where the lotus flowers drifted, and paths which were flanked with rows of exquisite rose trees. The marble halls were studded with jewels which sparkled brilliantly when caught by a shaft of sunlight or by the rays from the crystal chandeliers hanging from mosaic ceilings. Fountains played and the lawns were as soft as green velvet with different shaped flower beds whose sweet fragrance was carried on a gentle breeze. There was also the Chattermunzle which, in the days of the Mogul empire, had been a dignitary's palace but which was now the English Club. Its roof was encrusted with carved and fluted umbrella-like domes. Lucknow, in those days, could indeed be proud of her possessions.

It was in one of these beautiful houses, not as large as some, that a family called Hubbabulla lived. One tiffin time my mother said to my father, "John, I saw Hubbabulla today in Huzurat Gunge (shopping centre). He told me that he had just come back from England where he had left his two sons in school at Eton. I said "Surely, the Indian schools are good enough", but he smiled and replied, "No, I want my sons to be taught the English game, so that when they return to India they will be able to crush the English". My mother was scandalised, telling my father that it was almost treason, but he, on the other hand, said that Hubbabulla was a farseeing and wise man.

Tizene, their little daughter, would often call for me with her governess, Mrs. Daly, in their private phaeton with a liveried coachman. We would go for a drive and then return to Tizene's house for tea. Sometimes, we would be joined by Bell Weir. Mr. Weir was the Headmaster of the La Martinere boys' school, the same that Kipling immortalised in "Kim". Tea was always laid in the garden and I would only go into the nursery to wash my hands. On one of my visits just before I was to be sent home, Mrs. Daly took Tizene and I inside. A door was opened by a servant in uniform and

when we entered the drawing room, Tizen and I stood together with Mrs. Daly behind us, a hand on each of our shoulders. I had never been into an Indian drawing room before and was bewildered by the magnificence of the room. A large crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling giving out a thousand starlit flashes with rays that looked as if they were being shot from a splintered rainbow. Sitting in the room were Indian gentlewomen wearing most exquisite saris - emerald, crimson, jade, turquoise, jasmine, sapphire; pure silk, pure satin, embroidered with gold and silver thread, jewels rested on their foreheads, gold and diamond bracelets were clasped round their wrists. Standing about were men, mostly dressed in three-quarter length black coats and tight white trousers, but some wore velvet waistcoats, heavily embroidered. I stood spellbound; I was in fairyland. Tizene, with a natural grace and charming poise, put her hands together, raised them to her forehead and bowed to her parents and then to her parents' guests. She was not more than five at the time.

In the evenings, my mother, father and I would stroll down Huzurat Gunge. Perhaps we would stop at the Criterion Restaurant or go to the Tea Dance held twice a week in the Dance Hall of the Prince of Wales Cinema. My mother and I would chat with friends while my father would listen to the orchestra, tapping out the beat of the music on the table with his ring. The ring had been given to him on his 21st birthday by his father. It was a carved monkey's head with a semi-precious stone set in gold. My father was nicknamed "Monkey More" because of it. He was very superstitious about the monkey's head and repeatedly said that bad luck would befall him if ever he lost it. One day he noticed that the stone had fallen out of its setting. He was very distressed and one would see him walking around the house and garden looking for it. Although at the time he was a strong man in good health, nevertheless within the year he had died.

My father was Permanent Assistant Secretary to the Governor, and during the Prince of Wales' visit to Lucknow, the equivalent members of the Prince's staff came to dine with us. It was after dinner when they had all retired to the drawing room that Luchman, my father's chaprassi (personal servant) crept in, sidled up to my father, put his hand into the pocket of my father's dinner jacket and removed his silver cigarette case. One of the guests quickly jumped up, caught Luchman by the sleeve and cried out, "Stop him, stop him!" He did not realise that all Luchman was doing was taking the cigarette case out in order to refill it as he did regularly. I wonder what these gentlemen from England would have said if they could have seen my father coming out of the bathroom each morning with his towel tied round his waist, picking up the morning paper and reading it whilst Luchman shaved and dressed him. But then, those were the days of the British Raj and my father had been born and bred in an era of opulence and servitude for the Indian.

When my mother was first married, she went to live in Katmandu. Nepal was a kingdom with a king as resident instead of an appointed governor. My eldest sister was born in Katmandu and the Rajah insisted on having his photograph taken with her in his arms dressed in full regalia. I think it was because my sister was the first British baby to be born in Nepal. We used to have a photo in a silver frame with a gold crest showing the Rajah holding Beryl. The photo was taken with my sister in her christening robes which were very long. The Rajah, whilst holding the baby, said to my mother, "Where are her feet?"

Part of my father's duties were that from time to time, he had to visit the outlying villages to inspect and make sure everything was in order. These inspections were carried out with him on an elephant. One day, my mother asked if she could accompany him. Whilst in the heart of the jungle, my mother heard a crash. She called to my father, saying, "John, John, our tiffin basket (lunch basket) has fallen down." My father replied, "Look back and see". On doing so she saw it was only the elephant relieving itself!

In the days when my father was stationed in Nepal, there were no proper roads and one was carried in a dooley. This was a sort of box with curtains replacing the sides. This was borne by six sherpas who had poles with a sharp spear on the top surrounded by bells to keep off wild animals. On one occasion when my mother was alone with her babies, the dooley suddenly was put down and all the sherpas ran off. My mother got quite alarmed as she was alone in the middle of the Terai jungle. Gradually the men returned and when my mother spoke to the leader - the only one who understood English - what the reason was for the disappearance of the sherpas, he replied that they had become aware of a rogue elephant which was in the area.

In Lucknow, the durzi (tailor) who sat crossed-legged on the verandah and did anything that was given to him - make or mend clothes, patch, darn, let out or take in clothes which fitted no longer) was one of my good friends. I sat beside him and made my dolls' dresses. We chatted away

until one day he asked me why I ate pork (the durzi was a Muslim). I said "Why not?" to which he replied that pork was impure. I said, "Who said?". He answered, "Allah told Mohammed". I retorted that that was only pagan talk. How could a God who made you and me and everything, and who was pure, make unclean food. This conversation ended our friendship. He refused to talk to me again.

Jack and I made friends with Rhimatulla Baboo. He worked in Government House, and lived just across the road from us. His wife and daughter were both in purdah and would wave to us from behind the curtains. The daughter's name was Maboohan and was soon to be married. I was a frequent visitor, taking a new toy, or a new dress to show them or to watch them cook and pray - they were Muslims. Rhimatulla often brought us presents from the bazaar - white turtle doves, young rabbits and, on one occasion, a little black lamb. It was so young it had to be fed from a baby's bottle. We had to leave it behind when we went up to the Hills and entrusted our friend, Fatty Grant, with its care. When we next saw Fatty up in Naini Tal, he told us that the lamb had died. We did not believe him and wondered whether he ate our lamb himself or sold it in the bazaar.

As a Public Works' Inspector, Fatty's job took him motoring miles around the villages, making sure the road were in good repair. Often he would take me with him. At about this time, India was raising her arm towards independence. Once, as Fatty and I were passing through a village, we saw a dozen or so little boys sitting crossed-legged in a circle under a bulbul tree, chanting their lessons to the master sitting at their head. Fatty slowed down and suddenly at the command of their teacher, the little chrokas (boys) stood up, waved their hands, and shouted, "Ghandi Marajah kai jai" - Ghandi is our sovereign. Fatty pulled up, jumped on to the seat of the car, and cried, "Ghandi Marajah kai jai". There was dead silence. The children looked bewildered. They turned to their schoolmaster and said, "Kai boloo?" - What shall we say now? The teacher roared with laughter and was joined by the class, all appreciating the joke.

I remember with sadness an incident between my friend, Rhundi, myself and the cook. Jack had taught me a filthy, Indian abuse word. I was never told the meaning of it, but by the reaction of the servants when I used it I realised how appalling it must be. I persuaded Rhundi to call after the cook using this word. As she shouted it, he turned and hit her hard across the head with the hooka he was carrying. There was a resounding crack and the little girl ran crying to her blind mother and I ran after her. The mother cradled the child in her arms, bared her wizened bosom and tried to suckle her baby girl. There had been no milk in the mother's breast for years, for Rhundi was about six or seven at the time, but how else could a penniless, blind, widowed mother comfort the child she had only seen as a baby.

At night when all the housework and meals were finished, the servants would sit, smoking, around a fire in the compound. The fire was kindled and kept burning with dried leaves and twigs. Sometimes they smoked beeries - cigarettes made by wrapping tobacco in a dried leaf, but more often the hooka. Each smoker would cup his or her hand round the stem of the hooka so as not to let their lips touch it, draw in the smoke through water in a bowl made out of a dried coconut, and then pass it on to their neighbour. My brother and I were often allowed to join in. During these nocturnal gatherings the world would be discussed. The servants' "world" was the Sahibs and Memsahibs of the various households, their servants, their children, their fortunes, their failures. Jack and I would contribute our snippets of scandal and the servants would draw us out longing to hear more. Our parents had forbidden us to go to the compound at night, so we would sneak out after we had said goodnight and gone to bed. Years later my brother told me that it was hashish which was being smoked. The smell of the smoke I found pleasing even to this day.

"Smells are surer than sounds or sight to make your heart strings crack".

(Kipling)

Once when I was very young I walked barefooted into the servants' quarters. I saw a pile of soft, grey ash. I tossed it with my feet and immediately cried out in pain as the ashes were red hot and burnt me badly. The Ayah poured water on the burns and for days after I limped around heavily bandaged.

## ALLAHBAD

But this was all yesterday. Today, No. 9 Havelock Road, Lucknow lies empty. The furniture, the luggage, the servants are all already on the train and tomorrow we shall be in Allahbad. Jack and my mother with my help are packing up the little car. Soon we shall be leaving. As I sit in the back seat, cramped by luggage and Patch our enormous dog, my eyes smarting, my heart in my throat, I glance at my mother and see her eyes rimmed with red. We are leaving our home. We are deserting Daddy. Is not his spirit everywhere? In the house, on the verandah, among the flowers?

The Allahbad house was built by my grandfather whilst he was Deputy Commissioner of Allahbad. Originally, it stood in about 20 acres, mostly fields, but part was later sold off. Whoever bought the fields was given permission to use the well in the back garden. I remember two oxen walking backwards and forwards hauling up a leather sack filled with water which was emptied as it reached the top allowing the water to run down the bank into the field while the cattle were made to retrace their steps. Jack and I would paddle in the water as it flowed down. The house was a large high bungalow with a wide verandah all round. Two sides of the verandah were glazed, the front one my grandmother used as her office. Off the verandahs there were rooms which we called the "Long Rooms", the front being the dining room, the back the morning or breakfast room. These were connected by the drawing room, a very large, high room which later was divided into three. It was about the size of a small ballroom. Off this room were four complete sets of double bedrooms, with dressing rooms and bathrooms attached. There was a cottage in the grounds and this was occupied by my grandmother's housekeeper, Mrs. Swindon who only had one arm, the empty sleeve being pinned to her blouse.

My grandmother was a very keen gardener. She had built a rustic arbour round which several different sorts of grapevines grew. There was also a guava tope (orchard), mango, peppia, plaintain, custarapple, grapefruit, orange, lemon and pomegranate trees flourished. The drive from the gate was long and soft green lawns stretched on either side of the hedge running from the gate to the porch. Round the house I can remember exquisite carnations in pots and from the front glazed verandah, there was a pergola over which the sweet scented Marchialniel rose grew. There were also rosebushes of every hue, some chosen for their beauty, some for their fragrance. I can also remember an orange tree which had small, very bitter oranges, about the size of a golf ball. These were pickled in brandy and laid aside for Christmas. The vegetable garden was also well tended and, apart from the commonplace vegetables, my grandmother would experiment with rare and exotic species. There were three gardeners, a head and two coolies who did the rough work.

My grandmother, my grandfather having died, would have us to stay during the school holidays. Sometimes I would go by myself and sometimes either Sheila or Jack or even both would come for a short visit. During these visits, my grandmother would sometimes take us for a picnic in the grounds of a rajah's palace where the gardens ran down to the river. I can clearly remember cast iron chairs and tables dotted about, but the rajah never seemed to be in residence. When I was a baby I nearly drowned on one of these picnics. This time the whole family were staying with my grandmother. My sisters who were several years older than me had gone paddling and I had toddled after them. My mother, on turning round, suddenly saw me floating face downwards in the current. She rushed in fully clothed and pulled me out.

One day, while staying with my grandmother, a moochi (cobbler) came round asking if we had any shoes that needed repairing. My grandmother called me, and took off my shoes to inspect them. A large centipede scurried out from one of them. It had lain quietly under my sole, I suppose because my flesh was warm and soft - I did not have any socks on as it was too hot. If it had been disturbed it would have immediately buried itself in my flesh and, unless burned by a red hot poker, would have continued to bury and shed its legs as it got deeper. I am told the pain is excruciating.

My grandmother had died about seven or eight years before my father. I was looking forward to seeing her house and its beautiful garden again, and as we drove from Lucknow and neared 4, Minto Road, some of my sadness began to lift. When the car turned into the drive I was horrified at the wilderness that stretched in front of me. Gone were the beautiful lawns, gone the arbour and the vines, gone the flowers, the rose pergola; the fruit trees bearing neither fruit nor blossom, stood limp, neglected and starved. The pure white house now had dirty rainwater lines running down the walls, the plaster was chipped and crumbling; broken tiles lay round the house swept off the road by heavy monsoon rains. The whole house had a grey, forlorn look. Nettles, briars, thorns, thistles had

gradually spread over the entire garden. There were gaps in the hedges where even the straying goat or cow would not be bothered to eat. None of us spoke as we unpacked the car. The only happy heart was Patch's as he raced round barking at squirrels as they scrambled up the trees away from danger. I never asked my mother if she were aware of the desolate state of the place. I pretended I never noticed anything different. The gardens, the house, the cottage had lain empty and neglected for several years and nature had entered and taken over in her own and often cruel way.

Soon friends living in Allahbad began to invite us to their homes. There was one from Mrs. Rayner to spend the day with Enid. Enid was going to boarding school for the first time and Mrs. Rayner took me into the bedroom and showed me all Enid's new clothes and the pretty party dresses. I knew it would be a long time before I got a new dress. There was not regular income coming in as both my sisters were in a finishing school on the Continent, and Jack was due to go to University in England. After tiffin, Mrs. Rayner went to the piano and Enid sang, and sang "Katholeen Mauvane" beautifully. It was the first time I had heard the song and I thought it was enchanting. Mrs. Rayner then turned to me and asked me what I would like to sing. My embarrassment was acute, as I am unable to sing a note in tune. Mrs. Rayner would not believe me and kept on pressing, "Enid will sing again for you and then you must sing to us". I was so ashamed, my self-deprecation was complete and it has stayed with me.

Beryl returned from finishing school in Europe and was now with us. Our social life was full - tennis and badminton parties, picnics and "At homes", when on a set day of the month a hostess would throw open her drawing room and guests were expected to call without any formal invitation. Unfortunately, there were not many friends who were my contemporaries. They were either too old or too young, but we did meet a few and had happy days. However, these grew less enjoyable when Jack was sent to England and the ranks thinned. After Jack left, I went about with my mother for most of the time. We would walk down to the courts to watch Beryl play tennis and then drop in for a drink to some friend. All eyes were on Beryl. She was witty, cheerful, a good sport and very good looking.

Living in the cottage was a Mrs. Simmons with her two sons, Bertie and Freddie. Bertie, the elder, was a delightful boy, amusing and pleasant, but Freddie who was about my age was quite the opposite. He had bright red hair, a dead white face with colourless eyes, eyebrows and eyelashes. They were both sent to England but Freddie returned on practically the next boat because he was homesick and could not abide living in lodgings in London, its fogs and its loneliness.

It happened that at this time Beryl had an admirer called Bill Howard. One evening, as Bill and Beryl were walking around the compound, they saw a piece of paper pinned to the tamarind tree, and there were other pieces pinned on to trees dotted around. On taking these down they turned out to be love poems addressed to me from Freddie. They were written in the centre of a heart pierced with an arrow. Beryl came in triumphant for she now had a weapon with which to tease me. Day after day while sitting on the verandah, she would produce one and read it aloud. I was furious, humiliated and my pride was sore. If they had been passionate poems from Bertie I would have been flattered. But Freddie! Oh no! Beryl never tired ridiculing, taunting and chaffing me.

Then one day, quite unexpectedly, our solicitor, Mr. Chiene, drove up and asked to speak privately to my mother. He stayed on for drinks and left without my learning what the mysterious visit was about. My mother, on the other hand, seemed very jumpy and every time a carriage passed the gate - far away as it was - she became agitated. On another day, shortly after Mr. Chiene's visit, a strange car drove up and stopped in the porch. My mother, before the car was even halfway down the drive, pushed me roughly indoors and told me that on no account was I to make myself visible. Beryl came in, made up her face, changed into one of her smartest and most expensive dresses, and joined my mother and the two unknown gentlemen. There was a lot of laughter as if life was one big continuous joke. I heard the car start up again when it was out of sight my mother called me. It so happened that Freddie had gone to the Cemetery which was quite near our house, and had shot himself, though not fatally. When the police questioned him he said that he was in love with one of the More girls and that his love was unrequited. Mr. Chiene knew it was me, but as I was only about 15 years old and as the Press were always searching for scandal ceaselessly, and the residents in Allahbad were longing for a chance to gossip, he had advised my mother to keep me out of sight and let Beryl pose as the lovelorn poet's dream. When the two gentlemen who were police officers saw Beryl, a beautifully made up and dressed, charming young lady, they were convinced that the adolescent youth had been bewitched by her. But, now I had *my* revenge. No one had ever tried to



take their life for *her*. When she was quipped about Freddie, she would give such a gratified smile, but I knew and she knew that I was the real objet d'amour.

It was about this time that I attended my first formal dinner party. I wore one of Beryl's cast off dresses, and was bought my first pair of evening shoes. It was a small party. There were three judges from the High Court, my mother, my sister, our host and hostess and me. I sat next to Mr. Omar Shanka Bajpai. The judges were very good conversationalists and everyone was in a very good humour save me. I was so shy, so clumsy, so stupid, and when spoken to, my tongue clove to my palate and would not let me answer. When I drank liqueur with the coffee I sneezed and sputtered. It burned my throat. After dinner when we withdrew to the drawing room, I sat as close to my mother as I possibly could. Fortunately, the judges ignore me. It was Beryl with her charm and wit whom they found delightful. I knew that when we got home Beryl would scold me for being so gauche, but that would be preferable to this torment through which I was going.

A few days after the dinner party, we received an invitation from Bajpai to a garden party he was giving. Later we had other invitations from him, and then he began to call regularly. He would take us for drives in his chauffeur driven limousine to yet unknown beauty spots; he would hire a launch and we would go up and down the river. He would come to see us frequently, but it was not my mother who enchanted him, nor Beryl with her beauty, but me, stupid, foolish, pimply me. He bought me a bicycle, gave me a beautiful sari embroidered with gold thread, and presented me with an opal encased in gold and on a pearl chain which I later gave to Beryl. My mother became quite alarmed when it gradually dawned on her who it was that Bajpai really called to see. He was 35 years my senior. On retrospect, I realised that Bajpai who was a very kind man, noticed how I was forced into the background by my eldest sister. He found my shyness more attractive than Beryl's brilliance, my innocence more pleasing than my sister's sophistication, my timidity more of a challenge and more desirable than her flamboyance.

In later years, I tried to hid my bashfulness by being bombastic, bumptious and overbearing. I thought that was what society wanted - not a cringing, servile creature as I saw myself to be. How wrong I was not to follow my natural personality. Even now, as old as I am, I still try and hide my painful self-effacement. Life would be easier if I could only leave myself alone.

Whenever Bill Howard came to see Beryl he would push his motorcycle to the gate before starting it up. My mother used to wait for the distant purr and then turn over and go to sleep. One day she did not hear Bill go off and the very next morning the bearer said to her, "Memsahib, someone has been sleeping on the verandah. The cushions are all upset." When Bill came again, my mother asked him if he had stayed the night. He said that, in fact, he had done because he cycle lamp had gone wrong and it would have been dangerous to ride over a dozen miles on a broken road in the pitch dark. At first light, he had got up and gone home. "But," he said, "who was the old man with a beard and leaning on a stick who came round the house. Although he tapped the ground as he walked he did not make a sound. I got up and followed him and as he got to the tamarind tree, he disappeared. I looked everywhere but there was no sign of him. I called but there was no reply." My mother knew of no-one of that description so she sent for the servant and asked him. "Yes, Memsahib, that's the old man, the buddha man. He often comes round. We servants have seen him often. He is someone's ghost. Someone who perhaps lived or died in this compound and he wants to look after us." That was our ghost story. Our Allahbad house had a ghost.

In the back garden there was a reeta tree. When I had Nancy, my pony, she would be tethered to it and I would often go and sit with her to keep her company. My pet donkey was also tied to this tree. A reeta tree (I do not know the scientific name) has fruit the size of a hazel nut. The skin is similar to the chestnut and encloses a hard shiny black seed. I mention this tree because the casing when soaked, sends out a soapy foam in which the India girls wash their hair. When I tried it, the suds got into my eyes and they smarted for a considerable time, but the hair did, indeed, feel soft and clean, and shone with an unusually bright sheen.

The confluence of the Rivers Ganges and Jumna was at Allahbad. There was a distinct line where they flowed into each other. One was a blue river, the other a muddy, greenish-brown. This meeting place was holy and pilgrims would come from afar to bathe in the waters. Once every twelve years there was held the Margh Meler. I happened to be in Allahbad on this occasion and we made up a party, and went down to the rivers. Dotted all along the banks were fakirs in various stages of meditation. Some appeared to be in a trance, lying on beds of nails, or sitting in the lotus position and not moving a muscle. I thought that they were under some spiritual influence, but on



reconsideration I am sure they were drugged. To sit hour upon hour, eyes glazed, staring into space, oblivious of the crowds flocking to look at them, some covered in ash, other painted in various designs and colours, not eating, not drinking despite the hot sun that was burning down, earned the veneration of their followers.

There was also a fort at Allahbad. Many years ago, the general who commanded the fort also became very friendly with Mhoti Lal Nehru, father of Jawaharlal Nehru, the late Prime Minister. The general was very anxious that Mhoti Lal should join the Allahbad Club which up till then was purely open to Europeans. There was the usual formality in the Club that anyone could blackball a nominee from membership. Mhoti Lal said that he could not face the humiliation of being blackballed by perhaps a young subaltern. The general assured him that no subaltern would dare to blackball a candidate put up by him, and the civil servants were very happy to welcome Mhoti Lal. Mhoti Lal finally agreed and his name went forward, but to the dismay of the members, a young subaltern did blackball the Pundit. The general was outraged, and he immediately resigned from the Club and ordered his officers to follow. Feelings in the station were high and the general, together with his regiment were transferred. It is said that it was from that time that Mhoti Lal decided to take an active part in freeing India from the British Raj.

During the Great War my grandparents moved temporarily from Allahbad to Calcutta where I think my grandfather was doing voluntary war work. They lived in a typical town house - very narrow and high with a small garden at the back, the front door opened on to the road. While my father was at the Front we spent one winter season with my grandparents in Calcutta. We children lived right at the top of the house and we were never allowed to come down to the drawing room or dining room. The only time I can remember seeing my grandfather was just after we arrived. During the journey a sash window had fallen on to my fingers, so my nails were black and my hands bruised. My grandmother would take me each morning into my grandfather's study to put on some yellow ointment out of a white china jar. I would then go up to my grandfather and show him my fingers. In later years, my mother told me that my grandfather drank heavily and, no doubt, this was why we were kept away.

One morning Sheila and the ayah took Gypsy, our little poodle, for a walk. I decided to go with them and ran down the long marble staircase, but when I got to the front door they were out of sight. I ran after them but must have taken the wrong turning. I kept on running and then walking on and on, hoping to catch up with them, and finally I found myself in Chowringi, the shopping centre. I knew the park where Sheila and the ayah were making for was nowhere near the shops. I turned back to go home. The road was unfamiliar; the sun was beating down, and I had not topee (hat). I was hungry and thirsty; it was long past tiffin time. I was exhausted and frightened. I sat on the edge of the pavement, but a policeman came up and said, "Move on, move on. You can't stay here". I got up and started walking again. By this time my hands and dress were grimy, tear marks smeared my face, and my nose was running. I could not speak Hindustani properly; and there were no Europeans about. Pedestrians pushed me out of the way. I was standing helplessly at the edge of the curb when a large, fat Bengali in a dhoti and wooden sandals came up to me, took me by the hand and led me away. I was too tired to walk so he had to carry me. I did not know who he was but I gladly went with him. He was the cook. We children were never allowed into the kitchen which was at the end of the garden, away from the house. When I got home, I was put straight to bed. My family had been very distressed during the several hours that I was missing. Calcutta was a very densely populated place.

Bathrooms in India had tiled floors with an area portioned off by a low wall about a foot high. A hole in the wall allowed water emptied from the tub to run into the garden. Another stood on a stone shelf under the tap. This tub was kept full of water because, at times, there was a scarcity and a reserve was needed. In fact, a friend of ours who stayed down for the hot weather said that he often had to open a bottle of soda water to wash his hands. During the hot season there was never enough water to fill a bath tub and one was forced to stand in the walled off space with a bucket and mug, and throw water over oneself. The window in our bathroom was eight feet high and very narrow. There were two doors, one leading outside from which the sweeper would come in to clean out the room and the other leading into the dressing room.

It was during one of Uncle Harry's visits to his mother that, when having a bath, he turned round to get the towel and saw, to his horror, a cobra between the two doors cutting off his escape. It was in an angry mood, its forked tongue darting in and out, its hood up, and its beady eyes focused on Uncle. It had apparently crawled in through the drain, slithered up the stone shelf to have a drink

and then curled up behind the tub, no doubt to keep cool. Uncle, with his splashing and whistling (he whistled all the time), must have disturbed the reptile. He called out to the servants and to his mother, but no-one heard, the servants' quarters being about 50 yards away from the house. The venomous creature and my Uncle, both trapped by the other, stood motionless staring at one another. How long this torment lasted one cannot say, but it seemed an eternity to Uncle. When finally he heard a footstep outside the window, Uncle shouted out his predicament. The mali, gardener, rushed away and returned with other servants. They smashed down the door and killed the cobra with sticks.

After my grandmother's death, Uncle Harry who was very fat and waddled like a duck, came to us for the various holidays both in the Hills and the plains, bringing exotic and expensive toys which he had picked up at auctions - his favourite pastime. No doubt people returning to England found them too bulky to transport. Uncle was a confirmed bachelor. He had a very sweet and kind nature and patiently tolerated our continual teasing. My mother decided to get him married and thought that a spinster friend would be ideal. She threw her heart and soul into this match, no doubt being bored with the indolent life one leads abroad. Meetings possible and impossible were planned, but to no avail. At last, her patience at an end, she turned to Uncle one day and said, "Harry, why don't you get married?"

"Never! Never!", Uncle replied, "Women are insanitary".

Snake stories were numerous especially during the hot season. Mother Geraldine who taught the violin once told me that when she was in the Allahbad Convent, she sent a little pupil out to practise under a tree. It was cooler and more pleasant. Later when she returned to give the child a lesson she saw a cobra swinging from the tree about six inches from the child's head. Not to frighten the little one, she called her to come over and lead her away without ever letting the child know what danger she had been in.

The old colonial bungalows were built with high ceilings, no doubt to help keep the place cool. The ceilings were not plastered but had a strong cloth stretched over the rafters which was whitewashed. In the middle of the ceiling hung a fan which was manipulated by a servant sitting on the verandah in the scorching heat. He occasionally fell asleep and was, alas, abused. He was known as the punka wallah whose life entailed pulling ropes as the family moved into different rooms. On one occasion my grandmother had decided to give a dinner party. The guests arrived and during the meal, a tearing, ripping noise was heard and there, on the table, fell a cobra. It had perhaps climbed up into the roof to hunt mice which scramble on the ceiling. I suppose the cloth was not strong enough to bear the weight of a large cobra. I do not know the results of this incident.

Whilst back in the Hill Station, a picnic had been arranged on Ayapatta, one of our highest peaks. Two friends had told me they were slipping off to go to the cinema, and asked me to join them. "The Little Minister" by James Barrie was being shown. At an appropriate moment we sneaked off and began to run down the hill which was very steep. We gathered impetus as we ran, when suddenly I stopped. On looking down the khud (hill) I saw two rock pythons playing or courting on a large boulder. They were swaying from side to side. I could not move; I was transfixed. My friends kept on calling me, and at last, and just in time, I managed to turn away and run for all my worth. I still wonder what made me stop and look down the hillside.

I have always been afraid of snakes. Even today, when I see one on the TV I turn it off.

It was in Allahbad that my life was born and it was from Allahbad, the very same house, that as a young, unsophisticated girl I left forever to grow up and mature in a callous, unsympathetic and lonely world.

## Epilogue

And now, half a century or more later, as I sit in my Norfolk garden swinging on the seat looking at the wild flowers, the beautiful wild flowers that gardeners call weeds, I find my pulse beginning to beat rapidly, my subconscious is awakening and I wonder what will come to mind.

I am back in Naini Tal; in Ione Ville; I am in the bedroom distraught - Beryl had gone to Ranikhet for the weekend and has taken my new, brand new, unworn hat with her. "Never mind, darling", my mother tries to console me, "no-one looks at you, you are still a schoolgirl. Your time will come!"

A dull pain suddenly grips me. I am back in Craiglands, am seven years old. My mother comes into the bedroom, takes me by the hand and leads me into the room next door. "Kiss Granny goodbye". I kiss my grandmother's forehead. It is cold and hard as she lies still, her arms crossed over her heart, her natural wavy grey hair resting on her shoulders, her body covered by a white sheet with sprigs of heliotrope enframing her, heliotrope picked from the bush behind which the leopard crouched before leaping onto Bindle. We four children are sent to the house next door, Vernon Cottage, where Mrs. Finnemore lives downstairs. Suddenly, Beryl, Sheila and Jack rush to the bathroom. "Here it is, here it is", one of them calls out. They hang out of the window. I am too small so I climb on to the lavatory seat just in time to see the coffin covered in flowers, resting on the bier being pulled by four jampanis (coolies) wearing black uniform, as they make their way to Kaladhungi Cemetery. A few years later my father's ashes are laid there in the same grave, and now my old age is creeping on apace.

A cool breeze off the sea is blowing towards the large red sun sinking in the West. It is getting too cold to stay out, but just before I go in my mind flashes back to Allahbad. We are all sitting on the verandah. My mother is knitting the eternal sock, my sisters are reading or making dolls' clothes, and my brother is playing with his Hornby 00 train, with me interfering, when a tonga turns into the drive. As it approaches, I notice an Army officer sitting alone in the back. My brother suddenly races towards the tonga crying, "Daddy, Daddy! How many Germans did you kill?" The year was early 1919.

".....that past is it really  
Dead to us who again and again  
Feel sharply, hear painfully, see clearly  
Past days with their joy and their pain".

I have had many invitations to return but "one cannot recapture a spent pleasure".  
"There is not coming back on the impetuous stream of Life,  
We must set out pocket watches by the clock of Fate."

(Robert Louis Stevenson)



CONSTA CONSTANTINISES

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Dear Mrs. Gordon

WOODWARDS,  
HYDE, WAREHAM,  
SOMSET. BH20 7NT.

7 August 1996.

It is irresistible to write to you, having read your narrative "A Himalayan Sunset" passed on to me by my daughter CHRISTINE (née CONSTANTINISES) REDDWAY after she had checked with you, through "Mim" Reddway, that it was O.K. to pass it on to me for reading. I enjoyed every minute of reading it and I have taken the liberty of photocopying it, so that I may read it again and again, when I seek to bring back old memories, which, contrary to your quotation, are not AT ALL painful but full of joys and satisfactions, and wonderment that I have experienced so much in my youth. I loved ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE.

I was born in Izmir (Greek Smyrna) in 1917, our family was "ethnically cleansed" by KEMAL ATATURK from Turkish soil in 1922 (with killings of the Greeks and Armenians) and via Rhodes and Athens, my sister SORA and I finally arrived in Amritsar, Punjab, India, where my father took a post with OCM Women Hirts and Carpet Manufacture (East India Carpet Co.).

After one year at Sacred Heart Convent Darnovsie, we moved to NAINI TAL - I to St. Joseph's College and my sister to St. Mary's Convent, just below.

I spent some 9 years at St. Joseph's College 1926/1935, completing my Senior Cambridge, and then proceeded to Leeds University, 3 years, London School of Economics, 1 year, and on the 1<sup>st</sup>



September 1939, sailed by the S.S. STRATHNAVER to Bombay and so to Amritsar, from where I finally retired in 1973 to settle at my present address.

I am unsure about the years which you cover under the heading "Naini Tal-Craiglands". Government House was of course immediately adjacent to St. Joseph's. I recollect "Craiglands" vaguely but cannot pin-point it on a map.

I did the journey from Amritsar to Naini Tal and back, every year by train VIA BAREILLY JUNCTION - KATHGODAM - and BUS TO CHOTA BAZAR TERMINUS. From there we walked up to St. Joseph's, which as you know is at the Crest of the mountain.

I visited my sister Dora at the Convent, just as your brother did. She never visited me!

Rev. Brother Connolly was there, in a semi-retired position, but he took all the grand decisions.

I learned to swim in the very LAKE which you describe and where we went swimming 2 or 3 times weekly.

My mother came up for 3 months each year and took Dora and myself out of school every week-end. She brought us tumpers of "goodies".

I played fierce matches of Hockey and Football on Saturdays at THE FLATS against our rivals P.S.C. College on the opposite side of the lake.

Week ends we hired little ponies



and galloped recklessly along the upper circular road terrified in case the horses hit the projecting huge rocks of the hillside and sent us hurtling down some 600-800 feet into the lake.

We rowed in the lake, but always avoided the owners of yachts at the Sailing Club at the Flats' end of the lake.

We climbed up Chelva Peak as far as we could get and explored. We looked across the divide of ranges to guess the names of the peaks in the distant Himalaya ranges.

Yes, I also experienced the locust swarms. As a first experience it was almost indescribable.

I never had the privilege of being invited to a children's party at Government House. I recall the name Sir Horatio Butler as Governor of the U.P.

We had our Annual Sports and Theatrical Shows, when of course our relatives and friends at the Convent were invited.

Lucknow, Allahabad and Amroha, Lucknow are all familiar names to me, especially after my return to India. I know Lucknow very well, and holidayed in Kossori. What was the name of the family which ran the Hotel? \*

Please tell me the name of your brother and which year was he at St. Joseph's? Perhaps my failing memory can identify him! <sup>19</sup>

We must keep in touch. Meanwhile - Thank you for a wonderful REVIVAL of my youth. Yrs. Sincerely, L.M.

\* name was "COSSERAT"!