

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

A VERY RAINY DAY.

By David Llyall.

Lisbeth Marshall was fond of relating how all her troubles befell her in one day, and how she had to meet and conquer them single-handed. She was a middle-aged woman, general servant to a genteel small family in the suburbs of London. The circumstances which brought her south of the Tweed would make no bad story, but it is with the later life of Lisbeth that we have to do. She woke up one morning in January, a raw, nipping day, when there seemed to be a struggle between frost and rain in the air, with the certain conviction that things would go wrong.

The first match she struck to light her candle in her attic bedroom went out, and the candle itself "guttered," as she expressed it, and only made up its mind to send forth a decent light when she had by feeling and touch, managed to get into her clothes. Lisbeth in her morning rig-out, before the quality were supposed to see her, was not by any means a beautiful object. She was a tall, angular person, with a long, narrow, somewhat harsh face, clear, far-seeing brown eyes, and a knot of hard, nondescript hair. She wore an old wincey skirt of scanty dimensions and a sort of compromise between a blouse and what she called a bed-gown, with very loose sleeves, well rolled up, so that her thin, hard arms were left free for the whisk of the broom and the proper handling of the blacklead brush and the duster. Lisbeth liked to be purpose-like at her work, and despised aught that hampered her in it. She was accustomed to rise at six of the clock, summer and winter, and by the time her two maiden ladies were ready, the portion of the house in which they lived was as neat as a new pin, a tempting breakfast cooking in the underground kitchen, and Lisbeth herself metamorphosed into a thoroughly respectable middle-aged servant with a clean gown of lilac print, a neat cap, and a voluminous and immaculate white apron. Things went wrong with Lisbeth that morning from the outset; the chimneys smoked, and after the dining-room table had been thoroughly cleaned and the white cloth laid, the spoons fell down, and sent the black specks flying over everything. No sooner had she cleaned up all traces of this untoward happening, than the cat stole the fish from the top shelf of the larder, knocking over a jug of cream in her guilty flight. Then the postman came heavily laden with large blue documents, and one small letter for Lisbeth, addressed in a cramped, illegible handwriting, and bearing the postmark of a small and undistinguished village somewhere in the wilds of Scotland. Lisbeth, a little disheartened with the set-backs of the morning, sat down and read her letter, which was a word contained bad news. Her only sister had died suddenly, and her brother-in-law, the captain of a fishing boat in a remote Scottish fishing village, demanded that she should come up forthwith and take him and his in hand.

"No' me," said Lisbeth to herself, while one hardly-wrung tear rolled slowly down her cheek for the sister who had gone away, glad, no doubt, to slip out of life, which had existed chiefly of hard toil and little love. "No' me. I ken Elshender Bain ower weel. I ken gang to the Frigate? No' me, never in this world!"

The bell rang with the gentlest hint of impatience, and Lisbeth, conscience-stricken, ran upstairs. She had put off longer than she ex-

pected with her letter, and the ladies were ringing for their breakfast. And there was nothing to give them now, except an egg, the freshness of which could not be guaranteed. She pushed the letter in the bosom of her dress, and made haste up the kitchen stairs to find Miss Harriet, the younger of the two mistresses, standing at the top. "We thought we heard the post, Lisbeth," she said almost apologetically.

"So ye did, ma'am; the letters is here."

She took them from under her apron, with which she shielded everything she carried, and offered them in both hands.

"An' please, mem, that jaud o' a cat has stolen the fish, and there's naething but bilid eggs, and buttered toast, which will be up in a jiffy."

She whisked down again and proceeded with hot haste to get the breakfast ready. Using such expeditions, she had it on the tray in ten minutes, and carried it upstairs without a moment's further delay.

When she entered the dining-room, the ladies were so very busy with their letters that they did not appear to notice her at all, even when she coughed and informed them that breakfast was on the table.

Then they said, "Thank you, Lisbeth," simultaneously, and in rather a breathless way, and returned to the contemplation of their correspondence.

Lisbeth went downstairs to her own domain, and sat down to read her letter again. It was a very human document, though Lisbeth would not have called it by such a name. She was moved, however, by the pathos of it, and though she continued to shake her head, it was with a little less conviction. It was many years since she had seen the old Frigate village, where it scattered on one of the foreshores of the grim North Sea. For the moment she was fain to feel' once more the bite of its salt wind, and watch the gulls dipping to the grey, white-capped waves that were never completely lulled to rest. It all belonged to the stormy time of her girlhood, which she had put resolutely behind her, but it had power to rise again before her mind and heart, drawing at the very cords of being, in a way which both surprised and troubled her.

"I thought I was done wi' the soid Frigate," she muttered, as she put a mouthful of dry bread between her teeth and took a drink of tea. "Mo gang to keep hoose for Elshender! Never in this world! A mighty guld cheek he has to ask it."

The bell broke upon her reverie once more, and she ascended to the dining-room wondering whether she could have forgotten anything which they could possibly mean by such a summons. There was no unnecessary ringing of bells in that quiet, well-ordered house, where there existed the most complete understanding between mistress and maid.

Lisbeth's eye, roaming critically over the table, instantly divined that very little had been eaten.

"Have I forgotten anything?" she inquired meekly, "or is it the eggs no' fresh."

"It's all right. Come in and sit down, Lisbeth, we wish to talk to you," said Miss Sophia. "We have had bad news."

"So has I," answered Lisbeth quietly. "And nae wonder; you should bae seen that gutterin' candle this mornin'! There was everything that was bad int, and naething that was guld."

"Ah, that is curious," said Miss Sophia, in her thin, quiet voice. "This

is a letter from Australia; our dear sister Madeline, Mrs. Lugard, is dead."

"Mercy me, and my sister Kate has deed too; that was the meann' o' the black tails to the gutter, there was twa; now I mighd."

"Extraordinary! The letter is from our brother-in-law, Captain Lugard."

"An' mine is frae my brither-in-law, Elshender Bain," put in Lisbeth quietly; "so we're upsides."

"He is anxious that we should come to him at once to Adelaide, Lisbeth; it is a very long journey, but he does not even give us the option of refusal. He wishes us to sail by a boat which leaves Tilbury on Saturday week, and he has sent ever so many banknotes to pay for the passage."

Lisbeth nodded.

"Elshender tells me to come by the next train, but he doensna send any banknotes," she added grimly; "he kens better."

"It is very strange indeed that the two events should have happened simultaneously, because it will simplify everything. We will offer to lend the house as it is for a year to young Mr. and Mrs. Parkes, who are looking for one in this neighborhood; you can go to your brother-in-law, and we will go to ours. Will that do, Lisbeth? in the meantime, at least—"

"I suppose it'll hae to, but I'm no' keen, candidly speakin', on the Frigate," said Lisbeth resignedly. "I ken what brither-in-laws are, notably Elshender Bain."

"But we have our duty to consider, Lisbeth—our duty to our family—"

"Yes, the maist of a woman's life is taken up wi' that same," she observed philosophically; "and then she dees, and she's never got onything out o' it that I can see."

"There is the satisfaction of duty done, Lisbeth," said Miss Harriet gently. "I see the finger of Providence in all this."

One clear, frosty morning, some few weeks later, a very slow train crawled out from Aberdeen, and in course of time deposited a handful of resigned passengers on the Frigate shore. A big, burly man of the seafaring class was waiting the arrival, and when he saw the tall, angular figure of the woman he expected alight from the train, the sternness of his features somewhat relaxed. He stepped forward grimly.

"That's you, Lisbeth."

"Ay, that's me, Elshender. Hoos a' wi' ye?"

"I'll be weel, now you've come, Lisbeth, but you're no' the woman ye was."

"I'm twenty years aulder, Elshender; you're lookin' well yourself!"

"I'm fine."

"An' the bairns, hoo are they?"

"There's nae o' them at hame. Annie's in a place, and wee Bob has gaen to my mither's at Fraserburgh. There's only me."

She stood still, and looked at him with a sudden indignation.

"Ye had a face to ask me to come here for you, Elshender."

"No," he answered, in his big, slow way. "It was the only thing to do. Katie bade me, and besides, there's nae woman I could suffer in the hoose efter Katie but you. There hasna been a foot across the door since she deed. I've kept it clean for you."

There was a strange, slow pathos in his voice, and the years rolled back. They had been lovers once in the days that would never come again, only the rainy day had intervened.

"I think I'll go back even yet, Elshender," she said, hesitatingly. But he gripped her by the arm.

"No; that ye winna, Lisbeth; the hoose is empty, and the fire's burnin' there for ye. Come awa hame."

Her step was a little unsteady as she turned about to watch the unload-