

build the biggest bonfire ever, bake potatoes, grill salmon steaks, prepare a giant salad and make tea and cocoa. This day-long party was made memorable by the stalker's wife who had been ill but wanted to join us well wrapped in her husband's vast Inverness cape. When the feast was ready she was fetched from her cottage and rowed across the golden water to the tune of "Will ye ne'er come back again," soulfully rendered on his accordion by Beady, the gamekeeper. A great cheer went up as she rose majestically from her seat to step ashore, tripped over the enveloping cloak and sank over the side in ludicrous slow motion. There she floated like a latter day Ophelia with the cape billowing about her, while all stood in stunned amazement. Beady, hunched over the concertina, played on regardless.

The boys and I with a protesting Rosemary in tow explored the Falls of Unich and searched for the crack in the rock where the steam was said to rise from a hot sulphur spring. We collected garnets and rock crystals and found a stone coffin. Alas there was nothing in it. Round the loch we picked blaeberrries and high up cranberries and cloudberrries. We located the ancient silver mines, the entrance to which could still be seen from the valley, but was difficult to find on the rocky hillside in Glen Mark.

Alec was a dowser. He demonstrated his skill over a pile of rocks obviously man made. Great excitement when his

Y-shaped twig began to move. We carefully dismantled the cairn in the liveliest area and found eventually, not water, but an old sword hilt with the blade rusted away to a stump. Our monosyllabic dowser showed no surprise, but I did notice a fleeting twinkle in his eye.

Slowly the days got shorter. As our holiday visitors left we decided to dig ourselves in for the winter. Curtains were made, lamps were trimmed, chimneys were swept, great piles of dry wood were collected and cut up. Herbs were dried and the late raspberries made into jam with the hoarded sugar ration. Eggs were put down in stone jars in salt. We acquired two goats. We found some wild honey in a tree which Alec helped us to harvest. I had taken on the cleaning of the little church half a mile away where once a month a service was held. Rather a forlorn, lonesome little church it is, surrounded by a church yard full of people with names strange to the Glen now. Whole families of weavers and immigrants who worked silver mines in Glen Mark long ago. The Glen must have been full of life and activity then with another church two miles away on the shore of the loch, a school, a dominie's house and even a resident poet who wrote a book called *The Happy Shepherdess*. Now even the ruins of their houses have disappeared, only the occasional rhubarb clump or currant bush flourishes forlornly and marks the place where they lived their lives.

Our church was small and loud with bees which seemed to work away somewhere in the rafters. More than once we had a swarming of bees during the service, sweeping in through the open door with a dangerous high sound, and causing havoc among the worshippers and attendant dogs and children. The minister disappeared beneath the pulpit and everyone rushed outside hell for leather.

One cleaning day when I investigated the tiny gallery I found it deep in dead bees. There was a hole in the plastered ceiling, above which large slabs of honeycomb were hanging in layers from the rafters in the roof, pressing on the plaster. With bucket under the hole I enlarged it carefully and managed to liberate two buckets full of honey mixed with wax. We set it all in basins on the cool side of the range overnight. In the morning the honey had settled below a thick layer of melted wax, which could be lifted off in a slab when it cooled and hardened. The honey was a god send, it kept us going all winter and the wax mixed with turps provided years of superb polish.

Being wartime there was no organised shooting of the red deer when the season for it came round. The keepers took us on the hill and on the river and taught us a lot about nature as well as about fishing and stalking. Peggy and I took it in turns to join in. I loved those long days of walking over the hills and high ridges, observing the movement of the herds

often as far as the edge of Glen Clova or Glen Muick. During the rutting season, the bellowing of the stags echoed everywhere. Stags engaged in fierce battles at this time oblivious to all else, taking run after run at each other, meeting head on with deafening crunch and clatter of antlers entwined, all within yards of us, with the hinds complacently looking on. The shooting of deer was done one day and the collecting with the ponies the next. It was often my job to carry home a liver, a large, heavy, bloody, floppy burden, but what a treat in ^{the} kitchen. Deer liver is quite the most delicious treat, thinly sliced and lightly fried with a little butter and bacon.

Thinking back, I am amazed at the amount of work we managed to get through in a day and how tranquil our life was in the midst of war. When the lamps had to be lit in the evening, we had sewing, knitting and reading aloud sessions round the fire. Rosemary joined in and even the little ones took to making things and choosing stories. We painted and drew and made a book of scissor-cut pictures of ourselves and our adventures, which Chris, my son, and his family still treasure. Christmas was lovely in the Glen. At that time our local friends largely ignored Christmas, but we dressed the tree and made a crib and had lots of fun making Christmas food with our meagre resources. Only homemade presents were allowed I think.