

## CHAPTER XXII

### *HOME AT LAST*

IT was early in May when, after a brief tour of Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago, the "She Stoops" company came back to New York, there to do the subway circuit, and then close.

A whole year of hard work—and joyful companionship. For every one in the company was congenial. Miss Clavendish had become a great favourite with them all; and her little girl was well enough to travel with the troupe, a sort of combination governess-maid being toted along so that she should not miss her studies. The child had blossomed and prospered, and all was well.

There came the day when there must be hand-clasps and sad words of good-bye. These gipsies—they must part now. Three of them were to return to England, never again to appear in the States. This season had made the dream possible for Queenie and Jack. Added to what they had already saved, and with the snug profit on their



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Long Island place (Miss Clavendish had taken it off their hands, as she had fallen in love with it during her child's illness and convalescence there), they were able to invest in sufficient securities to make their old age a thing not to be feared.

Barrow said to Silver: "You go over with them. One year of work for me, however. There are many things to straighten out before I definitely give up the Splendide. Then it's rest and peace for me, too, back there in the country I love. Queenie and Jack will take care of you. I want you to retire now, after this great success of yours."

And so it was arranged.

It was a wonderful morning in the middle of May when they came up Channel and passed St. Michael's Mount, and then Eddystone Lighthouse, and landed at Plymouth. One of those glorious mornings it was, so absolutely golden in the May sunshine, that fill the heart with an almost divine ecstasy. 'Coming home!

The very seabirds seemed in a perfect ferment of happiness, welcoming them. The sea sparkled, a mass of glittering diamonds, little boats all around the ship appeared to be hauling them home, laughing and bounding on the choppy waters, tacking and tacking again. People shouted and laughed (with stray tears in their



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eyes), and as an old London critic once observed on the first sight of a certain play, "Strong men wept and shook hands with strangers." And if the strong men on the great ship that morning did not actually weep, they felt rather choky with emotion. Coming home!

The happy trio soon were ashore, and found, according to orders they had sent on to Totnes, a roomy although a rather rickety old car awaiting them, to take them to the cottage of their dreams. Queenie had been absolutely responsible for buying the little place, and arranging for its transformation into what she and Jack required in the way of American plumbing and other creature comforts, to which they had become accustomed. A cousin of hers—an English cousin of great originality and talent, had superintended the furnishings, the painting—everything, in short. So all they had to do was to drive there on the most glorious morning that ever blest dear old England, through the very loveliest part of it, to the sweetest and fairest spot therein. No more noise and bustle, no more study and worry over new parts, and—no more prohibition, but a glass of port every night! No more biting winds, no more touring, no more crowded hotels, but—well, just England and the real English, just as their forefathers were



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who set sail for old Virginy in Good Queen Bess's time. Not Londoners, who have to rub shoulders with almost as many foreigners as Americans have to in New York, but the real unadulterated British, like those who were quite as disgusted at the behaviour of George III as their brothers in America were.

Their first delight on landing was the way that all the porters and even the Customs officers seemed to be ready and willing to joke with them—a great change, after the grimness of the New York men. They soon gathered their masses of luggage through the Customs, and forwarded them on by train to Totnes. Then they got into the “one-horse shay,” as Old 931—now 931 no longer!—described it, and driven by a cheery and communicative local chauffeur with an accent that constantly diverted them, made their way to the dream cottage.

Flowers, flowers all the way! Along the lanes, peeping through the hedgeways, bowing to them, nodding in the sun. After a light Spring rain, how they shone and glistened! They purposely went out of their way round by Slap-ham Sands and Blackpool Sands, too, and then up the hill to dear, quaint old Stoke Fleming; then out of their way again to call in at the ancient house, of an old professional friend of



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other days. And, knowing of their coming, there he was, standing at his gate, ready to welcome them, and take them down the little valley to show them very proudly his own home, his dogs, his chickens, and his treasures. Among these were many an old programme in which they read their names, and signed over the names of those old friends who had passed on, and laughed over those who had made them laugh themselves so much in the dear dead days. They had to go over the whole house, and nothing would do but that they must have cocktails—real ones!—out of a wonderful little cocktail case of which the old friend was exceedingly proud; for it had been given him by the members of his own company shortly before he left for home the last time he had played in America. They drank a toast to the land which had made their coming back to England possible.

Then on they went right down into pretty and quaint old Dartmouth, after a look-in at the old high-walled kitchen garden which was simply alive with promise. Laden with blessings and bunches of Spring flowers, they took their way farther. The gods! what a drive it was! There was Dartmouth glistening in the sunshine, and the river looking at its loveliest. They crossed in the shabby old ferry, which in itself seemed



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so delightful and "comfy," and then up the hills again along lovely winding lanes, with banks and banks of hawthorn all the way, past glorious old houses, past peeps at the river, past the fishermen hauling in their nets, with leaping salmon in them, past the sweetest of cottages in all the world. Old Silvef was saying to himself:

" 'This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
This blessed spot, this carth, this realm, this Eng-  
land! ' "

At last they arrived at Totnes, and fell in love with the narrow winding streets and the court-house and the old church. And so on, to the cottage of their dreams!

And would you believe it, the very birds seemed to welcome them at the gateway, and literally sang them up the drive to the Abode of Peace and Goodwill, in which Queenie and Jack had come to dwell.

Home at last!