

NANCY LIVINGSTON



THE LAND OF OUR DREAMS

The absorbing sequel to
THE FAR SIDE OF THE HILL

THE LAND OF OUR DREAMS

Christmas, 1912. McKies' department store glows with festive Paisley colours. Behind the scenes, the family prepares for Christmas.

Luke McKie has chosen a hard road – to qualify as a doctor. But his achievement will fulfil the cruelly thwarted ambitions of his father. His welcome home from college could not be warmer.

Heartsick with calf love for her cousin Luke, Jane dreams of greasepaint and curtain calls . . .
but Charlotte McKie has determined that no daughter of hers will appear half-clothed dancing on the stage!

Then comes 1914. Luke and Jane, like all their generation, have to grow up fast, their innocence lost to the tragic realities of the Western Front. With warmth and humour Nancy Livingston tells their story, creating a truly compelling saga of heartbreak and courage.

Also by Nancy Livingston in Warner paperback:
THE FAR SIDE OF THE HILL
NEVER WERE SUCH TIMES • TWO SISTERS

FICTION

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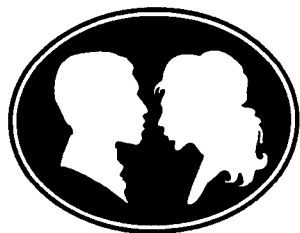
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**TRANS-
LIVINGSTON**



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OUR DREAMS**

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*To the memory of Harry Woolsey,
scholar, eccentric and loving father,
with deep affection.*

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on public record written by men who served with field
ambulances rather than fight during World War I, formed
the basis of part of this fictional book. I honour the memory
of brave men.**

McKie Family Tree

Alex McKie m Jeannie in 1869

John McKie (born 1870) m Mary Hamilton (1876-1918)

One stillborn son

Luke (1895)

Beatrice (dec'd) sister to Adelaide Armitage

(no issue)

*Joseph Forrest m Jane
(both dec'd)*

Davie McKie (1872-1908) m Charlotte Forrest (1878)

Ted (1897)

Jane (1899)

Matthew (1901)

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CHAPTER ONE

The Return

The tall dark-haired youth hurried across the cobbled yard, past the stables and in through the back door. 'Hallo? It's me, I'm back.' He didn't really expect to find anyone; commercial travellers lurked in this part of the Emporium during the evenings. Nevertheless his disappointment increased. First the empty station platform, now this. After his first term away at Newcastle University, Luke McKie had been hoping for a warmer welcome.

He'd developed a nervous habit of twitching at his sleeves to hide the bony wrists. He did so now before tapping on the frosted glass door. 'Father . . .?' The office was empty. Familiar smells were a comfort, though. Luke was glad these hadn't changed. The old roll-top desk stacked with samples, catalogues on the shelves, every item had a familiar odour — he could have found his way blindfold. The most unmistakable smell of all wafted up as he stood there; polished linoleum. He remembered that from the day he first learned to crawl.

There was one change. Looking for the old rag rug, he saw the stove had disappeared. In its place was a gas fire. Profits must be improving — or was it Mother? Luke grinned and the adult veneer he'd tried so hard to cultivate disappeared, leaving him idiotically happy. Fancy Mother bullying Father into an extravagance — unbelievable!

Suddenly he couldn't bear the loneliness any longer. He raced along the passage. The lift with his mother's chair was at the bottom of the shaft. Luke tugged the doors shut, hauled on the ropes and shot up like a rocket into the kitchen above.

Emily Beal screamed. Her mother dropped a ladle.

'Help!'

'It's all right, Mrs Beal, it's only me —'

'Gawd, I thought you were too old for that trick nowadays!' Mrs Beal clutched the roll of fat that concealed her heart. 'Eee, but I'm glad to see you, pet. Where's your mother?' Luke gazed at her blankly. 'Don't say you missed them at the station? Your dad will be upset. They were meeting your aunt as well, you see.'

'Ah!'

'She was coming back from Harrogate.'

'Maybe her train was late?'

'Go downstairs,' Mrs Beal ordered, 'Mrs Armitage can give you a cup of tea while we send word to tell them what's happened. Emily — find our Billy. He's to go to the station at once —'

'He's out delivering, Ma.'

'So he is, drat it!' Mrs Beal, who had come to 'help out' temporarily seventeen years previously, soon became hot and bothered.

'Don't worry,' Luke soothed, 'I'm home and they'll be back. Let's enjoy the peace before Ted arrives. I don't suppose he's changed?'

'Go and see Mrs Armitage,' Mrs Beal begged. 'You've got to have someone welcome you.'

'You already have, splendidly.' To Mrs Beal's astonishment, Luke hugged her, pinny and all. 'It's good to be home!' Despite her agitation, she blinked. My word, he'd grown handsome! A good job he didn't kiss Emily as well — she could act real daffy sometimes. All the same, Master Luke was far too thin.

'Emily, find that seed-cake. Mrs Armitage only nibbles little scones with her tea. This young man needs fattening up.'

With three hefty slices, Luke went to Mrs Armitage via the shop. The Emporium was busy with Christmas so near. Luke threaded his way through crowds of females buying unsuitable neckwear for their husbands and brothers in Gentlemen's Sundries. The Ladies' department was full of similarly disposed young gentlemen attempting to

describe undergarments. Haberdashery, Notions and Household Linens were, by comparison, fairly quiet.

Luke acknowledged greetings shyly. Like his father he found the social aspect of shop-keeping a trial but nervousness faded as he looked about; everywhere paintwork was fresh, glass, brass and mahogany shone. No hint of scrimping here. There was even a new colour scheme: rich paisley shades of red and blue that brought a glow to the December afternoon. 'Nothing but the Best' was the maxim by which John McKie conducted his life and his business.

Luke's own prospects depended so much on McKie Bros.' success. He hadn't yet decided which branch of medicine to follow — it was all too new and exciting — but whatever it turned out to be he would need money.

Destined for medicine since the day he was born, the choice of career and name had been bestowed by John as he held the baby in his arms. Mary McKie had repeated the story so often, her son sometimes fancied he could remember the actual words being spoken: 'Your father said you were to be a doctor and your name was Luke.'

Oddly enough, Luke hadn't needed further persuasion, perhaps because he'd heard of John's thwarted ambitions with equal frequency. Born on one of the poorest of crofts in Western Argyll, John and Davie McKie had been well educated thanks to their father's heroic efforts yet neither had been to university. 'There wasn't enough money . . .' It was a refrain which haunted Luke.

Today gold, silver and banknotes flowed along overhead wires to the cage where two lady cashiers emptied the small leather buckets. As he watched, Luke became conscious of whispers — 'That's Mr McKie's son back from medical school,' — and tried not to quicken his pace. He'd come this way deliberately to see how things were.

He reached the holy of holies, the delicate pink and blue *Salon de Thé* where Darlington ladies sat on elegant gold chairs, gravely contemplating further extravagance. Acknowledging salutes from one or two, Luke went through the pass-door into Mrs Armitage's apartment.

Submitting to her tearful kisses and cries of delight it occurred to him that theirs was an eccentric family composed

of few relatives but many more whose lives had simply come together.

Mrs Armitage, stout, Victorian, was aunt to Charlotte, Davie McKie's widow, and 'great-aunt' to everyone else by virtue of affection. Certainly she smothered them equally with love. One mottled hand clutched the jet-embroidered *front* she always wore. Even as he returned her embrace Luke found himself noticing the age freckles on her skin as well as her breathlessness. How old was Mrs Armitage? Over seventy at least. He'd have to ask Father.

She hadn't changed in one particular. As soon as her eyes lighted on the seed-cake, she cried joyfully, 'Oh, how kind of Mrs Beal! Bertha, two more plates.' And that was another member of his 'family'. Tall and buxom, Manageress of the Salon as well as companion to the old lady, Bertha had taken time off this afternoon to welcome him home.

Luke stretched out indolently in front of the fire. It was so pleasant to let them spoil him! 'I managed to miss everyone at the station. They were too busy meeting Aunt Charlotte.'

Appalled by his disappointment, Mrs Armitage heaped more jam on his scones and Bertha topped up his tea. Luke protested, but only feebly. After the cold comfort of student lodgings a little luxury was most acceptable.

Their chatter rose and fell making him drowsy. Bertha piled on more coals and pushed the cushions behind his head. Yesterday, chilled to the bone, Luke had managed to stay awake because he'd been fascinated by anatomy. Today, overcome by cake, jam and affection, his eyelids drooped.

'We'll let him sleep,' Mrs Armitage whispered, 'His brain must be tired after all that exertion. Remind me to order a jar of beef tea next time we're out, Bertha, to build up his strength.'

Young Ted McKie never entered a room, he erupted, demolishing peace and quiet. He hurled himself at Luke, carrot hair ablaze, 'What happened to you? We looked everywhere! Have you cut anyone's leg off? Mama was so angry we'd missed you, she complained to the Station Master —'