



THE WORLD OF JENNIE G.

ELISABETH OGILVIE

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Elisabeth Ogilvie

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One

THE BRIG *Paul Revere* entered the St. David River on an incoming tide and a strong southwesterly breeze at a little past noon on a Sunday in late June 1809. Since yesterday at dawn the passengers had been seeing the coast of Maine, but that undulating heather-purple line was unimaginable as the eastern edge of an immense continent; reality was in the scatter of islands past which they had sailed on that long penultimate day. Some were no more than craggy islets where seabirds nested. Others showed log cabins and cleared fields, and children climbed on high rocks to wave at the *Paul Revere*. They had passed small fishing boats, in which the crews stood up and swung their caps over their heads and exchanged shouts with the brig's crew.

"Chet Mayfield, you have a son!" one man yelled between cupped hands, and aboard the *Paul Revere* a lanky young man with a big nose and hair like yellow straw blazed up in an incandescent grin, while he was slapped and pounded on the back. The nearest Highlanders, having some English now, shook his hand.

For the Highlanders these American fishermen were as exotic, if not as alarming, as the whales that had sometimes played about the vessel. A little more than a month ago they had sailed down Loch Linnhe with the bagpipes crying "We Shall Return No More," torn between grief and rage because they must go or be driven, trying to cling to the minister's affirmation that God had ordained this voyage.

"But how do we know that He is not ordaining the bottom of the sea for us all?" Alick murmured while the minister preached faith to his

people. "The wee man is only trying to give himself courage. The great fear is at him, and he is trying to pray it away."

Alick knew all about fear. He had been living intimately with it for weeks. Sleeping with it. Waking to the ache of knowing it hadn't gone away. Jennie tucked her hand domestically into his elbow and gave him a pinch on the bicep.

"Don't be putting terror into their heads," she murmured.

"They have the terror already, if they are not daft entirely."

He was speaking for himself; he believed he had escaped the gallows for the privilege of drowning.

They'd made no stop at Oban or at Tobermory on Mull. All through the long summer evening, as the ship beat steadily to the southwest with a bone in her teeth and her American ensign snapping against the sky, the emigrants had watched Scotland disappear below the horizon, until the night filled in the place where their land had been.

If God seemed to be on the side of the landlords, He sometimes conferred blessings on exiles, as Mr. MacArthur promised; this time He was helped by a new and able vessel and an experienced captain who had been sailing the Atlantic ever since he was his father's cabin boy. Westward the *Paul Revere* flew like a gull, her new canvas swelled with fair winds. There was very little sickness. Jennie was astonished not to be seasick, even during the turbulent days when the captain ordered the passengers to stay below. Alick had had no appetite, and she suspected he was white around the mouth under his beard, but she laid that to fear and nerves.

One woman had a miscarriage on the voyage, and a boy just past sixteen went on deck during a time when everyone had been told to stay under cover, and he had been washed overboard with no one knowing just when it had happened. He left parents, younger siblings, and a fifteen-year-old virgin widow. Theirs had been one of the marriages arranged to conform with the General's edict about bachelors. The girl had wept herself sick for the playmate of her earliest memories.

In a few days each was left far behind, the missing boy and the little creature that had just begun to move in the womb. A healthy baby was born to another woman, and they all took heart from this omen. She was named Paulina Revere Mackenzie. "Because she is American, just," the mother said proudly in her new English.

Jennie taught English daily, from the first morning at sea. Mr.

MacArthur supplied paper and pencils from his trunk, and she compiled lists of the most useful English phrases to be learned. Alick was the interpreter between her and her pupils.

He didn't want to be, he preferred to be left to himself, but between Jennie and Mr. MacArthur he had little choice, and it took his mind off his certainty that they'd never reach America.

The children were quick learners; within a week they went back and forth between Gaelic and English with no difficulty, demanding new words as voraciously as infant birds demanding food. They were fearless and happy, except for the little widow. They would grow up as Americans, and they could hardly wait; all they knew of Scotland would come from their parents' memories.

Among the adults some learned as easily as the children did. Others, just as eager, had trouble but kept doggedly at it, practicing with each other or muttering phrases over and over to themselves. There were a few who wanted nothing to do with the language of the Sassenachs, as if to speak it would be to surrender the last particles of themselves, to have lost everything, not only their cottages and their valleys and their mountains forever. They were Highlanders, and they would speak as Highlanders wherever they went.

"I am a Highlander forever in my heart," Mr. MacArthur told them, "and I will always be remembering the old tongue, but I will be an American, too. And so will you be."

But that didn't move them. Even telling them that God demanded it of them couldn't fracture their granite opposition. They sat with the class but kept their mouths clamped shut and their eyes stonily distant. Alick tried to work alone with the men, in case Jennie, as a female and a Sassenach, put them off, but he got nowhere.

Some of them were quite young, whereas old Dougal MacKenzie, who had not a tooth left in his head, whose chin and bald crown were fringed in white, and who groaned and whispered lamentations to himself for an hour every morning until his rheumatism eased up, was as excited as the children.

"Good morning, sir!" he would call to the captain, lifting his bonnet. "It iss a ferry fine morning, iss it not?"

Captain Wells would respond with an austere nod. The first mate always smiled and agreed. For the most part the crew was good-natured, especially with the polite, soft-spoken children, and tolerant of the bag-

pipes, perhaps because Ruari Beag, the piper, was restricted to one hour in the morning and another in the late afternoon. He was composing a march to which the immigrants would disembark in America, and as it took form, it became more acceptable to the Americans as music. Sometimes he slid slyly into a jig, a reel, or a strathspey, which set the children dancing, and then there'd be some Yankee foot-tapping and appreciative grins.

Jennie and Alick, nominally part of the minister's flock, could not ignore the twice-daily devotions. Jennie learned to sing the Gaelic psalms, and if she gathered only a word here and there in the sermons and prayers, she could at least look attentive. Alick's expression was usually unreadable, and he wouldn't sing. He bore a grudge against the Landlord of the World, who bullied the weak in favor of His chosen ones. Jennie's theory of divine indifference was just as heretical, but she respected the others for their faith and the little minister for his passionate conviction. She didn't see her and Alick's lip service as hypocritical but as a necessary form of self-defense.

Ironically Alick's first real reading was the Bible. Elspeth Glenroy had insisted on their keeping her English Bible while she and Andrew retained their Gaelic one. "You *must* have a Bible. How can you be living without one?"

It had been given to her when she was twelve by the laird's wife on the estate where she had grown up. The elegant script ornamented the flyleaf: "To Elspeth MacKaye with kindest wishes from Emily, Lady Robertson. 'In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths.' "

Jennie read that out to Alick in their box of a cabin. His response was a cynical sidewise glance.

"He is directing His own into some very strange paths. I am thinking of the Linnmore folk directed out to wander and starve and die."

Linnmore: the name that always crashed sickeningly into her midriff like a fist or a hurled boulder and with always the other name coming up behind it.

"Och, it's ill teaching a man to read from a book he is not believing!" she exclaimed in his own accent. "But there'll be grand stories of bloody battles in here, and sinfulness, and revenge, and you'll be meeting a most fearful Jehovah. You'll be believing in *Him*. God is not becoming the loving Father until the New Testament."

"Aye, when He betrays His son," he said. From a lifetime of listening to sermons and Scripture, until he'd finally refused to go to church, he was familiar with the substance, if not the printed word. But he was ready to learn to read well, not too proud to show his ignorance of long, hard words, and here was a book with weeks of reading in it. They worked steadily in the hours they could spend alone in their cabin. He would sound out a chapter to himself and then read it aloud to her for correction.

She had kept out some of the minister's paper for Alick's writing. With the dedication of a Michelangelo he copied the texts she chose for him. He was determined that he would set foot on America—if he survived—a literate man.

They also studied arithmetic. Mentally he was a swift calculator, but setting down problems and solving them on paper were new to him. He was fascinated with numbers and was soon working with large figures. Correcting his answers, Jennie never got the same result twice in succession, while he looked on, too polite to smile at her frustration.

"Arithmetic was never my strong point," she said once, hatefully flustered. "There must be a schoolmaster at Maddox who will tutor you and take you farther along than I ever could."

"You are taking me to America," he said. "How much farther could there be? Of course, we are not there yet," he added, being Alick.

She was on the deck very early one morning and saw a rampart of rock risen from the sea, burnished red-gold with the sunrise. It was like Venus rising from the foam, with gulls and terns flying about it instead of doves and cupids. Her first reaction was to rouse Alick out to see, but then she would lose this moment of particular glory.

"Davie's Rock," said Stephen Wells behind her. "It was St. David's Rock once."

She repeated it. "It sounds Welsh."

"Yes, and we'll be sailing up the St. David's tomorrow. Named by a Welshman, back a few hundred years."

"Did he name the town, too? Maddox?"

"You could say so, even if there wasn't any town then, just wilderness. He built a fort up the river, just below where the General's house is now, and called it after the place he hailed from in Wales, Portmadoc. I reckon 'Maddox' comes from that."

"What happened to him?" She kept her eyes on the rock, astern of

them now but still glowing, wondering if the Welshman had seen the crag in such a light.

"He stayed for a year," the mate said. "Exploring up the river and trading with the Indians for furs. Then in one hard winter most of his crew were wiped out by scurvy because they wouldn't eat the way the Indians told them to. He and a handful survived by drinking this concoction of boiled white spruce bark, and they sailed home in the spring. He wrote it all up, but he never came back."

"It's strange that the name survives," said Jennie.

"It was recorded as Maddox on the maps that were made afterward, and when the later settlers came, nobody ever called it any different. When the town was incorporated about twenty-three years ago, there was a notion to pick a real Yankee name, but the General sent word from Saratoga that they ought to honor the choice of a brave man and leave well enough alone."

"The General sounds autocratic," said Jennie.

Wells smiled. "There were so many names put forth and everybody so violent for his own choice, they were carrying on their own war up here. The General put an end to the pulling and hauling—This has been an elegant changeover. So far." He knocked on wood. "It's his luck, the weather we've had, and she's a lucky ship, like everything the General owns or does. But your parson thinks it's all the doings of Providence. I don't have to know the lingo to guess what he'll be telling them today."

"Well, couldn't it be six of one and half dozen of the other?" Jennie asked.

"Now I never thought of that, ma'am." His grin made his long-jawed face boyish and filled his blue eyes with a mischievous light. He lifted his cap to her, and went aft to the helmsman.

Stephen Wells was her first American. He'd been the officer at the top of the ladder when she boarded the ship in Lock Linnhe, and they had become speaking acquaintances on the voyage because he handed on the captain's communications either to her or to Alick as the English speakers. Usually he managed to have a few moment's extra conversation with Jennie when she was the go-between.

The captain was his older brother. He kept a near-Olympian detachment and was respectfully referred to as the Old Man, even by crewmen with gray in their hair.

"Does your brother call you Mr. Wells on dry land, too?" Jennie asked once.

"You should hear what he calls me. And what I call *him*. No, you shouldn't. And what my father calls us both. 'Down east chowderhead' is the least of it. He doesn't want us to get too big for our breeches."

"Mr. Wells." His brother's barely raised voice. Stephen winked at her and smartly left. The summons had interrupted too many of their conversations to be always coincidental.

Davie's Rock was the beginning of those scraps of America scattered over a gentian blue sea. Passengers and crew prepared for tomorrow; not only would the brig be spotless, but so would the Highlanders. There was no need to stint on water now, and they had their Sabbath clothes in their chests; they were not paupers, even if the actual coinage among them was small. They had paid their passage, and they would not arrive looking like derelicts.

Hector MacKenzie, whose wife, Anna Kate, had suffered the miscarriage, clipped shaggy heads and trimmed well-established beards. The men who had grown beards on the voyage shaved them off, but Alick refused to. "Will you just be taking a look at Andrew Glenroy's razor?" he asked Jennie in exasperation.

"You could borrow one," she suggested. "Hector has given himself a beautiful shave."

His look put paid to that. Either men did not borrow razors, or women were not supposed to suggest it.

Most of the men and boys customarily wore the kilt; with fresh shirts, a change of hose, their hair cut, and their bonnets brushed, they looked amazingly well-dressed. The minister's black suit was old, but his linen had been bleached to a dazzling whiteness in Highland sunshine. Alick wore a pair of Andrew Glenroy's breeches, well belted in, a decent linen shirt, hose with feet in them. His boots and his bonnet were still whole.

The women's dresses were for the most part like the one Jennie had got from Kirsty, the wool and linen weave dyed in serviceable dark blue or brown, worn over a bright tartan or striped petticoat, and with the little plaid, the *guilechan*, fastened at the neck with the treasured brooch. Jennie had had to do without a brooch since the pin of hers had become a fishhook, but she knotted the *guilechan* as neatly as possible. Elspeth's second-best dress must have been made long before she became pregnant, and was only a bit large for Jennie. It was in better condition than Kirsty's

dress and had been put away clean in the chest, like all the other Glenroy clothes and blankets. Some dry, fragrant leaves had been scattered among them.

She wore a mutch for the first time since she'd lost one running away from Jock. There were three left in the chest, as white as the minister's linen and the men's shirts. She'd gone bareheaded on the voyage, wearing the little plaid over her head for the daily service and letting it slide back for the rest of the time. No one ever criticized her to her face. She was forgiven such ways, along with being a Sassenach, because she was married to a Highlander and had given up palaces and dukes for him. So the young girls told her, and when she tried to dim the splendor of their fantasy, they thought she was being modest.

When they actually entered St. David River, a Sabbath service of worship and thanksgiving was held on the forward deck. After that there was nothing to do but wait while the brig raced toward home. Jennie and Alick stood apart from the rest, as they had stood when they left Fort William. Alick was as silent as before, and there was no way to guess his thoughts as he looked out on the sunlit banks, but Jennie brimmed with pagan rejoicing. "I did it, didn't I?" she said softly.

"You did indeed." He continued to watch the shore, but she felt that he was not seeing the land sliding by. Her euphoria collapsed like a hot-air balloon. It was not going to be right after all. It would be horribly wrong. But what choice had he?

"I have not the words to be thanking you properly," he said. "I have read thousands of words these weeks, but still, I have none to thank you as I should."

"Alick, we don't need words between us," she said. "Think what I owe you. We share too much that I will never want to forget, never in my life."

"Aye," he answered, "and too much that we will not be able to forget, though we would wish it."

For a shattering moment Nigel was there, and then everything went dark and silent, as if she'd been struck blind and deaf. Then gradually sounds came through to her, and her vision cleared. She blinked at an osprey riding the wind on motionless dark wings in blue space, above a sheltered cove glassy with hot noon.

"*Uisge-iolaire*," she whispered like an incantation. "*Water eagle*." She felt so sad, so tired; the weight of everything came on her so hard that

the earlier instant of black silence seemed in comparison a refuge. What was Jennie Hawthorne doing *here*, so far from home and the people who loved her?

She'd have appreciated an arm to take or a hand to clasp. Alick was beside her but not with her, as if the final separation had already begun. The comradeship of the journey through the mountains, the shared suspense of departure, the hours of work in the cabin—all gone. Everything left behind, like the dead boy and the baby. Time rushed her on as the tide and the wind drove the ship.

But the ship was going home.

Then mentally she shook herself hard like a dog coming out of the water. She had done it; she had kept her promises; she should be proud. Here she was, about to step on American soil. Think of it! Jennie Hawthorne of Pippin Grange had crossed the Atlantic. And Ianthe considered herself cosmopolitan for merely traveling to Switzerland. *Just you wait till I'm back!* she threatened her sisters. *Will I have tales to tell!*

Hector MacKenzie came up to Alick's other side and spoke in Gaelic, pointing at a farm they were passing, and Alick answered. Hector, who had been always whistling and doing jig steps before they lost the baby, was smiling now. He hoped to be a farmer in America.

"Mistress Glenroy, will we be seeing Red Indians?" someone asked.

It was Mairi, the fifteen-year-old widow.

"I hope so!" said Jennie. "What is America without Indians?"

"Oh, Mistress Glenroy, that is all Calum was talking about!" the girl wailed. "He was wanting to be a hunter and a trapper with the Red Indians!"

Jennie put her arm around the slender, bony shoulders while Mairi mopped her eyes with an edge of her *guilechan*. No one had been able to stop her weeping; it was as if she had come down with it as a chronic disease. The paradox was that during the hours when her mind was occupied with learning English, she never cried, and she was one of Jennie's best pupils. Her lower lip was raw from being bitten, and there were hollows under her high cheekbones. Soothingly Jennie put back the dark auburn hair from the girl's forehead. "Your hair is so lovely, so thick and long."

The sobs decreased as the child listened. "Was it a sickness you had," she murmured, looking at Jennie with drenched violet-blue eyes, "to be cutting off your hair like that?"

"Yes, love, it was a sickness." She sensed Alick's sudden move behind her, as if he'd heard. They had joked as he'd sawed off handfuls of hair with his dirk, and then she had never seen the hair again. Would it be woven into nests, she wondered, or be discovered in the depths of the cave by some traveler, to his eternal wonderment?

Two

THEY STOOD or sat quietly among their chests and baskets and bundles; most of the children were as subdued as their elders. For a little while the open ocean lay broad astern. Just inside the mouth of the river Jennie had seen a farmhouse cresting a green rise on the left, set snugly against a dark cloud of spruce forest with a view straight out to sea. Jennie saw it wistfully because she felt so tired, and the steep-roofed, gray, weathered house slumped so comfortably into its setting, like a hunk of granite that had been there since the world began. She thought achingly how deeply she could sleep under that roof. She'd hardly slept the night before, and now she had to endure the rest of a long, confusing day on an unknown planet, and she wished she knew where she was going to sleep tonight. As a high rocky point hid the house from her, she had an attack of homesickness for the cabin in which she'd slept for the past five weeks; if she could only sleep there tonight, she'd be able to face anything in the morning.

The ocean was gone now, but not the wind that filled the sails and whisked the water into whitecaps. Gulls still followed the brig on the chance that some orts would be thrown overboard by the cook, but the noon meal had been no more than what the Highlanders called a *strupak* and the Americans called a lick and a smell.

On either side of the broad blue tidal river there were open slopes with plowed fields and pasturage for healthy-looking cattle, a few horses, sometimes a small flock of sheep. The houses and outbuildings were log cabins or weatherboarded structures instead of stone and thatch. Almost every house had its orchard on the southwestern side and, where the

fields dropped to the shore, a little wharf with one or two small boats moored off it or pulled up on the shingle. There were belts of woodland between the cleared areas: spruces blued with distance and the bright green splashes of hardwoods. Oaks, birches, and maples were familiar, but it was the mountain ash which made tense faces break into smiles. Here was the rowan tree in good supply and still in blossom, a lucky omen if there ever was one.

There was a little quiet weeping, but nothing like the sound of mourning. The older youngsters clustered together, taut with suspense, eating up everything with their eyes. Mairi was not weeping now; she was too busy keeping her little brothers in one place. Two-week-old Paulina Revere MacKenzie was a tartan bundle in her mother's arms. Chet Mayfield, coming forward on an errand, stopped and touched the small face delicately with a big finger.

"My, that's a pretty one! What say we make a match of it, ma'am? Your girl and my boy, 'bout eighteen years from now?"

The mother beamed at him, not sure what he'd said but knowing it was well meant. He went on, saying over his shoulder, "I'll hold ye to it now! Remember!"

Jennie sat on a Glenroy chest, a Highland wife from the white mutch tied demurely under her chin to the brogues. Alick stood beside her, his bonnet tipped over his eyes, his plaid over his shoulder, and the leather satchel lying against his hip. They looked like any emigrating Highland couple. How long before everyone, including their sponsor, the General, found out how shockingly *unlike* they were? *It will be the instant I can take ship for home*, Jennie thought. Meanwhile, there was the rest of this day to get through. If only she could imagine a bed somewhere that would be hers, the vision would guide her like the North Star through the chaos to come.

The river swirled around a long arm of rock and daisy-flecked turf thrust out from the right bank, and a low, bleak barracks of a building appeared beyond it.

"Smallpox hospital," a crewman said. "Don't get to use it much since the General made everybody get inoculated."

This made no sense to the Highlanders, who wanted to be assured that this unsightly structure wasn't the General's house. Questioning faces turned toward Jennie. She had been inoculated herself a few years

ago, but right now she couldn't think how to explain; she felt that if she opened her mouth to say anything, she'd burst into tears.

"There she is!" the American sang out. "That's the General's place! Look yonder, across the Pool!"

The harbor opened before them. Except for the clear avenue of the channel leading to the wharves, it was a leafless thicket of masts of all heights sprouting from craft of all sizes, from small wherries to boxy, broad-beamed cargo vessels. The land rose from the cluttered waterfront toward the northern sky; the mansion stood as if on a stage, with a broad wharf at its feet and a curtain of green behind it. In the full resplendence of a midday sun the first dazzling impression was of the luminous whiteness of marble or alabaster. The American flag flew as high as the chimneys from a mast on the lawn, the red and white stripes streaming out in the wind.

The Highlanders were mute before the irrefutable evidence that one of theirs, born under a thatched roof in Strathbuie, had risen to this. Into their silence came the first long summoning note of the bagpipes, echoing from bank to bank like the preliminary warning of a call to battle. Ruari Beag began to play his new tune, "The Strathbuie MacKenzies Arrive in America."

It was said that the pipes could tear the heart out of you with a lament and put it back into you ten years younger with a march. The *Paul Revere* left Scotland to the one and came home to the other, and the passengers stepped smartly down the gangway onto America with the piper leading the way.

If any of the crowd on the wharf snickered at their first sight of kilted men and groaned or grimaced at the sound of the bagpipes, they'd have been careful not to let the General know. The red-blond man in a brown coat and fawn trousers who stood bareheaded and radiantly smiling at the foot of the gangplank could be no one else. He was leaning on a stick, and his free hand kept time with the pipes, except when he stopped to wipe his eyes and blow his nose. A lanky black-haired boy stood beside him, holding two little girls by the hands. They were jiggling up and down to the music. The boy, also in a brown coat but wearing knee breeches, looked unhappy.

Jennie and Alick stayed back in a silent agreement to let the bona fide immigrants go first. She was reluctant to leave the ship, and she

wondered if Alick felt the same, but their relationship had so subtly changed in the last few days that she was too shy to ask. He moved away from her now and stood alone, and the literal distance emphasized the figurative one. *But this is how it was supposed to be*, she reminded herself. *We're each on our own now.*

The music had stopped, and the diminutive piper stood at attention, grinning, with his pipes drooping under his arm. Mr. MacArthur began to introduce the Highlanders, and the General handed his stick to the boy so that he could embrace Dougal and the two other old men who had known his father. He had leisurely words with everyone, hard handshakes, and claps on the shoulder. He prevented the men from pulling off their bonnets and raised the women from their curtsies with a smiling reproof. "None of that here!" The resonant voice carried to the brig. "I'm one of you!"

He shook hands with the older boys and girls, repeating their names and vigorously welcoming them. With the young children he spoke more quietly, caressing their heads, tipping up shy chins with a forefinger. The two little girls in muslin frocks and the Highland children stared at each other with a wholehearted objectivity which is beyond rudeness.

The skinny black-haired boy was introduced again and again; each time he looked more bored and sulky than the last. The only son of a man who had come up from nothing was likely to be badly spoiled, and Jennie guessed that this was the case here.

While the General was exuding Highland hospitality at the gangplank, there was a parting of the spectators and a dark blue open barouche drawn by two grays drove briskly out onto the wharf. The driver, in plain clothing but not livery, stepped down and came around to the horses' heads. The passenger was a woman wearing a flame-colored shawl and a hat with matching plumes. She carried an ivory white parasol, and even from this distance she had an air of imperious languor.

"Ah, there's the lady herself," Stephen Wells said behind Jennie.

"Mrs. MacKenzie?"

"She'd liefer be called Madam. But nobody remembers it much." He nodded toward the withdrawn Alick with a friendly curiosity. "What's your man's trade?"

"He is good at a number of things. He will do what honest work comes to hand first, while he's—while we are settling."