

# MRS. OGILVY'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

BY  
Mrs. C. N. Williamson



**M**

RS. JAMES OGILVY sat in the great hall of the castle in Scotland, which her husband had lately bought. "An ancestral castle," she usually called it, thinking—perhaps quite truly—that it was more than a little tired of both. Nobody ever came to it except the ancestors, and it was only right that the ancestors should be thrown in.

The hall was particularly ancestral in effect, for ancient armor loomed out of the shadows in every corner, and great grandfathers and mothers stared haughtily down from tarnished frames or peered from behind tattered banners carried triumphantly in battle by long dead heroes of the family name.

Mrs. Ogilvy in a tea gown, copied by a modern French dressmaker from an old Scottish portrait, was trying her best to live up to the castle, and feeling a load of responsibility and unlike boredom. By and by tea would come in, wonderful Caravan tea at 5 guineas a pound, with a gorgeous silver service, brought by two magnificent footmen in livery which, with their white heads, made them look like giant cockatoos. Put the worst of it was that there would be nobody save her husband and herself to drink the tea or see the footmen, and they were secretly getting a little tired of both. Nobody ever came to the castle except the clergyman from the village, and Mrs. Seaforth sometimes, for really there was nobody else to come, and by this time, having been at Dorloch castle for the best or worst part of a month, Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvy devoutly wished themselves back in Minneapolis.

After spending several summers abroad they had decided to leave America "for good," and live in England. A lady who had promised (for a consideration) to present Mrs. Ogilvy to the queen next summer had suggested that the possession of a Scottish castle, as well as a house in town, would be a passport to favor in high places. The Scottish castle had been duly acquired (singularly enough it belonged to a cousin of the lady in question) and several novels which Mrs. Ogilvy had read led her to believe that the "smart thing" was to spend Christmas in your friends' country houses, or your own, if nobody else invited you.

Nobody had invited them, therefore they had to do the second best smart thing, and might have found some satisfaction in doing it if they could have collected a large house party; but they knew few people in their adopted country, and besides, as they were learning rapidly, there are country houses and country houses. There was not in a neighborhood to attract visitors in the dead of winter.

Tea came, and with it Mr. Ogilvy, back from a "constitutional," his legs looking ready in knickerbockers and stockings of a pronounced plaid. The lady in the tea gown greeted the gentleman in knickerbockers listlessly, but his manner was so alert that she roused herself to ask if anything had happened.

"Well, I should just think something has," he replied with his best English accent, which he thought suitable to the owner of Dorloch castle. "Who do you think is at the village inn? But you'd never guess, Carrie, so I'll tell you. The marquis of Borrowdale."

"What on earth should he be doing there?" exclaimed Carrie Ogilvy.

"He's en panne with his motor car and won't be able to get it repaired for a couple of days. Something wrong with its inner workings. And now there's come this snow—first of the season. If it lasts he'll have to leave the car and go south by train."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes. And what's more, I asked him to dine here tonight; you'd be delighted to see him."

"Of course he said no."

"Of course he said no."

"O, my goodness, Jimmy!"

"I thought you'd be crazy with joy."

"Well, it will be nice to have a real live marquis, but—he's the only titled person I ever met, except Lady Potter, and she's nothing but a knickerbocker or whatever you call it, and I only met the marquis crossing on the steamer. I didn't talk to him more than once and then I had to say 'you' all the time because I didn't know how to speak to a marquis. Do you call him 'marquis,' or 'your lordship,' or what?"

"I guess people of his own class, like us, just say Lord Borrowdale, and it's all right," Jimmy reassured her. "Don't you be afraid of him, we're as good as he is, and I bet we could buy and sell him, though he's said to have some money and a couple of nice enough places somewhere or other which he got when he came into his title a while ago. I don't know how long. But I do wish he could have somebody to meet him. What about Mrs. Seaforth?"

"O, I don't know," objected Carrie.

"She's a mighty pretty woman and as sweet as she's pretty; young, too, though she's so quiet. She can't be more than 23."

"She's 26 if she's a day," said Carrie. "But what I mean is, I don't like her very much. I feel as if I feel as if she was the sort that wouldn't like it. Besides, he'll probably change his mind and fall us at the last minute. Then we'd be pretty mad."

"Send a note to The Firs with the carriage and beg her to come without giving any special reason. She'll think we're lonesome and want her company. She's alone there and it would live her up."

"It's snowing harder every minute."

"Pooh, she won't mind that in the closed carriage, and it's only a short two miles between here and The Firs—three miles this side the village."

"Well, I'll write the note, and then I must ask the housekeeper to see that we get an extra good dinner. I'll impress her to hear that we're marquis coming."

"Not a bit of it. Old Mrs. Mackellar's a heap more used to the aristocracy than to our kind. Lord Borrowdale will be here at 8. I said 8, because it's smarter than half past 7."

"Good. That was thoughtful of you, dear. It's long after now and I must hurry."

This she proceeded to do. The housekeeper, an awe-inspiring person in black satin, was interviewed and the note written. Of the created envelope the coachman took charge and was told to wait at The Firs for an answer or for Mrs. Seaforth to return in the carriage to the castle.

Now that Mrs. Ogilvy had made up her mind to send, she began to hope that the lady would accept. Her real reason for hesitating lay in the arguments which Jimmy had put forward in favor of the invitation. It was exactly because Mrs. Seaforth was young and pretty that Carrie had wondered whether her presence would be desirable or the reverse; but now that the time for Lord Borrowdale's arrival was drawing near her confidence in herself as a hostess wavered and she thought with relief of Mrs. Seaforth as an adjunct. Besides, whatever Mrs. Seaforth's antecedents might be (Carrie had no acquaintance in the neighborhood to enlighten her on this point) she was evidently accustomed to good society.

As Mrs. Seaforth had lived quietly for some months at least (Carrie fancied from words dropped here and there) on an insignificant estate in a remote part of Scotland it was impossible that she really could be "smart"; nevertheless, even the air might have a good effect with Lord Borrowdale; and as Mrs. Seaforth had been "nice" to Mrs. Ogilvy ever since an accident to the latter's carriage in front of The Firs, Carrie felt that she owed the lady some small debt of gratitude.

There was no Mr. Seaforth, but as the local parson, and his wife were known to be friends of hers it was apparent



MRS. SEAFORTH—THE MARQUIS OF BORROWDALE'S WIFE.

to the moanest intelligence that he must have died quite properly. Altogether, the quiet little tenant of The Firs was a suitable enough fellow guest, even for a live marquis, and on reflection Carrie hoped that Mrs. Seaforth would come.

Time went on, however, and the carriage did not return, though according to the Ogilvys' calculations it might easily have done so. At last an ancestral clock struck the hour of 8, and the last stroke had not sounded when one of the cockatoos announced "The marquis of Borrowdale."

Carrie and Jimmy jumped up, and trying not to appear nervous went fustily forward to greet a tall, slim, brown, clean shaven, clean featured man of 34 or 35.

He had taken a fly from the inn, he explained, and soon after starting the snow storm had increased so tremendously that the driver had proposed going back, saying that a later return might be dangerous; but finally the man had been persuaded to proceed. Lord Borrowdale did not say how, but it was not difficult to imagine.

"Dear me, I suppose that's the reason why the carriage hasn't come back yet from The Firs?" exclaimed Carrie. "We hadn't looked out of the window lately and didn't know the weather was getting worse, but if poor—"

"Mrs. Seaforth," the footman's voice inserted in the right place; and a youthful, girlish looking figure in filmy black advanced across the hall.

Lord Borrowdale had been standing with his back turned toward the entrance door, and as a shrill exclamation of joy from Carrie Ogilvy broke into the announcement of the newcomer's name it could have conveyed no meaning to the ear of a stranger.

Mrs. Seaforth was slenderly petite, pale, and golden haired; Mrs. Ogilvy was of a sumptuous personality; therefore in rushing to greet her guest she overwhelmed the smaller woman as an incoming wave overwhelms a pebble. It was not until a volley of welcoming words had been shot forth, and Carrie had whirled silkily round, holding the other's hand in hers, that either of the men had more than a glimpse of the late arrival.

"Dear me," Mrs. Seaforth; the marquis of Borrowdale, breathed Mrs. Ogilvy, hoping against hope that she was accomplishing the introduction in the right way.

The tall man and the slim girl (she seemed little more) turned, faced each other, stared, gazed, froze; and then Mrs. Seaforth, who had been thawed, for she burst out laughing, showing two delightful dimples.

"At this Lord Borrowdale bit his lip, looking as if he would have given anything for a mistake to pull; but at last a spark of humor kindled in his eyes. He did not laugh, but something between a grin and a smile gave a glimpse of white teeth.

"How do you do, Mrs. Seaforth?" he said, and held out a brown hand.

Her little white one hesitated for the fraction of a second before it fluttered into his palm, where it was gravely shaken up and down and released.

Then Carrie Ogilvy, tingling with the electricity in the air, said exactly the wrong thing and knew it was wrong as she said it. "O, have you met before?"

"I—er—believe we have—somewhere," replied Borrowdale.

"A long time ago," added Mrs. Seaforth. "I had—almost forgotten."

"You have not changed," remarked the man.

"Not in any way," replied the lady. "What weather?"

"Rather bleak."

"But reasonable. I came near not getting here."

This last sentence was for the benefit of her host and hostess, to whom Mrs. Seaforth now gave her attention. "Your coachman said that if it had been a mile further he couldn't have done it, but I did not realize how bad it was until we had arrived, or I would not have dared to come on. Luckily the man seems to think it will clear; and it isn't the depth of the snow that matters, it is the wind and the blinding storm. Flakes as big as my hand!"

"That's not saying much for their size," responded Jimmy Ogilvy gallantly; but Borrowdale did not smile and it was a welcome relief at this moment that dinner was announced.

The table at which the Ogilvys dined in the huge dining hall was so small as to look like a tiny oasis in a vast desert and it was round in shape which brought the diners close together. Lord Borrowdale talked to Mrs. Ogilvy and Mrs. Seaforth talked to Mr. Ogilvy, and Carrie and Jimmy had the awful consciousness that they had committed a social crime of some sort, though what might be its nature they could not divine.

Were these people hereditary enemies, children of rival factions; had they merely met and quarreled; or had there been a lawsuit about property? This it was to be alien in a strange land, ignorant of things which had they been "in society," they would have had at their finger ends.

Somehow dinner passed not unpleasantly, though the atmosphere was still electrical. If Mrs. Seaforth could have sung for joy when her hostess rose she restrained herself admirably; but once in the yellow drawing room she did not even wait for coffee to appear before she asked Carrie if she would mind ordering the carriage.



HAVE YOU—FALLEN IN LOVE WITH ANY ONE?



"What about the cab which brought Lord Borrowdale?" asked Mrs. Ogilvy. "Did it go back?"

"No, madam; it is here; there's plenty of room in the stables."

"I must walk home," said Mrs. Seaforth, briskly.

"O, madam," protested the excited footman, "you would perish on the way."

The two ladies sprang up, and pushing back a yellow curtain tried to look out of the window. Nothing was to be seen save a whirling mass of whiteness, and the howling of the wind was loud in their ears. They were still gazing at the wild swirl, when Jimmy's voice at the door made them turn.

"Say, Carrie," he cried, "I want you to help me to show Lord Borrowdale common sense. He felt he should get back early, and word was sent out to the stables where his cab was waiting, but it'll have to wait. This storm has turned into a big blizzard. It would be madness for man or beast to put his head out of doors. Of course, Mrs. Seaforth and Lord Borrowdale must stay all night; that ought to go without saying, but Lord Borrowdale won't hear reason. He's got a sort of 'Pike's peak or bust' idea into his head, and I want you to go in with me in getting it out."

"Why, of course they must stay," echoed Carrie. "I was just going to tell Mrs. Seaforth so. We can let them have everything they want."

"I must get back," broke in Borrowdale.

"I must get back," insisted Mrs. Seaforth, the two speaking at the same instant, as if upon a signal. And it was not until a visit had been paid to a neighboring door, and something like a ton of snow had seemed to blow in with the wind, at the rate of two miles a minute, that the guests could believe their fate inevitable. When they saw that it was so, however, they resigned themselves sportingly to live through the evening. Of course, after breakfast next morning, they should be able to get away.

But the next morning came, and the blizzard was no more weary of blizzarding than a debutante of dancing at her first ball. Nothing like it, according to the maid servants, had been known for many years. And the day was Christmas eve. There was nothing to do except to make the best of the adventure, to go on wearing other people's clothes, and being resigned. But when the flat of irrevocability had gone forth Mrs. Seaforth and Lord Borrowdale happened to meet at the landing of the stairs which led into the great hall. One was running up, the other was running down, and after a slight start the woman would have passed on, but the man stopped her.

"Look here, Mabel," he said, hurriedly, in a low voice. "I'm glad to have this chance of a word with you, though I wouldn't have sought it. I want you to know that this concrete isn't my fault. These idiotic Ogilvys—"

"I quite understand; but they're not idiotic. How could they have known? It's such an old story now—seven years old."

"Well, they ought to have known. That's the worst of picking up with strangers. How long have you been in this neighborhood?"

"Six months. I took a fancy to it. And—you? Not that I have any curiosity. Still—where did you come from last?"

"Across the world. I've been round it. Got home only a few months ago. Met the Ogilvys on the ship, crossing."

"Have you—fallen in love with any one?"

"Yes, I. As if I could after being deprived of turkey or plum pudding. She had her present ready for Jimmy, and doubted not that he had one for her. There were bank notes for the upper servants and gold for the humbler, and though there would be no greens or holly, nobody need forget that it was Christmas—nobody, unless it were the two prisoner guests. Carrie racked her brains to evolve gifts for them, but the problem was difficult. She could not offer them some of her old jewelry, and yet she could not bear that they should receive nothing. Finally, she decided to consult the housekeeper. "I suppose," she said, "that there's nothing in the way of old china, or silver, which you have in your inventory of the things we bought with the castle that would do as Christmas presents for Lord Borrowdale and Mrs. Seaforth?"

Mrs. Mackellar raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips.

"I can really think of nothing, madam," she replied, "unless—"

"Unless what? I hope you have an idea."

Something like the pale ghost of a smile flickered over Mrs. Mackellar's statuesque features.

"Well, madam, I was going to remind you of some little trinkets in the seawood cabinet in the Japanese drawing room. There's a thing called the magic wishbone, a pretty bit of carved ivory, which you might be willing to part with to the lady, she's a friend of yours, and it's supposed to bring good luck, according to the legend. And there's the wishing ring, if you remember, made from a single piece of jade. That has a story, too; but they're both written down in the catalogue in the drawer underneath the cabinet, which you have probably read."

Carrie was obliged to confess that she had not opened the catalogue or noted the contents of the cabinet with any particularity. But she was eager now to hear the stories. The magic wishbone, said Mrs. Mackellar, could apparently be broken in half by two persons for a wish, but it could not be put together again except by those who were happy or about to be happy. By the right persons, however, the two pieces could be united as if they had never been severed. As for the wishing ring, it was for the finger of a man. He had but to rub it, when on the hand, to see the face of the woman whom Providence intended for his wife. These things were little Japanese fetiches which Mrs. Mackellar said, had been "in the family for a long time. Mrs. Ogilvy was glad she had consulted the housekeeper, and instantly decided to take her advice.

That the ceremony of rubbing and wishing should be properly performed it was necessary witnesses should be present when ring and bone were bestowed, and by way of making the occasion doubly festive Mrs. Ogilvy arranged that the gifts should appear during the Christmas dinner. She would give something to Jimmy at the same time, and he must do the like for her.

Snow and wind were still fierce on Christmas morning, and the white drifts were far up the windows, for it would have been useless, so far, to attempt clearing them away; but the husband and wife and the two victims of a "family misunderstanding" were wonderfully merry together.

After lunch they played bridge, and then, tired of sitting still, Carrie proposed battledore and shuttlecock. They had a wild game, into which, after the first stiffness, Mabel Seaforth and Borrowdale entered as enthusiastically as the others. At tea time it was made known to whom it might concern that the wind had dropped and the snow was ceasing, but strange to say, the news was received quite without enthusiasm, as if it had been an ordinary piece of intelligence.

Then came dinner, and with-despatch the gifts were handed on a silver tray. Carrie hurriedly explained to her guests the magic properties of the ring and wishbone, adding: "Now, Mrs. Seaforth, there's no good trying to break it except with an unmarried man, so you will have to choose Lord Borrowdale."

"O," echoed the lady, "I must break it with an unmarried man, so I will have to choose Lord Borrowdale." Then she laughed and held it out to him, as frankly as if there had never been a family misunderstanding. He laughed, too, but before they could part the bit of ivory Carrie cried out: "Have you wished?"

They had not, but proceeded to do so, looking—absent-mindedly, no doubt—into each other's eyes. The ivory snapped; Mrs. Seaforth's bit was the shorter, so she would have her wish, and Lord Borrowdale would be married first. At this they laughed again, and seemed a trifle confused; but Carrie held them to their duty. The ceremony was not complete; the wishbone must be joined, as if it had never parted. "There is where the magic comes in," she said. And—"I should think so," Borrowdale was heard to mutter, but to the surprise of the actors and their audience the thing was done by Borrowdale and Mabel Seaforth, as if by a charm. It was really wonderful to see how the breach was healed.

"Then, don't forget to shut your eyes and rub your ring," Carrie reminded Borrowdale. "Immediately after you will see the woman who is to be your wife."

He slowly slipped the hoop of jade over his finger, then suddenly looked up, straight at Mabel, something almost like delight in his eyes. "Do you know," he said deliberately. "I believe I won't shut my eyes, for if I wish and keep them open I shall see the woman I want for my wife; whether she is to be or not remains to be found out. Now I shall wish aloud. Ring, ring, give me back the old happiness I threw away. Give me back my wife. Grant that we may unite once more, like the magic wishbone, as if the bond had never been broken."

All this time his eyes were on Mabel Seaforth, and she was going from red to white, from white to red again.

"Ronny!" she exclaimed.

"Thank you for the dear old name. Is my wish to come true? If it is, tell me so before the friends who have brought us together."

"O, Ronny, you speak gratefully of them now, but yesterday you were angry!"

"Only for your sake. And yesterday was yesterday. Today is Christmas. I have always been in love with you, you know, but you sent me away."

"I didn't. You went."

"It was you who suggested the separation."

"Because you wanted it."

"You had such an awful temper!"

"And you were such a flirt!"

"I wasn't. I cared only for you. But I was too proud to defend myself."

"The caring come back?"

"I don't think it has ever gone."

He slipped the ring from his finger to hers. "You are witnesses to this second marriage of ours," he said to the Ogilvys, who had sat through the little scene as if turned to stone.

But his last words broke the spell. "You don't mean to say that you two people are married?"

"Seems so odd you never knew; but of course you are strangers."

"Foreigners," apologized Carrie. "How awful! And to think that I introduced you to each other. And you've been knowing each other ever since. But—how could I guess? You are Lord Borrowdale. She is Mrs. Seaforth."

"I wasn't Lord Borrowdale or Lord Anything when we were married eight years ago, but plain Ronald Seaforth."

"We staid married a year," said Mabel. "Then happened that 'family quarrel' I spoke about. I do really think we were both young [I was 19]; we both had bad tempers. I had a parrot and he had a dog, and his dog killed my parrot, and—well, anyhow, we hadn't laid eyes upon each other for six years—until—until—"

This Christmas house party of Mrs. Ogilvy's, Borrowdale finished the sentence for her.

"Good old blizzard!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Good old Christmas, and—good old Mrs. Mackellar!" breathed Carrie.

It was only fair that she should tell the housekeeper the romantic result of her inspiration, which she slipped away to before the evening was over. "Only to think of their being husband and wife!" she repeated for the fifth time.

Mrs. Mackellar sighed patiently. "O, I know that madam, all the time."