

CHAPTER 1

HOME

Ronnie, May 16, 1905

18 Woodside Terrace, Glasgow

My dear Teddie,

I hope you are having a good time and enjoying yourself.

Have you made many runs at cricket – the weather has not been very nice.

I hope you will get on well at the Sports. I won a prize at the Sports my first term, but never got any more.

Have you seen Charlie yet? I suppose he will be over at the Sports.

I hope you are learning to swim, and that you like the Baths. It is a very nice wee Bath at Cargilfield, and you will enjoy the Fettes Baths when you go there, they are much bigger.

Bertie went off to Drumhead yesterday. Uncle Cam came up in the motor for him but unfortunately it was raining.

I am to get a holiday at the end of May – and am going up to London in a motor with John Bell – won't that be a jolly ride, 405 miles.

With love from,

Ronnie

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Bertie, July 21, 1909

18 Woodside Terrace, Glasgow

Dear Ronnie,

Well, I have done it. I am now a married man and write from this address for the final time. We returned from the honeymoon last night

and have a further night here before moving into our new home. Won't that be strange? Mr and Mrs Anderson at home!

I am determined to inform you of every single detail about the day – whether you are interested or not, dear brother! It rained (Scotland does not change) but that had little influence over proceedings as the Gilmours had everything arranged to perfection. In truth it was all much of a blur, so many have a call on your time and we were constantly being whisked here and there with smiles fixed in place across our faces, part pure happiness, the remainder pure bemusement. I could not tell you with any conviction who was there, apart from everyone who mattered (with one notable exception!). At any rate, in your absence Charlie did a noble job as best man, altho' public speaking was obviously not something instructed by Sandhurst. It did not seem to matter. As always with Charlie his earnest smile was enough to win a laugh after another stuttering story, and his uniform lent him a splendid air. I never wore anything quite so grand in my weekend soldiering I can tell you.

The Boy Soldier cut a dash through Woodbank, Tuppie's quite taken I fear! He had a weekend leave from his battalion and then it was back to Montrose, where at least he is not too far from Strathairly. Tuppie is now keen to accompany Gertrude and I whenever we head east to Strathairly, in her new role as sister-in-law of course!

Mother spends more and more time out in Fife, she is keen to leave Glasgow and wants Dad to come out too and take more of a back seat at the firm. I fear it's a lost cause. The two of them just sat and beamed their way through the day.

Which is more than Little Ben did. Our youngest brother does hate to be upstaged and the roll of chief usher was little consolation I fear. Mother calling him Honey Bee within hearing of Allan Gilmour didn't lighten his mood either. Nor did Charlie and I win favour by calling him Little Ben in public – he considers himself far too grown up to answer to those childhood names any more! Poor Teddie, as he insists we must call him!

He was particularly envious of Charlie and his uniform, and at one point during the evening he announced that he intended to join the army as soon as he left school, but not in some 'awful infantry regiment'. He stayed till the bitter end tho', he's a sticker. I think Fettes will do him wonders, bring out the best and knock off the edges. Or

send him to the other side of the world like it did to you, dear Ron!

So now you have a sister to contend with as well. I tell you, she looked a picture. I will send you a photograph we had taken outside the church with all the party, perhaps the happiest moment on a happy day (tho' we all missed you not being there). I know Gertie and I belong together.

We had a wonderful ten days up north, the Gilmour's gave us use of one of their lodges and we walked and walked, must have covered half of Sutherland. I also taught her to fish, but I don't think I made a very able tutor as we caught nothing between us. The motor back to Glasgow felt very arduous after such a glorious time.

Now Gertie has the house to organise and I have work to contend with again. It seems an age since I was last in the office. That is all going well, Norman and I are taking more and more off the old men. It leaves them to get on with their own favourite areas and gives us more of the day-to-day running of the company's affairs. Again happiness all round – it is good to write such a jolly letter. Not a cloud on the horizon.

Frank Donald and George Harvey both send their hearty best. I am trying to rope Frank into the young unionists, his livewire approach is just what we need in Glasgow. As for George, well he's still George.

What news from Canada? I do hope the fruit business is prospering. It never ceases to surprise people when we say you are a fruit farmer, not the occupation most would have chosen for you Ron.

I must close now. Do write soon and let us know your plans. Dad does worry about you, he would like to know you are on to something solid.

With much love,

Bertie

ps Mrs Anderson sends her regards to her new brother!

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Charlie, October 14, 1912

Solon, India

Dearest Tuppie,

Thank you ever so much for another long letter and the photographs too. So good to see you all, and Strathairly too – a pity only

that it was not in the flesh! It was silly of me not to bring any photographs out, I never even thought to do it. I do miss it all, tho' I suppose I have to learn to accept it. I chose to do this so that's that. At any rate, it is not as if I don't enjoy it. It is such an adventure, travelling all the way out here and then seeing such sights.

What an amazing country, and the heat, you would not believe how hot it is. Parading in full uniforms is quite a battle. I'm not sure the heat would suit you. It is ever so dusty too, when the company goes off on route marches we kick up great clouds of dust – any enemy would see us coming from miles off!

I have some news. I have been promoted to Lieutenant, the youngest in the battalion. They will have to stop calling me the babe of the regiment now! It has been terribly embarrassing to carry that label, especially at dinners when ladies are present and one of the captains will address me loudly as 'Babe' and turn me scarlet.

To answer your question, I am afraid I will not be coming home any time soon, altho' I should be due for a long leave in just under two years from now. I know it seems a long time, but you watch, it will fly by and before you know it I will be back in Scotland.

I have had one short leave here. Myself and Grant went up to the hills for a few days and away from the heat. They are very beautiful and we took long walks through the forests looking for monkeys and strange, colourful birds. The station we stayed at looked just like an English village and there were several officers from other regiments up there as well on holidays. None of us were keen to go back down to the camp. One of them took some photographs which he promised to send on and I will send some to you when I next write.

So for now it is back to the routine of everyday life in the army. Some days are arduous, some are just plain boring, but soldiering is still the occupation for me. I hear your brother may agree with me. Bertie wrote that Allan is thinking of joining the yeomanry. You should hear what the others here say about the cavalry, terrible things that I could not put in a letter. Do tell him he must never look down on us foot men!

Bertie's main news was that we are now each an uncle and aunt. Have you seen the wee Allan? You must tell me all about him. Have the couple changed since the new arrival? Bertie has always been terribly grown-up, suppose that comes with being the eldest, but now a father

too. Mother will have someone other than Little Ben to dote upon now.

We have a brigade sports day at the end of the month. It is to be a huge affair with the final of company football and rugby competitions, athletic events and a finale of the tug of war. I am to take part in some of the running, something I haven't done since Fettes. I can see you smiling as you read, you are terribly cruel. This evening we have a practice for it so I must go to prepare.

Wish me luck and do write soon.

With all my love,

Charlie

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Ronnie, March 3, 1914

Umtali, Rhodesia

Dear Dad,

I write with news. I am coming home. Whether that's good news or not I don't know! I assure you tho' Dad I am not in any trouble or difficulty. Now that is good news surely?

I plan to leave here in a month or so and will be back for the Scottish summer. I have missed them, I really have. The smells and most of all the colour, the greenness of Strathairly and all around. Would we be able to all go up to Loch Inver for a time? I do like it out here and I am prospering, believe me Dad I am, but it is Scotland I feel that suits me best, if only I could be sure of it and sure of what I want to do. I intend to take the journey and voyage to come to a decision and so when I arrive home you will have the news you want – I promise you that.

Whether to farm? They have made me so welcome out here and I can stay if I want to. They have found a temporary manager to take over the ranch while I come home but he will step aside when I return. I have not told them I might not be coming back. Is that terrible? I do adore the ranch life here, more so than the fruit farm in Canada. That did tend towards squishy tedium, and it was beginning to turn my hands purple. Here the life is so active, so physical and always challenging.

Any so, I face quite a journey to get home, altho' it's almost the reverse of coming out so I know what to expect. I find I am not a good traveller, I'm always keen to arrive, and I inevitably mislay tickets and the

like. I do hope it goes smoother than coming out. I will get the train down to Cape Town from Bulawayo – I will ride there as it is still the easiest way to get about.

You should see me on board my steed. I'm quite the horseman now altho' I am told, when my esteemed colleagues have supped, that I strike a ridiculous pose in the saddle. That rather hurt me, but they say my legs are not to scale – even by Anderson standards. Apparently I look like a stork riding a Shetland pony! I refuse to believe it!

I intend to spend several days in Cape Town before catching the boat as it is a beautiful place and well worth exploring properly. One of the managers here has a friend with whom I can stay. From there I will telegram the details of my passage.

I am looking forward to getting back. So much has changed since I left. I am looking forward to seeing my two wee nephews, Bertie was proud in his letters and I am sure you and Mother are too.

I had a letter from Charlie saying that he is hopeful he will get leave very soon and be able to come home, altho' he said one must always guard against the whims of the military.

That helped prompt me into a decision to come back. It is something I have been pondering for several months now and at last I am acting. How like me I am sure you're saying.

It has been sometime since we were all at Strathairly together. More than six years by my reckoning. I only know Little Ben as a boy. How he must have changed. He writes excellent letters, full of his exploits and plans. What a young man he must be. Has he decided on his path? I suppose I will find out when I get back.

With Gertie and the boys and all of us back at Strathairly there will not be a moment's peace for you or Mother. I don't suppose you are looking forward to it one jot!

It is peculiar that I have rarely thought of the comforts of home – life is so constant here there is rarely the chance – yet writing this has sent me off into daydream after daydream. The sound of the motor crossing the gravel outside the house, the echo of conversation as people come into the hall and then in the evening the provocative smells from the kitchen. I miss Glasgow too. The bustle and motion of the city, even its greyness!

I must stop this otherwise I will write myself into a decision and announce it before everyone here.