

## A Tale of Love and Deception



It was a late October afternoon in the Lord's year 1906 as the 'SS Lothian Warrior', unhappy tramp steamer that she was, pulled awkwardly away from the darkened wooden pier in the dirty harbour port of Glasgow, Scotland on its way to Australia and New Zealand. Its ship's horn, like dying bagpipes, moaned sadly towards the west and the light of day turned into evening. Rain was drizzling and cold blasts of icy wind froze the lost faces of the quiet passengers leaning on the starboard railing of the old ship and darkening clouds scudded across the swiftly flowing waters of the River Clyde. The wind frothed at the peaks of the cold slopping waves, turning them into grey menacing foam and homing seagulls screeched and swirled in the black sky.

William Ewart Gladstone Bell, better known to his friends and colleagues as 'Gladdie', stood glumly in the shelter of the ship's funnel, shielded from the blast of the cold wind and the whipping rain. His thoughts were melancholy as he stared at the small black figures standing close below, waving sadly from the lonely harbour dock. Thus, sunk in his thoughts as he was, Gladstone hardly noticed the pretty, young Scots lass who had neared him from the backbord side and now stood next to him. Bonnie-looking, with black shining hair and wrapped in a dark warm winter coat, Gladstone estimated her age at about 19 or 20 years. Maybe the 40-day

passage to Australia, he surmised optimistically, was not going to be as boring and unpleasant as he had contemplated. Only this morning, while his good wife Mary had packed his small ship's trunk and their ill-tempered baby child had wailed continuously from the kitchen, had he wondered whether the decision to emigrate to such a far-off land as Australia, initially leaving his family behind, had been right.

"Ullo there!", the dark-haired lass said to him, tilting her happy head to one side and smiling coyly at Gladstone, an impish gleam in her soft steel-blue eyes. "My names's Flora McIntyre and I've come from the Isle of Skye and I'm only 18 and on my way to New Zealand to meet my cousin Mr. Raymond in Christchurch who's going to one of the best painters on the island and one day have his works displayed in the 'Waikato Art Museum'!" With this Flora stopped to catch her breath and then asked demurely "And who's you and where's you's going?!"

"I, my dear child," said Gladstone, immitating a very good Oxford English accent, coloured with a mixed touch of Sunderland makem slang and Glaswegian patter, "am William Ewart Gladstone Bell, on my way to an unknown Australia to become a well-known musician and later a well-loved professor of the cello at the 'Sydney Conservatorium of Music'. But you , young lady", he added smilingly, "are, I trust, hopefully not travelling alone on this good ship - are you?"

"Oh, but indeed, Gladdie!" Flora answered, immitating a lost black lamb and biting her lip. "By the way", she asked, "I may call you Gladdie, mayn't I? Sounds better than 'Willy', don't you think? And you can call me Florrie! Yes, yes I'm afraid," she continued, "so quite alone - and that, all the way to New Zealand - isn't that just awful? My mum didn't have enough money for two fares out, so I 'ope there won't be any lecherous old men on board like I've read about in the 'Daily Skye' newspaper. You know - those men, 24 years old and such and travelling without their families! Now that would be terrible, wouldn't it - me at my age, alone and afraid and nobody to turn to for assistance and all that!" For a moment, Florrie stopped, thoughts drifting across her knitted brow. "Oh," she said, staring at the waiting relatives and friends below. "Oh, oh - just got so carried away, almost forgot my mum! That's 'er down there on the quay to the right. Yes - the one standing next to the old lady in the black cape with the squalling bairn on her arm! Can you see her, Gladdie - together with the lady who looks like a barmaid...?"

"Ah yes, indeed." mumbled Gladstone, "I do indeed see an old barmaid with a child and I wonder who they're waving at - and I see your mother of course . But perhaps you should wave kindly to her while we pull out into the murky river waters of the Clyde. And, if you so wish," he said, "I'll wave as well - just to show your mother that you're already in good hands and honest company! That will be a relief for her, no doubt ..." And so it was indeed, that Florrie's mother was relieved and waved back happily to her bonnie wee daughter on her way to New Zealand and a new life. And the little old lady in the cape with the nasty child on her arm also waved - again and again, uttering growling complaints and calling out unclear threats. But fortunately the wind and the rain and the wail of the ship's horn cut off the strange incongruous angry words she shouted and these were carried out on the wind and down the river and into the night and were lost for all time.

And so it was that the 'SS Lothian Warrior' slipped away from the Glasgow quay and headed into the night waters of the River Clyde, sailing 'doon the watter' as the natives said, on its way to the Firth of Clyde and into the Atlantic Ocean and on to Tennerife, Australia and New Zealand. "Ah", said Gladstone, "how sad you must be feeling, dear Florrie, leaving your old and hapless mother behind, to sail to the ends of a new, new world." And saying this, Gladstone put his comforting arm around her shoulders and led her into the warm passenger saloon bar which had just opened. "A good Scot's whisky", Gladstone said, "will no doubt cheer us both, Florrie, and I'm sure we're going to become great friends on this long trip around the world and to a new country and a new life. And if you so later wish, I'll show you where the music plays and you can come down to my cabin and see my cello ...". "Oh!" said Florrie, quite enchanted, "That does sound like good fun, doesn't it, Gladdie? - But you arn't 'alf a naughty one, now arn't you?!"

So, with a last wail of the ship's horn, began a long but happy and exciting voyage for Gladdie and for Florrie, first to Sydney in Australia, where Gladstone, having forgotten to leave the ship, still had time to cable his honest Mary, announcing his good arrival in the new homeland Australia and sending his loving wishes to their dear baby son. And then it was on to a new New Zealand and a new merry Christchurch, where in 1907 Florrie's cousin Raymond McIntyre did a time-honoured oil painting of 'Gladstone Bell and his Cello', which today hangs in the sacred halls of the New Zealand 'Waikato Art Museum' in Waikato. And the story became a fact and believed by all the family, that Gladstone had arrived in Australia in 1906 and had later become, as he had planned, a well-known musician and then a professor at the 'Sydney Conservatorium of Music'.

What became of bonnie Flora McIntyre is an unknown tale, but native Maoris still repeat around their campfires in the hush of the evening, that when the moon is full and rises above the hills, shadowy figures with shining black hair can be seen flitting from glen to glen, laughing and joking, singing and dancing and playing the old Skye island tunes of yesteryear on their precious cellos to the accompaniment of the drone and lilt of the bagpipes ...

§§§§§§§

Note from the author - This story is indeed fictitious, but based on fact. With the exception of Flora McIntyre, all persons named really existed and the journey to Australia and New Zealand indeed took place, when possibly not quite as indicated. William Ewart Gladstone Bell, who preferred to use the name "Gladstone" and was called "Gladdie" by his friends and associates, was born in 1881 in Sunderland, England. In 1904 he married Mary Pennycuik Whapole Scott, a barmaid, near Glasgow, Scotland and on 22. February 1906 their son John Stevenson Bell, my father, was born in Wishaw, Lanarkshire. According to the tales of history - the story as told by Gladstone himself - the family emigrated from Glasgow to Sydney, Australia sometime in late 1906. However, this was not so and professional photos of my father in a kilt were taken in a Glasgow photo studio around 1910. This proves that my father was not in Australia up to that time, but probably, together with his mother, was then still in Glasgow. As told in the story above, in 1907 the now well-known painter and artist, Raymond McIntyre, then a student in Christchurch, New Zealand, painted a portrait of my grandfather with his cello, the painting today being exhibited in New Zealand in the 'Waikato Art Museum'. A report in the Christchurch Musical Union programme for 1907 shows that Gladstone appeared in a concert there at "His Majesty's Theatre" on 26 September 1907. In addition, an article in "The Daily Telegraph", Sydney, Australia on 6. June 1909 announced that on the previous evening, "Mr. Gladstone Bell, a cellist who recently arrived in Sydney, gave an invitation concert at the Y.M.C.A. Hall". As stated above, Gladstone always maintained that between 1906 and 1910, when he returned to Scotland following the death of his father, he had been settled in Sydney and nothing has ever been mentioned as to his residing in New Zealand at any time. So, where was Gladstone in those three long missing years and - of course - more importantly, with whom was he missing!?

Lionel W. Bell

1. June 2019