

## BOOK II: VISSARION

Letter from Rupert Sent Leger, Castle of Vissarion, the Spear of Ivan, Land of the Blue Mountains, to Miss Janet MacKelpie, Croom Castle, Ross-shire, N.B.

January 23, 1907.

MY DEAREST AUNT JANET,

As you see, I am here at last. Having got my formal duty done, as you made me promise—my letters reporting arrival to Sir Colin and Mr. Trent are lying sealed in front of me ready to post (for nothing shall go before yours)—I am free to speak to you.

This is a most lovely place, and I hope you will like it. I am quite sure you will. We passed it in the steamer coming from Trieste to Durazzo. I knew the locality from the chart, and it was pointed out to me by one of the officers with whom I had become quite friendly, and who kindly showed me interesting places whenever we got within sight of shore. The Spear of Ivan, on which the Castle stands, is a headland running well out into the sea. It is quite a peculiar place—a sort of headland on a headland, jutting out into a deep, wide bay, so that, though it is a promontory, it is as far away from the traffic of coast life as anything you can conceive. The main promontory is the end of a range of mountains, and looms up vast, towering over everything, a mass of sapphire blue. I can well understand how the country came to be called the “Land of the Blue Mountains,” for it is all mountains, and they are all blue! The coast-line is magnificent—what is called “iron-bound”—being all rocky; sometimes great frowning precipices; sometimes jutting spurs of rock; again little rocky islets, now and again clad with trees and verdure, at other places stark and bare. Elsewhere are little rocky bays and indentations—always rock, and often with long, interesting caves. Some of the shores of the bays are sandy, or else ridges of beautiful pebbles, where the waves make endless murmur.

But of all the places I have seen—in this land or any other—the most absolutely beautiful is Vissarion. It stands at the ultimate point of the promontory—I mean the little, or, rather, lesser promontory—that continues on the spur of the mountain range. For the lesser promontory or extension of the mountain is in reality vast; the lowest bit of cliff along the sea-front is not less than a couple of hundred feet high. That point of rock is really very peculiar. I think Dame Nature must, in the early days of her housekeeping—or, rather, house-BUILDING—have intended to give her little child, man, a rudimentary lesson in self-protection. It is just a natural bastion such as a titanic Vauban might have designed in primeval times. So far as the Castle is concerned, it is alone visible from the sea. Any enemy approaching could see only that frowning wall of black rock, of vast height and perpendicular steepness. Even the old fortifications which crown it are not built, but cut in the solid rock. A long narrow creek of very deep water, walled in by high, steep cliffs, runs in behind the Castle, bending north and west, making safe and secret anchorage. Into the creek falls over a precipice a mountain-stream, which never fails in volume of water. On the western shore of that creek is the Castle, a huge pile of buildings of every style of architecture, from the Twelfth century to where such things seemed to stop in this dear old-world land—about the time of Queen Elizabeth. So it is pretty picturesque. I can tell you. When we got the first glimpse of the place from the steamer the officer, with whom I was on the bridge, pointed towards it and said:

“That is where we saw the dead woman floating in a coffin.” That was rather interesting, so I asked him all about it. He took from his pocket-book a cutting from an Italian paper, which he handed to me. As I can read and speak Italian fairly well, it was all right; but as you, my dear Aunt Janet, are not skilled in languages, and as I doubt if there is any assistance of the kind to be

had at Croom, I do not send it. But as I have heard that the item has been produced in the last number of *The Journal of Occultism*, you will be easily able to get it. As he handed me the cutting he said: "I am Destilia!" His story was so strange that I asked him a good many questions about it. He answered me quite frankly on every point, but always adhering stoutly to the main point—namely, that it was no phantom or mirage, no dream or imperfect vision in a fog. "We were four in all who saw it," he said—"three from the bridge and the Englishman, Caulfield—from the bows—whose account exactly agreed with what we saw. Captain Mirolani and Falamano and I were all awake and in good trim. We looked with our night-glasses, which are more than usually powerful. You know, we need good glasses for the east shore of the Adriatic and for among the islands to the south. There was a full moon and a brilliant light. Of course we were a little way off, for though the Spear of Ivan is in deep water, one has to be careful of currents, for it is in just such places that the dangerous currents run." The agent of Lloyd's told me only a few weeks ago that it was only after a prolonged investigation of the tidal and sea currents that the house decided to except from ordinary sea risks losses due to a too close course by the Spear of Ivan. When I tried to get a little more definite account of the coffin-boat and the dead lady that is given in *The Journal of Occultism* he simply shrugged his shoulders. "Signor, it is all," he said. "That Englishman wrote everything after endless questioning."

So you see, my dear, that our new home is not without superstitious interests of its own. It is rather a nice idea, is it not, to have a dead woman cruising round our promontory in a coffin? I doubt if even at Croom you can beat that. "Makes the place kind of homey," as an American would say. When you come, Aunt Janet, you will not feel lonesome, at any rate, and it will save us the trouble of importing some of your Highland ghosts to make you feel at home in the new land. I don't know, but we might ask the stiff to come to tea with us. Of course, it would be a late tea. Somewhere between midnight and cock-crow would be about the etiquette of the thing, I fancy!

But I must tell you all the realities of the Castle and around it. So I will write again within a day or two, and try to let you know enough to prepare you for coming here. Till then adieu, my dear.

Your loving  
RUPERT.

From Rupert Sent Leger, Vissarion, to Janet MacKelpie, Croom.

January 25, 1907.

I hope I did not frighten you, dear Aunt Janet, by the yarn of the lady in the coffin. But I know you are not afraid; you have told me too many weird stories for me to dread that. Besides, you have Second Sight—latent, at all events. However, there won't be any more ghosts, or about ghosts, in this letter. I want to tell you all about our new home. I am so glad you are coming out so soon; I am beginning to feel so lonesome—I walk about sometimes aimlessly, and find my thoughts drifting in such an odd way. If I didn't know better, I might begin to think I was in love! There is no one here to be in love with; so make your mind easy, Aunt Janet. Not that you would be unhappy, I know, dear, if I DID fall in love. I suppose I must marry some day. It is a duty now, I know, when there is such an estate as Uncle Roger has left me. And I know this: I shall never marry any woman unless I love her. And I am right sure that if I do love her you will love her, too, Aunt Janet! Won't you, dear? It wouldn't be half a delight if you didn't. It won't if you don't. There, now!

But before I begin to describe Vissarion I shall throw a sop to you as a chatelaine; that may give you patience to read the rest. The Castle needs a lot of things to make it comfortable—as you would consider it. In fact, it is absolutely destitute of everything of a domestic nature. Uncle Roger had it vetted on the defence side, and so far it could stand a siege. But it couldn't cook a dinner or go through a spring-cleaning! As you know, I am not much up in domestic matters, and so I cannot give you details; but you may take it that it wants everything. I don't mean furniture, or silver, or even gold-plate, or works of art, for it is full of the most magnificent old things that you can imagine. I think Uncle Roger must have been a collector, and gathered a lot of good things in all sorts of places, stored them for years, and then sent them here. But as to glass, china, delft, all sorts of crockery, linen, household appliances and machinery, cooking utensils—except of the simplest—there are none. I don't think Uncle Roger could have lived here more than on a temporary picnic. So far as I only am concerned, I am all right; a gridiron and a saucepan are all I want—and I can use them myself. But, dear Aunt Janet, I don't want you to pig it. I would like you to have everything you can imagine, and all of the very best. Cost doesn't count now for us, thanks to Uncle Roger; and so I want you to order all. I know you, dear—being a woman—won't object to shopping. But it will have to be wholesale. This is an enormous place, and will swallow up all you can buy—like a quicksand. Do as you like about choosing, but get all the help you can. Don't be afraid of getting too much. You can't, or of being idle when you are here. I assure you that when you come there will be so much to do and so many things to think of that you will want to get away from it all. And, besides, Aunt Janet, I hope you won't be too long. Indeed, I don't wish to be selfish, but your boy is lonely, and wants you. And when you get here you will be an EMPRESS. I don't altogether like doing so, lest I should offend a millionairess like you; but it may facilitate matters, and the way's of commerce are strict, though devious. So I send you a cheque for 1,000 pounds for the little things: and a letter to the bank to honour your own cheques for any amount I have got.

I think, by the way, I should, if I were you, take or send out a few servants—not too many at first, only just enough to attend on our two selves. You can arrange to send for any more you may want later. Engage them, and arrange for their being paid—when they are in our service we must treat them well—and then they can be at our call as you find that we want them. I think you should secure, say, fifty or a hundred—'tis an awfu' big place, Aunt Janet! And in the same way will you secure—and, of course, arrange for pay similarly—a hundred men, exclusive of any servants you think it well to have. I should like the General, if he can give the time, to choose or pass them. I want clansmen that I can depend on, if need be. We are going to live in a country which is at present strange to us, and it is well to look things in the face. I know Sir Colin will only have men who are a credit to Scotland and to Ross and to Croom—men who will impress the Blue Mountaineers. I know they will take them to their hearts—certainly if any of them are bachelors the girls will! Forgive me! But if we are to settle here, our followers will probably want to settle also. Moreover, the Blue Mountaineers may want followers also! And will want them to settle, too, and have successors!

Now for the description of the place. Well, I simply can't just now. It is all so wonderful and so beautiful. The Castle—I have written so much already about other things that I really must keep the Castle for another letter! Love to Sir Colin if he is at Croom. And oh, dear Aunt Janet, how I wish that my dear mother was coming out! It all seems so dark and empty without her. How she would have enjoyed it! How proud she would have been! And, my dear, if she could be with us again, how grateful she would have been to you for all you have done for her boy! As I am, believe me, most truly and sincerely and affectionately grateful.

Your loving  
RUPERT.

Rupert Sent Leger, Vissarion, to Janet MacKelpie, Croom.

January 26, 1907.

MY DEAR AUNT JANET,

Please read this as if it was a part of the letter I wrote yesterday.

The Castle itself is so vast that I really can't describe it in detail. So I am waiting till you come; and then you and I will go over it together and learn all that we can about it. We shall take Rooke with us, and, as he is supposed to know every part of it, from the keep to the torture-chamber, we can spend a few days over it. Of course, I have been over most of it, since I came—that, is, I went at various times to see different portions—the battlements, the bastions, the old guard-room, the hall, the chapel, the walls, the roof. And I have been through some of the network of rock passages. Uncle Roger must have spent a mint of money on it, so far as I can see; and though I am not a soldier, I have been in so many places fortified in different ways that I am not entirely ignorant of the subject. He has restored it in such an up-to-date way that it is practically impregnable to anything under big guns or a siege-train. He has gone so far as to have certain outworks and the keep covered with armoured plating of what looks like harveyized steel. You will wonder when you see it. But as yet I really know only a few rooms, and am familiar with only one—my own room. The drawing-room—not the great hall, which is a vast place; the library—a magnificent one, but in sad disorder—we must get a librarian some day to put it in trim; and the drawing-room and boudoir and bedroom suite which I have selected for you, are all fine. But my own room is what suits me best, though I do not think you would care for it for yourself. If you do, you shall have it. It was Uncle Roger's own room when he stayed here; living in it for a few days served to give me more insight to his character—or rather to his mind—than I could have otherwise had. It is just the kind of place I like myself; so, naturally, I understand the other chap who liked it too. It is a fine big room, not quite within the Castle, but an outlying part of it. It is not detached, or anything of that sort, but is a sort of garden-room built on to it. There seems to have been always some sort of place where it is, for the passages and openings inside seem to accept or recognize it. It can be shut off if necessary—it would be in case of attack—by a great slab of steel, just like the door of a safe, which slides from inside the wall, and can be operated from either inside or outside—if you know how. That is from my room or from within the keep. The mechanism is a secret, and no one but Rooke and I know it. The room opens out through a great French window—the French window is modern, I take it, and was arranged by or for Uncle Roger; I think there must have been always a large opening there, for centuries at least—which opens on a wide terrace or balcony of white marble, extending right and left. From this a white marble stair lies straight in front of the window, and leads down to the garden. The balcony and staircase are quite ancient—of old Italian work, beautifully carved, and, of course, weather-worn through centuries. There is just that little tinging of green here and there which makes all outdoor marble so charming. It is hard to believe at times that it is a part of a fortified castle, it is so elegant and free and open. The first glance of it would make a burglar's heart glad. He would say to himself: "Here is the sort of crib I like when I'm on the job. You can just walk in and out as you choose." But, Aunt Janet, old Roger was cuter than any burglar. He had the place so guarded that the burglar would have been a baffled burglar. There are two steel shields which can slide out from the wall and lock into the other side right across the whole big

window. One is a grille of steel bands that open out into diamond-shaped lozenges. Nothing bigger than a kitten could get through; and yet you can see the garden and the mountains and the whole view—much the same as you ladies can see through your veils. The other is a great sheet of steel, which slides out in a similar way in different grooves. It is not, of course, so heavy and strong as the safe-door which covers the little opening in the main wall, but Rooke tells me it is proof against the heaviest rifle-hall.

Having told you this, I must tell you, too, Aunt Janet, lest you should be made anxious by the *arriere-pensee* of all these warlike measures of defence, that I always sleep at night with one of these iron screens across the window. Of course, when I am awake I leave it open. As yet I have tried only, but not used, the grille; and I don't think I shall ever use anything else, for it is a perfect guard. If it should be tampered with from outside it would sound an alarm at the head of the bed, and the pressing of a button would roll out the solid steel screen in front of it. As a matter of fact, I have been so used to the open that I don't feel comfortable shut in. I only close windows against cold or rain. The weather here is delightful—as yet, at all events—but they tell me that the rainy season will be on us before very long.

I think you will like my den, aunty dear, though it will doubtless be a worry to you to see it so untidy. But that can't be helped. I must be untidy SOMEWHERE; and it is best in my own den!

Again I find my letter so long that I must cut it off now and go on again to-night. So this must go as it stands. I shall not cause you to wait to hear all I can tell you about our new home.

Your loving  
RUPERT.

From Rupert Sent Leger, Vissarion, to Janet MacKelpie, Croom.

January 29, 1907.

MY DEAR AUNT JANET,

My den looks out, as I told you in my last letter, on the garden, or, to speak more accurately, on ONE of the gardens, for there are acres of them. This is the old one, which must be almost as old as the Castle itself, for it was within the defences in the old days of bows. The wall that surrounds the inner portion of it has long ago been levelled, but sufficient remains at either end where it joined the outer defences to show the long casemates for the bowmen to shoot through and the raised stone gallery where they stood. It is just the same kind of building as the stone-work of the sentry's walk on the roof and of the great old guard-room under it.

But whatever the garden may have been, and no matter how it was guarded, it is a most lovely place. There are whole sections of garden here of various styles—Greek, Italian, French, German, Dutch, British, Spanish, African, Moorish—all the older nationalities. I am going to have a new one laid out for you—a Japanese garden. I have sent to the great gardener of Japan, Minaro, to make the plans for it, and to come over with workmen to carry it out. He is to bring trees and shrubs and flowers and stone-work, and everything that can be required; and you shall superintend the finishing, if not the doing, of it yourself. We have such a fine head of water here, and the climate is, they tell me, usually so lovely that we can do anything in the gardening way. If it should ever turn out that the climate does not suit, we shall put a great high glass roof over it, and MAKE a suitable climate.

This garden in front of my room is the old Italian garden. It must have been done with extraordinary taste and care, for there is not a bit of it which is not rarely beautiful. Sir Thomas Browne himself, for all his Quincunx, would have been delighted with it, and have found

material for another “Garden of Cyrus.” It is so big that there are endless “episodes” of garden beauty I think all Italy must have been ransacked in old times for garden stone-work of exceptional beauty; and these treasures have been put together by some master-hand. Even the formal borders of the walks are of old porous stone, which takes the weather-staining so beautifully, and are carved in endless variety. Now that the gardens have been so long neglected or left in abeyance, the green staining has become perfect. Though the stone-work is itself intact, it has all the picturesque effect of the wear and ruin wrought by many centuries. I am having it kept for you just as it is, except that I have had the weeds and undergrowth cleared away so that its beauties might be visible.

But it is not merely the architect work of the garden that is so beautiful, nor is the assembling there of the manifold wealth of floral beauty—there is the beauty that Nature creates by the hand of her servant, Time. You see, Aunt Janet, how the beautiful garden inspires a danger-hardened old tramp like me to high-grade sentiments of poetic fancy! Not only have limestone and sandstone, and even marble, grown green in time, but even the shrubs planted and then neglected have developed new kinds of beauty of their own. In some far-distant time some master-gardener of the Vissarions has tried to realize an idea—that of tiny plants that would grow just a little higher than the flowers, so that the effect of an uneven floral surface would be achieved without any hiding of anything in the garden seen from anywhere. This is only my reading of what has been from the effect of what is! In the long period of neglect the shrubs have outlived the flowers. Nature has been doing her own work all the time in enforcing the survival of the fittest. The shrubs have grown and grown, and have overtopped flower and weed, according to their inherent varieties of stature; to the effect that now you see irregularly scattered through the garden quite a number—for it is a big place—of vegetable products which from a landscape standpoint have something of the general effect of statues without the cramping feeling of detail. Whoever it was that laid out that part of the garden or made the choice of items, must have taken pains to get strange specimens, for all those taller shrubs are in special colours, mostly yellow or white—white cypress, white holly, yellow yew, grey-golden box, silver juniper, variegated maple, spiraea, and numbers of dwarf shrubs whose names I don’t know. I only know that when the moon shines—and this, my dear Aunt Janet, is the very land of moonlight itself!—they all look ghastly pale. The effect is weird to the last degree, and I am sure that you will enjoy it. For myself, as you know, uncanny things hold no fear. I suppose it is that I have been up against so many different kinds of fears, or, rather, of things which for most people have terrors of their own, that I have come to have a contempt—not an active contempt, you know, but a tolerative contempt—for the whole family of them. And you, too, will enjoy yourself here famously, I know. You’ll have to collect all the stories of such matters in our new world and make a new book of facts for the Psychical Research Society. It will be nice to see your own name on a title-page, won’t it, Aunt Janet?

From Rupert Sent Leger, Vissarion, to Janet MacKelpie, Croom.

January 30, 1907.

MY DEAR AUNT JANET,

I stopped writing last night—do you know why? Because I wanted to write more! This sounds a paradox, but it is true. The fact is that, as I go on telling you of this delightful place, I keep finding out new beauties myself. Broadly speaking, it IS ALL beautiful. In the long view or the little view—as the telescope or the microscope directs—it is all the same. Your eye can turn on

nothing that does not entrance you. I was yesterday roaming about the upper part of time Castle, and came across some delightful nooks, which at once I became fond of, and already like them as if I had known them all my life. I felt at first a sense of greediness when I had appropriated to myself several rooms in different places—I who have never in my life had more than one room which I could call my own—and that only for a time! But when I slept on it the feeling changed, and its aspect is now not half bad. It is now under another classification—under a much more important label—PROPRIETORSHIP. If I were writing philosophy, I should here put in a cynical remark:

“Selfishness is an appanage of poverty. It might appear in the stud-book as by ‘Morals’ out of ‘Wants.’ ”

I have now three bedrooms arranged as my own particular dens. One of the other two was also a choice of Uncle Roger’s. It is at the top of one of the towers to the extreme east, and from it I can catch the first ray of light over the mountains. I slept in it last night, and when I woke, as in my travelling I was accustomed to do, at dawn, I saw from my bed through an open window—a small window, for it is in a fortress tower—the whole great expanse to the east. Not far off, and springing from the summit of a great ruin, where long ago a seed had fallen, rose a great silver-birch, and the half-transparent, drooping branches and hanging clusters of leaf broke the outline of the grey hills beyond, for the hills were, for a wonder, grey instead of blue. There was a mackerel sky, with the clouds dropping on the mountain-tops till you could hardly say which was which. It was a mackerel sky of a very bold and extraordinary kind—not a dish of mackerel, but a world of mackerel! The mountains are certainly most lovely. In this clear air they usually seem close at hand. It was only this morning, with the faint glimpse of the dawn whilst the night clouds were still unpierced by the sunlight, that I seemed to realize their greatness. I have seen the same enlightening effect of aerial perspective a few times before—in Colorado, in Upper India, in Thibet, and in the uplands amongst the Andes.

There is certainly something in looking at things from above which tends to raise one’s own self-esteem. From the height, inequalities simply disappear. This I have often felt on a big scale when ballooning, or, better still, from an aeroplane. Even here from the tower the outlook is somehow quite different from below. One realizes the place and all around it, not in detail, but as a whole. I shall certainly sleep up here occasionally, when you have come and we have settled down to our life as it is to be. I shall live in my own room downstairs, where I can have the intimacy of the garden. But I shall appreciate it all the more from now and again losing the sense of intimacy for a while, and surveying it without the sense of one’s own self-importance.

I hope you have started on that matter of the servants. For myself, I don’t care a button whether or not there are any servants at all; but I know well that you won’t come till you have made your arrangements regarding them! Another thing, Aunt Janet. You must not be killed with work here, and it is all so vast . . . Why can’t you get some sort of secretary who will write your letters and do all that sort of thing for you? I know you won’t have a man secretary; but there are lots of women now who can write shorthand and typewrite. You could doubtless get one in the clan—someone with a desire to better herself. I know you would make her happy here. If she is not too young, all the better; she will have learned to hold her tongue and mind her own business, and not be too inquisitive. That would be a nuisance when we are finding our way about in a new country and trying to reconcile all sorts of opposites in a whole new country with new people, whom at first we shan’t understand, and who certainly won’t understand us; where every man carries a gun with as little thought of it as he has of buttons! Good-bye for a while.

Your loving

RUPERT.

From Rupert Sent Leger, Vissarion, to Janet MacKelpie, Croom.

February 3, 1907.

I am back in my own room again. Already it seems to me that to get here again is like coming home. I have been going about for the last few days amongst the mountaineers and trying to make their acquaintance. It is a tough job; and I can see that there will be nothing but to stick to it. They are in reality the most primitive people I ever met—the most fixed to their own ideas, which belong to centuries back. I can understand now what people were like in England—not in Queen Elizabeth's time, for that was civilized time, but in the time of Coeur-de-Lion, or even earlier—and all the time with the most absolute mastery of weapons of precision. Every man carries a rifle—and knows how to use it, too. I do believe they would rather go without their clothes than their guns if they had to choose between them. They also carry a handjar, which used to be their national weapon. It is a sort of heavy, straight cutlass, and they are so expert with it as well as so strong that it is as facile in the hands of a Blue Mountaineer as is a foil in the hands of a Persian maitre d'armes. They are so proud and reserved that they make one feel quite small, and an "outsider" as well. I can see quite well that they rather resent my being here at all. It is not personal, for when alone with me they are genial, almost brotherly; but the moment a few of them get together they are like a sort of jury, with me as the criminal before them. It is an odd situation, and quite new to me. I am pretty well accustomed to all sorts of people, from cannibals to Mahatmas, but I'm blessed if I ever struck such a type as this—so proud, so haughty, so reserved, so distant, so absolutely fearless, so honourable, so hospitable. Uncle Roger's head was level when he chose them out as a people to live amongst. Do you know, Aunt Janet, I can't help feeling that they are very much like your own Highlanders—only more so. I'm sure of one thing: that in the end we shall get on capitally together. But it will be a slow job, and will need a lot of patience. I have a feeling in my bones that when they know me better they will be very loyal and very true; and I am not a hair's-breadth afraid of them or anything they shall or might do. That is, of course, if I live long enough for them to have time to know me. Anything may happen with such an indomitable, proud people to whom pride is more than victuals. After all, it only needs one man out of a crowd to have a wrong idea or to make a mistake as to one's motive—and there you are. But it will be all right that way, I am sure. I am come here to stay, as Uncle Roger wished. And stay I shall even if it has to be in a little bed of my own beyond the garden—seven feet odd long, and not too narrow—or else a stone-box of equal proportions in the vaults of St. Sava's Church across the Creek—the old burial-place of the Vissarions and other noble people for a good many centuries back . . .

I have been reading over this letter, dear Aunt Janet, and I am afraid the record is rather an alarming one. But don't you go building up superstitious horrors or fears on it. Honestly, I am only joking about death—a thing to which I have been rather prone for a good many years back. Not in very good taste, I suppose, but certainly very useful when the old man with the black wings goes flying about you day and night in strange places, sometimes visible and at others invisible. But you can always hear wings, especially in the dark, when you cannot see them. YOU know that, Aunt Janet, who come of a race of warriors, and who have special sight behind or through the black curtain.

Honestly, I am in no whit afraid of the Blue Mountaineers, nor have I a doubt of them. I love them already for their splendid qualities, and I am prepared to love them for themselves. I feel,

too, that they will love me (and incidentally they are sure to love you). I have a sort of undercurrent of thought that there is something in their minds concerning me—something not painful, but disturbing; something that has a base in the past; something that has hope in it and possible pride, and not a little respect. As yet they can have had no opportunity of forming such impression from seeing me or from any thing I have done. Of course, it may be that, although they are fine, tall, stalwart men, I am still a head and shoulders over the tallest of them that I have yet seen. I catch their eyes looking up at me as though they were measuring me, even when they are keeping away from me, or, rather, keeping me from them at arm's length. I suppose I shall understand what it all means some day. In the meantime there is nothing to do but to go on my own way—which is Uncle Roger's—and wait and be patient and just. I have learned the value of that, any way, in my life amongst strange peoples. Good-night.

Your loving  
RUPERT.

From Rupert Sent Leger, Vissarion, to Janet MacKelpie, Croom.

February 24, 1907.

MY DEAR AUNT JANET,

I am more than rejoiced to hear that you are coming here so soon. This isolation is, I think, getting on my nerves. I thought for a while last night that I was getting on, but the reaction came all too soon. I was in my room in the east turret, the room on the corbeille, and saw here and there men passing silently and swiftly between the trees as though in secret. By-and-by I located their meeting-place, which was in a hollow in the midst of the wood just outside the "natural" garden, as the map or plan of the castle calls it. I stalked that place for all I was worth, and suddenly walked straight into the midst of them. There were perhaps two or three hundred gathered, about the very finest lot of men I ever saw in my life. It was in its way quite an experience, and one not likely to be repeated, for, as I told you, in this country every man carries a rifle, and knows how to use it. I do not think I have seen a single man (or married man either) without his rifle since I came here. I wonder if they take them with them to bed! Well, the instant after I stood amongst them every rifle in the place was aimed straight at me. Don't be alarmed, Aunt Janet; they did not fire at me. If they had I should not be writing to you now. I should be in that little bit of real estate or the stone box, and about as full of lead as I could hold. Ordinarily, I take it, they would have fired on the instant; that is the etiquette here. But this time they—all separately but all together—made a new rule. No one said a word or, so far as I could see, made a movement. Here came in my own experience. I had been more than once in a tight place of something of the same kind, so I simply behaved in the most natural way I could. I felt conscious—it was all in a flash, remember—that if I showed fear or cause for fear, or even acknowledged danger by so much as even holding up my hands, I should have drawn all the fire. They all remained stock-still, as though they had been turned into stone, for several seconds. Then a queer kind of look flashed round them like wind over corn—something like the surprise one shows unconsciously on waking in a strange place. A second after they each dropped the rifle to the hollow of his arm and stood ready for anything. It was all as regular and quick and simultaneous as a salute at St. James's Palace.

Happily I had no arms of any kind with me, so that there could be no complication. I am rather a quick hand myself when there is any shooting to be done. However, there was no trouble here, but the contrary; the Blue Mountaineers—it sounds like a new sort of Bond Street band, doesn't

it?—treated me in quite a different way than they did when I first met them. They were amazingly civil, almost deferential. But, all time same, they were more distant than ever, and all the time I was there I could get not a whit closer to them. They seemed in a sort of way to be afraid or in awe of me. No doubt that will soon pass away, and when we know one another better we shall become close friends. They are too fine fellows not to be worth a little waiting for. (That sentence, by the way, is a pretty bad sentence! In old days you would have slipped me for it!) Your journey is all arranged, and I hope you will be comfortable. Rooke will meet you at Liverpool Street and look after everything.

I shan't write again, but when we meet at Fiume I shall begin to tell you all the rest. Till then, good-bye.

A good journey to you, and a happy meeting to us both.

RUPERT.

Letter from Janet MacKelpie, Vissarion, to Sir Colin MacKelpie, United Service Club, London.

February 28, 1907.

DEAREST UNCLE

I had a very comfortable journey all across Europe. Rupert wrote to me some time ago to say that when I got to Vissarion I should be an Empress, and he certainly took care that on the way here I should be treated like one. Rooke, who seems a wonderful old man, was in the next compartment to that reserved for me. At Harwich he had everything arranged perfectly, and so right on to Fiume. Everywhere there were attentive officials waiting. I had a carriage all to myself, which I joined at Antwerp—a whole carriage with a suite of rooms, dining-room, drawing-room, bedroom, even bath-room. There was a cook with a kitchen of his own on board, a real chef like a French nobleman in disguise. There were also a waiter and a servant-maid. My own maid Maggie was quite awed at first. We were as far as Cologne before she summoned up courage to order them about. Whenever we stopped Rooke was on the platform with local officials, and kept the door of my carriage like a sentry on duty.

At Fiume, when the train slowed down, I saw Rupert waiting on the platform. He looked magnificent, towering over everybody there like a giant. He is in perfect health, and seemed glad to see me. He took me off at once on an automobile to a quay where an electric launch was waiting. This took us on board a beautiful big steam-yacht, which was waiting with full steam up and—how he got there I don't know—Rooke waiting at the gangway.

I had another suite all to myself. Rupert and I had dinner together—I think the finest dinner I ever sat down to. This was very nice of Rupert, for it was all for me. He himself only ate a piece of steak and drank a glass of water. I went to bed early, for, despite the luxury of the journey, I was very tired.

I awoke in the grey of the morning, and came on deck. We were close to the coast. Rupert was on the bridge with the Captain, and Rooke was acting as pilot. When Rupert saw me, he ran down the ladder and took me up on the bridge. He left me there while he ran down again and brought me up a lovely fur cloak which I had never seen. He put it on me and kissed me. He is the tenderest-hearted boy in the world, as well as the best and bravest! He made me take his arm whilst he pointed out Vissarion, towards which we were steering. It is the most lovely place I ever saw. I won't stop to describe it now, for it will be better that you see it for yourself and enjoy it all fresh as I did.

The Castle is an immense place. You had better ship off, as soon as all is ready here and you can arrange it, the servants whom I engaged; and I am not sure that we shall not want as many more. There has hardly been a mop or broom on the place for centuries, and I doubt if it ever had a thorough good cleaning all over since it was built. And, do you know, Uncle, that it might be well to double that little army of yours that you are arranging for Rupert? Indeed, the boy told me himself that he was going to write to you about it. I think old Lachlan and his wife, Sandy's Mary, had better be in charge of the maids when they come over. A lot of lassies like you will be iller to keep together than a flock of sheep. So it will be wise to have authority over them, especially as none of them speaks a word of foreign tongues. Rooke—you saw him at the station at Liverpool Street—will, if he be available, go over to bring the whole body here. He has offered to do it if I should wish. And, by the way, I think it will be well, when the time comes for their departure, if not only the lassies, but Lachlan and Sandy's Mary, too, will call him MISTER Rooke. He is a very important person indeed here. He is, in fact, a sort of Master of the Castle, and though he is very self-suppressing, is a man of rarely fine qualities. Also it will be well to keep authority. When your clansmen come over, he will have charge of them, too. Dear me! I find I have written such a long letter, I must stop and get to work. I shall write again.

Your very affectionate

JANET.

From the Same to the Same.

March 3, 1907.

DEAREST UNCLE,

All goes well here, and as there is no news, I only write because you are a dear, and I want to thank you for all the trouble you have taken for me—and for Rupert. I think we had better wait awhile before bringing out the servants. Rooke is away on some business for Rupert, and will not be back for some time; Rupert thinks it may be a couple of months. There is no one else that he could send to take charge of the party from home, and I don't like the idea of all those lassies coming out without an escort. Even Lachlan and Sandy's Mary are ignorant of foreign languages and foreign ways. But as soon as Rooke returns we can have them all out. I dare say you will have some of your clansmen ready by then, and I think the poor girls, who may feel a bit strange in a new country like this, where the ways are so different from ours, will feel easier when they know that there are some of their own mankind near them. Perhaps it might be well that those of them who are engaged to each other—I know there are some—should marry before they come out here. It will be more convenient in many ways, and will save lodgment, and, besides, these Blue Mountaineers are very handsome men.

Good-night.

JANET.

Sir Colin MacKelpie, Croom, to Janet MacKelpie, Vissarion.

March 9, 1907.

MY DEAR JANET,

I have duly received both your letters, and am delighted to find you are so well pleased with your new home. It must certainly be a very lovely and unique place, and I am myself longing to see it. I came up here three days ago, and am, as usual, feeling all the better for a breath of my native

air. Time goes on, my dear, and I am beginning to feel not so young as I was. Tell Rupert that the men are all fit, and longing to get out to him. They are certainly a fine lot of men. I don't think I ever saw a finer. I have had them drilled and trained as soldiers, and, in addition, have had them taught a lot of trades just as they selected themselves. So he shall have nigh him men who can turn their hands to anything—not, of course, that they all know every trade, but amongst them there is someone who can do whatever may be required. There are blacksmiths, carpenters, farriers, saddle-makers, gardeners, plumbers, cutlers, gunsmiths, so, as they all are farmers by origin and sportsmen by practice, they will make a rare household body of men. They are nearly all first-class shots, and I am having them practise with revolvers. They are being taught fencing and broadsword and ju-jitsu; I have organized them in military form, with their own sergeants and corporals. This morning I had an inspection, and I assure you, my dear, they could give points to the Household troop in matters of drill. I tell you I am proud of my clansmen!

I think you are quite wise about waiting to bring out the lassies, and wiser still about the marrying. I dare say there will be more marrying when they all get settled in a foreign country. I shall be glad of it, for as Rupert is going to settle there, it will be good for him to have round him a little colony of his own people. And it will be good for them, too, for I know he will be good to them—as you will, my dear. The hills are barren here, and life is hard, and each year there is more and more demand for crofts, and sooner or later our people must thin out. And mayhap our little settlement of MacKelpie clan away beyond the frontiers of the Empire may be some service to the nation and the King. But this is a dream! I see that here I am beginning to realise in myself one part of Isaiah's prophecy:

“Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

By the way, my dear, talking about dreams, I am sending you out some boxes of books which were in your rooms. They are nearly all on odd subjects that WE understand—Second Sight, Ghosts, Dreams (that was what brought the matter to my mind just now), superstitions, Vampires, Wehr-Wolves, and all such uncanny folk and things. I looked over some of these books, and found your marks and underlining and comments, so I fancy you will miss them in your new home. You will, I am sure, feel more at ease with such old friends close to you. I have taken the names and sent the list to London, so that when you pay me a visit again you will be at home in all ways. If you come to me altogether, you will be more welcome still—if possible. But I am sure that Rupert, who I know loves you very much, will try to make you so happy that you will not want to leave him. So I will have to come out often to see you both, even at the cost of leaving Croom for so long. Strange, is it not? that now, when, through Roger Melton's more than kind remembrance of me, I am able to go where I will and do what I will, I want more and more to remain at home by my own ingle. I don't think that anyone but you or Rupert could get me away from it. I am working very hard at my little regiment, as I call it. They are simply fine, and will, I am sure, do us credit. The uniforms are all made, and well made, too. There is not a man of them that does not look like an officer. I tell you, Janet, that when we turn out the Vissarion Guard we shall feel proud of them. I dare say that a couple of months will do all that can be done here. I shall come out with them myself. Rupert writes me that he thinks it will be more comfortable to come out direct in a ship of our own. So when I go up to London in a few weeks' time I shall see about chartering a suitable vessel. It will certainly save a lot of trouble to us and anxiety to our people. Would it not be well when I am getting the ship, if I charter one big enough to take out all your lassies, too? It is not as if they were strangers. After all, my dear, soldiers are soldiers and lassies are lassies. But these are all kinsfolk, as well as clansmen and clanswomen, and I, their Chief, shall be there. Let me know your views and wishes in this

respect. Mr. Trent, whom I saw before leaving London, asked me to “convey to you his most respectful remembrances”—these were his very words, and here they are. Trent is a nice fellow, and I like him. He has promised to pay me a visit here before the month is up, and I look forward to our both enjoying ourselves.

Good-bye, my dear, and the Lord watch over you and our dear boy.

Your affectionate Uncle,

COLIN ALEXANDER MACKELPIE.