

December 26, 2014

The children of the cherry tree farm



We stare at the man nonplussed. Farmer Jenks leans on the stile in a weathered brown coat and knee-high wellingtons crusty with clay. He’s framed against cows munching on the green, green grass of home, a blue summer sky with billowing white clouds and the happy sounds of children tucking into lunch spread on a red-checked cloth under a cherry tree laden with fruit. “The next bus will be a while coming, dearies,” he says, in his broad Hampshire accent. “Come in for a spot of tea.”

My friend and I are stranded on a winding country road a few miles south of Winchester in southern England, and starving. We had hopped off the bus from Southampton to Winchester, the Anglo-Saxon capital under King Alfred the Great and home to the magnificent cathedral where Hitler hoped to be crowned king, a few stops too early and now stand outside Cherry Tree Farm. The children, their cheeks berry-stained, wave us in. At the end of a pebbled drive is a charming farmhouse — red-brick walls, lace-curtained windows and a gabled roof with roses climbing all over. It’s quintessential Enid Blyton.

Mrs. Jenks bustles around the warm kitchen and lights the kettle over the fire. The aroma of Earl Grey rises to settle on the Cornish pasties lined up on a tray. Tea cakes crowd the tiered stand and a pitcher of cold milk — fresh from the cows in the field, no doubt— threatens to spill over. Warm bread from the oven, slathered with butter appears in several rounds. And when it’s time to leave, she presses two brown paper bags into our hands. Inside are apples, crumpets, a bottle of hand-pressed lemonade, and a whole lot of childhood memories.