

The Time of Our Lives by A.C.R.

It was Saturday afternoon and despite the fact that weekends are saved for relax and joy in my humble opinion, my close friend Arla came like every year to the manor to dust off all those boxes full of ornaments, garlands and cute trinkets from the attic and to prepare our yearly Christmassy party, decorating Croft Manor with extreme pamper. Gelen called to confirm her attendance, because I was waiting for all my best friends to come and spend a few days together and to catch up (we love this, by the way).

“Do you know something?” I asked Arla with intentions to agree in a thing. “It always happens the same when these days come, Arla. Don’t you think it’d be better, instead of working so much in the manor, to reunite everyone and travel to any place to enjoy this festivity differently?”

“You’re right, Lara! But it has to be a place in which I don’t have to share rooms with Lili. I’m a little tired of her fixations!” She said a tad uncomfortable.

“Ha, ha, ha! But you have to admit that some them are funny! All right then, it is decided! We’ll wait for the girls and while having an orange and blueberry tea, we tell the news, study where to go and have a really fun time.”

After spending part of the afternoon dealing with the perfect trip, we all agreed to rent a small cottage in the outskirts of Luss, a small Scottish village that looked like as if it was taken from a fairy tale. The perfect destination for days of happiness and friendship.

And it is that Arla loves trekking, Lili enjoys sleeping like a log, Dulce is keen on climbing trees to see the landscape up high (se reminds me of those curious cute monkeys from India, I must say). Flor is addicted to listen to music in the open fields under the trees and see birds placed on them and Gelen is a total enthusiastic of Art... My dearest friends. Definitely, Luss was the best choice for us!

I really craved for something like this in my life after long and intense months of adventures far from home. It was I just needed direct contact with my next of kins. And even if I adore my loneliness and independence, I can’t deny the fact that trips like this one please the soul. One that declines many times when I see the vilenesses that the world also houses. The two sides of the same coin, as an erudite would say...

Eagers to spend the time of our lives, I asked Winston to prepare and delight us with his juicy and sinfully caloric honey and butter flapjacks before his flight to Sweden to see an ill friend that was recovering quite nicely from his recent new surgery.

We arrived in Luss mid-morning to our little house and after setting all our belongings in place, I got ready to lay the table for the drooling snack. I opened the basket in the living room and instantly, the sweet scent filled the whole place. Sublime! No words could describe those flapjacks. I’ve always managed myself freely in the kitchen, specially when using mama’s recipies. But I admit that Winston is a first-class chef!

I was about to put the last piece of cutlery, when the other girls came in from seeking stuff from the fields to create our small Christmassy spot and make our cottage look warm and cosy.

So many wonderful moments we lived when decorating the house, sitting next to the chimney and its warm fire, with a cup of lemon and cinnamon tea and Winston's glorious flapjacks..., remembering all our youth pranks, like when we put a toad on Miss Daisy's head without noticing it... She was one of our dearest teachers at the Wimbledon High School. Unspeakable secrets, conspiratorial laughs. A pact between best friends, a small world that was only accessible to us.

The next day, it was Christmas Eve and as the meal would be more elaborated, Lili and I went to the village for a moment to buy some more ingredients for the banquet. And once at home:

"Can I help you?" Asked Lili.

"Of course my dear! You know how to prepare a dream table. Your exquisite taste hasn't changed with the years despite what Arla says he, he, he," I said with a kind smile.

"I'm going to leave her speechless! You'll see!" She said very determined!

Right when the night came, we were a small group of gorgeous ladies ready for dinner and dance with our adorned hair with wild flowers and dressed in silk, moving to the beat of bagpipes and tambourines... We looked like beautiful druids dancing at the foot of mystical circles of stones like the ones told in legends. A night to remember, all of us dancing and singing, spiritually united... Our lives at that instance were perfect. We toasted with a glass of champagne our best wishes. It was then Christmas for sure!

The next morning, we decided to go out and explore the land ahead us. It was a splendid day: the sun was shining brightly, the birds were singing heavenly chirps and if you paid attention, you could hear with the breeze a subtle bell tolling in the distance. If you've never been to Luss, what are you waiting for?

The days we spent in this magical village and its surroundings were simply magical. We were like living inside a Scottish dream. We felt that those majestic lands attracted us inevitably to their heart. But that wasn't new to me, since I already knew about the beauty of these fairytale landscapes. The most special thing was to know that among all those breathtaking fjords, our unique friendship had a place in them. That among those mossy and impressive mountains in the Highlands, we were accepted between their fresh and green mantles. That all the lakes of crystal water reflected one truth: an unbreakable friendship. Just like the ruins of old castles that stand immutable even with the inclemencies of the years. That's who we are: united even far.

But everything has an end:

“What a pity!” Flor and Dulce complained! “We have to leave tomorrow!”

“Yes, it’s true...” Said Lili. “It’s been quite a few days, but they’ve felt too short. Next year, we have to do it again, girls!”

“And let it be till New Year!” exclaimed Arla!

Back to the cottage, we went to bed early as we had to have everything sorted out for the returning trip and leave Luss behind to go back home, to Surrey. If that wasn’t enough, we also had to say goodbye to Gelen, Lili, Flor and Dulce since they live in Exeter. If only the happy times lasted a little longer... But at least, a tender hug gave us peace and relief to our hearts until the next time.

“Farewell my dear friends. We’ll never forget these beautiful days we shared together,” I said affectionately.

I took Arla to the closest taxi rank. She got in one of the cabs and vanished in the distance, merging at the same time with the daily hustle and bustle of the city. She just left like the others...

I walked all the way back to Croft Manor, thoughtful and nostalgic, as we’d have to wait a whole year, easier said than done, to meet again (too many daily duties prevent us from being together more frequently and if we add that my journeys take me to remote locations in this world...). Although I hold within me that marvellous memory of the present Christmas. I believe we won’t forget it very easily, no matter how far we are.

Two steps near the gate of the main yard, I was thinking if Winston would have already come back from Sweden. Or if Zip would be still in New York visiting his sister... Would I be alone on New Year’s Eve?

Once inside at the Croft’s property, I bent down to tie the lace of my right boot firmly and when I stood up thinking of my loved ones, I looked at the starry sky for a moment and I saw, since long ago, an astonishing meteor shower... Full of grace and blessings. Was it just coincidence? Could it be that the sky felt my feelings somehow and gifted me with such spectacle? Would everyone be viewing this as well? I really hope so... Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year my dears! See you soon!

THE END