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IN
ORCHARD
GLEN
·
MARIAN KEITH



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IN ORCHARD GLEN

BY

MARIAN KEITH

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IN ORCHARD GLEN

CHAPTER I

APPLE-BLOSSOM DAYS

It was on Christina Lindsay's nineteenth birthday that she made the second Great Discovery about herself. The first one had been made when she was only eleven, and like the second it had proved an unpleasant surprise.

It was midsummer holidays, that time when she was only eleven, and raspberry time too, and Christina and her brother Sandy were picking berries in the "Slash," a wild bit of semi-woodland away up on the hills that divided her home farm from the land of the Grant Sisters. The Grant Girls—they were all three over fifty but everybody rightly called them girls,—the Grant Girls were there picking berries too, with Mrs. Johnnie Dunn, and several other friends; and there were many more groups scattered here and there through the green tangle of bushes and saplings. For a berry-patch was community property, and when the crop was plentiful, as it was this year, a berry-picking became a pleasant social function, where one met friends from near and far, and picnicked with them under the trees.

Christina was working with furious speed. She and Sandy had been racing all morning to see who would be the first to fill a four-quart pail. For Uncle Neil had promised the winner unheard-of wealth, a whole quarter of a dollar to spend as one wished, and Christina was determined that the money should be hers.

She had found a wonderful patch and was fairly pouring the berries into her pail in a red and black shower. She was keeping well down behind a clump of alder, too, out of range of Sandy's roving eye. For Sandy had a habit of allowing you to find the best place, and then swooping down upon it like a plague of grasshoppers. She was working so hard that she did not notice a group of berry pickers who had taken up their station right opposite her on the Grant side of the low fence, and was suddenly attracted by the discovery that they were discussing her own family.

"Them Lindsay lassies are that bonnie, I jist like to sit and look at them, even in church when I ought to be looking at my Bible."

It was Miss Flora Grant's soft voice that came through the screen of sumach and alder.

"They've all taken after their mother's folks." It was Miss Elspie's still softer voice. "The MacDonald women of that family was all good lookin'."

"Well, my grief! You don't call that long-legged youngest thing good-lookin', do you?" sang out the loud voice of Mrs. Johnnie Dunn. "She's as homely as a day-old colt!"

The long-legged youngest thing nearly jumped out of her hiding place on the other side of the bushes. She caught a fleeting glimpse of the last speaker, her long, thin neck and green sunbonnet sticking up out of a tangle of bushes, like a stinging nettle in a garden.

"Oh, you mean little Christina," said Flora Grant gently, "I jist didn't mind about her. No, she's a nice bit lassock, but she's not bonnie. Eh, Sarah, jist look at yon patch over there; the bushes is jist as rid as roses!"

They all moved away with a sound of tearing briars, and the Lindsay lass that was not bonnie crawled deeper into her leafy hiding-place, making a brave effort to choke back something that was causing her throat to swell and her eyes to smart. Crying was a luxury never indulged in, in the Lindsay family, except in the case of a real calamity like falling out of the hay mow, or tearing your Sunday dress, and Christina dared not run the risk of having Sandy find her in tears over mere hurt feelings.

Nevertheless it was a very dreadful thing, quite worth crying over, this discovery that she was homely. She knew it was a tragedy, from what Ellen and Mary said about girls who were not pretty. And the worst of it was that

even the Grant Girls, who were her mother's very best and closest friends, admitted the shameful fact. Mrs. Johnnie Dunn would say even Joanna Falls was ugly, just to be mean, but the Grant Girls always said the very best about any one that could be said. Flora Grant had admitted that she was a "Nice bit lassock," but that was small comfort. Christina would have preferred to be pronounced the most disagreeable little girl in all the Province of Ontario, provided her accuser had added that she was a beauty. Character might be improved, but what hope was there for an ugly face?

The Lindsay habit of industry forbade that she sit long under a bush covered with berries bewailing her lack of comeliness, for even a person as homely as a day-old colt might make use of twenty-five cents. So she wiped her eyes on her blue-checked pinafore, and crawling out from her hiding-place, set stoically to work.

She had been following a path led by the ripest and largest fruit, and rounding a clump of briars, she came upon some one's dinner basket, tucked away in a cool corner. There was a pink silk sash folded on the top of the basket, and from underneath peeped the edge of a hand mirror. The basket undoubtedly belonged to Joanna Falls, who was here with a party of girls from the village. Joanna was quite the handsomest girl in Orchard Glen, and Mrs. Johnnie Dunn said she believed she never went even to church without a looking-glass in her pocket. Christina glanced about her guiltily, and then, trembling, took up the little mirror. For the first time in her life she looked carefully and critically at her own countenance.

She saw a thin, little, brown face, framed by a blue sunbonnet, big blue eyes that made the sunbonnet look faded, some untidy wisps of straight fair hair, and a great many freckles scattered over a shapely nose. Christina carefully replaced the mirror and moved on feeling like a thief.

Yes, she understood now why she was homely. It was her straight hair and those dreadful freckles. Mary had beautiful long black curls, and Ellen had brown wavy hair, and both of them tanned a lovely even brown with never a spot or blemish. Well, she would cure both maladies, see if she wouldn't! Mary said Joanna Falls washed her face and hands every night of her life in tansy and buttermilk. Christina would do the same, and she would buy some of that pink complexion cure that was in the corner store window, and which Tilly Holmes, the store-keeper's daughter, said would wash anything off your face, even a scar. And she would put her hair up in curl-papers every night, and best of all, she would take the twenty-five cents that Uncle Neil would give her, and after she had paid for the complexion cure, she would buy a yard of pink satin ribbon and tie up her hair and she would look as fine and handsome as Joanna Falls herself, and even Mrs. Johnnie Dunn would have to admit that she was as good-looking as any of the Lindsays!

And as if to put emphasis upon her vow, she tossed the last cupful of berries into her pail, and found it heaping full! She had won the money! She caught up her pail and hurried joyfully to the spot where she had last seen Sandy, her spirits rising at every step. She was already on the way to beauty and success, by way of tansy and buttermilk and twenty-five cents worth of complexion cure and pink ribbon!

Unmindful of many scratches, she tore through a clump of briars, and almost tumbled over a small figure crouched in the pathway. It was a boy in a ragged shirt and a pair of trousers many sizes too large for him. He was kneeling beside an overturned pail, and was striving desperately to gather up a mashed heap of berries and sand.

"Oh," cried Christina, stopping short in sympathetic dismay, "oh, Gavin. What did you do?"

The boy looked up. He was holding his mouth in a tight line, manfully keeping back the misery his eyes could not hide. "I—I jist fell over them," he said with a desperate effort at nonchalance.

Christina put down her pail and tried to help. She had never liked Gavin Hume. He was a Scotch boy, whom old Skinflint Jenkins' folks had adopted from an Orphan Asylum. He was dirty and shy, and at school the girls laughed at him and the boys teased him. But to-day he was in trouble, and rumour had it that Gavin's life was one long period of trouble, for the Jenkinses were hard people.

"It's no use," declared Christina at last, examining the dreadful mess, and thinking of what her mother would do with it, "they're too dirty to use, Gavin. Never mind," she added comfortingly, "she won't scold, will she?"

The boy gave a half-contemptuous gesture. "Scold? I wouldn't care about that. *He* said he'd give me the horse-

whip when I got home if it wasn't full."

Christina shuddered. "But you did fill it," she cried indignantly. "Won't he believe you?"

The boy looked at her as an old man might look at a prattling child. Gavin was only a couple of years older than Christina and no bigger, but there were ages of hardship in his experience, which her sheltered childhood could not know. But Christina's heart was always far in advance of her head, and it guessed much. That look told her volumes. Quick as a flash, she righted his pail, caught up her own, and tumbled its fresh rosy wealth into his, heaping it high.

"Oh, Christine! Oh, you mustn't!" The boy caught her hand to stop her, but Christina jerked away, and ran from him down the twisting green pathway. And as she ran she heard Mrs. Skinflint's terrible voice calling,

"Gav-*in*! Is that pail not full yet, you lazy lump?" and Gavin's prompt reply, "Yes'm. It's heapin'."

And that was some comfort to the homely young person who, with a pail only half full, and without prospect of either wealth or beauty, was wending her way down the green tangle of the berry patch. Somehow the comfort seemed to outweigh the misfortune. Gavin's escape from dire punishment gave her a feeling of exultation that even a pink satin ribbon would fail to produce.

A shout from Sandy away down in the green nook where they had left their dinner pail under a log, quickened her footsteps. She found him trampling down the berry-bushes in a vain search for the refreshments, for Sandy was thirteen and in a chronic state of starvation.

"Where on earth you been?" he enquired, in mingled relief and wrath. "I thought you must be dead and buried. I'm so hungry my back-bone's comin' out at the front."

Christina giggled. One could never remember one's troubles in Sandy's gay presence. She dived into the cool cavern beneath the mossy log and came out with their dinner. Sandy helped her unpack it feverishly. Mother had put up a very comforting lunch for a starving boy and girl; thick sandwiches of bread and pork, scones soaked in Maple Syrup, a half-dozen cookies, a bottle of milk and two generous wedges of pie.

When Sandy had eaten enough to make speech possible he pointed triumphantly to his full pail.

"Say! What do you think? I've beat you!" He cried in amazement, "I did a perfect moose of a day's work. The quarter's mine!"

"Well, I've just as much right to it as you have," declared Christina, who did not believe in letting her good deeds waste their sweetness on the desert air of a berry patch. "I had my pail heaped a dozen times, and shook down too, and Gavin Hume spilled all his on an ant hill, and he said Old Skinflint would thrash him, so I gave him mine."

"You did!" Sandy grunted. Christina was always doing things like that. "Well you're a silly. Why can't he keep his berries when he picks 'em? Never mind," he added, having reached the pie, and feeling generous, "I'll give you half the money, and we'll get some gum and a box o' paints."

Christina did not dare confess how she had planned to spend the money, and was not much comforted by his offer. Even paints would not permanently improve one's complexion.

"Sandy," she said at last, with much hesitation, "do you,—who do you think is the prettiest girl in our school?"

Sandy stared. He belonged to the Stone Age as yet, and knew nothing of the decorative, and less about girls. He had no notion that they were classified at all, except as little girls and big girls.

"How do *I* know?" he enquired, rather indignantly, as though his sister had suspected him of secret knowledge of a crime. "I don't know any that's good lookin'," he added conclusively.

"Our Mary's awful pretty," suggested Christina pensively.

"Is she?" Sandy lay back in gorged content, and gazed up into the swaying green sea of the Maples. "I bet she

knows it mighty well, then, let me tell you."

"I heard the Grant Girls and Mrs. Johnnie Dunn talkin', when I was away back by Grants' fence. They were talkin' about our girls, and Flora Grant said they were all,—said that Ellen and Mary were so good-lookin' that she watched them in church."

Sandy was showing signs of interest. He sat up. "What did they say about you?"

"Flora said I was a 'nice bit lassock,' but Mrs. Johnnie said,"—Christina could not bring herself to tell the humiliating truth—"she said I wasn't like the rest," she finished falteringly.

Sandy was beginning to wake up to the fact that Christina was in distress. Why any human being should worry about her appearance was something far beyond Sandy's comprehension, but he could not endure to see Christina worried. He caught up a stone and shied it across the sunny tangle at an old Crow perched on a tall black stump.

"Sugar," he declared. "Who cares for what Mrs. Johnnie says? She looks like our old brindle cow herself. Duke Simms says she's got chilblains on her temper."

His stormy attack upon the enemy proved very bracing to the one who had been so recently overthrown by her.

"But the Grant girls said so too," she added, searching for more comfort.

"Just as if they knew," scoffed Sandy. "They're a lot of old rainbows, Duke says they are. Looks don't matter anyhow. It don't get you on any faster in school."

Christina, much encouraged, reflected upon this aspect of the case.

"I don't care," she decided courageously, making a new resolve, that had nothing to do with hair or complexion. "I'm going to study awful hard at school and beat everybody in the class, and then I'm going to college some day and be a lady. You'll just see if I don't. And it'll be far better to be clever than to be good-lookin', won't it, Sandy?"

That was just eight years ago, and now on her nineteenth birthday Christina was calling to mind with some amusement the humiliation of that day, and with some discouragement, that the high resolve of that occasion was far from being realised.

She came up the path from the barn, where the rays of the early sun made rosy lanes between the pink and white boughs of the orchard. For Christina had been born in the joyous May-time, and the whole farm was bedecked for the occasion. She was tall and straight and carried her two pails of milk with easy grace. The light through the orchard boughs touched her fair hair and made it shining gold. Her eyes were as blue as the strip of sky above her, and her cheeks were as pink as the apple blossoms. Mrs. Johnnie Dunn's judgment had not been reversed by the years, Christina was still a long way from being one of the Lindsay beauties. But she possessed an abundance of that loveliness that always accompanies youth and health and a merry heart.

She was not quite so gay as usual this morning. She felt that she ought to be grave and dignified, as befitted a person who was so old. It was no joke, this being nineteen, just next-door to twenty, when you wanted still to play with the dog or chase Sandy round the stack. Age makes one retrospective, too, and she was reflecting how far short she had come of attaining the great ambition born eight years ago in the raspberry patch. For here she was, on her nineteenth birthday, still milking cows and feeding calves, with not even a school teacher's certificate to her credit.

She had not failed to put forth every effort to attain, but somehow each high endeavour had turned out like the race for the quarter dollar in the berry patch; she was always just about to grasp the prize, when some unfortunate picker fell across her path with a spilled pail.

There was that day when she and Mary and Sandy were all ready to go to High School together. But Father died that summer, and it was decreed that the expense of three in the town could not be met. So Christina stayed, partly because the other two were older, but mostly because Mary cried bitterly at the suggestion that Christina go in her

place.

Then there came a second chance when Sandy had graduated and started to teach school, but Grandpa took very ill and could not bear that she leave him. The third time proved the charm, for she did get away, and for a whole year spread her wings gloriously in Algonquin High School. She did wonders, too, taking two years' work in one, but the crops were poor the next year and Mary had to take her term at the Teachers' Training School, and the expense for two could not be met.

And so here she was at nineteen, burning to be up and away, and vowing to herself that not another year would pass over her head and find her still in Orchard Glen milking cows and feeding chickens.

The world about her did not seem to be in accord with her thoughts. It was full of joy and contentment with its beautiful lot. The robins in the gay orchard boughs were shouting that it was a glorious place to live in. Away up in the elm tree before the house an oriole was blowing his little golden trumpet, his flashing coat rivalling the row of scarlet and golden tulips that bordered the garden path. The little green lawn before the house sparkled under a diamond-spangled web.

From beyond the pink and white screen of the orchard came the happy sounds of the barnyard; the clatter of the bars as Sandy turned the cows into the back lane; Old Sport's bark; Jimmie's high voice scolding the calf that was trying to swallow the pail for breakfast; the squeal of hungry little pigs; the clatter of hens and many other voices making up the Barnyard Spring Song.

Christina's pet kitten, a tiny black blot on the pink and green, came daintily down the path to meet her, mindful of her two pails of warm milk. Sport, who had succeeded in putting the cows into their places, came bounding up in a fit of boisterous familiarity, and leaped at the little black ball with a gay,

"Woof! How are you this morning, you useless black mite?"

Two indignant green spots flamed up in the blackness and the mite itself turned into a fierce little bow, bent to shoot, and in a flash, bow quiver and all shot like lightning up the tree, spitting arrows in all directions.

Christina forgot all about her ambitions and laughed aloud, and Sport joined her, leaping around her and laughing silently in his own dog fashion with tongue and tail. It was very hard to remember that one was nineteen and had never been anywhere nor attained anything, impossible to remember when the orchard was aflame in the sunrise, and the oriole was shouting from the elm tree. Christina burst into song, just as spontaneously as the robins.

It was a very foolish song, too, one that Jimmie had brought home from Algonquin High School:

"Oh, Judy O'Toole,
It's you that's the fool,
For lavin' the county o' Cork.
Oh, Judy O'Toole,
It's you that's the fool,
That iver ye came to New York!"

Ellen, her eldest sister, was frying the pork and potatoes for breakfast in the old summer kitchen. She looked through the door as the singer passed.

"Christine!" she called reprovingly. "Whatever will that girl sing next?"

Uncle Neil, who was drying his hands on the roller towel at the door, laughed indulgently.

"It isn't jist the kind of a hymn that would do for prayer-meeting," he said. "Hi, Christine! Is that a new psalm tune you're practisin'?"

But, Christina and her song had disappeared into the spring house. This was a little stone structure, built into the grassy hill behind the house. Down beside it, overhung with willows, a little spring gushed out of the sand, clear and cold on the hottest summer days. And so, in the little stone building, Christina's butter was always sweet and hard, like golden bricks.

She set about her work with swift motions. It was necessary to work harder than usual to-day, to get rid of the ache to be away doing something else. She set the separator whirling, giving out its droning song of plenty—the farm Matins and Vespers.

"Jimmie," she called up the little stone stairway, "hurry down here, Lazybones, and turn the Gramophone."

A big clumsy boy, whose body was getting ahead of his mind in the race for maturity, came thumping down the steps with the calves' empty pails. He pulled a loose strand of his sister's hair as he seized the handle of the separator.

"Now, Mrs. Johnnie Dunn," he warned, "don't go orderin' your betters round."

Their work was brightened with a great deal of merry nonsense. For Christina always made holiday of all toil, and even Jimmie, who was passing through the weary period of boyhood, when any effort is insupportable, found it amusing to work with her.

"I suppose, now that you're nineteen, you'll be gettin' a fellow," he teased, as he watched her wash the separator and put it out in the sun. "It's time you had one."

"Yes, I was thinking that too," said Christina agreeably. "I was planning that I would get Mike Duffy to be my beau, now that you're so sweet on Big Rosie. It would be so nice to be married into the same family."

Jimmie gave a squall of rage and disgust. Rosie Duffy was a huge freckled-faced girl, to whom, in a moment of generous weakness, he had given a ride from town, and Christina had used the fact to his undoing ever since.

He caught up the calves' pails of milk and fled up into the sunshine. It was never safe to tease Christina, you always got back far worse than you gave.

When he came back to the house the family was gathering for its breakfast, and a fine big family it was. There were just two absent, the father, who was taking his well-earned rest in the grassy church yard on the hill, and Allister, the eldest son, who had gone west ten years ago to make his fortune and had not been home since.

Uncle Neil MacDonald took his place at the head of the table, where he had sat ever since the father left it. Uncle Neil was very much beloved, but he was in no sense the head of the family. He was a gay, easy-going body, given to singing songs and playing the fiddle, and not at all calculated to keep a virile group of boys and girls in order. So, John, the eldest son at home, was the real head of the family, and his mother's support. For John was wise and strong and many, many years older than Uncle Neil.

Ellen, the busy housewife, came next. She was just as handsome as when Miss Flora Grant used to look at her in church, and since she had grown up many other admiring eyes looked her way. Neil, who was going to be a minister, but who was very much of a farmer this morning, sat by John. Neil was already in College, and Mr. Sinclair, the minister of Orchard Glen, who made it his boast that in twenty-five years of his ministry the Orchard Glen church had not been without its representative in Knox College, declared that not one of the train had come up to Neil Lindsay in intellect, and that the world and the church would hear of him one day.

Mary was the family beauty, all pink and white with glossy curls, and Sandy was still Christina's chum and confidant, and the last was Jimmie, hovering between boyhood and manhood. There was a plate set for Grandpa Lindsay, who had not yet appeared. He was rarely quite in time for the early farm breakfast, but he was always on the scene before they separated, to conduct family worship. His bedroom was off the winter kitchen, where the breakfast was laid, and they could hear him moving about singing and talking to himself.

Mrs. Lindsay was a little woman with a sweet, strong face covered with a network of wrinkles. Her hands were calloused and discoloured and her back was bent with hard work, but her eyes were bright, and her heart was still as young as her family.

"And it's nineteen you are to-day, hinny," she cried, looking at Christina fondly.

Christina made a wry face. "Yes, isn't it awful? I don't want to be so old."

"Hut, tut, old," laughed Uncle Neil. "Your mother and father were on their way from the Old Country when she was nineteen, and Allister was a baby."

Christina mentally decided that even crossing the ocean to a strange country was not at all as bad as staying for nineteen years in the same place, but she did not say so.

"Well, it's pretty nice to be nineteen, isn't it?" said Neil. "If it wasn't seeding time John and I would take a day off and go on a picnic."

"I wish something would happen," said Christina recklessly, "something awfully surprising."

"You might go out and hoe up that back field of corn," suggested Sandy. "That would surprise John and me more than anything."

"But it wouldn't surprise me a bit and I'm the person concerned. Nothing in the shape of work could possibly surprise me any more. It would have to be a spree of some sort."

"Well," said Ellen, who was always sensible and practical, "be thankful that nothing unpleasant is happening. Anybody would think you would like the barn to burn down."

It was rather a noisy breakfast, for the Lindsays were a bright crowd in spite of much hard work, and Christina and Sandy were always making merry over something. They were just finishing when Grandpa came in with his toddling step and his usual exclamation of pleased surprised, "Eh, well, well, and you're all here!"

Christina ran for the ancient Bible that lay on the shelf in the corner, with Grandpa's spectacles upon it. Ellen fetched his old red cushion from the sofa in the corner, and Grandpa sat down slowly and heavily. He had never been heard to complain in all his hard-worked life, nor in his years of approaching age, but at the morning worship he always chose a portion of scripture that accorded with his feelings. So when he read the 103rd psalm, his sister smiled, evidently he felt in accord with the radiant May morning. Grandpa was very deaf and laboured under the idea that every one else was similarly afflicted, so he read and prayed in a very loud voice. But the Lindsays were all used to it. This early morning worship set the standard for the day's work. And led by Grandpa who had travelled far up on the road of saintship, it fortified young and old for the day's toil and temptations.

When it was over the family hurried away to their tasks. John and the preacher-farmer went off to the brown fields, Ellen went to her baking and washing. Jimmie shouldered his books and set off on his Monday morning tramp to the High School in Algonquin, from which he would not return until Friday night. Sandy put off his farm overalls, and drove up from the barn with the single buggy; and Mary, with a trim dust-coat over her pretty blue dress, came tripping down the orchard path and climbed into the buggy at his side. Mary taught school at a little corner called Greenwood, a couple of miles down the concession, and Sandy taught just two miles farther on. So every morning the two drove away to their schools and returned in the evening. Christina ran down the lane to open the gate for them.

"Now, be good, and don't go and do anything very wild just because it's your birthday," called Sandy.

"Oh, Christine," cried Mary, "don't let Ellen forget to wash my pink dress; I got some mud on it yesterday. And if you could iron it like a dear, I'd be ever so much obliged."

Christina promised willingly, and waved them a gay good-bye. She stood at the gate watching them as they turned down the broad white road. That road could be seen for miles from where she stood, winding away down over hill and through wooded hollow. It disappeared in a belt of forest but came into view again running along the margin of Lake Simcoe far off on the horizon, and away beyond her view it ended in a great city where Christina had never been. But that road always set her heart beating faster. It was the great highway that led out into the world, the road she longed to take. And always in the morning when she stood at the gate thus, just before turning back to the tasks that held her, it seemed to beckon her to come away.

And then she ran back to the barnyard to feed her chickens, and made the second Great Discovery about herself.

Uncle Neil came out of the noisy enclosure where the pigs were fighting with their morning meal, and helped

her throw the feed to her quarrelsome brood. Uncle Neil had for years been a semi-invalid and spent his time doing the lighter work of the farm and garden. Though he had attended school only a few years in his childhood, he had a mind stored with the wealth of years of reading, held by an unfailing memory. And now that his physical ailments gave him more leisure, he was reading everything that was worth while that came to his hand. And he gave out his wealth generously to Christina as they did their work every morning in the barnyard.

They laughed together at one old hen whom Christina had named Mrs. Johnnie Dunn, after the one woman in Orchard Glen who managed everything and everybody on her farm. Her namesake of the barnyard ruled all the other hens and saw to it that she was well provided herself.

"She never waits for Opportunity's bald spot, now does she?" said Uncle Neil, admiringly, as the busy, fussy lady made a leap and caught a grain of corn, in mid-air, while another hen was watching for it to fall upon the ground.

"What's Opportunity's bald spot?" enquired Christina. "How dare you have some information you haven't given me?"

"Don't you know the old story about Opportunity and his bald spot?" enquired Uncle Neil delighted.

And then he told the ancient tale of Opportunity and his lock of hair that hung in front, and Christina listened with more than her usual absorption. She was making her second discovery.

"There!" she exclaimed, with an energy that sent the hens scurrying away, alarmed, from her feet. "That's just what's the matter with me. I am always letting Mr. Opportunity walk past and then when I try to grab him I catch hold of his bald spot and he slips away."

"Well, well," said Uncle Neil, "I don't think he's walked past you very often. You're but nineteen to-day."

"I'm sure that's bad enough. That's nearly twenty, and then you're out of your teens. When I was eleven I made a solemn vow that I'd get a good education and go away off somewhere and attend college and be a lady. And here I am at nineteen, still feeding the pigs and milking the cows. I guess I haven't any of the Lindsay luck."

"The Lindsay luck was always spelled with a p in front, my lass, and a capital P at that. You can have all of that ye want."

They went back up the blossoming orchard path, stopping at the pump, which was mid-way to the house, to take up a pail of water. They left it at the back door under the vines, and Uncle Neil went round to the garden at the other side of the old rambling house, to help his sister with her onions. Christina ran round to the side door where Grandpa was sitting in the sun on the old sloping porch. The old man saw her coming and drew back behind the vines. As she shot round the corner of the house he poked out his head suddenly with a loud and alarming "Boo!"

Christina jumped back with a scream that set the old man laughing heartily and kept him chuckling for an hour afterwards. Every morning of her life Grandpa played this little trick upon her from some corner, and Christina never forgot to scream in terror, and Grandpa's amusement was never abated.

She slapped him for frightening her, adding hugely to his enjoyment, and ran on into the kitchen. Ellen was almost ready to put the clothes on the line and Christina gave her a helping hand before going on with her own work, reminding her meanwhile of the pink dress that must be ready before the evening.

"We'll have to hire a woman to do the baking, and I guess Grandpa'll have to do the washing when you leave," declared Christina. "I'd make a bargain with Bruce, if I were you, that he's to do the washing himself, before I'd marry him."

Ellen laughed gaily. She and Bruce McKenzie had been sweethearts ever since their public school days, and the next Christmas they were going to start life together on Bruce's farm. Ellen was very radiant these days and Christina's warnings were a source of amusement.

When the snowy array was hung in the sunshine, Christina went down into the cool spring house to her

churning. She stood at the door, whirling the dasher and looking up into the blossoming orchard, but seeing none of it. She was really very much concerned over this bald spot of Mr. Opportunity. She had surely let him slip past her many a time, and here she was at nineteen and who knew if he would come again?

"I just *won't* stay here working at you forever, now, mind that," she cried, slapping the butter viciously with her wooden paddle. "Just let Mr. Opportunity come along once more, and see if I let him go! Never again!"

And then she made a daring resolution. She would dress up, even if it was Monday morning, and go away down to the village, and see if some event wouldn't happen. Something told her that a great adventure was awaiting her just out there on the road if she would only go to meet it.

She packed away the butter in its firm golden bars, and went into the house. As she crossed the grassy open space, an old-fashioned double buggy went rattling down the road. Some one in the back seat waved a gay parasol at her, and Christina responded with a flap of her apron.

It was two of the three Miss Grants going to town with their adopted nephew, Gavin Hume, who was now Gavin Grant. For the very summer that Christina had given her berries to the abused little orphan, the Grant sisters had rescued him from the dire possibility of being taken West by the Skinflint Jenkinses who were moving to the prairies. Gavin had grown very dear to the old ladies, and indeed it was the joke of the neighbourhood how much they petted him.

"There's Oor Gavie with two of his Aunties," called Christina to Ellen, who was looking through the door to see who was passing. "I guess they are taking him to town to help him choose a new necktie."

Ellen laughed. The Grant Girls, as they were still called, were certainly foolish enough over Gavin to do it. They were still Mrs. Lindsay's closest friends, and "Oor Gavie's" virtues were well known in the Lindsay family.

"I'm all done now," declared Christina, standing in the middle of the kitchen, and waving her apron vigorously. "And as it is my birthday, I think I'll go off and look for an adventure. I feel as if something's got to happen to-day, or I'll set fire to the house."

Her elder sister turned from her pie-baking to look at her. "Well, my goodness," she exclaimed, "sometimes I think you're not in your right mind." Ellen was staid and steady and well behaved and could never comprehend Christina's restlessness. "Whatever do you want now?"

"I want to go to the University; that's the exact truth. But as I can't go before dinner, I believe I'll walk down into the village instead, and see if I can meet Mr. Opportunity."

"Mr. What?" asked Ellen in alarm. If Christina had any smallest notion of dressing up and parading the village street when the young men came down to the corner, as some of the girls did, she, Ellen, would look after her right thoroughly. "Who's he?"

Christina laughed uproariously. "Oh, I must tell Uncle Neil!" she cried. "Don't worry, he's awfully old and bald, so there's no danger."

She darted out to the garden to share the joke with Uncle Neil, and then she slipped into the house, unnoticed, and up to her own room. She felt as excited as if she were planning to run away. She dressed very carefully in her afternoon gingham of blue that looked pale beside the colour of her eyes. She made a coronal of her heavy golden brown braids, winding them round her shapely head, making a face at herself in the glass because the hair was so straight and her nose was so freckled. And then she slipped down the stairs like a thief and ran down the path behind the spring house. She would not have confessed it, even for a college course, but she was wondering if, in this wild expedition to meet Mr. Opportunity, one might not meet one's Dream Knight riding out there on the highway. For though Christina had never had a lover, she had her true Knight, who rode just beyond the horizon. And why shouldn't she meet him to-day? Anything wonderful was liable to happen on a May morning when you were just nineteen and were running away from the beaten track in search of adventure.

The path that ran down behind the spring house and across the corner of the clover field was the Short Cut to the village. It ran into a little grove, and there Sandy had made a very primitive stile to enable Mary to get over the

fence without spoiling her Sunday clothes. All the fields were bordered with a fringe of feathery green bushes, from which rose the sweet roundelays of the song sparrows. The meadow larks soared and called to each other over the green-brown carpet of the earth, and away up against the dazzling blue of the sky the bob-o'-links danced and trilled. Christina gave a joyous skip as she entered the little grove. There the sunlight lay on the underbrush in great golden splashes, and the White Throat called "Canada, Canada, Canada," as if he could never leave off.

She ran joyously down the pathway that led to the road, and there, just at the edge of the stile, under the low bushes, her sharp eye caught something white. Her heart gave a leap; here, surely, was the Great Adventure waiting for her. She ran forward and found a basket hidden away under the stile. It was covered carefully with a newspaper, and, wonder of wonders, bore a card with her name, "Miss Christina Lindsay." She pulled it out breathlessly and tore off the cover. Beneath was a perfect glory of garden flowers, great crimson and golden tulips, narcissi, waxy white with golden hearts, purple hyacinths, filling the woods with their perfume, and such a wealth of daffodils as would take away the breath.

Christina stood with her arms full, and looked at them with a feeling that was very much like dismay. There was only one garden in the township that could produce a basket like that, and it belonged to her mother's friends, the Grant Girls, but Christina well knew they had not sent her the birthday gift. In a corner of the card was written in very small letters, "From G. G."

Though Christina was nineteen she had never had what was termed in Orchard Glen society, "a fellow." There was no girl having reached such an age without the pleasant experience of a special notice from some young man, but must stop and ask herself the reason. Christina had long ago put her poverty down to her lack of beauty. But she was not very much troubled over it, for her Dream Knight still rode gaily just beyond the horizon, and who knew when he might not ride up to her door? But though his outlines were very hazy, Christina knew in her heart that he was altogether and entirely unlike Gavin Grant.

Gavin was shy and awkward, and had lived so long away on the back concession with his Aunties, where the grass grew in the middle of the corduroy road, that he had grown as queer and old-fashioned as they were. But ever since the day Christina had saved him from Skinflint Jenkins' horse-whip, he had shown a tendency to follow her with adoringly humble eyes. He had made no further attempt to attract her attention until now. And here was his first gift! And worst of all he must have told his Aunts about it! Christina hastily pushed the basket back, and seating herself upon the stile, looked down at it.

The first offering from Love's treasure house could not but make the heart beat faster; but what a disappointment that it should come through Gavin Grant of all people! How Jimmie would tease her, and how Mary would laugh—Mary, who had so many beaux sending her presents that she did not know what to do with them all. And Sandy,—no, Sandy would not laugh. Sandy liked Gavin and said he was one of the best fellows he knew. But his virtues were not the sort that a Dream Knight possessed, especially when you were only nineteen and out on the road for adventure.

Christina sat on the stile and gazed down the road that crossed the little brown stream and then became the village street. She could see the church spire above the orchard trees, and hear the "cling clung" of Mark Falls' blacksmith shop, and the shouts of the school children out for their morning recess. But there was no smallest sign of an additional adventure. Evidently this was the announcement of her fate. And as she sat there, filled with restless longing, a car appeared in a cloud of dust away on the hilltop at the other end of the village, and even in the midst of her disappointment Opportunity was speeding towards her on rapid wheels.

CHAPTER II

AWAY FROM ORCHARD GLEN

Mrs. Johnnie Dunn, driving home from town in her new Ford car, spun down the hill and through the village, without even stopping at the post office.

Mrs. Dunn was the only truly emancipated woman of Orchard Glen; her husband was a quiet, shy little man, whom every one called "Marthy," and he always referred proudly to his clever wife as "The Woman." She managed her husband, her household, her farm, and a dozen other enterprises such as no woman was ever supposed to be able to manage, and did it all in such a thoroughly capable manner that she was the envy and the scandal of the whole neighbourhood.

Her latest escapade had been to buy up the old Simms place, next to her own farm, turn it all into pasture for cows, buy a milking machine and a Ford car, and go dashing into town every morning with milk for a list of customers that astonished all the milkmen of the district. And she often came tearing back to her day's work when the lazy village folk were shaking the breakfast tablecloth out of the back door!

As she came storming down into the village on this bright May morning, Marmaduke Simms was sitting on the store veranda as usual, with his peg leg displayed upon a soap box, as his eternal excuse for his idleness. But there was no excuse for Trooper Tom Boyd, The Woman's own nephew, whose two perfectly good legs were stretched out beside him, and all in the middle of a morning in the middle of seeding!

Trooper Tom had once ridden the prairies in the Mounted Police force, but though he had been one of the most fearless riders of the plains, he was frankly afraid of his Aunt. He had fully intended to be back in the field before her return, and now, when her car appeared upon the hill half-an-hour earlier than it should have come, he gave a start of dismay.

"Great Ghosts," cried Marmaduke, "it's The Woman, sure as death!"

Trooper Tom gathered his long limbs together in one swift spasm, and leaped to cover through the store doorway.

"I ain't a bit scairt of her, Tilly," he remarked to the store-keeper's daughter, as he landed tumultuously against the counter, "but I just remembered all of a sudden that I wanted to buy a box o' matches."

Tilly leaned against the counter and went off into a spasm of giggles, while the car stormed past the store in a cloud of reproving dust. Marmaduke reached his head around the door-post. "She's gone, Trooper," he whispered, as though afraid that The Woman might hear, "and, say, I guess you're goin' to have swell company. She's got a passenger, and he waved his hat at me and yelled."

Trooper ventured out upon the veranda, followed by Tilly.

"Like as not he was yellin' for help," he suggested. "It's a man, sure enough, Trooper," said Tilly, with a giggle. "Guess she's goin' to give you the sack, and she's brought him out to do the seedin'."

"Too good to be true," sighed the young man mournfully. "'Most likely it's an implement agent. The Woman's always buyin' something new made o' wheels."

"She'll be gettin' a machine to wind you up and set you goin' at four in the mornin'," said Duke comfortingly. "Sit down and have a smoke, she'll know you're gone in a minit anyhow."

Meanwhile the car bumped across the little bridge that spanned the creek and went storming up the opposite hill. And at the top of the hill sat Christina Lindsay on the fence top wishing with all her might and main that Mr. Opportunity would come out and meet her.

As soon as Mrs. Johnnie Dunn saw her, she stopped her car opposite the stile with a word to the man at her side. He picked up his suit-case and stepped hurriedly from the car.

"Hello, there, Christine!" shouted The Woman, over the stranger's shoulder, "here's a man from Algonquin wants a place to board. Do you think your mother'd take him?"

The stranger came forward looking intently at Christina, with a twinkle in his eye. He was stout, with iron-grey hair. His bronzed face was good to look at, and he had a loud hearty voice, and a breezy manner. He raised his hat with elaborate politeness.

"I hope you can take a stranger in for a week or two," he said. "I heard that the Lindsays are noted for their hospitality."

"I'm afraid we can't, but I'll ask mother," said Christina, coming down off the fence to a more formal position. She spoke rather stiffly, for the stranger's air of easy familiarity rather put her on her dignity.

Mrs. Johnnie Dunn still sat in her churning car and looked on with laughing eyes. "Take him along up home and show him to your Ma, and see if she likes him," she shouted "'cause if youse folks won't keep him, I'll have to cart him back to town."

The stranger burst into a laugh. It was a big, hearty, noisy laugh, with something in it that arrested Christina's attention. He shut up his eyes just the way Sandy did, and he showed his two rows of teeth just like Neil, and he threw back his head exactly like John, and it surely couldn't be, and yet it really was,——

"Allister!" screamed Christina, and the next moment she was over the fence, with her arms tight round the stranger's neck, and was saying over and over, "Oh, Allister, Allister, I just knew something awfully good was going to happen, and it's you!"

And The Woman, who could carry through a business deal with a high hand and was a terror in a bargain, sat in her car and watched the brother and sister, with the tears blurring her vision.

It was not until the day's work was done and the reunited family were gathered round the supper table that the Lindsays had time to realise the wonderful fact that Allister had come home.

He sat in the centre of an admiring circle and told all his experiences of the past ten years, shouting occasional bits of the history to Grandpa, who was sitting devouring him with his eyes.

There were the first hard years when everything went wrong; the year he was hailed out, and the year the frost got everything, and the year of the great prairie fires when he was on the verge of throwing everything up and coming back to Ontario. But there had been good years in between and finally he had begun to move up the hill. Everything in the West moved in the same direction, and now he had a big ranch and some coal mine shares, and building lots in Prairie Park where real estate was going up like a sky rocket.

And the truth of the matter was that if everything went all right he would be a rich man some day not far distant. And he was planning that when he sold out and got from under some of his schemes he would come home and fix up the old farm and make it the finest place in Ontario. He was going to buy all the new machinery for John, and have electric light,——

"And a piano," put in Christina, "we need one far worse than we need a hay loader, don't we, Mary?"

"You'll have one some day if I go bust," shouted Allister, and went on to tell of profits and prices and real estate deals. His mother's face looked a little wistful, but if there was rather much talk of money and none of the wealth that thieves cannot steal, she put aside her disappointment. Allister was home, he was well and prosperous and that was surely enough happiness for one day. She sat beside him, keeping tight hold of his hand, patting it occasionally and repeating Gaelic words of endearment, precious words he had not heard since he was a child and which brought a sting to his eyes.

The family conference did not last long, for the neighbours had heard that Allister Lindsay was home from the

West, and the chores were not nearly completed when visitors began to arrive to welcome the long absent one. The girls hurried about their work, while Allister ran here and there and got in every one's way. He followed Christina down to the milking and back again to the spring house and helped her with the separator, and she was rapturously happy that he should single her out for special notice.

He was back at the barnyard with Uncle Neil again, when she came out of the barn with a basket of eggs. Uncle Neil was turning the cows into the back lane to drive them up to the pasture.

"Here, Uncle Neil, let me do that," cried Allister. "I want to see what it feels like to drive the cows to the back pasture again. Hurrah here, Christine! Come along with me, for fear I get lost!"

Christina fairly threw her basket of eggs at Uncle Neil, and ran after her brother. They walked hand in hand up the lane like a couple of children.

"Maybe you wanted to go back to the house and get dolled up before the boys come," he said, looking down at her big milking apron.

Christina eyed him suspiciously. She was wondering if he was thinking that she needed much more fixing up than her sisters.

"No," she answered, "I'm beautiful enough without. It's just girls like Ellen and Mary that need to be fussing over their looks."

Allister looked down at her in admiration that was impossible to mistake.

"By ginger, you're right," he shouted heartily; "you're the sort of a girl for me. Say, what would you say to coming out West and keeping house for me?"

Here was Opportunity come back to her! Christina seized him tightly.

"Oh, my! Wouldn't that be grand. It would be the very best—well, the *second* best thing in the world!"

"And what would be the very best?"

"To go to the University with Sandy next Fall!" she answered promptly.

"Well, I declare!" Allister laughed, "you've all been bitten by the education bug. Mr. Sinclair used to say that if father was to change the catechism, he'd have it read: 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and get a good education.'"

"Just what I believe exactly!" declared Christina, who was trembling with excitement.

"But girls go and get married, or ought to," said Allister practically.

"Well, I hope I will some day," confessed Christina. "I don't want to be an old maid like the Auntie Grants. But I want to go away from Orchard Glen first, and see what the world's like—and get a grand education and know heaps and do something great—oh, I don't know what, but just something like you read about in the papers!"

The cows were in the pasture by this time, and as Allister put up the bars he said,

"Let's set down here for a few minutes and settle this matter."

Christina perched herself at his side on the top of the low rail fence. The soft May mists were gathering in the valleys, the orchards shone pink in the sunset. Away down in the beaver meadow the frogs were tuning up for their first overture of evening, and a whippoorwill far up in the Slash had begun to sing his lonely song to the dark hillside. Allister looked about him and uttered a great sigh of contentment.

"Oh, it's great to be home again," he breathed. "Now that I don't have to keep my nose to the grindstone I'm going to come home oftener. Things change so. We may never all be home again together."

"Well, I'd be sorry for that," said Christina, who was fairly dancing with impatience. "But I'd be sorrier if I thought things wouldn't change. We don't want to live here for ever and ever just as we are."

"No, of course not. But I hope some of us will always be in Orchard Glen. John always will."

"I suppose so. John's spent all his life working hard for the rest of us," cried Christina, "and I suppose he'll go on doing it to the end."

"There's nobody better than John," declared Allister. "But let me tell you this, that the man or woman, either, who gives up all his chance in life to somebody else is bound to come out with the small end of the stick. It sounds fine, but it don't pay." Allister spoke with the assurance of the successful man of business. "There's a certain amount of looking out for Number One that's necessary in this pleasant world."

Christina was silent. Her heart told her he must be wrong, but she could not have argued the matter if she would. It did not seem possible that John's life of self-sacrifice and devotion had been a mistake. Something that Neil was always quoting was running through her head, "There is no gain except by loss." She could not recall it fully, but she remembered distinctly another quotation, "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it."

"Well, we're all getting on in the world all right," cried Allister heartily. "I tell you, our family's doing fine. And if I make my pile as I hope to, we'll all do better. I'd like to be able to give Neil and Sandy a lift, but Sandy's ready to go next Fall to the University anyway. And it'll be a good while before Jimmie's ready."

"Ellen and Bruce will be married some time next Fall, I expect," said Christina, going over the members of the family in her mind.

"I hate to think of her as a farmer's wife," said Allister. "If I had her out West I'd do better than that for her, but I suppose I might as well tell her I wanted to cut her head off."

"I should think so!" laughed Christina; "it's a dreadful thing to be in love."

"Look as if Mary wouldn't be teaching school long either, eh? Mother'll soon be without a girl if they all keep going off like that. What about the one they call Christina?"

"Goody! We've come to Christina at last! Let's settle her case. Christina will stay at home and milk the cows and feed the pigs and bake and scrub and take the eggs and butter to Algonquin on Saturdays. She will be the old maid sister with the horny hands, who always bakes the pies and cakes for Christmas when the family come home!"

Allister threw back his head and laughed into the coloured heavens till the echoes came back sharply from the whippoorwill's sanctuary on the hillside.

"Never!" he cried heroically, waving the long stick with which he had driven the cows up the lane. "Never! Let me die before I see the day! No, *siree!* Christina will go to the University and take all the gold medals, or whatever truck it is they get there, and she'll be a high-brow and go travelling over the country lecturing on Women's Rights!"

"I do believe I'd do it, even the lecturing part, for the sake of the college course," she declared. "Oh, Allister, I'm simply *aching* to get away and have a good education and be—be *somebody*—even if it's only a Woman's Righter!"

"Hooroo! I'm with you. I guess your education won't break me. You've got the kind of spirit that's bound to win, so off you go. You get your sunbonnet and all the fal-lals girls have to get, and be ready next Fall to finish your High School and then it's you for college!"

"Allister!" She turned to look at him. It just could not be that he meant what he said. Her eyes were like stars in the twilight, her voice sank to a whisper.

"Allister! What are you saying?"

He laughed joyfully. "I'm saying that you can start out on the road to glory next September and I'll foot the bills!" he shouted. "You're deaf as Grandpa!"

Christina suddenly realised that he really meant it; that the glorious unbelievable thing upon which she had set her heart was hers. She gave a sudden spring from her seat to throw herself in an abandon of gratitude upon her brother. But the leap had an entirely different result. The unsteady fence rail upon which she sat gave a lurch, turned over and Christina and it together went crashing into the raspberry and gooseberry bushes and thistles and stones of the fence corner.

Allister jumped from his perch to her assistance.

"Gosh hang it, girl," he cried, "you might have killed yourself!"

Christina staggered to her feet, scratched and dishevelled. "Oh, my goodness!" she cried, "to think of killing myself at this supreme moment! If I had I'd never, never speak to myself again for missing that University course!"

When they got back to the house Christina went about in a happy daze. There was no opportunity to do more than whisper the wonderful news to Sandy, and then she had to fly about to help put everything in order before the guests arrived.

The Lindsay home was at all times a popular gathering-place of an evening, for there was always plenty of company and music there, and a jolly time. Indeed Uncle Neil was in the habit of saying that, when the milk pails were hung out along the shed they were like the Standard on the Braes o' Mar, for when the young fellows of the countryside saw them, they came flocking over the hills. And indeed the last pail had scarcely been washed and put in its place to-night when the first visitor appeared in the lane.

Uncle Neil, coming up from the pump in the orchard, with two pails of fresh water, announced that the whole MacKenzie family were coming across the field, and burst into the song that always set Ellen's cheeks flaming.

"MacDonald's men, Clan Donald's men,
MacKenzie's men, MacGillivray's men,
Strath Allan's men, the Lowland men
Are coming late and early!"

"MacGillivray's man's coming early to-night, Mary!" called Sandy. "There's his buggy comin' up the line! Man, it's easy to see he hasn't any chores in the evening!"

"I'm all behind the times!" cried the new brother. "Tell me all about this MacGillivray man. He's a new one!"

He caught hold of Mary as she came in from the spring house, but she dodged him. This MacGillivray man was a new and quite special cavalier. He was no country boy from a neighbouring farm, but a prosperous young merchant from Port Stewart, a town some dozen miles away on the lake shore. Driving through the country one bright day in early spring, he had met Mary on her way to school, and had never got over the sight. Since then he had driven out all the way to Orchard Glen many a night for a repetition of the vision.

"Will you finish for me, Christine?" Mary whispered in a panic. "I'm not fixed up yet, and he's coming up the lane."

Christina promised and hurried her away. It didn't matter, she reflected, whether she was dressed in her best or her milking apron. There was no MacGillivray's man or MacKenzie's man, Highland or Lowland, coming over the hills to see her. And then she suddenly remembered with dismay the flowers that must be still lying under the bushes at the stile!

She hurried through her work, threw off her apron, smoothed her hair, and ran down the path to the grove. The evening shadows had full possession now, and there were no splashes of gold on the undergrowth. The veeries were ringing their bells in the tree tops and a cat bird was fairly spilling out music of a dozen delightful varieties from a hidden corner behind a basswood bush. Christina ran down the path and parted the undergrowth. The basket was gone! She searched in every corner. And then she remembered that on her way out to the milking she had seen Gavin driving home from town. He had taken the basket back, lest she should not find it! She turned and went slowly back up the path, feeling ashamed and a little relieved. He would never know that she had seen it, and yet it seemed too bad not to thank him for such a beautiful gift!

She hastened back to help Grandpa to bed. Grandpa always sang his evening hymn just before he went to sleep, and as he lived in the belief that every one was as deaf as himself, it was well to get the performance over before the house was filled with company.

Grandpa had a very ancient little hymn book with an orange cotton cover which had been one of Grandma's treasures, and which was now his most prized possession. Grandma Lindsay had been a Methodist before her marriage, and under her influence Grandpa had often been in danger of wandering from the paths of Presbyterianism. He would have considered it a great sin to confess that this old hymn book with its gospel songs was more to him than the psalms of David, and he would never have dreamed of introducing one of them into family worship. But he loved every line inside the tattered orange covers, and their bright melodies had helped him over many a hard place after Grandma had left him. His favourite hymn was the last in the book, "The Hindmost Hymn," Grandpa called it, and every night of his life, unless he were too ill, he sang at least one verse of its sweet promise,

"On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden,
Where the tree of Life is blooming,
There is rest for you.
There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for the weary,
There is rest for you!"

"Aren't you too tired to sing the Hindmost Hymn to-night, Grandpa?" asked Christina slyly. But Grandpa did not fall into the trap.

"Tired? Hoh! Me tired! And the Lad jist come home! Indeed it will be more than a hymn I'll be raising to the Lord this night. I'll jist be singing Him a psalm, too, for He has brought Joseph back to the land of Israel."

Christina was ashamed of her subterfuge, and joined him in his psalm of gratitude, feeling that she, too, should raise a song of thanksgiving for all that had come to her on this wonderful day. So she joined Grandpa's shaking notes in

"Oh, thou, my soul, bless God the Lord;
And all that in me is
Be stirred up by His holy name
To magnify and bless!"

And then they finished with every verse of the Hindmost Hymn. Though Grandpa never confessed it, he had a secret hope, every night, as he lay down to sleep, that all his aches and pains might be at an end and that the next morning he would waken "on the other side of Jordan, in the sweet fields of Eden," and he liked to close the day with the cheering words.

So Christina sang it with him to the very end and then tucked him into his big feather bed. She left his door into the winter kitchen ajar so that he could hear the singing, which they were sure to have. Then she helped her mother air the spare room for Allister, and put a little fire in the shiny box stove in the hall, for the May evening was chilly.

By the time she had finished all her little duties the house was full of visitors. Mrs. Johnnie Dunn and "Marthy" were the first, the former eager to retell the manner of her introduction of Allister to his family.

The McKenzies, who lived on the next farm above, were all there, and Bruce was helping Ellen carry chairs out to the veranda. The Browns, a big family who lived just across the road from the Lindsays, were in the kitchen, and young Mr. MacGillivray's horse was in the stable and he himself was seated in the parlour talking to Uncle Neil, and looking at Mary.

Then there was quite a little crowd coming up from the village, Tilly Holmes and Joanna Falls, the blacksmith's handsome daughter, and Mr. and Mrs. Martin, who owned the mill, people of some consequence in Orchard Glen, for Mrs. Martin had been a school teacher before her marriage. Then there was Burke Wright, who worked in the mill, and his little wife; Trooper Tom Boyd and his chum Marmaduke, and even Mr. Sinclair, the Presbyterian minister, and his wife, all come to do honour to the long-absent son of Orchard Glen.

Christina joined Tilly Holmes and Bell Brown and some more girls of her own age in a corner of the veranda

and told them all about Allister's sudden appearance, and how she had taken him for a stranger looking for a place to board, and how he had promised to send her to the High School next Fall and then to the University with Sandy!

The young folk bunched together in the semi-darkness of the veranda, laughing and teasing, the older women gathered with Mrs. Lindsay in the parlour, and the men collected about Allister in the greater freedom of the kitchen, where coats could be laid aside and pipes taken out, and they sat astride their chairs in the smoke and listened to him tell about the prairies and the wheat crop of Alberta and the prices of real estate.

It was just like a party, Christina felt, as she ran here and there, waiting on the guests, and trying hard not to think about the glory of the future.

Uncle Neil came to the veranda door in his stocking feet and shirt sleeves.

"Come away in here, you musicians," he called, "Allister wants to hear some of the old songs!"

There was much holding back and shoving of others forward, and many declarations of heavy colds and a rooted inability to sing at any time, but finally some of the girls were persuaded to move inside, and the boys followed.

Minnie Brown was organist in the Methodist church, so she was invited to the place of honour on the organ stool. Ellen lit the big lamp with the pink shade, and Trem. Henderson, who was the leader in musical circles and whom everybody called Tremendous K., was called in from the smoky region of the kitchen to start the singing.

They sang several of the old hymns first, so that Grandpa might enjoy them; and then Allister sent Sandy in from the kitchen to say that he must have some of the good old rousing Scotch songs they used to sing when he was home. So Mary brought out the old tartan-covered song-book and they sang it through, from the dreamy wail of "Ye Banks and Braes" to the rollicking lilt of the Hundred Pipers when

"Twa thousand swam ower to fell English ground,
An' danced themselves dry to the pibroch's sound!"

It was a grand old-time evening, such as was not so often indulged in as when times were newer and money scarce. When Mrs. Lindsay and the girls had passed around cake and pie and big cups of tea thick with cream the festivity was over, and the company moved away down the lane in the soft May moonlight.

And Christina and Sandy hung over the garden gate, like a pair of lovers, long after the last guest had gone, and made wonderful plans for the future, when they would be going to the University together.

CHAPTER III

"WHOSOEVER WILL LOSE HIS LIFE"

Christina was sitting in the old hammock on the veranda, ready for church. She had already done a big morning's work. For, though the Sabbath was rigidly kept in the Lindsay home, and made a day of rest as much as possible, the usual multitude of barnyard duties had to be attended to, for the chickens and the pigs and the calves clamoured just as loudly for their breakfast on Sabbath morning as any week day.

But Christina's work was all done and she was neatly dressed; her heavy golden brown braids were placed in a shining crown about her head, and her freshly ironed white dress and her white canvas shoes were immaculate. For her keen sense of a lack of beauty had taught her the value of scrupulous neatness. She was studying her Sunday School lesson, and her white gown and her bright head bent over the open Bible on her lap, made her look not unlike a young saint at her meditations; which was an entirely misleading picture, for Christina's mind was rioting joyously across the University campus, far away from Orchard Glen and Sabbath calm, even though her eyes were reading words such as never man spake,

"Therefore, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or drink ... is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

"Are you really ready?" cried Sandy in admiring astonishment, as he settled himself beside her in the hammock. "You never take half as much time as the other girls to get dolled up!"

It was more than two months since Allister had gone back to the West, and Neil had left for his summer Mission Field away out on the prairies. July was marching over the hills, trailing the glory of her clover-blossom gowns, her arms laden with sweet-smelling hay. The pink blossoms were blown from the orchard and instead the trees were hung with a wealth of tiny green globes. Inside the house and about the barnyard there were changes also, for Allister had been very generous, especially to John, and his labours had been very much lightened by machinery.

Christina sat with her fingers between the leaves of her Bible, her thoughts far away on the shining road to success which she and Sandy were so soon to take. For her the days could not move fast enough.

"My, but I wish I didn't have that year of High School to put in first," she declared. "But then I suppose I wouldn't be satisfied if I were a B. A. and you a Ph. D. But I'm going to study like a runaway horse next winter," she added, growing incoherent in her joy, "and maybe I'll catch up to you, Mr. Alexander Lindsay."

Sandy lay back in the hammock and gazed up at the festoons of little green balls, hanging in the trees. He did not respond with his usual readiness to his sister's nonsense. His gaiety seemed to have deserted him lately.

"I don't see how you can help getting up on the barn and yelling for joy, Sandy," she declared impatiently. "I know I would, every time I think about going to college, if I were a boy. But I have several good reasons for not expressing myself in that manner. Ellen's one, and Mrs. Sinclair's another, and then I'm really a very well behaved young woman anyway, and I'm going to be a lady some day, and it might not be well to have such dark places in my past."

Sandy laughed rather forcedly. "It'll be time enough for me to yell, when I've got something to yell about," he said. "'Don't holler till you're out of the bush,' is a good old adage. And I'm a long way from being out of it yet."

"What do you mean?" asked Christina in alarm.

"I was talking things over with John last night, and we're afraid we can't manage for me to go this year. Allister lost some money in real estate last month, and can't be depended on to help John as much as he expected. I've almost decided to go down and see Mitchell about the Anondell school. They wrote yesterday asking me to take it again."

"Oh, *Sandy*! Oh!" Christina's tone was full of unbelieving dismay. "I can't believe it. Surely,—oh, John won't let you stay! Something can be done surely——"

"Oh, of course John wants me to go and he'd manage somehow. But I won't let him. It would cut Neil short too. It's no use making a row over it," he concluded stoically. "It just can't be helped."

But Christina was inconsolable. It required a great deal of explaining to convince her that it was not all an evil dream. She just couldn't and wouldn't believe it. It was harder to bear Sandy's disappointment than if it had been her own. He found he had to undertake the role of comforter and try to convince her it was not such a disaster after all. There was no use making a row over what couldn't be helped, he repeated again and again. She would catch up to him in the year she would have at school, and who knew but they might enter college together.

But Christina could only sit and stare in silence down the orchard aisle to where the sun was glowing, richly purple, on the last uncut clover field. The glory had departed from the morning, and the glory had departed too, from the road to success which she and Sandy were to have taken together. For she alone realised what a bitter disappointment this was to Sandy. He would never complain, she well knew, nor indulge in self-pity, but she did know that there was grave danger of his throwing away the hope of a University education altogether, and going into business or perhaps back to the farm. For if he did not start this year, how was one to know what might happen before the next year? She sat perfectly silent, and when Christina was silent she was in deep trouble. Sandy strove in vain to cheer her. "Never mind. Don't let it worry you," he said bravely. "I can study nights and perhaps I won't lose so much time. And if I can't manage it next year I can go out West with Allister. Come along, let's get to church."

She rose slowly, and as slowly went into the house to see if Grandpa were comfortable. They left him in a cool corner of the winter kitchen with his Bible and hymn-book and Sport at his feet. The family gathered on the veranda, and though Christina's mind was so disturbed, she did not forget to see that her mother had a clean handkerchief, and that her bonnet was on straight.

Mary was like a fairy in her white muslin dress, and Ellen looked unusually radiant, in a new blue silk, a present from Allister. But Ellen had an especial reason for looking radiant these days. For a long time she and Bruce had nursed the hope that he might study medicine one day, and Dr. McGarry had promised to hand him over all his practice the day he graduated. Times had been too hard on the McKenzie farm for Bruce to leave, but crops had been good for several years now, and he had almost decided to try the University. And Ellen, who shared the Lindsay ambition to the full, was sharing his joy and urging him on.

John walked by his mother's side, and Christina fell behind between Sandy and Jimmie. Usually her mother had to rebuke the hilarity of these three on Sabbath mornings, but to-day Christina was so quiet that Jimmie enquired if she were sick.

They passed silently through the little gate between the lilac bushes, and down the lane to where the tall poplars stood guard at the entrance to the farm. When their mother accompanied them the Lindsays never went by the Short Cut, for even Sandy's stile was too difficult a climb for her.

As they passed out onto the Highway they were joined here and there by groups of church goers. For everybody in Orchard Glen except two or three odd characters, went to church, and Sunday was a day of pleasant social intercourse, such as no other time of the busy week afforded.

It was a real relief, too, from the long strain of six days' toil, and as yet neither the pleasure-seeker nor the money-getter had interfered seriously with its grateful peace. It was a day when you took yourself out of your toilsome environment, dressed in your best, and drove or walked leisurely to church, with a feeling of ease and well-being that no hurried pleasure-seeking could ever give. And you met all your friends and neighbours there, and had a word with them, and incidentally you were reminded that while crops and cattle and fine horses and motor cars and a swelling bank account were good things to possess; like the work of the past week, they would be put away one day, while the unseen things would remain.

The McKenzies came down the path from the farm above, the whole family, from Old Johnnie, who was an elder, to Katie, who was Christina's age. They paired off with the Lindsays, and Bruce and Ellen dropped behind, for they had gotten so far on their courtship, that they even walked to church together, in broad daylight, a stage that was supposed to immediately precede a wedding.

The young folk from the Browns came pouring out of their gate. The Browns were Methodists and the old folk

went only to their own church which held its meetings in the evening. But youthful Orchard Glen practised Church Union very persistently, and the Browns were only following the usual custom when they went to each church impartially.

Mrs. Johnnie Dunn and Marthy came bouncing past in their car. The Woman was a Methodist, but Marthy was a Presbyterian so they went to both churches. Trooper Tom never went with his Aunt anywhere that could be avoided and he came down the pathway with the wide stride that marked him for a rider of the plains, and walked beside Sandy.

They were down in the village proper now, and every house sent out its representatives. The village did not begin until the Lindsay hill had been descended and the little bridge that spanned the brown stream crossed, and right on the bank stood the tiny cottage where little Mitty Minns and her old invalid grandmother lived. Mitty had lately married Burke Wright who worked in the flour mill, and was now emerging from the gate with her new husband, fairly bubbling over with joy and pride at being off alone with him for a few hours, away from Granny's complainings.

Across the street stood a much more imposing residence, Dr. McGarry's red brick, white pillared home. Mrs. Sutherland, his widowed sister who kept house for him, came rustling out in her best black silk, and wonder of wonders, the Doctor with her!

Joanna Falls, the blacksmith's daughter, burst from the next gate, like a beautiful butterfly from a green cocoon. Joanna was glorious in a pink silk and white shoes, and a hat trimmed with pink roses. She was a very handsome girl, but she was fast nearing the danger line of thirty, and a long attachment to Trooper Tom Boyd, who was a gay lad, attached to nobody, had rather soured Joanna's temper and sharpened her tongue.

Her father, in his shirt sleeves, was sitting in the most conspicuous part of the little veranda with his stockinged feet on the railing, smoking his pipe and reading the newspaper. Mark Falls always managed, when the weather permitted, to arrange himself in this position on a Sunday before the church goers. He knew it scandalised the worshippers and especially angered the good old Presbyterians who were strict Sabbatarians. Mark made a great parade of his extreme irreligiousness, and could tell stories all day long about duplicity of ministers and the hypocrisy of church members. Joanna was his one orphan child and he was not a very kind father, which had added not a little to his daughter's acidity of temper. But they went their several ways quite independently, and Joanna's way was always where Trooper Tom Boyd was to be found.

She happened to come out of her gate just as Trooper and Sandy Lindsay were passing together, and of course they walked with her. It was surprising how many times little coincidents like this happened. Trooper whispered something to her and Joanna's happy laugh could be heard all down the line of demure church goers.

The procession passed the closed and deserted store, but Marmaduke Simms was perched on the veranda, and Trooper meanly deserted his fair partner, and swung himself up beside his chum, there to wait until the sound of the first hymn would assure them they were in no danger of being too early for church.

Tilly Holmes came tripping out of the side door and through the garden gate, an entrance used only on the Sabbath. The Holmeses were strict Baptists, and their service was not held until the afternoon. But they found it impossible to keep their children from the promiscuous church-going habits of the village and long ago had given up the struggle. They even allowed Tilly to belong to the Union Presbyterian-and-Methodist Choir, knowing that youth will be wayward and you can't put old heads on young shoulders.

Tilly was trying hard not to giggle, seeing it was Sunday, but she found it particularly difficult, for she had to walk beside Joanna, and since Trooper had dropped away Joanna's tongue had become more than usually sarcastic.

The unusual sight of Dr. McGarry going to church proved an irresistible opportunity. Mrs. Sutherland was never done telling Mrs. Sinclair how the Doctor struggled to get to church on Sundays, and all in vain. It seemed as though the whole countryside selfishly arranged their maladies to prevent his attending the sanctuary.

"Well my sakes," declared Joanna, "the Doctor's goin' to church! Everybody must a' got awful healthy all at once, or else they've all up and died on him."

She turned to Mary and Christina who were walking behind her. The unimpaired success of the Lindsays was particularly trying to Joanna's temper.

"Well, how's that rich brother o' yours gettin' on, Christine?" she asked, her black eyes snapping. "I see he hasn't sent you to college yet."

"It's very kind of you to ask after him, Joanna," said Mary smoothly. Mary Lindsay was the one girl in Orchard Glen who could put Joanna in her place. "If Trooper was of a jealous nature he might object, but he doesn't seem to be that kind at all."

Joanna whirled around and addressed herself to Tilly, her cheeks flaming. Her love for Trooper Tom, who was but a wayward cavalier, was the cause of much bitterness and heart-burning.

They were turning in at the church gate, when an old-fashioned double-buggy rattled past, drawn by a heavy shining team. A young man was driving and there were three very gaily-dressed ladies with him.

Gavin Grant's three Aunts were always a sight worth seeing on a Sunday. They were lovely ladies, who, by the calendar, might have been termed old; but they had stopped aging somewhere in the happiest period of girlhood. So it was not unfitting that they should dress in their girlhood clothes, though they were all of a fashion of some thirty years previous. And so, though Auntie Elspie's hair was white and her face wrinkled, and Auntie Flora was stooped and rheumatic and Auntie Janet stout and matronly, their hearts were young and light, and they arrayed themselves accordingly. They owned the most wonderful flower garden in the countryside and the old democrat looked as if all its hollyhocks had come to church, as Gavin pulled up at the door. The Grant Girls were all dressed in ancient silks and velvets made in the fashion of an early Alexandra period, with much silk fringe and old heavy jewellery as accessories.

Gavin carefully helped each of them alight, for the Aunties had given much time to their boy's manners and had seen to it that he did not fail in little acts of courtesy. And though the women declared that they had "babied" him beyond belief, and the girls said he was as much an old maid as any one of them, their kindness had not spoiled him for he was as generous and unselfish as they were.

Christina felt the blood mount to her cheeks as she caught Gavin's glance. She had never mentioned her flowers to him, and always felt ashamed when she saw him.

The three Grant Girls were immediately surrounded by friends. Everybody loved them, and their arrival at church always caused a pleasant stir.

Gavin came back from putting his horses into the shed and showed them to their seats, where he sat with them until it was time for him to go into the choir.

Christina always went to choir practice, but like many another, she did not sing in the choir on Sundays, so she went to the family pew with her mother while Mary and Ellen joined the singers in the vestibule.

The congregation were almost all seated, when the choir, with Tremendous K. at their head, came hurrying down the aisle, and took their places in seats beside the pulpit. Joanna Falls was leading soprano, by virtue of a voice of peculiar strength and carrying power, Gavin Grant, who had the best baritone voice in the countryside, led the boys, and Minnie McKenzie, whose father was an elder, and Martha Henderson, Tremendous K.'s sister, played the organ on alternate Sundays—an arrangement necessary to prevent a split in the church.

Mr. Sinclair had been in Orchard Glen for twenty-five years, and knew his people better than they knew themselves. He realised that the week's toil was absorbing, and on Sundays he tried hard to turn his people's eyes away from the things that are passing to those that are eternal. And on this morning it seemed to Christina that he had chosen his sermon entirely for her benefit.

"For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it;" the divine paradox was his text, and he told Christina plainly that by saving for herself this life of wider experience and greater opportunity, she was missing the one great opportunity that comes to all souls. She was losing her life.

When church was over and Mr. Sinclair was moving about among the people, he came down the aisle and gave one hand to Sandy and the other to Christina at the same time.

"Well, well! and you'll both be leaving me soon!" he cried heartily. "I'm getting used to sending off my boys to the University, but it's a great event when I send one of my girls! Sandy, I want to hear of you in Knox yet. That's your destination, don't forget. You'll make as good a preacher as Neil any day. Well, well, and how are you to-day, Miss Flora—and you Janet—?" He had passed on and was shaking hands with the Grant Girls, giving Christina no chance to reply. She glanced at Sandy; his eyes were on the floor, but she could read his face, and she knew he was struggling with the bitterness of disappointment.

She was even more silent on the road home from church. Bell Brown and Tilly Holmes chattered away on either side of her, asking questions about where she would board in Algonquin, and what new dresses she would get, and how long she would be at school before she would be ready for the University, and wasn't she scared stiff at the thought of studying hard for years and years the way folks had to do at college?

Christina answered absently and when she parted with them she surprised herself by suddenly exclaiming:

"Oh, don't talk about my going any more, girls. Maybe I won't go after all!" and fled from them before they could demand explanations.

That Sunday marked the opening of a period of misery for Christina. She worked furiously in house and barnyard, striving to smother the insistent voice that kept reiterating, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it."

She had caught Opportunity as he came to meet her, determined not to fall into her old error, and now that she held him, her full hands were unable to grasp a greater prize that was slipping away. Christina did not realise all this; she only knew with a feeling of sick dismay that Sandy was not going to college and that it lay within her power to let him go.

She was still fighting her battle when Friday evening came, the night of the greatest function of all Orchard Glen's weekly events. It was the night when the Temperance Society met, and though it was still early, Christina had finished her work and was ready as usual long before the other two girls. She went down the orchard path and seated herself beside Sandy on the old pump platform. Sport stretched himself out at Sandy's feet, panting with the exertion of putting the cows in their place and Christina's pet kitten curled up at her side, the green eyes on guard against the enemy.

Sandy had striven manfully all week to raise Christina's spirits and he burst into cheerful conversation.

"What do you suppose, Christine? Bruce says he's got everything fixed up and he's going to Toronto this fall and Dr. McGarry's tickled to fits. He thinks the world of Bruce."

"Bruce—Bruce McKenzie!" Christina groaned. "Well, I never! It seems as if everybody in Orchard Glen was going to the University but you," she added returning to the one subject that absorbed her attention.

"Well don't go chewin' on that all the time," said Sandy cheerfully. "It's better to have one fellow left. Bruce's been saving up his money for the last five years."

"Ellen won't have to get married so soon then," remarked Christina with some feeling of comfort, for Ellen's presence at home made her leaving easier. "But oh, Sandy, if only——"

"Come along," cried Sandy jumping up. "It's time we were going. There's Tremendous K. passing now."

Christina went back to the house to see if her mother needed anything before she left, and if Grandpa was comfortable in bed, and returned to the veranda where Sandy stood waiting for her. Bruce and Ellen were there ready to start, and Mary and young Mr. MacGillivray were already strolling down the lane.

"Well, Christina," cried Ellen, her cheeks pink with excitement, "how would you like to have Bruce for a doctor if you were sick?"

More than a year before Bruce McKenzie had been prepared for college, but lack of money had stood in his way and every one had thought that he and Ellen had given up the idea and had decided to settle on the farm.

"Why, Bruce!" cried Christina, forgetting her own trouble for the moment. "Isn't that too grand for anything?"

"Ellen here says I've got to keep up with the family, you see," said Bruce, standing in the midst of the admiring circle, half proud, half embarrassed. "Everybody in Orchard Glen seems to be getting the college fever, and Dr. McGarry's been at me all summer, so I guess I'll try it anyway."

If Sandy had been going Christina would have been rapturously happy over this. Ellen's approaching marriage had always hung like a cloud on the horizon, but if Ellen were going to be left at home until Bruce became a doctor, what a joy that would be. But nothing could be a joy now that Sandy's hopes had been blighted.

"It's just bully," Sandy was saying generously, "I'm sorry that"— He was interrupted by Christina's pinching his arm, and stopped suddenly. No one noticed in the dusk of the veranda, and when they were out in the lane, Sandy asked an explanation. "I might as well tell everybody first as last," he said, "it's decided now. And I'd rather tell and get it over."

"Oh, don't," pleaded Christina, "wait for a little while. You don't know what may happen. Don't say anything about it for a few days, anyway. I—I want to think about it. Promise me you won't, Sandy, till I let you."

Sandy promised reluctantly, saying she was a silly kid. Thinking for a month, day and night, wouldn't double his bank account, but he promised; and Christina proceeded to think about it as she had said, and to think very hard and very seriously all the way down to the village.

The old Temperance Hall was open and already several had arrived. Burke Wright, with his little wife, Mitty, her face shining at being out alone with her husband, were sitting on the steps and Joanna was there laughing and chatting with Trooper Tom and, of course, Marmaduke Simms, with a crowd of girls. For Marmaduke was a sort of lover-at-large and made love openly and impartially to all the girls of the village.

The McKenzie girls had proudly announced that Bruce was going away to learn to be a doctor, and this piece of news was the chief topic of conversation. The girls all half envied Ellen, half pitied her. It took a deal of study and a dreadful long time to become a doctor, Joanna explained, and as none of the McKenzies were very smart, Ellen would be an old maid before Bruce was through. But Ellen seemed radiantly happy, and no subject for commiseration, and every one agreed that it was just the way with all the Lindsays, there was no end to their luck.

The crowd gathered inside the hall, where a number of the boys were bunched in a corner preparing the programme with much anxiety.

After the business of the evening which was never very heavy, there was always a programme rendered by the boys and girls on alternate evenings. To-night was the boys' turn to perform, which always meant a great deal of fun for the girls. John Lindsay was President of the Society, and was down on the programme for a speech on Reciprocity, and there was to be a male chorus, both sure to be good numbers, for John had some fame as a political speaker, and the boys of Orchard Glen could always put up a fine chorus with Tremendous K. to beat time and Gavin Grant's splendid voice to hold them all to the right tune.

So the programme opened auspiciously with the chorus. The only trouble was the organist. Sam Henderson, a brother of Tremendous K., was the only young man in Orchard Glen who could play anything more complex than a mouth organ, and Sam always seemed to have too many fingers. And he pumped the air into the bellows so hard that the organ's gasps could be heard far above its strains.

Then three of the boys played a rousing trio on mouth organs, and young Willie Brown played a long piece on the violin. Tommy Holmes, Tilly's brother, who worked in Algonquin and came home week-ends, then gave a recitation, a comic selection which cheered everybody up after the wails of Willie's fiddle.

Tremendous K. sang a solo, a splendid roaring sea song that fairly made the roof rock, and then John delivered his speech and Christina sat and twisted her handkerchief and fidgeted every minute of it, in silent fear lest John make a mistake or anybody laugh at him. But John's speech was loudly applauded, though Tremendous K. said

afterwards there was to be no politics brought into the Temperance Society, for Tremendous K. was not of the same political party as the President and was not going to run any risks of the liberals getting ahead.

When John had sat down there arose from the back of the hall among the young men a great deal of shoving and pushing and exhorting to "go to it," and Gavin Grant came forward very reluctant, very red in the face, and looking very scared, to sing his first formal solo in public.

Gavin was a tall fellow and well built, but his clothes, the majority of which his Aunties still fashioned, were always too small and very ill-fitting. They seemed to have a tendency to work up to his neck and they were all crowding to the top when he lurched forward and took his place beside the organ.

"Gavin always looks as if some one had just carried him in by the back of the neck and set him down with a thud," said Joanna, loud enough for all the girls to hear. Every one laughed except Christina. She had not been able to laugh at Gavin since she had been so unkind to his birthday gift. Her heart always smote her for the waste of that wonderful basket of blooms. Now that she knew she was going away she felt she might at least have acknowledged them.

Meanwhile Gavin had brought out his Auntie Flora's oldest song book, "The Casket of Gems," from its wrapping of newspaper, and Sam Henderson had once more mounted the tread-mill of the organ, and was trampling out the opening bars of the solo. Tilly and a few of her companions were in convulsions of giggles by this time, but when Gavin's rich voice burst into the first notes, every one was hushed and attentive. He sang without the slightest effort, pouring out the melodious sounds as a robin sings after rain.

"In days of old when knights were bold,
And barons held their sway,
A warrior bold with spurs of gold
Sang merrily his lay,
Sang merrily his lay

'My love is young and fair,
My love has golden hair,
And eyes so blue
And heart so true
That none with her compare;
So, what care I though death be nigh,
I live for love or die!
So, what care I though death be nigh,
I live for love or die!'"

It was a gallant lay of love and war and deathless devotion but only one as unsophisticated as Gavin could have sung it. For while it was held quite proper for a young man to sing of war in a public way, no one with a sense of the fitness of things would dare to raise his voice in a love song, alone, before an audience of his fellows. But Gavin's voice brought the warrior's gallant presence so vividly before them that not even Tilly felt like smiling, and there was a sober hush as the song went on to tell how the brave knight

"Went gaily to the fray.
He fought the fight
But ere the night
His soul had passed away.
The plighted ring he wore
Was crushed and wet with gore,
But ere he died
He bravely cried,
'I've kept the vow I swore!
So what care I though death be nigh,
I live for love or die.
I've fought for love, for love I die!'"

The singer put all the valour of his brave young heart into the song, all its pent up feeling. For Gavin Hume had been born a real diamond in a dark mine of poverty and ill-usage; he had been dug up, and polished and smoothed by the loving hands of the three Grant Girls and his character was beginning to shine with the lustre that comes only from the real jewel. But very few people knew this, he was too shy to give expression to the high aspirations that thrilled his heart, and only in such songs as this did his soul find a medium of expression. There was a day coming swiftly upon him, that was to try to the utmost all the pent up valour of his reticent nature, but as yet that day was all

undreamed of. And Christina Lindsay, remembering when that day came, this Temperance meeting, recalled with self-abasement that she had thought that Gavin Grant could not have chosen a song more unlike himself; he, so shy and shrinking to sing of "A Warrior Bold." If she had not been so downhearted she would have laughed at him.

When the song was finished there was a moment's hush over the meeting, and then came a storm of applause, long continued. The boys took to clapping and stamping rhythmically, and shouting, "More, more," until the old building rocked.

But Gavin shook his head persistently, and John arose and announced the next. This was a comic song by Marmaduke Simms, and Duke certainly was a very funny fellow. He could imitate anything from Mrs. Johnnie Dunn's car on a steep hill, to the Martins' youngest baby crying. He soon had them all in roars of laughter, and the meeting broke up in much gaiety, and some anxiety on the part of the girls as to their ability to do as well on the next Friday.

Most of the boys and girls paired off and vanished into the darkness. The unfortunate ones who were not yet attached, moved away in bunches. Christina belonged to this latter class, unless a brother was with her. But Jimmie had disappeared with the boys of his own age, John was walking ahead, arguing hotly with Tremendous K. about the subject of his address, and Sandy had meanly deserted her to go off with a white dress, which she had identified as belonging to Margaret Sinclair, the minister's youngest daughter who was home for her holidays. Under happier circumstances Christina would have been pleased at his choice, but nothing in connection with poor Sandy could please her just now. He was bearing his disappointment far better than she was, for her trouble was worse than a disappointment. The unbearable part to her was the fact that stared her in the face, the fact that she was deliberately taking the privilege denied him.

She walked away from the hall slowly and silently, between Joanna Falls and Annie Brown, for Joanna's cavalier was a very uncertain quantity and poor plain Annie had never had a beau in her life. But Joanna suddenly remembered that she had left her handkerchief on the seat in the hall, and must run back for it before Trooper and Duke locked the door. The girls knew better than to wait for her, and then Burke Wright and Mitty strolled up and began talking with Annie. Christina stepped behind them in the narrow pathway for a moment, and it was then that a tall figure loomed up beside her out of the darkness, and a musical voice with a slow Highland accent that it was impossible to mistake, repeated the proper formula.

"May I see you home, Christine?"

Christina stopped short in the pathway. Never in all her nineteen years had she been asked that momentous question; the opening note of all country romances. She had heard it sounded on every side for years but its music had always passed her by. She had begun to wonder just a little wistfully, when she would hear it. And now here it was! But, alas, like her first birthday gift, it had come from an unwelcome source!

But she answered quite cordially, being incapable of deliberately wounding any one, and Gavin gave a deep breath of relief as he took his place at her side. He was too shy to take her arm in the approved fashion, as all young men did when seeing a young woman to her home. Instead he left a foot or two between them as they walked up the hill under the stars in the warm scented darkness.

Christina tried to chat, but Gavin was so overcome with the wonder of seeing her home, that he could not talk. He longed for some deadly peril to threaten her so that he might be her protector, some catastrophe that he might avert.

He was fairly aching to tell her that his great ambition was to be her Warrior Bold, and ride out to do doughty deeds for her sweet sake; that she was his Love so young and fair, of whom he had been singing, with eyes so blue and heart so true; but instead, he walked dumbly by her side, keeping carefully a yard away from her, and answering her laborious attempts at conversation with only a word. For Gavin was one of the inarticulate poets of earth, a mute, inglorious Lovelace, with a heart burdened with unsung lines to his Lucasta on going to the wars.

They had come to one of their prolonged seasons of silence, when Christina discovered that they were strolling slowly behind Old Johnnie McKenzie, Bruce's father, and Mr. Sinclair who was seeing him a piece of the way home, for the purpose of rejoicing over the good news about Bruce. The minister had been so many years in the

pulpit that he used his preaching voice on all occasions, and there was no chance of missing a word that he said.

"This is great news about Bruce, Mr. McKenzie," he was saying in a full round voice, "great news! I'd rather see him going for the Ministry. But you have brought up your lads in the fear of the Lord and Bruce will serve his Maker well as a doctor, I've no fear. Yes, it's fine news."

Mr. Sinclair was greedy of gain of the highest order for his flock, and gave parents no rest if he thought they were not giving their children the utmost education they could afford. It was largely due to him that all Orchard Glen looked to the University rather than to the counting house as the goal of those who would succeed, and that old Knox always had an Orchard Glen boy helping to keep her halls noisy.

"Yes sir, it's grand to see another of our boys entering the University," he went on, as though delivering his Sunday sermon. "And now that Johnnie's got into the High School we'll have to head him for the ministry. He's a bright lad that Johnnie of yours. Neil Lindsay is the only boy we have in Knox now, and there must be another coming along before he gets out. I was hoping I'd get Sandy Lindsay started to the University this Fall, but he seemed to talk to-night as if he wasn't sure of going. I'll be disappointed if Sandy doesn't get away soon; I was hoping Allister would see him through. Sandy would make a fine man in the pulpit. He's got the same gift as John. Man, I hope he won't be kept back. We can't do without our representative in Knox, Mr. McKenzie, the boys must be coming on. And your Johnnie will have to be the next. Come away in, Mr. McKenzie, and we'll tell Mrs. Sinclair, this is a day of good tidings. Come away in, man."

They stepped in at the Manse gate, and Christina and Gavin moved on alone. She had almost forgotten his presence, but she turned to him now, because she must have some one to confide in.

"Oh, Gavin, did you hear what he was saying, that Sandy might be a minister some day!"

"But that would be a great thing, wouldn't it?" asked Gavin, surprised out of his shyness at the grief in Christina's voice.

"But, I'm afraid—Sandy thinks we can't afford it this Fall. I mean for him to go to college," whispered Christina in distress. "And if he doesn't go now he may not go at all. He has had to wait so long."

Gavin forgot his shyness entirely in his efforts to comfort her.

"But you must not be feeling so bad," he said gently. "Is there no way to help it?"

Christina suddenly remembered that Mr. Sinclair had often told her mother that Gavin Grant had both the ability and the longing to be a minister, but he would never confess his desires, lest they trouble the Aunties. Perhaps he could understand her case and advise her, and in an impulsive moment, born of her great need, she told him all about the cloud that had been hanging over her during the past week.

"I want just dreadfully to go to college and get a good education," she finished up. "You know all about it, I'm sure you do, don't you, Gavin? And now I've got my first real chance, and if I take it I'll be keeping Sandy back. Perhaps I'll be keeping him from being a minister, and wouldn't that be dreadful? And I don't know what to do."

It did not seem queer, somehow, for her to be asking Gavin's advice about this momentous question, but his position was especially difficult. He could not answer her for a few minutes. For he knew that he was not at all an unbiased judge. Next to his own going, he wanted more than anything else in the world that Christina should be left at home. He could hardly bear to think of what life in Orchard Glen would be like without the chance of looking at her in church or at meeting, and occasionally speaking to her. Indeed he would not have dared to take this bold plunge of asking to see her home to-night had he not known that it would likely be his last chance, and that she would soon be gone out of his life.

"I am afraid I would want to go if I was in your place," he confessed at last. "But," he hesitated shyly, "Auntie Elspie always knows what is best, and she has always told me that we never lose a thing by giving it up for some one else. She gave up all her chances for Grandmother Grant and stayed home and cared for her. And she let their only brother go to college, while she managed the farm at home. And she says now she is always glad she did it."

He stopped suddenly, embarrassed. It looked as if he had actually had the presumption to preach Christina a sermon.

But she did not seem to think so. "And you, yourself," she said, "Mr. Sinclair always wants you to go to college, Gavin, and you know you would like to, wouldn't you?"

"I am in a very different position from any one like you or Sandy," said Gavin with a new note of sternness in his voice. "It is not for me to choose whether I will go to college or not. But," he added hastily, "my Aunts would let me go if they could, you may be sure of that."

Christina's heart felt a sudden rush of sympathy. She guessed what Gavin must suffer, seeing this boy and that pass on, leaving him behind.

There was another long silence, which he broke. "You will always do the kind thing," he whispered. "You could not do anything else."

They had come to the big gate between the sentinel poplars, and Christina stopped. Mary and young MacGillivray were leaning on the little garden gate that led in from the lane, and Bruce and Ellen, who had long passed the hanging-over-the-gate stage of courtship, had gone indoors for something to eat.

"Oh, I'm afraid you're all wrong," she declared; "I—I don't want to a bit, but, you think I ought to let Sandy go, don't you?"

Gavin looked down at her in the dim starlight for a moment before he found courage to reply. "You know so much better than I do," he said at last. "And I am not the one to advise you, because,—because,——"

"Because what?" she asked wonderingly.

"Because I can't bear to think of you going away," burst out Gavin with desperate boldness.

Christina felt her cheeks grow hot under the sheltering darkness. She was speechless in her turn, and then afraid of what might follow this sudden outburst, she said confusedly, "I must go in now and think about it," and with a hurried good-night, she was gone.

She ran noiselessly up the lane, avoiding the lovers at the garden gate, and entered the back gate that opened from the barn-yard. She found Bruce and Ellen with John and her mother in the kitchen eating scones and drinking buttermilk. No one remarked her entrance except that her mother, looking over her shoulder asked, "Where's your brother, Christine?"

"He's gone off with some one else's sister," answered Christina trying to speak carelessly.

"Sometimes sisters go off with some one else's brother," remarked John, his eyes twinkling. "No, I don't believe he is a brother to any one, is he?" Christina gave him an imploring look, that begged him to keep her secret, and he generously changed the subject. They were all full of Bruce's new prospects, and Christina slipped away unnoticed to bed.

But for the first time in her healthy young life worry drove sleep far from her. She heard Sandy come in, heard Jimmie enter the next room and his boots drop heavily on the floor, and when Ellen and Mary came up she pretended to be asleep. She occupied a small room opening off the one shared by her sisters, and could hear their whispers and hushed laughter. Ellen was so proud of Bruce and all he was going to be, and Mary was justly proud of her lover, and Christina had nobody to see her home but Gavin Grant, and no hope of anything better was before her. For how could she go to school and leave Sandy behind?

How could she? She was facing the question at last. And her heart answered that no matter what wise folks might say about grasping Opportunity, she simply could not let it stand in Sandy's way. There was only one answer to her question.

She lay very still till she knew that her sisters were asleep. Then she rose and softly closed the door between

their rooms. She lit her lamp, feeling quite like a thief, and took out her box of writing paper. The pen and ink were downstairs, but she had a lead pencil, and Allister would not mind.

She took the little stubby pencil and poured out her heart on to the paper. She just could not go, that was all about it. And would he send Sandy instead? Sandy might be a minister some day like Neil, Mr. Sinclair said, and she would never, never be happy again if she thought she had made him stay home and be a farmer, or perhaps just a school-teacher because she had taken his chance away from him. And would he mind if she stayed home? Perhaps she could go some other time. Or she could teach for a while and put herself through. Sandy was nearly two years older than she was and he would soon be thinking he was too old to go to college. Of course Sandy did not know she was doing this. He would not let her, she knew, so she had told no one. She was up late at night when every one else was asleep, and she could not rest until she told him what she wanted. And she was going to get up early and give the letter to Mrs. Johnnie Dunn to post in Algonquin so it would get to him sooner. And oh, would he please, please, write right away, the very day he got it, and tell Sandy he could go in her place. For she could never, never be happy _____"

The letter went on and on reiterating incoherently all she feared and suffered. It was very late indeed when she crept to bed. She thought the right thing for a girl to do who had lost all her chances in life was to lie down and cry all night. But she was surprised to find that she felt strangely light hearted. All the dreadful weight of the past week had been removed. She could not think about her own loss, so joyous was she over the thought that Sandy was going after all.

So she slept soundly, and dreamed that she was going to college and that Gavin Grant was a professor there and was teaching her wonderful truths.

CHAPTER IV

CRAIG-ELLACHIE

In spite of the high rapture of her sacrifice Christina found life distinctly dull when Sandy and Neil went off to Toronto leaving her behind. She felt as if she had been away on a long romantic journey since Allister's return; a journey that gave glimpses of wonderful countries still to be travelled, and then she had suddenly been dropped back into Orchard Glen and forbidden to travel any more.

And here she was milking and churning and feeding the hens and companying with Uncle in the barn yard. Of course Uncle Neil was the excellent company he had always been, full of song and story, and Christina could not find an opportunity to mourn over her lot even if she had been so minded. She was not the sort to wear a martyr's robe. She would play the part, but she refused to make up for it. So she went about her daily tasks, singing as blithely as that Spring morning when Allister opened the gate into a larger life for her, the gate which she had voluntarily shut, with herself inside. She bore her disappointment jauntily, walking erect as Eastern girls carry their burdens on their heads, growing straight and graceful in the effort.

And then she was too busy to fret. There was Grandpa who needed more help every morning with his dressing, and every evening with the Hindmost Hymn. There was her mother, whose tasks must now grow lighter each year, there was Jimmie to be helped with his lessons on Saturdays, there was a Sunday school class with two of the bad Martin children in it, and there was Mary's trousseau to help prepare against the wedding at Christmastime. For the courtship of MacGillivray's man had proceeded at a furious pace and through Ellen had been engaged for five years, Mary was to be the first to marry. And so, Christina's hands were very full, and John would often say to her, after an unusually busy day, or when a letter came from Sandy bewailing her lot:

"Just wait, Christine. In another year who knows what will happen?" And Christina's heart was content.

As Mary had to keep up her teaching until the Christmas holidays, and her evenings were mostly spent with the young man who drove over from Port Stewart quite a remarkable number of times a week, there was much to do in the preparation of her clothes. Ellen had stopped her own embroidering, to wait until Bruce was through college, and she took to doing towels and table-napkins and doilies for Mary.

"I can't help thinking that it's a dreadful waste for you to get married," declared Christina, one Saturday afternoon as they all sewed furiously in the big roomy kitchen. "You're just throwing away a teacher's certificate. My! If I had Greenwood school I'd never get married!" And Mary and Ellen laughed and looked at each other knowingly from their respective heights far above Christina's head.

She tried to keep up her studies by following Jimmie's course, and stayed home on Friday nights from the Temperance meeting to help him with his lessons.

One evening they had a long hunt through "The Lady of the Lake" for a line about the Harebell which Jimmie must quote in an essay. They were sitting around the long kitchen table, all except Mary who was out driving in the moonlight. Ellen was at one end writing to Bruce as usual, John at the other, reading the daily paper, Mrs. Lindsay was knitting, and Uncle Neil was strumming out fragments of old songs on his violin, his stockinged feet comfortable on the damper of the stove.

Even Uncle Neil's memory could not produce the Harebell, and Jimmie went rummaging through the book impatiently.

"Gavin Grant would tell me if he was here," Jimmie said. "He knows all this stuff off by heart."

"And plenty more," put in Uncle Neil to the tune of "Oh wert thou in the cauld blast?" "Gavin's mind is well stored. Mr. Sinclair says he reads Carlyle in the evenings with the Grant girls. I wonder if you could match that anywhere in this country?"

Christina felt self-accusing, remembering her superior feeling in Gavin's awkward presence. He had been very

busy with the harvest and she had not seen him except at church for a long time. He had never attempted to walk home with her again, and she could not help wondering whether it was because he was shy, or because he did not care. Womanlike she would have given a good deal to know.

"I wish you would run over to Craig-Ellachie with that jar of black currants I promised the Grant Girls, Christina," said her mother.

"That's the seventeenth time you've been reminded of that," said Jimmie chidingly.

"I think John'll have to hitch up the team and take that jar over in the hay wagon," said Uncle Neil, "Christine doesn't seem to be able to manage it."

"She's shy about going to see Gavin," said John, looking at her with twinkling eyes over his paper. For John alone knew her guilty secret. She hastily promised to take the jar the very next day, and managed to get the conversation back to the Harebell, which in time showed its shy self and was set down in the essay.

It was nearly a week before Christina managed to get away on her difficult errand. She did not want to go, certainly, but she was afraid of attracting more comment from John and Uncle Neil by staying.

It was a golden September day when she went up over the hills with a basket of apples from their best tree, and the special jar of her mother's black currant jelly. The air was motionless, the sky a perfect soft unclouded blue, the hills were amber, the hollows amethyst. The branches of the orchard trees behind the village houses sagged, heavy with their harvest, and gay as orchards gotten up for a garden party, all hung with fairy lantern globes of yellow and red. The gardens were filled with ripened corn and great golden pumpkins. The wild asters along the fences glowed softly purple.

Christina stepped over the warm yellow stubble singing, and climbed the hill to the old berry patch, where the briars grew more riotously every year. Gavin's cows were straying through the green and yellow tangle on his side of the fence and a bell rang musically through the still aisles. The Wizard of Autumn had been up here on the hills with his paints and had touched the sumachs along the fences till they looked like trees of flame. And he had been working on a bit of woodbine that now draped the old rail fence as with a scarlet curtain. A blue jay flashed through the golden silence waking the echoes with his noisy laughter and the flickers high up in the dead stumps called jeeringly to each other.

Christina came out of the Slash into the yellow sunshine of Gavin's fields, and as she did so, she suddenly dropped down behind the raspberry bushes that fringed the fence, quite in a panic. For a loud musical voice arose from the field just beyond the brow of the hill, Gavin was ploughing the back meadow and singing, and the song made Christina's heart heat hotly:

"Will ye gang to the Hiellan's, Leezie Lindsay?
Will ye gang to the Hiellan's wi' me?"

Hidden by the hill, and the screening bushes, she slipped away and took a devious course down the valley. But there was a lump in her throat as she went.

She ran past a clump of cedars and came out into view of Craig-Ellachie. The Grant Girls had given their home this name because of its association with their clan's history, but Nature had encouraged them, for behind the house, set back against the dark pine woods, rose a hill crowned by a towering rock. The cosy old white-washed house was set in the centre of a saucer-like valley. It was the original log house in which their parents had lived and had been added to here and there till it was beautifully picturesque just as the home of the Grant Girls should be.

But visitors to Craig-Ellachie never saw anything else after their first glimpse of the garden.

Every one wondered how it was that the Grant Girls' garden should outbloom all others, and that nobody else ever had any hope of first prize at the Fall fairs. One said it was the sheltered location of the place, others the low elevation, still others that it was the southern slope that made the Craig-Ellachie garden unfold the earliest crocus in Spring and hold safely the latest aster in Autumn. But wise folk, like Christina's mother, always held that it was the tender care of the three gardeners and the sunlight of their presence that made their flowers the wonder of the

countryside.

Christina drew a breath of delight as it came into view. Dahlias and asters, rows and rows of them, clumps of feathery cosmos, hedges of flaming gladioli, dazzling golden glow and a dozen others she did not recognise made a glorious array. And the blooms were not confined to the garden proper that was spread out on the south side of the house. They overflowed into the vegetable garden at the back, and spread around the lawn at the front. They strayed away along the fences and completely hedged the orchard. They even encroached upon the barnyard; the manure heap was screened from view by a wall of sunflowers and golden glow and a rainbow avenue of late phlox led down to the pig-pens.

Christina entered by the barnyard and came up through the kitchen garden where rows of cauliflower and cabbage and tomatoes alternated with pansies and mignonette and scarlet salvia. Every bed of onions was fringed with sweet alyssum, and rows of beets were flanked with rosemary and lavender. She opened the little wire gate that led into the garden proper and walked up under a long arched canopy of climbing roses and sweet peas that seemed, like the Grant Girls, to take no heed of the passing of time but bloomed on as though it were June. As she disappeared into its green shade her eye caught a movement in one of the brown fields behind the barn. The two younger sisters were there digging potatoes.

There had been a day when the Grant Girls did all the work of field and farmyard, and their hands were hard and their backs bent. But since Gavin had grown to man's estate their lives had been easier. Indeed they were never done telling tales of how Gavie had forbidden their going into the fields. They boasted of his high handed airs, for hadn't he even chased Janet out of the barnyard, with the pitchfork, mind you, when she was determined to help him in with the hay. Eh indeed he was a thrawn lad, and nobody could manage oor Gavie!

And now that they had fallen upon easier days and Gavin's strong arms had taken up the heavier work, they had resumed many of the older tasks that long ago most farm women had gladly handed over to factory or mill. No cheese factory or creamery received a drop of milk or cream from Craig-Ellachie; and the Grant Girls still spun their own wool from their own sheep, and knit it into good stout socks for themselves and Gavin, and cousin Hughie Reid, and his big family of boys.

So this afternoon, Auntie Elspie, the eldest of the three, was sitting at the open kitchen door in the sunshine spinning. The soft September breeze swayed her white apron and pink-dotted calico dress. Behind her the wide, low-ceiled old kitchen fairly glittered in its cleanliness. The high dresser with its blue plates, and the old chairs and table were varnished till they shone like mirrors. And the kitchen stove, used only in winter, for the wood-shed was the summer kitchen, blazed as it never had on a winter night, for on it stood a great blue pitcher filled with flaming gladioli.

Around Auntie Elspie were arranged the household pets, all sleeping in the sunshine; Auntie Flora's cat and two kittens, Auntie Janet's spaniel, and Gavin's fox terrier and two collies. The four dogs set up a loud clamour at the sight of the visitor, and went gambolling down the walk to meet her. At the sound the two workers in the field paused to look, and stood gazing until Christina disappeared indoors.

Auntie Elspie dropped her thread and came hurrying down the steps, saying in mild reproach, "Hoots, toots, what a noise!" And then in glad welcome, "Eh, eh, and it's little Christina! Eh, now, and wasn't it jist grand o' ye to come away over here—well—well—well—well!"

Mrs. Lindsay was the Grant Girls' oldest and dearest friend, and a visit from any of her family was an occasion of great rejoicing.

"Eh, well, well!" Auntie Elspie was patting Christina on the back, and taking off her hat in exuberant hospitality, mingling her words of welcome with admonitions to the riotous dogs which were bounding about making a joyous din.

"Eh, well, now, and your poor mother, she would be well! Hut, tut, Wallace! Bruce! Yon's no way to act. And wee Mary'll be getting married—Princie! Did ye ever see the like o' that? They're jist that glad to see ye. Wallace! Down, sir, down! Jist wait till Gavie gits home, Bruce, then ye'll mind! And Sandy's away to the college too. Well, well, you Lindsays were all great for the books—come away in, hinny, come away. Down with ye, down!"

They went into the house, the dogs still bounding joyously about, for they knew that a guest at Craig-Ellachie was a great and glad event and that they must express their joy in a fitting manner.

Auntie Elspie was tall and thin and stooped. Her thin fair hair, almost white, was combed up in the fashion that had obtained when she was a girl. She wore a voluminous old dress of some ancient pattern of "print," that had been quite fashionable some twenty years earlier, but she was also clothed in the gay garment of youth which the Grant Girls always wore.

She managed to eject the joyous, scrambling quartette from the kitchen and led the visitor through the dusk of the parlour where Auntie Flora's organ stood with Gavin's fiddle on top of it, on into the gloom of the spare room, heaping welcomes upon her all the way, and asking after everything on the Lindsay farm from Grandpa's rheumatism to Christina's black kitten.

When Christina's hat was laid upon the high white crest of the billowing feather bed, and her hair smoothed before the little mirror on the dresser, Auntie Elspie led her away beyond the parlour into a close, hushed room, where the mother had lain an invalid for many years, and which was kept sacred to her memory. Here the Grant Girls hoarded all their mother's treasures: the photographs in oval frames on the wall, the high old dresser and the big sea chest filled with keepsakes, tenderly associated with her life; the Paisley shawl she wore to church, the sea shells she had brought from the old country, even the old china tea set that had been her one wedding gift.

Christina was placed in an old rocker, while Auntie Elspie displayed all the treasures as a girl shows her jewels to a companion, and Christina knew she was being shown a great honour, for only special friends were ever taken into Mother's Room.

The last jewel to be exhibited was the mother's photograph in an old leather case, velvet lined.

"Folks say that after a person dies, the picture begins to fade," Auntie Elspie said, wiping the shining surface tenderly. "But mother's picture is as bright as the day it was taken."

Christina looked at the strong, kindly face, with the white cap and the little knitted shawl and felt her heart contract at the yearning in the older woman's voice. Elspie was still a girl, longing for the touch of her mother's hand, though that mother had been gone twenty-five years.

"Perhaps it's because you keep her memory so bright, that the picture never fades," said Christina gently, and Auntie Elspie kissed her for sheer gratitude.

When they came out into the sunshine of the kitchen again the other two sisters were there to add their welcome. They had hurried in to see who their visitor was and were overwhelmed with joy to find it was Mary Lindsay's girl.

"I told you it was little Christina, Flora," cried Auntie Janet triumphantly; "Flora said it was one o' the McKenzie girls!" And Flora admitted herself beaten.

The two were in their farming costumes, old bits of past grandeur, a purple velvet skirt for Janet and a sacque of ancient brocaded silk on Flora, both accompanied by Gavin's cast off boots and wide straw hats. But the wearers received Christina in her trim blue skirt and white blouse, of the latest Algonquin style, with a high bred unconsciousness of clothes.

"Oh, I'm that glad you've come," cried Janet, shaking her fifteen-year-old ringlets from her big hat, "you've given us an excuse for a rest. We were jist doin' a bit of *gardenin'*. Weren't we, Flora?" she asked.

Auntie Flora's eyes twinkled, "Oh, yes, yes, jist *gardenin'!*" she declared, and the three Aunties burst out laughing, and Auntie Janet spread out her earth soiled hands with a comical gesture.

"We've been diggin' the potaties!" she whispered, her eyes dancing. "But if Gavie caught us at it, we'd catch it! So we jist keep tellin' him we've been *gardenin'* an' he never suspects, an' he can't see us from where he's ploughin'!"

"An' we'll be finished in another day if he doesn't find out!" cried Auntie Flora exultingly.

"Aye, but jist wait, you'll get yer pay for yer pranks when he does find out," admonished Auntie Elspie, like an indulgent mother threatening her mischievous children with a father's punishment. "Gavie jist won't let us put foot into the fields!" she added proudly. But the two younger ones laughed recklessly. They would be up sides with Gavie yet, for all his high-handed, bossy ways!

They washed their hands, changed their shoes and put away their big hats, and all three bustled about getting tea. Christina would have preferred to slip away before Gavin came in, but she well knew that no human being had ever come to Craig-Ellachie and left again without sitting down to eat, and knew it was no use to protest.

So she went out into the garden to help Flora gather a bouquet for the table, and her hostess broke off armfuls of every sort of flowers she admired, making a great sheaf to carry home to her mother. They put the glorious mass into a shining tin pail to await her departure. Then Christina ran about the kitchen and pantry, helping set the best blue dishes on the table, and they all laughed and joked and had such a time, as though all four had just turned nineteen last May.

"Did ye hear that Elspie has a fellow, Christina?" called Auntie Flora from the cellar whither she had gone to fetch the cream.

"No," cried Christina, overcome with laughter, "she didn't tell me."

"She's just a wee bit shy about it yet," said Auntie Janet. "But when she gets over it, you'll see them together in church."

"It's Piper Lauchie McDonald!" cried Auntie Flora, coming up to the surface again; "he's been comin' here pretendin' he wanted to teach Gavie the pipes, but we can see it's Elspie he's got in his eye."

Auntie Elspie's eyes were dancing. "They're both that jealous o' me, there's no livin' with them," she confided.

They all joined Christina in a gale of laughter, none gayer than Elspie herself.

Tea was all ready now, a perfect banquet set out with the blue dishes, on the best white and blue tablecloth, with a tremendous glory of asters and dahlias in a bronze jug in the middle of the table.

When everything was ready, Auntie Janet ran to the foot of the front lawn and called a long clear "Hoo-hoo!" and from far away in the fields a faint halloo answered.

"Gavie's coming," the three cried together joyously, and Auntie Elspie hurried out to the wood-shed to place the blue china teapot on the stove to warm.

"He won't be long, he always knows there's company when the dogs bark and he'll hurry in."

While they waited Auntie Flora took Christina into the parlour to show her a new song-book Gavin had brought home the Saturday previous.

Christina's fascinated gaze went around the wonderful framed wreaths on the wall, one made of cotton-batting flowers, another of coloured feathers and the most interesting one fashioned of flowers made from hair. Auntie Flora went over each blossom tenderly. This rose at the top was made of mother's hair. Wasn't her hair beautiful and soft and shining? Nobody in the family had hair like mother's. And the one just beside it of darker grey, was father's. Father's hair was rich and beautiful too. The dark brown one was Janet's and the fair one Elspie's.

"And ye can tell whose is the mouse-coloured one," said Auntie Janet teasingly.

"Aye," said Auntie Flora. "They're never done talkin' about my mouse-coloured hair; but they'll soon have to stop because it's gettin' white!" she added gaily.

And the next flower that beautiful brown, was made from Duncan's, the only brother who died when he was in his first year in college. He was to have been a minister. Mother had saved his curls from the time he was just a wee laddie. Duncan had died twenty years ago but his sisters could not yet speak of him without tears.

Then they brightened when Flora pointed out the next and the last—that shiny black bit, it couldn't be anybody's but Gavie's; hair as black as that. Did Christina mind what beautiful curly hair he had when they got him first? And such a time as they had getting him to let it grow long enough to get a piece for the wreath. It was just getting nice once, but the boys teased him about it at school, and what did he do but get the shears one night and cut it all off that close that he nearly cut the skin, and a sight the rascal was, with bare white patches all over his black head!

But Janet saved what was cut and they managed to make this little flower and put it in the wreath next to Duncan's. Gavie was just such another boy as Duncan was, and the Lord had been good indeed to give him to them in their old age.

Gavin did not appear quite so soon as expected. He came up slowly from the barn, and spent a very long time over the little wash-bench at the wood-shed door. At last he came in, fondling the dogs that kept circling about him, and shook hands with Christina very hurriedly, as though he had been in great haste all the time.

They sat down to the table immediately, and for a while the rapture of having Christina sitting at his right hand almost overcame him and he had very little to say. But he shared the Aunties' spirit of hospitality, Christina was his guest and he soon found courage to wait on her and see she was well served. Auntie Elspie, sitting opposite him with the tea-pot and the cups and saucers, understood, and did all she could to make things easy for him. Though the three Aunties loved Gavin with equal devotion, Auntie Elspie had been more of a mother to him. She read her boy and had long ago guessed at his devotion to Christina. She was sure of it now and was very happy. With the optimism of youth she saw nothing but success ahead for Gavin and was overjoyed that he had chosen so wisely and well—one of Mary Lindsay's girls. What better could happen?

As for Christina, she was feeling strangely at home and yet in entirely new surroundings. Gavin Grant at the head of his own table dispensing hospitality to his guest was a different person from the shy boy she knew. Here he was a man with an air of authority, strong and yet kind and gentle.

He soon forgot his embarrassment in the joy of her presence. They grew very merry over Auntie Elspie's beau again, Gavin taking great credit to himself for having arranged the match.

"She'll be goin' off with him one o' these days," prophesied Auntie Janet, "and indeed, we'll all leave ye, if you don't mind and let us work out in the field when we like," she threatened.

"Indeed you ought to let the girls help you with that field of potatoes, Gavie," said Auntie Elspie. "He won't let one of us do a hand's turn beyond the house, Christina," she complained, turning to her guest. "Did ye ever hear the like?"

A telegraphic message flashed across the table between Auntie Flora and Auntie Janet which Gavin did not see.

"We jist have no life with him at all," said Auntie Flora, "he's that thrawn."

"I think I'll jist have to take him in hand, myself," said the lively Auntie Janet.

"I can manage them all but Auntie Janet," Gavin said brazenly. "I didn't start early enough with her. I brought up the other two better. But I'll get her broken in, in time."

The three Aunties went off into loud gay laughter that echoed far out over the bright garden. They declared he was quite beyond them, and how did Christina suppose they ever put up with such a rascal?

They lingered long at the table and after the gay supper was over Christina was loath to go; she was having such a good time. So she did not need much coaxing to prevail upon her to stay till the cows were milked. They could surely do without her for once. It was Friday night and Jimmie would help Uncle Neil and the girls, she admitted. So she ran out to the barn with a pail, though Gavin was determined she should not milk, and she helped with the separator, doing everything with her usual swiftness, and the Aunties looked on in amazement and admiration.

The short Autumn evening had descended in a soft purple haze and a great round golden moon was riding up over Craig-Ellachie when Christina put on her hat and declared reluctantly that she must leave. She was laden with gifts: a jar of tomato relish, a huge cake of maple sugar, a bottle of a new kind of liniment for Grandpa, and

such an armful of dahlias and phlox and asters and gladioli as Christina had never seen in her life.

The Aunties and Gavin all came with her as far as the pasture bars where the tall ghosts of the corn stood whispering in the twilight. The two younger sisters were for going all the way with her over the hills, but Auntie Elspie, with her deeper insight, interfered.

"Gavie'll go and carry the flowers for you, Christina," she said. "We'll have to be gettin' away back, girls." And the girls, being young themselves, understood, and bade Christina good-night, with many admonitions to come back again and warnings to Gavie to take good care of her. Gavin put the bottle of liniment in one pocket and the catsup in another, the relish and the maple sugar in a third and bundling the bouquet under his arm in a fashion that made Auntie Flora scream with dismay, walked by Christina's side across the dim pasture field, with the golden and purple sunset ahead of them and the silver moonlight behind coming down over Craig-Ellachie. The night was warm and still and the endless song of the grass, the swan song of all that was left of Summer, filled the air.

Christina felt perfectly happy and care-free. A career seemed a far-off, nebulous thing that one need not fret over. It was very pleasant to be walking up over the hills in the moonlight and sunset with Gavin at her side carrying flowers for her. She felt it would be beautiful to be able to always stroll around this way with the scent of rosemary heavy in the air, and never to bother to look forward to a college course. They chatted away happily and she told him about their search for the Harebell, telling him that Uncle Neil said he would know, and he quoted long stanzas from "The Lady of the Lake," and "Marmion." And they discussed the new song-book he had bought and quarrelled over their favourite Scotch song. And he did not confess that his was the one she had heard him singing that afternoon as he ploughed the back field.

They crossed the end of the Slash, where Gavin had to help her through the tangle of bushes. And did she remember how she had given him her berries that day, he asked.

Christina laughed, but Gavin was sober. "It was a beautiful thing to do," he said, "and now you have done it again for Sandy."

"No, no," said Christina, "it was nothing; I could not be happy to go and let Sandy stay."

"But you will go some day?" added Gavin, his voice sunk to a tremulous whisper.

"Yes, perhaps next Fall, Allister and John both say, if the crops turn out well next summer. But it's a long way to look ahead."

They had come down to the level again, along the back lane and up to the little gate that led in from the barnyard.

Gavin put the flowers into her arms and handed her the many gifts.

"Won't you come in, Gavin?" she asked. "There might be a letter from Sandy."

"Thank you," he said gratefully. "No, I must not be going in to-night, Christine. Thank you for your visit. You made my Aunties very happy. And you have made me very happy, too," he added in a whisper. He saw the look of embarrassment on her face and instantly stopped. Gavin was a true gentleman at heart and guessed when he was bordering on forbidden ground. He walked away and Christina went slowly up the path.

Perhaps, after all, there was something in the saying that homekeeping hearts are happiest, she reflected. It did not seem quite so dreary to look forward to always living in Orchard Glen.

CHAPTER V

"HEY! JOHNNIE COPE"

After that visit to Craig-Ellachie Gavin was a new person to Christina. She was humiliated to remember that she had ever presumed to make fun of him. He was good and kind and chivalrous, and Sandy was right when he declared that Gavin knew far more than half the fellows around the village who thought themselves so much smarter. Christina thought about him often these soft slumbrous Autumn days and said to herself that, should he ever ask to walk home with her again, she would surely be much kinder than she had been. And she could not help wondering just a little why he did not try.

Indeed, had Gavin only known, he was very near gaining his heart's desire, when an unfortunate event snatched away his chance and tore him down from the heights to which he had unconsciously risen.

All the previous Winter and Summer the Temperance Society, which was the Presbyterian Choir, which was the Methodist Choir, had been practising strenuously for a concert. This weekly choir practice was really a community singing. Young and old, Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists went to it, and Tremendous K. led them. There was an inner circle that sang on Sundays, in the Presbyterian Church in the morning and the Methodist Church in the evening. And they sang in the Baptist Church, too, on each alternate Sunday afternoon. For the Baptist minister lived in Avondell, and gave Orchard Glen only two services a month.

So this Union Choir decided to give a grand concert under the auspices of the Temperance Society to raise money to buy new chairs for the hall, and perhaps a new table if there was money enough. As the date of the concert approached the practices were twice a week, and every Tuesday and Thursday, from eight o'clock till half-past nine, Tremendous K.'s big voice might be heard booming:

"Watch your time, there! Sing up, can't you? Give her a lift! Don't pull as if you was haulin' a stun boat up the hill!"

It was just such drilling that had made the Orchard Glen choir famous over the whole countryside, and caused them to be in demand for tea meetings all through the Winter.

But the drilling was becoming wearisome, for the choir had been practising for a very long time indeed. The date of the concert had been set again and again, and on every occasion some other affair interfered.

After many vicissitudes the date had been finally settled for the evening of the first of October, and no sooner was it set, and set for the twentieth time, too, than the Methodist minister announced a week of special meetings at his church as there was an Evangelist available at that date!

This was a serious affair and the Methodists in the choir were for having another postponement.

"When's the concert to be?" asked Willie Brown one evening, as they took a rest, and a paper bag of candy was passed round from Marmaduke.

"Haven't you been told straight ahead for a month that it's the first of October!" cried Tremendous K. in his most tremendous voice, "and it's not goin' to be a minute later, neither!"

"That's the first night of the special meetings in our church," put in Minnie Brown, sharply, "and father wouldn't think of letting us come."

Tremendous K. scowled. "Looky here," he declared, "we've been putting off this here concert for some dog fight or another for about two years, and I don't care if King George the Third was goin' to have special meetin's right in the hall that night, we're goin' to have that concert!"

Tremendous K. was exceedingly loyal to both King and country, but he could never remember which George it was that occupied the throne, and had no notion of suggesting that one should rise from the dead.

"You don't call special services in a church a dogfight, I hope," put in Tilly Holmes's father, his eyebrows bristling. Mr. Holmes was a Baptist and had no intention of attending the Methodist meetings, but he felt he ought to stand for the principle of the thing, especially as Tremendous K. was a Presbyterian.

"I never said nothing of the sort!" denied the choir leader hotly, being himself a bit troubled in his conscience. "But what I do say is that we've put off this thing so that it can't be put off no longer if it's to be sung before the crack o' doom! The concert's on the first of October, or not at all. Here! all turn to page thirty-four, the opening chorus, 'All's Well.' Everybody, whoop her up, now!"

That was the beginning of the trouble; the next evening the Browns and several other good Methodists were not at practice and neither were the Holmeses. Mr. Wylie, the Methodist minister, went to Mr. Sinclair about it and Mr. Sinclair said it was no more a Presbyterian affair than a Methodist. And the Baptist minister stood aloof and said he always knew these union affairs would never bring anything but trouble.

The thinned ranks of the choir closed up, though the loss of the Browns, who were all musical, was a staggering blow. Tilly Holmes cried so hard that her father had to let her come back, and two or three of the less faithful Methodists returned, pending the final decision in regard to the date. And Tremendous K. went on, stubbornly waving his baton in the face of the whole Methodist congregation.

No serious trouble might have arisen, however, had not the two who were always a source of dissension in the village, put their wicked heads together. To be quite fair, for once in their lives, Trooper Tom and Marmaduke were without guile when they decided to invite old Piper Lauchie McDonald from Glenoro to come and play at the concert. They were merely actuated by the pure motive of making the entertainment more attractive than the Methodist gathering, with, perhaps, the subconscious thought that it was a question if Old Tory Brown, who was Scotch, even if he were a Methodist, could resist leaving a mere preaching to hear a real Piper. The two were willing to bet almost anything on the superior attractions of the music, Duke offering to put up his wooden leg against Trooper's Mounted Police Medal.

Tremendous K. was not very enthusiastic when, with great diplomacy, Marmaduke suggested the bagpipes as an addition to the programme. The Hendersons were very rigid concerning certain worldly amusements, and a Piper was always associated with dancing and kindred foolishness. When it was made clear that Lauchie would draw a crowd, which a Piper always did, he yielded, and Marmaduke and Trooper borrowed The Woman's car, and whirled away up over the hills to Glenoro one evening and invited Lauchie to play in Orchard Glen on the night of the big concert.

Christina had been faithfully attending all the practices. She was not a real choir member, but Tremendous K. said he couldn't get up a concert without at least one Lindsay in it, and she was the only one available. For John could not sing, Mary had lost interest in everything outside Port Stewart, and Ellen was too busy with the trousseau to attend to anything else.

On the evening of the last rehearsal, as Christina went down the hill with a crowd of her girl friends, Tilly met them in great excitement.

"Wallace Sutherland's come home," she announced, breathlessly. "The Doctor met him in town with his car, and he's going to stay a week before he goes back to college. Mrs. Sutherland told Mrs. Sinclair and she told ma."

This was surely interesting news. Wallace Sutherland had not been in Orchard Glen for any length of time, since he was a little boy and went to the public school. He was attending a University over in the great United States, and spent his holidays with the wealthy uncle who was paying his college bills. Mrs. Sutherland often went to Boston to visit him and her rich brother, but Wallace had spent very little time in the old home. Folks said that his mother was afraid of his becoming familiar with the country folk and so kept him out of the way.

Christina laughed at Tilly and her news. The storekeeper's daughter was always in a high state of excitement over some wonderful happening in Orchard Glen, while Christina was prepared to testify that nothing at all ever happened within the ring of its sleepy green hills, and she immediately forgot all about Mr. Wallace Sutherland.

The next evening was the date of the concert, and excitement ran high. When Trooper and Marmaduke had

visited the Piper they had made elaborate arrangements for his entry into Orchard Glen. He was to stay with old Peter McNabb, a relative who lived about half-a-mile above the village, until the hour for the concert had almost arrived, then he was to come sweeping down the hill, when the crowds were gathering, and march playing into the hall where he would open the proceedings. And if he did not sweep all the folks around the Methodist church back into the hall with him, then Trooper had missed his guess. Piper Lauchie was a true Highlander, with a love of the dramatic, and he fell in with the arrangements with all his heart. The Dunn farm was just next to Old Peter's house, so early in the afternoon Trooper went over and ascertained to his satisfaction that Lauchie was there, with his pipes in fine tune. The two old men were smoking and telling tales of pioneer days on the shores of Lake Simcoe, with as much zest as if they were relating them for the first time instead of the forty-first. So, with everything so well arranged, there was seemingly no cause for anxiety, and not the most pessimistic Methodist could have prophesied disaster.

The evening of October first was bright and warm, and at an early hour the rival crowds began to gather; the worshippers and the revellers, Mr. Wylie designated them in a remark made afterwards to Mr. Sinclair, a remark the Presbyterian minister did not forget in a few weeks. The Methodist church, which was up on the slope of the hill, began to fill slowly and the Temperance hall, down near the store corner, rapidly. A group of young men lingered at the door of the hall with their usual inability to enter a meeting until a few minutes after the hour of starting. There was also a small group at the door of the Methodist church farther up the hill. They were not the customary loungers, but a small self-appointed committee of the Methodist fathers on the outlook for any of the flock who might stumble into the pitfall of the Temperance hall on their way to church.

The visiting minister drove into the village, passed the hall in a whirl of dust, and hurried into the church. Dusk was falling, the lamps were lit in both gathering places and the light shone from the windows.

It was now on the eve of eight o'clock, in another moment the meeting on the hill would open, and the Piper had not yet appeared. Marmaduke and Trooper, consulting in the middle of the street where there was a view of the hill up as far as the Lindsay gate, were growing anxious. It would be quite too bad if, after all their plans, the Piper should fail them. Trooper was for going after the missing musician, but Duke counselled patience. He fancied he saw a figure on the hill now and any moment they might hear the pipes.

But eight o'clock came, the group of watchers on the hill moved inside, and the strains of a hymn came through the open door and windows of the Methodist church. There was no hope of catching any stray sheep in the Piper's net now!

Tremendous K. came rushing out of the hall declaring that they could not wait any longer, the boys were beginning to stamp and yell for the programme, and Dr. McGarry was as mad as a wet hen. Then Dr. McGarry, who was chairman, came right on his heels, his watch in his hand, demanding what in common sense and thunder they meant by holding up the meeting this way. That confounded piper of theirs could play for an hour after he got here if he wanted to, but were they going to sit up all night waiting for him? He had been called to go and see old Granny Anderson just as soon as this show was over, and she wouldn't be likely to put off dying until that Piper appeared as if he was Gabriel with his trumpet!

The Doctor was a hard man to argue with when he was angry, inasmuch as he did not stop talking at all, and so there was no chance to state your case. So it was decided that the Choir had better sing the opening chorus, while Trooper would go up the hill and hasten the Piper's tune if possible, Duke remaining on guard at the door to see that he did not enter during the rendering of some other selection.

So Tremendous K. and the Doctor dashed back into the hall and Trooper ran up the village street. But before he had come to the bridge across the stream, he discerned a figure appearing out of the dusk on the hillside and the next moment, high, clear and thrilling sounded the opening skirl of the pipes! Trooper gave a whoop of joy, and ran back waving the good news which had already arrived on the evening breeze. Marmaduke sent one of the boys flying into the Hall to see if the programme would not wait another moment, but he was just a second too late. The opening chorus, "All's Well," was started, and already they could hear Joanna's voice on the high notes.

"Never mind," cried Marmaduke as Trooper ran up breathless, "he'll come in as neat as a tack right after this piece, and we couldn't a' got any more into the Hall anyway," he added gloatingly, "even if he'd been playin' all day."

He was certainly playing now, and most enticingly. It was that teasing, alluring lilt, "Tullochgorum," and Trooper went out into the middle of the road and danced the Highland Fling to it, while Marmaduke took his place opposite, hopping about in a cloud of dust, on his one foot and holding up his peg leg in a very elegant fashion as a dainty young lady might hold her train.

"Say, he'll bust the church windows when he's passin'!" cried Trooper, stopping to listen to the music soaring louder and clearer. The night was warm, and the doors and windows of the church were all wide open and Piper Lauchie was making as much noise as a company of massed bands marching past.

"It's turned out better than we intended," said Marmaduke in improper glee. "Why didn't we think of it?"

Now, Piper Lauchie had not been in Orchard Glen that summer, and the last occasion upon which he had visited the village had been on his way home from a picnic, under rather merry circumstances which left his memory of the place pleasantly hazy. Trooper had cautioned him to march right into the hall on his arrival, explaining that the building was on his left hand side after he crossed the bridge, and that he could not miss it for it would be all lit up and he and Marmaduke would be at the door to see him march triumphantly inside. So far he had followed his instructions to the letter. He tuned up half way down the hill and came marching across the bridge, and then the Dreadful Thing happened.

It was almost dark by this time and surely neither the Piper nor Trooper nor Marmaduke was to blame that the Methodist church should be placed on the left hand side after you crossed the bridge, and that it should be all lit up so that the Piper could not miss it! And he did not miss it, either. The sight of the rows of heads against the windows, all in the attitude of waiting, inspired the musician to greater effort. He shifted his chanter a bit, put more wind into it, and burst into a gayer and faster tune, and when he reached the bit of sidewalk opposite the door of the Methodist church, he whirled about, with a flirt of his kilt and a flip of his plaid, swept up the steps, through the open door and went screaming up the church aisle right to the pulpit steps, fairly raising the roof to the tune of "Hey! Johnnie Cope, are ye waukin' yet?"

And all the while this terrible mishap was occurring, the Choir in the hall farther down the street, just at the moment when all was going as ill as human affairs could go, was singing in false security, "All's Well!"

When Trooper and Duke, waiting admiringly in the middle of the road, saw their charge suddenly disappear into the pitfall of the Methodist church, they stood paralysed for one dreadful moment, like men who had seen the earth open and swallow everything upon which they had set their hearts. Then Trooper gave a terrific yell, the war whoop he had learned on the prairie, and turned and looked at his companion in disaster. Duke was beyond uttering even a yell. He collapsed silently upon the grass by the roadside, and rolled back and forth in a kind of convulsion, while Trooper staggered to the fence and hung limply over it like a wet sack. And all the while inside the hall higher and stronger and more confident, swelled the words of the chorus in dreadful irony, "All's Well, All's Well!"

Nobody could ever quite explain how the Piper got ejected from the church and transferred to the hall where he belonged. There were so many conflicting reports.

Some said that Mr. Wylie gave him a solemn talking to upon the error of his position, and the visiting minister upon the error of his ways, being under the impression that he and old Peter had been drinking, which, strange to say, was really not the case. Others declared that the Piper did not stop playing long enough for any one to speak, but went roaring up one aisle to come screeching down the other. No one seemed quite clear on the subject, for the Methodists were too angry to speak of the affair coherently and for a long time it was not safe to ask them about it.

But upon one part of the history all eye-witnesses, except the Piper himself, were agreed, and that was that Mrs. Johnnie Dunn left her seat and chased the Piper down the church aisle with her umbrella. The Woman would have preferred to attend the concert, though she was a Methodist, but Trooper's lively interest in it had decided her to adhere to her church, and she was not slow to take this opportunity of showing her disapproval of his choice.

Whatever happened, Piper Lauchie did finally reach the hall, but he was too angry to either play or speak. There was no sign of the committee that was to meet him, for Trooper and Marmaduke had fled down the dark alley between the hall and the blacksmith shop and were lying in an old shed, trying to keep from shouting.

Gavin Grant had arrived late, after a very busy day, and with a little group of boys had also witnessed the catastrophe. Gavin stepped up to the old man to apologise and explain, but Lauchie shoved him aside and marched noisily into the hall, ready to murder any one who stood in his way.

He burst in just as Dr. McGarry arose and announced:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the next item on this programme is——"

And Piper Lauchie shouted from the back of the building in a high thin yell:

"The next item will be that some one will be hafing his brains knocked out, whatefer!"

And he tramped straight up the aisle to the platform, his old plaid streaming from his shoulders, his pipes held like a drawn claymore.

The Chairman, like the rest of the crowd, had been listening to "All's Well" and did not dream that things had been going otherwise. He stood for a moment staring at the enraged Piper and then Gavin, who had just slipped into his seat in the choir, leaned forward, and touching the Chairman's elbow, strove to explain.

"Mr. McDonald went to the wrong meeting," he whispered, but he got no farther.

Old Lauchie slammed his pipes down on the Chairman's table, upsetting a glass of water and a big bouquet of flowers from Craig-Ellachie, and turned upon Gavin, his fists clenched.

"I would be going to the wrong meeting, would I?" he shouted, and Gavin backed away hastily. The old man pursued him hotly.

"It would be you and your fell tribe that would be sending me to the Messodis meeting house!" he shouted. "Ta Messodis," he repeated in withering scorn, "I'll Messodis you——"

Gavin was continuing to back away in a most ungallant fashion, till he got to the wall and there was no means of escape, when rescue came from an unexpected quarter.

Just at the end of the front row of seats, where the pursuit came to a halt, Wallace Sutherland was sitting with his mother. He had been the centre of many admiring glances, especially from the girls. And indeed he was a fine-looking young fellow and it was no wonder that his uncle was so proud of him and his mother so afraid. He was hugely enjoying the Piper's tumultuous entry, and his black eyes were dancing with delight, when the old man, his red blazing eyes fixed upon his supposed enemy, was backing Gavin into a corner.

But Mrs. Sutherland, for all that Orchard Glen pronounced her proud and cold, was a timid, gentle woman, and Lauchie's appearance filled her with panic.

"Oh, Wallace, my dear," she whispered in alarm. "Oh, how dreadful. He's going to strike him——"

Wallace was very loath to put an end to the fun, but he rose and touched the enraged Piper on the arm.

"Mr. McDonald," he whispered tactfully, "my uncle, Dr. McGarry, is the Chairman and he,—he's just a little bit nervous. Won't you get your pipes and play for us? He doesn't know what to do next, and we've been waiting anxiously to hear you."

Wallace Sutherland's charming manner seldom failed him and it did not now. The Piper looked at him and the fierce rage died from his eyes. The clenched fists dropped to his side and Gavin slipped into a seat. Wallace nodded to his uncle and Dr. McGarry hastily announced, without any embarrassing explanations, that the Piper had been unavoidably delayed but that he was now ready to favour them with a selection for which they were all so anxiously waiting.

So Lauchie shouldered his instrument and took his place on the platform. The storm was abating but there were still thunderings and occasional flashes of lightning concerning the crass ignorance and stupidity of the people of

Orchard Glen and Methodists the world over.

"Come up to Glenoro and we'll be learning you manners," came rumbling out of the thunder cloud. "We'll be showing you how they treat a Piper there."

But by this time the pipes were beginning to scream their opening note, and Lauchie was blowing his anger into the chanter. The tune rose on a shrill spiral and high and clear it poured forth the challenging notes of a fierce pibroch, the war song of the Clan McDonald. The player marched back and forth across the platform keeping quick step to the mad tune, that rose louder and faster and shriller at each step.

The audience began to clap, to stamp, to cheer, and still the war cry of the McDonalds went screaming to the roof; and finally when the walls were beginning to rock, and the women were becoming terrified, the Piper whirled down the aisle and swept out of the building on the high tide of his song. The young men in the back of the hall followed him in noisy hilarity, but he stopped for nobody. He went marching straight up the village street towards home, the defiant notes rising in a wild crescendo. And oh, how he blew with lungs of leather like fifty pipers together, when he was passing the Methodist church!

Dr. McGarry called the audience to order with some difficulty, and the rest of the performance went on quite decorously. And when the last notes of the pipes died away in the hills, Marmaduke and Trooper crawled from their hiding place and sat on the hall steps till the programme was over, holding each other up.

"Gosh," whispered Marmaduke, wiping his eyes weakly. "Who'd 'a' thought that a McDonald from Glenoro wouldn't know a Methodist church when he saw one?"

"It was the sight o' the Temperance hall that turned his stomach," lamented Trooper. "We might 'a' known he'd shy at it."

The Piper played himself away up and out of Orchard Glen, vowing solemnly, like the Minstrel Boy, that he would tear the cords of his instrument asunder ere they should sound again within the hearing of that traitorous community, a vow that old Lauchie was to live to see broken, under very stirring circumstances.

But there were other cords torn asunder in Orchard Glen by the unfortunate contingency of that fatal evening. The Hendersons and the Browns, who had been lifelong friends, stopped speaking to each other; Mr. Sinclair and Mr. Wylie met on the most frigidly polite terms; the union choir, which was the pride of Tremendous K.'s heart and the glory of Orchard Glen, fell to pieces, and a line of demarkation was drawn carefully between the two denominations where so recently every one had talked about church union.

Mrs. Johnnie Dunn did not allow whatever part her nephew and his chum had in the affair to go unnoticed. She advertised it, and hinted that perhaps the Piper was not so much to blame after all. Indeed the past record of Trooper and Marmaduke afforded little weight in proving their innocence, and public suspicion fastened upon them. Neither of them took any pains to establish their innocence; indeed, Trooper secretly wondered why they had never thought of planning the affair, and was rather ashamed of his lack of enterprise.

But both he and Marmaduke felt that The Woman pressed the case against them just a little too strongly.

"We'll have to do something to make The Woman mind her own business, Troop," Marmaduke declared, as they sat by the roaring fire in the store one chilly afternoon. "She'll ruin our innocent and harmless reputations if we don't."

So the two put their heads together to plan a just retribution, but before it could be made to fall, The Woman astonished every one by an entirely new enterprise. She packed her trunk, and leaving Marthy and Trooper to take care of themselves, she went away to spend the Winter on a visit to a sister in California.

But to no one was the night of the concert such a great occasion as it was to Christina. Wallace Sutherland went back to his studies the next week, but the vision of his handsome smiling face and his gallant behaviour remained vividly with her. She was filled with dismay at the contrast Gavin Grant had presented to him that night. It did not dawn upon Christina's mind that Gavin would as soon have raised his hand to Auntie Elspie as to defend himself against poor old Piper Lauchie. Tilly had whispered that Gavin was scared, and the other girls, with Joanna's able

assistance, emphasised the shameful fact. So when she saw him after the concert, standing on the edge of the bar of light that streamed from the hall door, she slipped away as he turned towards her and escaped with John in the darkness. But Gavin noticed her haste and interpreted it aright.

The Aunties sent a gay message by John, when he was over at the Craig-Ellachie threshing, to the effect that Elspie had broken off her engagement. She had heard that Piper Lauchie had taken to going to the Methodist church, and they had warned her that they would not abide a Methodist body in the family. But Christina could not joke about the Piper with Gavin, she felt he really must be humiliated, when, in fact, Gavin felt no more at fault than if he had backed out of the way of an enraged child and dodged his blows.

But indeed Christina was giving him and his affairs very little thought. Her Dream Knight had taken form, she even knew his name and his station in life. And though he still rode gaily beyond the horizon she could not but think of him and wonder when she might see him again.

CHAPTER VI

SAINT VALENTINE'S PRANK

But indeed there was no time for dreams with the days of preparation for Mary's wedding flying past. It had been set for the Christmas holidays when the boys would be home, and Annie Brown, who was the neighbourhood dressmaker, spent almost all her days at the Lindsays now, for Allister's cheque had bought many yards of silk and lace and Mary must be as fine as possible to go away and live in a house in town and be dressed up every afternoon of her life.

Christmas came with a rush on snow laden wings, and the boys came home and the old house was filled with noise and laughter. Sandy could not do enough for Christina, he followed her about, that she might not so much as lift a pail of water without his assistance, for he was always keenly conscious of all she was doing for him, and his conduct made Christina far happier than a college course could possibly make any human being. And then came the wedding before anybody was really ready, as weddings always do, with all the MacGillivrays from Port Stewart and all the McDonald relations from Glenoro. And then suddenly it was all over and Sandy and Neil were gone back to Toronto and Jimmie to Algonquin; and Christina awoke to the astonishing and dismaying fact that Mary had left them and gone far away to live in a home of her own. This last fact dwarfed all others and threw even Sandy's absence into lighter gloom.

Early in the Winter she paid a short visit to Mary's new home in Port Stewart. It was a wonderful place, with slippery hardwood floors that had to be polished instead of scrubbed, and shiny new furniture, and electric lights all over—you could press a little button in the hall at the front door and the light would flash up in the cellar; and hot water upstairs in the bathroom; and a telephone that rang your own number only, and through which no one could overhear what you were saying; and a piano, and Mary taking music lessons, and she a married woman! All these wonders had to be shouted again and again to Grandpa on Christina's return, and he always ended the recital by clapping her on the back and declaring,—

"Och, och, indeed, and it is our own electric light that will be back again, and it will jist be darkness when she is away."

If Christina came home filled with the wonder of Mary's new house she was secretly much more impressed with the wonder of Mary's new life. Surely it was having all your dreams come true to be married to a handsome man who adored you and go to live with him in a fine house with a piano and polished floors. This must be the Great Adventure, not second even to a college course. What if the road out of Orchard Glen, which she had sought so persistently, and as yet without success, should not be the steep Path up Helicon, after all, but the rose hedged lane along which Mary had gone? Christina's heart left her no doubt as to which road she would choose, were the choice hers. But when one's True Knight was far away and merely nodded carelessly to one when he was near, what chance had one? She longed more keenly than ever to get out into the world of wider opportunity.

The only excitement of the Winter was going to the post office for the boys' letters. They always came on Tuesday. Neil wrote home every Sunday of his life and his letter reached Orchard Glen post office on Tuesday afternoon. And Sandy wrote Sundays, too, or if he missed he sent a hurried note or post card later in the week. Then there was Mary's weekly letter, an occasional one from Allister, and generally Bruce's. At first Bruce was as faithful as Neil, but as the Winter advanced he occasionally missed a Tuesday.

"None from your beau to-day," Christina called out one blustery February afternoon when she brought in the mail, and handed out letters from Sandy and Neil. "He's likely got another girl in Toronto and forgotten all about you."

She was surprised to see that Ellen did not take her nonsense in her usual smooth good-natured way. She flushed and said nothing. Thereafter Christina kept a strict censorship over Bruce's letters, and was slightly troubled to find that they were rather irregular. Ellen's answer always went back the very next day, and Christina could not help seeing that her sister was anxious and worried until another came. And occasionally a wearisome time elapsed before it did come.

At first Christina's unconquerable cheerfulness forbade its troubling her much. Bruce was probably working very hard as this was his first year. Sandy sometimes missed a week altogether and even Neil was known to delay a day or two when examinations were near. As for Jimmie, he declared that when he went to college he wouldn't write to them at all except when he was home for the holidays. After all it must really be a great deal of trouble to have a sweetheart, as much care and worry, one seemed, as young Mrs. Martin's cross baby. She just couldn't understand anybody fretting over one, and she went round the house, putting wood in the stoves and seeing that Grandpa was kept warm, and singing,

"Oh, I'm glad my heart's my ain yet,
And I'll keep it sae all my life,
Till some bonny laddie comes by
That has wits that can wile a guid wife!"

On Valentine's Day she brought home a whole armful of letters. There was one for her from Allister, and she tore it open first, while Ellen eagerly opened one she had received. Allister had enclosed a valentine for Christina, a horrible picture of a tall, thin, frowsy woman sweeping a house, and beneath an atrocious rhyme about the cross old maid who always stayed at home and swept and scrubbed. Christina remembered with glee that she had sent him one, quite as ugly, a fat old farmer, mean and tight-fisted, growing rich out of his ill-gotten gains. She read his letter, even before she took time to show the valentine to Grandpa, and it sent her dancing through the house in a way that alarmed her mother. For Allister's letter had, once more, opened up the door into the big outside world.

"I have to go back East on business next Summer some time," he wrote, "and I'm going to make you come back here for a visit. The rich bachelors are as thick as gophers out here and I think I ought to do something for them, even if I can't get a wife for myself. So I'm going to get all the Orchard Glen girls out here, one by one, and I think you'll do all right for a start. Campbell and his wife are on my place now and they'll be fine folks for you to stay with...." There was more about the details of her visit, but Christina could not read it for very joy. She went flying around the kitchen waving the letter over her head.

"Hurrah!" she cried, "I'm going out West! I'm going to Alberta! My Valentine's sent for me!"

"What's all this?" cried Uncle Neil, coming in from the barn and stamping the snow from his feet. "I hope you're not thinking about going to-day, there's likely a blizzard on the prairies."

Christina flew at him, crying out incoherent bits from Allister's letter, and then rushed into the sitting-room where her mother sat by the stove.

"Be wise, Christina, be wise," warned her mother, after she had rejoiced mildly with her, "I'm often feared for you, when I see you so bent on the things of the world."

Christina pulled her high spirits down to a discreet level and went back to the corner of the kitchen, where Grandpa sat in his old rocker, to share the joyful tidings with him. But before she had attracted his attention from the book of Moody's sermons he was reading, she suddenly stopped. She realised with a pang that this wonderful good fortune that had come to her would be exceedingly ill news for poor Grandpa. There was no need to tell him until the time was near for her to go. She went back to the table and picked up the other letters she had dropped in her excitement.

A glance at Ellen showed that there was no valentine message from Bruce; but Christina found three for herself.

There was a very gorgeous one, all red hearts and lovers' knots, from Sandy. The second was from an unknown source. It was a dainty thing, fashioned by an artistic hand, a little sprig of heather glued to a card to form the letter C. Beneath was written in a masculine hand.

"My Love is young and fair,
My Love has golden hair,
And eyes so blue
And heart so true
That none with her compare."

Christina wondered over it for a few minutes; the lines seemed familiar. Where had she heard them before, she asked with beating heart. The postmark was Algonquin, but then every one who sent a valentine from Orchard Glen

mailed it in Algonquin. She looked at it closely, and then noticed the scent of rosemary. It had come from Craig-Ellachie! and the little lines were from the song "A Warrior Bold" that Gavin sang.

Christina was touched. It was so ungracious to receive gifts from Love's storehouse without even a thrill of gratitude. She had thought Gavin was forgetting her. He was so good, and so kind, too, and she loved all the Grant Girls so. But how was it possible to make a hero out of a young man who could only sing of heroic deeds, and would never, never perform one?

She slowly opened the last valentine. It belonged to the class that she and Allister had exchanged. It was very ugly and very funny; a picture of a tall, lank woman in spectacles and a college gown, her claw-like hands holding a ponderous volume. Christina laughed gaily and mentally blamed John, either he or Jimmie was surely the guilty person.

But she looked at the post-mark again and saw to her surprise that it had a United States stamp, and the place stamped on the envelope was one she knew nothing whatever about, El Monte, California.

"Look at this," she cried, running to Ellen. "Who do we know in California?"

"Why, what in the world?" asked Ellen in bewilderment. "I've got a perfectly horrible one from the very same place."

It was quite true, a very ugly and insulting thing it was, with the same post-mark, El Monte, and furthermore, it transpired that there was one for John and one for Jimmie in the same queer printed hand with the same postmark! and as for Uncle Neil's—a foolish old man with a fiddle—it was quite the funniest thing Christina had ever seen.

When John and Uncle Neil had received their insults and laughed over them, there was much speculation. The family could scarcely eat their supper through wondering who had sent them.

"El Monte," spelled John, spreading them all out on the table before him. "Now, who is it we know in that place? I've heard somebody talk about going there."

"Oh," cried Jimmie with one of his high-pitched yells, "that's where The Woman went! Mrs. Johnnie Dunn's there for the Winter. That's where her sister lives, I heard Trooper say so the other day."

The family looked at each other dumbfounded.

It surely could not be possible. The Woman had always been a faithful friend of Mrs. Lindsay and it was hardly likely she would take all this trouble to send such foolish messages to her family. Indeed Mrs. Johnnie Dunn would think twice of the money before she spent it on such nonsense.

"Indeed it would not be Sarah," declared Mrs. Lindsay as they argued and speculated. "She would be far from doing such a thing. Maybe you will find soon who it is."

But further light on the subject only went to fasten suspicion upon Sarah. It appeared that the Lindsays were not by any means the only ones in Orchard Glen who had received valentines from California. There was such a rain of love's tokens upon the village on the Fourteenth of February that Tilly and her father were nearly drowned in the deluge and had to call in the aid of Mrs. Holmes and Aunt Jinny to help keep their heads above water!

And the day after the Fourteenth was almost as bad, many having been delayed, probably owing to congestion of the mails between El Monte and Orchard Glen.

And every person in the village, almost, from Granny Minns to the Martins' youngest and naughtiest child, received a valentine, a very ugly and insulting valentine, too, from that place in California where The Woman had gone to spend the Winter!

At first the universality of the insult was not recognised, as each person strove to conceal his own personal injury. But neighbour began to confide in neighbour till at last the whole evil scheme was uncovered.

No one had seemed insignificant enough to be overlooked, no one was high enough to be immune. Even Mrs. Sutherland and the ministers were not slighted. Dr. McGarry's was a picture of a quack giving bread pills to old women and babies, and he roared and laughed long and loud over it, and showed it to every one in spite of his sister.

The Methodist minister's, the Baptist minister's, and Mr. Sinclair's were all exactly alike, violent-looking preachers with gusts of texts flying from their wide-open mouths, and sly rhymes concerning their denominational differences. The pretty little school teacher's was so mean that she couldn't go to school the next day, she cried so hard; and Mrs. Sinclair said that, of course, one should be above these things, but as far as she was concerned, she felt she needed all the Christian grace she possessed to forgive the unscrupulous person who had sent hers.

At first it did not seem possible that Mrs. Johnnie Dunn, that sensible, practical woman, could be the guilty party. At the very worst, her friends felt, she might have told the names of the people in the village, and some foolish mischief-maker—there were all kinds of folks in the States—had done the rest. But as each valentine was revealed it grew plainer that only some one intimately acquainted with the life of Orchard Glen could have chosen with such evil sagacity.

Who, for instance, outside Orchard Glen, knew that young Mrs. Martin had been a perfect martinet in her teaching days, but had now lost all her old power with the rod, and her children were the terror of the village? And who but a neighbour could have known that Granny Minns scolded Mitty all day long and pretended she was much more feeble than she really was? And who could have such an intimate knowledge of the flirtations of Tilly Holmes, and the dual organist's position held by Martha Henderson and Minnie McKenzie, and the coolness between Mr. Wylie and Mr. Sinclair since the night of the Piper's mistake?

It was Marmaduke who finally convinced the public mind that The Woman must be the perpetrator of the valentines; not a difficult case to prove.

He and Trooper had received quite the worst and most insulting of all the mail bag and Trooper's was particularly stinging. Marmaduke declared there was something in it that showed beyond doubt that it must have been The Woman, but Trooper did not like to say so, seeing that she was his aunt. But couldn't they see the postmark? And didn't every one know that she was visiting her sister in El Monte?

All the storms of the Winter were as a summer calm besides the gale the valentines raised. Nobody talked about anything else. They would just wait till The Woman came home in the Spring and then they would show her that she could not insult her neighbours like that and her away wintering in the South as if she were a millionairess!

The valentines was still the chief subject under discussion when The Woman came back in April.

The roads were too muddy to take the car to town, so Trooper and Marthy met her with the double buggy at Silver Creek, a nearby flag station, and drove home without preparing her for her reception. As they came down the muddy street of Orchard Glen with the brown fields smiling in the sun and the first hint of Spring showing in the soft tender tint of the willows beside the creek, The Woman declared that it was a sight better than California any day, and she was mighty glad to get home and see all her old friends, and take a holt of things again, for she supposed that she ought to be thankful if the two of them hadn't let everything go to the dogs while she was away.

They pulled up at the post office and The Woman hailed Mr. Holmes and Tilly jovially.

"Hello in there!" she shouted. "Still at the old job, I do declare!" Ordinarily the postmaster would have received her with the utmost cordiality, but he could not forget that picture of himself as the old Socrates of the village giving forth spurious wisdom, and he replied very stiffly.

Tilly merely shook hands in a great hurry and fled to the back of the store, and young Mr. Martin, who was there in a panic for a bottle of emetic for the second youngest who had drunk some shoe polish, did not even take the trouble to speak, but dashed past her without a word. He wondered if she would be sorry for what she had done if one of his children was to be poisoned. Marmaduke was at the store and Trooper made him climb into the buggy and drive home to help welcome his aunt. Duke was as cordial as ever and uproariously glad to see her, but he was alone; throughout the village, averted faces and cold looks met her on every side. Even Joanna, coming down the street, who had a brilliant smile for Trooper, tossed her head and looked the other way, when his aunt spoke.

"Now, what in the world's up and give all these folks the stomach ache, I'd like to know?" she asked in anger and bewilderment, as they splashed through the muddy street.

"It's all about them dretful valentines, Sarah," complained the patient Marthy. "What ever did you send them for anyways?"

"Valentines?" she exclaimed. "What are you talkin' about?"

"Why, them Valentines you sent everybody. Most folks is awful mad about them."

The two young men on the front seat were sitting side by side gazing over the blue-grey landscape with faces of rapt innocence. They did not appear to be interested in the conversation in the back seat, but his aunt gave Trooper a sharp poke with her umbrella.

"What's this foolishness about valentines he's tellin' me about?"

"Aw, now, Aunt Sarah, you know," he said, turning to her with gentle reproof. "He means them valentines you sent."

"I didn't mind a scrap about mine," put in Duke generously; "I knowed it was just your fun. They didn't need to get so mad."

"That's what I told everybody," supplemented Trooper. "I said you only meant it for a joke."

Mrs. Dunn leaned back in the buggy seat helplessly. "If you ain't all gone clean out of your minds; will you tell me what you're ravin' about?" she demanded.

It was some time before the young men could be persuaded to tell her, insisting upon taking her attitude as a joke. But finally the truth came out. Every one in Orchard Glen had received an insulting valentine from El Monte last Winter, and everybody, of course, blamed her and was as mad as mad could be.

By the time they reached home and had sat down to the supper that Marmaduke had prepared in the morning, The Woman was angry enough to go out and challenge every one in Orchard Glen to dare to say she had done the fell deed. She began to question as to who had received the missives. Mrs. Sutherland? Yes, hers was a fright, the Doctor had said, and the Doctor's was worse. Not Mrs. Wylie, surely? Why, Mrs. Wylie couldn't sleep the night after she got hers, and it didn't seem fair, her not really belonging to Orchard Glen. The Ministers? Oh, yes; theirs were awful sights, neither of them preached the same for a month after.

Surely Mary Lindsay didn't get one? No, but all the family did, and the Grant Girls, too. The Grant Girls got terrors, folks said, and there was some talk about Gavin saying he'd have the law about it. Gavin was awful sensitive about the Aunties and he was firing mad.

Poor Mrs. Johnnie Dunn, her home-coming was completely spoiled! She got up early the next morning, and not even waiting to look over the premises to see what damage Marthy and Trooper had done in her absence, she hitched up her mare and drove over through all the mud and water to Craig-Ellachie, and took in the Lindsays on her way back. There was nothing lacking in the Grant Girls' welcome, and she was a little comforted but also much disturbed. The Aunties showed her their valentines, and Gavin's, but they laughed heartily over them, and Mrs. Lindsay allowed the girls to display theirs, assuring her that she had never believed her the sender. But it was beyond doubt that they had all come from El Monte, and that the addresses had all been printed by the same hand.

The Woman spread them out on the table before her and meditated. "There's that young villain of a boy my sister has. He's another Trooper all over again, and worse, 'cause he ain't got me to trim him down. He'd be capable of doing it. But he couldn't. He doesn't know even the names of folks here, unless Trooper—Trooper—" She stopped and sat bolt upright.

"I'll bet," she said deliberately, while Christina fled from the room that she might laugh aloud, "I'll bet every cent I make out o' milk this Summer that Trooper and that other emissary of Satan is at the bottom of this and you'll see I'll find out."

But the damage had been done. Poor Mrs. Johnnie Dunn had a very harmless but very great desire to shine before her neighbours. She had expected to return to Orchard Glen with a blare of trumpets and astonish every one with her tales of California with geraniums in the garden at Christmas, and bathing in the ocean in January, and oranges everywhere for the picking, and a host of kindred wonders in which her untravelled neighbour friends were to be instructed. And instead she found the very name of California and El Monte were a byword and a hissing in the mouths of the inhabitants of Orchard Glen, and had to spend the first month after her return in voluble explanations and denials.

CHAPTER VII

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE

It seemed to Christina as if there had never been a summer that opened so joyously. In the first place she was preparing to go West with Allister when he came home in July, and she would not be very far from the Mission Field where Neil had gone, and that was good fortune enough in itself. Added to that, Sandy came home in May, and life was all holiday when Sandy was near, but best of all, at the closing of college, who should come riding over the hills but her Dream Knight. He was to stay the whole summer, Tilly explained on Sunday when he appeared with his mother and uncle at church, and Mrs. Sutherland was scared to let him go beyond the garden gate alone.

Though his coming to Orchard Glen brought such joy to Christina, young Mr. Sutherland had really come home under a cloud, though his mother took great care to turn it inside out for the public benefit and allow the silver lining of Wallace's many virtues to shine through. He was so handsome and so genuinely glad to see everybody in Orchard Glen, and so free and hearty in his manner, that it was very easy for people to believe the best of him. And indeed the worst was only that he had been a little less studious in college than he should have been.

He had barely passed his examinations in his first year, and now in his second, when he should have retrieved himself, he had gone under altogether. And the worst of it all was that Uncle William, who was paying his college bills, and who was rich and childless and would never miss the money, was making a dreadful fuss. Wallace wrote him apologising deeply, and explaining just how it all happened, the inconvenient examinations having come on just when he was labouring under a heavy cold.

Mrs. Sutherland wrote her brother explaining still further, Wallace had been ill, he was not at all well now. He had been really quite indisposed all Spring, and it was cruel to blame the dear boy for not studying.

But Uncle William seemed to enjoy being cruel. He wrote that he had done his best to give her son an education, but it appeared that it couldn't be done, and he felt it was time to stop wasting money. So he was sending Wallace home to her to see what she could make of him. Perhaps she could find something for him to do in Orchard Glen that would not tax his mentality as the University seemed to have done.

Poor Mrs. Sutherland was overcome with grief. Dr. McGarry was too, and he stormed and scolded Wallace and his sister by turns, and ended up by declaring that William was getting to be nothing but a skinflint and that he might give the boy another chance.

Wallace alone seemed undisturbed. He felt sure that Uncle William's bilious attack, as he termed his difference with his patron, would pass off, and that he would be ready to forgive him in October. So he settled himself in the old home with a tremendous display of books and a fine appearance of studiousness, and declared he would work so hard that when the Autumn term opened he would pass any examination they could possibly set before him.

His mother and uncle caught his optimism and were both soon ready to agree that all would be well. So Wallace spent the Summer very happily in Orchard Glen, lying in the hammock under the trees, always with his books, or driving about the country in the Doctor's car.

But poor Mrs. Sutherland had little enjoyment in his home-coming. She was really a very neighbourly soul, in spite of a few strange ideas about social usages, and she was now condemned to the difficult task of keeping Wallace at his studies, and away from the young life about him, and that in a village where the girls were as thick as the thistles along the roadside.

First there was that pretty young simpleton at the corner store, who giggled all the time, and made it dangerous for Wallace even to go for the mail. Then there was that family at Browns up on the hill with girls of all ages. And there were those Lindsays, for though the most dangerous one was married and out of the way, and another one said to be engaged, there was still another, very attractive and quite too smart. And there was that bold, black-eyed daughter of the blacksmith, who lived next door. She was too old for Wallace, but those mature girls were the most to be feared. And indeed, there was no safety whatever way you turned.

His mother had hoped for some relaxation when Wallace decided to spend an hour or so each morning under Mr. Sinclair's tutoring, but no sooner had this haven been provided, than the minister's daughter, a fine looking, high-spirited girl, came home for her holidays, from her school teaching.

So Mrs. Sutherland remained a prisoner in her own home, on guard over her son. And the girls of the village did all in their power to make her task most difficult.

And though Christina would have disdained to take any part in their schemes to meet Wallace, she managed to see her True Knight quite often and the Summer was a very happy one.

She always received a nod and a bright smile from him on Sundays, and sometimes on week days when she went down into the village. And he was always as gay and as debonair and handsome as anybody could wish a Dream Knight to be.

Sandy came home full of joyous relief that at last Christina was to get away out into the world. The trip to the West was not as good as college, of course, but Allister would give her a chance for an education yet, when this pinched time that he was passing through was over.

"I hate the thought of your going away," Sandy grumbled. "Girls ought to get married," he added, struggling confusedly with this first experience with femininism. Mary's career and Ellen's prospects were the only right and proper sphere for a girl.

Privately Christina thought so, too.

"But I can't get anybody to marry me," she said gaily. "So what am I to do? There's nobody in Orchard Glen wants me except"—she paused, perhaps she was wrong after all about Gavin's caring for her—"except Marmaduke," she added on second thought.

"And I'll bet if any fellow in Orchard Glen asked you to marry him you'd turn up your nose at him," complained Sandy. "My, but girls are queer. Now, if that Wallace Sutherland was to come along I suppose you'd be like the rest and be as sweet as honey to him, and you wouldn't look at a fellow like Gavin Grant. And I wouldn't give Gavin for a wagon load of Wallace Sutherlands."

Christina's cheeks grew crimson. Sandy had drawn a bow at a venture, but had hit right in the centre of the mark. But she responded gallantly.

"Neither would I. I wouldn't know what to do with a wagon load of him. But one would be very nice—loaded on an auto," she added slyly.

Sandy sniffed; but he could not dispute long with Christina over anything. They had grand times together, as June came in and they fell into their old habit of sitting in the evenings on the pump platform. There were long confidential talks there, under the apple boughs, too. Sandy's mind, under Neil's careful guardianship, was turning more and more towards the ministry as his life-work. And every day Christina grew more thankful that she had not been the means of holding him back.

She had not yet confessed to Grandpa that his electric light was to be switched off before the end of the summer. Christina had not found an occasion when she could summon sufficient courage to break the news to him. It would be time enough when she had to tell him. So he sang his evening hymn and read his morning psalms of thanksgiving undisturbed.

And to make things even better for Christina Mary came home in June. Hugh McGillivray had gone to Toronto on business and Mary came back to the old farm for a visit during his absence. Mary looked more beautiful than ever, in her new town-made clothes, and Christina was very proud of her as they went about the village together.

The practice for the Presbyterian Church's first of July picnic was in full swing, and as there were no Methodists helping this year, the Presbyterians had to do double duty. Mary went to practise with her sisters and had a grand reunion with all the girls.

"Christine, where's Bruce to-night?" she asked, as they came up the hill on the way home together, with Ellen walking ahead beside Annie McKenzie.

"Bruce? I don't know," confessed Christina. "Oh, he hasn't come to practise much since he came back from Toronto."

"No, and it's my opinion he hasn't been going to anything else," declared Mary. "Do you know that he has been here only once since I came home?"

Christina listened in dismay. She had been so absorbed in her joyous preparations for going West that she had actually not noticed what was quite apparent to Mary.

"Maybe he and Ellen have had a lover's quarrel," she whispered hopefully.

"Nothing of the sort," scoffed Mary. "Can you imagine any one quarrelling with Ellen or Bruce either—and as for their quarrelling between themselves!"

Christina was forced to admit that was extremely unlikely. And as she watched Ellen she could not but be convinced that there was something woefully wrong between her and Bruce.

"You couldn't think that he doesn't care for Ellen any more, could you?" faltered Christina as she and Mary held a second conference.

"Wouldn't it be awful," cried Mary aghast. "I can't remember when Bruce wasn't in love with Ellen and was coming here to see her. It would be an insult to the whole family!" she cried hotly.

Christina was not concerned about the family honour, but she was very much disturbed over Ellen. And then it was a heartbreaking thing to lose Bruce, too. He had always seemed like a brother, and it was almost as bad as if Neil or Sandy should become estranged.

Poor Ellen was striving hard to hide her hurt, and made heroic efforts to explain Bruce's changed manners. He was tired with all the unaccustomed work of the farm, he had to study at nights and that kept him at home. She was always ready with an excuse for his unaccustomed absence.

"Where's Bruce, Ellie?" asked her mother one Sunday evening when the usual crowd strolled in after the Methodist service.

"He's back at the gate with the boys, Mother," said Ellen with affected carelessness. "He'll likely be in later."

Bruce did come in later with John, but he did not stay late and went home when Annie and Katie left.

Of course Joanna did not fail to notice the change in Bruce and remark upon it. There was a little crowd at the Lindsays one evening to see Mary, when the McKenzie contingent entered without him.

"Where's your family doctor, Ellen?" Joanna inquired. "You'll have to look after your fellow better than you're doing!"

Ellen looked at her with quiet dignity, but her cheeks grew crimson.

"It's very good of you to be so interested in him, Joanna," she said.

"Course I'm interested in all my neighbours. Here's the whole McKenzie outfit, every one of them, but your particular one. Annie, you keep Bruce tied up as close as Ma Sutherland does her little boy. What have you done with him?"

Annie McKenzie was Ellen's close friend. She looked embarrassed.

"He's tired. He's been working in the field all day and now he's got studying to do at night," she declared

hurriedly.

"My! If you let him study that hard he ought to be a doctor about next Christmas! Maybe he's hurrying up so's he can get married a year or two sooner!"

Ellen's face grew pale, but Mary was there. Mary Lindsay had always been a match for Joanna in a quiet elusive way, and now from the vantage ground of a rather brilliant marriage Mary McGillivray was still more to be feared.

"Oh, Joanna," she said suavely, "a long piece of your hair is hanging down at the back. There's a looking-glass on the wall over there where Trooper's standing. Would you like to go and fix it?"

Joanna flounced away into the bed-room completely routed. There was something subtle about Mary that one could not combat.

Bruce dropped in late at the next practice that was held in the church. He sat in the back seat and talked with the other boys during intermission, but his very presence seemed to make Ellen happy. She became radiant, and chatted and laughed gaily with the other girls, looking handsomer than she had for many a day.

When they started home, Christina, with an eye for Gavin, kept carefully in the crowd. But Gavin had turned and gone away at once with the other boys who were unattached. And with the perversity of a woman's mind Christina felt a little hurt. She wondered why he seemed to have stopped trying for her favour. Was it because he was discouraged, or because he did not care? She was so far from understanding Gavin that she did not guess that his pride was keeping him aloof.

Annie McKenzie and Ellen were ahead, and Christina found herself walking beside Bruce. This was not unusual, for Bruce had always been so much one of the family that he just as often walked with her or one of the boys as with Ellen. She was so happy that she was impelled to express her joy.

"It's so nice to see you at practice, Bruce," she said. "It's lonesome here when all the boys are away."

"Yes, it's good to be home again," said Bruce without enthusiasm. "But I think I've got the city fever rather badly. I just couldn't settle down in Orchard Glen, now that I've been away."

Christina sympathised. "I fancy I'll feel like that when I go away," she ventured.

"Yes, you will," he declared. "When you get away you realise how small and narrow everything in your life has been. It changes a person completely. Nothing seems the same." He spoke in tones of depression. He was not at all the old Bruce who had been always kind and cheery, and almost as nice as John.

Christina experienced a feeling of dismay. "Nothing seems the same," weighed heavily upon her heart.

He came in for the evening lunch the Lindsay kitchen always furnished, but he went away when the rest left, and did not have a word with Ellen alone.

"What were you and Bruce talking about so seriously?" asked Ellen with forced lightness, as she and Christina put away the remains of the feast in the cellar.

"Oh, nothing much," said Christina confused. "About Toronto mostly. He likes it awfully well there," and she hurried away into Grandpa's room to take her last look at him and see that he was comfortable, and avoided further questioning.

"Tell me all about him when you write next," Mary said when Hugh came as radiant and eager as on her wedding day to take her home.

Christina promised. "It wouldn't be so bad if everybody wasn't so interested," she said with a sigh. "It's Joanna; that's the worst part of it."

"This is such a narrow gossip little place," complained the lady from the metropolis. "I'll be glad when you get

away out West with Allister, Christine."

"But Ellen can't get away from it," said Christina, "and mother's been here nearly all her life and she's not narrow nor gossipy." For Christina was not quite so sure now that she really wanted to get away. Ellen's undeniable trouble was taking away much of the joy of her sister's good fortune.

When the time came to write Mary, the news of Bruce was not encouraging. He came to the house very seldom, was almost melancholy and not at all his old self, and every one in the family noticed the change. Even Uncle Neil asked what was the matter between Ellen and Bruce, and he carefully avoided singing the "Standard on the Braes o' Mar" in the evening, knowing that there would be no McKenzie's man coming over the hills as in the old joyous days.

And so June slipped away and Allister wrote that he would come about the middle of July and for Christina to be ready. She felt that she could no longer put off the evil day of telling Grandpa and one night as she helped him to bed resolved to prepare him.

"I've got something to tell you," she shouted as she gave him his hymn book and put back the curtain. "But there isn't time to-night. I'll tell you to-morrow."

"Eh, eh, that'll be fine," said Grandpa, who was always looking forward to good things. "Don't forget about it." And after she left, she heard him say,

"Eh, eh, but it's a fine bit lassie. Eh, there's not such another—not such another!"

Christina felt a big lump choking her as she went upstairs to dress for practice.

Bruce appeared at practice again, and as the boys and girls paired off to go home, Christina noticed with great joy that he took his old place at Ellen's side and they walked away together.

Sandy had gone off with Margaret Sinclair again, and Christina joined herself to Burke Wright and Mitty, and later to Mrs. Johnnie Dunn. The Woman was still hot on the scent of the valentines and her remarks on the subject were highly amusing. They passed Ellen and Bruce, and Christina noticed joyfully that they were walking very slowly and were in deep conversation. It was still more encouraging, as she slipped into the house alone, to see that they were standing at the gate very much absorbed.

Her mother was moving about the kitchen. No matter how late her children were in getting home she always lingered till all were safely in the house.

"Bruce and Ellen are hanging over the gate," whispered Christina excitedly. "They've taken about half an hour getting home."

"They'll be all right, then?" whispered her mother eagerly.

"Oh, yes," cried Christina joyfully. "I'll tell you all about it in the morning. You go away to bed now, mother, and I'll set the bread."

Her mother went slowly to her room, and Christina bustled about the kitchen. She had got out the bowl and the flour, when she heard Ellen's step on the old creaking veranda floor. The door opened and Christina turned with a word of gay raillery, but stopped suddenly. Ellen stood in the doorway looking white and dazed, as though some one had given her a blow.

"Ellen!" cried Christina aghast. "What is the matter? Are you sick?" Her sister did not seem to hear. She did not answer, but passed the door and went on upstairs, slowly and stumbling, as though she were Grandpa's age!

Sandy came in from the woodshed door to find Christina standing overcome in the middle of the kitchen. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Did you see a ghost?"

"Oh, Sandy," Christina was full of dismay, "something is wrong with Ellen and Bruce. Something dreadful."

Sandy was deeply concerned as he listened. This was no mere girl's love affair like the sort Mary would have had. Bruce and Ellen had always been lovers. It was like hearing that John had broken with the family.

"Ellen just can't stand it here any longer," Christina burst out at last. "The girls are all talking about her, and Joanna is just dreadful; and, oh, Sandy, do you think I ought to let her go West instead of me?"

"Now, you look here!" cried Sandy violently, "don't you go talking like that any more. If there's anybody has to stay home I will. You just can't be the one that's always left. Cheer up. Wait till you ask Ellen what's up. Maybe it's not so bad, after all!"

It was just as bad as it could be, Christina felt sure, as she lay awake in the night listening to Ellen's slow deep sobs, not daring to ask the cause. The Lindsay girls were reticent, especially about affairs of the heart, and Christina hesitated to intrude. It was not till they were alone in the spring house with the churning the next morning, that the opening to the subject came and Ellen herself made it. She had gone about her work, pale and spiritless all morning, her mother's kindly eyes watching her with anxiety.

"Christine," Ellen said, when the picnic was broached, "I wish you'd tell Mrs. Johnnie Dunn you'll take my place on the tea committee, will you? I don't want to go."

"Of course I will," said Christina. "But don't you want to go to the picnic?"

Ellen turned her back and busied herself with something in the far end of the dim little cellar. "I don't want to ever go to a picnic again, as long as I live," she said quietly.

"Ellen!" cried Christina in dismay, "what is it? Have you and Bruce—what's the matter? Did you quarrel?"

"No, it would be better if we had." Ellen seemed to be relieved at the possibility of unburdening her heart. "He's just got tired of me—that's all."

She said it with a quiet bitterness that was far more sorrowful than a rush of tears. Christina felt her anger rise with her grief.

"Why, I never heard of anything so abominable—" she commenced stormily, but her sister stopped her.

"No, I won't listen to anything against him. Bruce is just as good—" she stopped overcome for a moment. "It isn't his fault," she went on, regaining her self-control. "He feels awful about it. He didn't want to tell me, but I made him, last night. I knew there was something, ever since last Christmas. And it's been getting worse all summer and I couldn't stand it any longer. He's changed since he went away. And he,—I've never been anywhere outside of Orchard Glen, and he's seen the difference. He's gone ahead of me, that's all and he couldn't help it."

She finished in a whisper, and stood looking before her in a kind of dazed despair. "I don't know,"—she faltered,— "I don't seem to know how to start over again," she said with an air of bewilderment.

"Oh, Ellen!" cried Christina in a sudden rush of tenderness and pity that had to have an outlet, "wouldn't you like to go away for a while, till—right now, and do something and—and catch up?"

A light flashed up for a moment in Ellen's eyes, but faded immediately. "How could I?" she cried, "and leave them here alone—I might as well think of going to the moon."

"But you can. Yes, you must, right away. Allister would just as soon have you go out there as me. He said so, but he didn't think you would, and you'll go and I'll stay at home. It will only be for a little while, and you can see everything, and it'll just be grand!—" her eyes were shining, her cheeks pink with excitement.

"Christine!" Ellen looked at the little sister, her eyes filled with unspeakable gratitude. "Oh, it wouldn't be right to let you—but if I only could—just for a little while, till he goes away, I might stand—"

She sank down upon a little low bench and buried her face in her apron. "It seems too good to be true," she sobbed.

Christina had a sudden vivid remembrance of a time when she dropped the heavy trap door of the cellar in a foolish prank and barely escaped giving Ellen a terrible blow on the head. And this time she might have killed her if she had been careless enough to forsake her in the day of her despair!

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAR DRUM

"And what would the grand news be that you promised to tell me?" asked Grandpa, that evening, when bedtime came and Christina was getting the little hymn-book ready.

"The news?" she hesitated, nonplussed. Then she went close and shouted into his ear, "Allister is going to take Ellen back to Prairie Park when he comes home, and perhaps she will stay with him all next winter."

And she ran away before he could ask her to go into any of the details. But she could not help hearing him as he talked it over with himself. And the result of his conversation was that though he did not like to see any one of the family leave, and especially one of his girls, he was reconciled.

"Aye, it'll be grand for Ellie, she's not been away, the bit lass, for a long time. But it's a grand thing he didn't take away my own lass. Eh, ah'm a selfish old body, but ah could ill spare her."

And once more Christina was rather surprised that she was not desperately disappointed. It was hard to be very sad in the face of Grandpa's perfect contentment and Ellen's overwhelming relief.

And so once more Christina turned her feet resolutely from the road to success to walk in the commonplace paths of field and farmyard and home. Allister came and took Ellen away with him in July. He was disappointed at Christina's failure to accompany him, but promised her the long deferred college course would be hers yet. He was putting through a new deal and if all went well he might be a millionaire one day.

"Now old Lady Stick-in-the-mud," he shouted jovially, as he bade Christina good-bye, "I see I can't pull you out of this place with a stumping machine just yet. But I'll call around for you again in about five years or so, and perhaps you'll be ready then."

Christina tried to laugh and take it all in good part, but it was harder to be misunderstood than it was to give up her chance to Ellen. But her sister did not misunderstand her. "I'll come home soon and do the work and let you have your turn, Christine," she whispered tremulously, as she said good-bye. "And oh, oh, Christine, I can't ever, ever tell you how good you've been to me!"

That was Christina's reward and it helped her in the days that followed. For they were not easy days. The heavy summer work was on, and Ellen's ready hands had taken more than half the tasks. Her mother missed Ellen sorely and was able to do less every day though she tried in every way to help.

And then John went down to the corner and hired Mitty to come up three days a week and do the heavy work, the washing and cleaning, and other things on days when the churning and baking took all Christina's time.

Poor Mitty was delighted to come. Burke had gone to work in Algonquin and came home only on week ends. When he was away Granny was very hard to manage, and it was like being on a holiday to go up to the Lindsays' and know you would not get scolded for a whole long day.

"'Ere I am again, for a 'ole day's fun," she would exclaim, her face all radiant, and a whole day's fun it certainly was, for Mitty was the gayest and brightest little soul in the world, and, as Mrs. Sutherland said, certainly did not know her place. Granny complained bitterly to the neighbours, but they all agreed that it was on the whole as beneficial to her as to Mitty, for she went about and looked after herself and was quite contented when there was no one there to see that she was not suffering.

Ellen wrote brave letters that breathed the relief she felt at getting away. The prairies were wonderful, and her days were so full she had no time to think. She was staying with the people that worked Allister's farm and they were so kind and good. Allister had given her a horse and she was going to learn to ride, only all the girls out here rode astride and it seemed so dreadful she did not think she could do it. Neil's Mission Field was only a half-day's journey away by rail, and she and Allister were going to see him and hear him preach.

Sandy lauded Christina as he read Ellen's letters, telling her again and again that there was no one like her and that she was just a corker, and that was all about it. And Christina glowed with happiness under his praise and grew fairly radiant over Ellen's cheerfulness.

"I'm not a bit more settled down than I ever was, remember," she warned Sandy. "You'll see I'll get away sometime yet, even if I have to get married to do it."

"Well, I hope you will," said Sandy gloomily. "Don't settle down and be an old maid whatever you do. You're just the sort to do it."

"Why?" gasped Christina in alarm. She wondered if Sandy thought she was too plain ever to have a suitor.

"Because you've always stayed around home doing the jobs that nobody else wanted to do," declared Sandy.

Christina gave a relieved laugh. "Something will happen some day," she promised. "Just see if it won't."

She repeated the promise to herself many times as she went bravely about the kitchen and barnyard.

"Something will happen some day!" But she often added, "But, oh, my, I do wish it would hurry up and happen soon."

And then something did happen; an event that vitally affected all Christina's future. Something happened which made it unnecessary for any one to go far afield for adventure, for it brought the busy world of affairs, with its turmoil and sorrow and strife, right inside the green walls of Orchard Glen. Away on the other side of the world giant oppression suddenly arose to trample and slay, and freedom leaped up into a death struggle, and her voice rang round the world, calling on her sons to come to her aid.

It was as peaceful a summer evening as could be, even in Orchard Glen, when the first faint echoes of that Call reached its quiet homes. The day had been very hot, and evening had come with her cool mantle of purple and gold, dew-spangled, and had spread it over the valley. Down in the river pasture the boys were playing foot-ball, and a dull thud came up the road like the distant boom of a cannon, could anything so incongruous come into the mind on such a peaceful evening? The store veranda had but few loungers, for the day had been a heavy one on the farms and was not yet over. The orchards grew pink and then purple in the evening light, the murmur of the water from the dam came up from the mill.

And right into the midst of this calm and peace came the first note of the Great Strife. To those who thought about it afterwards, it seemed fitting that the news should have been brought by that warlike lady, Mrs. Johnnie Dunn. She was returning from a second trip to town that day, and though she liked to send her Ford whirling through the village as a rebuke to idlers on the store veranda, this evening she slowed up and stopped with a grinding of brakes.

"I say, Sam! Sam Holmes," she cried excitedly, ignoring the crowd on the steps, "I've got some news that'll help spunk up some o' these lazy lumps that's clutterin' up your front door here."

Trooper, who was one of the lumps, tried to efface himself behind Marmaduke, without success. The Woman was glaring right at him.

"Well, well, now, Sarah," said the peaceable Mr. Holmes, "what is it? Has anything gone wrong in town?"

"Gone wrong? Well I should rather say so! Something that'll make yous folks buy another pound or so o' starch, when I tell you."

"Milk gone down?" guessed Marmaduke innocently. The Woman transferred the glare that belonged to her nephew upon his companions in wrong-doing.

"It couldn't go any lower than it is," she affirmed sternly, "but it's likely to go up, yes, and everything else, now! No, sir, there's goin' to be a war, that's what there is. They're fightin' right this minute over in Germany. The news about it was telegraphed up from Toronto to Algonquin and everybody says England'll be in it, first thing."

A small ripple of amusement broke over the still, smoky surface of the the veranda. The Woman was always bringing home startling news and this was only one of many wild rumours.

"I knew somethin' dreadful would happen if you went to town again to-day," muttered Trooper from his sanctuary behind the coal-oil barrel. "No wonder there's a war."

"Well, well, now, I declare, is that true," exclaimed Mr. Holmes, comfortably. "There's always trouble in them Balkans. I suppose Germany has got to have her hand in it too. Them Balkans, now," he continued with the splendid deliberation of one who was an authority on international affairs, "them Balkans," he lit his pipe and gave a couple of puffs, "they're nothing but a hot-bed of dissension and intrigue." And having settled Eastern Europe to every one's satisfaction, he threw away his match and smoked complacently.

"This ain't no Balkan affair, let me tell you that," cried The Woman, rather chagrined at the lack of excitement. "This is going to be a terrible war. It'll be a reg'lar Army Geddin, and after that the end of the world. Folks was a sayin' that in town to-day; it's prophesied in the Bible; you can ask any of the ministers and they'll tell you. Here, Tom, come down here and crank up this machine o' mine, I can't hang round here no longer doin' nothin', war or no war."

Very gladly Trooper sprang down and gave the crank a whirl that set the car roaring away up the hill, speeded by a wave of his arms. The veranda settled down after the disturbance to talk about the weather and politics again. But Trooper was interested in the news his Aunt had brought. He had never been content on the little Ontario farm since the free days when he rode the plains, and soldiering would be a grand job.

"Wonder if England'll be into this?" he asked eagerly.

"No danger," answered Mr. Holmes, puffing authoritatively. "England don't want to get into a war any more'n I do. And nobody'd dare to go to war with her, 'count of her navy."

"There's always some rumour about Germany makin' a war," said Old Tory Brown. "I don't remember the time that it ain't been talked about."

"There'll never be any big kinda war no more, you may bank on that," said the postmaster, seating himself on a nail keg. "Things is too much mixed up for that. Why, trade and commerce wouldn't stand it for two days. The banks would all go busted and business would stop. And the world has got to a place when business means more than anything else. So there'll not be much of a war. 'Course there will always be trouble in them Balkans, I suppose."

Trooper looked distinctly disappointed. "The Woman's always getting up some storm that never comes to anything," he said aggrievedly. "I thought she really meant it this time. Gosh, I wish there would be a real bang-up fight with guns shootin' everywhere! Wish the States would come over here or something and try to take Canada. But I guess there's no such luck."

There were those who did not feel quite so secure as the Orchard Glen postmaster. There was very terrible news coming from Europe soon, news that a people brought up with liberty in the very air they breathed, could not at first comprehend. There came fearful tales, only half-credited as yet, of an iron nation gone mad with the lust of power, and of a free race being trampled in blood and ruin. The cry of Belgium was reaching to heaven, and a new spirit was beginning to stir in Canadian hearts, the spirit that takes no thought for trade or commerce, and counts gain as refuse. The new spirit, which is as old as the cry for freedom, was aroused, and all Canada was listening, breathless, for the Lion's roar, the sound that would tell that that spirit had not perished from the heart of the British Nation.

And then it came! That call that thundered round the world into every corner of the Empire, setting the hearts of her youth, whether they beat under palm or pine, aflame for the Great Cause; and at its sound. Freedom rose up once more from the blood-soaked soil of Flanders, and gave back, yet again, a challenge to the hordes of Tyranny.

To Orchard Glen the first note of that call was a drum beat that came throbbing over the hills one summer evening, a drum beat that started in Old London.

Christina had gone up the back lane with the cows in the evening, to see if the berries were ripe in the Slash.

The Back Hill was very silent and lovely in the evening. Far below her lay her home fields; she could see John and Sandy hauling in their last load of alfalfa, with Jimmie perched on the top. She opened the bars into the back pasture and the stately herd trooped in, according to precedence. Cherry stepped back meekly until Plum walked ahead, for the cows were all well bred and knew their place. And Plum's place was always at the head. She strolled in like some splendid duchess, her meeker sisters dropping behind. Christina laughed as she put up the bars. She always called Plum Mrs. Sutherland. She wondered if Wallace would be staying all Summer in Orchard Glen. She was thinking so much about him that she did not see some one coming up the opposite slope until a tall figure suddenly appeared on the other side of the fence. "Good evening, Christine," said Gavin Grant.

"Good night, Gavin," called Christina. She was always just a little bit flustered in Gavin's presence. She was half afraid that he cared for her and just a little bit afraid that he did not care at all.

"How is your haying?" she asked pleasantly.

"Fine. I finished to-day. And I was just looking if these oats were ready. If the rain holds off I'll cut them to-morrow."

"Did Auntie Janet help you?" asked Christina slyly.

Gavin's dark eyes twinkled. "No, she didn't, but I had to give in and get Hughie Reid's boys to help me, or she would have. I'm afraid I can't manage her alone."

Christina was wondering how many young men she knew on the farms about would be so careful of three old women as Gavin was of his Aunts. Tilly Holmes said that Mrs. Sutherland waited upon Wallace hand and foot. But then one could not believe half the gossip Tilly repeated.

She pulled a plume of the flaming fire-weed, a bright monument to some splendid forest monarch that had perished in the flames.

"I like this flower, even if it is only a weed," she said. Gavin smiled sympathetically.

"I always like weeds best, but I daren't tell my Aunties that," he said.

He was much more at his ease here up on the hills, and he looked very fine too, with the sleeves rolled back from his strong brown arms, and his bare head covered with thick wavy hair. If he wore the kind of clothes that Wallace Sutherland wore, Christina could not help thinking he would be quite as handsome.

"I like weeds," he was saying, "though they do give a great deal of trouble. This bind weed now. It is such a plague but I feel sorry every time I destroy it."

He pulled a long graceful branch with its exquisite pink blossoms and Christina put out her hand for it. And Gavin was emboldened to gather a little blossom of the blue jay and hand it to her shyly. He wanted to tell her that the fire-weed was like her cheeks and the blue jay like her eyes, but he could not. He knew Christina's ambition, and he was too proud to play the lover when he was not wanted.

But he walked by her side, across the Slash, and Christina felt that old sense of happy companionship in his presence. The berries were fairly falling off the branches in ripe luxuriance, and they filled the little pail she had brought in quite too short a time. Behind them the top of Craig-Ellachie stretched up to catch the last light of the setting sun. Her home fields spread out beneath; the dusk laying its velvet cloak softly over them. The air was so still, the sound of the horses being driven to the water trough came up from the barnyard.

And then there came across the rose-touched hills a new sound, the dull throb of a drum.

"What is that?" asked Christina.

They stood side by side and listened, looking in the direction of the town, where now the electric lights glowed against the sky. The sound came from the great outside world like the pulse beat of another life, the life into which Christina was longing to plunge.

"Maybe it's about the war," said Gavin; he suddenly raised his head and his eyes grew bright. "Perhaps it means that England is in it."

"Oh," Christina looked at him surprised. "It would be awful if the Old Country got into it," she exclaimed. "Surely they won't."

"It would be worse if she did not," said Gavin. "Think of Belgium."

"But what if they sent a Canadian contingent. I wouldn't like anybody I know to go to war."

Gavin made no reply. Christina wished he would say he would like to go. They stood for a little listening to the drum. And the girl had no slightest idea that to the young man the sound was as a bugle call. It was Gavin's reveille, and it summoned him across the hills to come away. But he knew he could not obey, and he stood silent saying no word of the tumult it raised in his heart.

The next day the news that the drum had sent over the hills came to Orchard Glen. England was in the war and she would in all probability call for a Canadian contingent. Indeed Algonquin had not waited to know, but was going to offer one herself whether the rest of Canada was loyal or not. And on the very day that Britain entered the Great War, this little obscure town, set far away north in a ring of forest and lake, was calling her sons to go over seas and help the Mother Land. And it was the sound of her drums that had penetrated to the hills of Orchard Glen and had set Gavin Grant's heart throbbing in time to its beat.

Mrs. Johnnie Dunn had gone into town that morning with her milk as usual, and on her return she went out to the hay field to see if her two underlings had been attending to business in her absence. Marthy and Trooper Tom were good friends and they were not working so hard that they were unable to have a little friendly chat. The Woman bore down upon them.

"Well, if ever there was a time when there should be no hangin' round an' palaverin' that time is jist right now," she declared. "What d'ye think's the latest?"

The two men looked at her, Marthy undisturbed, Trooper alert and eager.

"England's into the war, that's what! Yes, sir, and Sam Holmes didn't keep her out of it neither. And they were enlistin' fellows in Algonquin last night, an' they say that Burke Wright—For the love o' goodness, has the boy gone clean off his head?"

"Sufferin' Moses!" cried Marthy, standing with his fork suspended.

For Trooper had turned his face to the heavens and uttered the ear-splitting war whoop that he had learned on the prairies. He threw his fork up into the air so that it turned a complete somersault, and came down and stuck neatly in the coil of hay, gave another whoop, and was off to the barn in wild leaps.

The two stood staring after him. "He didn't get into a bees' nest did he?" asked Marthy looking around in bewilderment. The Woman threw up her hands in sudden enlightenment.

"I'll bet—I'll bet he's off!" she gasped. "He's off to the war an' the hayin's hardly over, an' the harvest jist comin' on! If that don't beat——"

But Trooper gave not a thought to either haying or harvest. He was in frantic haste lest he be too late for that fortunate band of recruits in Algonquin. What if they got off without him? What if the war should end before he got away? He dashed into the stable and flung the saddle upon his horse, fastening it with swift, feverish jerks, while the sympathetic animal watched him with eager eyes, quivering to be away.

"Hooray, Polly!" he shouted as he swung over her back, "Hooray for Berlin!"

He went thundering down the lane, roaring good-bye to the two, still standing, in the field, gazing open-mouthed. Then he went whirling down the road in a cloud of dust, waving his cap and shouting a joyous farewell to everything and everybody along the way.

Joanna was at her gate looking up the street to see which of the Martin children had carried off her watering can, and Marmaduke had stopped to make love to her on his way home to dinner. They were standing laughing and joking when the wild horseman came thundering down the hill.

Trooper shot past them, yelling something that neither understood and before they could recover from their amazement he had stormed past and was up over the hill with only the sharp rap of his horse's hoofs to tell that it had not all been a vision.

Joanna looked at Marmaduke in real concern. He stood for a moment staring at the cloud of dust on the hill top, and then he suddenly slapped his knee.

"He's off to the war!" he shouted. "I bet Trooper's off to enlist. He's the very boy to do it. The Woman stopped here on her way home and said there was a Canadian Army to be raised and they were recruitin' in Algonquin last night. Yes, sir," he ended up heavily. "I just bet you that's what he's up to." He leaned against the fence and suddenly looked old and weary.

Joanna's handsome face had turned white. She turned and without a word walked into the house steady and erect. And it takes some courage and resolution to walk so when your lover has just gone shouting to the wars without so much as a good-bye wave of the hand, because of the very joy of going!

The next day Mitty was due for a day of fun at the Lindsays but she did not appear, and Christina ran down as soon as she could get away, apprehensive that Granny was really ill again. She found the tidy little house in great disorder, with Mitty sitting on the edge of Granny's bed, her face swollen with tears, while Granny sat up in bed rocking to and fro and bewailing her fate for a poor unfortunate buddy who should'a' died years ago.

"What has happened?" cried Christina in dismay. "Has Granny——"

"B-b-Burke!" sobbed Mitty, "E-e's a reservist."

"A what?" cried Christina in alarm. She had some vague idea that the steady, hard working Burke must have joined some sort of disreputable gang.

"A—a reservist," repeated Mitty between her sobs. "An' they've sent for 'im an' 'e's goin' to the war. An' me an' Granny'll be left all alone!"

"Do you mean he belongs to the army?" asked Christina bewildered by this strange new thing which had come into their peaceful lives.

Mitty nodded. "Burke was always a grite feller for the solderin', an' 'e joined wen 'e was only a bit o' a lad. But 'e never feared after 'e come out 'ere as anybody would ever send for 'im. An' now 'e'll go to the wars an be shot down an' we'll be left without 'im."

This was really a terrible calamity, something so big one feared to face it, and Christina could only sit and hold Mitty's hand. She was soon reinforced by the neighbours, many of whom had heard the sad news earlier, and had been in to console them. Dr. McGarry had already called twice to see Granny, though he had not been sent for, and he had left her some new powders. Mrs. Sutherland had brought over a little book of poems on Strength in Adversity. Tilly Holmes had brought a dozen oranges from the store, and Mrs. Sinclair came in while Christina was there with a bowl of soup.

Christina, mindful of her many duties at home, went back soon and sent her mother down, for Mrs. Lindsay was a wonder at bringing comfort and cheer.

Mrs. Holmes was there, having come over to supplement the dozen oranges with a half-dozen bananas. Joanna had come over early in the morning and carried off Mitty's ironing and was just returning with the basket filled with beautifully ironed clothes. Joanna hardly ever rejoiced with them that did rejoice, being rather of the opinion that they required a little wholesome adversity to temper their glee; but her heart was very warm towards those who were in sorrow. And though she had never taken much interest in Mitty's happiness, and had said many sarcastic things when Burke married her, still she was all sympathy with her in the day of her trial.

"Now, just let's cheer up and don't worry about it at all," she exclaimed bustling about with an air that was a real tonic. "Mitty, you just shut up your crying right now, and come and help me put away these clothes, or you'll have to send Burke away in his night-shirt. He'll never get to the war anyway. The British Navy'll have Germany chased out of Europe long before he'll get there and he'll jist have a free trip to the Old Country and a chance to see all his old friends and visit his mother. Why, you ought to be glad!"

"Now that's jist right, Mitty," declared Mrs. Holmes cheerfully. "Pa says the war can't last any time. Business can't stand it, and there ain't so much to worry about after all."

Mrs. Lindsay came in with a cup of tea and cream for Granny, and the old lady was much refreshed and sat up and scolded Mitty well for crying so much. And Mitty pulled herself together and began to feel that perhaps life could go on even if Burke were away for a time. Granny's scolding did her more good than all the neighbours' sympathy. It was the atmosphere of normal times, and set her back into the sanity of every day surroundings.

And Mrs. Lindsay made a cup of tea for everybody and they all sat around Granny's bed and sewed for Burke and mended everything and talked about the war in familiar terms, feeling that it had really come right home to them, and that Orchard Glen, with Trooper and Burke as representatives, had no small part to play.

They talked about Belgium and Austria and Turkey just as though they were Dalton, Silver Creek and Algonquin. It made them feel quite grand and important and gave something of a thrill as they spoke familiarly of those places and at the same time helped to get Burke Wright's clothes ready to go away and fight the Germans.

"And how was it you and Joanna let Trooper go?" asked Mrs. Holmes of Mrs. Johnnie Dunn who had dropped in on her way from town, whither she had followed her impetuous warrior.

"He didn't wait to ask neither of us, I guess," said The Woman. "Tom ain't the fellow to ask anybody's leave when there's any fightin' to do." It appeared that though she would have died rather than admit it, Mrs. Johnnie Dunn was secretly proud of the way Trooper had gone off to the war, and would hear no adverse comments upon his conduct. Joanna made no reply to the raillery. These days were harder upon Joanna than upon Mitty, for she was denied even the luxury of grieving. But Trooper had not gone. He was still in Algonquin and would perhaps be home yet. And though her pride was badly hurt, Joanna had not at all given up hope.

CHAPTER IX

THE DREAM KNIGHT

Trooper came tearing back to Orchard Glen, the finest sight the place had ever seen, in a smart uniform the colour of the dun fields he had forsaken so gaily. The day he burst upon the village there was such a crowd around him at the post office that it looked like election times and Dr. McGarry neglected his practice and followed him about.

"Eh, if I was only ten years younger I'd be going with you, Trooper," he cried enthusiastically. "Perhaps, I'll get there yet. There'll be plenty more going over before this business is done. None of us has any idea what this war is going to be like, let me tell you."

"It'll not last long," declared Mr. Holmes, not so much from conviction as because that was the opinion he had given forth at first and he must adhere to it. Besides he and the Doctor were opposed in politics and religion, and they would naturally hardly agree about the war.

Trooper continued to be the centre of attraction for the few days he spent at home before he was called to Valcartier. Though he was in the village for such a short time he found an opportunity to assist Marmaduke in a farewell piece of mischief, and though neither of them had any notion of involving Christina in their prank, she, quite accidentally, became one of the most interested parties.

The two village mischief-makers had long been hatching a plot to get Wallace Sutherland away from his mother and off with the girls. Trooper had promised the first one who would capture him and take him home with her to supper before he left, the biggest box of chocolates he could buy in Algonquin.

Though Wallace Sutherland had been living quietly in Orchard Glen all summer, his prospects were much better than they had been on his return home.

When Uncle William was in his most adverse mood, he had written a caustic letter hinting that he had grave doubts concerning Wallace's ill health interfering with his examinations. And just that very week, a kindly fate intervened, and Wallace became really ill. Dr. McGarry waited on him hand and foot, giving him every care possible, and at the same time declaring that it was nothing but too much to eat and too little to do that ailed the boy.

When Uncle William heard, however, he really repented of his hard heart; not very humbly, for that was not Uncle William's way, but quite substantially, nevertheless. He did not believe in agreeing with his adversary too quickly, so he wrote to his brother instead of to his nephew. He admitted that he might possibly have been too hasty with the young rascal, and he would give him one more chance, and only one. He might come back to the University at Christmas, and if he could take the supplemental examination that would be set for him, then, he could go on to the end of his course. Uncle William did not think it would be wise to let him return this coming Autumn, he ought to be kept in exile for a little while longer. And they would have to see that he studied; make him sweat a bit over his failures and a few months up in that backwoods concession where Peter lived would be beneficial, it might induce meditation; there must be lots of quiet lying around loose in that forsaken region. And above all things they must try to knock it into his head that this was absolutely his last chance.

Uncle William McGarry was one of those Canadians who, having made money in the great United States, was convinced that there was nothing good in Canada, since he had always been rather poor there. His attitude always nettled the Doctor who was a warm Britisher, and when he answered the letter there was more about the young men who were responding to the call of the Empire from this same back concession, than there was about the subject in hand.

Nevertheless Wallace's prophecy had come true. Uncle Will had recovered from his bilious attack. His convalescence took rather longer than the young optimist had expected, but as his recovery seemed sure, there was nothing more to worry about except the intervening studies. He went at his lessons with a right good will, and then something happened that disturbed the even course of his life. And that was the prank that Trooper and Marmaduke played before the former went to the war.

Christina had been to town. She had gone alone, on an errand for John, because Sandy and Jimmie were both very busy in the harvest fields. It was a very warm, dusty day and she let Dolly walk leisurely on the homeward road. When she came to the village she stopped at the post office for the mail.

She would not have confessed for the sake of a college course that she was wondering if there was any possibility of meeting Wallace Sutherland there. Christina could not have stooped to the little subterfuges the other girls practiced to waylay him at the corner, but none the less she could not help wishing that she might encounter him in some way that would attract his attention. He was always so pleasant when she met him, but he raised his hat to her and said, "Good afternoon, Miss Christine," in exactly the way he spoke to Tilly or Bell Brown or Maggie Blair.

Marmaduke was sitting on the store veranda as she came up, and Trooper was leaning against the door-post, very smart and handsome in his uniform with his buttons and his spurs all aglitter. Bell Brown and Maggie Blair were there as usual, and as Mrs. Holmes was not in the store there was a great deal of hilarity.

Marmaduke, in his role of the village Lover, had been courting each of the girls in turn and immediately transferred his affections the moment Christina appeared.

"Hello, Christine!" he cried, "you don't get down here as often as these other girls do; and here I've been spendin' days jist waitin' for a sight of you. I've been jist that lonesome for you,—will you think jist the same of me if I go to the war?"

"I'm sure even the war couldn't make me change my opinion of you, Duke," she answered with twinkling eyes. "Oh, Trooper!" she drew a long breath of admiration, "and you're really and truly going to the war!"

"You bet! Goin' in cavalry too, so I can make a swift get-away when the Germans take after me!"

"I'm thinkin' of goin' to the war myself," said Marmaduke, who was trying to cover up his real grief under an unusually frivolous exterior. "I might as well go and get killed if none o' your girls 'll look at me. Honest now, Christine, what would you take and go west with me next Spring? Now that Trooper is leavin' I'm not goin' to hang round here any longer," he added with a touch of real seriousness.

"Well, I suppose I'd have to take my trunk, first of all," said Christina, "and Grandpa and Mother—I couldn't leave them."

"Pshaw," giggled Tilly, "he was askin' me that very same thing before your girls came in, and I told him I'd take a gun so's I could shoot myself when we got there. No letters for your folks to-day, Christine, but your fellow's letter don't come till to-morrow anyhow," she added with a giggle at her joke.

"Oh, say girls," whispered Bell Brown, "look who's comin'!"

Wallace Sutherland was swinging down the street and came up the veranda steps in two graceful springs.

"Hello, Tilly! Hello, young ladies!" he cried in the free gay manner that was the hope of the girls and the despair of his mother. He made a profound bow to Marmaduke. "And how is His Grace the Dook to-day? Hello, Trooper! Oh, say, don't I wish I were going with you!"

Marmaduke gave him a poke with his peg leg. Like every one else in Orchard Glen he liked Wallace.

"And how is Lord Sutherland?" he asked in return, "I hear you're gettin' brain fag studyin' the latest novels."

Wallace did not deign to notice this. "Miss Tilly," he exclaimed, "I'm sure you've some letters for me away back there, now haven't you?"

Tilly flew to the little wicket and came tripping back with her hands full, her cheeks pink, her curls bobbing.

"Just one for the Doctor, and one for your mother, and only papers for you," she cried apologetically.

He leaned over the counter, "Come now," he said coaxingly, "are you quite sure you haven't hidden mine away somewhere?"

"She's forgotten to write to you, I guess she's got another fellow," giggled Tilly.

Christina turned towards the door. She wished with all her might that she could talk and joke with him as Tilly did, but even if she could there was no opportunity. He did not seem to notice she was there.

"Come along, girls," she said to Maggie and Bell, "I'm going home and you can drive up the hill with me if you like."

Marmaduke, who had been in a hurried whispered conference with the two girls, rose and hobbled after them, the light of a great inspiration dancing in his eyes.

Christina climbed into her old buggy as Wallace came out on the veranda followed closely by Tilly.

"Look here, Christine," cried Marmaduke, winking solemnly at her, "you're goin' to get your neck broke one o' these days, drivin' that mare, with the road full o' cars. What does John mean lettin' you?"

"Dolly!" cried Christina in amazement, "why she wouldn't—" she caught a frantic warning wink from Trooper's dancing eyes and paused. If the boys were playing some prank on Maggie and Bell it would be too bad of her to spoil it.

"She's dangerous, Christine," put in Trooper, "I've seen her actin' like a wild cat on the road. There was a girl killed the other day over in Grey County. Horse took fright at a Ford and ran away and busted everything!"

"Mercy, me!" cried Bell Brown, who had her foot on the buggy step and now jumped back. "I wonder if there'll be any cars coming along before we get home?"

"There's a big car full o' town folks visitin' up at McKenzies due to be along here any min'it," cried Marmaduke nervously. "You better stay here till it passes, Christine."

"Well," said Christina, still doubtful of her part in the play, "if you're scared to come with me girls, you needn't, but I can't wait—"

"Look here, Trooper," cried Duke, "hop in there and drive them kids home. That car at McKenzies looks like a thrashin' machine an' that mare'll go clean crazy. Here Christine, here's Trooper, he'll go with you."

"Oh, do come, Trooper," cried Maggie Blair tremulously, "Christine's a reckless driver and Dolly's dreadful with cars."

Christina sat looking on at the little comedy, laughing and wondering what its outcome was to be.

Just then Mrs. Johnnie Dunn came honking home from town and stormed past the store. Dolly would not have so much as switched her tail and the little play all arranged for Wallace Sutherland would have been spoiled had Trooper not come to its rescue. He gave a heroic leap to the mare's head, clutching her bridle and shouting:

"Whoa, Dolly, whoa now! Whoa there!" Marmaduke joined him, calling on Christina to hold tight. The mild Dolly was really startled and jerked up her head and pranced about in a very realistic manner indeed, and it took some patting and coaxing to get her quieted.

"Now, look at that, Christine!" cried Tilly, who was not in the play, and had screamed quite spontaneously.

"Well," cried Bell, coming forward nobly with her part, "that settles it for me. Trooper won't come, he's scared Joanna'll see him, so I'm going to walk. You'll have to risk it yourself, Christine."

"Aw, come along and drive us home, Trooper," cried Maggie. "I'm just too tired to walk up the hill."

"Say, I would now, but I can't leave here, girls. I was to meet Captain Morris here at five." He turned as if with a sudden inspiration. "Here, now. Here's Mr. Sutherland. Why don't you ask him to drive you? He's the very fellow for the job. Can't you drive these girls up the hill, Wallace? Here they are all scared to death, man."

"The very job for me!" cried Wallace gallantly. "I'll drive you across Canada if you'll let me, Miss Christine. Hop in girls. Is there room for us all?"

For a moment Christina hesitated, a moment of weakness. She had suddenly seen through the joke. It was a plan to get Wallace to drive off with the girls right under his mother's nose. She felt too deeply on the subject to take part in any such foolish jest. But she could not very well stop the impetuous young man who had scrambled into the buggy, and was now seated between her and Bell, while Maggie placed herself upon Bell's knee. And while she hesitated he caught up the lines with a gay flourish.

"Now, we'll all likely be killed," he cried. "But what's the difference so long as we die happy!" And he gave Dolly a terrible lash with the whip and shouted, "Get along there, you."

Now in all Dolly's quiet well-ordered life she had never felt anything but the gentlest encouragement from a whip, neither had anything in her memory ever pulled on her mouth in this dreadful manner. There was both terror and indignation in the leap she gave into the air, and the ignorant driver, taken quite unaware, pulled on one line so that the buggy was almost overturned. Then away they went at a gallop up the street, first on the edge of one ditch, then on the edge of the other, while the two plotters left on the veranda, ready to fall over with laughter, suddenly became sober as they saw a chance of their joke ending in a catastrophe.

There was no feigning in Bell's terror now. She had turned pale, and was crying out, "Oh, Christine, take the lines, take the lines!"

But Christina needed no bidding. Already she had caught the reins in her strong brown hands, shoving the young man's aside sharply.

"You, you idiot!" was what she said, though she did not know it until afterwards. She was too angry to say more, too genuinely alarmed. With the firm familiar hand on the lines, and Christina's voice calling soothingly, Dolly's panic began to subside. She came down to a canter, then to a trot.

"Well!" cried the young man in real amazement. "She is some horse. How do you ever manage to drive her?"

Christina was too angry to answer yet. She could never bear to see any dumb animal hurt, and to have Dolly, her pet, struck—she could never feel the lash of the whip across her own back and was tingling with indignation. And she was more deeply angry for another reason. She had divined by Wallace's free manner that he understood just as well as any of the girls that this had all been a ruse to capture him and carry him off, and she felt enraged that she had to lend herself to such a humiliation. She would show him that she was no party to the scheme by getting rid of him then and there.

When she managed to get Dolly down to a walk she stopped her altogether just at the foot of the hill, and turned upon the young man with blazing eyes.

"Why did you not tell me you didn't know the first thing about driving a horse?" she demanded.

Wallace Sutherland stared at her. To him Christina Lindsay was merely one of the village girls, whom he had gone to school with, in boyhood days, some of whom waylaid him at the post office to walk home with him and all of whom were anxious for his favour. But suddenly one of them had detached herself from the crowd and stood out alone and indignant, displaying vigorously the very opposite of admiration or a desire to please.

"It was brutal to strike a poor animal like that," she continued, still smarting for Dolly and for her own self respect.

Wallace felt the blood rise to his face. He remembered that she had called him an idiot. "I suppose you are waiting for me to get out?" he replied stiffly. For answer Christina turned her horse's head, and the wheel moved aside invitingly for him to alight. Maggie and Bell broke into a duet of apologies and protestations.

"Oh, Mr. Wallace, don't go! Why Christine, how can you act like that? He didn't know Dolly was going to be so wild!" But Christina was feeling more for herself than for Dolly and was inexorable. Wallace jumped out, and raised his hat stiffly. But she did not even glance at him, and drove away quickly up the hill.

"Don't you girls know that he's just making fun of us?" she cried hotly. "He knew just as well as you did that it was all a put up job, and he was a big, stupid, cruel thing to hit Dolly that way, so now." Christina experienced a fierce relief to her outraged pride in thus being able to revile him.

Maggie Blair was always inclined to be dominated by Christina, and she looked ashamed. What if her mother were to discover what she had been doing? But Bell was inclined to argue the matter, and the drive up the hill was anything but pleasant. However, neither of the girls was very much disturbed. Christina had made herself obnoxious forever to Wallace Sutherland, while he would think none the less of them for being full of fun.

This was the thought uppermost in poor Christina's mind also, when she reached home and her anger cooled leaving only shame and regret. She had behaved rudely,—oh, abominably,—to the one person whom above all others she wished to please. He would despise her and never look at her again. If she had only acted with dignity, but she had called him an idiot! She was overwhelmed with shame when she remembered that.

She longed for the advice of Ellen or even Mary and she confided her troubles to her mother in the evening as they sat sewing on the veranda.

"Well, well," her mother said comfortingly, not dreaming how badly Christina was hurt, "indeed I would rather you acted as you did, than to be taking part in such norms. But I think you would be rather hard on the lad because he did not know how to drive."

It was poor comfort when your heart was broken, when your Dream Knight had actually sat by your side and ridden with you and you had treated him as though he were a kitchen knave. The only crumb of comfort Christina had was that which her pride provided. At least Wallace would never dream that she had been silly enough to set him up on a pedestal, dream about him at night, and watch for him by day. But it was a very small and cheerless comfort in a whole world of misery.

But the result of her outrageous conduct towards the village hero was totally unlooked for. Wallace became very much interested in this spunky Lindsay girl. She was different from the other girls, the one reproving thorn in a field of admiring roses. That alone made her rather refreshing. Then he did not like to have a nice girl angry with him. He was a warm-hearted, easy going lad, who disliked opposition and disfavour and would do much to please any one. He was genuinely sorry, too, that he had hurt Dolly, for he was the opposite of cruel by nature.

So the very next evening when he saw Christina and Sandy pass on their way to that weekly function, Choir Practice, he remembered that the gathering was to be a sort of farewell to Trooper, and with this excuse he suddenly announced that he thought he would go.

"Of course you'll go," cried his uncle heartily. "We can't do honour enough to the boys that are going overseas to give their lives for us. I'd like to go, too! I'll drop in when I get back from my trip to Dalton."

So Wallace went off and was welcomed warmly by Tremendous K. and put in the bass row where Marmaduke and Trooper were sitting.

"You didn't seem to be able to keep up with that runaway horse, yesterday," said Marmaduke.

"I'd like to hammer the two of you jokers for putting up a job like that on me," Wallace said good-naturedly.

"Don't do anything to me," pleaded Duke, "Christina's been lookin' at me like a buzz saw all evenin'."

"I'll bet she wasn't in it," cried Wallace, suddenly anxious that Christina should be vindicated.

"No, she wasn't," admitted Trooper. "And I notice she didn't let you stay in it long either," he added with a grin.

"You got let down by one of the girls that time all right," boasted Marmaduke. "You'll find out you can't get too

gay with a Lindsay."

Wallace felt put upon his mettle immediately. He would show them that even as outspoken and independent a young lady as Miss Christina Lindsay was not likely to continue her opposition long. He felt a keen delight in the thought of his victory.

Tremendous K. called them sharply to order and the business of singing through an anthem for Sunday was finished hastily, and the real business of the evening, a farewell to Trooper, was taken up. They had collected enough money to give him a wrist watch, the older women of the church had knit him a half dozen pairs of socks, and there was a farewell address which had been prepared by Mr. Sinclair expressing very feebly a little of what the community felt at the departure of their gay and gallant young rider of the plains.

When it was all over, Gavin Grant watched for Christina. She had been so kind and friendly every time he had seen her lately, especially when they met, as they sometimes did, up on the hills, that he was beginning to wonder if he might not once more put his fortune to the test.

He waited for her outside the open door; she came out, looking about anxiously for some girls going in her direction, when to Gavin's dismay, Wallace Sutherland stepped to her side, and leaning over he whispered something. And then they walked away side by side up the hill.

But Gavin's distress was nothing to the feeling of Maggie and Bell. This seemed incredible after the way Christina had acted. She had called him an idiot, and literally turned him out of her buggy, and yet, here he was seeing her home the very next morning! Truly no one could tell what was the best way to treat a young man!

Meanwhile Christina's amazement knew no bounds. Wallace went straight to the point.

"I want to apologise, Miss Christine," he said humbly, "I know now why you were so angry and I don't blame you a bit. It was all Marmaduke's nonsense and I shouldn't have joined it."

"Oh, it's I who ought to apologise!" cried Christina in a rush of gratitude. "I was dreadfully rude, but I wanted you to know it wasn't really you I was angry with, but with the girls and Marmaduke."

"Well you hid your feelings pretty well," he said ruefully, and then they both laughed.

"You see I really don't know much about a horse," he confessed hurriedly. "A car is a different proposition. I thought that using the whip was the same as turning on the gasoline and I didn't expect such an explosion."

"I am afraid that I was the one that was guilty of the explosion," said Christina contritely, and they grew very friendly over their mutual apologies. Wallace had expected that a reconciliation would have been a difficult matter. He was not the sort to be sorry that it was not. He was very happy to find that, after all, this tall, frank girl, who held herself aloof from the doings at the corner, was inclined to look upon him with friendliness in her bright eyes. He very much enjoyed apologising to her and kept on doing it after they had reached her home, and they stood together in the moonlight listening to the soft whisper of the leaves in the poplar trees at Christina's gate.

Of course every one noticed that Wallace Sutherland had gone home with Christina Lindsay, and so much comment did this cause that the fact that Trooper and Joanna walked away together very slowly did not attract much attention. It was probably the last time. Joanna's spirits had left her. She could not find the strength to pretend any longer. She was silent and miserable on the way home and Trooper was silent too. This last leave was a trying experience. He might never come back, might never see Joanna's handsome face again, and, after all, no one would care so much if he were killed as Joanna. And so they hung over the gate long after her father had gone to bed, and finally when Trooper tore himself away, he whispered, "Now, not a minute later than four o'clock," and Joanna answered, "Do you suppose I could forget?"

Mark Falls always rose at six o'clock, called his daughter and went into the blacksmith shop returning at seven for his breakfast. He followed the usual rule the next morning but when he returned, Joanna had no breakfast ready for him. There was a cold lunch set out on the table but there was no fire in the kitchen stove and no tea made. He was a rather cross-grained man but he knew it was never safe to antagonise his daughter and so he called rather mildly up-stairs, "Hi, there Joan, you ain't sick are you?" but Joanna did not answer and he mounted the stairs slowly

grumbling about the young folk who would never go to bed at night and never get up till mid-day, and then he stopped in the middle of Joanna's open door. The bed was made and the room was in its usual spotless order, but there was no sign of its owner. And then he noticed a note pinned to the pillow with his name on it. He tore it open in dismayed haste. Mark Falls had always had the idea that Joanna would run away some day, perhaps because she was always threatening to do it. His mind worked rather slowly and he had scarcely time to formulate his fears when he had read the note.

"Dear Pa, There's mush on the back of the stove and you can warm it up for yourself. Mitty will likely come over and get your meals till I come back. I guess I will be back on Friday. Trooper and I are going in to Algonquin to get married before he goes away. You don't need to make a fuss for if you do there is no great cause for to stay home at all, Joanna."

Mark Falls merely grunted. It was always what he expected of Joan, he declared, she was flighty like her mother.

He sat down morosely to his breakfast. The mush was not very good when it was warmed up. He felt sure that Mitty would never cook things as he liked them. By the time he had finished his unpalatable breakfast he decided that he would act upon Joanna's hint and make no fuss when she returned. Whatever his daughter's temper, there was no doubt she could make the kind of meals a man could eat.

CHAPTER X

CALLED TO THE COLOURS

For some time after the first stir of Burke's and Trooper's departure, the war occupied all minds. The first shock of German brutality was shaking civilisation, and people were trying to readjust themselves to living back in the days of barbarity. Mr. Holmes was compelled each day to contradict the prophecies he had made the day before until he became quite discouraged, and the groups that met every day at the store to wait for the daily papers which the Doctor and Mr. Sinclair took, began to have their long-established faith in his opinions rather disturbed.

For even if the Germans had not succeeded in persuading the postmaster that he was wrong Dr. McGarry would have done so. The Doctor was a tremendously loyal Briton and these disastrous days were hard on his temper. People were afraid to ask him how the war was going, when he opened the newspaper, for if it were bad woe betide the questioner. The reverses of the Allies were nearly breaking his big heart and he had to vent his grief and wrath on somebody. He railed at Britain for being unprepared, he stormed at the United States for their neutrality, and he denounced Canada for being so slow, and always ended up by declaring that Germany would win and wishing with all his heart that, instead of being sixty, he were Trooper's age and were riding with him in the Princess Pats.

This sort of talk made an uncomfortable home atmosphere for young Wallace, who had no desires to be up and away from the comfortable fire-side and all the pleasant surroundings of Orchard Glen, and just now his environment, with Christina Lindsay's bright eyes to welcome him wherever he went, was pleasanter than he had ever dreamed it could be.

But if the Doctor's fiery patriotism did not greatly disturb his nephew, it made life quite miserable for his sister. Indeed the poor lady had more troubles in these days than many a mother who had sent her son to the Front.

The thing she had most feared had come upon her; namely that Wallace should take up in the vulgar country fashion with one of the young women of the village. She had to confess to herself that of all the Orchard Glen girls the Lindsays were perhaps the least objectionable, and Christina's manner seemed always quiet and well bred. But at best the case was very dreadful. Suppose Wallace became infatuated, and Wallace had a habit of doing that, what might not happen? He might even want to settle down on a farm here and be married, and he with all Uncle William's wealth at his disposal if he would only make proper use of his opportunities!

There was just one fate that would be worse than remaining in Orchard Glen, Wallace might take a notion to enlist, and his Uncle's outbursts of temper were sufficient to drive the boy to do anything desperate.

She sat herself with all her might to the task of making him study hard, so that he would be ready to go back to college in the States and be away from all the temptations of both Christina and the war. But making Wallace study was a heavy task, especially now with his infatuation for the Lindsay girl growing stronger every day.

He was off almost every night with the village rabble. He joined the Presbyterian choir, and the Temperance Society, and went to Bible Class every Sunday afternoon. And the time that was left from these engagements, she suspected, he spent at the Lindsay farm.

Indeed her mind was not at rest concerning him even during the hours when he was supposed to be under the tutelage of Mr. Sinclair, though Miss Margaret was away. No one knew what Mr. Sinclair would do with a young man who came under his influence. Mrs. Sutherland wanted Wallace to be a good boy, of course, she confessed with tears in her eyes, and she trusted he would always be religious and go to church as she had taught him, but Mr. Sinclair never seemed to know where to stop in matters of religion, and might spoil all the worldly prospects of a young man like Wallace. There was that young Neil Lindsay. Her brother always said that he was the brightest young man that Orchard Glen had ever sent out, and that he would make his mark in the world, and Mr. Sinclair had spread his blighting influence over him and now he was studying to be a minister and would likely go away off into some dreadful heathen country and never be heard of again. And indeed Orchard Glen could furnish many another instance of his undoing a promising career. And who knew what he might do with Wallace? Of course ministers existed for the purpose of seeing that wayward sons kept in the path of rectitude, but they ought to know there should be temperance in all things. For while Mrs. Sutherland wanted her son to have sufficient religion to keep him

from going wrong and doing anything disgraceful, she certainly did not want him to have so much that it would interfere with his getting on in the world. And Mr. Sinclair seemed to have no notion that getting on in the world mattered at all.

Wallace continued to be as gay and good-natured as ever in the face of his mother's tears and his uncle's temper. He would pull her ear playfully when she admonished him, and when Uncle Peter grew cross and grumpy he would go off whistling up the hill to the Lindsay farm.

As for Christina her golden dreams had all come true. She had at last obtained that one great requisite to happiness, a special cavalier of her own, to wait upon her and do her bidding. There was no more slipping home alone forlornly from meetings, no more coaxing John to take her to picnic or concert, no more fear of Gavin Grant seeing her home. And not only was her cavalier always at her side on these occasions, but he was the beau ideal of all the girls in Orchard Glen, as Christina was the envy. Her sweetheart was young and handsome and gallant and gay, indeed the very Dream Knight who had lingered so long just beyond the horizon and had ridden at last up to her door.

Mary wrote her delight in Christina's good fortune, hinting just a little surprise that she should have won a prize where Mary herself had failed. Ellen wrote cautioning her sister not to set her heart on any one for the present. Wallace was young and they would likely be parted, and people saved themselves a great deal of pain if they did not make plans for the future.

Christina was too busy to think much of the future, the present was quite sufficient. For besides all the joyous social events and home duties, like all the other women of the village she was called upon to take up the burden of Red Cross work.

The Red Cross Society proved as great a blessing in the divided ranks of Orchard Glen society, as it did on many another field of battle. It provided a place where the Methodists and Presbyterians could meet on common ground and it was wonderful to see the gradual drawing together of the forces that had been rent asunder by the skirl of old Lauchie's bagpipes. It was very heartening to see Mrs. Henderson, Tremendous K.'s wife, and Mrs. Johnnie Brown, the wife of the Methodist Sunday School Superintendent working side by side. It was impossible to keep from speaking when you were sewing on the same hospital shirt and gradually people began to forget that there were Methodists and Presbyterians in the world, remembering only that there were Germany and the Allies. And when Tremendous K. was asked by the Red Cross Society to get up a concert that winter to raise Red Cross funds, Methodists and Baptists came flocking back to the choir and they all sang, "O, Canada" and "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," together as though there had never been a piper in Orchard Glen.

But these harmonious heights were not reached without many a rocky bit of road for the Red Cross Society to travel.

When the Society was formed, a number of women came out from Algonquin to organise, though Mrs. Johnnie Dunn did not see why in common sense they couldn't form a society themselves without a lot of women from town trolloping out to show them how to do something they all knew how to do already. Nevertheless the ladies from town came and they organised centres in Dalton and Greenwood and Orchard Glen and in other places all through the country.

The Orchard Glen Red Cross Society was to meet once a week in the basement of the Methodist Church, it being the largest available space in the village.

Mrs. Sutherland was made President and Mrs. Sinclair Treasurer; and young Mrs. Martin was Secretary, with Christina Lindsay to assist and take the minutes when the children were so bad that nobody could manage them. There was a large executive committee besides, but all these officials were quite irrelevant, for Mrs. Johnnie Dunn was the real head and body and limbs of the society, and looked after all its business.

Then The Woman brought out the materials for sewing and knitting from Algonquin, and returned the garments when she thought they ought to be finished, and woe betide the unlucky Red Cross worker who was behind a day with a shirt or a pair of socks! For she decreed just how much was to be done each week, and no Prussian Militarist ever ruled with so high a hand.

"Just add another roll o' towelling to that order," she would command the Algonquin woman who was handing out her month's work, "there's a lot o' lazy lumps out at our corner that's sittin' pickin' their fingers for want o' somethin' to do."

The Society followed The Woman and the President was left far in the rear. Indeed Orchard Glen was rather proud of Mrs. Johnnie Dunn. She was so clever and made such a name for them in Red Cross circles. The valentine episode was forgotten with other pre-war trivialities and she was reinstated in her old place of leadership.

Mrs. Sutherland presided at all Red Cross meetings with something of the air of a Queen ruling a much limited monarchy, over which a strenuous and efficient Prime Minister is wielding unlimited power. It was an unpleasant position and the rightful monarch might have made efforts to retain her authority but for the ambassador who kept peace between the Queen and the Prime Minister. The peacemaker was the last woman in Orchard Glen to be chosen for such a task, and yet a real peacemaker Joanna proved herself.

Joanna Falls would never have filled the position, but Joanna Boyd, as every one was discovering, was a new creature. She came back from her brief trip with Trooper, when the first contingent left for England. She had a wedding ring on her hand and a new light in her handsome eyes. And she was so gentle and kindly that those who did not stop to remember that love works miracles scarcely knew her.

She became Mrs. Sutherland's life-long friend on the very day the Red Cross Society was formed. It was after the meeting and people were standing about asking questions and delivering opinions, Mrs. Sutherland was still sitting on the platform with the visitors from town and called Joanna to her.

"Mrs. Boyd, my dear," she said pleasantly, "will you come here a moment?"

Joanna looked around in a moment's bewilderment, wondering who Mrs. Boyd was, and then the girls all laughed, and she remembered, and, blushing and looking very beautiful, she obeyed. Mrs. Sutherland introduced her as "Our war bride," and told how Trooper had gone away at the first call of his country. And the visitors asked her all about him, and Joanna, with tears in her handsome eyes, told how he was in the Princess Pats and expected to be in the fighting any day now. It was so wonderful to be able to talk about Trooper and speak out her grief without shame, that Joanna's voice grew very soft and her manner gentle. And a lady whose only son had also ridden away in the Princess Patricias' patted her hand and said it was the women who stayed at home who needed to be brave and that she had many to sympathise with her.

From that day Joanna became Mrs. Sutherland's right hand, she was always ready to do her bidding. Mrs. Sutherland would call across the room full of shirts and towels and whirring machines, "Mrs. Boyd, my dear, could you find me the back of this shirt? I must have mislaid it." And Joanna would run and wait on her hand and foot, Joanna who used to throw the dishwater so it would splash over into Mrs. Sutherland's yard!

And another miracle caused by Trooper's going to the war was the friendship that sprang up between Joanna and The Woman. Mrs. Johnnie Dunn was a warrior at heart herself, and Trooper's leap to the first sound of the bugle thrilled her. She would have parted with a year's profits on milk before she would confess this, but she was really inordinately proud of her soldier and her feelings were displayed in her treatment of him. He had enough socks to foot every man in the Princess Patricias and there was never a soldier in the Canadian Army received such boxes of cake and candy as Trooper.

So his wife and his aunt became firm friends in their common love and pride. They sat together at sewing meetings, sharing scraps of each other's letters and the latest bit of news concerning the Princess Pats.

But Joanna had no easy task keeping peace in the Red Cross Society. The course of that blessed institution ran over a rough bed of rocks from the day of its inception.

There were a deal of rules about the fashioning of shirt collars and the hemming of sheets and the sewing on of buttons and the folding of bandages which The Woman characterised as tomfoolery. The President was for keeping the rules. She believed in system, she stated in her address to the Society, but Mrs. Johnnie Dunn believed only in her own system, and told every one to go ahead and do things the way they had always done and they'd be all right.

Then there was the knitting! Granny Minns, who could turn out her sock a day, and not omit a tittle of Mitty's scolding, said the Kitchener Toe was all humbug. She had knit for her son Tom all his life and her husband too, and was now knitting for Burke. And Burke said her socks were Just right, and what was good enough for Burke was good enough for the other soldiers!

She had an army of followers who were ready to second all she said. Mrs. Lindsay and the Grant Girls and Mrs. Brown and Tremendous K.'s mother were all superexcellent knitters, and Mrs. Brown who was no more afraid of Mrs. Sutherland than The Woman was, said right out in the meeting that the Kitchener Toe was jist some norms got up by the women in the town who hadn't enough to do, and had never learned to knit, anyhow! And Mrs. Brown and Tremendous K.'s wife took to walking home together after the meetings, just to discuss the foolish fashions of some women like Mrs. Sutherland!

Mrs. Sinclair asked for one of the leaders to come out from town and tell about the Kitchener Toe. The lady came and they had an extra meeting in the basement of the Methodist church, and passed around tea and cake and pie afterward. The lady spoke of the horrors of Trench Feet, and showed how the wrong sort of knitting would be sure to produce it. But as Granny Minns never went anywhere, and Mrs. Lindsay and the Grant Girls went only to church, and Mrs. Brown was too deaf to hear, and Mrs. Tremendous K. told her it was just all dishwater anyway, the talk had very little effect.

So a secret society was formed, of which Joanna and Mrs. Sutherland were the leaders. They met at night with drawn blinds and locked doors, and ripped out the uneven and condemned knitting and knit it up again. And before long Orchard Glen was mentioned in the Algonquin papers as the one place that always sent in perfect socks. And a photographer came out from town and took a picture of Granny Minns, as the oldest knitter of faultless socks, and it was put in the paper and Orchard Glen was held up as an example for the countryside and was the envy of the whole knitting public.

The excitement over Red Cross troubles during the winter almost made folk forget the war. The terrible onrush of the enemy had been stopped at the Marne, and, lulled by an over-censored press, the public settled down to the belief that when the Spring came the Germans would be forced back across the Rhine and the war would be over. Britain was safe anyway, every one knew that. For there was the Navy and that, as every one knew, was invincible.

The first contingent had gone; English and Scottish reservists like Burke had left, and many another Old Country man had volunteered, going back to give the old land a helping hand. Then there were the gay lads full of adventure like Trooper, up and away at the first glad chance of looking into "the bright face of danger," and some serious minded ones also, knowing that a terrible danger menaced humanity and they must stand as a wall between. But the great mass of young Canada was as yet undisturbed, and while the press could have called them with one bugle sound, the press sent them back to their work and their play, and so they lingered undisturbed.

Wallace had to part with Christina at Christmas time, a consummation that had been devoutly looked forward to by his mother. He left her with many promises to write and to be home for Easter. Christina had scarcely time to miss him for Sandy and Neil came home and Mary and Hugh McGillivray came up from Port Stewart and the house rang with the good times they all had together. And Grandpa could scarcely be persuaded to go to bed lest he miss some of Jimmie's and Sandy's antics.

On Christmas day a letter came from the two absent ones. They were invited to take dinner with some friends in Prairie Park, people who had heard Neil preach when he was in the west, and they declared he would be one of Canada's leading preachers some day.

Allister wrote a longer letter than usual to Christina. There was an entirely new note in it.

"This war has knocked things endways for me I'm afraid," he said. "You needn't say anything to John or the boys yet, but if everything keeps rolling down hill as fast as it's been going there will be no college for any one next year. So perhaps you were just as wise to stay home. I didn't know just how good you were to let Ellen come till she told me all about it. It's been rough on Ellen and you've been a brick to let her come. But if things don't get too rotten we'll win out yet and make the world sit up and take notice. Ellen's got the craze to go nursing and she wants to start right away. Only she thinks she ought to go home. If she trains maybe she'll be going overseas if this war doesn't show some signs of ending."

It was not at all like Allister, and Christina was filled with anxiety. What if Sandy and Neil had to be stopped in their college course? And Allister had furnished many a comfort on the farm that made life easier for them all and especially for John and had hinted that there might be a car in the Spring. If his money all went with the war, there would be never again any chance for her. But she did not worry over herself, only wrote to Ellen urging her to take her nurse's course by all means, for everything was quite all right at home.

When the pleasant rush of Christmas was over she was rather surprised to find that life was not so dull as she had expected. She missed Wallace, but not quite so much as she felt she should. She grew impatient with herself and began to wonder if she were different from other girls. Mary lived for Hugh, and Ellen's days had arranged themselves around Bruce's coming and going, and she could not but ask why she was not as joyous over Wallace's preference for her as she had expected to be.

When he was away from her he seemed to be her very ideal Knight, so handsome and brave and good, but when he was in her presence, he was just a very ordinary, pleasant young man, with no halo of romance about him. She was rather disappointed in herself. She wondered if she were of a dissatisfied nature whom nothing could please.

And then she had no sooner settled down to a lonely winter than suddenly Wallace came back. He came up to see her on the very evening of his return, to explain his sudden appearance and tell her all the tragic sum of his experiences.

It appeared that his hopes were all blasted; his uncle had behaved in a shameful manner. In spite of the fact that Wallace had almost studied himself ill all Fall, Uncle William simply refused to let him go back to college.

"But your examination!" cried Christina in dismay. "You passed that, didn't you?"

Wallace had neglected to explain about the examination. One paper, the Latin prose, was quite beyond belief. The man who set it was crooked, there was no doubt about it, and anyway Wallace had always felt that Mr. Sinclair was very old-fashioned in his methods. A fellow just couldn't learn under him.

Christina's heart was striving to excuse him, declaring that he had been ill-used, while her head was protesting that he was only a spoiled boy who had wasted his opportunities, and was now ready to lay the blame at any door but his own.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she declared with real sympathy. "And what will you do now?"

"I think I'll enlist," he declared despondently, sinking down into the depths of the soft couch, one of the comforts that Allister's money had made possible. "There isn't anything else for me to do. I've had such rotten luck."

He glanced at Christina as he spoke and was rather disconcerted to see that she made no opposition. His mother always wept and wrung her hands, and made any concession at the merest suggestion of his going to the Front, and he had supposed that Christina would, at least, show some agitation.

But instead there came a sudden light into her eyes.

"Oh," she declared, "it must be grand to be a man and go away and fight for freedom!"

Wallace raised his head and stared at her.

"I don't believe you'd care a mite if I were killed!" he cried reproachfully.

Christina's eyes dropped to the grey sock she was knitting.

"Oh, I—I didn't mean that!" she cried apologetically. "I—I just thought maybe you wanted to go."

"I can't leave mother," he declared, "that's one sure thing. And another is that I'm going to give up the University. I never wanted to go anyway. I think I'll go into business, or perhaps I'll farm. I'm going to stay home for a week or so anyway and talk things over with Uncle Peter."

He seemed to forget his troubles after this resolution and became his old gay self, and Christina's head gave way to her heart and she was altogether happy that he had come home.

But there was not much happiness or comfort in the red house with the pillars. Dr. McGarry had helped his sister indulge their boy and now he was angry with him for turning out the exact product to be expected from their indulgence. The Doctor stormed and scolded and Mrs. Sutherland wept. Wallace threatened to enlist. Uncle Peter said it was the best thing he could do and then, when things were really getting quite intolerable and Wallace was packing his trunk for parts unspecified, fate intervened once more and he was taken down with what the Doctor said was a very heavy cold but which Mrs. Sutherland declared might easily develop into pneumonia.

Mitty Wright, who did Mrs. Sutherland's washing, reported that the way his mother waited on the young gentleman and babied him was a caution, and the Doctor was nearly as bad, running up and down stairs, scolding one minute and giving medicine the next. The patient responded to the good nursing and before the middle of January he was able to be outdoors again. He convalesced very happily, especially after he was able to walk as far as the Lindsay hill. Uncle William showed no sign of repentance, though Mrs. Sutherland told him how near to death's door the boy had been, but Wallace did not seem disturbed. The evil provided by Uncle Peter's war-distemper was sufficient unto the day without worrying over Uncle William. The old man would come round yet, Wallace felt sure, and meanwhile he was having a very pleasant time and Orchard Glen with Christina in it was a very delightful place.

Jimmie came stamping in one wild boisterous evening when February had begun to shout across the country from hill to hill and turn the world into a whirling whiteness.

It was Friday evening and he was earlier than usual as Mrs. Johnnie Dunn had given him a lift more than half way in her cutter. And she had so much Red Cross truck piled into it, he complained, that his feet stuck out into the drifts all the way home.

He had stopped at the postoffice for the mail, and there was a letter from Neil. His regular Tuesday letter had come as usual and a second one was rather surprising.

Christina ran with it into the sitting room where her mother was sewing overtime on a couple of hospital shirts that The Woman said had to be ready for Monday, and not a minute later.

"A letter from Neily," Mrs. Lindsay said, stopping her work and taking off her spectacles to await the reading. "What will he be wanting to say at this time o' the week?"

Christina tore it open and went to the window to catch the last light of the short winter day. The letter started as usual with the weekly budget of college news. Every one was speeding up, now, for Spring and exams, had just turned the last corner and were coming straight at them. Sandy's new room was something superfine and much warmer than the last, but board wasn't getting any better. They were all longing for a taste of Mother's biscuits and Christine's pies. And then the letter fell back into reminiscences of old days, as Neil's letters had a habit of doing.

"Do you remember, Mother, when we were little and any danger threatened, I was always the shy one who ran and got behind your skirts? And do you remember you were always saying to John and me, and especially to me, 'Lads must be brave?' It was not so bad, I remember your saying, if Ellen or Mary were to take fright when a stranger came to the house, or Mr. Sinclair called to hear our Catechism, but it was a real disgrace for a boy. 'Lads must be brave' was your slogan. And many a time it has braced me in hard places since. Out on the prairie, for instance, when it was deadly lonesome, and the work seemed to be no use, and down here in the city when I gave out my text the night I preached in Hamilton Street Church, and looked up and saw old Professor Johnstone sitting straight in front of me, looking at his boots. I tell you, Mother, the consolations of religion were not so upholding at such moments as your 'Lads must be brave.'

"And how it has been 'dingin' in my ears these days to fairly deeve me," as Tremendous K. would say. "The bugle calls it every morning when the boys march out on the campus. I see it in every headline of the paper; I hear it in every call for men, and I'm afraid I haven't wanted to listen. I have wanted my life to run along a smooth road, the one I have planned for myself; a fine church with a big salary, plenty of time to study and a little to travel, and you sitting in the Manse pew with the best silk dress in the church. That has been my programme. But the pleasant road was not the way the Master went, and the servant cannot choose. He trod the hard way, and there is not the slightest

doubt in my mind which way He wants me to go. I know you are guessing already at what I am going to ask of you. And now I must turn upon you with your own slogan and say, 'Mothers must be brave!' Oh, how brave and gallant they must be in these days, only they can know. But I know you, Mother, well enough to tell that you will say yes when I ask you to be brave enough to let me enlist. It is not a matter of choice with me, I am constrained. Woe is me if I go not to Belgium!"

"I wish I could say this is all I am asking you to give up. Is it too much that we ask you to let Sandy go, too? He is more eager than I and saw his duty clearly from the first. We both realise that yours is the hardest part. But your sons couldn't be slackers. And after all the war may not last so long, and we'll be home before you know it. Sandy will likely be a general, and who knows but I may get to be a lance-corporal!"

There was more in the same light strain and a note for Christina from Sandy, saying he was taking the officers' course and she must remember when he came home to say "sir" to him when she addressed him.

But Christina did not read the letter through at first. When the full meaning of it burst upon her she turned to her mother, expecting to see tears, but instead her mother's small bent figure had grown suddenly straight and her eyes were shining with a strange mingling of pride and anguish.

"Oh, Mother!" cried Christina, "oh, don't I wish I were a boy!"

"Whisht, whisht!" cried her mother, "I could ill spare you, Christine, I can ill spare the lads." And then she rose and went quietly into the bedroom and shut the door, and Christina knew that her mother had gone for strength to bear this trial to the source of all power.

When Wallace came up the hill the next evening, he found the Lindsays in a state of subdued excitement. Christina's cheeks were crimson and her eyes shone until she looked positively handsome.

"Sandy and Neil are both going to the war," she cried half in dismay, half in exultation.

"Are they really?" asked Wallace. "They're lucky. This beastly breakdown of mine has spoiled all my chances. My, I'd like to be in their boots!"

Christina felt a sudden rising of resentment. "I don't think they are a bit lucky," she burst forth. "You surely don't call it lucky to go to the front and get badly wounded, and perhaps killed?"

Wallace smiled a superior smile. "There's not much danger of that. The boys won't get over there for a year at best, and the war will likely be all over by that time. Germany can't stand this strain for many more months."

Christina had a distinct feeling of disappointment. She had wanted Wallace to admire the boys for all they were giving up, and he was calling them lucky, and maintaining an envious attitude as though they were off on a free trip to Europe. She changed the subject hastily and he did not refer to the war again that evening.

Jimmie and Uncle Neil alone were filled with rejoicing. Uncle Neil felt an exultation that he was at pains to hide. He said little, for his sister's anguished eyes forbade that he voice the pride that was consuming him, but he sat up half the night playing his fiddle, and for the next few days he went about whistling all the warlike songs he knew.

The news was shouted to Grandpa, along with extracts from Neil's letter, before he went to bed. He made little comment, merely saying that "they were fine lads and would do their duty." But Christina knew he was deeply grieved that Neil should be turned aside from the ministry. He expressed no sorrow but he did not sing the Hindmost Hymn and the next morning at family worship he read,

"Why art thou cast down, oh, my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?"

CHAPTER XI

"LAST LEAVE"

The Lindsay boys did not get home on leave until the Easter vacation, for they were taking their military training along with their university work. John drove down to Silver Creek Crossing to meet them, for the roads to town were almost impassable. The home-coming of the boys had always been the great event in their family life, but it was a far more wonderful thing this time; it had something of the flavour of heroes returning from the war.

Christina and Jimmie met them at the road gate under the moaning poplars, where the wind whipped her skirts about her and blew her hair into her eyes.

Their mother and Uncle Neil were half way down the lane, and even Grandpa had hobbled to the edge of the garden to meet the soldier boys home on their first leave. Christina had known they would be in khaki, but when a trim young private of artillery in jingling spurs and bandolier, and a smart young subaltern in shining boots and straps and belt and what not leaped from the democrat and charged upon her; instead of running to meet them, their sister put her head down against the gate post and burst into tears. Somehow the sight of Sandy in the uniform of his country's service had overwhelmed Christina with a sense of the great gulf that had yawned between them. Sandy and Neil were gone and there were two soldier-men in their place. Manlike, they did not understand her tears.

"Goodness, Christine!" cried Sandy, jovially, "if you're sorry we've come home, we can turn right back if you'd rather."

"You silly thing—I—I'm not sorry," gasped Christina; kissing them and turning from tears to laughter. "I—I forgot you'd be in uniform."

"Well, cheer up," said Neil comfortingly, "I'll admit that the sight of Sandy's calves is enough to make anybody weep, but he'll fatten up next summer—here's Mother!"—and he ran up the lane at a breakneck pace.

Certainly Sandy's calves were not any too stout. He looked like a whip handle dressed up, Uncle Neil said as he circled round him admiringly. But he was as neat and smart as a whip, too, even if he were thin and even John could not hide his admiration. And as for Grandpa, he had to take refuge in Gaelic exclamations to express himself.

The mother spoke just one hint of her regrets as they sat around the supper table, Neil at her right hand. She smoothed his rough khaki sleeve, examining the cloth closely, and pronounced it a fine comfortable piece that would wear well.

"It's the only cloth to wear these days, Mother," Neil said. "Don't you think so?"

She shook her head. "I would be hoping to see you in a black coat, Neily," she said softly.

"That'll come later," said Neil comfortingly. "You think I did right, don't you?" he continued, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed, you did right, and I'm proud that you will be wanting to go," she declared bravely. And Neil's heart was content.

These were stirring days in Orchard Glen while the boys were home. All the boys and girls gathered at the Lindsays just as they used to. But there was one family missing. The McKenzies were absent, and Uncle Neil never sang the "Standard on the Braes o' Mar" any more.

There was great fun with Sandy and Neil, for Sandy was an officer and his elder brother a private, and it was impossible for them to remember that Neil's old air of authority with Sandy was now quite out of place. The private was always saluting the subaltern with tremendous gravity, and the next moment treating him in a manner that deserved a court-martial.

Jimmie followed his soldier brothers about in a passion of admiration. And one day the ambition that was

burning him up burst forth.

"Say, what do you think?" he cried excitedly, coming in with the afternoon mail. "Tommy Holmes has enlisted, and he's a month younger than I am."

"Then he's a silly youngster, and ought to be kept washing dishes to punish him," said Neil sharply. "No boy under eighteen has any right to enlist!"

"I'll be eighteen next Fall!" declared Jimmie defiantly.

"Which means you've barely turned seventeen, so hold your tongue," said Sandy.

Jimmie saluted with mock meekness. "Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," he said, with a great show of nervousness.

Uncle Neil laughed uproariously, but brother Neil looked serious, and when milking time came he took Jimmie aside in the barn.

"You're worrying Mother, with your talk about enlisting," he said. "Can't you see that, and be quiet."

"I want to go as much as you do," said Jimmie stubbornly.

"I don't want to go at all," declared Neil, and his younger brother stared. "And neither would you if you would stop and think what a fearful thing this war is. I'm going because it is my duty, and so is Sandy. It's your duty to stay at home and finish the education John and Allister are giving you, and look after Mother.

"I don't want to go back to school," grumbled Jimmie, "Not after I've passed next summer, anyway."

"John doesn't want to stay here on the farm. He'd like to go to the Front, but he stays. You are young and you will be needed later. So be a man and do your duty. All the soldiers aren't going into the trenches."

But his advice had little effect on Jimmie, the war fever was in his veins. He gave his promise, however, to wait until he was eighteen, and Neil had to be content. But he was restless and fretful under the restriction, he felt quite sure that the war would all be over long before that date and his great opportunity would be gone.

Meanwhile Orchard Glen was slowly waking up at the call for men. Tommy Holmes rushed into khaki after the first glorious sight of the Lindsay boys in the village street, and Tremendous K.'s eldest son followed. And Christina had the heavy task of writing to Ellen to tell her that Bruce had given up his prospects of being a Doctor, and was enlisted with the University corps. Mr. Sinclair's only son, who was a minister in a neighbouring town, came home to say farewell, dressed in his chaplain's uniform, and the little village lived in a whirl of excitement.

The Red Cross Society was busy night and day making socks for the boys who had left, with the result that they each one got far more than any young man with only two feet could possibly wear.

All this stir, and the sight of so much khaki coming and going in the village had a bad effect upon Dr. McGarry. Every day he took the war more grievously to heart. He and Mr. Holmes took different sides as to the conduct of the spring campaign, and after Tommy enlisted it was not safe for the Doctor to go into the store, so high did feeling run.

And at home the Doctor was even worse, until poor Mrs. Sutherland's life was scarcely worth living. Wallace unwittingly brought down a torrent of wrath upon his head one day when the Spring Drive was on and prospects were looking black. It was an inopportune moment for Wallace to broach the subject upon which he had been thinking deeply for many days.

"Uncle," he said, as they sat down to their pretty tea-table in the sun-flooded dining-room. "I'd like to go on a farm this Spring. That Ford place below the mill is for sale, and the Browns are talking of buying it. You've always wanted to retire on a farm and I could start the work and——"

He paused, interrupted by his mother's dismayed exclamation. "Wallace! You with your prospects to settle

down here and be a common farmer! Surely you don't mean it!"

"Elinor, don't be foolish!" snapped her brother, looking up from a dreary paragraph concerning a British reverse that was attempting to appear as a strategic move. "You might be glad to have him a common farmer, as you call it. And as for his prospects, I don't see what they are, to tell you the truth."

"Don't you agree with me, Uncle?" cried Wallace ingratiatingly. "These old chaps here farm like Noah before the flood. I'd like to show some of them an up-to-date way of managing stock." But his uncle was not capable of agreeing with anybody. His sister's tears forbade that he put his duty before his nephew, and it fairly broke the old man's heart that Wallace needed any one to suggest that he enlist. In times of peace he would have sympathised with the boy's desire to be a farmer, and he approved highly of Christina, but just now he could listen to nothing but the cry of Belgium.

"What's the use of talking a lot of rot!" he burst forth irritably. "You needn't ask my advice about farming! Before you'd get your crop off your farm next Fall the Kaiser of Germany would have everything to say about it. How will you like it when you have to pass over most of your profits to him and his War Lords? Here we are planning and scheming and all the time we're living in a Fool's Paradise, with the enemy at our door! We are marrying and giving in marriage, while the floods are pouring in upon us! Yes, go farming to-morrow if you like! It'll only be for a few months anyway. The Philistines are upon us!"

Matters were always serious when the Doctor took to quoting Scripture, and Mrs. Sutherland reached protectingly for her cut-glass spoon tray as his fist came down with a crash upon the table.

The result of the unhappy episode was that Wallace tramped sulkily up to his room after supper, and when his distressed mother went up to comfort him, she found him packing his suit-case once more. He was going to enlist. This was the end, he could stand no more, he declared.

"Oh, Wallace, Wallace, you will surely break your widowed mother's heart," declared Mrs. Sutherland in despair. She wept and pleaded. She made extravagant promises. She would write to Uncle William, she would even go to see him if he thought best, she would not urge him to go back to college if he did not want to. She would write Uncle William about the farm and she would try to make Uncle Peter be more reasonable if only Wallace would promise that he would not break her heart by enlisting. Wallace was a warm-hearted boy who could not bear to look upon distress. So he promised and his mother put aside all her high hopes and wrote humbly and pleadingly to her brother. Wallace was really not strong enough to study, the confinement seemed to impair his health. Peter agreed with her there. He would like to go farming, there was an excellent chance to buy or rent a place right near the village. Peter was interested in it and declared that he would like to retire and go on this farm some day. They felt that Wallace's health would improve if he had outdoor life, etc.

Whatever the letter contained it proved the key to unlock Uncle William's closed money box. He was not at all a hard man and his sister's distress moved him. He wrote that he was glad that the young cub had sense enough to farm, for it was no use trying to educate him. But he thought that a military training would be good for a young fellow's health. However, if he would rather feed the pigs and clean out the stable than go to college, all right, let him, that was probably his proper place. The words stung but they were covered by a most wonderful cheque, with instructions to Uncle Peter to see that the youngster did not throw it away.

Mrs. Sutherland was relieved even in the midst of her bitter disappointment. She had had such high ambitions for Wallace and now there seemed nothing ahead of him but the life of a common farmer. He would marry Christina Lindsay and probably never go further from home than Algonquin and William would give all his money to Tom's girls who had more now than they needed. But there was no alternative, and when she thought of his enlisting she was thankful that there was something to keep him at home. The recruiting officers would not trouble a young man on a farm.

From that time Christina noticed a marked change in Mrs. Sutherland's attitude toward her. From being coldly aloof she became warmly gracious and treated her second only to Joanna. Christina accepted the change gratefully. It had always been a trial, this disapproval of Wallace's mother. She ought to be very happy, she told herself, when she scolded herself for still longing to be away. Wallace would always be in Orchard Glen now, the Ford place had good barns and a fine old house, and who knew?—her heart beat fast at the thought, but there was no thrill of joy

accompanying. Some subtle change had come over Christina since Sandy had enlisted. It seemed as if there could be no other course for a young man now in these days of agony and blood. Her heart was away with her brothers in their high endeavour and could be content with nothing less.

It was a beautiful Autumn day when Sandy and Neil came home for their last leave, as bright and happy as though they were going for a pleasure trip round the world. Hugh MacGillivray brought Mary home to say good-bye to them, for Mary was needing special care these days and could not travel alone.

Grandpa read the 91st Psalm at worship the morning before they left, and he paused and looked at the two young soldiers as he read the words. "Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night nor for the arrow that flieth by day ... a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand but it shall not come nigh thee."

Christina listened and wondered and a strange new doubt crept into her soul. How could she believe that promise, knowing that so many brave boys had fallen before the arrow that flieth by day and that these dear ones might meet a similar fate? Were the words of that psalm merely beautiful sounding phrases that meant nothing? She glanced at her mother to see if she could read a similar doubt there; but Mrs. Lindsay's face was rapt, as though she had seen a new vision of the psalm's meaning, and Christina was puzzled and disheartened.

She held up her head bravely, standing at the garden gate to wave them good-bye as they drove down the lane in the golden sunlight. Then she ran down the lane after them, stumbling a little when a mist came over her eyes. She even ran down the road, gallantly waving her apron as long as Sandy waved his cap, feeling glad that he could not see the tears that were streaming down her face. And she made sure that the democrat had disappeared behind the hill before she gave way and sank down sobbing on the dusty grass of the roadside.

She went back to the desolate home, she must not linger over her grief for she was needed there as comforter. Her mother had disappeared into the sanctuary of her room where she was seeking strength from the source that had never failed her in all life's trials and would hold her up even in this great agony. Grandpa was sitting fumbling helplessly with his hymn book and arguing with himself. She could hear him whispering, "Be not far from me, O Lord, for trouble is near!" and she patted his bowed white head gently as she passed. Uncle Neil had fled to the barn, and Mitty was crying over the wash-tub in the shed. Christina went furiously to work, as her refuge from tears. It would never do to break down and be no use when Sandy was gone away to fight for her!

But work would not last all day. It was finished in the evening and Wallace came up in his usual gay spirits to report progress on his new farm, where everything was running in the most up-to-date manner. But Christina was too sad to even pretend to be interested. She could not rejoice over a new gasoline engine that was to do all the work, when Sandy and Neil were to be made part of the cruel engine of war. And for the first time Wallace found her uninterested and consequently uninteresting.

CHAPTER XII

"ALL THE BLUE BONNETS ARE OVER THE BORDER!"

One day early in the Winter, when the boys' English letters had begun to arrive regularly, Auntie Elspie Grant came over the hills on her snowshoes, to pay a visit of sympathy to Mrs. Lindsay. She brought a bottle of the liniment they made every Fall from the herbs of the Craig-Ellachie garden, a stone jar of their best raspberry cordial, a pot of mincemeat, and a piece of Christmas cake.

She spent a long afternoon while they both knitted socks and read the boys' letters and heard the latest news of Allister and Ellen and Mary and discussed at great length the never-failing virtues of Gavin. John drove the guest home in the cutter round by the road, for Mrs. Lindsay could not bear the sight of Elspie walking away over the drifts, though as a matter of fact, Elspie in her youthful spirits enjoyed it immensely.

"Elspie Grant's worryin' about Gavin," said Mrs. Lindsay, when the guest had gone and the early supper was being cleared away.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Christina with that feeling of self condemnation that any thought of Gavin always brought.

"She doesn't quite know. That's the trouble. He's not been eating and he doesn't seem to want to go anywhere. I wonder what can be wrong with the lad? Such a comfort as Gavin will be to the girls!"

Christina did not suggest an explanation. She had no self-conceit, and could not imagine that Gavin was grieving over her to the extent of loss of appetite. But she could not help wondering if she contributed in any measure to his trouble. For now that the matter was drawn to her attention she remembered that Gavin was not taking the part in the life of the young people of the village which he had once taken. Since the Red Cross Society had brought about a reunion of the divided forces of Orchard Glen, social activities had become very popular, but Gavin was not one of the reunited company. He did not come to the Temperance meetings any more and had dropped Choir Practice. He had even left the choir of his own church and he had deserted on the very day when he was most needed, the day they unveiled the Honour Roll with the names of the boys who had gone overseas. And in spite of all Tremendous K.'s scolding and pleadings he would not return.

"Gavin Grant's queer," grumbled Jimmie. "We were depending on him to give something the next night the boys have to give the programme, but he won't even help with the singing."

"Did you ask him what was the matter?" asked Christina, interested. "Auntie Elspie told Mother that he is acting as if he were sick."

"I think he's acting just plain mean," declared Jimmie, who had been taking Sandy's place with Gavin lately and was disappointed in him. "Maybe he's in love," he added with a grin and went off whistling.

But it was not that altogether that troubled Gavin, for there was certainly something very badly wrong with the lad. It was love and war combined that ailed him, and the war had become a burden too heavy for his strong young shoulders.

For quiet, shy, gentle Gavin was burning to be up and away into the struggle. His daily tasks of peace had become a galling joke scarcely to be borne. And the more he yearned to be gone the more bitterly he blamed himself for what he called his ingratitude and faithlessness. He loved his three foster-mothers with all the power of his loyal young heart. They had rescued him from a miserable starved childhood and had lavished all the wealth of their loving hearts upon him. And now he had grown to manhood, and every year they looked more and more to him for support. Their declining years had come and he dared not face the possibility of leaving them. He argued the matter out with himself by day in field and barnyard, and by night as he tossed on his sleepless bed. Why should he yearn to go when his duty plainly declared that he should stay? Many of the young farmers about Orchard Glen, boys he had grown up with and who could easily be spared, never thought for a moment of the war as their task. And why should he, who was so sadly needed at home?

But it was inevitable that Gavin should be unhappy in the safety of home while the world was in agony. Without realising it the Grant Girls had raised their boy to be a soldier, they so gentle and so peace loving. Life had not been narrow, even away back at Craig-Ellachie, where the grass grew in the middle of the corduroy road. Gavin had been nurtured on songs and tales of noble deeds and deathless devotion. He had been reared in a home where each one vied with the other in forgetting self and serving the other. The best books had been his daily reading. And, greatest of all, he had been trained to take as his life's pattern the One whose sole purpose had been not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

Night after night as he was growing into manhood, Auntie Flora would seat herself at the little old organ, and together they would all sail happily over a sea of song, thrilling ballads of the old days when men went gaily to death, singing

"So what care I though Death be nigh,
I live for love or die!"

Then Auntie Elspie would put aside her spinning and Auntie Janet her knitting and they would tell him tales from the glorious history of the clan Grant. And he was never tired of hearing that story of the Indian Mutiny, told the Grant Girls by their grandfather; how a Highland regiment held a shot torn position till help came, held against overwhelming odds while men fell on every side, held, crying to each other all up and down the sore-pressed line, "Stand fast, Craig-Ellachie!"

And so Gavin could not but grow up filled with great aspirations. He could no more help being chivalrous and self-forgetful than he could help having the slow, soft accent of his Aunties.

And then into his high-purposed life came the Great Occasion! It seemed as if he had been trained just for this. It called to him and him alone. The greatest struggle of history; a death-struggle of sore-pressed Freedom against hideous Oppression was shaking the earth, and the smoke of the conflict was blackening the heavens—and through it all Gavin Grant remained at peace in his home! Every old Belgian woman of whom he read, driven from her ruined home, was Auntie Elspie. Every Belgian girl, suffering unspeakable wrong, was Christina. And they were crying night and day to him for help and crying in vain.

Many a night, after he had read a flaming page of Belgium's and Armenia's fearful history, he sat, sleepless, by the dying kitchen fire until dawn, and the day that the name of Edith Cavell was written in letters of fire across the sides of civilisation, Gavin went off into the woods alone with his axe, and tried to put some of the fury that was burning him up into savage blows against the unoffending timber.

And then the Orchard Glen boys began to answer the call, one by one; Burke and Trooper, and Christina's brothers. Tommy Holmes and Charlie Henderson, and Bruce McKenzie, and he was like Gareth in the story Auntie Flora had so often told him, Gareth who had to work in the kitchen, while his brother-knights rode clanking past him through the doorway, out into the world of mighty deeds, out to meet Death on the Field of Glory. Those were the days when he had to repeat "Stand fast, Craig-Ellachie" over and over again as he went about his peaceful tasks. It brought him little comfort, for it was not to stand fast that he wanted, but to spring forward in answer to the call to the hazardous task, to death itself, the call which through the ages has always summoned the high heart. Sometimes the acutest misery would seize him at the thought that persistently haunted him, the fear that if he had been really a Grant he would have seen his duty more clearly and would already be in the battle line. Perhaps there was some necessary spirit left out of him, some saving quality which his degraded parents could not hand down to him. If he had been of better blood might he not have paid no attention to tears and partings but have thrown away everything in the glorious chance of dying in the greatest cause for which the world had ever struggled?

He argued the question from every point, and yet he could not find it in his soul to leave his Aunts. He watched them intently to see if they would drop any hint of their opinion in the matter. But while they highly admired Trooper and commended the Lindsay boys, saying that not even the ministry should keep Neil at home, he could not elicit from them the smallest hint that they thought he was called to enlist. And so he set his teeth, determined to Stand Fast though his heart should break. But he was ashamed to be seen in public and he grew more shy and reticent as the hard days dragged on. Gradually he dropped out of all the activities that used to take him to the village. When he went he always saw Christina and Wallace Sutherland together, and that sight added to his misery. And finally he could not bear to hear himself sing. He looked down at his big brawny hands and arms and felt

ashamed that he should be standing in a safe and peaceful place, singing! He choked at the thought. He sometimes wished he were not so big and strong. If he were small and weak like Willie Brown or even had one leg like Duke it would be easier to bear.

He gave no reason when he suddenly left the choir the day the Honour Roll was unveiled. He could not confess that he found it intolerable to sit up there right next to that list of heroes. His Aunts remonstrated gently, but though he answered as gently he was unyielding. So he went back to the family pew and sat beside Auntie Elspie. To be sure the growing Honour Roll faced him there, every name written in letters of flame that leaped out and scorched him, but at least he did not have to sing back there and could bear his shame better.

His Aunts worried themselves almost ill over him. Auntie Janet dosed him with medicine and compelled him to wear heavier underwear. Auntie Flora was so fearful that his spiritual condition was languishing that she spoke to Mr. Sinclair and he promised to see Gavin and talk to him. Auntie Elspie said nothing but she watched him, and finally her keen mother-heart divined his malady.

Auntie Flora had always been Gavin's instructor, and had led him along the way of good books and into a slight knowledge of music, Auntie Janet had been his playmate and confidante, the one with whom he had always shared his secrets and to whom he had confessed his boyish scrapes. But Auntie Elspie had been his mother, and she knew her boy. At first she thought the trouble arose over Christina and was bitterly disappointed when the handsome young man from town had stepped in and ruined all Gavin's hopes. But she knew he was too proud to grieve long, and he had laughed one night when Auntie Flora read him "The Manly Heart," "Shall I, wasting in despair, die because a lady's fair? If she be not fair to me, what care I how fair she be?" and asked that she read it again. It was just right, he declared, and went around whistling that evening. There must be something more than Christina troubling him she concluded. And then she began to suspect the truth. Many little incidents helped to confirm her suspicions, and at last she realised it beyond a doubt. Gavin was craving to be up and away into the death struggle of the trenches!

The truth broke upon her with a thrill of mingled exultation and dismay. For the three gentle ladies who could not bear to contemplate the possibility of Gavin's leaving them, were each secretly cherishing a longing to hear him express a desire to be away to the war, the desire which he was so painfully smothering for their sakes.

Hughie Reid, who was next of kin to the Grant girls, lived on the farm just below Craig-Ellachie on the road to the village. He was a distant cousin, and a kindly man and the Aunties were always giving his wife a hand with her work and practically kept his boys in socks and mittens. His oldest boys were almost grown to manhood, and Hughie had often said to Auntie Elspie,

"If Gavin ever wants to quit farming, Elspie, I'll take Craig-Ellachie on shares. I need a bit more land for my stock." And Auntie Elspie had always laughed at him, saying there was little fear of his ever getting it, for Gavie would never think of anything but the farm. But the night when Gavin's heart was laid bare before her, Auntie Elspie remembered Hughie's oft repeated wish and made a great and noble resolve.

She came to her dismaying conclusion concerning Gavin one evening after he had been to town. He was all unconscious of her loving espionage and had no idea that he was betraying himself. A Highland Battalion was being raised in the County, called the Blue Bonnets. Recruiting agents were going all through the country, and at concert and tea meeting the young people sang a gallant old Scottish song transcribed to suit the locality.

"March, March! Dalton and Anondell!
Why my lads, dinna ye march forward in order?
March, March! Greenwood and Orchard Glen,
All the Blue Bonnets are over the Border!"

Gavin had been to Algonquin and had heard it on every side, had seen boys in khaki marching down the street, and worse still, lads in kilts swinging along, laughing and light-hearted. And he had fled home, in terror lest some one accost him and ask him to join them. The lilting lines had set themselves to the jingle of his bells as he drove homeward, and mile by mile he could hear nothing but

"Trumpets are sounding, war steeds are bounding,
Stand to your arms and march in good order.
Germans shall many a day tell of the bloody fray

When all the Blue Bonnets came over the Border!"
"March! March!"...

He was very silent at supper that evening. He made an effort to be especially kind and attentive, but he could not be merry. He could not chat about his visit to town and the doings there which the Aunties were all eager to hear. For he had seen nothing but boys in kilts, swinging laughingly down the street, had heard nothing but the pipes and drums lilting "All the Blue Bonnets are over the Border!"

And all the while Auntie Elspie watched him closely, her heart sinking.

When supper was over and they sat around the sitting room stove, Auntie Flora seated herself at the organ, thinking to cheer him.

"Come away, Gavie dear," she cried. "It's a long time since we had some music and I'm afraid you'll be forgettin' the fiddle altogether. Come away and we'll have a good old sing."

He could not refuse, but said he would play if she would sing, and then he passed over all the old war-like favourites, "A Warrior Bold" and "Scots Wha Hae," and asked instead for songs of peace, "Caller Herrin'," "Ye Banks and Braes," "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

"Sing 'A Warrior Bold' Gavie," cried Auntie Janet, looking up from the sock she was knitting for Burke Wright, "Ye've no sung it for such a long, long time."

He made an excuse about not being able to sing it; it was too high for him.

"Ye haven't got a cold, have you, hinny?" she asked anxiously, and he answered no, that he was quite well.

Then Auntie Flora, all unconscious, opened all the stops of the little organ and burst into Bruce's deathless "Battle Hymn," the welcome to all gallant souls to a gory bed or to victory.

"Play it and sing it both, Gavie!" cried Auntie Janet joining her voice in, "Now's the day, and now's the hour!" But Gavin made a hurried excuse about seeing to the cattle, and hastily putting down his violin went out quickly. Auntie Elspie saw his face as he passed and all her doubts and with them her hopes vanished. She had suspected before; now she knew!

"I thought Gavie did all the chores," said Auntie Flora, looking up as she finished only the first stanza of the song. Auntie Elspie said nothing. She bent over the hospital shirt she was sewing, as though to look for a flaw in her work. She was winking away the tears that her sisters must not see.

She put on an old coat of Gavin's and slipped out after him to the barn.

She found there was little to do. He had recovered his composure, and scolded her lovingly for coming out in the cold. He had a momentary picture of his Aunts' going out to the stable on sharp nights like these to feed the cattle and bed the horses, and he tried to believe he was glad he was not going.

The next day at dinner Auntie Elspie remarked casually that she thought she would take a run over to Hughie's and see if little Elspie was better of her cold, and have a cup of tea with Hughie's wife.

Gavin had an errand to Orchard Glen Mill, and on his way drove her over in the old box sleigh, promising to call for her early on his return. Auntie Janet had a few purchases she wanted him to make at the store in Orchard Glen, and when he had come back from the mill, Gavin tied his horse and ran into the store.

Marmaduke was sitting tilted back on a chair behind the stove making love to Tilly. Life had been but a dreary business for Duke since Trooper went to the war. Old Tory Brown and old Willie Henderson, who had been bitter enemies ever since the disastrous day the Piper took his music to the wrong meeting, were sitting waiting for the mail on opposite sides of the stove. Mr. Holmes was slowly and carefully putting the letters and papers into their proper compartments, at the back of the store, looking up over his spectacles as each newcomer entered.

"Hello, Gavin," called Marmaduke, "Cold day. Reg'lar Tory weather we're gettin' these days."

"It'd be hot enough times if yous folks and Quebec was runnin' the country," remarked old Tory Brown, while Mrs. Holmes, who had come in to give a hand at distributing the mail, gave a warning before her departure into the house, "Now, Pa, don't let the folks talk politics. It's bad enough to have our boys goin' to the war without havin' war at home."

Tilly ran forward and took Gavin's list and began to put up his parcels. She stopped to stare out of the frosty window as a smart cutter dashed up to the store veranda. A portly gentleman in the uniform of a Major stepped out of it. He was not an unfamiliar figure in the locality, having been through the country for some time raising recruits for The Blue Bonnets. Major Harrison was not very successful in his dealings with men, but if he had little influence at home he had plenty at Ottawa and was sure of his position.

"Here comes Lord Kitchener," remarked Marmaduke. "Better take a good look at him, Tilly. He'll maybe be goin' to the Front in a year or so, and you won't see him for a while."

Mr. Holmes looked over his glasses, a flash of appreciation in his eyes. Since Tommy had gone to the Front his father was on the lookout for any one who stayed behind under the shelter of a khaki uniform and Major Harrison was said to belong to that rapidly growing unit.

"Look out, Duke," he warned. "He's a great persuader, he'll have you in The Blue Bonnets before you know what's happened you."

A joyous resolution suddenly shone in Marmaduke's eyes. He quickly concealed his peg leg behind a barrel, and leaning back, the picture of idleness, he drummed on the floor with his one good foot and whistled, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary."

The Major swung open the door and marched in, followed by his bat man. He had been but an indifferent business man on a small salary before he fell upon the fat days of war, but now he had a servant and a position of authority.

"Good-day, Mr. Holmes," he cried heartily. "Good-day, Miss Tilly, you're looking as lovely as ever, I see."

Tilly gasped and giggled and took refuge in questioning Gavin as to whether it was number forty or fifty white spool his Aunt wanted.

"Good-day, sir," cried Marmaduke heartily, suspending his musical performance for a moment. "Glad to see you. Heard you were gone to the Front. Glad to see it's a false alarm again."

"*But my heart's right there,*" he added tunefully, keeping time on the top of a barrel with his fingers.

"How's things going in the Army, Major Harrison?" put in Mr. Holmes, seeing the Major looking slightly annoyed.

"The Army's growing," answered the officer, pulling off his gloves and spreading his cold hands over the stove.

"We just need a few more young fellows like you've got hanging round this corner, and we'll have the Germans driven back to Berlin in another month or so."

He looked around him sharply. "This is a war where no young chap that's got red blood in his veins can stay at home." He glanced meaningly from Gavin to Marmaduke.

Gavin was one of Marmaduke's warmest friends and he did not enjoy the thought of the Major worrying him. He attempted to draw the fire to himself.

"Some folks round here claims to have blue blood, though," he remarked with a guilelessness that would have misled a German Spy. He accomplished his object; the Major looked down at him.

"If their claims are true they won't be here long, my friend," he said emphatically, but he turned to Gavin again.

"Come along, young man, and let me put you down for The Blue Bonnets. It's the finest Battalion that's going overseas, and we've room for only a few more. I believe you're Scotch, aren't you? What's your name?"

"Grant, Gavin Grant."

"Grant! Why, you're the very fellow I'm looking for! Come along and get into a kilt, man. What's a fellow by the name of Grant doing at home when there's a war on? Wouldn't you like to go over and smash the Germans, now?"

Gavin looked at him dumbly. It was as if a lost soul were being asked if it would like to enter Paradise.

"Well, what's keeping you?" asked the Major impatiently.

"I—I can't leave the farm and my Aunts," he stammered.

"Pshaw, you're not tied to your Auntie's apron string, are you? Every fellow I ask to enlist in this part of the country has got either an aunt or a grandmother or a second cousin——"

"I'm worse off than that," interrupted Marmaduke, seeing that Gavin was in misery, "I've got a——" His voice dropped to a confidential whisper,—"*A girl!*"

The Major looked at him sharply, but Marmaduke was a perfect picture of rural simplicity.

"You're not married are you?" he asked shortly, glancing at Tilly, who had forgotten all about Gavin's purchases and was staring at the smart officer in open-mouthed admiration.

"Well, not,—that is," Duke hesitated in evident painful embarrassment, "well, we're not married yet, but we expect very soon,—" He turned a languishing look upon Tilly, and indicated her to the Major with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder. "You wouldn't have a fellow go and leave his girl now, would you?"

Tilly went off into a spasm of hysterical giggles and denials, and the shoulders of the two old men beside the stove began to heave with suppressed laughter.

"Oh, well, you're not married yet," cried the Major briskly. "You come along and enlist in our Highland Battalion. What's your name?"

"Timothy O'Toole," said Marmaduke shamelessly, "and I'll go in no Highland gang, I'd niver do at all at all among them outlandish spalpeens with their bare legs; Tilly wouldn't like it," he added modestly.

"Pshaw! Everybody knows that half the Highland regiments in the British Army are Irish. Enlist first and you can get married after. Every girl admires the khaki, eh, Miss Holmes?"

Tilly was hanging on to the counter by this time, too far gone to be able to enlighten the Major as to the truth, while her father was standing with a bunch of letters in his hand, a pleased smile on his face. Nobody minded Duke's nonsense and he dearly loved to see these city fellows taken down a button hole or two.

"No sir," cried Duke firmly, "no Highland Battalion for me. I'm goin' over wearin' o' the Grane or nothing at all. Besides my Bittalion ain't goin' yet for a while. I was askin' some of them high-up officers in Algonquin and they were tellin' me not to be in any hurry. You see," he added confidently, "it's this way. You can get transferred. If you're in a Bittalion that's goin' over you get transferred to another, and when it goes you get transferred again. I can let you in on the thing if you'd like to know how they do it," he added with ingratiating generosity.

The Major's face flamed hot. It was no secret that he had been going through the transferring process. Red anger leaped into his eyes.

"Aw, what's the matter with you?" he asked, dropping his suave manner and becoming abusive. "Are you one of those yellow-livered chaps that's got chronic cold feet?"

"Well," said Marmaduke ingenuously, "it ain't quite so bad as that. I've got one cold foot though, but I s'pose that wouldn't keep me out. I guess a wooden leg wouldn't matter any more than a wooden head would it?" And straight in the air he held his peg leg up to view.

The long pent up amusement of the audience burst forth. The two old enemies across the stove broke into a simultaneous upheaval, a disturbance that filled up the breach between them with the loose earth of laughter. Mr. Holmes dropped his letters and chuckled loudly, and as for Tilly, she was past giggling, she fairly shouted.

The Major turned and walked out, his face white with anger.

"He's gone to get transferred to the Five-Hundredth," declared Timothy O'Toole joyfully. "I hear that Canada's goin' to send over Five Hundred Battalions and he'll be all ready for the last one."

"Ah, Duke, Duke, you're a rascal," said Mr. Holmes reprovingly.

"It's the only fun I can get out o' this business of stayin' at home," declared Duke, his face growing grave, "and I guess I need all that's comin' to me with Trooper and the other fellows away fightin' for me!"

Gavin could not join the laughter. He was too deeply hurt. He gathered up his parcels and hurried away; and once more the bells set themselves to the tune of "Blue Bonnets" and played "March, March, Why, ma lads, dinna' ye March Forward in Order?" as he drove home.

Auntie Elspie was talking to Hughie Reid in deep conference when Gavin arrived at the farm, and on the way home she was so silent, that he was worried over her.

"You're not cold, are you, Auntie Elspie?" he asked for the third time, as he tucked the old sheep skin robe around her.

"No, no, lad, I'm not cold," she said, but she shivered as she said it. It was not the blustering February wind that chilled, but the cold hand that seemed closing round her heart, the knowledge that now it was possible for Gavin to go and that soon she must tell him. She put off the evil day. She could not tell him to-night, she felt, but perhaps on the morrow.

As they were sitting down to their early supper and the February sunset was turning all the white fields to a glory of rose and gold, a big sleigh-load of merry young folk came jingling down the glittering road and swept past the house with a storm of bell-music. There was a good Winter road here across their sheltered valley and through the swamp to Dalton's Corners and the Orchard Glen Choir was taking its musical way thither. They were singing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," and Auntie Janet, young as any of them, ran to the door and waved to them, while Bruce and Wallace and Prince and Bonnie bounded out barking madly. But Gavin did not go near the door nor look after them. He suspected Christina would be there, and most likely Wallace Sutherland and their gay company was not for him.

"You ought to be going with them, Gavie, lad," cried Auntie Janet, coming in with a rush of fresh air. "Listen, they're singin': 'All the Blue Bonnets are over the Border!' now! Eh, isn't it bonnie?"

Auntie Elspie's loving eyes were watching Gavin, and her sinking heart told her she must soon do something to put an end to his misery.

He went to his bed early that night, before they could ask him to sing, but he could not sleep. He heard Auntie Janet and Auntie Flora come up the creaking old stairs together, talking in whispers lest they disturb him. They shared a room at the end of the hall and Auntie Elspie's room was opposite his. It was quite late when finally he heard her come up to bed. But yet he could not sleep. His window-blind was rolled to the top and the moonlight flooded his room. Outside the diamond-spangled earth lay still and frost bound. Craig-Ellachie stood out white, silver-crowned, against the blue of the forest. Gavin raised himself on his elbow and looked out at the silent beauty of the night. The great white expanse seemed calling to him to come away and do as his fellow heroes were doing. He ought to be lying in a freezing trench, grasping a rifle instead of skulking in a feather bed wrapped in warm blankets. But indeed the bed had become a very rack to poor Gavin, the blankets smothered him. He tossed from side to side, vainly seeking relief.

Suddenly he sat up in bed, holding his breath to listen. The great glittering space of the outdoor world had taken voice and was crying out against him for not playing the man. From far across the silver sheen of the fields, clear and piercing, came the words,

"By oppression's woes and pains,
By our sons in servile chains,
We will drain our dearest veins
But they shall be free!
Lay the proud usurper low;
Tyrants fall in every foe;
Liberty's in every blow;
Let us do—or die!"

Gavin sprang from his bed and flung on his clothes madly. He had a wild notion that he must run out to the road and shout aloud to the world that he was coming, coming to the battle-front! When he was dressed he ran to the window and threw it up and his madness departed from him. It was only the gay sleigh-load returning from the Dalton tea-meeting. They swept past the house, setting his dogs barking madly, and the song died away as they disappeared down the glittering silver road. Gavin leaned far out of the window; his burning face stung by the cold air.

"Stand fast, Craig-Ellachie!" he whispered through his clenched teeth. The hot tears came smarting to his eyes, and he suddenly drew back, ashamed of his weakness. He closed the window, remembering even in his misery to do it quietly so as not to disturb the dear ones who were sleeping. He still knelt on at the window watching the shining track where the song of deathless liberty was fading away.

But there was a pair of loving ears near, that had heard all Gavin's movements. Auntie Elspie slept in the room opposite his, and ever since the night he had developed the whooping cough she had kept her door ajar and that was the reason she knew that her boy had not been sleeping well for many a night. And to-night she lay awake listening to the incessant creak of his old roped bed, and sharing his misery. She knew she could not bear it much longer, she must rise and tell him he was free. And then she heard him bounding from his bed, and the notes of the song as it swept gloriously past and died away.

She rose from her bed and lit the lamp. She dressed herself fully, for she knew there was no more sleep for her that night. She was trembling from head to foot, and praying for strength to carry out her heavy task. She had something of the feeling of the patriarch when the imperative Voice called, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering." She dropped on her knees before her bed. She knelt a long time, and then, strengthened, obedient to the Voice that summons all great souls, she rose and walked into Gavin's room.

Gavin was still kneeling by the window when she entered. His hair, touched by the moonlight, was soft and wavy, he looked very young and grief-stricken. For a moment the vision of him lying wounded and helpless in a trench, uncared for, shook her brave resolve. A great lump rose in her throat. She braced herself and said softly, "Gavin, Laddie!"

Gavin leaped to his feet. "Auntie Elspie!" he cried in amazement, his eyes dazzled by the light, "why, you are dressed! You're not sick?" he cried anxiously, taking the lamp from her hand.

"No, no," she said; "I'm jist all right. Put the lamp down, hinny, I want to talk with you." She sat down on the edge of his bed and he placed the lamp on his high old dresser and came and sat beside her wonderingly.

"I couldn't help hearing you tossing about. You're not sleepin', Gavie, you're worryin', lad."

"No, no, Auntie Elspie," he cried hastily, "I'm all right, I'm not sick. You go back to bed, do. You'll catch cold."

But the woman only gazed at him mournfully. "Eh, eh, hinny, I ken all about it," she whispered, lapsing into broader Scotch in her agitation. "Ye can't hide things from your Auntie Elspie. Ye're wearyin' to be away to the war, I ken as well as if ye telled me."

There was a wail in her voice that wrung Gavin's heart. "Oh, Auntie Elspie," he cried, "oh, no, no! I'll never leave you. I'll not be going. I'm not wearying. I know what my duty is; and it's here at home with you." He was

repeating his assurance incoherently, when she stopped him.

"Gavie, there's no need to tell your Auntie Elspie that you would do all that is in your power for us. I ken you've kept silence all these months for fear of giving us pain. But I've been watching you, and I guessed what ailed you. And it is what we would have, Gavie. We would not have you want to stay at home while others go to die for us to save our homes and lives. And indeed it's proud I am this night, even if my heart is sore—sore——"

She broke down a moment, and again Gavin firmly declared his decision. He could not deny he wanted to go to the Front he confessed, but maybe it was just a foolish love of adventure and it did not interfere with the fact that he was needed at home.

"So I'll jist stay here, Auntie Elspie," he repeated, "I am needed here, and I would be ashamed to turn my back on you. I couldn't be happy knowing you needed me, and I wasn't here to take care of you all."

And so they argued the matter far into the night, Auntie Elspie insisting that he should go, and the boy declaring that he would not. She was reinforced shortly by her sisters. Auntie Flora had heard the low rumble of voices and had seen the light in Gavin's room. She wakened Janet, and fearing that Gavin's strange conduct had culminated in an attack of some real illness, the two anxious old ladies hurriedly flung on some clothes and went down the hall to Gavin's room. And there they found a strange scene, Elspie urging Gavin to enlist, and Gavin holding back and declaring that nothing would induce him to go to the war!

It was the look in his two younger Aunts' eyes, when the case was explained to them, that first shook Gavin's resolution. Auntie Flora stood up tall and stately, and her face flushed proudly as she turned to Janet. "What did I tell ye!" she cried triumphantly, "I knew he wanted to go!" And Auntie Janet burst into tears, and hiding her face in the old shawl she had thrown round her shoulders she sobbed, "Aye, and I said it, too. I knew ye couldn't be the kind that would want to stay at home, Gavie." And Gavin comforted them in a state of speechless wonder. It appeared that after all they had been waiting for him to express a desire to go and that their pride was quite equal to their grief!

CHAPTER XIII

"THE PLIGHTED RING"

Jimmie came home from school on Friday evening bounding in full of news.

"Say, who do you s'pose's gone and enlisted from Orchard Glen now?" he demanded indignantly of Christina, who was preparing supper in the bright, warm kitchen.

"Mrs. Johnnie Dunn," suggested his sister. But Jimmie was in no mood for a joke. Each new enlistment from the community was to him a personal injury.

"More unlikely than that!" he growled, throwing his heavy bag of books in the corner, and his wet mittens behind the stove, "it's Gavin Grant, that's who it is."

Christina stopped in the operation of taking a pan of hot biscuits from the oven. "Gavin Grant! Why! Are you sure, Jimmie?"

"Course I'm sure. I saw him in town to-day. He's joined the Blue Bonnets, and they're going to Camp Borden, and I tell you it just makes a fellow sick, that's what it does!"

Jimmie did not explain just why Gavin's joining the army should have such an effect upon his health and Christina paid no heed to his complaint. She was completely taken by surprise. If there was a young man in Orchard Glen who had a good excuse for staying at home surely that young man was Gavin. And yet he was going, when it would be so easy to remain. She was not long left to wonder over him. Her mother brought home the whole story of Gavin's struggle from his proud and grief-stricken Aunts the very next day. Elspie Grant had come over to offer sympathy when her sons left her for the battle-field and Mary Lindsay could not rest until she had done the same for her old friend. So as next day was Saturday, Jimmie took her over to Craig-Ellachie in the cutter.

She came home filled with the story of the long time Gavin had been yearning to go, but had remained silent for his Aunts' sake, how he was making every preparation for their comfort in his absence, how brave he was, and how proud they were of him, even though it was breaking their three old hearts to see him go.

Christina listened to the recital in ever-deepening humiliation. She remembered how she had been disgusted with Gavin when he fled from before Piper Lauchie's wrath, and how full of admiration she had been for Wallace Sutherland's courage. She had played the part of a silly girl who could not see the character under the thin covering of appearances. Her humiliation was not made lighter by the remembrance that Wallace had given no smallest hint of a desire to enlist.

There was nothing else talked of at the Red Cross rooms the next day. Mrs. Sutherland was quite severe in her condemnation of Gavin for going and leaving a farm and three helpless women who had brought him up and given him his chance in the world.

"It is his plain duty to stay at home," she said distinctly. "It is nothing but a desire for adventure that is taking many of our young men away, when they are needed here to work the land. No young man with a farm should be allowed to enlist."

This was too much for Mrs. Johnnie Dunn, of course, and she proceeded to rid herself of the burden of it.

"Well, my stars!" she declared loudly, her needle flying in and out in time to her words, "I would rather get down on my marrow bones and scrub for my living if I was the Grant Girls than keep a young man at home. Gavin Grant's duty ain't at home any more than Trooper's is. The Grant Girls'll never want. Hughie Reid is just a brother to them, and he's to work the farm. And the Grant Girls are as well fixed as any folks in this Hall. And let me ask yous folks what good our farms'll be to us when the Germans gets here. Just tell me that, now?"

As usual, the Prime Minister had silenced the Monarch, and the latter took refuge in a royal and dignified

silence that ignored the noisy usurper.

"Christina, my dear," Mrs. Sutherland said, "will you be so good as to fetch me another skein of this sweater-coat yarn from the storeroom?" Christina went obediently, inwardly hot and raging. She wanted to rush in by The Woman's side and stand up for Gavin and tell how chivalrous and brave he really was. But how ridiculous she would look speaking up to Wallace's mother in that fashion. And yet, it seemed as if some one had cast a reflection upon Sandy so much did it annoy her.

She was unpacking the desired article from a bale, hidden by a pile of supplies which The Woman had brought out the evening before, when voices from the other side of the barrier reached her.

"She won't stay President long, I bet." It was Tilly's voice and Tilly's giggle accompanied it. "She's started now to talk like the war was wrong and young men shouldn't go."

"Everybody knows it's all because Wallace won't go," answered Bell Brown. "Pa says Dr. McGarry won't speak at any more recruitin' meetings nor anything because he's so ashamed."

"I don't see how Christine Lindsay..." But Christina had tiptoed out of her ambush and escaped into the main room with the yarn, her cheeks burning, her eyes unnaturally bright.

Gavin went to camp at Niagara but was allowed to come back to work his farm for a month in the Summer. The Grant Girls were as happy to have him again as if he had returned from the war, and with youth's happy disregard of the future, they set themselves to have the gayest Summer that had ever shone down upon Craig-Ellachie, and folks who went there said there never was such fun as they had round the supper table with Gavin giving his Aunts' military orders and they obeying them with military precision.

Christina would have given much to be one of those guests. She wanted to show Gavin before he went that she admired his spirit, and was glad he wanted to go. But she felt diffident about going to Craig-Ellachie, and she shrewdly guessed that Gavin would never ask her.

She saw him only at church, and how proudly the Aunties walked down the aisle with Gavin in his Highland Uniform to show them to their seat and sit at the end of the pew. And indeed they could scarcely keep their eyes off him during the service, and a fine sight he was to be sure, in his trim khaki coat and his gay kilt. And the worry had all gone from his face and he was his old smiling kindly self. He was too busy to come to any of the village festivities and Christina had no opportunity to speak to him except as he came down the church aisle. And though the other girls crowded around him she stood aloof, so strangely shy she had become of Gavin.

Joanna and the other girls decided the young people must give Gavin a send-off such as had been given to all the boys and so they planned for a gathering on an evening when he came home for the last leave, and Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists once more joined amicably in a common cause. But Gavin was not to have the privilege of receiving a public farewell, a circumstance that suited him well, for he had dreaded anything that would drag him into public notice.

For one dark Autumn day, when the last blossom of the Grant Girls' garden had drooped before the frost, the Blue Bonnets were suddenly called to go overseas. Gavin had come home just the night before for a week-end leave, and a telegram summoned him to rejoin his Battalion at once. There was a great stir at Craig-Ellachie. Hughie Reid hurried over as soon as the news reached him, and he sent one of his boys to fetch Mrs. Johnnie Dunn to help the Aunties through their trial, and Hughie himself got out his Ford car to take Gavin to Algonquin to catch the midnight train for Toronto.

The weather seemed to be in accord with the hearts of the three bereaved old women, a cold rain came sweeping across the hills just as night fell and Gavin drove away from his old home and the loving arms that would have held him, into the storm and darkness, and the light of Craig-Ellachie went out with him.

Christina had not heard of Gavin's sudden call, and while he was driving away in the wind and rain, she was sitting by the fire winding a skein of yarn which Wallace Sutherland was holding.

The sitting room was warm and bright, and had many pretty feminine touches, and there were plenty of easy

chairs and cushions that Mary had contributed from time to time. The soft-shaded lamp-light fell on Christina's bright hair as she bent over her yarn. Her mother had gone to bed early, they were alone and Wallace was watching Christina from his luxurious seat on the big deep sofa, in perfect content. The wind howled around the corners of the old house, and the rain lashed the window panes, but the comfort of the bright sitting-room and Christina's presence were only made more delightful by the contrast.

Wallace sank down deeper into the sofa. He was in his happiest mood. He had worked quite steadily all Summer and had been so successful in the process of "Showing Uncle William" that that unreasonable old person had written quite a reasonable letter to his brother, saying that, maybe there was something in the young cub after all, and that if he really succeeded in demonstrating that he was good for something, even if it was only feeding the pigs, he, Uncle William, might be inclined to pay him a visit, etc., etc. It was that etc. that so raised Wallace's spirits. He knew Uncle William, oh, right down to the ground, he declared, and had no hesitation in assuring Christina that if everything went all right with his stock this Winter, Uncle William was his to do as he pleased with. He was very happy, and expected Christina to rejoice with him. She was naturally gay and ready to follow a merry lead, and Wallace enjoyed her companionship more than any one he had known for that very reason. But he could not deny that for some time she had not been such a good comrade. She had to make an effort to-night to help him be gay over Uncle William's complete undoing. She tried to be interested as he told all his good fortune, but was just a little relieved when John came in for a few minutes and began talking politics.

She went to the kitchen for a plate of apples, leaving them discussing the Minister of Militia, and was taking down a plate from the high old cupboard in the kitchen, when she heard a sound as if some one were fumbling at the door. The big kitchen was empty, the damp day had been bad for Uncle Neil's rheumatism, and he had gone to bed early, it was almost too late for a visitor, and thinking it might be only the wind, Christina put down her plate and went to look if the outside porch door were slamming.

She threw open the door and the rain and wind whirled in her face, and out of the wet and the darkness emerged a tall figure in a long khaki overcoat and a Highland bonnet. The bonnet came off immediately, and the soldier said in a soft Highland accent, "Good evening, Christine."

"Oh, Gavin," she cried in surprise, and a sudden unreasonable joy. "Is it really you? Come away in. Are you wet?"

But Gavin still stood in the doorway. "No, I cannot come in," he said hurriedly; "Hughie is waiting for me at the gate. He is taking me into Algonquin."

Christina looked past him into the darkness. "To Algonquin! Oh, Gavin, you're not called away are you?"

"Yes, the Battalion is ordered to Halifax, we will likely be sailing at once. I did not know till this morning; and I—" his voice dropped to a whisper, "I just couldn't go away without saying good-bye to you, Christine."

A gust of wind swayed Christina's skirts, and Gavin stepped inside and closed the door, but stood holding the latch.

"And your poor Aunties!" cried Christina. She was angry with herself the moment she said it, for a look of anguish passed quickly over Gavin's face.

"They are very brave," he said simply. He paused, there was silence in the big warm kitchen.

"Won't you come in, just a minute, and say good-bye to John?" asked Christina. "Mother and Uncle Neil are gone to bed, but—"

"No, I have no time to-night, but I could not go without seeing you, just once, and saying good-bye," he whispered.

Christina's eyes suddenly stung with tears. "Oh, Gavin," she faltered, "I—I don't deserve it."

He shook his head to indicate that she was wrong, and again silence fell. Gavin glanced at his wrist watch. She noticed that his awkwardness had disappeared under his military training, he held himself with a new dignified

bearing. "I must not be keeping you," he said, but it seemed as if he could not go. He stood looking down at her and she could not mistake the look in Gavin's eyes. Her own fell before them.

"Oh," she managed to whisper, "I have always wanted to tell you that I think it is so brave and so grand of you to go, and, ... oh, I hope you'll come back safe," she ended, faltering, and Gavin still stood unable to speak and looked at her as if he could never take his eyes away.

The loud, slow tick of the old clock marked off the minutes.

Suddenly Gavin put his fingers under the collar of his coat. "Could you—would you mind taking this as a little keepsake?" he whispered, handing her the regimental pin of the Blue Bonnets. She took it with grateful thanks.

And then a sudden impulse came to her.

"But, I ought to give you something in return."

She looked up and down her dress. She wore no ornament but an old-fashioned brooch of her mother's fastening the throat of her soft blue dress. "I haven't anything," she said helplessly. She followed Gavin's eyes that were fastened on her left hand.

"Could you spare me that?" he whispered. It was a little old ring, one that Allister had sent her before he came home for his first visit, just plain gold with her initials carved on it. Christina slipped it off her finger eagerly.

"Oh, it's just a poor little, old thing, Gavin, but I'd be so proud to have it go to the war," she cried. He took it, his face radiant.

"Oh," he cried, "I ought not to have asked you. I was too bold, perhaps, I shouldn't—perhaps—he,—wouldn't like it?"

Christina's face flamed. "There is no one who has any right to say what I should do," she said with sudden boldness.

Gavin's face lit up. He slipped the ring on his little finger. It would hardly go on, but he managed it. A line of the old song he had sung flashed through Christina's mind as he did it, something about the plighted ring the warrior wore, being crushed and wet with gore.

"Oh, Gavin," she whispered, the tears welling up into her eyes, "God bless you, and bring you home safe again."

A sharp whistle sounded from the gate where Hughie Reid was waiting impatiently in the rain. Gavin started as if from a dream. He held out his hand. "Good-bye, Christine," he whispered, "you won't forget me, will you?"

Christina put her hand into his. She shook her head; she could not answer. He was going away, perhaps to his death, and she had not a word for him, and yet he was leaving her deliberately to another at the call of duty. Her heart was in a tumult of grief and self-abasement. She could only stand and look up at him, her eyes filled with tears, her lips trembling, and the next moment, Gavin had stooped, with the sudden boldness of a shy man, and kissed her.

And then the door was flung open and shut again, and he was gone into the storm and darkness, and Christina was left standing motionless, gazing at the closed door.

It was a long time before she found courage to return to the sitting-room. Her heart was throbbing with grief and at the same time a wild exultation that she could not understand and had no time to analyze. She did not even attempt to answer Wallace's raillery as to the length of time she had been away, or John's as to why she had stayed in the cellar long enough to eat all the apples which she found she had forgotten to bring. The event had been too stupendous for her to come down to the commonplace. And at last Wallace grew just a little piqued over her absent-minded air and went home early very much to Christina's relief.

It was the week after Gavin had gone out into the storm and Christina was still going about in a sort of daze,

with feelings still unanalyzed, when she remembered that Friday would be Jimmie's eighteenth birthday. Jimmie should have been through school, but he had done that disgraceful thing that, so far, no Lindsay had ever done; he had failed in his examinations the Summer before. Had it not been for the boys' going to war, the great event that absorbed the mind of the family, Jimmie might have fared badly. As it was he received a solemn warning from John, and went back to school in the Fall very unwillingly.

"Life is so queer," Christina was constrained to say. "I was always dying to go to school and couldn't, and Jimmie is dying to stay out of it and can't."

"It's Allister's money that's spoiled the silly kid," grumbled John. "That and the war. I tell you, Christina, we always thought it was a dreadful misfortune to be poor, and wished we had money, but I am beginning to think that we ought to thank the Lord that we have had to do without. Jimmie has never done very well at school just because it has been made easy for him to there."

"I'm afraid Allister's money is not likely to do any of us much more harm, anyway," Christina said to herself, remembering another rather despondent letter from him. She could not quite agree with John that money was not a very good thing to have. It would have opened for her the road to the college halls, but it had been denied. And yet she was not unhappy. Something sang in her heart these days, the memory of a certain farewell at the back door in the wind and the rain and darkness, a memory that was all light and glory.

But Jimmie was still unsettled and dissatisfied with school, and Christina said that she would please him by making him a birthday cake. She would ice it with plenty of thick almond paste, his favourite, and put his initials on it and the date. It was a very handsome and tempting confection indeed, when she put it on the pantry shelf in a secluded spot where he would not see it until the right moment arrived.

The kitchen was still filled with its spicy fragrance when there came a quick footfall in the porch and a knock at the door. Christina opened it to meet a slim young soldier who strode into the room and saluted smartly. She stood looking at him in stupefied silence for a moment, and then she dropped upon a chair and put her head down on the kitchen table.

"Oh, Jimmie! Oh, Jimmie!" she sobbed. "How could you?"

But the new recruit caught her round the waist and waltzed her across the room, and then, snatching the butcher-knife from the table, he presented arms and saluted and posed all in such an absurd fashion that in spite of her grief she smiled.

"Go right back into the shed till I tell mother," she exclaimed, "she mustn't see you till she has had warning."

Jimmie went out and hid himself, just a little subdued. Evidently his gallant act, the thing that everybody had admired in Trooper, had taken on a different colour when performed by him.

He had little opportunity to reflect upon his act. There was hardly time for sorrow before Jimmie was gone; he had been put in a draft for a Battalion already in England and to his huge delight he was sent overseas almost immediately. It seemed as if this, her baby's going, was almost more than Mrs. Lindsay could bear, and Christina was more and more called upon to be a comforter and a bearer of burdens.

It was not the fear of gas nor bomb nor German bullet that kept Jimmie's mother wakeful at night, but the pestilence that walked in darkness, waylaying the souls of young men. Terrible tales of brave boys falling before an enemy more to be dreaded than all the frightfulness of the Hun came back to Canada. It was this living Death that stalked through the camps of England, and behind the lines in France and Flanders, that made the mother's heart sick with fear.

As she watched her mother's silent suffering, Christina's soul began, again, to ask questions. What was the meaning of that psalm that Grandpa had read when Sandy and Neil went way, and, later, when Jimmie left? Did it mean anything? And if it did, why could it not bring comfort to her mother's sorely-tried heart?

Through all the days of Christina's loneliness and anxiety there was no one so kind to her as Wallace's mother. Mrs. Sutherland made a point of selecting Christina for her special helper at Red Cross meetings, and Christina

could not but notice the significance of her attentions.

"You are such a comfort, Christine," she declared one day when the girl handed her back a sock with a dropped stitch deftly picked up. "Your mother is a fortunate woman. I wish I had a daughter like you!"

Christina's cheeks grew scarlet, and she was thankful that the clatter of sewing machines and the noise of Mrs. Johnnie Dunn's orders secured them from being overheard.

But indeed, she could not shut her eyes to the fact that all events pointed in the direction so prettily indicated, again and again, by Wallace's mother. Wallace was succeeding beyond his own expectations, and Uncle William was growing more lamb-like every day. The road to success had surely opened out for Christina. Her Dream Knight had ridden up to her very door. He was possessed of a fine house, and broad acres, and had prospects of great wealth. He was handsome and gay and debonair, and what more could any human girl ask?

And in the face of all this grand good fortune that unreasonable Christina Lindsay was more dissatisfied and restless than she had ever been in all her life. She reasoned with herself and scolded herself all to no avail. That foolish heart of hers, that had always got in the way of her worldly prospects, was standing stubbornly right in the very highway of success.

Here was the great opportunity of her life, such prospects as might dazzle any Orchard Glen girl, and its glory was all blotted out by the memory of a tall figure in a khaki coat, coming suddenly out of the wind and rain of a dark night. Wallace had sat by Christina's side that night in the warmth and shelter of the fireside, but though Christina did not quite realise it yet, her heart had gone out into the storm after Gavin, and could never come back. It was still following him over the perils of the high seas and into the blood and carnage of the battlefield, and it valued farms and stock and fine houses less than the dust.

And so Christina was more dissatisfied than she had ever been in her life, and she lay awake nights wondering what she should do, and how she could possibly extricate herself from the impossible position in which she found herself.

And to make matters worse or better, she did not know which, Gavin wrote to her, and she wrote him long letters in reply. And she grew into the habit of running over the hills to Craig-Ellachie to cheer the Grant Girls, and, of course, they talked of their soldier-hero all the time, and of nothing else.

The Aunties literally lived by his letters. Everything was dated by them.

"We started yon crock o' butter jist the day Gavie's first letter came from France," Auntie Janet would say. "It's time it was finished."

"Gavie's letter was a bit late this week," they announced at another time, "so we didn't start the ironin' till it came. It jist seemed as if we couldn't settle down."

Gavin's letters were certainly worth waiting for, Christina had to confess. He wrote much easier than he spoke, and his happiness in being permitted to write to her at all filled them with a quiet humour. Christina's eyes searched them just a little wistfully for any hint of the feeling he had displayed in his farewell. But there was none. Gavin was too much the true gentleman to presume on that parting. He told her he had the little ring safe, and that it was his most precious possession, but beyond that he did not refer to that last evening. There was never a hint of hardship, even after he reached the Front, and was in many a desperate encounter. It was only all joy that he was able to be in the struggle for right. He had just one anxiety and that was lest his Aunts be lonely, and he wondered if she would be so good as to comfort them just a little when she could.

And Christina wrote him long letters in return and felt like a criminal in her double dealing. She knew she was wrong but she could not make a decision. On the one hand was all that she could hope this world could offer, and on the other nothing but a true and gallant heart. She was angry and ashamed of herself and very restless, and withal, in spite of herself, quite unreasonably happy.

Mary had been writing all Winter urging her to come for a little visit, and see Hughie Junior, who was a marvellous baby, with wonderful feats to his credit that no human baby had ever yet performed. But Christina put

the tempting invitations aside, feeling she must not leave her mother in her deep anxiety.

And then there came letters from overseas that brought a wonderful relief from her mother's worry, and lightened greatly the burdens of the night.

For many and many a night her mother sat sleepless by her window, looking up at the stars that hung above her home and that also watched above her soldier sons. She had no fears for Neil, a thousand might fall at his side and ten thousand at his right hand, but it would not come nigh him. And Sandy,—Sandy was honest, and true, and as fine a lad as marched in the Canadian Army, but he was young and careless and gay, and how did she know what temptations might assail him? And there was Jimmie! Night after night she lay awake, thinking of Jimmie, praying and agonising for him. He was so young, such a big overgrown baby, how could he come through unscathed?

And then there came from France this great relief from her dread. Jimmie's draft had reached England and Neil had managed to get himself transferred to Jimmie's Battalion. It was going to France immediately, and France was safer than England, Neil wrote, from certain kinds of dangers. And his mother was not to worry, for he had Jimmie right beside him and he would look after the boy and see that no harm could come to him. And Sandy wrote that Neil had refused a chance to take the officer's course and a Commission, because he would not leave Jimmie.

Full of joy and gratitude, Christina watched her mother's eyes grow bright again, and so she left Mitty in charge of her many affairs and took the train for a week's visit to Port Stewart.

Mary's house was as pretty as ever, but had lost much of its immaculate tidiness. For Hughie Lindsay MacGillivray's wardrobe and appointments overflowed into every room. But Hughie himself was all he had been reported and more, and Christina fell down and worshipped his apple blossom face and his dimples at the first sight.

"And tell me all about Wallace Sutherland," demanded Mary, between raptures. "Isn't it grand that he's doing such fine things with the Ford place. Why, Christine, you'll be a wealthy woman some day!"

"Oh, hush!" cried Christina in distress. "Why, Mary, I haven't even been asked to live at the Ford place yet, and it's positively shameful to talk about, about anything, yet!"

"Nonsense!" laughed the practical Mary. "You know perfectly well that Wallace is in love with you, and that you are as good as engaged."

"He is not! I am not!" denied Christina excitedly. "Don't you talk like that, Mary, I—I can't bear it—"

"Why, Christine, why, mercy! I didn't mean anything!" cried Mary, alarmed and amazed at the sight of tears in Christina's eyes. "Why, what's the matter, dear? You haven't quarrelled with Wallace, have you?"

"Oh, no, of course not," said Christina dolefully, regaining her composure.

"And his mother's just lovely to you now, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"And, well, what's wrong? Why, any girl I know, even here in town, would give anything for your prospects!"

But Christina could not explain her sudden outburst. It had astonished herself as much as Mary. She knew that now was the great opportunity to confess to Mary that Wallace had fallen far below her high standard, but the memory of the Ford place and all it meant closed her lips. It seemed too much to give up, and she went home with the battle between her heart and her head still raging.

CHAPTER XIV

"OVER THE TOP"

The Lindsay boys had been about a month on the battle line when, beside their weekly letters, there came a splendid big fat envelope to the home people, containing a letter from each of the three.

There had been many letters from the boys, gay and bright and full of cheer, but none that contained such comfort as these. And the assurance they brought put new life into the mother and Christina's loving eyes noted a new energy in all her movements.

She read Jimmie's letter first. It was headed "Back of the Front," and was largely taken up with a list of the wonderful things they had had to eat for their Christmas dinner. It was a bang-up spread, sure enough, and with the boxes sent from home on top of it all, they ate so much that they couldn't even have run away if Fritz had come over to pay them a visit.

But the important part of the letter was the description of a Sunday afternoon he and Neil and Sandy spent together behind the lines. It was great having that day with Sandy. Of course he and Neil were always together, for Jimmie wished to assure them all at home that he couldn't blow his nose without Neil standing over him to see that he did it just right. But a day with Sandy was a treat, for besides being in another quarter he was an officer, and as hard to get at as the Kaiser. But they arranged a meeting this Sunday, and Jimmie guessed that Sandy bust all the red tape in the British army doing it.

"Neil and I had just come out of our ground-hog's hole and we had nearly all France on our uniforms, and Sandy was such a swell, all dolled up like a field-marshal that Neil said perhaps we oughtn't to be so familiar as to salute him. But we got a bath and got fumigated too, and it was real Christmas holidays not to have to scratch for a whole day. We had to salute Sandy when there was any one else round, but when we got him alone I paid him up for all the respect and I wiped the floor with a few yards of his officer's uniform. I tell you, Christina, he can't put me down now the way he used to. I'm as hard as nails and I'm as tall as he is. Sandy said I could be court-martialed and shot for it, but Neil refereed and saw that justice was done. I started out to tell you and Mother about that Sunday we had together, but I'll leave it to Neil, he can do it better than I can, but I want Mother to know that I agree with everything he says, and she needn't be scared about me out here. I'm all right."

"So don't cry, Dear, I'm all right here.
Oh, it's just like bein' at hame."

Sandy's letter told still more about the meeting; but Neil's letter went right to the heart of the matter. "I wish you could have seen us at our Battalion service, Mother, that Sunday morning. It wasn't very far back, and we could hear the guns booming as we stood in a quiet spot behind a shattered little village. We sang 'Faint not for fear, His arms are near,' the last hymn we sang in Orchard Glen church, and after it was over we met Sandy and we went off together, Sandy and Jimmie and I, to have one of our old-time Sunday talks, just as we used to wander off to the fields after Sunday School, we two, with Jimmie tagging at our heels. It wasn't much like home, though, just a desolate shell-torn corner behind the ragged remnants of a barn, but, somehow, the quiet took us back to Orchard Glen and home, and you seemed there. And we got talking about the contrast between our life out here and back there and the temptations all around that were so new. And we each stood up, so to speak, and told our experience, like a good old Methodist class-meeting, that would have delighted Grandpa if he could have heard it. And Sandy said that when he saw the devastation Sin could bring, it had made him want to be a preacher more than ever before. And then it was Jimmie's turn, and he confessed that something about military camp life gave him a feeling of physical nausea at first. For a month he didn't want to go beyond the Y. M. C. A. tent, and then he began to get used to it all, but he never had the smallest inclination to mix in it. He's the same bright, clean boy that left you, Mother, a great deal older and wiser, but no sadder, and you need not fear for him. We were saying that it was you who had given us our strength against temptation, because you never set anything but the highest before us and Sandy remarked that you had buckled our armour on tight before you sent us out to battle, and then Jimmie said, 'It's like being in one of the Tanks. You ride right over everything in the biggest show the Huns can pull off and nothing can touch you.'"

"I think that was a fine description of what you gave us, don't you, Mother? You had no money to give us, but you built and riveted a Tank with your years of hard toil, and you put us all inside and we are safe there forever. And so you must not worry about us. For even if we are called upon to pay the price, what does that matter?"

When the letter was read and reread, Christina was surprised to see her mother put it carefully away in the pocket of her skirt; and putting on her bonnet and cloak, she slipped out quietly and went away across the Short Cut towards the village. Christina wondered that she had said nothing about where she was going and stood at the window watching her with anxious loving eyes and wondering if she were wearing warm enough clothing as the wind swayed her bent old figure. She supposed her mother had gone to see Granny Minns, but Joanna dropped in with some Red Cross work on her way up to Mrs. Johnnie Dunn's for an afternoon's sewing, and told Christina that she had seen her mother sitting in the churchyard beside her father's grave.

Christina's eyes filled with tender tears; she understood. Her mother had gone with the boys' letters to share with their father the glad news that had lifted the burden from her heart.

Christina read all Neil's letter to Grandpa that night. It was no light task, but she could not bear that he miss a word. She had her reward, for he sang the 103rd psalm at the top of his lungs before he settled for the night, and the Hindmost Hymn louder and clearer than he had ever sung it since the day the boys went away.

And the next morning he read again the 91st psalm, and his old shaking voice rose high and strong as he came to the words that spoke the triumph over all life's ills, and for the first time in her life Christina understood them. "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence.... Thou shall not be afraid for the terror by night nor for the arrow that flieth by day nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness."

The promise was literally true! The white Comrade walked beside her warrior brothers and they were safe. And Christina learned that morning that there was only one thing in life that mattered after all. For even though the boys had had wealth and power and great fame and social position none of these would have brought any real comfort to the heart of the mother and grandfather at that moment. The knowledge that they were safe from sin and its power was everything. And those things upon which she had set her heart and counted of supreme importance did not weigh at all in the great crisis of life.

And right on that day of exultation, when the psalm was still repeating itself triumphantly in their ears, the dreaded word came from the battlefield. Mr. Holmes received the telegram at the little office behind the store. He had been very distant with Mr. Sinclair ever since he joined the Methodists against the Presbyterians, but he forgot all about their estrangement in the terrible task that faced him of carrying the news to the Lindsay family. So he went hurriedly to the Manse with his heavy burden, and Mr. Sinclair did not seem to think it strange that he should come. The two men left their work and went up the hill to the Lindsay home walking close together like children who were afraid and were trying to give each other support.

And there by the bright fireside, sitting in the sunny window, where her scarlet geraniums bloomed as gay as the poppies in Flanders Field, they found Christina and told her the news: that Neil and Jimmie had gone over the top, together, very eager and glad, and that they would not come back.

Christina was thankful afterwards for the merciful numbness, that was like an anaesthetic in a painful operation. She had a feeling that she would awaken soon and realise fully the terrible calamity that had befallen, but just now, if she kept still it would not hurt so much.

She was filled with wonder at her mother's courage. Even in the first moments of anguish she showed not a moment of wavering faith. And she was more filled with wonder at Grandpa. Neil had been Grandpa's special pride, and she was afraid of the result of the news. She went to the bright corner of the kitchen where he sat and tried tremblingly to make him understand, holding back her own grief by main force, that she might tell it gently. He made no outcry, spoke no word of grief; but for an hour afterwards he sat quite still in deep thought, and she heard him saying over and over to himself, as though trying to grasp the magnitude of his sorrow, "Both o' them! Not the two o' them, surely?" And then after pondering a while, "Aye, the two o' them!"

But when she put him to bed that night, dumb and sick with anguish herself, she could not but notice that Grandpa was acting strangely. He had an air of suppressed excitement, as though he were hiding some good news.

She did not guess what it was until she had left him, and overheard him saying, "Aye, aye, I'll see them all the sooner. All the sooner!" in a tone of exultation. She did not hand him the hymn book, thinking he would not want to sing, but when she peeped in later to see if it were time to take away the lamp, she was amazed to hear him singing very softly and low, lest any overhear him, but singing, nevertheless, in the house of mourning, the Hindmost Hymn,

"On the other side of Jordan, in the sweet fields of Eden,
Where the tree of life is blooming, there is rest for you."

For Grandpa had travelled far on the upward road, and Christina did not realise that death was a small incident in the life of one who stood just at the door into the other world.

In the morning when she went in and ran up his window blind to the top to let in the sunlight, he was lying as she had left him the night before, with the little orange-covered book held loosely in his cold hands. For Grandpa had sung the Hindmost Hymn for the last time and was even now singing the First Hymn in a new Book away in the sweet fields of Eden, where there is no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither is there any more pain.

Christina had no time for her own grief, so busy she was comforting her mother, cheering Uncle Neil, sustaining John and writing consoling letters to the absent ones. Sometimes she was so occupied that she almost forgot the terrible blow that had fallen, and then it would come upon her with an unbelievable shock that Neil and Jimmie were dead,—gone forever out of the world!

It was something her heart would not accept. How could it be, it argued, that Neil, so strong and steady and full of high purpose, and Jimmie, so radiant and full of life, could be lying dead in the mud of a trench? It was unbelievable. And at last she came to understand, through watching with her mother, whose faith leaped over even this barrier of death, that the instincts of her heart were right. Jimmie and Neil were not dead. They were gone, somewhere, beyond her sight, but they were still living and moving and working as they had done here on earth. Some fault of vision, some failure of the senses made it impossible for her to communicate with them. But they were there, and alive! Her mother was sure of that. And Grandpa was right, he had met them the sooner for their untimely call to the Life Beyond.

Allister came home as soon as the news about Neil and Jimmie reached him. He stayed a week with them, comforting his mother and Uncle Neil, helping John about the barn, and trying to keep Christina from going too often to Grandpa's empty room. He brought a long letter from Ellen, offering to come home just as soon as the hospital authorities would spare her. She was getting on wonderfully well, Allister reported, and had determined, should the war continue, that she would offer herself as a Red Cross nurse, but had decided to come home if she were needed.

Christina was longing for her elder sister's presence and help, but the remembrance of Neil's sacrifice for Jimmie made her ashamed of the thought. So she wrote bravely to Ellen bidding her stay until she finished her course.

On the evening before Allister left, he and Christina sat by the fire talking, long after the others had gone to bed. Wallace had been there earlier in the evening, and to Christina's amazement Allister did not share in the universal admiration for him.

"He's got money, that young chap, Christine," he said. "But money isn't everything, girl, remember that."

"But you like Wallace, don't you?" asked Christina in surprise.

"Oh, I guess he's all right. But he's got things too easy. And he'll want to get them easy all his life or he'll kick over the traces."

Christina was not conscious of any feeling of resentment. She did not even take the trouble to attempt to defend Wallace, and Allister seemed surprised.

"Yes, I thought money was the whole thing," he went on, "and now the war has made me a poor man. I've got the farm I had when I went West first, and I've got something more, I've got a pocketful of debts that will take me years to pay off. But, I guess I'm about as well off in some ways as I ever was."

Christina would have been very much dismayed at this some months earlier, but in the face of the stupendous events of her life the loss of property or even of the chance of wealth seemed trivial. She said so to Allister and was glad to find that he agreed with her.

"I found that out since I was home last," he declared. "I thought you lacked ambition because you always gave up your chance in life to this one and the other one. But you were the wise one. Money, and gettin' on in the world and all that don't amount to much after all. And if money is all this fellow of yours has, mind you, that ain't enough. It might do for some girls, but let me tell you, it won't satisfy you."

As the dark days of the war dragged on, Christina found her talent for comforting others sadly needed. For her own family were only the forerunners of many another stricken home.

Burke was the next to fall, and little Mitty was left alone to struggle with Granny and poverty and grief, and Christina needed all her strength to bring her through the trial.

And the next was Trooper. He went over the top in a gallant raid of the Princess Pats, calling on his comrades to follow, and it seemed to those who had known him, that somewhere he must still be going on, gay and bright and fearless, always calling on other high hearts to come after him.

Joanna bore his going like a soldier's wife. She never walked quite so erect again, and her jet black hair began to turn grey, but she was even more faithful in her work at the Red Cross meetings, and she and The Woman grew firmer friends than ever in their common grief.

Christina went about among the stricken ones, easing her own grief in comforting others. But she had one ever present trouble for which she could receive no comfort on any side. Every day the falseness of her attitude towards Wallace Sutherland weighed more heavily upon her honest heart. And how she was going to tell him of the change in her she did not know. How was she going to tell him that, though he had once been her hero, her ideal True Knight, that he had failed to live up to her high standard, and that another, a real hero, who had left her at the call of duty, had, all unwittingly, slipped into his place?

And then an event happened that made it unnecessary for her to tell him. It was the news that came one early day in Spring, when all the world was a wild rush of wind and water, and blinding sunshine,—the word that Gavin had been killed.

By a strange chance it was Wallace, himself, who brought the news to Christina. When Mr. Holmes heard the dread message ticked off on the telegraph machine, he went straight to Mr. Sinclair, again, with his burden of dismay and grief. And, unable to bear the heavy news alone, the minister went over to see if Dr. McGarry would help him carry the terrible burden to Craig-Ellachie.

Mr. Holmes kept the dread secret to himself until they had time to deliver it, fearing that the Grant Girls might hear it from another source. So the news had not reached the Lindsay farm in the evening when Wallace came up the hill to see Christina.

He could not but notice a growing change in her manner towards him, but he had put it down to her grief over the loss of her brothers. One of Christina's charms in his eyes had been her independence and her evident indifference as to whether what she did or said should please him or otherwise, but he thought it was high time she was showing some warmth of feeling and instead she had been strange and cold and aloof recently. And Wallace, accustomed to have everything arranged just as he wanted it, was beginning to feel somewhat ill-used. He felt that, though Christina were so heartbroken over Jimmie and Neil, she ought to show more consideration for him. And tonight he had made up his mind to ask her to share the Ford place with him. He had quite decided that there could never be any one like Christina for him, and he felt sure that when they were really engaged she would be more like her old self, and they would be as happy as they were in the beginning.

Christina was sitting in the warm corner by the sitting-room stove, knitting a sock for Gavin when he entered. The room was bright and pleasant, and Wallace felt very happy when he flung himself luxuriously upon the deep sofa. But Christina was graver than she had ever been. She was sorry for him and was blaming herself bitterly; she had laid a snare for her own feet and now she was in desperate straits to get out of it.

Wallace saw her evident distress and supposed she had heard of Gavin, and was disturbed for his Aunts.

"Awful thing, this, for the poor old Grant Girls," he remarked, sympathetically.

Christina stopped in the act of sitting down, and straightened herself quickly, as though she had been struck a blow.

"What?" She uttered the word in a fearful whisper, but the young man felt she was showing only the natural agitation she must feel, remembering Jimmie and Neil.

"Didn't you hear? Gavin's killed," he said concisely.

Christina stood and looked at him stupidly. "What did you say?" she asked in a dazed fashion.

"Gavin,—Gavin Grant," he repeated wonderingly, "he's been killed. They just got the telegram to-night, and Mr. Sinclair and Uncle Peter have gone to tell the poor old Aunts—" he stopped, struck by the look in her face. She had turned perfectly white, even to her lips, and sat down, slowly and dazedly. She picked up her knitting, looked at it a moment, foolishly, and then laid it down with a bewildered air.

Wallace got up suddenly from the sofa. "Christine!" he cried in alarm. "What's the matter? Don't—don't look like that! I didn't mean to frighten you. Oh, Christina, was Gavin?—Oh, I didn't know! What does it mean to you?" he cried in sharp dismay.

She looked at him with honest, stricken eyes. "It means everything to me, Wallace," she said simply. "Everything in the world," telling the bald truth, in this supreme moment, without an effort. And when she had said it, a great billow of darkness came rolling across the room and surged over her. She heard Wallace calling for her mother, heard Uncle Neil run in from the kitchen, and then sank away into a great silence and peace.

They tried to make her stay in bed the next day, but she insisted upon going to see the Grant Girls with her mother. The fields were too wet and soft to be crossed, so Christina drove Dolly in the old buck-board. Craig-Ellachie was all sunshine, and the windows were alight with blossoms, scarlet geraniums and great waxy begonias, pink and white and crimson, were in every sunny nook and corner, and purple hyacinths and pure white Easter lilies filled the old kitchen with fragrance. The garden, too, showed signs of beauty, for already the first crocus had pushed its brave little head through the brown earth of the flower beds.

But the Grant Girls had lost the Spring-time bloom of their youth. An untimely frost had smitten down the one flower of their hearts. They were not girls any more; three stricken old women sat in the wide bright kitchen among the flowers in a bewilderment of grief too deep for tears.

Hughie Reid and his wife were there, and Mr. Sinclair and Joanna, and several other friends from the village. And out in the summer kitchen Mrs. Johnnie Dunn had blackened and polished the stove that did not need polishing, and was now madly scrubbing the floor that did not need scrubbing in the least, the tears all the while streaming down her face. Everything that loving hands could do in the house and barn was done, and the Aunties sat about in unaccustomed idleness, like lost children who had suddenly found themselves in strange surroundings, and were even afraid to speak.

And Christina sat beside them, dumb with her grief and theirs, and not even daring to whisper to them that her heart was lying with theirs, "Somewhere in France."

It seemed a very little thing, in the face of their stupendous loss, when the news came that Gavin had died a very glorious death, that he would have been given the Victoria Cross had he lived, and that they were sending it to Auntie Elspie. He had held back a rush of the enemy, alone and single-handed, until his comrades got to a place of safety. He had stayed on in a desperate position, working his machine gun, while the world rocked beneath him and the mad heavens raged with shot and shell above him, had held on though he was wounded again and again, saying between his teeth, "Stand Fast, Craig-Ellachie!" And then a shell had come and the gallant stand was over. But he had saved the Blue Bonnets from destruction, and spared many lives in losing his own.

The Aunties held up their poor bowed heads, as Mr. Sinclair read them the splendid story. They knew Gavie

would do something great, and it was just the way he would have wished to go, Auntie Elspie said tremulously. But the light had gone out of their lives, and it was small comfort that it had blazed so gloriously in the going.

CHAPTER XV

THE GARDEN BLOOMS AGAIN

The day that Gavin's picture appeared in the Algonquin paper with an account of the gallant deed in which he had given his life, Christina received a letter in an unknown handwriting.

Mitty brought it up to her room on a sunny April afternoon, where she was sitting, trying to interest herself in some sewing for baby Hugh. She laid the letter aside while she finished her work, too indifferent even to open it, but when the last button-hole was fashioned in the dainty little muslin dress she remembered it.

She opened it slowly, noticing with some interest that it was from the Front, and then she suddenly sat up very straight and read the written pages greedily. The letter was signed, Harry Kent, and was from a comrade of Gavin's in the Blue Bonnets, a boy whom he had often mentioned in his letters to Christina.

And inside was a letter from Gavin himself sealed in a separate envelope. The first was a formal note from a shy boy.

"Dear Miss Lindsay: I hope you won't mind if I take the liberty to write to you, though I am a stranger. Gavin Grant and I were pals, and when he went up to the Front for the last time he gave me the letter I am enclosing, and he asked me to mail it to you. We knew his company was going into a hot place, and he said he did not think he would get back. So he wrote you this letter and when I heard he was killed I said I would mail it to you. Gavin was the finest fellow I ever knew. He was always singing and he taught the fellows a lot of songs. There was one he was always singing, it was called a 'Warrior Bold,' and he was singing it that morning just before the Boche came over. The fellows in our Company would rather we had all gone West than Gavin, he was worth them all put together...."

There was more about what Gavin had done in that last dread struggle. But Christina could not take the time to read it. She opened Gavin's letter reverently, with trembling hands. The blinding tears would permit her to make out only a few sentences at a time.

"I wrote you a letter last night," it said, "and I hope you will not think I am too bold to be writing you another to-night. But we are going up into a rather bad place to-night and if I do not come back, I want to send you a good-bye message. I have never been able to tell you how much you have always been to me. I could not even write it in a letter. I have always been afraid I would offend you. But I thought you would not mind that I told you if I never came back. You have always been so far above me, that I did not have the courage to try to go with you. And then somebody else came, and I knew I had no chance then. But you have always been my girl in spite of all that, ever since the day you filled my pail with your berries to save me from a thrashing. I was always singing about you when I sang that old song,

"My love is young and fair,
My love has golden hair,
And eyes so blue and heart so true
That none with her compare."

"It was partly because you were so much to me that I wanted to enlist. I felt that I would be fighting for you. And if I do not come back to-morrow I will be glad to feel that I will be helping to save you from harm. You will not miss me, but the Aunties will, and I am going to ask a great favour of you. Will you always go to see them, and comfort them? And tell them they must not grieve for me. It is so much better to come out here and die for a good cause than to live in peace and safety at home. I am so glad, and they must be glad too, for my sake. I will have your little ring——"

Christina could read no more just then. Her bright head went down on the sunny window sill, she slipped to the floor in a very passion of grief. She was realising with overwhelming remorse that a most beautiful thing had happened to her and her eyes had been too blind to see until the pageant had faded. Her True Knight—and what lady of high degree had a knight more noble?—her True Knight had ridden out to mortal combat, and she had not even waved him farewell from her window!

She left the work with Mitty the next day and went up over the hills to see the Grant Girls. She did not take her letter, it was too sacred for even their loving eyes, but she wanted to talk to them about Gavin and, if she were alone with Auntie Elspie, she would whisper to her that her heart had gone out into the storm and darkness after Gavin that night he went to the war, and that it still followed him somewhere in the shining regions where he moved.

She went slowly up over the dun fields, lying all quiet and restful, waiting for the stirring of the Spring. Away down in the beaver meadow a soft green flush told that the pussy willows were already out, a bold robin was singing the opening song of the Spring concert, and the crows cawed derisively over the memories of a vanquished Winter.

But Christina's sad heart could not respond to these little, gay greetings of Spring. She lingered in the bare slash, remembering the day of the berry-picking when Gavin had been in such deep trouble. She stood in the place where he had stood when he pulled the bind-weed, and when they had listened to the call of the opening drum beat of the war. And she went over in memory every foot of the walk in the harvest moonlight from Craig-Ellachie that night when she had been so happy with him, but had walked beside him with blinded eyes.

The garden at Craig-Ellachie had already wakened to life, the crocuses were out, rows and rows of them, and the garden hyacinths were holding up their little green spears. But there was no happy gardener working in the brown beds. Christina went slowly up the walk where the dry leafless branches of the climbing roses hung over her head. Gavin's dog came tumbling down the steps to meet her in joyous welcome.

She looked up in wonder as the kitchen door was flung suddenly open. Mrs. Johnnie Dunn flashed into the doorway and shouted something incoherent, and as suddenly disappeared, and Hughie Reid's wife came to the window and waved frantically. Christina ran forward, filled with foreboding. She darted up the steps and stopped amazed in the doorway. The kitchen was full of people, it seemed, all moving about and talking wildly. Mr. Sinclair was there and Dr. McGarry and a half dozen women, and the Aunties were running about laughing and crying, and it seemed as if every one had suddenly gone quite mad.

And then it seemed to Christina that the room was going round and she found a chair and sat down quickly, for Mrs. Johnnie Dunn's voice from far away was calling out the most amazing and unbelievable thing—shouting that Gavin was not dead! He had been found! He had been buried in a shell-hole, half-dead, and when the Blue Bonnets swept back over the enemy's trenches he had been rescued. He had been badly wounded and had lain unconscious for a long time. But he was alive and was in a hospital in France!

Christina flew over the brown hills on the way to her mother with the news, saying over and over to her numbed senses that Gavin was not dead, that he was alive. It seemed as if her heart had been so stupefied with grief that it could not yet accept joy. She ran in a kind of dream saying that she would soon wake up and find that this was not true.

But the glorious news was confirmed. There was a week of alternate wild hope and fear, and then, as wonderful as a message from the dead, came a cable from Gavin himself. He was in a hospital in France and was progressing rapidly. The next news told that he was in England, and then came a blessed letter from his nurse, saying that he was recovering slowly but surely and was promising himself that it would not be long until he would write a letter home.

Such a clamour of joy and relief as the news of Gavin brought to Orchard Glen no one would have thought possible. Every one had sorrowed deeply with the Grant Girls and now the whole countryside came out to Craig-Ellachie to rejoice with them and to hear again and again the story of Gavin's rescue. And the Grant Girls put in such a garden as the county had never seen, and grew young and bright again with joy and hope.

As for Christina she moved about in a golden dream. Life was not real at all these days, but the dream of it was

beautiful and the colour came back to her cheeks and the light to her eyes, and she went about the house with her old swift motions.

She could not believe in the reality of her joy at all until she received her first letter from Gavin. As soon as the message came that he was in England she wrote him. It was her answer to the letter that he had never intended her to see during his life. It must have been a satisfactory answer, for not all the skill of surgeon and sister combined had produced a fraction of the healing and strengthening quality that its closely written pages brought to the wounded soldier in England. And his answer made Christina's eyes brighter and her step lighter than they had been since the day Jimmy and Neil went over the top.

It was not until Gavin was so well that he was walking about that he wrote confessing the full extent of his injuries. He had lost an arm, only his left arm, he wrote, which he really didn't miss much. He made jokes about it and warned Auntie Janet that she need not be laying plans to do as she pleased, for he could manage the whole family and make them mind, even with one arm. And as he was still a little lame and would be likely to carry a heavy stick for some time he would be quite able to keep her in her place.

But he did not write so lightly on the matter to Christina. He had only one arm, and was a poor hobbling creature, he confessed, and how could he ask her to share life with him? He was only half a man, and a poor weak half at that.

But Christina wrote him such a letter as forever put such notions out of Gavin's head. It was a letter that made him feel not like half a man but as though he had the strength of ten. For what was the loss of an arm when one had such a warm heart beating for him, and awaiting his coming?

Christina had not seen Wallace Sutherland since the day he had disappeared from her view in the black mist that had rolled up over her with the news that Gavin was killed. Her mind had been too much racked to think of him since, but now that it was at rest she remembered him with a feeling of shame. So she sat down and wrote him a letter, telling him humbly and frankly all the truth, how Gavin had held her heart long before she realised it. She begged him to forgive her if she had done him any injury and ended up by the tactful hint that as their association had been a pleasant friendship, in which the kindnesses had been so many and so generous on his side, she hoped he would think of her with pleasure, and that they would always continue to be friends.

But Wallace was thinking of Christina with feelings entirely the reverse of pleasant. And his mother was thinking very bitter thoughts about her indeed. For just when Mrs. Sutherland had become reconciled to her son's changed prospects, and when Uncle William was doing handsomely by the boy, when there was every prospect that Wallace would soon be married and be safe from the recruiting officers, with a farm and a wife and a widowed mother between him and military service, when everything had turned out better than she had dared to hope, suddenly the whole fabric of her plans came crashing about her ears. And all owing to the outrageous conduct of a girl who had thrown her son aside for a farm boy, merely for the glamour of a medal won on the battlefield!

It was really very hard on poor Mrs. Sutherland, and Christina was overcome with shame when she thought of her. For Wallace sold the Ford place to Mrs. Johnnie Dunn for a shamefully low figure and went off to the States where quite likely some wicked sleuth of a recruiting officer would find him and send him to the war after all.

Christina was very humble and very much ashamed of herself, but it was hard to worry over Wallace when such wonderful things were happening in one's own life. For before the apple blossoms came to decorate the orchard for her birthday, Sandy was home to help celebrate. Even the news that he was wounded came as a relief from the strain of waiting. At least he was off the battlefield. And then it proved that the wound was not serious; but he was lame and unfit for more active service and was coming home to finish his course at college if that were at all possible.

And Uncle Neil took out his fiddle when the letter heralding Sandy's return was received, and played softly some of his old favourite airs; tunes Christina had not heard since the boys went away to the war. And they brought the tender tears to her eyes, remembering the happy old days when they were all at home and Grandpa sang the Hindmost Hymn at eventide. Sandy's presence brought new life to the Lindsay home. John and Uncle Neil sat up half the nights listening to his tales of the world of glory and horror in which he had been living. And Christina and her mother could scarcely let him out of their sight. He was all that had been spared them from the War Monster's greed.

In spite of all the dread sights he had witnessed he was the same gay old Sandy, and the home took on some of its old-time life and gaiety. He and Christina soon fell back into their habit of comradeship. They had many confidences to exchange, and Christina had to tell all the story of Gavin and what his going had meant to her. Sandy was full of joy at the telling. Gavin had always been a True Knight in his eyes and then he had all the returned soldier's disdain of the slacker. Christina could not but shudder at what her life might have been had ambition ruled, instead of her heart and Wallace and Sandy were meeting here in the old home.

They had many long talks on the pump platform under the blossoming orchard boughs, and they smiled often over their great plans that had all turned out so differently from what they had expected.

"Are you still bound to get out of Orchard Glen?" asked Sandy slyly, and Christina had to confess that she was not. She could not quite explain to Sandy that all her restless ambition had been but the desire for something great and heroic such as her simple life did not seem to contain. But the great and heroic had come right to her door, unseen, it is true, but now recognised, and her soul was perfectly content in its radiance. Life could never be narrow and common-place any more. She had attained all her ambition through following the road her heart indicated,—the shining pathway of loving self-sacrifice that leads to the stars.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HILLS ABOVE ORCHARD GLEN

As soon as the word reached Craig-Ellachie that Gavin was to be sent home to Canada, Orchard Glen began to bustle about for a grand celebration when he arrived.

Tremendous K. got the biggest choir together that the village had ever seen; a harmonious jumble of Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists. And the children of the three Sunday Schools united in a grand chorus, and Minnie Brown and Martha Henderson worked like slaves teaching them songs and patriotic exercises, all denominations so mixed up nobody could tell which was which.

Mr. Sinclair was chairman of the committee to plan the celebration with Mr. Wylie and the Baptist minister as his assistants. And nobody raised the slightest objection when, at the very first meeting, Marmaduke proposed that they invite Piper Lauchie McDonald to come down from Glenoro and play Gavin home from the station.

Mr. Wylie nodded, and said "A good idea," and old Tory Brown himself spoke up and said, "Yes, yes, let's have the buddy. I don't like his noise, myself, but Gavin will be pleased. He aye liked the pipes."

And Piper Lauchie was vastly pleased when he received the invitation and graciously declared that he would set his vow aside, not for the sake of Orchard Glen, but out of his reverence for the Victoria Cross, and permit the misguided folk to listen to his music once more.

Every one was pleased furthermore because the public reception was to be held in the Temperance Hall instead of the Presbyterian Church, for it was felt that for this occasion Gavin belonged to the whole village, no Church should claim them. And this arrangement suited the good folk who were alarmed at the possibility of hearing the piper in church, for as old Willie Henderson said, "Even though the lad did a great deed, that was no reason why the people of the village should pollute the House o' God."

So the Hero was to be received in the Temperance Hall where Gavin had sung his songs of heroic deeds, none so great as that he had done himself. Then after the reception, with speeches and singing, all were to gather in the basement of the Methodist Church for a great supper. The Red Cross work was to be cleared away for the occasion, and tables were to be set that would hold all the township of Oro. And if the weather was fine the supper was to be taken out to the church lawn and everybody was to have a real good old-fashioned picnic.

Young Mrs. Martin, who had once taught school, and knew how things should be done, suggested that they arrange the supper in a more up to date style. It could be held in the Hall also, and everybody could sit down to the tables first and have the speeches after, as was the proper way. But The Woman, who was running the affair, would not listen to her.

"When you want to eat, why eat and be done with it, says I," she commanded. "But this mixing up of a concert and speeches with the food and dirty dishes on a table, I just can't abide. And the idea is nothing but some foolishness of them town trollops who don't know how to do things right anyways."

So, when everything was arranged so perfectly, and the two choirs could sing "O Canada" and "Keep the Home Fires Burning" without a flaw, and sufficient sandwiches and cakes and pies had been promised to feed all the Blue Bonnets had they been coming home, it was something of a shock to everybody's nerves when the astounding intelligence was received that the people of Algonquin were actually claiming Gavin as their own, and were arranging a reception for him at Algonquin on the very same day!

Fortunately Mrs. Johnnie Dunn discovered in time what Algonquin was up to. The Woman was now the President of the Red Cross Society in name, as well as in reality, as poor Mrs. Sutherland had withdrawn from all social life since her bitter disappointment over Wallace. And while she was attending a Red Cross meeting in Algonquin, Mrs. Johnnie made her amazing discovery. She called her forces together immediately upon her return home and told them all the deadly plot of the towns-people in a red hot speech that was talked about for years afterwards.

It appeared that the Algonquin people, with their unflinching habit of gobbling up everything that came near them, had calmly appropriated the Victoria Cross hero as their own, just because the company of the Blue Bonnets to which he belonged had drilled for a few months in their town! And they had published all over the countryside that he was an Algonquin boy. He was to be met at the station,—just as if he had nobody belonging to him,—by the Mayor, and the Council, and a member of Parliament, and what not. And there was to be a little girl all dressed up fit to kill, who would hand him a bunch of flowers! To Gavin Grant, who had all the Craig-Ellachie garden waiting for him! And then he was to be taken up to the Town Hall and set down to a banquet, with long speeches by all the preachers in the town, right in the middle of the eating; one of those messed-up affairs where you sat round amongst the dirty dishes and had speeches and singing all mixed up with your meat and potatoes.

Yes, it was true,—every word of it! It was the Algonquin President herself who told her,—that forward woman who was always teaching them how to sew a band on a shirt. And it was all the talk at the Red Cross meeting in town about the wonderful reception that was to be given to their returned soldier.

"Who's the reception for?" says I, "for I hadn't heard of any one in Algonquin that had done anything but dodge the recruiting officer?"

"Why one of our boys won the V. C. at the front," says she, "didn't you hear about it?"

"The V. C.!" says I, gettin' suspicious, "it's the first time I ever heard that any soldier from this town got anything but C. B." says I.

"Oh, yes," says she, as sweet as honey, "why, didn't you see in the papers about Gavin Grant getting the V. C.? He's one of our Algonquin boys. He enlisted here in The Blue Bonnets!"

And then another woman speaks up and says she, "'Why Mrs. Dunn,' says she, 'it's a wonder you don't know Gavin Grant. I think he comes from somewhere near Orchard Glen,' says she!"

"'Well' says I, 'it is a wonder; that's a fact! I don't seem to know as much about him as I thought I did. He's lived almost on the next farm to me since he was the size of a grasshopper,' says I, 'but this is the first time I ever heard that he belonged to Algonquin!' says I."

"Well, I tell you, that blew down their clothes-line in a hurry; especially when I told them that he was to be received at his own home on the very day they were planning their spree."

"They got into a terrible sweat, and one of the women ran and telephoned the Mayor's office, and the Mayor came runnin' over as if the town had caught fire. He was in a great sputter I tell you, when I let him know that he'd put his horse into the wrong stall. You'd think it had turned out that Gavin was a German spy."

"'Why, Mrs. Dunn,' says he, 'we've got all our arrangements made,' says he, 'and Mr. Leigh, the member, is spoken for,' says he, 'and, you'll just have to put yours on for the next afternoon,' says he, 'we really can't change now!'"

"'Well,' says I, 'I wouldn't have you stop Corny Leigh from makin' a speech, for all the world,' says I, 'I know how hard it would be on him,' says I, 'but I don't see how you'll manage,' says I, 'seein' that Gavin Grant, V. C., is going' to get off at Silver Creek Crossing, on the other side of Orchard Glen!' says I."

This was an inspiration on The Woman's part, and her audience burst into clapping. Silver Creek was a little station away back in the woods, and Orchard Glen lay midway between it and Algonquin. It was merely a flag station set away in the swamp, and not a fitting place to meet a hero home from the war, but every one agreed that in this emergency it proved a real refuge from the greed of Algonquin. It was a grand notion of The Woman's, and all Orchard Glen fairly held its sides laughing at the enemy's discomfiture.

So there was nothing for the vanquished but a retreat. They accomplished it hastily, and dug themselves in, there to await a later opportunity when Gavin would be received in proper style after Orchard Glen had got over blowing its trumpets.

But Orchard Glen had to learn that they could not keep Gavin quite to themselves. A reporter from one of the

Algonquin weekly papers came out to the village; and later a couple of representatives of Toronto papers. They all had dinner at Craig-Ellachie and they took pictures of the old house, and of the three Aunties in the garden, and another of Auntie Elspie spinning in the door way. And they carried off a photograph of Gavin in his Highland bonnet and kilt, and it was all published in a great page of the Saturday issue, the pictures of the beautiful old home, and the thrilling tale of Gavin's glorious deed, with his picture in the centre of it all, and underneath his battle-cry, "Stand Fast, Craig-Ellachie!"

And the Aunties were so proud and happy, that they could neither eat nor sleep, but just wandered about the house and garden in a happy daze.

And through all the interviews, not one of the clever, keen-scented reporters, discovered that the hero had been just a poor waif from an Orphan Asylum that Auntie Elspie had plucked as a brand from the furnace of Skinflint Jenkins's cruelty.

The Grant Girls were eager to guard the secret, but that required some finesse of which they were entirely incapable. But Mrs. Johnnie Dunn was equal to any occasion, and she managed to be at Craig-Ellachie during the interviews. She kept close to the reporters, answering all their questions, and forestalling any that might be embarrassing. Without making any direct statements that might hurt the tender consciences of the Aunties, she led the newspaper men gently along a train of thought that ended in the firm impression that Gavin was the only child of their brother, with all his virtues and many more of his own. It was a subtle suggestion of The Woman's that made the youngest reporter notice a strong resemblance between Gavin's photograph and Aunt Janet. And indeed The Woman made such a fine story for the visitors, encouraging them along any and every bypath that their imagination might suggest, that not even Auntie Elspie could recognise her quiet, unassuming, reticent boy in the prancing warrior that Mrs. Johnnie Dunn permitted the representatives of the press to create.

The discovery of the perfidy of Algonquin in trying to steal Gavin made some re-arrangement for his reception necessary. As he was to be met at the quiet little nook in the swamp, instead of the noisy station at Algonquin, young Mrs. Martin made her second suggestion. It was that they have their programme and addresses of welcome right there in the open, beside the Silver Creek, and the more informal part, the supper, and some of the performances by the children, on their return.

This new arrangement met with every one's approval; even The Woman felt it would be a good idea to welcome Gavin properly right at the station, as soon as he stepped off. For the papers had all announced that Orchard Glen was preparing a grand home-coming for their hero, and who knew but there might be half-a-dozen reporters on the train to take notes of how they were doing it?

At last the word for which every one was waiting came. Gavin had reached Toronto; the hospital authorities were releasing him for a time, and the day for his home-coming was set! Sandy Lindsay was in Toronto at the time, and he wrote to Christina that he would be up with Gavin. For the hero of the Victoria Cross dreaded this public reception more than German gas, and insisted upon having some support when he was compelled to march into it.

So Sandy took matters in his own hands and telegraphed Mr. Sinclair that Gavin would arrive at Silver Creek on the two-thirty train, on a Friday afternoon, and Orchard Glen sat up half the night before getting ready.

Christina had never taken such a long time dressing in her life as she did that afternoon. At first she was seized with a sudden panic of shyness, and told herself she would not go. She knew the girls gossiped about her sudden change of heart, and her relation to Gavin was no secret. For the Aunties had been too happy to keep from telling, and Mrs. Sutherland had not been guiltless of making Christina's faithlessness public.

The girls were rather inclined to feel sorry for Christina. It did not seem possible that any girl would choose Gavin Grant, even with a Victoria Cross, in preference to Wallace Sutherland with the Ford place, and the only true explanation of the affair was that Wallace had changed. On the other hand, Bell Brown declared that Christina Lindsay was not like other girls and no one could tell what she would do.

So Christina well knew that they were talking about her, and at first she declared she would stay home with her mother and Uncle Neil. But the Aunties made it clear that they expected her to go, and she could not bear that they be disappointed on this the greatest day of their lives. And then Gavin would be disappointed too, and that would be

still worse, and she had to confess to her honest heart that Christina would be more disappointed than any one, for she was impatient to see her hero, and quite as eager to go as the Aunties themselves.

So she put away all her fears, and spent a most unreasonable length of time getting herself ready. She wound her shining braids around her head and put on her best white dress and her white hat, and reverently fastened the purple band on her arm, for the dear ones who would never come home, but who were somewhere near in the free outer ring of being just beyond the painful confines of her life. And when she was all ready, with her golden hair and her eyes so blue, as Gavin had so often sung, she looked very young and fair, and far more beautiful than any Lindsay girl had ever yet looked.

The weather was perfect, such a glorious day of blank blue skies, with the smooth shaven fields lying golden-brown in the sunshine. Here and there a field showed sheaves of wheat standing in khaki-coloured groups like soldiers on guard. Nobody cared that the Air Service of the clouds might bomb them with silver bullets before night, for how could any one stay home and haul in his crop when one of their own boys was coming home bearing the Victoria Cross?

The crowd gathered at the corner, where the order of the procession was to be arranged. Piper Lauchie was there early this time and was marching up and down the store veranda, so that nobody could come in or out, and playing gloriously. Mrs. Johnnie Dunn brought her new car to carry the three Aunties, with a space reserved for Gavin. Mr. Holmes had recently bought a Ford and he came next with the piper, a piece of real Christian sacrifice on the store-keeper's part. He was followed by the ministers, all crowded amicably into one single buggy, where there was no room for denominational differences. Next came the choir, spreading over three big democrats, and following them, the Hendersons' hay wagon with the children piled into it three deep. Ordinary individuals came next without any order of precedence, and as far down the line as possible, Christina sat beside John in their single buggy.

The procession made a brave showing, with the long line of vehicles stretching from the corner away up the hill and down the other side, every one decorated with flags and streamers, and Piper Lauchie standing up in the Holmes' car playing loud enough to be heard in Algonquin.

But not all the rest of the procession together could compare in display with Mrs. Johnnie Dunn's car where the three Aunties sat arrayed as no even the Grant Girls had ever appeared in public. Auntie Elspie wore a sea-green brocaded satin, trimmed with silk fringe; Auntie Flora was in a dazzling silk of an ancient "changeable" variety, that was now purple and now gold, and a wonderful beaded cape of black velvet. And Auntie Janet was in her ruby velvet with a rose silk fringed parasol that turned to flame when the sun struck it. And beside they had the car filled with flowers and each Auntie carried a little posie of rosemary and pinks, Gavin's favourites of all the garden.

"We wanted him to smell the rosemary as soon as he got off the train," explained Auntie Flora, "and then he would feel he was at home."

The procession were a bright and beautiful sight, indeed, and the Grant Girls' faces, so shining and young and eager, were the brightest thing in all the gay throng that started out to bring Gavin home.

Mrs. Johnnie Dunn had them all put into their proper places at last and away they went skimming down the sunny River Road, under the towering elms that fringed the highway, with the golden harvest-fields, where the khaki-coloured sheaves stood up like soldiers on guard, smiling on either hand, and the winding reaches of the Silver Creek peeping out from the green, here and there, with a flash like an unsheathed sword.

The Woman had arranged the programme to be given at the Crossing, so that there was no possibility of anything going wrong. The choirs were to line up, right in front of the place where the train would stop, with the Piper behind them, ready to play at the first sight of the train coming out of the swamp. Indeed the Piper was The Woman's one anxiety. She was afraid he could not be induced to stop in time for the children to come in with their chorus, and she had cautioned Marmaduke to give his old shawl a good jerk and choke him off before it was too late.

It had been arranged, very prettily, that the Piper was to play until the train came to a stop, then he was to stop too, and the children were to burst into "O Canada," and were to sing it with all their might, standing up in the

wagon and waving their flags. While this was going on Gavin would be getting off the train and was to be welcomed by the ministers and Dr. McGarry and Mr. Holmes, the special committee appointed for the purpose. Then the committee was to lead him to the car where the Grant Girls were sitting, and while he was meeting them, Marmaduke was to give the signal, and all were to burst into three cheers, and the boys had promised they would be such cheers as had never before wakened up the echoes of the swamp.

When Gavin was properly seated, both the choirs, and indeed everybody, were to join in singing his regimental song, "All the Blue Bonnets are over the Border."

And when that was finished Mr. Sinclair was to read the address, and Mr. Wylie and the Baptist minister were to say a few words, and if Auntie Elspie could make him, Gavin was then to step out upon the platform and give his reply. And Auntie Elspie had promised to do her best, but would give no assurance of success.

When this was over, there was to be another patriotic song by the choirs, then the Piper could have a chance again, and every one was to climb back into their rigs, and they would all go back home and have such a supper as nobody would believe until they saw it!

It was really to be a fine welcome home, and Orchard Glen could not help feeling some regret, that Algonquin's mean habit of hero-snatching should have prevented the whole town witnessing the splendid scene.

When they all drew up with much noise and dust at Silver Creek Crossing, the crowd made a great stir in the lonely place, and the sound of their gay voices echoed far away into the swamp as they arranged themselves around the tiny platform, and along the green bank of the stream.

Willie Meek, the one inhabitant of the lonely place, came out of his tiny habitation with a tattered cloth on a stick and stood ready to flag the train. And then when every one was ready and waiting, of course the Martin children were constrained to stir up trouble! As soon as the children's choir was put into its proper place, these two "limbs," as Mrs. Johnnie Dunn called them, slipped away from the confines of the hay wagon, and no one missed them till a terrible scream from the crossing bridge announced that one of them had fallen into the creek.

Mrs. Martin echoed the scream and called out as she always did in time of disaster, "Oh, Alfred!" And Alfred left his horses and ran to the rescue. Willie Meek dropped his flag and Piper Lauchie dropped his pipes, and joined the crowd that was pulling the eldest Martin out of the soft mud and water of the creek. And at the same moment the shriek of the train just on the other side of the bend came thrilling through the woods. Tremendous K. saw that there was nobody to flag the train and he rushed gallantly onto the track, waving his hands and shouting on the monster to stop.

But they might have known that the train would stop if there had been no one there at all. For all the way from Toronto hadn't two returned soldiers been tormenting the conductor with warnings to stop at Silver Creek Crossing, if he valued his life. And at every station he would come into then and say hopefully, "Only six more stops, boys," or "Just five more, and we're there," and finally it had been "Silver Creek comes next," and, with fine sarcasm, "Did you say you wanted to get off there?"

And so, when the train swept round the bend out of the swamp, with a shriek and a roar, and came thundering down upon the Crossing, there was no need for Tremendous K., who, nevertheless, stood his ground in the middle of the track, waving his arms to be quite sure there was no danger of its tearing through, and carrying Gavin on to Algonquin.

The roaring monster stopped with a grumbling of brakes and an impatient hissing of steam, with Gavin's car right in front of the waiting crowd. All eyes were turned upon the two khaki-clad figures. The young officer was in the background, the kilted figure was on the step. Gavin was leaning far out, his eager eyes sweeping the crowd. He looked very tall and very, very thin, with a red spot burning on either sunken cheek, but his eyes were bright and he stood up very straight and looked a gallant figure for all he held a heavy stick in his one hand, and his poor empty sleeve was tucked into his pocket.

And at the sight of him Auntie Elspie gave a cry, and before any of the committee could get near him, Gavin had fairly fallen off the car platform, and at the same moment the three Aunties had tumbled from the car where they

were supposed to sit decorously, and the four were in each other's arms, and the Grant Girls were crying over their battered hero, as they had not cried even when they heard he was lying dead on the battlefield of France. And Gavin, half-laughing, half-crying, himself, was trying to gather the three of them into his one poor arm which was needed so badly for his supporting stick!

And all Orchard Glen stood and looked on in dead silence, with a lump in every throat and a mist in every eye, and everybody forgot entirely that there was such a thing as a programme to be followed.

Finally, Mr. Sinclair and Dr. McGarry led the Aunties back to the car and as Gavin climbed in he cried out, "Oh, Auntie Flora, I'm really home. I smell the garden." And the Aunties took to crying harder than ever.

Then all the mothers, who were weeping in sympathy, came and hugged and kissed him, and shed tears over him, and all the rest left their appointed places and crowded round the hero to get in a word of welcome, and speakers and choir and everybody got all mixed up in hopeless confusion.

Nobody noticed that the train had pulled out again, and that every one on board (and who knew but half of them might be newspaper reporters?) had seen the Orchard Glen had done nothing but stand and stare in perfect silence when one of their boys came home bearing the Victoria Cross, and what would the people of Algonquin say when they heard?

But nobody thought of all this just yet, not even The Woman, for she too was crying over Gavin's empty sleeve, and thinking of the one who would never come back. Every one was coming up to shake his hand now and Gavin's eyes were wandering searchingly over the crowd, even when Marmaduke and Tremendous K. and the minister were making him welcome.

And suddenly the restless, hungry look was replaced by a flash of rapture, for Christina, all flushed and trembling, and looking more beautiful than any one would have dreamed she could look, came forward, hanging tightly to Sandy's arm. She forgot all about the crowd for just a moment, when she took his one hand in both hers, and whispered, "Oh, Gavin!" And he looked at her with his eyes shining and said with equal incoherence, "Oh, Christine!"

They stood for a moment looking into each other's eyes, the world blotted out, and remembered the night they parted. And they did not say what they had expected to say at all. For Gavin whispered, looking at her dress, "You are wearing my pin." And she looked down for her ring, and remembered that the hand that had worn it was gone! And she could only look at him with the tears welling up in her eyes, and then she was pushed on to make room for Tilly who was crying her pretty eyes out for no reason at all. It was not much of an interview, but it was a very great deal to the lovers, and the red spot that had faded from Gavin's cheeks at the first sight of Christina, flamed up again, and he rallied Tilly gaily and asked her was she sorry that he had come home?

And when the mothers had all kissed him and bewailed him and rejoiced over him again, and they had all climbed into their cars and buggies, and Piper Lauchie had tuned up for a homeward march, The Woman suddenly remembered that there had been no singing and no addresses and no programme and nothing but dead silence and tears to welcome the hero of the Victoria Cross on his return from the war!

It was perfectly outrageous, and not to be tolerated for a moment. She sprang from her car, leaving Gavin and his Aunts to themselves, and shouted to Tremendous K. and Mr. Sinclair and Mr. Holmes to come right back and do it all over again!

But nobody paid the slightest attention. The procession was already moving down the road without the slightest regard to order. The strain had been removed, and everybody seemed seized with a joyous madness. Even Mr. Sinclair waved his hat and laughed at her as his buggy swung past, leaving the hero in the rear.

Then Marmaduke forsook his companions and without asking permission scrambled into her car with Gavin, and sat on the silk fringe of Auntie Elspie's dress, and shouted and waved encouragement to every one that passed while The Woman screamed expostulations.

"Never mind," he roared, to each one, "we didn't forget to flag the train!" and from each buggy and car the long

delayed cheers burst forth.

In spite of all her efforts the procession dashed away. Though it wasn't a real procession at all, but a joyous scramble, with every one getting in every one else's way. The children would not go back into their hay-wagon, but scrambled all over into the best cars, and the girls in the choir got mixed up with the boys in single buggies, and a crowd of foolish young fellows got into Mr. Holmes' car with the Piper, and actually persuaded that staid and proper pillar of the Baptist Church to race with Dr. McGarry. And the Piper was so shaken up he couldn't play at all. And young Mr. Martin's horse took fright at the noise and confusion, and nearly ran away, and just escaped throwing all the children into the ditch. And so they all scampered gaily, helter-skelter, back to the village, the hero far in the rear, hidden in clouds of dust, with his friends gambolling ahead. And indeed Gavin's homecoming was no more like a triumphal procession than any of the foot-ball games in which he used to take part in the river pasture.

But whatever faults The Woman or Tremendous K. might have found with his reception, it was perfect in Gavin's eyes and the eyes of the three Aunties. For all its mistakes were but the result of the overwhelming sympathy and joy of his friends, and relief that the Aunties had not, after all, lost the light of their eyes. And indeed if no one had met him but had left him to find his way to Craig-Ellachie alone, and afterwards over the hills to Christina, Gavin would have been perfectly happy. For he was still much the same shy boy who had gone away, with no thought of glory or public notice, but only a simple desire to do his duty. He was not a boy any more, for he had been through scenes that make men old, and the remembrance of them lingered in his deep eyes, and showed in a new staidness of manner. But he was the same simple-hearted Gavin, reticent and unassuming and in his heart he almost could wish, except for the joy it gave his Aunties, that he had never heard of the Victoria Cross. He had only done his duty, he repeated over and over, and all the men at the Front were doing that.

And so he lay back among the cushions, surrounded by flowers, his one hand in Auntie Elspie's, and looked with shining eyes, not at the beautiful familiar bits of landscape which were passing, and to which the Aunties were calling his attention, but at the gleam of a golden-brown head that was occasionally visible from John Lindsay's buggy. Marmaduke pointed out this and that historical landmark; the hill where they used to go coasting in winter; the old burnt stump up which Gavin had climbed to get the hawk's nest one day at recess; the hole below the mill where the teacher forbade them to swim and into which they all plunged at noon quite regularly, and Gavin smiled and nodded, and saw nothing but the gleam of gold ahead.

Whatever had been wrong with the reception and the procession, no fault could be found with the supper. It had been set outdoors on the church lawn, and the tables were so laden with chicken and ham and jellies and salads and cake and pie, that instinctively the men took off their coats before sitting down to the attack. And after everything was eaten nobody seemed able either to hear or make a speech. And there was no music and no programme, for the juvenile choir, after gorging itself in a truly dangerous fashion, went out into the dust of the village street, and played tag and hide-and-seek, and not even the Pied Piper, himself, could have collected them again. And the other choir was either waiting on the tables, or eating so much that they couldn't sing either.

The address was read, but there was so much noise and joyous running to and fro that not even Gavin heard it. And his speech was as short as a speech could possibly be, just a word of thanks for himself and his Aunts and his oft reiterated statement, he had only done his duty, and all the fellows at the Front, and many at home were doing that.

But everybody had a grand time, nevertheless, such a time of laughing and talking and eating together as had not been experienced in Orchard Glen since the fell day the Piper came to rend the village asunder,—the Piper, who was at this very moment cementing it again with "Tullochgorum," which he was blowing uproariously as he marched up and down in front of the Methodist Church!

When Christina reached home she found there was little work to be done. Uncle Neil and Mitty had come home early and had already finished the milking. Sandy was tired and had stretched himself in the hammock, to have a talk with his mother. Contrary to her custom Christina did not lay aside her white dress for a plainer garb. She spent a long time rearranging the shining crown of her braids, and when the shadows of the poplars began to stretch across the garden, she slipped away through the barn-yard and up the back lane, up to the sun-lit hill top, where Gavin had promised to meet her.

The peace of evening was falling with the dew. From far down in the village came the sound of children's

voices, beyond the orchards a binder was singing its way through the golden fields. Up on the hill top there was a sense of remoteness from the world, all sound and movement seemed far away. Only the vesper sparrows were here, filling the amber twilight with their soft murmurs, and away in the dim green aisles of the Slash a phoebe was calling sweetly. Christina came up into the light of the setting sun, and when Gavin's eyes first spied her, its rays were lighting up her white gown and touching her uncovered head to pure gold. He took off his Scotch bonnet at the sight of her.

There was an old heavy gate opening from his fields, and Christina, who was lingering that Gavin might come to her, saw that he was trying vainly to open it with his one hand, his stick held under what remained of his poor left arm. She forgot all her shyness and her pride at the sight, forgot everything but that Gavin needed her, and ran swiftly to him, down the green woodland pathway.

She took the heavy gate in her strong, brown hands and pushed it back.

"Oh, Gavin," she cried radiantly, "I will have to be your other hand, won't I?"

Even Gavin's unready tongue could not miss this great opportunity, "Yes, you will be everything,—my whole life, Christine," he murmured.

The heavy gate between them was open at last. It had been a long, hard climb, up their separate hills of suffering and self-sacrifice, but they had come up steadily and bravely. And now they met, and stood hand in hand, on the rosy hill-top.

THE END

[The end of In Orchard Glen by MacGregor, Mary Esther Miller]