Yonder Shining Light

Marian Keith

Title: Yonder Shining Light
Date of first publication: 1948
Author: Marian Keith [M.E.M. MacGregor] (1876-1961)
Date first posted: Nov. 1, 2018
Date last updated: Nov. 1, 2018
Faded Page eBook #20181101

This ebook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at http://www.pgdpcanada.net

Yonder
Shining Light

by

Marian Keith

Publishers • McClelland & Stewart Limited • Toronto

Printed and bound in Canada
T. H. Best Printing Co., Limited, Toronto

To the memory of
D. C. M.
whose life was
a shining light to all
who knew him

Contents

Yonder Shining Light

1

May Time

Old Alf Laird gave the handle of the cream separator a last whirl, and straightened up. He put his hand to his aching back and uttered a groan. Or, rather, he started out on what was intended to be a groan, but right at its beginning his wife's portly figure, in their son's old sweater and cap, suddenly filled up the doorway of the milk house. The groan, so well begun, adroitly eased off into what old Alf hoped would sound like the mere clearing of his throat. He coughed elaborately.

"Oh, yes, yes, Mother," he said with forced cheerfulness, "we're jist about through. Here's your cream."

But in nearly fifty years of married life he had never yet been able to deceive Janet.

"I heard you! Groanin' over that back of yours again! You'll soon be an old cripple all right. Nettie jist 'phoned again. Collins came back to see her about the house. He's goin' to sell it right away. And the first thing we know we'll miss it."

Mrs. Alf was a fluent talker, and when on her favourite topic—her plan to move to town and leave the farm to their son—she was like the waters of the Georgian Bay beating the rocks on a windy night. Her husband was a little like the shore, with stubborn rocks in his nature; but he was given to yielding for the sake of peace. And there was no doubt that he had come to the age when a man should retire. Yet he could not imagine living where one could not have the land under one's feet, to subdue and enrich, animals to care for, and crops to raise.

As for his rheumatism, hadn't Doctor Mack Wallace always said "Don't sit

around and nurse your pains; get up and shake them off!" And all Lairdale knew there was no better doctor than Dr. Mack. Only he was away in uniform now, at a military camp. Indeed there seemed no help for Old Alf anywhere, with Janet and the girls all against him.

Even his only son, Alfred, who had always been on his side, had recently been turned into a reason for retiring. For Alfred was getting on into his forties and his mother had been afraid he was settling down into bachelorhood. But now she was hinting, with mysterious nods and winks, that she thought Alfred had a girl in his eye at last. Somebody pretty high and mighty, too! But she was sure he would never settle down unless they moved and left him alone.

Janet went off with her basket to the hen-house, and Old Alf walked on towards the stable. A great army plane roared overhead, coming up from the training camp to the south. There was another strong reason for retiring: the war. Every week the boys were enlisting from the farms. Folks were beginning to look down on any unmarried man not in uniform. If Alfred were married now, his mother pointed out, and here alone on this big farm, no one could raise an eyebrow at him.

He looked in at the stable door where the horses and the row of cows were munching their evening meal. He smoothed Cherry's flanks—Cherry, who would not let anyone but himself milk her. Bud Armstrong came through with a huge forkful of hay. Bud was their good steady hired man, who lived in a small house on the edge of the farm: another reason for retiring, Janet often pointed out. Very few farmers had a hired man these days.

He felt a pain greater than the arthritis racking him; the thought of giving up. He and his old friend the minister had often discussed retiring, always agreeing heartily on one point: that it should be postponed as long as possible.

Janet came out of the hen-house with her basket full of warm brown eggs. She was going to see if Alice, the niece who helped in the house, had supper ready. He was about to join her, for it was near supper time and he was hungry; but she was still at the red brick house in town, with its bathroom, and its oil-burning furnace that never needed to be looked at, and its gas stove in the kitchen, and sidewalks right past the door. Old Alf suddenly remembered that he had forgotten to look at the lambs in the paddock behind the barn. He wouldn't be a minute, he said, as he hobbled away. He walked slowly after he got beyond the shelter of the barn. Alfred had not come home yet, and there was no hurry. He wondered what could be keeping him.

Alfred had never worried his parents by staying in town late or neglecting his work, even in his youth. He had always been a model son and was now a

model farmer. But he surely ought to get married. It had always been a mystery to his father why he never had. He was smart and good looking, and owned the best farm in the township; and here he was, past forty, and showing no sign of caring for any girl. Or had Janet been right, and he was thinking of someone? It would be hard to hide anything from Janet. Well, whoever she was, she would certainly jump at the chance of getting Alf, his father felt sure.

He climbed the slope behind the barn and looked down at his house standing in its lawn and garden. It was a huge house, built when the girls were growing up, in a day of florid ornamentation. It was dotted with little balconies and porches and bay windows, and there were rooms enough in it, he felt, to house the whole family, including his grandchildren. Why could not he and Janet take half or a quarter of the home and live there in peace, and let Alfred have the rest? He wondered if Alfred was seeing a girl in town this afternoon. He hoped and prayed that Alf would not bring an ignorant town girl out here, who would be scared at the sight of a cow.

Janet would like a town girl, he supposed. Janet had always been ambitious for the family. She had sent them all off to high school, and Alfred had had an extra year in Guelph Agricultural College. Not that it did him any good; but Janet liked the sound of it. And the three girls had married well. Nettie's husband had a fine grocery store in Carlisle. Yes, Janet had done well by the children. It seemed rather like defying Providence to go against Janet.

It was a warm sunny spring day and he lingered, watching the lambs and their mothers milling about the little pasture. The barn was on rising ground and he could look down at his acres smiling in the May sunshine; the fall wheat a vivid green, the ploughed fields warm and brown, the cherry orchard a white mass of bloom. He could hear the rap-rap of a tractor and see his neighbour going slowly across the field. Seeding was well under way in the sheltered valley. Alfred and Bud had finished; Alfred was always ahead of the neighbours. It was a bad time to leave the farm. Fall, now, would be better. But he remembered ruefully that he had flatly refused to leave last fall, saying that in the spring he would think about it.

Buddy Armstrong went rattling down the lane in his little car, his day's work done. A huge motor lorry filled with soldiers, shouting and singing, went thundering past. The sight of them stirred something warm and adventurous in the old man's heart. The Lairds had Highland blood in their veins. An ancestor had fought at Waterloo, and another had marched under Sir Colin Campbell to the relief of Lucknow. He was thankful Alfred did not want to go . . . and yet . . . .

A shining car was turning in at the gate. Alfred was home. The old man

hastened towards the house. He noticed with some amusement that Alf was dressed in his very best suit and hat, just to go to town. Well, if he had been off on a sparking trip, Janet would soon find out all about it.

But even Janet was not quite acute enough to follow the workings of her cautious son's mind. Alfred had indeed dressed in his very best and had gone to town. But the trip there was a clever feint. He had really been meeting the city bus that passed a mile away up on the Lake Shore Road. And he had done it in a way that would not arouse the suspicions of even his watchful mother.

The passenger bus that thundered haughtily along the paved highway from the town of Carlisle to points east took no notice of a farming community as obscure as Lairdale, tucked away down there between the Blue Ridge and the bay. Passengers journeying thither were dropped off at a corner on the main highway, a mile up from the shore, and found their way along the flower-bordered side road down into the valley of Lairdale. So Ellen Carruthers, the minister's daughter, coming home from the city for a week-end, stepped off at this corner into the bright May grass and dandelions. She drew in a long breath of the perfumed air, waved her hand to her good friend the conductor, seized her small suitcase, and set off happily down the flowery way. It was so good to be home again; and this was a surprise visit to her father, so there was no one to meet her. But the church and manse were not much more than a mile away, and the walk along the soft, grass-fringed road was grateful to feet weary with city pavement.

At the first rise in the road the air grew fresher and the great stretch of the Georgian Bay smiled up at her a deeper blue than the cloudless dome above. All the little wild cherry trees and hawthorn bushes along the road were covered with fragrant blossoms. Brown creeks murmured under the culverts, and the pools by the roadside were blue with iris and choked with yellow marigolds. She swung blithely along. It was always good to come home; but in May, when bob white whistled clear and sweet from the wooded hollows, and the meadow larks rose and dipped and called over the vivid green pasture!—And wasn't that a vireo? And there was a white-throat calling his endless love song to "Canada, Canada, Canada!"

Ellen was country-bred, and though she had the kind of temperament that could content itself wherever her lot was cast, she was never so happy as when she was in the open spaces of field and sky. The city had always claimed her: there had been school, and then college, and now a position in a busy city office. But the country was always calling her, and now that her mother was gone and her father was alone, she had a doubly strong urge to come home. She knew from experience that someone from Lairdale church would be sure

to pick her up before she had gone far. But she hoped no one would come until she had crossed the Wappitti Creek bridge and seen how many thousands of marigolds were in bloom down there by the green water.

Every time she came home she loved the old place more, and sometimes dreamed of what it would be like if she could just come back to the old manse and care for her father now that he was alone and growing old. But that, she knew, was only a dream, for one had to have money to live. So she was at present planning a campaign to get her father to retire and come to the city where they would make a home together. It was a constant anxiety to think of him, with only a housekeeper in the gloomy manse since her mother's death, and with his only son away in the air force.

She was so absorbed in this problem, which lived with her in the city through all her work, that she was unaware of the approach of a car until there was a gentle little sound of the horn and she stepped aside into the long grass and dandelions. As the car stopped beside her she looked up with pleased expectancy. Some one of her father's congregation always picked her up when she came by this road; and here was Alfred Laird, leader of the choir, and son of her father's best friend, Old Alf.

There was a saying in Laird Valley that if you threw a stick out of your woodshed door you would be sure to hit a Laird. And if it bounced off it would hit an Armstrong. The Lairds were the most populous, but the Armstrongs were the wealthiest and consequently the most important socially. Alfred Laird represented both families, having an Armstrong for his mother, and owning the finest and biggest farm in all the valley. And here he was in his handsome new car, dressed in his best, stopping for her on the road.

He jumped out and took her bag. That marked one difference between Alfred and the ordinary young men of the farm. His mother had trained him carefully in the proper conduct towards all women, and especially towards girls that knew what was proper like the minister's daughter.

"Thank you, Alfred," Ellen said as she took her seat. "I felt sure somebody from the church would happen along."

She would not have been so complacent had she guessed that Alfred had not happened along at all, but had taken an entirely unnecessary trip to town and back, planned carefully to meet her bus at the corner on the chance that she would be there.

Ellen was particularly glad to see Alfred for her father's sake. She knew the minister was a little worried about him. Alfred was leader of the choir and had always been a faithful church-goer. But during the past winter an

evangelist had come to Carlisle and had established a new sect. He had driven through the country distributing tracts that went to show that the ministers of most of the orthodox churches were not preaching the Gospel, but were leading folk astray. The Peter Lairds and their family had been attending his services, and Alfred had gone several times and had been very much attracted to the preacher. In a talk he had had with Alfred afterwards the Reverend Mr. Peterson had given it as his opinion that Mr. Carruthers was a higher critic. Alfred had but a dim idea of what this meant, but it sounded ominous; and certainly the new evangelist seemed to know what he was talking about. Ellen was aware that her father was very anxious to keep his flock from wandering, knowing that the new man's work would soon die down like an untended fire. To his daughter it all looked like appeasement, but for her father's sake she determined to be as nice as possible to Alfred.

"Father does not expect me, so I might have had a long walk," she said, giving him the radiant smile that always made friends for her. Alfred smiled back happily, but nervously.

It was only lately that his thoughts had turned towards the minister's daughter as a possible mistress for his big house on the hill, and he was a little afraid of her.

He had never considered her very pretty, for Alfred was rather critical of feminine beauty. But he had to confess that since she had gone to the city with Islay Drummond, and got a fine position there, she had spruced up wonderfully. She had style too, and something indefinable that the other girls of Lairdale lacked, a gentle dignity that caused his nervousness.

When his mother had declared that his hair was thinning on the top and he must look around and get a wife, because she and his father were certainly moving to town, he had suddenly thought of Ellen. It happened on a Sunday morning when Mr. Carruther's sermon was longer and less comprehensible than usual. From his seat in the choir, Alfred was looking out of the window and thinking of what his mother had said, and his eye caught the sheen of Ellen's brown hair where she sat in her smart city clothes, her beautiful eyes turned up lovingly to her father's face, her neatly gloved hands folded in her lap. Where could one find a girl like her in Lairdale? He had no use for town girls; they were all idle and always wanted to be going to the movies. And in the neighbourhood, he had to confess, all the girls of a suitable age were married or away. He had somehow missed his generation. Not one of the overdressed girls of the community scattered through the church could hold a candle to Ellen, he decided. Besides, she was well educated; a university graduate, indeed. He did not, he realized, know her very well, for her mother

had sent her away to school and college, so that she had not mingled socially with the young people of the church except on short holidays.

Later he thought a great deal about her; and when his mother declared that she and his father were finally to move to town in the spring, he determined on a bold venture. It was bold for Alfred, for he was extremely cautious. Only once before in his life had he paid attention to a girl, and he had had to leave home and go sailing on the Great Lakes for a whole season, to escape her. Since then he had been the soul of caution. He felt that this plan to meet Ellen and take her home could not raise any suspicions. It looked so very casual. And it would be a chance for him to talk with her and let her consider what a good match he would be. It was high time she, too, was getting married. Ellen was twenty-five. Granma Armstrong, who knew everyone's age, had said so, and had added that it was a dangerous age for a girl to pass.

Alfred kept his eyes steadily upon the winding road ahead as they drove sedately along, but his pulses were going faster than his engine.

Meanwhile Ellen, happily unconscious of what was in Alfred's mind, was searching for topics of conversation. Music, of course. Alfred was one of the musical Lairds. So when she had enquired for his father and mother and their plans for moving to town, she asked:

"Have you not been playing your violin lately, Alfred? I remember how well you used to play at our church concerts."

Alfred hesitated. Then he felt this might be a good opportunity to acquaint her with some of his new religious convictions. She would have to learn about them soon if he decided finally that she was his choice.

He shook his head, frowning. "To tell you the truth, Ellen," he confessed, "I have long been feeling that the church is no place to play secular music, nor for a secular instrument like the fiddle. I haven't been playing much since I heard the Reverend Peterson preach. He's the new man at the True Gospel Tabernacle in town. He gave a wonderful discourse one Sunday night last winter on church music. It was a revelation to me."

Ellen had a sense of humour that was often unruly at the wrong time. It threatened her safety now. Alfred, pronouncing solemnly upon what was secular or sacred in music and condemning the violin as worldly, struck her as funny. If her brother Ronald were only here to share it! But she sobered instantly.

"Perhaps," she said gently, "even the fiddle can be made to sound God's praises. They used all sorts of musical instruments in the temple services in

Bible times."

Alfred could not but be struck with admiration. Ellen always gave the soft answer that turned away argument.

"Perhaps you are right," he said with unwonted humility, "but I sometimes wonder if a choir is any help to a service. I have been considering giving up the leadership. Those careless young people only meet for worldly gossip and fooling. There is no idea in their minds of praising the Lord."

Alfred felt he was wise to tell her this so that she might pass it on to the minister, who didn't seem to care who sang in the choir.

"But you have taught them to sing so well, Alfred," Ellen said honestly, for the Lairdale choir was famous throughout the countryside. "You must not be discouraged. You do not know how much good you may be doing."

She spoke earnestly. She was pleading for her father. Any disturbance or disaffection among his flock weighed heavily upon his heart. "You mustn't resign," she cried. "What would the church do without you?" Alfred was greatly pleased, and assured her he certainly would keep the work going, for the present at least.

They had turned into the Bay Shore Road and mounted one of the many Lairdale hills. Alfred's home, the huge brick edifice topping an opposite hill, dominated the landscape. He nodded towards it.

"Awful big house for me to be left alone in, don't you think?" he asked, and then stopped, suddenly abashed at his own recklessness.

But Ellen was very far from guessing what was in his mind, and agreed with him completely. "Have your father and mother really decided to move?" she asked.

"Well, I think so. Mother has decided, anyway," he laughed indulgently.

"Have they bought the house on Elm Street?"

"Just waiting for Dad to close the deal. It's a fine place, oil-burning furnace, and an electric fireplace; you just turn on a button and there it is. And a sun room at the back."

Ellen was sufficiently impressed. But she was thinking of his father and her own father and the possibility of their retiring. They were climbing the hill now where the old stone church stood with the grassy, neglected graveyard behind and the old manse beyond, a wide low house of grey stone with a sloping veranda across the front.

Alfred drew up at the manse gate that hung between two great greening lilac bushes. He stepped out and handed her the suitcase. She thanked him again for the ride, and he stood for a moment looking away down the road.

"Staying home long?" he asked.

"No; just the usual week-end. I have to be back at work on Monday. Remember me to your mother, Alfred, and the girls, when you see them."

"How'd you like to go for a drive up the Ridge tonight?" he asked, still looking far away down the road. "We could go to town to a movie if there's anything good."

Ellen was completely taken by surprise. She had known Alfred since they were children and had never even heard of his asking a girl to go to anything. She had a feeling of terror lest she were going to laugh, and then hurried to make excuses.

"It's very kind of you, Alfred," she said gently, for she saw he was overcome with nervousness, "but father is lonely, and he will expect me to make some visits with him tonight. I am really afraid that I could not leave him. But thank you, just the same."

Alfred nodded approval. He was really rather relieved that she had refused. He had spoken on the spur of the moment, and was shocked by his own recklessness as soon as the words were uttered. It was much better as it was. He dare not set all Lairdale talking before he had really made up his mind. And then, though he admired Ellen very much and there was something about her that disturbed him profoundly, he really must not let her get ideas about his intentions too soon.

He drove away, well satisfied with his first venture, and Ellen opened the little picket gate and went up the pathway. The gate swung back with a rusty whine, and at the sound there came bounding around the corner of the house a shaggy brown dog, neither spaniel nor terrier but resembling both, her brother Ronald's dog. She dropped her bag. "Old Rowdy! Rowdy, you old love!" she cried. He leaped up at her in convulsions of delight, trying to lick her face. In an agony of welcoming joy he squirmed and grovelled at her feet. Then he ran around her, his tail going so hard it was fairly working all his hind-quarters. "Old Rowdy," she whispered, putting her arms about him, a choke in her throat. What would he do if Ron were to come home? Rowdy was inseparable from her brother when he was home and now Ron was away, and would soon be flying over to the war zone.

She quieted the dog, enjoining silence, and tip-toed into the house. She had

taken the bus up from Harrington under the insistent feeling that her father needed her especially this week-end, and she wanted to surprise him. Tomorrow would be the anniversary of her mother's death, and he would be more than usually lonely. Liza Laird, the neighbour who came over every day to cook his dinner, was away for a week seeing a sick niece.

The manse was big and old and shabby, but it had some pieces of good old walnut furniture that Ellen had polished up. And she had given the place a charming touch here and there with curtains and bright cushions. A door to the right led into the living-room, and the one to the left into the study. Both rooms were empty, and dust lay on all the furniture. In the living-room the old rocker where her mother had sat during her illness still stood by the bay window overlooking the garden. Ellen turned quickly away, a lump in her throat, and tiptoed down the hall to the kitchen. The dining-room was empty and tidy, but the long kitchen table was set out from end to end with soiled dishes: plates and cups and saucers for six. Her father must have been entertaining while he was alone! She peeped through the white frilled curtains of the low kitchen window. There he was, away down at the far end of the garden, putting in his tomato plants. He was tall and incredibly thin in the old sweater he wore. An ancient straw hat was set on the back of his head, and a lock of white hair hung down over his forehead. But for all his shabby clothes there was something distinguished about him, and in the eyes of his daughter, at least, he was a grand figure.

Her pet cat, which had been rubbing up against his legs begging for her evening saucer of milk, suddenly left him and came bounding up the path as though Rowdy, who was dancing about inside the kitchen door, had told her that the mistress was home. She came leaping into the kitchen, wailing.

"Mistress Gummidge!" Ellen cried reprovingly, lifting up the pussy and smoothing her black-and-yellow coat. "Now, you've gone and told on me!"

For she could see from between the curtains that her father had suddenly put down his hoe and was coming up the path.

Ellen Carruthers was twenty-five, as Granma Armstrong had declared. She was a graduate of the University of Toronto, and she held an important position in a large publishing house in the city of Harrington. But when she came home to her father she was his little girl, and the years dropped away. As he came up the back steps she slipped behind the open door among the brooms and mops, while Rowdy stood quivering in the middle of the floor, watching and panting with excitement. Her father came in and looked around the room. Then he moved the door and Rowdy burst into wild barking.

“Nellie! Child!” He dropped his straw hat on the floor and kissed her. “I did not expect you, but I felt something good had happened. When Rowdy left me in such a hurry I wondered, and then when Mistress Gummidge started for the house I said to myself ‘Can she possibly be home again?’ ”

He sat down with a sigh, but his face was radiant. “Well, well, well,” he declared happily, “you’re home! You should not come so often, my dear.”

“But I couldn’t help wondering how my poor old bachelor was getting along with Liza away. And actually I find you’ve been entertaining! Five guests!”

He peered across the disordered kitchen at the array of soiled dishes as though he had not seen them before.

“Tut, tut, no! Those are all my own places. You see I have been alone for two days. These are all the places I set for my meals since Liza left. There is where I had my breakfast this morning, and here my dinner. I thought I might as well leave them till the table was full and wash them all together. And now it is too late! I should have done them.”

His daughter laughed aloud. Ellen’s laughter was generally silent, but sometimes she burst out into a little crow of mirth that delighted her father.

“Oh, Daddy Carruthers, what a man! What a man! Never mind the old dishes. See what I brought you. Mr. James sent them.” She opened her suitcase and took out some magazines.

“The *Atlantic*! Six months! Well, well. He surely was kind.” He shoved aside a package of seeds and a box of tomato plants that were on the table, and spread out the magazines before him. “Ah, the Holmes articles! And I wanted to read them so much. That was indeed kind. Do you know, my dear, I find lately that magazine articles are almost all the reading I can accomplish. A book demands too much concentration, and I find the war coming between me and the page. I suppose you have had no more word of Ronald.”

“No, but there is a Halifax man in the office who has a son in Ron’s unit and he has not gone yet. But of course we won’t hear till they land.”

She came and sat on the arm of his rocking-chair and they looked out into the garden at the rows of daffodils that reared their golden heads against the grey stone wall. But what they both saw was a great winged plane flying over the heaving ocean.

“I am glad your poor mother was spared this,” he said at last. “She did not realize the war would be so long. Just a year since she left us, Nellie.”

“The season is late,” Ellen whispered. “Last year her tulips were all in bloom, and she asked me to bring her in some of the white ones.”

They sat together in wordless sympathy and communion, two lonely and loving hearts forced to live apart.

Then the daughter rose. “Take your magazines into the study, dear,” she said cheerfully, “while I straighten things and get our supper.”

He moved towards the door, but paused to look vaguely about the kitchen. “I fear I have made a great deal of work for you, my dear. There seems to be so much confusion about the house, somehow.”

Ellen laughed and urged him towards the door. “Never mind, I’ll soon straighten things. Go and read about Oliver Wendell Holmes and be ready to tell it to me at supper.”

She caught up her suitcase and ran upstairs to her bedroom. It, at least, was clean and tidy, as she had left it a week ago. She was soon out of her smart tweed suit and into a gay cotton smock. She looked in through the door of her father’s bedroom and a tender smile lit up her face, as she saw he had tried to make his bed. “Oh, the poor darling!” she cried, as she straightened the crumpled sheets and shook up the pillows.

She ran downstairs, restoring order here and there as she went. The dishes must be dealt with first. Soon she had a fire in the kitchen stove and plenty of hot soapy water. Ellen was at her best and happiest in her home. An untidy house needing to be restored to order and beauty called out all her resources. When the shining dishes were back on their shelves she went over the kitchen swiftly. It was only a few days since Liza’s strong hands had been sweeping and scrubbing and polishing, and the surface dust and disorder were soon removed.

She spread a gay luncheon-cloth on the little table drawn up near the fire. The evening shadows had fallen and the May night was cool. The fire and the lamplight made the place bright and cozy.

She managed to find eggs and milk and soon had supper ready. Her father came and sat down with a great sigh of content.

“My, my,” he cried, “this is better than setting a seventh place; and you got all the dishes away! I made my bed, didn’t I?” he asked anxiously. “I intended to.”

His daughter regarded him across the table with dancing eyes. “Well, I wouldn’t go so far as to say that, dear, but I could see your intentions were

honourable!”

“Well, well, I am afraid I shall never make a housekeeper. Tell me all about yourself and what you were doing this week. Do you like the new work?”

“Book-reviewing? Oh, that’s lovely. At first it seemed positively wicked to be paid for reading novels. But oh, Father, you would be horrified at some of the stuff your daughter is reading these days. Do you suppose I might get my mind contaminated?”

Her father smiled. “Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver,” he quoted.

“Well, some of the pots are dreadfully sooty! What’s all the Lairdale news? I forgot to tell you that Old Alf’s Alfred picked me up on the cross-road and brought me home. And he seems to think the old folks are going to live in town.”

Her father’s face, she noticed, became shadowed. “Poor Old Alf has been fighting against it, but I suppose he will have to go. It’s hard to uproot an old tree.”

She was about to tell him how Alfred had wanted to take her to the movies, but suddenly checked herself. She was feeling a little uncomfortable about that. Better not to say anything about it.

“But Alfred says his father needs the rest. He should not be doing the heavy work on a farm.”

“I suppose,” her father said without conviction. There was a silence, and the daughter spoke timidly.

“Father, do you—have you thought any more over what we were talking about last week-end?”

She opened the subject reluctantly. Her father was past the retiring age for ministers, and she knew there were many in the Church who would be pleased to see him go. He was becoming forgetful, and since the death of his wife he had no one to attend to the many little details of his work that were so important. She knew that most of his people loved and revered him, and his influence for righteousness was strong throughout the community. But he was growing old, and his sermons were long and above the heads of the farmers who slept through them. And if there were many being led away like young Alfred, it would be much wiser for him to leave the Church now before he was asked to go. The burden of his lonely life weighed heavily upon his daughter’s

heart. If she could only get him to retire, to come to Harrington, where they could have a cosy apartment and be together! He would have a small pension, and she could provide the rest.

Yes, he had been thinking about it, he confessed. “I have no doubt there are some here who would be happy to know I was leaving,” he said with a whimsical smile, “but I do not see how I could leave just now, dear, with the war on and so many of the younger ministers going into the army. It would seem as if I were not doing my bit.”

It was as though he were pleading his own cause, and a lump rose in his daughter’s throat.

“It is only that I thought—I wish we could be together,” she faltered when she could speak. “I think I’ll come home and raise chickens or angora rabbits or something, so I can be with you.” She spoke lightly, trying to ease the situation.

“Eh, that would be heaven on earth,” he cried. “But you must not sacrifice your life for me, child. But the war! Ronald at the front! It seems to be no time for laying down one’s armour.”

He rose and walked up and down the kitchen, his hands behind him, as was his habit when thinking through a problem. Ellen watched him, struggling to keep back the tears. He had done so much for her and Ronald, and now she was doing so little for him in his declining years. In her memory their parents’ lives had been one continuous sacrifice for their children. Her mother had been ambitious and had insisted upon a university course for them. Ronald had swept through college brilliantly, but his sister had been more of a plodder. Only by dint of all work and no play had she managed to graduate with a record that almost matched her brother’s. But her life had been a cloistered one. There had been no money for pretty clothes and social affairs. So there had been no dates and no friends of either sex, nothing but close study and hard work. And though she was blessed with a happy spirit and a bubbling sense of humour, the hard years of her youth had left their mark in a gentle diffident manner, and a look of wistfulness in her beautiful grey eyes. Her life in the city office where she was working was the best she had known. If she could only take her father with her and make a home for him, she would be satisfied.

He came back to his chair and sat gazing into the shining damper of the stove where the fire was crackling merrily.

“Perhaps it is my duty to retire, Ellen,” he said at last. “Sixty-nine! Next month is the time for the men in our church to make their changes, and if I go,

I should tell the congregation at once. We have been here twenty years. And people grow tired of the same voice." He paused, and Ellen's loving heart ached for him. "But we must think it over, my child. Yes, I must try to do what is best, what the Master would want me to do." He thought a moment, and his face brightened. "I'll see what my good old friend Alf Laird does. If he can stand being retired, surely I can. Yes, I'll wait and see how Alf gets along."

2

The Old Brigade

Ellen had come home with one burden on her mind, and instead of being relieved of it she found herself shouldering another. The more she thought of Alfred's invitation the more she was disturbed. Such conduct in any other young man of the congregation would have passed unnoticed. But Alfred was not just another young man of the congregation. For years he had enjoyed the reputation of being the one eligible and unattainable bachelor on the Bay Shore. As far back as even Granma Armstrong remembered, and she knew everything that had happened in Lairdale since pioneer days, there had been only one girl-episode in Alfred's life.

A very pretty teacher from Carlisle had come out to the Lairdale school for one term, and every boy that owned a car was using up his gasoline driving her to town. Alfred was young then, and he joined the taxi service. But the passenger suddenly began to show so decided a preference for him and his car that Alfred became alarmed and fled. That was the spring he went sailing up the Great Lakes, and by the time navigation had closed she had resigned.

Since then Alfred had been afraid of girls. He treated them all with strict impartiality. But, as Granma Armstrong pointed out, Alfred was getting on. And, as all the Bay Shore pointed out, he needed a wife, now that his parents were planning to move to town. The thought that the choice might be about to fall upon her filled Ellen with dismay. Alfred was a good son and the very centre of his father's and mother's life. Whoever offended Alfred would mortally offend the minister's best friends.

But she was not given to dwelling on her troubles. So the next morning she was out in her garden early, Rowdy at her heels, planting the seeds she had brought from the city, and singing Ronald's favourite song, in gay defiance of fate—

"Odds, Bobbs, hammer and tongs, long as I've been to sea,
I've fought 'gainst every odds, and I've gained the victor-eee!"

She was planting all her mother's favourites: sweet peas and stocks and gay pinks, and a border of sweet alyssum for each bed. Her father left his vegetable beds at the back of the house and came around to help, for the joy of being with her.

“What about coming with me this afternoon to see Mrs. Peter Laird?” he asked, as they finished off the last trench for the sweet peas.

Ellen straightened up from the earth and made a face of comic anguish.

“Oh, Mistress Gummidge,” she cried, addressing her cat, who was curled up daintily on top of the fence, watching the gardening. “Another lone, lorn creature like yourself to be visited! What’s she got now?”

“Well, well, I think it’s perhaps nerves; but she’s had the flu. These poor folk miss Doctor Mack Wallace. Nobody else will do. But if you would rather not, dear—”

“Oh, yes, of course,” she cried contritely, “it’ll be lovely to go for a bit of a drive. Let’s go a-visiting all afternoon!”

Mrs. Peter Laird was quite the last person in Wappitti township that Ellen would have chosen to visit on a May day, or any other day, but she well knew that her father liked to have her with him on just such visits. He sensed a lack of sympathy in some homes, and actual antagonism in others, like the Peter Laird’s; and he always found that his daughter’s presence sweetened the social atmosphere. She would go into the house and talk to the women and children, leaving him free to visit with the men at the barn or in the field.

So, after the early mid-day meal, Rowdy was shut up in the woodshed, disgusted at being left alone with the cat, and Ellen brought the car out of the shed; a high old-fashioned little box full of rattling machinery.

“This poor thing has certainly passed the retiring age, Father,” she said gaily. Her father leaned back happily as they turned out into the blossom-lined road.

“Well, daughter,” he declared, “when I drive down the Bay Shore on a day like this, with you at the wheel, I wouldn’t trade it for the royal state coach!”

The old stone church and manse had been built on the corner of a farm owned by two Laird sisters, Tilly and Liza. Their lane ran past the manse garden, and was screened from it by a clump of tall spruce trees, fresh in their new spring green. The farm gate stood open, suggesting an invitation to enter.

“Shall we run down to the house for a minute, and see how Gideon is getting on planting his potatoes?” Her father asked.

Ellen swerved into the lane, a long hill bordered with hawthorn and cherry, all in bloom. It led into the yard at the side of the big red brick house. The Laird sisters had been left this farm by their father, and for several years the two women had managed fairly well with the help of a hired man, until Tilly,

the younger, married him.

Gideon Begg was a good steady fellow, kind and hard-working, but somehow he and the sisters always seemed to be at variance with the calendar. They were always in the midst of a job that belonged to the season before. Young Geordie Laird, who was uncle to Tilly and Liza, always said that Gid was the best farmer on the Bay Shore: the only trouble was that the weather would not co-operate. If only it were possible to make maple syrup in seeding time, and have the threshing and Christmas dinner all in one!

The confusion and complications attending the Begg farm were further aggravated by the presence of young Andy Armstrong, an orphaned nephew of the sisters, who made his home with them when he was not away sailing the lakes. Andy was a big-hearted, gay, irresponsible lad, and the sworn vassal of Ellen Carruthers since the summer she had striven to teach him in her Sunday School class.

As she drove into the yard before the house, the old farm dog came bounding towards them with a furious barking, tempered by an equally furious wagging of his tail, for Sailor knew the minister's car. The yard was strewn with boards and boxes and odd bits of machinery. In the midst of the confusion stood a small car fairly glittering with a coat of wet bright-blue paint. A pair of long legs, in ragged overalls, were sticking out from underneath it, and Ellen was at some pains to avoid them as she drew up.

As she stopped, the legs began a tumultuous wriggle; and the rest of a tall young man emerged and staggered to an erect position. Andy's face was streaked with earth and car grease, and his reddish hair stood on end, but even under these disadvantages he was good to look at, with his bright hair and his flashing dark eyes.

"Hello!" he shouted in delight. "Hello, Mr. Carruthers! Hi-yah, Ellen! Glad to see you home! Say, will the folks ever be sorry! They ain't back from town yet!"

"How are you and Gideon getting on with your potatoes?" Mr. Carruthers asked anxiously.

Andy leaned easily against the car. "Well, we didn't jist get around to them. We're goin' to start as soon as they get home."

No, Aunt Liza wasn't back yet, but she 'phoned Aunt Till that she'd be here Monday. The folks had gone in to get the baby chicks. Four hundred o' them! At least Aunt Till went for them. Andy laughed gaily. "Gid jist had to go along. He's awful mad about them chickens. He hates hens around the barn."

Mr. Carruthers said he must see the new brooder-house they had been telling him about, and he and Ellen stepped out. The shining car, too, came in for their admiration. Though Andy was making but a bare living as hired man on his Aunt's farm, he always managed to own and run some sort of collection of parts that resembled a car. And, as he was good tempered and generous, someone was always borrowing it, and bringing it back a wreck.

As they picked their way toward the new hen-house, Andy sidled up to Ellen.

"Gettin' all shined up for Florrie," he whispered. "Goin' to the dance Monday night!"

Ellen smiled sympathetically. Peter Laird's Florrie was Andy's girl, and they were always having quarrels that Ellen was called upon to patch up. It was a relief to know that things were running smoothly. Ellen wished Andy would care less. The boy's eyes proclaimed him one of the perennially orphaned children of the world. When they were not dancing with mischief and glee, there lay in their depths the tragic look that rests always in the eyes of those who have been cheated of a mother's love in childhood. Ellen was not sure of Florrie, and Andy's heart was big and generous.

"Sorry not to ask you in," Andy said, suddenly remembering his manners when they returned to the car. "Aunt Till said they'd be back for dinner and she told me to put the meat into the oven and the potatoes on to boil at eleven o'clock. And I did. On the dot. And they've been cooking like nobody's business ever since. Guess they ought to be nearly done, eh?" He looked at Ellen solemnly, but his eyes were dancing.

"You ought to be made to eat them," she said severely.

Andy leaned against the car with a loud laugh, and then suddenly straightened and stared towards the bay. "Oh, look, *look*!" he cried eagerly. "Lookit, will you?"

All the hills of the Laird valley sloped down towards the blue reaches of the Georgian Bay. And across the great shining expanse, above the bright green of the cedars and birches that fringed the shore, a Great Lakes steamship was surging forward, gleaming white against the intense blue, silver spray leaping from her bows, a gay plume of smoke waving behind her.

The boy stood gazing after her with the eyes of a lover.

"The *Madawaska*!" he whispered. "Her first trip!" They watched in silence as the shining vision slowly passed out of view behind the trees of the shore. Andy turned to Ellen and she was disturbed by the tragedy in his eyes.

“I-I was turned down again,” he whispered. “The army! First the navy and now the army!”

The minister put a comforting hand on the boy’s shoulder. “But the navy and the army and the air force have to be fed, Andy,” he said. “We can’t let all the men behind the guns go to the front. You are doing your bit, and a very big bit here, raising food.”

Andy straightened and tried to smile. “I’d a liked to go sailing,” he said dully.

They got away at last, but not before Andy had managed another whispered word with Ellen. “Goin’ to Peter’s?” he asked, and she nodded. “Say, could you find out, if it’s not too hard, if she’s—if Florrie’s goin’ anywhere tonight?” She promised, and they drove away. Ellen’s heart was disturbed for the boy. This was his second big disappointment. Andy was such a lone sort of waif, and Florrie was a selfish girl who would take all she could get of treats and car rides and throw him over whenever a more desirable suitor appeared.

“I suppose Andy never heard of Masefield,” her father said, “but he has the same sea fever. The poor lad’s heart is crying ‘I must go down to the sea again!’ ”

“Turned down again on account of his eyes!” Ellen mourned. “And if he had had glasses when he was little I have no doubt his sight would have been all right now.”

“These lads brought up on the shores of the Great Lakes,” her father mused, “they’re never quite landsmen again after they’ve been away sailing, and they all go sailing sooner or later. And when the sailor comes back to the farm he may be away in the back pasture cutting his winter wood, and he looks around and there is the bay smiling and beckoning again. Andy was ready to leave, right there.”

“I know how they feel,” Ellen declared. “When I’m sitting in the office these May days and feel a breeze through the window, I see Lairdale and the bay and I feel as if I must throw Francis and Blair and all their books out of the windows and fly straight home.”

“Ah, well, well,” he said, “you are made for home, child. Like your mother. But you must not spoil your life by burying yourself back here. You will have your own home someday, I hope.”

Ellen shook her head. She honestly confessed to herself that she had never, so far, been asked to make a home for anyone. And now the thought of the one

that might be offered her loomed like a terrible shadow on the horizon.

Her father suddenly straightened. They were passing the end of Alfred Laird's splendid acres, and a figure could be seen just inside the fence.

"Isn't that Old Alf down there by the road? Stop a minute, dear. I must speak to him."

Ellen slowed up reluctantly, but was instantly relieved to see that only Alfred senior was there. The old man was standing under a snowy blooming cherry tree, fixing a piece of barbed wire that topped the rail fence.

"Hello! Hello!" the minister called heartily. "It's a grand spring day, Alf! Indeed I think it's summer!"

The old man looked up, and a beaming smile wrinkled the leathery brown surface of his face. He came quickly nearer, limping noticeably, and settled himself against the fence rails.

"Well, well, hello!" he shouted heartily. "You're dead right, it's summer!"

Ellen pulled up the car close to the fence. The old man nodded to her.

"Home again?" he said happily, and Ellen answered as happily, "Home again!"

"And what's this I hear about your moving to town right away? I thought you wouldn't go till the fall," the minister said.

The old farmer was silent for a moment, shaking his head. "The wife's set on it and I guess we gotta go."

His friend looked at him and nodded in deep sympathy. "I suppose retiring is always hard, Alf. I must be thinking about it soon myself."

"Not you! Don't you do it, Mr. Carruthers!" He looked at Ellen accusingly. "Is she kickin' like Janet and the girls?" he asked in a lower tone.

"No, no!" Ellen's father hastened to acquit her. "But we're all coming to it soon, unless one were fortunate enough to die in harness."

"Sure, and that's the only way. I wouldn't mind easin' up a little either, long as I was home. But sittin' around in town with the weemin walkin' over you!" He leaned over the fence and lowered his voice.

"Say, Mr. Carruthers, did ya ever live in one o' them apartment traps they put folks into in town?" He put the question with a shamed air, as if he were enquiring if the minister had spent any time in jail.

Mr. Carruthers confessed that one summer he and his wife had lived in an

apartment for the space of a week, when they were visiting his sister in Cleveland.

Old Alf shook his head. “Ain’t that awful?” he sympathized. He glanced back towards the house, as though his wife might hear him even across a ten-acre field. “Livin’ on a roost in a hen-house! Mother and the girls had one picked out for us in town. All upstairs, not a place to put the sole of your foot on God’s earth. Say, I got my dander up that time! Well, I thought that would be the end of it; but first thing I knowed Nettie and Muriel had their heads together again, and they’ve picked out a house. And now they’ve got Alf on their side!”

His brown face suddenly began to pucker up with laughter, his shoulders began to heave. “Mother’s got an idea that Alf’ll get a housekeeper of his own if she’ll only get out. I dunno. He’s been mighty hard to put a halter on so far, and I’ve no idea who thinks she’ll get him hitched up this time. Some girl in town, I bet, that’s never seen a cow milked. Anyways, his mother thinks it would kinda hurry him on if we got out!”

Ellen was sitting, looking far out over the bay, struggling between a feeling of dismay and an hysterical desire for laughter, while the old man continued his protests. The girls were always making a great talk about the wonderful garden he would have. And he bet if you stuck a half-dozen tomato plants in it you couldn’t get back to the house without steppin’ on them! Mr. Carruthers oughta just go and look at the place next time he was in town. Elm street, that was it. But he’d forgotten the number. But that was what they were comin’ to, jist numbers, like convicts in the penitentiary. He’d just about as soon go to penitentiary anyhow. They had lots of land there for a man to work on.

“If only Doctor Mack Wallace hadn’t enlisted,” he mourned, “I bet I’d never a’ had to go. But eh, Mr. Carruthers,” he looked up at his friend, his old eyes filled with both mirth and tragedy, “when Janet and the girls gang up on me, there’s jist one thing for me to do. I’m seventy-five.”

The minister leaned out and put his hand on the old farmer’s rough shirt-sleeve.

“I’m not many years behind you, Alfred.” he said. “I know how hard a trial it is for you. But the Lord has promised ‘As thy days so shall thy strength be.’ It may not be strength of body. The poor old frame will get weak, but He can give strength of soul.”

Ellen’s eyes were dim as they drove away. Her father had a message of hope and comfort for everyone—a rebellious young lad like Andy, and a poor rebellious old lad like Alfred Laird. She felt ashamed of her efforts to get him

to retire; she was no better than Nettie and Muriel!

At each turn in the road there opened a wider vista of the great bay, and once again the Madawaska appeared, far on, heading for port. The Bay Shore Road, everyone called it; and the name fitted it, for the bay was never quite out of sight, even when it was only a blue line above the tree tops.

Summer visitors who came out in large numbers to the cooling breezes of the Bay Shore were puzzled over the names of the roads, and were always getting lost among the Lairdale hills. For the paved highway where the bus ran out from the town, a mile or so up in the hills, was called the Lake Shore Road. In its name lay the early history of the settlement. In pioneer days the new settlers came out with their axes and cut a road through the dense forests, and as the great monarchs fell before their fury, they opened out magic casements on the fairy reaches of the great blue bay, and beyond, the ocean of Lake Huron. And so in their mistaken zeal they named the corduroy trail they had opened up the Lake Shore Road.

Later there came the Lairds and the Armstrongs who settled below the hills, down closer to the water. They, too, hewed out a corduroy road to town, one that paralleled the first. And with very good reason they, too, called the new highway the Lake Shore Road, and like the good tenacious Scots they were, they demanded that the hill dwellers give up their name. But the Lake Shore Road folk were good Scots too, fortified by a dangerous sprinkling of Irish, and they were not giving up anything to anybody on demand. And so the outraged dwellers down by the water front called their highway the Bay Shore Road.

All this had long been forgotten, even by Granma Armstrong. The Lake Shore Road, high up beyond the hills, was often a cause of confusion and bewilderment among summer tourists; but all the countryside accepted it unquestioning. When the young folk from the hills would come down for a day's swimming or fishing to the Bay Shore, neighbours in Lairdale would ask, "And how is everybody up on the Lake Shore?" having quite missed the incongruity.

The Bay Shore Road, which wound through the valley they had named Lairdale, following the irregular line of the water, was indeed a garden path. And on this bright May day its flowery curves, its space-viewing hills, and its cool green hollows were lovelier than ever. Ellen was sorry when they drew up at the gate of Peter Laird's farm.

The head of the Peter Laird family was a shrewd business man, bent on making money, and the mother was ambitious and jealous of her prosperous

neighbours. The family of three boys and two girls were what might have been expected, their teeth set on edge by the sour grapes of their parents' worldly ambitions. Lately they had been keeping aloof from their neighbours. The three boys were of military age, but none of them had enlisted, and those whose boys were in the fight overseas were beginning to look at them askance.

Ellen went into the house while her father drove on out to the barn. She was met at the door by Florrie, a pretty girl with black curls and bright blue eyes. Mrs. Laird was sitting in the chilly parlour, wrapped in a shawl.

"My, my, I can hardly believe it," she cried, as she shook hands. "I said to Marguerite, last week when I was so bad, I says, 'Well, Mr. Carruthers will have to come here if I die, to conduct the funeral!' " No, none of them had been at church lately, she went on. She just couldn't drive the boys to go, and she had been too sick herself. And the girls seemed to be all taken up with the new young man at the True Gospel Tabernacle. He was a wonderful preacher.

Ellen strove to make polite conversation, but made little headway against the stream of Mrs. Laird's complaints. Though she longed to rise up and leave before her father came in, she had to wait his coming with as good a grace as possible. But his presence somehow seemed to bring a fresh and more kindly atmosphere into the stiff chill room. He read words of comfort and cheer from his little pocket Testament, and led in prayer. His gentle kindly voice, uttering words of truth and love, spread a balm over the veneer of pretence and ill humour. He prayed for the family, for the father with his heavy responsibility, for the sons and daughters facing the great adventure of youth, and for the mother, the centre of the home, that she might be soon restored to health and strength. And when they rose to go, Mrs. Laird thanked them for the visit and said she hoped they would all be out at church soon again.

Ellen was wondering how she would get a word with Florrie alone, and was surprised when the girl followed her out to the car. She asked after Ronald, and then said shyly that if Ellen should happen to see Andy passing would she tell him it was all right about tonight?

Ellen drove away in silence. Her father guessed the cause of it.

"One must not mind Mrs. Peter," he said. "Just now, without recognizing it, she is on the defensive. She is ashamed that none of her boys has enlisted. All the mothers of our soldier boys hold their heads high, even though they have breaking hearts. And Mrs. Peter cannot be one of them."

"Well, she need not take it out on you," Ellen said indignantly. "Oh, Father, I wish——" she stopped suddenly. "I wish I could get some of those cherry boughs to put in the church tomorrow," she substituted.

“That wasn’t what you started to say,” he said, laughing.

“Well, no, it wasn’t; but never mind. But I do wish churches didn’t have so many Peter Laird families in them.”

“Ah, well,” he said smiling, “after all, dear, the Peter Lairds of our churches are the needy folk. They are our poor who must be fed and clothed. They have poverty of soul. Both the father and mother in this family are in danger of growing harder every day. If all the congregation were like Mrs. Steve and good Old Alf, and Young Geordie, I should grow fat and lazy with nothing to do!”

“*Oh, Father*!” was all Ellen could say, for the lump in her throat. But there was a world of love and adoration in the word, and her father understood.

There was one more visit to make. They turned in at a farm gate, and ran up a steep lane to the old stone house on the face of the hill.

There was a trim row of poplars on one side of it and a rich ploughed field on the other where the plovers ran and piped and implored them not to come too near. This was one of the first houses built in the Laird Valley, and was known as the Old Home Place. It was a picturesque grey stone building—three houses, indeed, built into one, and set in the midst of a fine old garden. Ellen looked around in delight as they entered the yard. There was the old low wing that belonged to her friend Islay Wallace. Here Ellen had spent the happiest summer of her life, with her friend Islay. She had inherited this farm from an old aunt and had come to spend the summer three years ago, and Ellen had come up on her bicycle from the manse to help with the housework. There had been work that was only play, and much young laughter and gaiety, and a romance between Islay’s niece and one of the Lairdale boys. It had been Ellen’s first summer of carefree youth and fun, and it had been the opening of a new life for her.

But the young friends were all gone now, and only Annie Pierson and her two children were left. And here her father’s comforting strength and faith were surely needed, for the husband and father was away at the front. Annie Pierson was a Laird by descent. She and her husband and family had come to Lairdale on a weary trek after six years in southern Saskatchewan without rain. Here they had found a haven and friends, and here she was living in the old home where her mother had been born. And now all this new-found happiness and security were gone, for at the first sound of the war drums her husband had marched away and was now at the front.

Ellen jumped out of the car and her father drove on towards the barn. The kitchen door was thrown open and a fair young woman with a curly-haired

toddler at her side called a welcome.

"Oh, come away, come away," she cried, in delightful contrast to the last visit. "I'm that glad! I didn't know you were home, Ellen!"

She drew her guest into the kitchen, apologizing for the disorder. She had started her spring housecleaning, she announced. Ellen must see the rooms for Islay and the Doctor, they were all ready if they should come. "But, oh, I'm that glad to see you!" she burst out again.

She drew up her best cushioned chair and Ellen sat down and immediately leaped up again. The baby was reaching up to the table, already set for the early farm supper, and was doing his best to upset a bowl of pickled beets upon his beautiful curly head. Ellen caught the bowl just before it descended, and set it back into the middle of the table.

"Oh, my, my, Bobby!" his mother wailed. "Ain't he awful? He gets into everything, and Artie laughs at him and jist makes him worse."

He staggered over towards the stove, and was reaching for the boiling teakettle when Ellen caught him up and held him on her knee, where he squirmed rebelliously. He was a beautiful child, strong and sturdy, with golden hair and apple-blossom skin; but the soul of a bold and determined marauder dwelt beneath this innocent exterior.

"We were wondering how you were getting on, Annie," Ellen said, "since Wilfred left. Is it very hard?"

Annie Pierson turned from the stove where she had been placing the kettle in a safer position, and Ellen looked at her in surprise. She had expected grief, though suppressed, for Annie never complained; but she was unprepared for the look of shining pride in her faded eyes.

"I guess you were surprised, like everybody else, weren't you?" she asked. "I guess everybody on the Bay Shore was surprised. But you couldn't keep Wilf home. He's English, you know."

Ellen experienced a rush of warm sympathy. Annie was transformed with a new dignity. Almost three years before she and her husband and one child had come as derelicts to the Bay Shore, and because Annie was a Laird the whole valley had given them help and comfort. And when Islay Wallace returned to the city she turned the Old Home Place over to them. But no one could restore to them their pride; and now they had found it again. Wilfred Pierson, the tramp from Saskatchewan's dried-out area, had been the first man on the Bay Shore to enlist, the first to march away in defence of his country.

"It's awful lonesome," the wife faltered, "and at first I jist couldn't see how I was to get along. But you couldn't keep Wilf home. He's English, you know. I knew from the first it would be like this. That night the news came over the radio that England had declared war—*Bobby*!"

The embryo pirate had struggled out of Ellen's arms, and was off again on his adventuring. This time he had managed to get up on a chair and reach for a pitcher on a shelf above the sink. It contained maple syrup from the early spring harvest of the Old Home maples. Both women sprang this time, but both were a second too late. The pitcher poured its contents right on top of the baby's curly head. He let out a roar of indignation and fright, suddenly cut short when the streaming sweetness reached his lips, and he discovered that the adventure had not been entirely without profit.

While the mother scrubbed the sticky baby, Ellen mopped up the sticky chair and floor and shelf, and placed the jug on a higher level. As Annie's daily routine consisted of such disasters she was not unduly disturbed, and took up her story calmly where she had been interrupted. Ellen lifted the scrubbed and chastened baby to her knee again and showed him a picture book while she listened.

"I'll never forget that night England declared war. Wilf had been workin' over at Steve's and heard it on the radio. And he jist sat and hardly spoke a word at supper. He hardly ate a bite. And after the chores when he came in he jist sat and didn't speak. And Artie was watchin' him and he kept saying, 'Are you sick, Daddy?' But I couldn't ask him, 'cause I knew what was troublin' him. And after Artie had gone to bed and the baby was asleep, he says to me, he says, 'England's in it,' he says; and I knew what he meant. And I jist couldn't say anything. And then he says, 'I've got to go, Annie. I've got to go,' he says.

"I was standin' here at the stove, heating the baby's milk, and I jist stood. I couldn't move 'cause it seemed as if the floor was movin' round, and I was afraid to step. And I jist stood here and he sat there and jist kept sayin', 'I've got to go, Annie, I've got to go.' And I could see he was jist in misery. He was born in England, you know, though he don't remember it. But I knew how he felt. And after a while I kinda got my breath and I says, 'I know, Wilf,' I says, 'you jist got to go.' I couldn't do anything else, could I?"

"No, you did right," Ellen burst out, "and we are proud of him and of you too. You're a soldier's wife, Annie!"

The wife's heart was uppermost now, and Annie had to wipe the tears away with her apron. "Poor Wilf, he didn't want to go a bit! He was homesick

all the time he was at camp, and now——"

She dried her tears and straightened up. "Artie's that proud, you wouldn't believe it. He's the only one in Lairdale school whose daddy's away at the war."

Ellen was amazed and greatly relieved. The Pierson self-respect, that had so long lain in the dust, was floating from the mast-head. Annie and her husband could hold their own with any Laird or Armstrong on the Bay Shore. She told proudly about the farewell they gave him in the hall at Acton Hill. Ellen had already heard all about it and had contributed to it, indeed, but it bore repeating; the wonderful speeches that were made about him, and the beautiful wrist watch that was presented to him by the neighbours.

And they were getting along fine, she declared. Wise Watty and Steve looked after the place; Artie helped after school, and he would be a big help when school closed in the holidays. Oh, yes, everything would be fine if he only just came back all right, she faltered.

"You're a grand soldier's wife, Annie," Ellen declared again as she rose to go and gave the pirate a final hug which he resented violently.

She found Artie and her father sitting on the platform of the old well, talking earnestly. Artie was a tall lad of twelve now, well grown, and did not in the least resemble the little waif that helped with the garden the summer Ellen had spent at the Old Home Place.

He came running down the path to meet her. She must come and see his lambs. He had two orphans and was bringing them up on the bottle. Ellen followed him out to the pasture while her father went in to the house to have a word with Annie. There were about twenty sheep and a few more lambs in a small green paddock behind the barn. Then there were the orphan twins, besides. Artie had just finished feeding them, and the bottles with their long nipples were standing on the top rail of the fence. But the lambs seemed as hungry as ever, and the sheep were moving about eating ravenously, after the manner of sheep, though they had been eating steadily all day.

"Say, lookit," the boy said worriedly, "wouldn't you think that twenty sheep could look after twenty-five lambs in a teeny bit of a field like that? Most of them old nannies haven't more than one lamb to look after and nothin' to do but eat, and jist look at them."

Ellen watched them and had to confess that they did not seem to be model mothers, for even in this sheltered enclosure there were always at least ten lambs lost and wailing for their mothers and ten mothers rushing about calling

piteously for their children. There was much running to and fro and wild-eyed searching; then rapturous reunions, with the prodigal burrowing into his mother's side, gulping his refreshment and twitching his little tail happily after the terrible separation.

Artie and Ellen sat on the fence and watched, the shepherd very much disgusted with his sheep. "I never saw anything like them for losin' theirselves if they no more than turn around," he complained reasonably.

Ellen looked at him lovingly. "You're growing up, Artie," she cried. "Remember the summer you and I worked here, and I called you the Artful Dodger?"

He laughed in delight. "Say that was fun! And I called Mrs. Wallace 'Mrs. Reilly.' I was only a kid, then."

"And now you're growing up!"

"That's what Mr. Carruthers was saying," Artie said proudly. "Now that my dad is a soldier, he says I'm the man o' the family. We had a long talk," he added shyly, but importantly.

Ellen knew. Somehow her father had a way of getting into the thoughts and ambitions of youth. It was his deep sympathy.

"Oh, lookit! Lookit! Look at the twins!" The boy was shouting. There was a steep little grassy knoll in the centre of the field and the lambs had picked it out for a game of King-of-My-Castle. One small leggy champion had gone scrambling and leaping to the top and was standing defying all rivals. He was immediately challenged by the twins, who managed to gain the height, and a battle ensued between little woolly heads. Then up came two more champions. The twins were immediately hurled down the steep, and a new usurper danced and capered in their place. But no one held power for long undisputed, and once there were at least five struggling for the place of honour. Suddenly a new impulse seized them. They flung themselves head downwards from the eminence for which they had so lately struggled, landing on top of the milling aspirants below, and the whole flock whirled and set off towards the barn in a mad stampede. As soon as they had gained that objective they whisked about and came tearing back like a charge of miniature cavalry, their tiny hoofs beating a sharp tattoo on the ground. Next they put on a Wild West rodeo, with small bucking bronchos dancing and leaping straight into the air. Some strange electric shock would send one straight up above the flock, another would writhe convulsively while he was still aloft, others flung themselves from side to side in agonies of delight. Then all would start off again on a desperate race for life, little heels flung high above heads, little tails flying in a mad ecstasy of

youth and springtime.

Ellen sat in her grand-stand seat, laughing, while the boy, as showman, leaped and shouted and called her attention to this one and that lest she miss any of the fine points.

“They’re crazy!” he cried at last, when the performers had returned to a measure of sanity and were looking once more for refreshment stands. “They’re all clean crazy!”

Ellen had to return to the house to have another look at Bobby, and at last the visitors left reluctantly. As they drove home between the rows of blossoming cherry trees, she could see that her father was very happy.

“I must write to my old friend David Laird in the west and tell him about Annie. This was David’s old home and wouldn’t he be happy to know there was such a fine representative of the family at the Old Home Place. Yes, I’ll write to David tonight. It’s great to be a minister, Nellie. Yes, it’s a high calling.”

And his daughter bowed her head in remorse, remembering that she had dared to mention his leaving this high calling.

3

Exile

Liza returned to her housekeeping duties at the manse, and when Ellen was next able to visit her father she found the home in its usual state of damp and cheerless cleanliness, with great quantities of food in the pantry and cellar, suitable for Gid and Andy after a day's chopping in the wood-lot.

It was Friday evening when she arrived, as usual, and after choir practice Alfred came over from the church with the minister's hymn book, which had been left there, and stayed quite late. Ellen tried to play the polite hostess. She brought out some of Liza's best cookies and a glass of gingerale, and strove to make pleasant conversation, in dread every moment lest Alfred renew his invitation to attend a moving picture.

Her father helped with a question here and there, when the talk showed signs of expiring. Yes, his parents had finally decided to move, Alfred said. Yes, Dad had given in at last. They would move in about a couple of weeks. Dad had not been feeling so well lately. They thought he needed a good rest.

"Yes, perhaps so, perhaps so," Mr. Carruthers said sadly. "I had hoped he would not have to go yet a while."

Alfred fell silent for some time after this. He had let Ellen know that he was soon to be left alone in the big house, and was afraid to say any more. There seemed to be something distant in her manner tonight. He went away finally, feeling he had not made much progress. Now that he had made his mind up about Ellen, or almost, Alfred was at a loss how to proceed. Courting a girl, and especially a girl like Ellen Carruthers, who was the minister's daughter as well, called for special skill. He had intended to ask her to go to town with him to a church concert the next week-end. He felt that would be more suitable than a movie. But he had not found the courage, with her father sitting there; though he had to confess to himself that it would have been perhaps worse had they been alone. Then there was a dance at Acton Hill Community Hall on Saturday night, but Alfred had a sense of the fitness of things and felt that even if she had wanted to go he would not ask her, considering her position as mistress of the manse. Courtship was beset with difficulties, and he went home feeling that the evening had been wasted, except for the fact that he had begun to show Ellen his intentions.

He had indeed shown them, and with a result he could not possibly have

imagined. The visit raised a real alarm in Ellen's mind, so that she did not dare go home for several weeks. Finally, when she felt she must see her father again and know how he was doing, she recklessly packed her bag and took the north-bound train.

She had not sent him word that she was coming, and she stepped off the bus on the Lake Shore Road with some trepidation. And there was her father in the high little box-like car, waiting at the corner! She ran across the road to him with cries of delight. "I came on faith," he said. "Just a poor weak faith, but it is vindicated!"

"Oh, Father, how did you guess? You just knew I couldn't stay away any longer, didn't you? Oh, let me drive! Are you well? Is Rowdy behaving, and Mistress Gummidge? How is Liza? Did you miss me?"

They were running down the grassy road before her rapturous questions could be answered.

"June!" she cried. "I've missed three weeks, and now it's June! Why didn't you write and tell me the brier-roses were in bloom?"

During her absence summer had come down the Laird Valley. June was smiling from every field and creek and orchard. Lilacs bloomed before every farm house. The brier-roses were decked out in bright pink, the apple trees were bridal bouquets!

As Ellen drove slowly along she kept glancing lovingly at her father, and was seized with the feeling that he seemed especially happy, not only because she had come home. He seemed to have some inner radiance, as though holding a pleasant secret.

"Now tell me all the news," she demanded. "Did Mr. and Mrs. Alf Laird move?"

She saw she had struck the spring of his hidden joy. He burst into a laugh, the deep hearty laugh she heard so seldom now.

"Yes, my dear, they moved. Twice, in fact. Once to town, and once to the Bay Shore."

Ellen could scarcely give her attention to her driving. Her father could not know how very much she was interested in the moving of Alfred's parents.

To the Bay Shore? What was he talking about? They hadn't come back, had they?

Yes, that was just what they had done, and the telling of the tale lasted till

they drove into the manse shed.

Ellen found the whole community humming with the news. It had flooded Lairdale and washed up over the Lake Shore telephones and set the whole countryside laughing. Young Geordie called in on his way from town a few minutes after Ellen's arrival home, to tell some more of the details; and in the evening Tilly and Liza came up the lane to see that Ellen got all the story right. You couldn't talk about it over the phone, for they said that Janet was so mad she listened all day long to hear what the neighbours were saying. But she couldn't be so uppity about her city house and her electric fireplace any more!

It was a long story, but it bore retelling. It opened with a joke, a really good joke on the whole neighbourhood. Because they had given them such a send-off, and a grand present to each of them, and all in the church at that.

Most of the community gatherings were held in the hall at Acton Hill instead of the church; for the young people argued, what was the sense of getting together for an evening if you couldn't have a dance? So, when anyone moved away, or got married, or joined the fighting forces, a collection was taken up, a suitable gift bought and presented, and then you could devote the rest of the night to the real business of the gathering.

But Alfred had not attended any of the dances for some years, and when he was consulted about a farewell for his parents, he asked that it be held at the church, feeling that the minister and his daughter would like it better that way.

So collectors went up and down the Bay Shore and gathered enough money to buy two fine upholstered rocking-chairs. Young Geordie made a grand speech when they were presented, but poor Old Alf could scarcely reply. He stood up and gazed around forlornly, and shaking his head said, "Well, mother, it looks as if the folks expected us jist to sit and rock ourselves for the rest of our lives!" And Mrs. Alf sat right down in one of the beautiful chairs and wept.

The moving took place the next day. Alfred used his truck and hired another to take everything, with the two grand chairs sitting right on top. Old Geordie Laird, their oldest and best friend, would not lend his truck when asked for it. He considered the moving an outrage and would not even go to the farewell in the church. But he promised that if ever Old Alf should come to his sane senses again and want to return, he, Old Geordie, would send in his truck to bring him home, all of which made Old Geordie something of a prophet afterwards, in his neighbours' eyes.

Folks said that old Alf looked like a criminal going to serve a life sentence, but that Mrs. Alf went as a bride to her new home. This was the end of milking

and baking and feeding calves and hens, she announced.

All the neighbours who had driven round by the new house on Elm street reported that it was just what anyone might desire. It was only two blocks from Nettie's, and three from down-town; had a cement sidewalk right past the door, and a neat little yard at the back.

Old Alf, himself, was the only one who could have told accurately what happened after they had settled in the town house that first night. And not even he could have expressed in mere words all the turmoil of soul into which he was thrown. Even on the occasional days when they had gone to town to do some fixing to the new place, Old Alf had a sense of utter loss and loneliness whenever he crossed its alien threshold. And when they had arrived finally and Alfred had said good-bye and returned to the farm alone, he was overwhelmed by a sense of complete desertion. It seemed indecent to live in a place where you could stretch out your arm and touch the brick wall of your neighbour's house. There was no place where a man could sit in peace outside and smoke his pipe, without the whole town staring at him.

He could not sleep that night. Muriel and her daughter had stayed with them, and the women sat up late unpacking and talking. The old man had gone to bed early, as was his custom. But he could not rest even after the women had retired. How could anyone sleep with a great blazing street light shining in at your window, and no friendly darkness anywhere? And the bedlam outside! Harsh scraping of feet on the cement sidewalks, loud voices, honking cars, banging car doors. Did anybody go to bed at all in town?

Five o'clock was his usual hour for rising, but he was up long before that time. He stole from his bed and dressed quietly. He had to put on his best clothes, for he had worn them for the coming away. He hated them, and his Sunday boots hurt his feet. But he did not know where to find anything else.

Janet was sleeping soundly. He took the new boots in his hand and cautiously made his way down the stairs. He turned on the electric light in the kitchen where some of the things they had unpacked last night were hanging. Among them he found a pair of old overalls, and in a corner his farm boots. He threw his Sunday suit over a chair and changed into his old clothes. Even his old cap and sweater were there, and when he put them on he felt like a man again.

It had been his lifelong custom to light the kitchen fire and put on the tea kettle for Janet before he went out to the barn. He turned instinctively towards the stove, and remembered with a shock that it was a gas range: a horrible cold heap of iron, with not a damper for a man to put his feet on, and never a lid to

lift to throw in rubbish or shake your pipe! He fumbled with the door handle, turned the key finally, and stepped out. They had locked themselves in last night like prisoners! He had never locked a door at night in his life. It was still dark, but he could see the faint outline of the despised garden patch, almost covered by the wide arms of a clothes-reel.

He walked around to the front and stood looking up and down. The place was dead and silent as the grave—the street that had been such a bedlam last night! And at home they would soon be up and out to the barn to do the chores. Far down the dim distance he could hear the slow clump-clump of a horse, the milkman on his rounds, the only living creature in this town of dead men. There was not even a fence between his property and the street. Everything was bold and obtrusive. There was no privacy for a man's soul. He hated that row of brick houses opposite, with windows all looking at him. He was a prisoner, shut in a long tunnel of red brick walls.

He stepped out upon the sidewalk. He must get beyond this narrow crack in the brick wall, before he smothered. His feet made such a loud clatter on the cement that, abashed, he stepped hastily into the middle of the roadway. He walked away down to the end of the street and turned into another that led up a hill. He walked faster, passing more and more rows of brick houses. He passed a filling station on the edge of the town; passed the silent dark bulk of spacious homes set back in the blackness of wide lawns; passed a row of motor cabins. He paused at the top of the hill. It was still dark, but he was aware of a subtle transparency in the air. From the bushes and trees along the way his ear caught a rustle, a soft murmur and a twitter. He marched on. He was out in the open country now, and the air was filled with the scent of brier-roses and apple blossoms. The dewy fields on either side still lay in darkness, but the heavens had begun to grow faintly grey, and seemed farther away. As he went on there gradually grew a twittering and a whispering on all sides, as though fairy voices were telling some wonderful secret. The whispers grew and swelled. Then came a murmuring from the grass as though ten thousand tiny orchestras were tuning their instruments. They were joined by a soft chorusing of myriad voices. Every blade of dewy grass by the roadside and far over all the fields, every leaf on every tree became vocal. And then, high up in a towering elm, an oriole that had caught a glimpse of the dawn blew a thrilling call on his little golden trumpet. A robin shouted an answer from the fence across the way, and the whole waking earth was chanting a hymn to the morning!

He could see the misty white apple trees in the orchards now. Away to the east he caught a faint crystal clearness tinged with pale gold. That great black bulk against it was the Blue Ridge. Somehow, unerringly, his feet had found

the Bay Shore Road. He stepped out briskly, with a young, jaunty step, and marched straight into the sunrise.

It was only eight miles to his own gate! What was eight miles? His pioneer father had walked it many a time with a sack of flour on his back. His pioneer mother had walked it with a basket of butter and eggs. He marched on, his back limber and free from pain, his feet light and young.

The sun had set the heavens aflame, and the fields were alive with the song of bobolink and meadowlark when he turned in at his own gate. His old dog came bounding down the lane in frantic welcome, and was still leaping about him in mad joy when he tramped in at the kitchen door.

The family were at breakfast. He noticed there was no one at his place at the head of the table. Alfred sat in his old place at the side, but Bud's wife was in mother's place, holding the coffee pot. At the sight of him the two jumped up in alarm, and Bud Armstrong came running in from the barn.

What was the matter, they all demanded, was anybody sick? "Where's Mother?" cried Alfred. There was nothing the matter, the old man said calmly; he just walked out, he had nothing else to do. He sat down rather hurriedly. His knees were feeling queer.

Bud's Lucy brought him a great plate of porridge and Alice fried up more potatoes and eggs, while Alfred went to the telephone to tell his mother. Then Alfred sat down and stared. He had always been a good son, but not at all demonstrative or very affectionate. But as he looked at his father something of the turmoil of soul he had been through seemed to get to the son's understanding.

"Well," he declared, "you sure came at the right time. Cherry wouldn't let down her milk last night, and she'll hardly let any of us touch her."

"Yeah, and she's kickin' everythin' to smithereens this mornin'." Bud complained. "You had better come out to the barn as soon as you're done."

The old man turned to his breakfast with a great warmth and comfort surging through his heart. They needed him here!

Janet held out for two whole days, but finally summoned the girls. They came and took down the new curtains, and lifted the new rugs. True to his promise, Old Geordie sent his truck, and it came roaring out the Bay Shore Road with all the furnishings of the new home, the two upholstered rocking-chairs on top. The house was rented to summer visitors, and the neighbours all said they believed that Janet was as glad to get back as Alf, only she would not let on.

When Ellen had listened to the story for the third time, amplified by Liza and Tilly, she was ready to feel as happy over the ending as Old Alf himself. Perhaps, now that his mother was with him again, Alfred’s mind would not be troubled with speculations about another housekeeper.

4

Under the Old Apple Tree

Ellen's brief sense of security, brought about by the return of Alfred's parents, was soon dispelled. It seemed that, having once made up his mind on such a stupendous question as the selection of a possible partner for life, Alfred was not to be turned lightly aside.

He began to be on hand always when she came home; always discreet and careful not to be seen near her in public, but in some subtle way conveying to her the dreadful intelligence that he was waiting and ready.

Then she well knew that her father's home life was uncomfortable. Liza Laird was kind and devoted, and a clean housekeeper, but she always managed to leave discomfort in her wake. Liza's methods were on the grand scale of Mother Natures. She swept and scoured and washed the place the way the wind and rain and sun cleansed the Laird valley on a March noonday when the snow came roaring down off the Blue Ridge in a thousand cascades. Ellen had never once heard her father utter a word of complaint about any domestic arrangement, but she well knew that when Liza did her weekly scourging of the manse, he had to get out and make pastoral visits, in self-defence. Once a week everything was dragged from its place and scoured and beaten and dragged back, and every room was left clean and damp and uncomfortable. There was not a square foot of paint, which Ellen had so carefully applied to the old woodwork, that was not in danger of being scoured away.

Her father's health and his work demanded that she do something for him, she told herself again and again, as she rode up and down on the bus. But what could she do? She had timidly approached her father as to what one should do with insurmountable problems, and he had answered, without hesitation, that faith and prayer would solve any difficulty.

Ellen had been well grounded in the Christian faith in her childhood; but its light had grown dim in her years at the university. She and Ronald had sometimes discussed the subject in the abstract, and had always come to the conclusion, though unspoken, that such things as faith and prayer belonged to one's childhood, with other elemental things they had had to learn. God became something hazy and unreal, having little or nothing to do with one's daily life. But now, when life pressed upon one, and the future held problems with which one could not cope, there ought to be something one could hang on

to if one had any religion at all.

Ronald had felt that, too, she knew, when he came home to say good-bye on his last leave. He had surprised her one day as they sat by the living-room fire, when their father was busy in his study.

"Nell," he said, walking about the room, pulling down a book and putting it up again, "what's your idea of immortality?"

His sister hesitated. Immortality? Had she any ideas on the subject? She fell back upon her early teaching. "Father believes we survive, individually," she said hesitatingly.

Ronald was a clever lad, a Rhodes Scholar, with a year at Oxford to his credit. But here he was at sea. "Yes, Father would," he said. It was uttered tenderly, reverently, but with some note that set his father's faith apart from the lives of ordinary people. Ellen understood. She longed to say something, anything, that would give assurance, hope for the future. The war grew more terrible every day and the air force was bearing the brunt of it. Something she had read, written by a young French air pilot, haunted her: "We were flung against the enemy as one would fling a glass of water into a forest fire." Ron was going into that, and she had nothing sustaining to give him. Then something had interrupted, and there had been no more chance for confidences.

Perhaps if she prayed, she thought, really prayed—something quite different from merely saying your prayers—prayed for guidance in her dilemma, a way might open up. So as the problem of her father's position and the menace of Alfred kept growing heavier day by day, she made it a matter for prayer. Show her what to do, she asked in child-like faith.

She came home often during the summer, for her father needed her and she loved to come, and she grew quite adroit in the matter of dodging Alfred. Fortunately, as the heavy summer work of the farm took more of his attention, he had not been seen so much about the manse. He was sometimes doubtful, too, as to whether he had really made up his mind. He deeply admired Ellen's gentle air of breeding and the lady-like manner that set her apart from the other Lairdale girls. Nevertheless, he was often assailed by doubts and fears and he welcomed the breathing space given him by his father's return to the farm. He had time for more consideration. Meanwhile he could pursue his courtship carefully and secretly so that none of the neighbours would suspect.

But the more he saw of Ellen the more confirmed he was in his mind that she was the right one. She was not a beauty, but even Alfred sensed that there was something more appealing than mere beauty in the gentle glance of her

soft grey eyes, the poise of her stately head, and the golden lights in her brown wavy hair. Her chief charm was one he rarely saw, for she was possessed of some inner spring of generous humour. Some source of unquenchable gaiety, such as lived on in her father's heart, had been inherited by his daughter.

The long warm summer days, many of them breathlessly hot in a city office, had passed into September before Ellen was given her two-weeks' vacation.

The employees of Francis & Blair had to have their holidays at different times, and someone had to stay with the work during the intense heat of midsummer. Ellen was the victim chosen for this ordeal, and she came home on the first of September feeling rather weary and fagged.

But the cool breezes from the bay, the scent of apples, and the feeling of well-being that always came to her when she saw the old manse, soon restored her strength. She found her father happily excited over the prospect of a visit from his boyhood friend, the Reverend David Laird. David had been born and brought up on the Old Home Place, and they had been classmates in old Knox. But he had gone west shortly after his ordination, and they had seen each other only once since. Now David had written an answer to his Springtime letter that he was in the East and was coming out to see his old home and his people. And if his old friend could make use of him on Sunday he would be glad. Her father was rather troubled about the letter, for in his excitement he had mislaid it and had not been able to find it again. He had read it hurriedly, coming from the post box, and then Mrs. Peter Laird had been taken suddenly worse and he had gone over to see her. And when he came back the letter was gone. Liza had been cleaning when he left, he added helplessly, and perhaps . . .

Ellen was accustomed to his losing things, and was not disturbed. It would turn up somewhere. She devoted her first morning at home to a thorough search for it.

"I remember he said something about Ronald, and that he himself was in the army: a chaplaincy. But I can hardly credit that. David and I are the same age. I really must find it and read it again. You must write and tell Islay, Ellen. The Reverend David is her uncle. Dear me, I wonder where I could have laid it? I must tell Young Geordie. He was David's closest friend. Geordie will be delighted. It wouldn't be possible that I slipped it into a book I was reading, my dear?"

Ellen hunted again, without success. Evidently the letter had been swept up in the whirlwind of Liza's broom and would never be seen again.

"If you see Young Geordie pass, Nellie," he called in the morning as he

went out to work in his garden, “call him in, will you? He’ll be driving his horse. The telephone is out of order, or I’d call him. Well, well, David Laird! What a day it will be! Fortunately I do remember when he said he was coming. I feel sure it was next Sunday!”

Ellen kept an eye at the front window for Young Geordie as she searched further for the letter. Young Geordie Laird was over seventy, but was so called because his cousin, Old Geordie Laird, who lived across the road from him, was over eighty. Young Geordie would not be hard to catch as he passed for he had laid up his car and was driving a horse and buggy. Young Geordie hated cars. He had bought one for his boy, Dick, but the lad had been away in South America for over two years, and the car was awaiting his return. So Ellen was surprised as she looked down the road to see him come swirling round the corner and up the hill towards the church driving the despised machine. There could be no mistaking who it was. Everyone knew Young Geordie when he went abroad in his car, and he was always given the right of way as though he were royalty.

In all the years that he had struggled with a car, he had never been able to come to terms with it. Some deep-seated antagonism between his free spirit and a machine of any sort rose up within him as soon as he put his hand to the wheel. He had always loved and respected the horse, and when he saw the farmer’s best friend, intelligent, willing and affectionate, replaced by a bewildering combination of wheels and bolts and gears, dead and unresponsive, he never could quite forgive the monster he was compelled to use. And what use was a car, anyhow? If you counted all the hours spent in tinkering at the thing, Young Geordie would argue at the Acton Hill store, you would gain time by trading it for a stone-boat and a good yoke of oxen.

As he came weaving his tortuous way up the road past the church, Ellen ran to the gate and gaily waved for him to stop. Young Geordie never could manage to get stopped less than a half-dozen yards beyond his destination, and he had passed Gideon’s gate by the time his brakes had done their work. Ellen ran down the road through a garden of queen-anne’s-lace to catch him.

He was muttering and growling like an angry old dog, but when she came up with him, his face broke into a smile. He had always loved Ellen, ever since she was a little girl joining all the other children at the Sunday School picnics to await his wholesale treat of ice cream.

“Eh, well, well!” he cried, “and here you are home again! Man, man, was there ever such a lucky man in the world before as the minister? To have such a daughter! But wait, now! What do you think? I’m goin’ to be up sides with him soon! Yes, siree!” His brown face lit up with delight, his bright blue eyes

danced. “Yessir! In about a month I’ll have a daughter of my own! And I won’t call the king my cousin!”

“Oh, oh, Uncle Geordie! Not Harry? Oh, really? Is Dick coming home?”

“Jist that! Every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the family will be on the way in less than a month! Dick’s home! At least, in the country! He joined the navy the minute he hit Canada. And on his very first leave he’s coming home to marry that grand lassie that’s been waiting for him so long!” Young Geordie fairly choked over the good news.

Ellen’s eyes were starry. “Harriet and Dick! It’s like a story book. Oh, and where will they be married? In Harrington?”

“Right here, in that there church! But don’t you say a word about it, lassie, only to the minister. I don’t know why, but all weemin seem to think that a wedding is like a murder and must be hidden. Bella warned me not to tell anybody for my life. But, I says, I’ll have to tell Mr. Carruthers. They can’t very well get married without a minister. So she gave in at last that I might tell the minister and you, but not for a while!”

“Oh, Uncle Geordie, it’s wonderful! Does Islay know?”

“Yes, she knows, and she’ll be coming out to the Old Home Place. You’ll hear from her all about it. Now, I shouldn’t a’ told you! But you always kinda put a spell over me, lass, so that I tell you everything I know the minute I look at you. That’s why I’m ridin’ around in this instrument of torture. I was afraid if the boy came home and found me joggin’ along behind Old Prince, he’d mebby do somethin’ desperate. So I thought I’d practise a little. I’m goin’ up to the store. Now, wouldn’t you like a ride up to Acton Hill for a pound o’ tea or something?”

“Oh, go away, Uncle Geordie, and don’t tempt me. You know how much I’d love to go with you. But I’m getting ready for a guest, a visiting minister from the West. I almost forgot! Your wonderful news drove mine out of my head. Father has—oh, here he is!”

The minister was hurrying down the road towards them, still carrying his hoe, and Ellen left them to talk over their double budget of good news.

And now Young Geordie’s Dick was going to war. Another Lairdale boy, and one of the very best. Where would it end? She hurried back to her work. One might waste one’s life grieving, if it were not for blessed work! There was plenty of it, for they would have a guest over Sunday; and as everybody was busy with threshing these days she had decided to do without Liza’s help.

The Reverend David Laird was related to all the Bay Shore people, but Ellen knew by experience that, being a minister, he would be expected to put up at the manse. There was no one but Annie Pierson, his second cousin, living in his old home now, and it was most unlikely that any of the Laird relatives would disturb a church tradition by inviting him to their homes.

The missing letter still refused to turn up, but the minister kept recalling bits of it which he pieced together. David had said not to bother writing. That was like David, exactly. He would be at the military camp and he would drive over to Carlisle. He had said something, he remembered now, about his son's being there. Ah, he had it now! It would be the son that was in the army, not David. And David would be back East to visit him. Now he had it all. But he still could not understand where the letter had gone.

Saturday came, and Ellen made the manse all beautiful and neat with flowers in every room, and set out the garden chairs under the maple tree at the corner of the lawn. The guest room was all pale green-and-white, and cool, with a dainty vase of sweet peas on the window sill that sent its perfume drifting over the white bed.

Everything was ready for supper, too, should he come in the afternoon. And there was the Sunday dinner almost ready. Meals were not so difficult, with her father's luxurious garden at hand, and milk and cream and eggs just down the lane at Liza's. It was so much more interesting to prepare meals, and make a house clean and pretty, than to sit at a desk in a dusty office all day, she told herself wistfully.

It was at such times, when she was enjoying her home, that she found herself trying to imagine what life would be like if Alfred were at all possible. What a relief it would be to have security and a home; a home for her father as well as herself. And Alfred was a good man, a kind and devoted son. But she never dallied with the idea long. She would look up at Alfred sitting in the choir on a Sunday morning, stiff and forbidding, and she knew there were some things that even the most devoted daughter could not do for even so beloved and worthy a parent.

As soon as their mid-day dinner was over, her father grew restless. He felt he had better drive in to Carlisle to meet the afternoon train, so that if David were on it he would not have to wait.

"I may bring him back to supper, my dear," he said. "But you must just give him what we would have ourselves. You won't go to any trouble, will you?"

Ellen smiled at him lovingly. "It won't be the smallest bit of trouble," she

declared. “Bring him home, and as many more preachers as you can pick up.”

He went away happy and excited, and Ellen took a basket and went out into the garden. She would pick a great bunch of those crimson zinnias for the study table, and then she would go over to Tilly’s harvest tree and get some apples for a pie for Sunday dinner. The Reverend David Laird, who had lived so many years on the prairie, must have a pie made of Lairdale apples while he was visiting his old home.

She went out to the garden at the side of the house where the tall zinnias glowed against the old grey stones.

The full lavish beauty of summer was waning, but the late flowers were at their best. Asters, purple and white; and hollyhocks along the fence between the manse and the church, glorious double blooms on stalks that rose ten and twelve feet high. Ellen had planted many along the little graveyard behind the church, too, and she stepped over to the fence to see how they were doing. She looked instinctively across the road and up to where Alfred’s big house topped the hill. There was a view of the lane from there, and Ellen stood still in dismay. A car was coming down Alfred’s lane from the house. Even at this distance it could not be mistaken, for the sunlight was reflected in a flame from its gleaming surface. This was no time of a Saturday afternoon for so good a farmer as Alfred to be going to town. What if he were coming here, and her father away? She darted into the house, carefully closing the door behind her. She looked around for Rowdy, but fortunately he was away on a rabbit hunt. She snatched up the basket and ran out of the back door and around behind the house.

Tilly and Liza had a big orchard in the field adjoining the church. They were mostly northern spies, but there was a neglected jungle-like corner of the field next the road that had a wonderful tree of harvest apples. They were the earliest and best, and were left to rot if someone did not use them. Tilly and Liza had always urged her to take as many as possible. And now was her chance. She slipped out of a back gate that led to the churchyard and ran behind the row of hollyhocks. Gideon’s corn field came almost up to them and provided a perfect sanctuary. She walked in between the tall stately lines of cornstalks waving their golden tresses in the soft breeze. They shielded her completely from watchful eyes on the road or at the Begg farm house; eyes that might otherwise spy out her headlong flight, with the result that Liza and Tilly would telephone over for an explanation, while all the Bay Shore listened in.

She arrived at the hidden corner of the orchard out of breath. There was a thick hedge of dogwood and hawthorn and tall undergrowth along the fence

that reached up to the apple boughs and made an impenetrable screen between her and the road. As she crouched down in the shade she heard a car swish softly past. She peeped through the undergrowth towards the house. Yes, her instinct for flight had been right. She saw Alfred stop and go in at the manse gate. He was there for some time before he decided there was no one at home, and she saw his car go on down the road. She sank down upon a big stone and breathed freely again.

The harvest tree leaned down towards her, hung with golden balls. There were no better apples in all the Lairdale orchards. They were soft and sweet and juicy, and they made foaming white apple-sauce and pies which her father pronounced something past perfection. In the little sunny circle golden-rod and queen-anne's-lace, and blue chicory made a perfect garden nook. A tall duchess tree bearing golden and scarlet fruit spread a gay canopy above, and next to it towered an ancient monarch of a northern spy with great heavily laden arms reaching out over the fence. She was safe here, in her flowery fastness. No one could find her. She filled her basket with the golden fruit and seated herself in a crotch of the old spy tree, and thought of the happy days when she and Ron had a play-house in this very corner and brought all the old broken dishes from the manse for their table. She had loved housekeeping, even then.

But she was disturbed by Alfred's call. She could not long escape him in this undignified fashion, now that her holidays were here and she would be home for two weeks. She knew the time was not far distant when she must let him know that she could not possibly find his attentions acceptable, and she must do it in such a way as not to hurt his pride. She must do it soon too, before the neighbours began to talk. Alfred would never forgive her, she well knew, if she let him become the object of ridicule. She had an uneasy feeling that he might never forgive her anyway. She had to do something soon, and the day she did it she would start dissension in her father's congregation. Even Old Alf's loyalty, she greatly feared, would scarcely withstand any rebuff to his only son.

Any time, her father said, was the time to pray. But when you were in straits, he declared, was God's opportunity. Well, she was in straits, with no visible way out, and she raised her heart in a cry for help. No matter what she had to do, no matter how hard the way, she petitioned, just let her father be saved from the consequences of her actions.

It was so cool and pleasant here, so quiet and secluded, that something of the peace of the little nook stole over her. She leaned back into the arms of the tree, the basket across her knee, and a sunbeam, filtering through the green

canopy above, touched the waves of her brown hair and turned them to gold. It touched the lilac print dress she wore, too, and brightened it, so that the purple-grey of her eyes was dark in comparison.

She sat so still that a little nut-hatch crept down the trunk of the tree and hung looking at her curiously. Butterflies hovered over the golden-rod, the humming of bees filled the little arbour, and flickers called to their mates, golden wings flashing in the sunny orchard aisles.

An occasional car went slipping past, making no disturbance under the apple trees. But there was one over on the side line that came roaring along, shattering the quiet of the whole countryside. It was a motor lorry filled with soldier lads on their way to the Tank Range far down the shore. They were singing *Waltzing Matilda* at the tops of their strong young voices. The truck stopped near the corner, and Ellen listened. If it stayed for any time near an orchard, she well knew what that load of brown boys would do. Lairdale apples were famous along Georgian Bay, and among all ranks of the army.

But fortunately it went on, and long after its roar had faded away in the valley she could hear the voices calling back their invitation: *You come a-waltzing Matilda, with me!*

The big army truck that ran across the country carrying soldiers from Camp Churchill had come thundering along the Lake Shore highway and turned down the side road towards the training camp at the Tank Range. At the corner, where it turned aside from Lairdale, it stopped, and a tall young officer in airforce blue swung lightly to the ground. A half-dozen brown boys, in uniforms a shade lighter than their faces, tumbled out with him, all eager to give information.

“There it is, right over there, Padre!”—“Lookit, you can see the church through the trees!”—“Yeah, that’s Lairdale all right, Padre. Ask Shortie back there, he knows every fence rail. He’s got a girl on the Bay Shore.”

The Padre was young himself, and evidently wanted to spare Shortie’s blushes.

“I’ve got my bearings now, boys!” he cried. “And thanks a lot for the ride and the directions!”

They all scrambled back into their seats. “So long, Padre!” they shouted. “Good Luck!”

“Remember, you guys all promised to come to my meeting Monday, when I get back!” he shouted back at them.

Sure thing! They'd all be there if they didn't all get C.B. for leaving the road to drive him out here to the backwoods! How about him 'phoning old Slaughterin' Sam, to tell him they were late because they had to drive the padre to church?

The padre threw back his handsome head and laughed, his fine teeth gleaming in his brown face. He picked up his bag. "I know you chaps! You don't need anybody to make up an excuse! You'll think of a dozen better than that before you get to camp. So long, boys, and thanks!"

The lorry thundered away, the brown load roaring inharmoniously—*You come a-waltzing, Matilda, with me!*

The chaplain stood for a little watching it sink into the valley. Great lads! His favourite army song was *Bless them all*. He had managed to become friendly with many of the boys, and sometimes wondered that they were so ready to confide their troubles and their misdoings. He was not given to thinking much about himself, and was unaware that it was his radiant smile that brought the boys to him, and that his warm generous sympathy did the rest. When his face was in repose it was grave, and as he watched his boys disappear it grew stern. War! It was all so bad for them, even the military training. And they were all so young and so carefree! He must do something for them, something more.

Then he turned, and the long flower-decked valley, with the blue water on one side and the blue hills on the other, and the orchards between, opened its arms to him. He stepped out into the middle of the road and drew a great breath.

"Ontario!" he whispered. "Lairdale!" He dropped his bag and took off his cap. For here was the old home he had heard about ever since he could remember. And this was his first real vision of Ontario, for he was prairie born and bred and had but recently flown from a training camp in the West. This was the fairy-land of his childhood. Around his cradle his parents had woven its magic spell, with tales of the old home beside the great inland sea.

"The very first leave you get, son," his father had said, "you must see the old home on the Georgian Bay, where all the Lairds had their roots. Your great-grandfather cut down the first tree in the valley. And you must preach in the little church. I'll write my old friend Carruthers."

"And you must go and see my old home in Carlisle, too, Dallas," his mother had added. "They say it's turned into a gas-station. Dear, dear!"

"Well, I can't believe they'd desecrate Lairdale with a filling station," his

father had assured him. “Why, it’s the Garden of Eden!”

It was, he confessed, standing, looking down the long valley, the Garden of Eden! From this hill-top he could get a wide view of the bay where a long low freighter lifted a wreath of silver foam as she plunged on her way southward, sailing down the Great Lakes—with a cargo of wheat, no doubt from his own Alberta plains. He scanned the distance for the row of lombardy poplars that his father had said marked the old home. He thought he could make out a tiny row of sharp points at the far end of the golden valley. Then he turned and looked at the old church standing near, and beyond it the grey stone manse in its gay flower garden.

He was filled with a delightful warm sense of homecoming. Shelter, warmth, love, and home—this place spoke of them all. He was prairie-bred, and the far spaces always called him. But here he felt the spell of home. A man could settle down in a place like this with a church and a manse and——

He put on his cap and picked up his bag. He must not stand here all day. Over yonder in the manse was his father’s old friend. He must go and pay his respects and see what was in store for him.

He stepped to the side of the road, knee deep in the blossoming weeds, some of which were new to him. There was a wonderful orchard on the other side of the fence, long rows of giant trees, their boughs sweeping the grass with their weight of scarlet apples. He had never seen anything like it! He had not thought apple trees grew to such a size. He had an overwhelming boyish desire to climb that fence. He was young and adventurous, for all the grave clerical insignia on his uniform, and he felt a tingling sense of discovery. He must explore that orchard. Perhaps his grandfather had planted it!

He dropped his bag and leaped upon a big rock close to the fence. He was an ordained minister, he reminded himself sternly. To-morrow he would likely have to preach to his relatives in that church. But for all that he was determined to break into that orchard and steal apples!

He gave a swift glance up and down the road. Nobody in sight. One more light spring brought him to the fencetop. He swept aside the thick branches, took a mighty leap, and landed in a green and golden tangle of flowers and underbrush. And stood abashed. The Garden of Eden his father had said; and here was Eve, in a lilac gown, sitting up in a tree with the sunlight making a golden crown about her head!

Ellen slid down from her seat and stared up into a pair of dark eyes as startled as her own. She was the first to recover. There were so many soldiers on the road these days, and now that the apples were ripening they were

always jumping over the orchard fences. This was another.

"Oh, my," she cried artlessly, "where's your parachute?"

He burst into a relieved laugh and imitated her glance upward. "Where are your wings?" he countered.

Something in his intense gaze made her suddenly become dignified. This was not one of the stray boys from Camp Churchill. He was an officer, and older than the lads she knew. She was not sure of his uniform. It was air force, but not like Ron's. The spreading wings on his cap had a dark cross between them. And there was something about his radiant smile and his whole appearance that was creating an entirely new sort of disturbance in Ellen's heart. She picked up her basket of apples, feeling confused.

He had become serious too, and was all apologies. "I had no idea I was crashing into a lady's bower," he said. "My name is Laird, Dallas Laird, and I believe I am expected here at the minister's."

Comprehension was breaking over Ellen. That lost letter! It was the son and not the father who was to come!

"Oh, not really?" she cried. "Why, I've just picked these apples to make a pie for your Sunday dinner! Come away in. My father is out looking for you!"

5

Back to the Old Home

In spite of the many encroachments upon the day of rest that had come to the Bay Shore with the motor car, Lairdale, largely owing to Mr. Carruthers' influence, held fairly well to its ancient custom of church attendance. Of course, as Nell Turner often said, you were quite likely to have a couple of carloads of folks drive up the lane just as you were putting on your hat to go to church; and on the other hand, you sometimes piled all the kids into the car and went off for a Sunday yourself and made somebody else stay home and cook all day. But, on the whole, there was still a strong tendency to remain at home on Sunday, the habit of years handed down from another generation.

But whatever temptation anyone might have to stray, even the Peter Lairds could not have been lured away on the Sunday that David Laird's son stood in the pulpit where his father had preached his first sermon. Nearly all the congregation was related to him, and all the older folk had known his father. True, he belonged to the Old Home family who had never been in high favour on the Bay Shore. They had all gone away from the old farm, and had distinguished themselves in one way or another and were considered by Granma Armstrong entirely too uppity about themselves.

But everyone had loved and respected David, the minister. And now his youngest son was here, a preacher too, and in uniform. And it was reported that he had been heard to say that he thought Lairdale was the most beautiful place he had ever set eyes on. But then the poor fellow had been brought up on the prairie, and had not likely seen anything but wheat.

There was much speculation among the older folk as to what sort of preacher he might be. Granma Armstrong, who had been a Laird before her marriage, remembered the sermon his father preached here just after he had graduated. And she had to confess that it wasn't up to much. Poor David was that nervous he could hardly get through. And no wonder, with old Dr. Campbell, himself, sitting up there beside him. Well, it would be something to hear David's son.

All the relatives and friends near and far seemed to be of the same opinion, for they came on Sunday morning and packed the church; those who had grown careless about church-going, those who said they were tired of listening to Mr. Carruthers and wanted a change, even those who had been going in to

town to the True Gospel Tabernacle, came out to hear a Laird preacher.

Mr. Carruthers introduced him, after the opening services—something Wise Watty considered a waste of time, as everybody knew who he was—and the young man sat with bent head, his face very grave, but when he stood up in the pulpit and looked about at his assembled relatives, his radiant smile beamed over them and they all liked him at once, young and old.

Some said afterwards they saw Young Geordie wipe the tears away because the son was so much like his father, and Granma Armstrong, who was never given to tears, declared that she just noticed in time that Aggie and Jen had forgotten to put a clean handkerchief into her bag, or she believed she would have been crying herself before he was through. He brought back the old times so.

The young Chaplain spoke feelingly of the pleasure and honour it was to stand in Lairdale pulpit, where his father had stood on the eve of his ministry. He paid a graceful tribute to the memory of old Dr. Campbell under whose ministry his father had grown up, and then to Mr. Carruthers who sat smiling beside him. And then he preached his sermon.

He was modest and quiet and terribly earnest. It was plain to see that David Laird's son had been brought up with a reverence for his high calling. His young eyes looked out across a burning world groping in sin and misery and strife, and saw beyond it the only hope of salvation. The things of time and sense would pass away, was his message, but the Word of the Lord would abide forever.

There fell a great hush over the little church as he spoke. The hum of the bees in the ripening sweet clover, and the rustling of the corn, coming through the open windows were the only sounds except the young minister's deep compelling voice.

Ellen sat in the manse pew, her eyes upon her gloved hands in her lap. She was so deeply impressed that she was afraid. She could almost have found it in her to hope he would say or do something that her mind and heart would not have to approve of so overwhelmingly. She was dismayed by a feeling of utter abandonment to a dream she had been cherishing unaware.

They crowded about him after the service and he demanded a full explanation of who each one was and just what relationship existed between them.

"Why, it's just like coming home!" he cried, when Young Geordie clapped him on the back and called him David. "I have a queer feeling that I have been

here before."

They overwhelmed him with invitations. He must come to dinner, to supper, then. He must stay overnight, a week, till the end of his leave.

He had to refuse them all for he must be away in the morning back to his big congregation at Camp Churchill. But he was coming back, he promised, and would accept all their invitations, every one of them, on his very next leave.

Ellen went around among some of the older relatives, asking them to come over to the manse in the evening when her father would be back from his other charge at Fairhill. Then she slipped away, for there was very little time for her father's lunch before he left for his second appointment. She was relieved to hear her father say as she passed him that Captain Laird was going out with him to preach at Fairhill too. She needed some time alone to set her confused world in order.

By the time they got away from the church she had their lunch on the table. Ellen was a good cook and she had set out her very best with a reckless hand.

"I hope I'm not in the way," the guest said, as they sat at the table by the window overlooking the garden. "I had ten invitations from my family, but I thought—"

Mr. Carruthers hastened to assure him that they would not think of allowing him to go elsewhere, and Ellen smiled shyly as she echoed his words.

"You were brought up in a manse," she said. "You ought to know that it would be an outrage for the visiting ministers to go elsewhere."

"Oh, don't I know? How often we kids who had to wait for a second table wished the visiting parson far enough away. Three boys, always in a state of advanced starvation, didn't wait patiently."

He told them of his early life, and his parents' struggle to bring up three boys and send them all to school on a minister's slender salary.

"Three boys," Ellen said. "But one boy and one girl were worse, because a girl needs so many clothes. I'm sure you and Mother had a far harder time, Father, with Ron and me."

They argued gaily as to whose rearing had been the more frugal and called upon Mr. Carruthers to decide who had done better in the debate.

When Ellen brought the pie she had made, he confessed that it was the main reason he had not accepted any of the invitations to dinner. "I believe,

sir," he said to Mr. Carruthers, "this pie was for my father and I inherited it, so I wouldn't have accepted if the King had asked me to dine with him."

"Eh, eh, well now," Mr. Carruthers cried, "how I could have made such a mistake I cannot tell. I seemed to get it into my head that it was your father who was coming. And really, Nellie, I cannot imagine what could have become of that letter."

They went away soon, Ellen reminding her father to take the visitor, on their return, to see the Old Home Place where his own father had been brought up, and to tell him all about Islay's connection with it.

The evening meal had scarcely been cleared away when the first callers began to arrive. Liza and Tilly and Gideon Begg came first, walking up the lane, and Ellen was delighted to see Andy lingering by the gate. She ran out to urge him to come in.

"Is it all right?" he asked eagerly. "Aunt Liza said you wouldn't want me, but I thought that he—that Captain Laird would be goin' away in the mornin', and I thought I'd like——"

Of course she wanted him, she declared, as she drew him in. So Andy had come under his spell, too! She was very glad, for Andy's sake. She envied him, too. It would be wonderful to be able to speak right out as Andy was doing, and say he sure was the greatest guy he had ever met.

Mr. and Mrs. Steve Laird were the next. Mrs. Steve slipped through to the kitchen with the air of a conspirator and Ellen followed, to find that she had brought a large loaf of cake and a basket of sandwiches. And there on the kitchen table was another great box of sandwiches donated by Liza and Tilly!

"Oh, oh, such neighbours as we have!" Ellen cried gratefully.

The night was warm and still, and the company seated themselves on the veranda facing the bay, where the sun was going down in a sea of glory. The amber air was sweet with the smell of garden and orchard and fields of ripened grain.

The guest seated himself on the dry grass of the lawn, and Ellen noticed that Andy sat close to him on one side, with young Tom Turner, a lad of sixteen, on the other. Old Alf and his wife had just arrived, and Ellen was relieved to see that when Alfred had driven them to the gate he went on alone.

"Well, well, I hear you're movin' to town this fall, Alf," Young Geordie cried as he and his sister came up the veranda steps. It was the current joke, always cracked when Old Alf was present.

“Tuts,” said Granma Armstrong, who was Young Geordie’s older sister, “hold your tongue, Geordie. If you moved you’d not likely have sense enough to come back.”

The visitor looked up and demanded to know what the joke was, and Granma Armstrong was only too ready to tell how the Alf Lairds had moved to town and stayed for the space of one night.

“And no fault o’ mine,” snapped Mrs. Alf.

“Wise man!” the newcomer declared. “Anyone fortunate enough to live in this valley should never move away.”

Old Watty Wiseman, who lived in a corner of Steve Laird’s farm and was hired man at large for the neighbourhood when he felt like working, uttered a disgusted grunt. There might be some good things about this Bay Shore, but as far as farming went the whole place was going to ruin.

“We’ve had a dry summer and we’re in for a hard winter,” he declared.

“We always have a hard winter,” Andy muttered.

Watty was sitting in his shirt sleeves, humped and round-shouldered, on the bottom step. He was not going to let this stranger go away with any false ideas of the place.

“Yes, sir,” he said, addressing the visitor, “the kinda times we have here in the winter with snow is clean ridiculous. Yes, sir, you ought to see it.”

Watty did not use the word ‘sir’ as a title of respect when addressing the young minister; he would have considered such a thing as putting on airs. It was merely for emphasis.

Yes, sir, it would be a hard winter, and with such a poor dry summer as they had had he didn’t see how the farmers would get their beasts fed. There was a short silence, and the chirp of the crickets and katy-dids filled it. They reminded Watty of the fact that there had been very few grasshoppers this summer.

“And that’s hard on the turkeys,” he declared. “There ain’t enough grasshoppers to feed them.”

The western man’s eyes filled with laughter. To anyone brought up on the prairie, he said, a shortage of grasshoppers did not seem like a calamity.

Steve Laird, who was the most fluent talker on the Bay Shore, felt that Watty had had the air long enough. Steve always had a grievance, too, and the chief one was the educational system under which the oppressed serfs of

Ontario groaned. He undertook to enlighten the man from Alberta on the subject, and Watty turned with his complaints to Mr. Carruthers. He thought after such a dry summer there would be lots of the farmers up on the Lake Shore who wouldn't even bother to thresh.

Well, there was one good thing, Gideon Begg proffered; the summer was near over, and them towerists that were ruining the country would soon be gone. Gideon could not abide the crowds of bathers and cottagers who disported themselves along the shores of the Georgian Bay all summer when the farmers were at their busiest. He attributed all misfortunes to their presence.

Ellen sat on the top step with Liza and Tilly and the other woman, listening and whispering together. She had placed a great jar of the lovely, feathery parasols of queen-anne's-lace at the edge of the steps, and when Watty leaned back he almost knocked it over. Andy jumped up and rescued it, and Watty looked at it in disdain. He turned to Ellen.

"Man, are ye pickin' that wild carrot weed?" he exclaimed in disgust. "It's the worst pest in the countryside."

"Oh, but it isn't wild carrot now, Watty," Ellen said, turning to him laughingly. "When I pick it and put into a jar it's queen-anne's-lace."

At that moment the guest turned on his elbow and looked up at her with such a warm smile of understanding that Ellen suddenly remembered an errand to the kitchen and rose hastily.

Steve had by this time come to a pause among the evils of the Ontario school system, and the visitor was given a chance. He told them something of life in a little prairie town in the early days when his father and mother first went west, and of their struggles and hardships. But now life was much easier. He gave a glowing picture of Alberta farms, the miles of wheat and pasture, the towering grain elevators; the constant sunshine, and the warm chinooks to temper the winters.

It was not in Wise Watty to agree with anyone who became enthusiastic over anything. Don't anybody talk to him about the West, he said. He had been there. And he knew.

Andy rolled over on the grass, his eyes full of mischief.

"Tell Captain Laird how you got lost out there, Watty," he prompted.

Watty grumbled and refused, but the guest sat up and begged for the story.

It was all the fault of Ike Simpson that he ever went out there in the first

place, Watty began. Tom, Ike's brother, went out there to live in Saskatchewan. Did he ever happen to come across Tom Simpson in the West?

The visitor did not remind Watty that many hundreds of prairie miles stretched between him and Tom Simpson. He answered that, though he had not known Tom, he had often heard his father speak of a Simpson who had been a neighbour in Lairdale.

Yeah, that would be old Ike, Watty agreed. This Tom was his brother. Well, one summer there was a whole gang o' folks from round the Bay Shore went out there on a harvesters' excursion, to help take off the crop. And gosh, that fellow Tom owned so much land he didn't know, himself, how much he had. There was no end nor beginning to it no matter which way you looked. And when the cutting was done there was nothing but stooks for miles and not a sight of anything else. He wouldn't have believed there could be that many stooks in the world. Well, sir, one night him and another guy from the East went off after supper to see a cousin o' his that lived on the next farm he said. Well, he lived on the next farm all right, but it musta been over in another township. 'Cause they walked for miles and miles along a dirt road without a sign of a fence and nothin' but more and more stooks. Well they got there at last and it was like Tom's place as two peas. There was the same kinda queer buildin's and the same kinda bunk-house for the men. Well after they had been there a while they started to go back to Tom's place. And this guy, Green, said he knew a short-cut through the fields, and so they started out.

"Well, sir, we went on and on, till we thought we'd a come to the end o' the world. And there wasn't anythin' but more stooks whichever way you looked. We kept goin' and goin' and never gettin' anywheres. And after a while this Green fella, that knew so much about short-cuts, he says, 'say, we'll soon be over in the States,' he says, 'if we keep on,' and he says, 'let's sit down and wait for daylight.' So we laid down on one of the stooks, and when we got up in the morning darned if we weren't right near the house where we'd been the night before!"

No, siree, that was an awful country to live in, and he wouldn't live there if you gave it to him, stooks and all! The westerner laughed long and heartily, and, encouraged, Watty continued.

Then there was that Pierson chap who lived up at the Old Home Place. Never a drop of rain for six years. The visitor's face became grave. Yes, he and Mr. Carruthers had been up to see Annie today. That was hard. But Saskatchewan was picking up now, and the farmers were coming back.

It was beautiful, Ellen had to confess, to see how patient he was with old

Watty and how considerate of his feelings; and Andy and young Tom were sitting at his feet gazing up at him as he talked. It would be a relief if he said or did something that would make it possible for her to look at him critically and coolly as she had been able to look at Islay's handsome brother, Pete, when he tried to be charming. It was staggering to be suddenly faced with the impossible hero you had been dreaming about since you were thirteen.

The evening shadows were growing long; the sunset was fading from the sky. The bay seemed to have gathered all the light over its own glassy surface where soft colours still lingered. A little string of glittering jewels moved slowly across the great space; a lighted steamship on its way up the Great Lakes. The crickets and katy-dids sang louder, and away back in Gid's darkening pasture field a horse neighed.

The dew was falling, and Mr. Carruthers marshalled them all indoors, while Ellen and her many assistants passed around the ample refreshments. The talk drifted to the war, which the guest was so soon to face; the terrible advance of the German army, and the desperate plight of gallant, embattled Britain.

Steve, whose eldest son, just turned eighteen, had enlisted, thought the Government should not let the boys from the farms get into the army.

"What is to happen to our farms?"

"If the Germans get past England, Steve," young Geordie said, "you won't need to worry about your farm."

And for once Steve was silenced.

When Lairdale folk went visiting they nearly always made a night of it. But someone remembered they were having the threshers tomorrow, and started the slow lingering exodus towards home. Saying good-night was a lengthy ceremony. Ellen and her father took leave of the guests at the hall door, then on the veranda, next on the steps and finally at the gate.

Old Alf and his wife were among the last to go. As Ellen said good-night to Mrs. Alf she saw Alfred's long car draw up at the gate.

"And you're going in the morning," Mrs. Alf said, shaking the guest's hand yet again. "My, we're sorry. Say, I'll send Alfred over in the morning to take you to town. Now, he'll be goin' anyhow, and it won't be a mite o' trouble. Eight o'clock? That'll be fine."

Ellen was standing in the lighted doorway, with the lamps shining on her hair, when Alfred opened the gate for his mother. She was wearing a white

dress, and her eyes were unusually bright. Alfred wondered why he had not realized before that she was beautiful. His well-guarded heart gave a quick beat. And just then, the young chaplain, tall and handsome in the uniform that always took a girl's eye, came out and stood beside her. The picture that Alfred took away with him was of the pair standing side by side, he smiling down at her, she smiling up at him. And for the first time in his life Alfred felt a pang of jealousy.

They all got away at last but Young Geordie and his sister, Aunt Bella. She was very deaf, and for that reason did not have to be bothered listening to anyone, and could talk all the time. She was still telling all about Dick's plans to come home and be married soon. They had been warned not to tell, Aunt Bella whispered, and she had been as careful as careful. She hadn't told a living soul but Annie Pierson, because Annie had to get the old Home Place fixed up for Harriet and Islay when they came. And, of course, Geordie had told Mr. Carruthers. And then she thought she would just tell Minnie and nobody else, and she had warned her not to hint it even to the girls; and if Minnie didn't laugh, till the tears came, 'cause she had known all about it for weeks and everybody was talking about it! And it was Harriet had told it herself. She had written to Celia, and Lily Anne, and Aunt Bella did not know how many more, and told them all about it and told them to hunt up all Dick's old football team and invite them to the wedding. Talk about her keeping a secret!

Ellen laughed with delight. It was so like Harry!

"Tell me about this wonderful wedding," the guest said to Ellen, "who's Dick, and who's Harry? And isn't there a Tom somewhere?"

"Oh, this is a very famous Lairdale romance," Ellen said. "Dick is Uncle Geordie's nephew, his adopted son, too. And Harry is Harriet Lawrence, of Harrington, your cousin Kate's daughter. Harry spent a summer here at the Old Home Place with Islay Wallace, who is also your first cousin, and Harry's aunt.—Are you bewildered?"

He ran his fingers through his wavy hair. "I'm pretty much at sea, but it's a very pleasant fog; please go on."

Well, Harriet and Dick had met at Guelph College the year before that, but her family had opposed the match, and sent her abroad. Then she came up here the summer Islay inherited the Old Home Place and they renewed their engagement. Then Dick was sent off to South America. That was nearly three years ago. But Harry had waited for him, and now he was coming home to be married next month! The guest turned to Young Geordie.

“What interests me most is—am I to be invited to this wedding? I think I ought to be here to assist Mr. Carruthers. You can’t have a real Laird wedding without a Laird parson.”

Young Geordie smote him joyously on the back. “You’re invited right now!” he shouted. “Man, man, we jist won’t have it without you! Where will you be?”

“Hard to tell. But I don’t think it will be possible that I’ll be out of the country. No such luck. The authorities seem to enjoy keeping the chaplains hanging round camp on this side. So if I’m on this side of the Atlantic I’ll be here. I’ll surely get an extra leave for a wedding.”

And Ellen, standing out in the dim light of the veranda listening, felt that somehow the sun had turned back on its course and was illuminating the whole landscape.

They went at last, Aunt Bella still talking, even after Young Geordie’s car had started on its uncertain weaving course down the road.

“Do come out with me into that field there,” the guest said to Ellen. “I want to see if you have Cassiopeia’s Chair in Ontario skies. I can’t see the stars here for the trees!”

Ellen led the way out of the back gate into Gideon’s field and along the path behind the church where the corn whispered softly. The stars were there, but dim and far away, for beyond the dark river pastures a silvery glow told that soon the moon was to quench their light with her radiance.

“Ah, there it is,” he whispered, “in the right place. And Ariadne’s Crown, too.”

“Of course; we have everything, in Ontario,” Ellen said, striving hard to speak lightly.

“I am coming to think you have. But you have your sky so cluttered up with trees one can’t see it. Now, on the prairie there’s far more heaven than earth. We keep our skies well cleared.”

Ellen was too disturbed to be her old self and answer in kind.

“Ontario,” he said softly. “How mother wove its spell around our cradles! What was that you were quoting to your father about ‘open barns’? I caught a bit of it.”

“It’s a line from Bliss Carman; I suppose he was dreaming of Nova Scotia, but he described Lairdale:

Fair the land lies, full of August,
Meadow island, shingly bar,
Open barns and breezy twilight,
Peace, and the mild evening star.

He was silent for a minute. “Peace,” he said at last. “That’s the charm; a sense of being at home, of fulfilment. Out west harvest brings the feeling ‘Now we’re through, let’s be off to Vancouver for the winter!’ ”

“It’s our smaller farms, perhaps,” Ellen said, “and homes nearer each other; the cosy way we live.”

“I’d ask nothing better of life than a country parish here in Ontario—” He paused. Ellen followed his thought.

“And you’re going to war,” she said, with a feeling of panic.

“Yes, I forgot for a minute. I’m going to war. After all it’s not so strange for me. Not so hard as for these farm boys. My life will always be going to war. A minister these days, at least a young minister, at the beginning of his work, should be at the church front either at home or in overseas work. So when I’m through with this war, I’ll have to be off to another.”

He said it gaily, as if he enjoyed the prospect.

They had been strolling along the path down which Ellen had fled the day before, and up which she had brought him home. The scent of apples filled the air, and as they went the radiance brightened behind the black band of trees far over Gideon’s pasture, and a great golden harvest moon rose up above the dark earth and laid over the fields a web of silver.

Before they reached the end of the path Ellen turned. She must not let her heart enter into the magic of this night. She was a hostess; and this was her guest, who was trying to be polite and entertaining. As they reached the little gate she heard her father call. “Where are you Nellie?” and she answered, “Coming, Father.” She was relieved to go into the house and the safety of homely tasks. If you lingered in the moonlight you might get a glimpse of paradise that would ruin your peace of mind forever.

6

Summer Holidays

Alfred was silent as he drove the guest away from the manse. Ellen and her father had come out to the gate, and the manner of the young man's lingering farewell to her had aroused his worst suspicions of the night before. He was not a talker at best, and he felt uncomfortable in the presence of the young minister. He would have liked to tell him just what a splendid crop he had this summer, and what his fat cattle were worth. But he did not quite know how to start.

Meanwhile the visitor was regarding Alfred in his usual friendly fashion, and trying to start up a conversation. He wanted to know exactly how their families were connected, and Alfred assured him that the relationship was pretty thin, merely that their grandfathers had been cousins. Then the young minister tried several topics. The choir; Mr. Carruthers had told him how well he was training them. It was a great help to a minister when there was a good choir to help in the service. Alfred replied that he had done his best, but it was up-hill work. It was very difficult to get the young people out to practice; they were all careless and worldly. Mr. Carruthers was not much good with young people. He was too old. He ought to retire soon. He felt sure Ellen wanted him to. It was hard on Ellen, having to come home so much. He said it with a proprietary air.

She was such a devoted daughter, the guest answered, that she probably did not mind.

Something in the young man's voice made Alfred look at him sharply in the car mirror. The fellow was altogether too good looking for a preacher, all dolled up in that blue uniform, too. He might catch the eye of any girl, and there was no doubt now in Alfred's mind that he had taken a fancy to Ellen. The conceit of him! What had he to offer her? He would likely spend all his life in some little shack town on the prairie, on a beggar's salary. He thought of his own wide acres, his big house and his big bank account. Any girl he chose for his wife could live like a lady. He had a sudden feeling that it was his duty to protect Ellen from any possible advances from one so far beneath what she might expect. For Ellen's sake, he assured himself righteously, he must put this young upstart in his place. He cleared his throat carefully.

"Well, I guess I'm the one that ought to know, about Ellen," he said.

“We’ve been pretty good friends for a long time.” He paused. “And,—well, I shouldn’t say anything yet, because she can’t leave her father, but we both—I guess you know what I mean.”

He had no sooner said it than he was appalled. And yet, he argued hurriedly with his conscience, there was no smallest doubt that this would be true some day. He had not really lied. And he might be saving Ellen from a life of poverty. He was only doing his duty by her.

The young man had been silent so long that Alfred glanced at him in the mirror again, and noticed that his face had grown grave to sternness. He saw him suddenly stiffen and sit straighter. At last he spoke.

“Oh, indeed? Yes, yes, I understand. You are to be congratulated.” Then he sharply changed the subject, and was silent most of the way to the station.

Ellen put on her oldest and biggest apron and plunged into housecleaning. She always kept her father’s study as her special task. The weekly upheaval of the rest of the manse had to be endured, but the daughter well knew that if Liza were allowed to put profaning hands upon the minister’s desk and his books he might find his best commentary being given a scouring, and his sermons hung out on the clothes line!

Then he liked everything left in its accustomed place. His desk stood against the wall near the east window, in the exact spot where it had been placed when they moved in twenty years before. And the old sofa was still where it had stood when she and Ronald used to sit on it side by side on a Saturday evening to repeat their scripture texts for the coming Sabbath.

Ellen recalled, half amused, the day shortly after her mother’s death when, in their mistaken desire to do something for the lonely minister, Liza and Tilly had turned his study inside out and cleaned it.

They had carried all the books out to the veranda, dusted and shaken them, and put them all back in hopeless confusion; Old Testament and New Testament, Bible dictionaries and fiction, ancient and modern, all mixed. It took Ellen half a day to get everything back where it belonged. For well she knew that if George Adam Smith was not next to Professor Denny, with the volumes of Hastings’ Bible Dictionary directly beneath, her father would be so confused he would not be able to write his Sunday sermon.

So she went vigorously to work; and as she worked, to keep her mind off a dangerous subject, she made plans for next week. She was determined that this summer she would make her father go away for at least a week’s vacation. This matter of her father’s vacation was one that had come up every summer

regularly and been put aside till the next summer. Mr. Carruthers had not taken any holidays when she and Ronald were getting their education, for summer was the time when they could be home, and the family could not afford to pick up and go anywhere. Only once had she and her brother managed to get their parents away. It was the year before their graduation, and Ron was home taking extra studies. They had persuaded their father and mother to take a trip to Cleveland to see Aunt Susie Dunbar, their father's sister. They had gone, taking the boat trip across Lake Erie, and had stayed a week. She remembered yet the happiness and refreshment the little jaunt had brought them. But there were never any more of the kind. The minister's contract with his congregation granted a month's vacation with salary each year. But it had almost been forgotten, and many of the congregation did not see why a minister, who really did not work hard, after all, needed a holiday. Why, he was always dressed up and going off to Presbytery meetings or something like that, and surely that was not work. Some of the congregation, too, felt it looked rather worldly to be wanting to go away and be idle for a whole month. Mrs. Peter Laird asked solemnly at a church quilting, when the minister's wife was absent, who had ever heard of the Apostle Paul taking a holiday and going away down the Mediterranean on a trip? Naturally, no one in Lairdale Church had heard any such rumour, and Mrs. Peter went on to say that the evangelist who was preaching just then in the True Gospel Tabernacle in Carlisle had never taken a holiday in his life.

It was her husband, Peter Laird, who had pointed out at the session meeting, when the arrangements for a month's holidays were being made, that sometimes there were five Sundays in a month, and the minister might be getting more than he really should. If the minister went away in February it might be all right, but the contract read 'summer vacation.' And he would move that the vacation be for four Sundays, and then they would be safe.

Some of them did not quite agree, but as Peter Laird was considered the best business head in the congregation, and was apt to make trouble if he were opposed, nobody said anything and the holiday period was fixed carefully at four weeks.

All this wise forethought made not an hour's difference in the length of the minister's holidays. Mr. Carruthers remained at his work, whether the summer months had four Sundays or five. Always, Ellen could remember her mother saying hopefully each year that they must try to get their father away this summer—a budding hope set out each spring to be withered in the heat of August. Once or twice it had almost borne fruit, but the congregation had not been able to see how they would get a substitute.

Since the war had come, holidays were not even discussed; and her father's drooping shoulders and tired face at the end of the summer urged Ellen to action. So as she worked she made plans. The General Council of the church was meeting in Toronto early in September, and she would persuade her father to go. They would drive to Toronto in the car and live on the edge of the city in a tourist cabin. She would cook their meals, and it would cost them very little more than if they stayed at home. She could not help remembering that a certain young padre was soon to be stationed in a military camp near Toronto. And she could not help remembering either that she had heard him tell her father he hoped to attend some of the sessions, if he could get away. It was hard to keep from dreaming, though dreams were foolish.

She placed the scheme temptingly before her father as they sat at their mid-day meal under the trumpet vines of the veranda.

"Think of our going off alone together," she cried, "just you and I. We'll stay in some lovely cabin by the bank of a stream, and you can catch fish for our breakfast. You could go into the meetings every morning, and I could go window-shopping. Now isn't it a perfectly wonderful programme?"

She saw at once that it was not, though he smiled and said it sounded delightful, just like something she would plan. Well, well, what a girl she was, to have thought of all that, and saved the money for it too. But this year he wondered if it would be wise to go away, even for one week. Many ministers were foregoing their holidays, or exchanging pulpits. But it was too late to make any arrangements like that now, as most men were just returning from their holidays. And he wasn't a delegate to the Council this year. Perhaps he would be appointed next year. But he saw her disappointment, and said he would think it over. Then he brightened; she must not miss her own holidays. Why could she not take a little trip over to Cleveland and see Aunt Susie?

"But, Father dear, you know that coming home is enough change and relaxation for me," she argued. "I would think it a waste of time to miss so many days with you. No, we will stay or go together. Do think about it."

He promised he would, but Ellen went back to her housecleaning with little hope. It was hard not to resent the crass selfishness of well-to-do people like the Peter Lairds. But she was not one to harbour resentment for long. She strove to adopt her father's attitude to the difficult ones in his congregation. If a man were mean and unkind and hard, then all the more reason why his minister should take a special interest in him and try to save his soul from becoming utterly sordid. This was her father's creed, and should be hers.

She was like him in refusing to let the petty trials of life play too important

a part. The same inner spring of a contented mind welled up in each heart. If she must accept the ‘no holiday’ rule again, she must. So she put the planning aside; put aside too the shy hope that perhaps her father would spy a tall figure in air-force blue at the Council. It was really not a very good time of the year for the housekeeper to go away, either. Early September brought all the fruit. There were pears and plums in the garden to be canned. There were tomatoes and peaches to be put away, and jellies and jams to be made. And after all, it would be wonderful to have two whole weeks at home, if only Alfred were a hundred miles away!

The day was warm, and the air was filled with the rap-rap of the threshing machine, and all the land was golden, and the bay was blue. One ought to be thankful and contented. Her father passed her on his way out. He was driving to Fairhill to see one of the boys who had enlisted.

“After all, dear, summer is really no time for a country minister to go off holidaying,” he declared. “It is all right for poor city-dwellers, but for the rural minister the winter is the time. January or February now, when the roads are so bad and the work is more or less disorganized. That is the time for vacation.” He was growing quite enthusiastic over the subject.

“I’ll remind you of that next February,” she declared, and he laughed.

“Well, well, I really will go some winter. I could take a few lectures at University of Toronto or Queen’s. Yes, we will go next winter, my dear—or as soon as the war is over. It’s really a very good idea!”

“As long as it’s six months away,” she teased; but he laughed and said he would not forget. “I still think you had better take a little time off and go to see your Aunt Susie,” he said.

Aunt Susie had already written from Cleveland asking her to come, a fact that Ellen had kept secret. Aunt Susie was her father’s only sister, a widow who lived with her sister-in-law. The sister-in-law was going away for a trip, and Aunt Susie was to be alone, and asked if Ellen and her father would not come over and see her.

Aunt Susie seemed kind and affectionate and wrote often, but she was many years younger than her father, and was only his half-sister. Ellen did not really know her very well, and felt from her letters that somehow Aunt Susie’s home would not be a very congenial place either for her or her father. Bridge parties and teas did not appeal to Ellen, and she knew they would be acute misery for him.

She went back to her work. Well, she had almost two precious weeks yet,

and perhaps she could get him to come away on little picnics down the shore. She would get out her old box of paints and perhaps make a picture. And meanwhile there was work, and she must finish the study this afternoon before he returned.

She dusted the books and replaced them carefully, and at last had the whole place thoroughly cleaned and polished except for one wall that was almost covered by two huge pictures in ancient wooden frames that had hung in her father's study as long as Ellen could remember. One was a photograph of a General Assembly, posed in front of a handsome Toronto church. There were imposing rows of ministers and elders, flanking a bearded Moderator in his long robes. Ellen could recall the childish delight she and her brother used to take in picking out their father from the crowd. She looked at him now, a tall slim young man with a drooping moustache, standing far in the rear.

The other picture was a yellowing engraving of a Highland glen filled with shaggy cattle with terrifying horns. She remembered them coming out of the frame to attack her one night as she lay on the sofa beneath, engaged in having the measles.

She stood looking up at them and wished she dared carry them to the attic and hang some beautiful coloured prints in their places. But she knew she never would. She was standing on a chair trying to reach one down, fearful lest it descend to the floor and take her with it, when she heard help coming. She had heard the terrific roar of Andy's car in the lane and had noticed that it had stopped at the gate. He came running up the steps, swung open the door and stood with it open, letting the flies sail happily in.

"Hi! What you doin'?" he asked, staring at her. "practisin' flyin'?"

Ellen jumped to the floor with a relieved laugh. "Andy! You always come along just when I'm most in need."

Ellen loved Andy most of all the boys she had taught in Sunday School. Though he was grown to manhood he was still very much the little boy, a generous, lovable, wayward lad who needed guidance and sympathy.

He grinned in delight. "Aunt Till said you were housecleaning the study, and I was goin' to the store and thought I'd drop in and see if you wanted any help or anything."

"I should say I do. I need a strong arm to remove these monstrosities till I dust them, and heave them up again."

"I'm your man," he shouted. He strode into the room in his heavy farm boots and swept the General Assembly from its place on to his shoulder at a

dangerous angle. “Where d’ye want it?” he asked, executing a fox-trot round the room. “Jeepers! Wouldn’t it make a dandy door for my new chicken house?”

Ellen held up horrified hands. “My father wouldn’t part with it for its weight in golden chickens! Be careful, you rascal! Out here till I dust it!” She guided him nervously to the veranda, where he slammed it down upon the floor. The highland glen followed, even more swiftly. Mercifully the glass on the pictures was tough. She dusted and polished while Andy sat on the railing, engaged in art criticism.

“Boy, look at all the whiskers on them old guys! Say, what sorta beasts are them? I don’t mean the preachers, I mean the other picture. Not cows? You’d have to take a gun when you went to milk.”

“They’re Highland cattle. Mother was born in Scotland, and when my Grandmother Sinclair came out here to live with her daughter, she brought this picture. So that is why Father and I prize it.”

“Well, they’d be the better of some good dehorning, if you ask me. Want me to take out the rest of the pictures?”

“No thank you, Andy; they’re done,” she cried, alarmed for the safety of her mother’s photograph that hung above her father’s desk. “But the minute I finish these you can hang them again in the old places.”

When the wall was wiped down, he swung the pictures into place, leaving them hanging at a drunken angle. “What now?” he demanded, laying heavy hands upon her father’s desk. “Want me to do something with this?”

She assured him hurriedly that he had been a great help, but that was all she needed. He leaned against the door-post and watched her polishing the old walnut table.

“I saw the padre goin’ off,” he said. “Say, ain’t he the great guy?”

Ellen stooped over a stubborn spot on the table and answered that he was certainly a very fine young man.

“I don’t know,” Andy said, “but somehow he kinda makes you feel as if you were, oh, kinda no use, I don’t know,” Andy’s voice trailed off. “I wish,” he declared suddenly, “I could get into the air force. I might get ground work and he might be the padre.” His eyes were shining.

Ellen was so entirely in accord with all he was saying that she was afraid to continue the conversation. Andy’s eyes were so sharp. She went to the door to shake her duster.

“Why, Andy,” she cried, “you have made your car look like a new one! It’s wonderful.”

Andy came proudly to the door. “Say, you would swear she was new, wouldn’t you now? Come on out and have a look at her.”

Ellen went out to the road and admired the queer collection of parts that had produced Andy’s car. The bright blue paint was polished to a mirror-like shine and the old leather cushions had been mended and refurbished.

“She runs like a sewing machine,” the boy cried enthusiastically. “Takes the hills like nobody’s business. All she needs is a coupla new tires now; and then, boy! I could ride her to Berlin. I haven’t a spare either, but I figure these’ll run a good many miles yet till I save enough for a tire. She’ll take the Lairdale girls to town anyhow.”

“Any girl ought to be glad to ride in it,” Ellen said.

“Come along and try it now,” he cried. “Aunt Till said as soon as I was done here I was to go to the store for some things, vinegar and a lotta truck. Don’t you want to go to the store?”

“I’m afraid I can’t, Andy, but I wish you’d bring me some groceries. I want some raisins, if they are to be had, and a loaf of whole wheat bread and a can of baking powder.”

“Hey, whoa! Put on the brakes!” he shouted. “I can’t remember more’n two things and sometimes one stumps me! Aunt Till always puts it in writin’.”

They went back to the house and she wrote her list on a slip of paper. He put it in his shirt pocket, but showed no signs of leaving, so Ellen resumed her polishing, while Andy leaned against the door-post and watched her.

“Florrie went to the dance last Thursday with that Private Sommers from camp again,” he burst out at last.

“Did she, Andy?” Ellen was grieved. “Andy, I sometimes wish, my dear ____”

“Yeah, I know, I oughta quit. But we were all right, long as she thought I was goin’ into the navy. But when I got turned down, it was different.” His face became bitter. “Girls’d run after a hoe handle if you dressed it up in a uniform.”

“It’s too bad, Andy,” she said, wondering if the sudden capitulation of her heart, which was still thrilling her, had been partly caused by air force blue.

“Mebbe they’d give me ground work in the air force, but I thought I

couldn't stand sittin' on the ground watchin' all the other guys fly. But Capt. Laird says they need mechanics bad."

Ellen stopped her polishing to look at him in deep sympathy. His eyes were not dancing any more; they were tragic. He needed encouragement and sympathy, and he had made the mistake of taking up with one of Peter Laird's self-seeking family.

"But Andy, dear," she said, "you are young to go to war."

"Steve's Stevie's younger'n me, and lots of others."

"But that's just the trouble. Too many boys are leaving the farms, and we are being urged to produce more and more."

"Guess there's a fat chance o' me leavin'. I tried the same place as Stevie. Went the same day, and I was turned down again," he grumbled rebelliously. " 'Counta my feet this time. Can you beat it? My head's no good and my feet's no good and I guess the part in between's all wrong too."

"No," Ellen interrupted, "your heart's there, Andy; It's good and brave and generous, and it will get you through. You can serve your country right here; and that's all anyone can do."

She saw he was touched almost to tears by the unaccustomed sympathy, and she turned away to her polishing of the table again. Andy was like a faithful dog that needed to be patted and praised occasionally. He relieved his mind with more complaining. "When that doctor guy in Carlisle turned me down I says to him, I says, 'I can do a bigger day's work on the farm than half them fellows that's enlisted,' and I said if he didn't believe me he could come out and work for half a day for Steve Laird and that would learn him. And all he says was, 'Yeah, well, if you're such a good farmer you get back to work; we need 'em.' And then he hollered for the next guy, and I was shoved out quicker than I came in. I hate to tell folks I was turned down, and I hate to act like I wanted to stay home and have other guys think I'm yellow!"

Ellen knew that was the sore place. Florrie loved the glitter of a uniform, and was leaving him too. It was too much.

"She went off with that Sommers guy again," he said, coming back without preface to the subject that was hurting him. "When I was gettin' my car fixed to go to the dance at the Beach. So I'd got Tom Turner to take Marguerite and me and Florrie too; it was all settled, and when we got there, there was only Marguerite waitin'. She said Florrie thought I wasn't comin'. So we haven't been speakin' since. But she nearly always goes down to the road to meet the mail and I thought if I happened to be passin' on my way to the store," Andy's

eyes began to sparkle again, “I kinda thought if you were with me, you might stop and ask after her mother or somethin’——” He stopped shyly. “Or go in for a visit——”

There was nothing Ellen could think of just then that she wanted to do less than make a visit to Mrs. Peter Laird. But she could not resist this appeal.

“Of course I’ll go, Andy,” she cried contritely. “I never thought. Just you wait. I’ll run and smooth my hair.”

When she came down, Andy was whistling gaily, but as they went to the door the air was rent by a long ring from the telephone. It was Liza, and the line was buzzing with indignation. Was that there Andy there yet? My land! They’d seen his car stop at the manse gate more than an hour ago. What on earth——?

Yes, he was here, Ellen confessed, and it was her fault, for she had kept him to help her with the heavy pictures in the study, but he would be - - - -

Liza was not listening. “You tell him to drive right back here! I sent him to the store for vinegar and coal-oil, and when I went outside, here if I didn’t find the coal-oil can and the vinegar jar both settin’ on the woodshed step where he’d left them. What a boy!”

“He’ll come right away, Liza,” Ellen assured her. “He’s just leaving.” She was keenly aware that Andy was standing right beside the telephone, writhing in silent laughter. “He’ll come right away,” Ellen repeated, waving him towards the door. But Liza had more grievances to pour out, and Andy drew nearer to listen. There was a long complicated explanation of which Ellen lost the thread.

Gid was just as bad, she never saw such a pair of fellas as her and Tilly had to put up with! Gid had promised to get them some more stove wood, Ellen wouldn’t believe the chips and bits o’ bark they were tryin’ to cook with. And then he said he’d go to the store because he wanted Andy to start ploughin’ the back field this morning. And then Tom’s Bill came over to ask him to give a hand at fixin’ some wire fences. And Gid had to take the team and a load of rails, because it was his cattle that broke down the wires and they had gone clean back to the crick, and her waitin’ for the vinegar for the cucumbers. Her and Tilly were making nine-day pickles and chili sauce and Andy had said he was goin’ to the store and Till told him to run and give Ellen a hand. And my goodness! Here was the vinegar jar and the coal-oil can settin’ on the step!

“He’s coming right away, Liza,” Ellen kept repeating, whenever there was the smallest opening, “he was helping me. It was all my fault. Yes, he’ll be

right there. I'll tell him. Yes, yes, the coal-oil can and the—yes, right away. He was helping me hang the heavy pictures."

It was impossible not to laugh at the antics of the culprit cowering behind a chair. When at last she hung up, he leaped towards the door and ran out, yelling in mock terror, to his car. As Ellen watched him, laughing in spite of herself, he turned and rushed back. She wouldn't forget she was coming, would she? No, she said, she would meet him at the gate.

When he was gone, she slipped into her top coat, and called the protesting Rowdy to his prison cell in the woodshed. For Rowdy and his neighbour, Sailor, had an unneighbourly habit of trying to tear each other to pieces when on Gideon's property. Poor Rowdy came reluctantly. When Ellen wore her best clothes ready for church or the journey back to the city he never tried to follow her. He would go to his corner in the shed without being told, and would flop down heavily as if to say: 'This is a dog's life, but I know my place.' He would lie there, his nose between his paws, and look up at her with obedient but melancholy eyes. She always tried, under such trying circumstances, to coax him into good humour. She praised him for being such a good doggie, but never a wag of his tail could she elicit. The occasion was too tragic. But when she was so unreasonable as to shut him up when she was plainly dressed for a frolic in the garden, Rowdy could not bear it. He just would not lie down and be good. He told her in grievous whines that she need not pretend she was going to church, or to town. She hadn't the right smell to her clothes. He was particularly rebellious today. He darted to the door as she passed out and had to be ordered back sternly. And he gave a despairing howl when she closed the door on him. Poor Rowdy, it was too bad, she called back comfortingly.

She went out to close the front door, and, glancing down the road, she saw a large shining car coming down Old Alf's lane. Alfred might take a notion to drop in and report on his trip to the station! It would be no use pretending she was not in. No doubt Alfred's mother had overheard her conversation with Liza and knew she was home. She closed the front door and darted out through the back garden to Gid's lane, rousing more protests from poor Rowdy.

It seemed so long ago that she had first run away from the sight of that car, she thought, as she hurried down the lane. Such a little while ago, really, and yet in that short time life had been completely overturned. Was it only two days ago that the young airman had come crashing into her life, that sunny afternoon in the old orchard? And that night over there beside the whispering corn, with the golden moon coming up over the river pastures. Was that only last night? Well, it was the end and the beginning, that night in the moonlight.

As the old song of fairyland went, she had ‘touched with her finger tips the ivory gates and golden,’ and knew that henceforth life was changed for her.

She hurried away down the lane, checking her headlong pace when she came into view of the windows of Tilly’s house. If the sisters saw her they would guess the reason for her hurry.

The bright blue car was drawn up by the back door, and Andy was loading some baskets of apples into the back, while Liza stood on one side with the vinegar jar and scolded him, and Tilly stood with the coal-oil can and scolded from the other side.

“I wanted to go to the store with Andy,” Ellen said, “so I thought I might as well come down here and get into the car.”

Andy flashed her a humorous look that raised her apprehensions, but he only said, “Sure, I’ll be glad to take you!”

“Don’t you do it, Ellen,” Liza warned. “I wouldn’t risk my life with him. He’ll have a dreadful accident one of these days.”

“Andy?” Ellen cried. “Why, all the men on the Bay Shore, even Steve, say he’s the best driver on the road!”

“Yes, but look at the kinda thing he drives,” Tilly protested. “Why can’t he bring your things from the store? But he’d forget them anyhow.”

“I saw Alf’s Alfred go past jist one minute ago,” Liza said. “You might a got with him. Look at the wonderful car he has. I hear he drove the young Reverend to the station. My, my, wasn’t he grand on Sunday? Such a preacher. They tell me he’s coming back for the wedding.”

Yes, he was very fine indeed, Ellen agreed. Likely he would be back.

The sisters regarded her neat gingham with envy. “My goodness,” exclaimed Liza, “there if you ain’t been housecleanin’ your Pa’s study all this day and you look like you’d been sittin’ readin’ a novel. How do you manage it?”

“Oh, well, I don’t have to go out to the barn to feed hens, and milk,” Ellen said. “Your clothes suit the job.”

The sisters certainly seemed arrayed for varied activities. They were tall strong women. Tilly was tall and thin, Liza tall and stout. They both wore their iron-grey hair done up in curlers to keep their permanent hair-dressing in good order for a possible trip to town. They considered slacks improper, though sometimes, in the winter, Tilly wore Gid’s overalls to the barnyard. But today

they wore their usual costumes of very short skirts, and ragged blouses. Liza's blouse and skirt always seemed to be at variance regarding a meeting place at the back, but whatever discrepancies Tilly's possessed were hidden by a long sweater from which all colour had been scoured away. Their stout legs were encased in old silk stockings that had many runs. Tilly wore a pair of Andy's farm-yard boots, while Liza sported a pair of high-heeled velvet pumps that had come down in the world.

Ellen smiled. She loved the two of them and knew that under the queer disarray beat two of the warmest hearts in their congregation. And there was no need to feel sorry for them, for when the sisters went abroad they blossomed out. Indeed they were considered the best dressed women on the Bay Shore Road, and, as Ellen well knew, each one had a closet hung with expensive dresses, hats and coats.

The coal-oil can was stowed in the back, Ellen took charge of the vinegar jar, and with many admonitions shrieked after it, the little car went roaring up the lane.

"I'll bet if Aunt Till and Aunt Liza was ever to stop scolding," Andy shouted above the roar, "they'd choke on what they were keepin' down."

"Oh, it sounds worse than it is, Andy," Ellen said. "It's really because they are so anxious for you to do everything just right that they talk so. It isn't really scolding, you know."

"Ain't it, now? Well, it sounds so much like it that I kinda got the idea that they were naggin' and jawin' all the time. But mebby my hearin' ain't too good." She laughed at him then, and as he could never be down-hearted long, he laughed with her.

"Say," he cried admiringly, "you made a mighty quick getaway just then, didn't you?"

Ellen glanced at him. Did he suspect anything?

"I didn't want to keep you waiting," she ventured; a remark that Andy seemed to think tremendously funny, for he laughed uproariously, and declared she was terribly smart.

Ellen thought it was safer not to enquire into the cause of his unseemly mirth. He had been in such a hurry to get away that she was surprised to find him suddenly slowing down. Would she mind if they went kinda slow for a little? If they happened along at the right time—a few minutes before Charlie came—Florrie would be there and then Ellen would not need to go and see the old woman. Ellen was quite glad to go slowly, for the car did not shake so

badly nor make such a terrific noise, and the warm sunny day was pleasant.

A youngster on an old rattling bicycle charged down upon them from a steep hill and shot past waving and shouting a greeting. Ellen waved her handkerchief and called, “Hello, Artie! Be careful!”

“Nice kid, Artie,” Andy said. “Say,” he burst out laughing, “remember what you useta call him that summer they came from the West?”

“The Artful Dodger,” Ellen said. “He loved the name, and looked the part exactly. Do you remember the little fellow in Oliver Twist?”

“Sure, you lent me the book, remember? I read—gosh, I musta read it ten times. Oliver Twist askin’ for more. Say!”

He was probably thinking of his own meagre childhood, Ellen reflected, but he suddenly laughed again.

“I was thinkin’ there’s another Artful Dodger lives on this road.”

“Why, who?” Ellen faltered.

He chuckled loudly. “Say, the way you can get outa the road when you see somebody comin’ would beat a jack-rabbit with Uncle Geordie’s dogs after it.”

Ellen listened in dismay. If Andy knew so much, what hope had she that the whole congregation did not know?

“Andy!” she cried. “What an absurd boy you can be! You don’t suppose that anyone else could have such foolish ideas, do you?” He noticed the real anxiety in her voice and hastened to reassure her. No, no, it was just his kidding. Nobody ever saw anything, he was sure; the Aunties would talk about it if they did. And Alf was too cagey, anyhow. No, he had been watching and saw her scoot out of church; and today, when he saw Alf’s car pass the gate, he knew what had brought her down in a hurry. Gosh! Poor old Alf. It was too bad! He shouted with laughter.

“Oh, Andy, please!” Ellen cried in misery. “There’s really nothing in it. Nothing at all! But if I thought other people were thinking the silly things you are, I just wouldn’t come home any more.”

He was immediately sobered by her evident concern. Andy’s warm heart made it impossible to see anyone he cared for suffering, and Ellen Carruthers was his best friend. He would gladly knock Alf and all the gossips into the bay if they troubled her, he tried to tell her in a halting way, almost on the verge of tears; and Ellen was forced to comfort him by declaring it was quite all right, and he must not worry; but in her heart she had heavy foreboding.

Then Andy immediately forgot all about her and her problems, for as they topped a rise they looked down upon Peter Laird's broad acres and handsome buildings. And down the long lane with its double row of splendid maples came a trim little figure in a bright green dress and a bright pink apron. Andy's car crawled along slowly and arrived at the gate just as Florrie opened it.

She was indeed a pretty sight in her pink apron, with her black curls tied up in a pink ribbon. She ran out to the mail box with a letter. "Hello, folks," she called, with a great assumption of gaiety. Andy did not answer and was driving on, when Ellen, knowing this was her cue, called out, "Oh, hello, Florrie, how is your mother? Wait a minute, Andy," she added. "I want to speak to Florrie." Andy, inwardly glowing with gratitude but outwardly sulky, stopped the car. He sat gazing far over the fields while the girls chatted. Florrie went round to Ellen's side, while Ellen asked after her mother. And she wanted to know if they had pears to sell this year. They had winter pears, Florrie said, but Mama was saying that the early crop was not so good this year. Ellen saw at once that Florrie was not the least interested in the poor crop, but was darting nervous glances towards Andy's dark lowering countenance.

"Goin' up to the store?" the girl asked, to keep the conversation going when the subject of pears lagged.

"Yes," Ellen said brightly, "Andy had to go and he's giving me a ride to get my weekly groceries. I am home for two weeks' holidays, you know."

"Oh, are you?" Florrie said absently. "Mama wanted some things from the store too, but Dad and the boys had to go away over to Jim Turner's thrashin' and they took the car."

"Could I get what you want?" Ellen asked. "Why don't you come along with Andy and me and do your shopping?"

The two girls glanced at Andy, and Ellen saw that in spite of his efforts his face was relaxing. "Mebbe there isn't room," Florrie said hesitatingly. "Do you mind, Andy?"

All poor Andy's frail defences were swept away. Florrie, suing humbly for a seat in his car, was not to be withstood.

"No, come along! Climb in!" he cried.

Ellen moved to the edge of the seat and put the girl next to Andy and immediately they roared away. Florrie chatted hurriedly and nervously, though Ellen could see they were both bubbling over with delight.

Mama wanted her to mail this letter for Aunt Lottie before Charlie came

along. “And now it’ll get away far sooner if I get it to the mail box at Acton Hill. Say, there’s Charlie now! Wasn’t it lucky you folks happened to be comin’ along jist as I was comin’ down the lane?”

Ellen smiled and said it surely was lucky for all of them, and Andy was spared a reply as he swerved for Charlie Cameron the mailman to pass.

“The General didn’t write today!” he shouted to Ellen, which was Charlie’s way of telling her there was no letter from Ronald. He bawled something at Florrie, too, about the army sending her a letter, but Andy put on all his gasoline and the roar drowned his voice.

Andy glanced at the letter in Florrie’s hand. “Bet that’s a letter to that corporal guy tellin’ him to hurry over and see you,” he growled.

Florrie slapped him smartly. “Mean old thing!” she screamed. “Look at that address, will you?” She thrust the letter into his face, and the car dodged from one side of the road to the other.

“Look there now, and read that, if you know how to read. There!” she spelled it out carefully: “Mrs. Samuel Johnston, R.R. No. 2, Beaver Valley, Ontario. My own mother’s sister! And that’s her name! Now, smarty!”

The car managed to get back to the middle of the road, and the last of Andy’s resentment melted away under the sun of Florrie’s good humour. They were soon laughing and teasing in the old way, “Ya did so!” “I never did!” “You’re crazy, I saw ya!” “Ya never did! It was some other guy like me!” “There couldn’t be another guy so ugly!” “There couldn’t be another girl so dumb!”

Ellen smiled indulgently. It was all so like the arguments of the crickets and katy-dids in the grass in the evenings. But the children were so uproariously happy to be reconciled that Ellen could not but rejoice in their happiness and the part she had had in the innocent little drama. She wanted Andy to be happy. If only she were as sure of Florrie as of Andy. He was steadfast and generous and unselfish, but how could the daughter of the Peter Laird house be anything but hard-hearted?

They roared along, and though the car stopped on every hill and smoked and shivered and threatened to disintegrate, the wizard at the wheel managed somehow to get them over the top. They finally arrived at the store and made their purchases. Ellen attended to the coal-oil and the vinegar; for Andy in his delirium was not to be trusted. There was no candy to be had under the sugar rationing, so he bought his passengers a dozen oranges. Ellen hurried them away, for the time was flying, and she felt she should be home. The return trip

was therefore swifter and quieter, the hysterical arguments having changed to confidential chat. Between Acton Hill and Lairdale a long winding wooded hill led down to a wide stream known as the Big Crick. They descended slowly, and Ellen leaned back enjoying the fragrance of the tall cedars on either side, with slim white birches among them. Little cool rivulets ran parallel to the road around mossy stones. The open spaces were faint blue with the first asters. She caught a glimpse, ahead, of the winding road of the Bay Shore, and the bay beyond; and far, far away, a misty island. The roar of the car was hushed as they slipped down the hill, and the first blue-jay of autumn shouted a challenge as he flashed from cedar to cedar.

The Big Crick was a famous trout stream. It came in sight at a turn in the road, a lovely pool of green and gold spanned by a bridge and clothed with the shining leaves of water lilies.

Suddenly Ellen sat erect. She was aware that the usual jolting and bumping of Andy's car had increased alarmingly. She was always on the look-out for accidents when driving with Andy, and was alarmed as she looked ahead and saw that one of the front tires had left its place on the wheel and was off on an independent tour, running merrily along the road beside the deserted parent machine, which was pounding and jerking along on the rim. The mere loss of a tire added so little to the discomfort of Andy's car that no one had noticed the change, and the young couple were so absorbed in each other that they would scarcely have noted if the four wheels had gone. Ellen gave the alarm.

Andy stared ahead unbelieving, while Florrie screamed. "It's off! It's off! Your tire's off, Andy!"

"Hey!" Andy viewed the phenomenon in amazement. "If that ain't the ding busted! Hi there," he beckoned commandingly to the runaway, "come back here, you! Whadda ya mean running out on me that way."

Florrie shrieked with laughter. "Step on the gas," she screamed, "it's gettin' ahead o' you! You're too slow!"

"I ain't slow," he shouted, "I'm smart! I'm so smart I'm gettin' ahead o' myself. Lookit that, will ya?"

They went bumping and thundering down the steep hill in a mad race with the runaway, and Ellen clutched the seat in some alarm. They almost caught up with the fugitive just before they reached the bridge. Andy reached out to grab it, but it gave a puckish jump from the road, avoided the bridge by an inch, leaped from the bank and went splash into the green bowl of the lily pool!

Andy stopped so suddenly that the two girls were flung forward into the

windshield and jerked violently back. Still undisturbed, he leaned out and gazed pensively into the stream.

"Well, forever more!" he said, with an air of patient remonstrance. "If you'd wanted a drink that bad, you coulda told a fella!"

Florrie's screams of laughter suddenly stopped.

"Oh, oh! It's sinkin'," she cried. "It'll be gone!"

The tire had drifted out towards the centre of the stream and was almost submerged. It was characteristic of Andy that he acted at once. He leaped from the car and another leap took him down the bank and into the stream, where he strode out up to his waist and grabbed the runaway. Florrie jumped out and scrambled down the bank to help him.

"Come on here!" Andy cried, as though addressing a balky horse, "You get back into the traces, d'ye hear me? Run away, would ya? I'll learn you to stay home where you belong!"

Ellen got out Andy's box of tools and the jack which she was surprised to find in the back of the car, under the baskets of apples which Andy had forgotten to deliver. They all went to work, but the other two had to stop at short intervals to struggle against another spasm of laughter, which made the green walls of the little glen ring, and sent the indignant crows and blue-jays far over the fields.

Then they had to stop to recount the strange experience again and again.

"Here I am," Andy declaimed to the green amphitheatre, standing erect and dripping, flourishing a hammer in one hand and a pair of pliers in the other, "here I am, drivin' along, as nice and proper as Cousin Alfie himself, and I looks out, and here if there ain't a spare tire hoppin' along beside me like nobody's business. And me needin' a spare that bad! I says to myself, gosh, I says, this musta fell down from heaven!"

When they had recovered from this, Flossie managed to take up the tale. "I thought I was goin' to fall outa the car dead, when I seen that thing runnin' a race with us. And then when you stopped so quick, me and Ellen went right through the windshield and back again, and I said—I said—" There was no breath to tell what she had said. She collapsed in silence. Ellen, too, was leaning weakly against the car, her hands full of nuts and bolts.

Andy fell to again upon the now replaced tire. "Say, but what d'ye think?" he boasted loudly. "Ain't she the smart car? No other machine that ever run on four wheels could a' done a thing like that! Other cars jist have their tires fall

off an' lie in the road! And you have to go back an' get 'em. But this one jist kep' hopping alongside, so's to be ready when we needed it again."

"But it didn't wait till we caught up," Florrie cried. "Did you ever see anything like the way it went jumpin' ahead, jist like it was doing it a purpose. And when you reached out to catch it—an' when it went plop into the creek!—I knew I was goin' to die right there!"

They were off again, making the little amphitheatre ring with their laughter.

Finally Andy recovered. "Shut up, Florrie. If I laugh any more, I'll take a stroke, an you'll have to fix this yourself!"

By the time the work of hammering and shoving and pulling had sobered them somewhat, Florrie cried out at Andy's wet clothes.

"Say! You're soakin' wet, Andy!" she cried in dismay. "What possessed you to walk into the water like that? You'll get a cold, for sure!"

Andy was so happy over her concern that Ellen was disturbed. One kind word from the girl, and he was her slave. He was like Rowdy.

Then, into the midst of the gaiety and beauty of the scene, there came a discordant note. A long shining car slipped down the hill and drew up smoothly beside the derelict. There was only one car in Lairdale like that. Ellen's gay spirits were instantly quenched. She felt like the captured tire. She had run away for a brief moment, only to be caught and put back in her place.

Alfred was out of his car immediately, offering help. Andy was enjoying himself, and the last thing he wanted was assistance that would shorten his delightful task.

"It's all right, thanks!" he assured him, "I got everything. I'll have her goin' in half a minute." Alfred looked around at Ellen. Could he take the ladies home, then? Alfred was the only man on the Bay Shore who called the girls ladies, and Florrie giggled.

Ellen thanked him and darted an appealing glance towards Andy. He responded nobly.

"No siree, yous girls can't leave me!" he shouted. "Ellen's gotta go home with me or Aunt Liza'll take my head off."

Alfred scoffed. "Scared of your aunts!"

"Bet your life I am," Andy confessed, "and so would you be!"

Ellen cast Andy a glance of gratitude. "I promised Tilly I would look after

her groceries," she said, "and I think I had better wait. We are almost ready."

Alfred drove away rather sulkily. He did not bother to ask Florrie if she were in a hurry to get home. His conscience had been troubling him ever since that morning drive. He had felt he must make true the statements he had made to the chaplain. This was the second time today he had been balked in his purpose.

7

The Collation

Ellen placed the last basket of flaming gladioli beside the pulpit and decided that was enough. The church was filled with flowers, all crimson and golden blooms of autumn; Harriet's colours. For this was Harry's wedding day. Dick was home and no one knew whether he or Young Geordie was the happier. Harry and her family were at the hotel in Carlisle. Islay and Doctor Mack were on their way and were bringing the Laird chaplain with them.

It was impossible not to be happy and just a little hopeful. And it was impossible, too, not to know that she was looking her very best in the beautiful blue bridesmaid's dress she was wearing. She was not, however, to be a bridesmaid. Long before Dick had left South America Harriet had planned every detail of their wedding. There was to be a wedding cake as high as Uncle Geordie's barn and a train of bridesmaids as long as the church aisle, with Ellen at their head. She had sent Ellen the dress, and in the next mail a humble apology. Let it be a very plain wedding, Dick had pleaded, and Dick's wishes were Harriet's law.

Ellen had taken some time to decipher the letter. Harriet Lawrence's parents had sent her to the most expensive and exclusive schools for the training of young ladies, and she had come through them not quite able to write, and entirely unable to spell. But the letter left no doubt of Harriet's good intentions and her complete rapture. Ellen was able to gather that she had been compelled to choose her cousin Angela as the only bridesmaid because she was so completely mad about the new cousin, the chaplain.

"Poor Angela thought if Cousin Dallas was best man it would be just too sweet for them to walk down the aisle afterwards together. Kind of put the idea into his head, you know." And Dick put a crimp into that too, because he was bringing some sort of able-bodied seaman from the training ship with him to help hold him up. But Ellen must wear the blue dress, for all the rest of them were to be in uniform.

So Ellen had done her bidding, and here she was in her blue and silver dress, with the blue band holding her golden brown curls in place, putting the last touches to the already perfectly decorated church. She could not help knowing that she was looking her very best and it was impossible not to be happy, in spite of the news about Angela Drummond.

Harriet's mother had driven out from town early in the morning bringing huge baskets of flowers and Ellen had placed them against the background of wild asters and reddening leaves, and Mrs. Lawrence had declared herself delighted with the beauty of the church. Ellen could see that she had at last become reconciled to the match. The young people had waited through nearly three years of separation and had proven themselves. Kate Lawrence was rather relieved, too, that they had determined to have their wedding away out here in the country. As Dick was in the navy, his uniform looked smart, but it would have been embarrassing to have all the Laird connections at the fashionable wedding she had wanted to give Harriet in the city. All their friends would have been there to see old Aunt Bella in her skimpy short dress; and Uncle Geordie would quite likely have come in his shirt sleeves if the day had been warm. So everything had turned out for the best.

Ellen checked over the details. She had laid out her father's Sabbath blacks and clerical collar. She had carefully coached Marguerite, the church organist, in her duties, and explained just how much of the wedding march she was expected to play.

The choir was to sing, and the girls had gathered flowers and helped decorate the church. Unhappily, Alfred had been a great help too, for he had gathered the choir together and drilled them carefully in *O God of Bethel*, and *The Voice that Breathed o'er Eden*.

So this morning the little church was a glory of blossoms; and, outside, the Laird valley was decorated too. October had given a perfect day. The glory of the dazzling cloudless skies, the sheen of the blue mirror of the bay, the beauty of the warm golden fields and the pomp of the flaming maples and the burning sumach, could not but delight one's heart in spite of the Alfreds and the Angelas, and even in spite of one's own common sense.

Ellen was turning to go down the aisle when the door burst open, another great sheaf of flaming gladioli came through, propelled from behind. And here was Alfred with still another offering. He was dressed in his best brown striped suit with the brown tie, and looked quite smart. Ellen's heart sank. But she had to be grateful, for they could not have too many glads, she told him, as she placed them against a background of the misty blue wild asters. They were alone in the church, stooping over the basket in front of the choir platform, when the door swung open again. Ellen looked up and gave a cry of delight, for in the doorway stood Islay and Doctor Mack, and then she saw that behind them was another—a tall figure in airforce blue. Ellen's heart stood still for a minute, and then she ran down the aisle to meet them. They were her very best friends! And then she was greeting the Other One. His smile was as wonderful

as ever, but Ellen missed something in his manner. The easy old feeling of comradeship that had been between them, on account of their informal meeting, had somehow gone. She strove to recapture it as she led the way to the manse, but something of sternness in his manner made her draw within herself.

Her father came out with both hands extended in welcome. He was all ready, in his clerical dress, and the two ministers went into the study to confer about the service.

The wedding was set for high noon, and those fortunate enough to have an invitation were to drive to town afterwards to a luncheon at the biggest hotel in Carlisle. The Lawrences were wealthy, and had spared no expense. The luncheon was supplied by a special caterer from Toronto, and great were the speculations as to what it would be like.

The crowds began to arrive early at the church. Everyone had fallen in love with Harriet the summer she had spent at the Old Home Place, and Dick was one of the finest of the Bay Shore boys, and Young Geordie's lad. Then there were Islay and Doctor Mack to be seen. They had all liked Islay, too, though she belonged to the Old Home Lairds. And now that she was married to Dr. Mack Wallace she was one of them. And everyone would have gone to the wedding just to see Dr. Mack in his uniform. For there wasn't a youngster under ten on the Bay Shore, on the Lake Shore either, that he hadn't assisted in its initial landing at Earth's airport. The Laird chaplain was to be there too, coming back home at the very first chance! And above all, the whole Laird connection wanted to see Mr. and Mrs. Foster Lawrence, especially the latter, she who had been Kate Drummond. Kate was considered the most uppish of all the uppish Lairds who had left the Bay Shore; and everyone well knew she had opposed the marriage of Dick and Harriet. So there was no one anywhere in Lairdale and environs who would miss this wedding.

Nell Turner, who had been a Laird before her marriage, drove up with a car full of children, the first arrival except for several young men in their best clothes who were already standing around the door of the church. Then Andy Armstrong rattled up in his car with Florrie and her sister Marguerite, who was to play the organ and had to be there early.

"Hi, Andy!" shouted Nell in her clear bugle tones. "Hurry over here and turn me around. Jim's comin' later, but I had to get out early with all these kids for fear we wouldn't get a good seat. I got 'em all scrubbed," she announced to the knot of listeners, "and I knew if I didn't get 'em here right away I'd have to do 'em all over again!"

Andy took the wheel, whirled the car around facing home, and parked it in a good position.

"Goody!" she cried stepping out, "thanks a lot, Andy. I'm all right on a straight road, but I never seem to be able to get turned round. Jim says it's because I always want to keep goin' and can't bear to turn round and go home. Guess there's somethin' to it!" She led the four uncomfortably clean and overdressed children into the church. "Now, come along here. If one of yous gets mussed up, I'll skin you alive!" She stood at the door and looked back at the procession of cars coming swiftly up the road. "Look at that, will ya? Everybody in the township's comin'! Andy, why don't you ring the bell?"

Andy ran into the porch and, scrambling up the ladder, reached for the dusty old bell rope; and immediately there sounded out over the fields the clanging news that the wedding day had come!

Cars came swooping up the hill to the church until the roadway was filled. Ellen, with her father on one side and the chaplain on the other, walked down the path at the side of the road. The two men went into the vestry and Ellen turned to the porch to wait for Harriet. She had promised to be there in case she should be needed, and she was to give Marguerite the signal to start playing. Alfred and the choir were there, all ready to march up the aisle to their places.

Ellen stood on the steps while Young Geordie's car came whirling up, guided by a steadier hand than Young Geordie's, and two young men in navy blue with wide collars and flopping bell-bottomed trousers leaped from the car and strode nervously into the vestry.

Marguerite, dressed in a flowered silk with high-heeled slippers, all fit for the bride herself, took her place at the organ. Then Islay and Dr. Mack arrived, and created quite a stir. As the doctor passed up the aisle, Granma Armstrong put out her hand and jerked a corner of his khaki coat, and he had to stop and shake her hand. Then Harriet's mother and young brother arrived. Kate Lawrence stopped to thank Ellen. The church was a picture, she whispered. Mrs. Lawrence was very elegant in a long purple gown, and a hush spread over the church as she swept up the aisle on the arm of her son.

Ellen saw her father and the chaplain come in and take their places, followed by the two sailor boys. She could see that Dick was white even through the tan of a South American summer.

And then Harriet was at the door with her father and her bridesmaid. Foster Larwence was stout and red-faced and flustered. And for the first time since Ellen had known her, Harriet was pale and subdued. She was dressed in her

navy uniform of blue and white, and carried a great sheaf of white roses.

Ellen knew Angela Drummond in the city, and was surprised to see how well she looked. With brilliant make-up, and shining hair, she gave an elegance to even the plain khaki uniform she wore.

Ellen could now see her father looking in her direction. She raised her hand, and Marguerite's first organ note sounded feebly. Angela, stately and erect, floated gracefully up the aisle. And when the bride and her father had gone, Ellen slipped into a seat behind Islay, her work for the moment done.

All the gaiety of the young folk was quenched. It was a real war wedding: groom and best man from the navy, the chaplain in air-force blue, bride and bridesmaid in the uniform of their country's service. It was a great disappointment to the young folk who had heard so much of the wealth of the Lawrences and had expected a display of white satin, veils, and orange blossoms. But the uniforms gave the little ceremony a grave significance—there was a deep hush through which came the solemn tones of the minister, "Dearly beloved, we are met," and then the deep rich voice of the chaplain in prayer.

Through the high windows the noonday sun touched the masses of flowers to new brightness, and fell on the bride's white roses. Kate Lawrence wiped away a tear after the manner of all mothers at weddings. There was one other who shed tears. They slipped down Young Geordie's face; for his boy would soon be away on the ocean. Young Geordie had spent many years waiting for Dick to come home, and there was to be more anxious waiting ahead.

The choir sang *O, God of Bethel*, while the principals were in the vestry, and the old bell clanged out again, drowning the wedding march as they came down the aisle, Harry and Dick all smiles now. Angela, on the arm of the frightened young sailor, glanced under amused, lowered lids at the Lawrence parents.

The procession had a hard time getting out of the church, for Lairdale had never had a wedding in the church before, and folk did not know they were supposed to wait for the bride. All the young folk in the rear seats slipped out ahead of the bridal couple to be ready with their confetti, and Mrs. Peter Laird stopped Doctor Mack right in the aisle to tell him her worst symptoms, while the wedding guests crushed uncomfortably past them.

There was a small elegant car standing near for the bridal couple; a wedding present from the bride's parents. The bride and groom stepped into the rear seat and the best man took the wheel, with the bridesmaid at his side. The bridesmaid was trying to look happy, but was not succeeding very well,

for the chaplain was getting into Young Geordie's car for the ride to town.

Harriet stood up in a storm of confetti and held up her bouquet. She saw many of her girl friends there who would not be coming to town.

"Hi, girls," she shouted, "who'll be the next?" and flung the sheaf of roses high over the milling crowd.

Steve's Lily Anne made a leap for it but missed, and Ellen saw it coming straight down upon her. She stepped back hastily and found herself almost in the arms of Alfred, who had been standing close behind her. And then Andy reached up a long arm to the descending shower of roses and knocked it straight into Florrie's outstretched hands, amid shrieks of delight.

Harriet fell back into the seat and the sailor lad started the new car. And then the clangour of the bell was drowned in a tremendous racket that arose from the wedding procession. A great long train of horrible objects was following the bridal car; old wash boilers, lengths of stove pipes, bottomless milk pails, heavy cream cans, and a conglomeration of lesser but even noisier hardware.

So far the wedding had been so beautiful and decorous that Kate Lawrence had been deeply impressed, and was just saying to her sister Islay that she had never seen a more beautiful wedding, and that perhaps Islay was right and they had missed something precious by cutting themselves off from association with their old home. But when she saw her cherished daughter driving off with this grotesque thing leaping and banging behind her, all her old dislike of country life returned.

"Who fastened that hideous thing to Harry's car?" she demanded of her husband, as though he should know. For the first time during this trying day Foster was beginning to enjoy himself. He turned to Young Geordie, trying hard to look stern, but not succeeding in the least. His shoulders were heaving, but Young Geordie's face was sculptured by gravity. He shook his head despairingly.

"There's a lot o' bad young fellas in this neighbourhood," he declared righteously, glaring around the knot of young lads standing about. "I don't know what the country's comin' to!"

The boys ducked in spasms of laughter. They all knew Uncle Geordie.

Doctor Mack looked at the old man with a knowing eye. "You might at least have left Aunt Bella her wash boiler," he whispered.

Kate Lawrence marched indignantly to her car, and her husband followed,

his shoulders still shaking.

Ellen, standing near and holding close to Islay lest Alfred ask to drive her to town, watched Young Geordie and her father go over to his car. Andy was to drive Young Geordie's car and was taking the two ministers, so that Mr. Carruthers would not have to take his own. It left Ellen free to go with her friend, and she stepped up to the old man to thank him. And then she saw something that brought sudden tears to her eyes. For she could see that Young Geordie was almost at the breaking point. He was putting up a gallant front to cover an aching heart. This was Dick's wedding day, but it was also his farewell.

They were all gone at last. Even those who were not invited to the wedding feast followed the procession to get one more glimpse of the tail of the bridal car which could still be heard slamming and banging its tumultuous way down the valley.

Wise Watty was left with a few stragglers on the church steps. He was a cast-iron bachelor by this time, and weddings left him cold. He had not been impressed by this one; indeed, it had made him more melancholy and forbidding than usual. He stood and watched the long procession of cars sink into the valley and climb the next hill.

"It's a heck of a long funeral with nobody dead," he said somberly.

Ellen was conscious of a great overwhelming weariness when, after the festivities were over, and the bride and groom had driven away, she found herself sitting beside Minnie, driving home with Steve's family. Her father was going back in Old Alf's car, but she had seen the trap in time and deserted him, whispering that she had promised to go back with Minnie.

It was nonsense to be so weary, for she had done very little all day. She drew her long grey coat over her beautiful blue dress and realized that she had built up high and foolish hopes on this day and that they had all tumbled about her head. The sight of the elegant Angela driving away with the chaplain had added the last weight to her weariness. She was conscious of one comfort. She had held up her foolish head, and not even Islay could have suspected how silly she had been.

The wedding luncheon had been a beautiful affair. The long table with its flowers and silver and crystal and tall shining candles, with Harry and Dick in their sailor uniforms standing at the end cutting their massive cake, was a sight to be remembered. The guests sat at little tables, or moved about at their pleasure. She had tried to stay near Islay all the time, but it seemed that no matter which way she turned Alfred was always at her elbow. Captain Laird

had been with her father most of the time, and of course with Andy and the other boys who hung around him. He had sought her out once, but Alfred had stepped up to her immediately, and before a word could be spoken Angela was there and had slipped her arm into his. “Oh, Cousin Dallas,” she said sweetly, “you must come at once and settle an argument——” and drew him away.

She had tried hard to forget her own weariness in looking after the wedding guests. For it seemed as if a great gloom had settled upon the feast as soon as it was over, as though the Ancient Mariner had stopped each one with his skinny hand on the threshold. Islay and Ellen did their best to assist the bride’s mother to lift the gloom, but to no avail. Even Young Geordie’s brave spirits had flagged, and he just sat and looked at Dick.

They had no sooner started homeward than she learned the cause of the widespread melancholy. Steve had no sooner put his hands upon the steering wheel than he burst forth. Did anybody, outside of a famine in India, ever hear of anything like that? Kate Drummond! Married to a rich man, and she’d set down all her relations to a set o’ dishes with nothin’ on them! Did she call that a dinner? And most of them didn’t even have a table to set themselves at!

Ellen was conscious of sudden enlightenment. The dainty little luncheon! That was what was the matter with everybody! There had been a beautiful little china plate with a tiny roll, and a wee ball of chicken salad, with exquisite fragments of curled celery, and olives. And then another tiny plate with a puff of ice cream and a cubic inch of wedding cake. It had been then that the pall had descended. Ellen turned her scorn upon herself. Probably it was only common hunger that was the matter with her. She had had nothing to eat since their early breakfast. She realized that all the farm folk must indeed have been in straits.

Steve was still voicing his grievance. Good food and plenty of it was almost a religion with Steve. His eldest son, Stevie, now in uniform, had come up from camp for the wedding, and was also starving. But his teenage daughter, Lily Anne, sitting between Ellen and her mother, had been too greatly impressed by the elegance of the feast to complain.

“Why, my goodness, what did you expect, Poppa?” she protested. “That’s what they always serve at swell weddings. Goodness, you’d want potatoes and gravy, I’ll bet. That was *style*.”

But Steve’s grievance was not to be soothed. “Style!” he roared. Did she call that style? Well, if they ever had the misfortune again to be asked to a stylish wedding he wanted Minnie to know they had to have something to keep body and soul hanging together before they left home. And he hoped they

could sit down to it with their legs under a table like Christians; he'd like a little more to eat than a tooth-pick.

"A tooth-pick!" young Stevie yelled, "yes siree! There was one on my plate! It was green, and it was stuck into a pickle! Say, that was worse than army chow. They give you lots of it in the army anyhow!"

"Why, you silly thing, Stevie," his sister scoffed, "that's the very latest, that stuff they passed round on big plates. Isn't it, Ellen? They have a French name, *canopies*! That's what they are, canopies. Aren't they, Ellen?"

Ellen was too much occupied listening to Minnie's reaction to correct this. Minnie had been filled with awe and admiration of the lovely tables and the beautiful dishes so daintily served.

"But you see," she whispered to Ellen under the rumbling of Steve's thunder, "if it had been on in the afternoon, and was like a snack, it wouldn't a' been so bad. But it was jist dinner time, and awful late for it, at that. And we'd all been up a lot earlier than usual to get the chores all away and everything done up to dress for the wedding. And breakfast was so awful early."

"You should a' seen Uncle Geordie, Momma," Lily Anne continued, for though her father was still continuing his loud lamentations in the front seat, she had the rear for an audience, and also her brother, who kept turning so that he might hear both ends. "Uncle Geordie was actin' awful funny about the teenty weenty spoons and the tiny cups."

"They weren't any bigger than that set Audrey got on her birthday when she was four!" shouted the brother from the front seat.

"Well, they're awful swell for coffee, anyhow," his sister declared, "Uncle Geordie and Aunt Bella was sittin' at a little table away back in the corner. There was Andy and Florrie and Marguerite and a whole lot o' kids there with him, and he started cuttin' up."

"Say, I saw him too," shouted Stevie, grinning with delight. "Say, he was so funny we all thought we were goin' to die. 'Cause we were all too scared to laugh."

"He took up one o' the wee spoons," Lily Anne continued, "and he kept turnin' it round and peering at it and he said the dust had been so bad coming in to town that he couldn't see right. Everything looked small. And when they brought him that second wee, wee plate with the ice cream, he put on his glasses and kept lookin' and lookin' all round it. And Aunt Bella, she's so deef she wasn't sure what he was saying, but she knew he was up to something and she——"

“She knew he was up to somethin’ all right,” shouted young Stevie, “she kept shovin’ and nudgin’ him and sayin’, ‘Hush up, Geordie, for peety’s sake!’ ”

The two young folk went off in shrieks of laughter.

Steve had never stopped meanwhile, but at the sound of the untimely laughter he shouted that there was nothin’ in bein’ starved to laugh about, and if he didn’t get home soon and get some food into him he would likely drop by the road.

“Well, it was in grand style, anyhow,” Lily Anne declared, “and I never saw anything so lovely as the table. I know now!” she cried delighted. “It is what they call a *collation*. Don’t they, Ellen? You’ll see when the paper comes out, it will say it was a *delicious collation*.”

Ellen was dropped at the manse and the family of Steve Laird was hurried home. Minnie and her daughter had scarcely time to get out of their wedding finery before preparations for supper were started. The table was set hurriedly with slices of cold pork and heaping dishes of fried potatoes, great loaves of bread, heaped plates of corn muffins, apple pie and preserved fruit.

Wise Watty came over to see if he could help with the chores, and was surprised to find the family at supper so early. He sat with them, very willingly at Minnie’s invitation, and when Steve had had sufficient food to enable him to speak he gave the guest an account of the wedding feast.

“Did ya ever eat a collation, Wat?” he asked darkly.

Wise Watty was always cautious. “I ain’t sure. It ain’t anything like spinage, is it?”

“No, it ain’t like spinage,” Steve declared bitterly. “It ain’t like anything under heaven that ever was et. But that’s what was handed out to us at Dick Hartley’s wedding.”

“It’s a caution what some weemin will put on a man’s plate these days,” Watty declared, helping himself liberally to more canned peaches, and placing the blame where, to his mind, all blame belonged.

Meanwhile Ellen had hurried into the chilly manse. She was glad to get home before her father. Rowdy greeted her with rapture and Mistress Gummidge came in from the woodshed with tail erect, to tell in a high complaining voice that she, too, had missed the wedding repast.

As she folded away the beautiful dress, Ellen talked sternly to her rebellious heart. She had acted like an adolescent; not a whit better than poor

silly Molly Grey in her office, who was always coming to sit on the end of Ellen's desk with a boy-problem.

"Say, Miss Carruthers, if you were in love with a guy, and he simply never saw you, no matter how you tried to - - -"

Yes, she was just another Molly Grey, she told herself in disgust. She put the lid down over her bridesmaid's dress with a firm hand. This was the end of her foolishness.

She had the fires crackling merrily, and supper almost ready, when she saw the car stop at the gate and her father alight. There was Scotch broth, the kind he liked, and bacon and eggs. There were two apple pies in the pantry, too, and she looked at them accusingly, remembering that she had been foolish enough to make them in the faint hope that Doctor Mack and Islay might come home with her to supper and bring the Other One.

Her father came and sat down at the table before it was quite ready.

"Well, well," he cried happily, "I am glad to be home. Such a long exciting day. I believe I have worked up an appetite. Do you know, my dear, I cannot remember whether we had our dinner. Did we?"

Ellen smilingly assured him that they had not; just a dainty lunch. The wedding luncheon was a symbol. Her hungry heart had been looking forward to some substantial food and had been given instead—a collation.

8

Aunt Susie

For many days wedding-talk swept like a Georgian Bay storm up and down the Lairdale hills. Everyone who had not received an invitation to the feast in town had to hear about the collation and the narrow escape from starvation of so many of the wedding guests. And Steve saw to it that no one missed a full description.

Then the doings of the bride and groom were of headline importance. Before long news came to Young Geordie that Dick and his best man were away out in a corvette on the submarine-infested Atlantic. And the bride was stationed at a Wren post on a storm-torn point of Nova Scotia. It was the best possible place, Harry wrote Ellen, because she could look out on the ocean and watch for Dick.

Ellen went back to her office determined that no foolish dreaming should further upset her mind and interfere with her work. Meanwhile the menace of Alfred hung over her. It was plain that the wedding guests from abroad had noticed he was always at her side, whatever the home folks saw, and they saw everything.

Islay wrote soon after her return to their post. Mack had been moved again for some special work. This time it was a camp near Toronto. She was planning to give up their apartment and go after him. “My life is just one wild game of ‘follow-my-leader,’ ” she wrote, “with an occasional one of hide-and-seek for variety.” Mack was glad of the change, and in the general shuffle they were happy to find that Cousin Dallas was to be stationed near them for a time, taking the place of a chaplain who had just gone overseas. Poor lad, he was dreadfully disappointed.

“And by a strange, or not so strange, coincidence, Angela is there too. I wonder how she managed that. I am in a perfect panic lest she gain her objective; Cousin Dallas is such a grand lad he deserves something better! But he’s never been interested in girls, he tells me, and he might be innocent enough to be taken in by Angela. It was certainly on his account she came to the wedding. Ellen Carruthers, I wanted to shake you out of your elegant near-bridesmaid attire. Why didn’t you do something? You looked glamorous enough to outshine all the painted Angelas in the world. But of course you wouldn’t raise your little finger to help. I know you! And what was that stuffy

Alfred Laird doing at your elbow all day? If you are leading him on I'll get Mack to give him arsenic or something next time he's in Lairdale. And if Angela gets hold of poor Dallas, I'll do something desperate!" Ellen could have replied that she was ready to do something desperate herself, but she could not confide her foolish secret even to her best friend. And what did it matter? If it were not Angela it would be some other girl.

She went home as often as she could, using every sort of ruse to escape Alfred's meeting her. She tried going at irregular intervals when her father would not be expecting her and would not be able to tell the neighbours. Sometimes she sent a note to him at the last minute asking if he could meet her in town, as she was coming on the train. This worked twice, but the third time when she stepped off the train to the station platform she was dismayed to find Alfred and his car waiting for her. Her father, in his joy at the news of her coming, had told the assembled choir at practice. And afterwards Alfred had come to him and said he had just remembered that he had to be in town the next afternoon at the very hour when Ellen's train came in, and could save Mr. Carruthers the trip. Her father was very grateful, for that made it possible for him to drive over to Fairhill to see if the managers had got round to fixing the furnace pipes in the church.

One more disaster of this kind, Ellen realized, would be sufficient to set the whole Bay Shore talking, if they were not already at it. When Andy saw so much, how could she hope that Granma Armstrong and Mrs. Peter hadn't seen more?

Now that housecleaning days had come, the manse was like a steaming cauldron. Liza flung soap suds far and wide. Cushions and rugs were thrown out on the fence and battered to shreds, and the kitchen was hung with clean wet clothing. And her father took a cold that would not leave him. He was looking old and tired, she had to confess. She heard over and over her mother's words, almost the last she had spoken, "Take care of your father, Ellen, my child, he has no idea of taking care of himself, and you and Ronald are all he has."

She went over her finances again and again, wondering desperately if she might give up her position and come home to live on her father's meagre salary. But added to the spectre of want there was the spectre of Alfred ahead. If she offended Alfred she would offend half the congregation, and the punishment would fall upon her father's devoted head.

"I do not know what I am going to develop into," she said to herself with a wry smile, for she was still able to smile at some of her troubles. "I will soon not have a mind above dollars and cents. I am always thinking of money and I

am getting positively tricky in avoiding Alfred.—The Artful Dodger!"

She delighted her father one week-end by coming home unannounced when she had been home just the week before. She had not even had time to write that she was coming. She had fled home because of a letter from Islay. Angela was coming home for the week-end to Harrington, and she was taking Dallas Laird with her. Robert and Mary had sent him so many invitations that at last he was going. "He asked me for your address," Islay wrote, "and I gave it to him, both office and boarding house. So see that you stay in town for the week-end. And do be nice to him, Ellen. I think it is your duty to try to save him from Angela."

So Ellen had hurriedly packed her bag and fled homeward. Old Geordie and his grandson picked her up on the road from the bus stop, and deposited her at the manse door. Her father's surprise and pleasure brought a lump into her throat.

Saturday morning they lingered over their breakfast in the sunny corner of the kitchen where she had set it. He had finished his sermon for Sunday and he liked to talk it over as he had always done with her mother in the old days. Prayer was his subject. Ellen listened eagerly as he read: words that showed his sublime faith in a heavenly Father, in spite of contradictions and disappointments.

"But, Father," she said at last, timidly, "how can one expect one's personal desires to be granted? I might ask for something that would interfere with God's plans for some other life." She was thinking of all the prayers she had uttered, urgent and anxious, for him. How could she pray that he retire, when it would mean breaking his heart? And how could they go on?

"There is always one sure test," he said with his usual tranquillity. "If you can end your petition with, 'Not my will, but Thine be done,' then the answer is as sure as the swing of the earth. If we are in the line of duty we can look confidently for an answer." It must be the Lord's will, she argued with herself, that she take care of her father, that Ronald return to his wife and child. But how could she have faith, when every day she saw no solution for her problem and Ronald was in the most dangerous place in the fighting line?

"I am afraid my faith is awfully weak," she faltered. She could not tell him that he himself was the chief subject of her prayers, so she spoke of the brother. "When I pray that Ron will come back, safe and sound, and think of all the others——" She hesitated to say that she felt as if it were no use. Ronald and Dick, and One Other, were just pawns in a great game, and what was one life more or less in this awful slaughter?

“Ronald is in the line of duty, dear,” he said calmly, “and no harm can come to him; no harm to his soul, I mean. *He shall preserve thee from all evil* is the promise. The Lord shall keep thy *soul*. ‘Fear not him that can kill the *body*.’ Our prayers, yours and mine, can help guard Ron from the fire that sears the soul.”

Ellen sighed. She knew she had not reached that height. She wanted Ron home safe in body and mind and had not been so concerned about the menace to his soul. Perhaps, after all, he had been in as much danger here at home in his efforts to make money and give Marjorie everything she wanted, as he was now, over Germany.

But she kept on praying, every day earnestly, though not very hopefully, for her father, for Ron, and for the Other One.

In the afternoon Charlie Cameron in his little buggy came trotting down the road as usual, and she bound a scarf around the shining curls that had so lately been arranged by the hairdresser, and went out to see what he had brought. The sharp metallic click of the box lid sounded as she went down the veranda steps. Charlie waved his whip to her as he drove away. He never stopped to talk on his rounds, but he never passed without a word of greeting to anyone in sight. He generally called out some information, too, about anything he had left, and greatly enjoyed teasing the girls who had correspondents beyond the valley.

“Brought you a letter from your fella today!” he would bawl across a field. He never shouted any of his nonsense at the minister or his daughter, but he always announced a letter, especially if it were one from overseas.

“Brought you something from your soldier today!” he would call happily when the tall spare figure of the minister appeared at the manse door, and he would hold up the letter for a moment before dropping it into the box.

Now he shouted as Ellen came down the path. “Nothin’ from the General today! But I brought you one from your aunt in the States! G’bye!” He waved his whip and his horse pounded away.

Ellen collected the letter and the *Carlisle Chronicle*. She glanced quickly through the war news and then took Aunt Susie’s letter inside to read it. She had kept up a fairly regular correspondence with her father’s half-sister, though they were not very well acquainted. Aunt Susie had paid them a visit once after the death of her young husband. Ellen remembered that she had played the piano and had a good singing voice. She remembered, too, that Granma Armstrong had given it as her opinion that she was a kinda nice friendly body, but had just a little too much of the come hither in her eye for a widow and the

sister of a minister.

And here, surely, was news! Aunt Susie, it seemed was at loose ends for the winter and would greatly like to see her dear brother and niece again. Cleveland was such a big noisy city she often thought it would be lovely to live in the country again. Would it be convenient for them if she came to spend the winter? She remembered when she and her dear Gordon were first married they had lived in a small village near Harrington, and they had a garden and the most wonderful vegetables and the loveliest climbing roses and sweet peas. Ellen hurried on anxiously. Irene, Aunt Susie's sister-in-law, had one son, Charlie. He had been married last spring and was now bringing his wife home. Irene had hoped they would be able to get a home of their own, but Charlie might be going to war now, and he would have to leave his wife and a baby that was expected, with Irene. So Susie felt she should get out of the way for a while. Irene's house was large, and she had plenty of money and wanted her to stay, but Susie felt that with the new wife and a baby that was expected with Irene. So be very much room. And she had always thought she would like to spend a winter with dear brother John and get acquainted with Ellen again. Ellen was just a little girl when she had seen her last. Susie wanted it to be known that she would not be a visitor. She would love to look after the manse while Ellen was away. She was used to housework. She would look after the home and relieve Ellen.

Ellen read the letter with a glowing heart. Surely here was the answer to those prayers she had been sending forth, feeble and unbelieving. Aunt Susie would be a bright companion for her father, for even after ten years of widowhood she seemed as blythe as ever.

"Well, well, well! Little Susie!" her father cried happily, when he read the letter. That surely would be fine! To have her here for the winter! "I feel I am a burden to you, dear, making you come home so often. If Susie were here, now —"

Ellen could not but be hopeful and happy over the prospect. Liza and Tilly had been planning on egg production ever since they had bought the chickens in the spring, and Ellen knew the work at the manse interfered. If Liza had only the weekly washing—

She ran over to Liza's with the letter to ask advice. The two neighbours received her joyfully. There was nothing they enjoyed more than to be consulted about affairs at the manse, and this was great news. They met her at door, calling her to come in. The Saturday cleaning had been finished and the place was wet and shining, but all the utensils from the combat with dirt were strewn about. Ellen skirted a pail of suds and stepped over the mop and

scrubbing brush that were still in the middle of the floor. Tilly was making currant buns for supper, and their aroma with the scent of baked apples filled the warm kitchen.

Yes, yes, Liza would be glad to go over any day she was needed, and she'd be glad to help Mrs. Dunbar with the washing. And, indeed, it would be a good thing to be relieved for a little, they confessed, for they were all set on supplying eggs for Britain. Indeed "Eggs for Rosamond" was their slogan. Rosamond, their favourite niece, was now a nurse serving in England. Poor Rosie, they felt sure, was hungry all the time, though she said nothing about it. But her last letter, Tilly declared, just about made her and Liza cry. Rosamond wrote that they were feeling so fine because they were allowed two eggs a week now. Could Ellen believe it? Two eggs a week! And Gid and Andy each had two for their breakfast every day of their lives. And what did she think she said? Rosamond said that all the nurses said they thought it ought to be considered good manners to lick your plate when you had an egg. Now wasn't that awful?

And Rosamond had always been such a nice polite girl, Tilly continued, with such nice manners. Andy used to make fun of her because she would never use her fork to eat with in her left hand. She always changed it to her right and put her knife down just so. Oh, Rosamond had the nicest manners of any girl they had ever met. Ellen would remember that, they were sure! Things must be awful when Rosie was driven to saying a thing like that. It just went to show you.

Gid and Andy laughed at them and said what good would their few eggs do. But Liza said it was just everyone doing their bit that would win the war, and anyhow they were going to do it and that was all about it. And they were just awful glad her aunt was coming to be company for her father! They had sent to Guelph for all the books on egg production and had ordered concentrate and laying mash. And they would show Gid and Andy.

Ellen started up the lane towards home, but was hailed by Andy from the barn-yard and went back to see the hen-house he had fixed up. When she had sufficiently admired the new windows and the airy rows of nests on the straw-covered shelves, she told him her joyful news about Aunt Susie. Andy was delighted. What was she like? Nice she could play the piano! "Don't you go to staying in Harrington when she comes," he warned. "You'll have to come anyhow. Alf might get lonesome."

"Andy!" She turned a pair of stern accusing eyes upon him. "If ever I thought you would—"

He was all contrition immediately. No, no, he never peeped a thing to a living soul and he was sure there wasn't any talk. Mebby a little round the time of the wedding, but he'd not heard any since.

She went back to the city determined that when Aunt Susie was established she would come home only once a month, and Alfred would likely turn his attention in some other direction. She found a note on her desk saying that a Captain Laird had telephoned and said he was sorry he had missed her. And the next day brought a note from Islay, scolding her for having gone away when she had told her to stay.

She had to go home the next week-end for the guest's arrival, and found Aunt Susie exceeded her expectations. Mrs. Dunbar was bright and young and well dressed. She was short and plump, had kept her school-girl complexion, and had very little grey in her fluffy hair. A trunkful of smart American dresses and hats added not a little to her pleasing appearance. She spoke with a strong Maine accent and was as loyal an American as if her ancestors had put on the Boston Tea Party.

When all the piles of sheet music and the dresses had been unpacked, they sat around the study stove with a cup of tea, and the brother and sister went over the old happy days in the old home where they had been brought up; he the eldest, she the youngest of the family, and now the only ones left.

"And you're not married yet, Ellen dear?" Aunt Susie said, when she and Ellen were alone. The evening meal was over, Mr. Carruthers had gone to his study, and the aunt and niece sat by the living-room fire, Ellen knitting a sock for Ronald, Aunt Susie with a piece of fine embroidery.

"That will never do," she went on. "We'll simply have to fix that right!"

Ellen, not a little amused, confessed that she had no prospects of marrying, now or ever.

"Tut, tut," her aunt cried. "Why, you're quite good looking, and I am glad to see you have some style, too. So many Canadian girls haven't. But, of course, you have the advantage of being in the city. Aren't there any eligible bachelors round here? I remember your dear mother would never hear of your going out with any of the young farm lads. But surely there must be some marriageable men you meet in the city? Lots of girls in offices marry their boss."

Ellen laughed at the picture that came to her mind of old Mr. Francis, bald and stooped and crotchety. She assured Aunt Susie that there was no hope in that direction.

“Oh, dear, that’s too bad!” Aunt Susie said in genuine sympathy. “Why, I remember the last time I was here; it was shortly after my dear Gordon died, and I was not thinking of such things. But I remember there was such a very nice young man used to come around the manse. He was a little younger than I —Oh, very little, but you know how girls feel about that sort of thing, and I was not thinking about beaus at that time. But he somehow seemed unlike the rest of the young farmers; more refined, you know. You were just a girl, of course, away at high school, I remember. But this young man. Now what was his name? I never thought I could forget it. Dear me, isn’t it puzzling when everyone in the place has the same name? This boy was an only son, I remember, and your father said he and his family were by far the most prosperous of all this community. Dear me, I ought to remember his name. But oh, dear,” she laughed girlishly, “I could never possibly remember all the names of all the young men that were interested in me. Dear, dear! And they are just the same today, I assure you, my dear.”

“I can quite believe it, Aunt Susie,” Ellen said, her easy tendency to laughter causing her some trouble.

“Do you know, dear, I rather wish you’d call me Suzanne. They all call me that at home now. Irene does, and even Charlie, my nephew. Susie sounds so back-woods-Canadian. It isn’t so bad if it is spelled S-u-z-i, but no one knows how you spell your name when they hear it. And I really think Suzanne sounds rather chic, don’t you? And never mind calling me Aunt, honey. I am sure we look more like sisters anyway, don’t we. They never use those old-fashioned designations any more over in the States. Dear me, it seems strange there should be such a difference in two countries in such a few miles. You never hear such words as aunt and uncle any more, nor father and mother, for that matter. Irene’s Charlie calls her *Bumps*. I think it sounds so cute, don’t you? And when her husband was living, you know, Alf Wilkinson—*Alf,—Alfred*! I do believe that was the name of the young man I’m trying to remember. Alfred Laird? Is there such a person?”

Ellen confessed, somewhat startled, that Alfred Laird was certainly a real person, and must be the very one of whom she was speaking. Yes, he had a very fine singing voice, and he used to play the violin, and he was the leader of the Lairdale church choir now. Yes, indeed, he was well off, the most prosperous farmer on the Bay Shore. His home was just a little way down the road, a wonderful farm, and a splendid brick house, and his mother was very anxious that he should marry.

Ellen could not but see that Aunt Susie was all in a gay flutter, “Really? Not married? And well off? Why haven’t you married him yourself, Ellen?”

Ellen explained demurely that a lady had to wait until she was asked, and added slyly that Alfred was not interested in young women, though he was only about forty; she felt he was probably waiting for her to come back.

Aunt Susie laughed gaily, but did not contradict her, and Ellen noticed that a deeply speculative look had come into her aunt's innocent blue eyes. She gave her attention to her fancy-work for some time in silence. Ellen noted, too, for the first time, that despite the curves and dimples Aunt Susie had a strong determined face and an almost Roman nose.

Ellen came home the next week-end to find the household in fine running order; everything was bright and shining, her father looked rested and very happy. And, best of all, Aunt Susie was a good cook and served delicious meals. She had the old piano piled with music, and every evening after supper she would play. She had a great many old books of elaborate pianoforte pieces she had played in her younger days. She had had very little time to play at her sister-in-law's home where, Ellen guessed, the greater burden of the work fell into Susie's capable hands, as sister Irene spent most of her time in social activities. Now, with greater leisure, Susie was reviving her old talent, her strong plump hands set the old piano ringing.

It happened that the choir was having a special practice that evening, and Mr. Carruthers went over to the church with the list of hymns for the Sunday Service. Ellen was not at all surprised, when her father returned, to see that Alfred was with him.

Susie was at the piano when they entered, executing one of her most elaborate selections, all arpeggios and brilliant scales and trills. She stopped and whirled round on the piano stool.

Ellen felt that her father made a most suitable introduction. "Now, Susie," he said, "here is a young man as fond of music as you are. I promised him that if he would come in, you would play for us."

Susie gave him a flattering greeting. Why, she remembered meeting him the last time she was here, years ago. She had never forgotten how beautifully he played the violin. But he was only a boy, she added tactfully, and would not likely remember her. But Alfred did remember her, very well; he could never forget how she played *Home Sweet Home* with variations on the piano, he assured her. Ellen noticed that he was more at his ease in five minutes with Susie than he had ever been with her or her father.

So Susie hunted up a worn copy of the very selection Alfred remembered. Then she played another brilliant number called *Silvery Waves*, and her fingers flew up and down the keys, making delightful tinklings. Alfred, enchanted

asked for some songs, and Susie brought out an old song book. Mr. Carruthers wanted *I'm Wearin' Awa Jean* and *The Rowan Tree*. And then Alfred was induced to sing *Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep*, and Susie went into raptures over his voice, and declared she wished they had him in the choir of their church in Cleveland. He was far better than the soloist they had.

Ellen passed a plate of sandwiches and cookies and a hot cup of cocoa; and the guest went away reluctantly, at a very late hour. And though it would be hard to say who had been most pleased with the evening, the guest, Ellen, or her Aunt Susie, Ellen would have chosen herself.

9

The Spider's Parlour

By the time she had come home for a couple of weekends, Ellen found Aunt Susie completely established in home, church and neighbourhood. She had joined the Ladies' Aid in the church, and the Women's Institute, and the Red Cross Society, and was attending all the sewing meetings.

"I'm better at the sewing than the knitting," she confessed. "These Canadian women are such wonderful knitters, I am afraid we Americans are not in the same class." Though Aunt Susie had never crossed the international boundary until long after her marriage, she never lost an opportunity to flaunt her American citizenship. What "we Americans" did was the standard for all conduct, but she was forced to confess that in knitting socks the Bay Shore women had established a standard of their own.

And indeed it was doubtful if any soldiers of the great armies of Europe wore smoother socks than those that came from the Bay Shore. Granma Armstrong turned out socks with incredible swiftness and dazzling perfection, and never a sock from Lairdale went to Red Cross headquarters in Carlisle without first passing under her sharp black eye. Many a heel and toe were ripped and re-knit before being allowed to enlist in the army.

So Aunt Susie knit navy scarves, and left the socks to the initiated. But on the whole she was a great success socially, and proved herself an equal success in housekeeping. Ellen tactfully suggested paying her a sum for her work, though Susie declared she could not accept anything from dear John. But Ellen insisted, and the arrangement made everyone happier.

But the place where Aunt Susie was the greatest comfort and success—in the eyes of her niece, at least—was in her influence on Alfred. From the first meeting she set herself to encourage and help him in his choir work. She advised him regarding selections for the church service, and even sent to a friend in Cleveland for some simple anthems suitable for small choirs. She always arranged that he should come over to the manse on choir-practice evenings while she ran over the music with him. It often seemed necessary, too, that he should come over after the practice to report his progress.

Alfred came and went, delighted to find himself in such high favour in the manse, and entirely unaware of any danger in the situation. Indeed, he felt as if everything was working out entirely for his benefit. For since he had driven the

Laird Chaplain to town he had finally made up his mind that he would marry Ellen. Indeed he told himself that after his confession that day he was almost in honour bound to do so.

He felt sure that when the cold weather came his mother would be able to persuade his father to try the town again, for the brick house on Elm Street had been rented only for the summer. Yes, the old folk would be moved soon, and then he must finally decide. He was being made rather keenly aware that unmarried men who did not enlist were looked upon askance, too, and that was hard to bear.

He was still a little afraid of Ellen. A strange sense of inferiority came over him in her presence. He confessed to himself sometimes in moments of unwonted humility that she might be his superior, seeing she had been through the university. But after all, she was a woman and there was really no proper ground for comparison. Her aunt's bright presence smoothed his way wonderfully. He felt now he could run into the manse often without the neighbours suspecting his intentions.

So he went happily on his way, and the choir work which he really enjoyed had never been more successful. Under the inspiration of Mrs. Dunbar's capable help he undertook to train the young people for the annual Harvest Home that was always held in the autumn in Lairdale church.

In past years the emphasis had been placed upon the chicken supper that came before the evening concert, but this year, with rationing of sugar and butter to restrict the cooks, they decided to forego the supper and ask the choir to concentrate on the musical side of the entertainment.

Most of the fathers of the church opposed such a startling innovation. What was the sense in having a Harvest Home if you didn't have a good supper? they asked reasonably. Chickens weren't rationed, nor gravy, nor potatoes. And why couldn't they have a good old-fashioned spread, and then they wouldn't mind listening to the concert afterwards? But the cooks silenced them, headed by Jim Turner's wife, who was, next to Steve, the best talker on the Bay Shore.

Where did they think they were going to get butter for rolls and biscuits and buns and cookies? And pie? Wouldn't they make a holler if they were set down to a church social without pie! And maybe they hadn't heard about it, but apple pie generally had a little sugar in it. Steve Laird was heard to say that maybe, seeing times were so hard, they might get up a collation. And that ended the discussion.

So for the first time in its history Lairdale church was to celebrate its

Harvest Home without a chicken supper, without even a piece of pie or a cup of coffee passed around. Most folks thought it would be a pretty thin affair, but they could do nothing about it, and certainly this was a terrible war they were going through.

But the less the cooks were doing the more there was for the choir to do, the choir-leader declared, and ably encouraged by Susie, he plunged into the practices with great zest. They learned some of the most popular patriotic songs, *Land of Hope and Glory*, *There'll always be an England*, and several others. Andy Armstrong suggested *Waltzing Matilda*, and *Praise the Lord, and Pass the Ammunition!* but Alfred frowned upon such foolishness sternly. The young lady who taught the Lairdale school was to give a couple of patriotic recitations, and Bob Laird's Bill from the Lake Shore was to sing some Scotch songs; and everybody said he was as good as Harry Lauder any day. Best of all, Alfred had arranged for the school piano to be brought down to the church basement, and the minister's sister had consented to give a couple of piano solos. And there was still the crowning piece, which had not yet been announced: Alfred and Mrs. Dunbar were to sing a duet, *Come Where the Lilies Bloom*.

This last item was supposed to be kept a complete secret until the last day. It had found its place on the programme by a happy accident. Susie had asked Alfred to drop in after choir practice, as she had just received a new book of anthems from Cleveland on which she wanted his opinion. Alfred came promptly, and as Susie was at the piano, filling the house with music, the minister opened the door for him. She had brought with her a great pile of old songs and had one before her now, an ancient elaborate duet she had sung in as a girl, *Come Where the Lilies Bloom*.

She was playing and singing the soprano part as Alfred entered. He, too, had sung in that very duet years before. He stepped to the piano and joined his rich deep baritone. Susie sang on, recognizing his help by a smile and a charming inclination of her head. They floated together on a tide of harmony. They called to each other like two birds in springtime, and they swept in perfect accord into the ecstatic finale, *Come away, away, away!*

Mr. Carruthers, still standing in the doorway, broke into delighted applause. Susie rose from the piano stool and took Alfred's hand, and together they bowed profoundly as to a great audience. It was such fun!

They must sing it at the Harvest Home, the minister declared. It was altogether too good to miss. Their voices blended wonderfully! When Ellen came home she added her enthusiasm, and so the duet was placed on the programme for the Harvest Festival.

The practices for it went on happily, entailing many more evenings at the manse for Alfred. Susie was determined that it should be done perfectly, and Alfred was enjoying the rehearsals. For the first time he was giving way to the spell of music Susie was weaving about him. He had never enjoyed anything more than their singing together. Ellen was not particularly musical, though she could sing and play a little. But Susie knew exactly what he enjoyed, and always gave it to him. And so he was borne happily along, little dreaming that while he thought of himself as a master spider weaving his web unseen, he was really the fly that had floated into the spider's parlour on a tide of song.

Ellen came home these autumn days with a more contented mind than she had had since the day Alfred had met her at the bus stop last May. As a prospective uncle, Alfred was positively attractive. She began to have a kindly feeling for him, and treated him with a new friendliness that made his heart beat a little quicker.

And she was happy for Susie, too. She could not help realizing that in spite of her gay manner Aunt Susie had not been quite happy living with her husband's relatives. In her sister-in-law's home she was more or less a dependent. Ellen could not but see that the vision of a home of her own, and independence, was making Aunt Susie look younger and prettier every day. And Ellen's gratitude to her, though it must be unspoken, knew no bounds. Aunt Susie was far more than a good housekeeper for her father. She was a refuge from impending danger, and a direct answer to prayer!

The Harvest Home was a great success. There was a wonderful report of it in the Carlisle Chronicle, with compliments paid the choir under the able leadership of Mr. Alfred Laird, a flattering paragraph about the duet, and special mention of the brilliant piano solos. It was really a triumph for all the performers.

Alfred of course was proud and happy. But the duet had given him and Susie a little more publicity than he thought safe. He could not help knowing that folks were talking about them. Cagey Alf was caught at last! Trust a widow. He was afraid Ellen might hear the talk and make the same mistake. He was really in a dilemma. His association with Susie was so delightful that he could not stay away from her, and yet he must not let any misunderstanding enter Ellen's mind. He spent hours worrying over the situation, and finally decided upon a careful plan of campaign. He would stay away from the manse for a while, now that the practices were over, until he had set public opinion straight. Then somehow, when Ellen was home, he would make it plain to her where his attentions were really directed.

But the fly was reckoning without the spider, and her wiles. When it became clear to Susie that he was easing off in his attentions, she set about drawing him gently back, into the charmed area. Would he be so good as to come over and see another new book she had sent for which had just arrived? Then there came to Carlisle a noted violinist who was to give an evening recital for the Red Cross. When Alfred was present, Susie asked her brother to take her. She was dying to hear him. Nobody should miss it. “We must both go, John dear,” she declared. “You are living in a rut here, and Alfred, you certainly ought to hear him! You will never hear his like again. And then, it’s for the Red Cross!”

Her brother having promised he would try his best to go, Susie bought the tickets the next time she was in town. But Mr. Carruthers found he had to go to a funeral over in Cedar Valley, and would not be home in time to get to town. So Susie wrote a woeful little note, and had her brother drop it into Alfred’s box as he passed. It was to the effect that she had two tickets, and could not go. Would he take them and go himself, taking anyone he liked? So Alfred came, of course, and they drove to town and attended the concert together.

He stayed away after that for a week, and then Susie called him up on the telephone, which was the same as if she had shouted from her housetop to his. She had not been able to find her piano folio since the night of the concert, and would he be so good, when he was at choir practice, as to see if he could find it? She thought she must have dropped it behind the organ. He was not to go to any trouble looking for it; but if he happened to see it, perhaps he would be so good as to bring it over.

The listeners, and there was one at each telephone, were highly amused, for, as everyone in the choir could testify, Mr. Carruthers came over to the choir practice nearly every night and why couldn’t she tell him to bring it?

However, Mr. Carruthers was not there, and as it was Friday night there was a faint chance that Ellen might be coming home, so Alfred found the book and went over to the manse after choir practice with it. He took note that the minister’s car was not in the garage, and so neither he nor Ellen was home. He decided to hand in the book and go, while there were still some members of the choir left to report that he had not gone in.

But Susie met him at the door and was overwhelming in her welcome. It was simply miraculous that he came, she cried, for she was just about to put on her things and go over to Tilly’s! She could not stay there one hour more, alone. John had had to go to some ministers’ meeting in town and was not home yet, and she was frightened to death there all alone. Would he come in, like a good kind neighbour, and keep her company for the shortest time? She

was certain John would be home any minute.

So Alfred went in, and the place was bright and warm, and his welcome was kind and friendly and disarming, and he could not but be flattered by her very evident admiration.

She knew she was a silly thing, she said in an apologetic girlish fashion. But there were such stories going about. Did he really believe that the peddler who had gone through here the other day was a German spy? Tilly and Liza had both said he was. She knew she was silly, but Alfred could laugh at her all he liked. Men were never sympathetic over such feminine nerves, she knew.

By this time Alfred was settled in the most comfortable arm-chair before the fire, and Susie played her softest and sweetest airs and then induced him to sing a song she said was just made for his voice; and once more the spell began to work. He stayed till the minister came home, and long after, for there was hot lemonade, and sandwiches and cake; and he went home in a state of mingled anxiety and happiness.

The next Friday night he learned from the telephone that Ellen was coming home, but too late for him to meet the bus. And resolving that this time he would surely make his position clear, he dressed very carefully and, as there was no choir practice that night, he went over to the manse early in the evening.

It was the most courageous move he had made in his timid courtship, for he brought not even the flimsiest excuse. He had no book to deliver, nor had he come for one. He simply tramped up to the manse door and banged the knocker, just like any other young man going to see his girl. It made him feel bold and reckless, and at the same time rather nervous.

Immediately he had his reward, for Ellen opened the door and receiving him so cordially that he realized that he had acted wisely. There was nothing like a bold front when dealing with women. Susie came tripping into the parlour immediately, but he was rather pleased. Her presence made things easier for him. He sat down happily in the easy chair that was becoming so familiar.

But the next moment he was filled with deep disappointment. Ellen rose with a polite apology, and took her coat from its hook in the hall.

Would Alfred please excuse her father and her, she asked. The Armstrong girls had telephoned that their mother wanted to see the minister tonight. They would not be long. And, smiling graciously, she went off with her father and left him alone to spend the evening with Susie.

Alfred was deeply chagrined, and not a little worried. It was rather serious, Ellen's going off like that, even if her father did want her. It really looked as if they both thought he wanted to be left alone with the aunt, as if Ellen had been listening to the silly gossip. Or could it be possible that Ellen might be a little jealous, and was taking this way of showing it? He doubted it; she had welcomed him so warmly at the door. It was a long time before Susie managed to play and sing him out of his despondency.

Meanwhile Ellen and her father, happily released, were on their way to Granma Armstrong's.

All Granma Armstrong's immediate family knew that for over a year she had been thinking seriously of holding her diamond wedding celebration. This was in spite of the fact that Grandpa Armstrong, whom she had married almost sixty years ago, had passed away ten years earlier. The outer ring of relatives —for she was related to the whole Bay Shore, having been a Laird—rather looked askance at the project. It wasn't showing proper respect for Uncle Johnny, said Mrs. Peter Laird, who had been an Armstrong.

Granma retorted that that was all *she* knew about Johnny. He was all ready for their golden wedding, but died just the year before it and she felt sure he would know about this one. Johnny was the sharp kind that you couldn't hide things from. It was not at all likely that he had changed.

But the war, and consequent rationing, had discouraged the idea for a time. Aggie and Jen, the two unmarried daughters who still lived at home, had been saving coupons for months, but they finally decided that the affair was off, especially as their mother had been taken down just after the threshing, with a very bad cold and attendant rheumatism.

And then something happened that changed everything. Granma Armstrong got her name into the *Carlisle Chronicle*, and under most humiliating circumstances. This newspaper, which was taken by everyone on the Bay Shore Road, Grit or Tory, had a page dedicated to the social doings of the town and surrounding country. When it happened that there were no weddings to report, with pictures of brides and grooms and their attendants, the young woman who was responsible for the page made a feature of the old folk and their activities. The attainment of the century-mark called for special notice; and she had a corner given over to complimenting those who had attained the age of ninety. 'The Gay Nineties,' it was coyly named, and any one who arrived there had a congratulatory paragraph, accompanied, if possible, by a photograph.

Somehow the young woman had made the dreadful mistake of listing

Granma Armstrong's name in this corner. Indeed it was suspected that one of the many grandchildren had submitted her name for a joke, though no one would have put the trick past her brother, Young Geordie Laird, who was himself over seventy. However it got there, it filled the subject of the highly flattering sketch with rage.

She was lying in bed when the paper came down the Bay Shore, and she rose up and dressed and said she would never rest again until she had shown the *Carlisle Chronicle* what a complete set of doddering idiots were running their paper.

"I'm goin' to town tomorrow," she declared, "to see that silly fool of a girl and find out who told her them lies about me. Ninety! The impidence! 'The dear little lady has attained the wonderful age of ninety!' " she quoted, in a high simpering voice. "If everybody along the Bay Shore ain't lost their memories, they know I was jist twenty when Johnny and me were married. And that will be sixty years ago on the tenth of November. I wonder if that girl knows enough to add that up and get it right. The Gay Nineties! The Gay Ninnies!"

The culprits who had submitted her name to the editor, trembled, but managed to hide their identity. For there were many in the evil plot and they dared not betray each other. Granma's uncanny memory regarding ages had caused embarrassment to many of them, and they were not sorry to see the tables turned. They had some doubts, too, as to her accuracy concerning her own age; and some suspicions that the editor of the Gay Nineties column might not be so many years astray.

But no one dared to say these things aloud, for Granma was hot on the trail of the culprit. Her suspicions fell here and there, like lightning up on the Blue Ridge in an electric storm.

"I wouldn't put it past that Alfred," she speculated, "Alf's Alfred. It's jist the kinda thing he'd do. He's not so young himself, is my fine lad. I'd like to send his name to the *Chronicle* for the Gay Forties. How would he like that? And he's over forty all right, and it's me that ought to know, 'cause I was with Janet the night he was born, and that was forty-two years ago the last fourth of March. He's forty-two and he needn't act like he was sixteen."

"He ain't tryin' to act young these days, Granma," giggled Nell Turner, her favourite grand-daughter. "Didn't you know he's been after the good-lookin' widow at the manse? Singin' duets an everythin'!"

Of course Granma did not need to be told who was courting whom on the Bay Shore, but just now she was not interested in anything but the Gay

Nineties and in discovering who had thrust her into their senile company.

When her search for the guilty one proved fruitless, she announced a new campaign for reinstating herself in the public eye. She would have her diamond wedding, with a big write-up about it afterwards in the paper, and she would have her age told. Her *right* age. And she would have an extra line or two saying that it had been a great mistake when they put her into their doddering Nineties.

"So yous girls better get smart and begin gettin' ready," she announced.

Aggie and Jen laughed indulgently, and as they saw this was what was most needed to restore their mother's health, they threw themselves heartily into the preparations.

Ellen and her father drove down the hills to the Armstrong home the night they left Alfred and Aunt Susie to their music. Granma had taken another cold, and the wedding preparations had been discontinued, but she was feeling much better and wanted to see Mr. Carruthers and ask his opinion of it all.

Grandma Armstrong's one bachelor son and two unmarried daughters lived with her in an old stone house overlooking the bay. Though they were all in their fifties, they were completely dominated by the strong old woman, sometimes in rebellion, but mostly recognizing her as a benevolent despot. Poor Mother, the daughters always called her, especially when the arthritic pains were bad.

Ellen stepped out of the car at the garden gate, while her father, as was always his custom, went on to the barnyard. Tom was there pumping water for his horses. The sisters had just returned from milking and wore their barnyard skirts and heavy boots, but they came out to meet their guests as though they were dressed in velvet and lace.

"Come away, come away," they cried joyously. "Poor Mother will be that glad to see you!"

"And you're home again this week-end!" Jen cried. "Eh, it's grand you manage to come. Aggie and I was jist sayin' last Sunday we could tell by the look o' Mr. Carruthers when he stood up in the pulpit to give out the first hymn, we could tell if you were home."

"Yes, that's jist what Jen and me were both sayin'," Aggie agreed. "We were sayin' we didn't need to turn around to look at the manse pew, to see if you were home or not."

"And your aunt, Mrs. Dunbar. How is she? You should a' brought her. My,

she's the nice friendly little body. And can she ever play the piano!"

Ellen followed them down the garden path, trying to answer all their questions, her attention all taken up the lovely surroundings. The Armstrong home and garden were famous all along the Georgian Bay. There were not many blooms left now, except for some bronze chrysanthemums in a sheltered corner, but the lawn was strewn with the gold of the poplar leaves, and bordered by the flames of the Burning Bush.

"Oh, what a lovely place you have!" Ellen cried.

"Oh, the garden's near gone," Jen said. "We haven't much to show a city girl here, Ellen, but you see you can walk up to the house on a carpet of leaves of the Lord's own making."

Ellen stood looking at the beautiful old stone house nestled against the hills, facing out over the bay. "If I were an artist," she cried, "I would come here and paint this place with you two and your mother sitting in the sun beside the door. Provided I could get you to sit long enough," she added.

They laughed gleefully. "Well, we might," Jen declared, "but not Mother! You couldn't keep her quiet long enough. Come away in! Mother would hear the car and she'll be wonderin' who's here. My, it's wonderful that her hearin's so good!" They looked at each other and laughed ruefully. "We just can't hide anything from her, she can hear through the chinks in the wall!"

Ellen was led into the big summer kitchen with its low rafted ceiling, and on into the main part of the big house. It was a roomy place, for it had been added to above, and on two sides, and had great rooms that were never used. Ellen was ushered into the parlour, a hushed airless place. The sisters had planted their winter garden here in the shape of sofa pillows and knitted afghans, and draperies, and curtains that dazzled the eye. But the blinds were pulled down to keep the sun from fading the colours, and Ellen was glad that they all went back to the winter kitchen with its shining painted walls and floor.

"We think we'll have it in about two weeks, the diamond wedding," Aggie said, as Ellen was seated in the rocker. "We'll get all our cookies and small things done up ahead o' time, and Tom'll bring out the meat from cold storage, and there won't be much to do after that." Aggie spoke as though feeding thirty-odd guests on rationed food was nothing but a small effort.

"Steve and Pete's folks got ahead of us thrashin' this year," Jen said, "and poor Mother didn't like it a bit. They say Pete's wife had both honey and apple-sauce on the table, but I don't know."

“Well, we’ll have to find out for sure, or Mother’ll make us have both, as well as preserves, at the weddin’,” Aggie declared. “But how can you get sugar to sweeten apple-sauce and give coupons for honey as well? The extra they give you for thrashin’ would hardly sweeten Tom’s tea.”

“And we’re goin’ to have a programme at the wedding!” Jen cried. “And we’re asking Alf and your aunt to sing that lovely duet. My, wasn’t that grand! Now, we won’t be a minute gettin’ these pails outa the road, Ellen, and then you’ll come in and see mother.”

They were interrupted by a loud banging and thumping from a bedroom beyond the floral sitting-room. The sisters looked at each other guiltily.

“It’s poor mother,” Jen cried. “I told you she’d hear the car! Come away in and see her. We can wash up later, Aggie!” They hurriedly led the way down the shining hall to the bedroom. “Poor Mother, she can’t bear to miss anything, and if we don’t go in she hammers on the floor till we do!” The sisters laughed indulgently, as at the pranks of a spoilt child.

The old woman was sitting up in bed, a wide feather bed covered with another flower-bed of a quilt in an intricate pattern and a blaze of colours. She wore a red checked shawl about her bony shoulders. Her thin grey hair was carefully brushed down on either side of her brown lined old face, but her bright black eyes were snapping. She looked less like an invalid than like a lively animal that had been caught in a trap.

She was waving the great walking-cane with which she had summoned them, and looked as if she were ready to use it on her daughters. “I knew that was the minister’s car! I heard it comin’ up the lane! How are you, Ellen? I’m glad you’re home. The girls would never let me see anybody if they had their way. I could hear you all talkin’ about the thrashin’ and, as I always say, give the men plenty to eat! They work hard and they ought to be well fed. I don’t care if there is rations. Give them lots o’ pies and cookies and raisin buns!”

“But raisins is so hard to get, too, Mother,” Jen said. “And sugar.”

“Well, I’m gettin’ outa this bed tomorrow, doctor or no doctor,” she declared, “and I’ll see to it that we get raisins for my weddin’ cake, and there’s lots o’ maple sugar. If Doctor Mack hadn’t gone to the war, I wouldn’t be lyin’ here. It’s that Doctor Burns in town that made me go to bed, and I’ve been worse ever since I went to see him. Doctor Mack always useta say, ‘Don’t lie down under your pains and groan. Get up and jump on them!’ And I bet he was right.”

And she was going to have her diamond wedding, rations or no rations, if

Mr. Carruthers thought it was all right. And she hoped there would be more to eat than there had been at poor Dick Hartley's wedding. Her sister Bella said she was never so ashamed in her life, and they said Steve hadn't felt the same since.

"It's kinda hard to grow old," Jen said, when, after the minister had had his visit with her mother, they were moving out to the car in the warm dusk.

"She'll feel a lot better after your talk with her, Mr. Carruthers," Aggie said gratefully. "You're the only one that can smooth Mother down."

"And I'm so glad you let her know you thought the diamond wedding was all right," Tom added. "The girls can go ahead now."

"And thank you for your visit," they all said in unison. The Armstrongs belonged to the old school, and felt that a visitor had conferred a favour.

"Well, well," the minister said, as they drove down the hills in the starlight. "I am reminded every day by the old folk of my congregation how rebellious my own spirit is. I think I'll go home and read 'Grow old along with me.' "

It was still early, and Ellen was reluctant to go home. Would they have time to drive over and see Minnie for a few minutes, and ask how Celia was? Her father was always glad to make still another visit to his flock, and went willingly, little dreaming of the real reason for his daughter's eagerness.

But a visit to Minnie was always a pleasure for Ellen. She was on the next farm to the Old Home Place and had been a wonderful neighbour to Islay and herself that happy summer.

"And where are your two high school students?" Ellen asked, as they sat by the kitchen table which was strewn with books where the two youngest children were doing their homework.

Lilanne and Jackie wouldn't be home till after nine. It was Friday night, and they were having a Junior Red Cross meeting at the school, and the bus waited for them.

"Always two in the high school, Steve," Mr. Carruthers said, smiling. "What would the high school bus do if it were not for Steve Laird's family?"

This was a mistake on the minister's part, for the subject of school and school buses was the one that set Steve off riding his hobby.

"Yeah, that bus!" he cried. Before it came you might manage to keep your kids on the farm, even if they were always hollerin' to go to high school. But now with that thing drivin' right up to your gate there was no chance to get a

kid to do a hand's turn on the farm. The minute they were big enough to be any use they jist hopped on the bus and were gone! Here he was with only Audrey and Bill left now. And what help were they?

The two sitting before their lessons, a boy of twelve and a girl of ten, looked up at their mother and smiled knowingly. No matter how their father blustered, they knew their mother would see that they got on that bus just as soon as they were ready.

Ellen tried to change the subject by asking about the latest news of Celia; but Steve was off, and had to go on talking. He seated himself uncomfortably on the edge of his chair, waving his arms, while the two women carried on their talk in a whispered aside, leaving the minister to bear the brunt of Steve's onslaught.

Yessir! and the minute you got them through school, along comes the army and nabs them up! And the government hollerin' at the farmer to produce, produce, and all the time makin' it impossible to get a hired man or boy. And if there was a place where there was only one boy of military age, that was the place they'd pounce on! Here was young Stevie; jist eighteen and finished school last spring. His mother was bound to make a doctor or a lawyer outa him, but along comes the war and away he goes. Eighteen, and the only one on the farm fit for a man's work! And across here at Pete's, look what they got there. Three o' them all growed up beside old Pete himself, and he could work like an ox. Never a day sick in his life. And they jist got one of the boys married in a hurry and Pete buys another farm so his boy don't have to go. "Ain't that the truth?" he demanded.

Mr. Carruthers was troubled. "It's the way of the world, Steve," he said sympathetically. "The willing horse always pulls more than its share of the load. But you wouldn't want your boy to be that kind. You'd rather see him eager to go in the cause of freedom, would you not?"

"I'd hate mighty hard to think he was yallah," Steve admitted. "But there ought to be something done about it."

Minnie with the help of her daughter served tea with sugar for the two men. Steve hauled his chair up to the table and drank cup after cup of tea, and ate slabs of home-made bread and butter, and currant buns, and relieved his aggrieved mind.

Minnie was whispering under the cover of Steve's tirade that Celie would be coming home to stay for the Big Event. David her husband was taking an officers' course and would soon be gone! And Stevie too! Minnie's eyes were filled with tears. And how was her aunt, she asked, trying to be cheerful. And

had she heard from Cousin Islay lately? “And that young chaplain! My, my, wasn’t he the grand lad!” She laughed easily. “Lilanne and all the young girls were crazy about him. But eh, he’s got a mind set on higher things, I tell them. Wasn’t he the grand preacher? He’ll have a big city congregation some day.”

Ellen remembered what he had said about always going to war, being on the frontier while he was young. But she changed the subject. It was not possible to talk about him, and Minnie was quite willing to talk about Celia and her great hopes for the future.

Steve was still airing his grievances, and they were real. “Say, that sermon you preached two Sundays ago, Mr. Carruthers, made me think times hadn’t changed much. Here’s these Egyptian taskmasters of ours doin’ jist the same thing! We can’t get help; and if we could, we can’t pay the wages!”

“Take that third kid of Ike’s, home here a month ago, and me in the midst of harvest. He’s been workin’ in a munitions factory, and I saw him up at the store and I says, ‘ye’re home for a while?’ And he says he was, for a little. And I says ‘Want a job on the farm while you’re here?’

“ ‘Whatter ye offering?’ he says. That’s the way! Money first, and no idea about work. ‘Well, I dunno,’ I says, ‘what you been gettin’ in that factory in Toronto?’ I says.

“ ‘Dollar an hour,’ he says. Yessir, that’s what he said and he wasn’t lyin’ neither. His father told me that’s exactly what a lot o’ them kids that ain’t worth their salt at home was gettin’ down there. So I says, ‘yeah, dollar ’n hour. And that’s what you’ll be lookin’ for when you go to work on the farm,’ I says. An’ he chirps up and says, ‘Yes, that’s what I’d expect,’ as bold as you please. Well, sir, I jist looked at him and then I says, ‘Yeah,’ I says, ‘that’ll suit me all right. You can have my farm and I’ll come and hire with you,’ I says. His dad was standin’ there and he never uttered a cheep. He was as muddled about the thing as anybody else. Well, sir, if Hitler gets over to England and then acrost here—and if you ask me, it looks mighty like as if he would—if he does, you can blame it on the men that’s letting the farmer kill himself!”

When the two runaways finally returned home they slipped silently in at the kitchen door.

“Do let us stay here a little while,” Ellen begged. “We can go in before Alfred leaves.”

From the living-room sounded the gay strains of *Come where the Lilies Bloom*. Susie must have heard that they were to be asked to sing it at the diamond wedding, and was getting ready. Ellen softly closed the kitchen door,

and they sat by the fire, listening.

Susie's high sweet soprano was calling "Away, away, away!" and as she floated upward on a long high note, Alfred came booming in on "Oh, come, come, come!" Ellen turned with a startled look towards her father. Alfred had a habit of saying chidingly, when anything did not exactly suit him, "Oh, come, come, come!" and this sounded exactly like it. But Susie's high clear notes drowned the protest in——

"Where the lilies, the sweet fragrant lilies——"

Ellen fled to the cellar for apples, choking with laughter. Her father stretched out his feet luxuriously towards the oven door. Ellen could not help noticing that since his sister had taken over the manse he seemed even more delighted to have her come home, and grew young and happy when they went away alone. He reached out and took two mackintosh reds, one in each hand.

"Comfort me, comfort me with apples," he quoted.

"Go on now, you know the rest," Ellen prompted. "For *I am sick of love*!"

10

Moon Madness

When the Armstrong sisters realized that their mother was really bent on having her diamond wedding they fell to with great goodwill. The season's housecleaning was rushed through. Curtains were taken down, washed and ironed, and rehung; rugs and bedding flapped on the clothes-line in sun and wind. Cupboards and drawers were emptied and scoured and painted and polished. Linoleums were varnished to a mirror-like gloss.

The Armstrong sisters were famous cooks, and as soon as the house was ready they began their preparations for a feast. They had been saving coupons for months, and the near relatives came forward with donations of sugar and tea and butter and all other ingredients that war time had rendered hard to procure.

Sugar was the greatest problem. One could manage about the butter. The Bay Shore was populated by good, honest, law-abiding folk who were anxious to help their country in her war effort. But their idea of rationing was a little elastic. If your right hand served your country consistently it was surely no harm for your left hand, unknown, to ease off a difficult situation. So if there was not quite enough butter for the table, there could be no harm in bringing down the long unused churn from the loft above the woodshed and whipping up a few pounds of butter. So Aggie and Jen followed the example of their neighbours and churned up some golden rolls of dairy butter, such as had not been seen on a farm table on the Bay Shore for years.

The matter of invitations was not so simple as the baking, with three generations entitled to be present. Then Granma wanted this niece and that second cousin; and the list, huge at first, grew like a snowman in Lairdale school yard on a mild winter day.

Granma gave Nell Turner the task of seeing to the invitations, for Nell knew everybody. They must have stylish printed invitations on nice thick paper, Nell declared, all gilt-edged, with a diamond in the corner.

But Granma who was famous for spreading her table with a lavish hand, was very frugal in almost every other way. Printed invitations! Such airs. She would have nothing of the kind. Nell could sit down and write to the folks far away on good white paper. As for the Bay Shore folks, she'd look silly writing them. What did she suppose they paid for a telephone for? Just to have an

ornament to hang on the wall? Nell could just get on the ’phone right away and call up everybody. She was always gossiping over it anyhow, as the Line all knew.

Then there was the programme after the supper, and the grand-daughters said it must start with a toast to the bride. Every swell banquet had things like that. Mr. Carruthers would make a speech, and they would get Alf and his widow to sing their duet. And as Uncle Geordie was Granma’s only brother left, he could propose the toast to the bride. Granma pronounced this all balderdash, but if the girls wanted it they could go ahead. The only thing she cared about was the piece that was to be written for the *Carlisle Chronicle*. And woe betide them if they let anything get into that silly paper wrong!

So Nell Turner sat at the telephone every minute she could find from her work, while the youngest child scrambled into her lap and tried to help.

“Granma wants yous all to come,” she shouted heartily. “Supper sharp at six! And come early! You’ve had sixty years to get ready, so there’s no excuse for bein’ late.”

Young Geordie was called early on the list. “You’re asked, Uncle Geordie,” Nellie cried. “Seein’ as you’re Granma’s only brother, she couldn’t very well leave you out! But you gotta pay for your supper. You’re down on the programme to make a good long speech, and propose a toast to the bride,” she giggled.

Young Geordie refused violently, then refused again a little more mildly. Then he argued, and pleaded, all in vain. Sarah had been the eldest, and he had not yet outlived the habit of obedience which she had exacted from the younger members of the family.

“Now, look here, Uncle Geordie,” Nell said reasonably, “Granma says you gotta, what’s the use o’ kickin’?”

Young Geordie emitted a long groan. He knew her argument to be unanswerable. “I guess you’re right,” he said gloomily. “If my sister Sarah was to say to me, Geordie, the moon’s made o’ green cheese, now you mind I told you so, I’d say yes, yes, Sarah, sure, you’re right! You always are! I can see the maggots on it right now. You tell her I’ll make the speech. But she’ll be sorry.”

“And that ain’t all,” she shouted cheerfully, “Granma says she won’t have you and Aunt Bella thumpin’ up to the door with that there horse and buggy, shamin’ her before all the stylish folks from the States. You get out that car o’ yours and shine it up. She says she’d jist as soon you came in a stoneboat with

a yoke of oxen as that buggy!”

Young Geordie shouted back his defiance. He would never drive that car again, not if the King himself ordered it. After Dick’s wedding he had again put up his car; more than ever it had become the symbol of the disappointment of his life. For Dick might never come home now.

The wedding party created a pleasurable stir in the community. There had not been anything of the kind on the Bay Shore for years. For, even before the war, home parties had almost become obsolete. Then, too, it came at the very best time of year. The heavy summer work was over, threshings were finished, and the soft warm days of Indian Summer lay over the land.

As soon as the invitations were out, presents began to arrive. Knitted shawls and scarves, and gloves, and one pair of bed socks, things Granma Armstrong scorned to wear. There were innumerable gifts, too, of cut-glass and china and silver, and table linen, and all the pretty things that would delight the heart of a bride.

The three sons and three daughters put their moneys together and bought her the nearest they could approach to diamonds: a big rhinestone brooch, that everyone said looked just as good as the real thing and they did not see how anyone could tell the difference.

By the time the great day arrived, Aggie and Jen and their helpers had prepared such a supper as put all the threshings in the neighbourhood to shame. And to crown it all, the son who lived in Toronto and owned a bakery came with his wife and six children, and brought a wedding cake five storeys high, which beat the wedding cake that Kate Drummond had provided for Dick’s wedding.

Early in the afternoon an army of grand-daughters, headed by Nell Turner, came over to set the long tables in the parlour, dining-room, winter kitchen, and even the downstairs bedrooms, which had been cleared out for the children’s tables.

The weather coöperated. It turned out to be a perfect autumn day, such a day as only a kindly November can give, warm and sunny, with tiny flies dancing in the air, and all the landscape clothed in soft amethyst, with the bay lying lazy and smiling as if taking a holiday the same as the land. Supper was ready early, for Granma wanted everyone to have a peep at Jen’s garden and the late climbing roses before dark. Ellen managed to arrive in time from Toronto, as it happened to be on a Friday night, and she and her father and Aunt Susie set out in good time, just as the purple twilight of the valleys was stealing up over the glory of the soft cloudless sunset. Ellen could not but

notice that Susie was radiant. She was armed with a bundle of music with the well-worn copy of *Come where the Lilies Bloom* on top, and *The Whip-poor-will's Song* for an encore. The big house was open, as the evening was warm, the windows facing the bay were aflame in the sunset, and the garden gave back the glory of the skies, as the wedding guests swept up the lane.

As they approached the open gate Ellen suddenly put on the brakes. For there was Young Geordie coming from the opposite direction in his car and at the usual terrific pace. After all his vows to let the ill-begotten machine rust in the shed until Dick came home, here he was, careening along the narrow road, his hands clutching the wheel, his eyes bulging. Aunt Bella sat at his side, straight as a little broom stick, hugging the huge bundle of the golden-ring quilt she had made for her sister's wedding. She was enjoying herself immensely. Though she was a few years older than Geordie she had no smallest sense of fear, and loved to go tearing over the country at his side. She was very proud of their fine appearance today; and grateful for her sister's insistence upon the car. It had been so humiliating to go plodding along behind a heavy farm horse while her neighbours sped past her. She was queen of the highway once more; nobody ever passed Geordie, and she was enjoying her high position to the full.

By the time he came to the gate Young Geordie had worked himself up into a rage with the machine. For it had already disgraced him on the road thither. He had had a most unpleasant experience as he descended one of the many hills to cross the Wappitti. The stream was swollen, and the sight of the foaming water rushing under the narrow bridge as he started to descend the hill made him lose his nerve. He remembered the fatal tendency that took dreadful possession of him to charge head on at any obstacle before him. He knew he would crash into the bridge railing and they would both be hurled into the river. "Now drive careful, Geordie," Bella cried, "cause I've got this quilt for Sarah, and if I get a spot on it!" This was the last straw. Young Geordie stopped the car in the middle of the hill and shoved on the emergency brake.

Aunt Bella lurched forward into the windshield, protected by the quilt, and jerked back again, her hat over her eyes. "Well, forever more!" she screamed.

Young Geordie fumbled with the gadgets before him and made no remark. He was really waiting for his nerves to steady. If he could only remember what you did to slow up, short of throwing on the emergency! But when there was a narrow place ahead he always put on more speed; why, he did not know. He sat with the perspiration running down his face. Someone would be sure to come up behind him, and him square in the middle of the narrow road. He loathed being caught in such a predicament. He hoped fervently that it would

not be Old Geordie, who was ten years his senior and was always disapproving of what he called Geordie's capers. A car came swooping down from behind, and stopped short. Of course it *was* Old Geordie! With his old wife and old son and *his wife*, and a car full of grandchildren, all heading for the diamond wedding. Old Geordie was already bawling out foolish questions as to what he meant by taking up all the road, and why in thunder he did not move on. The son and two stalwart grandsons jumped out and came to the side of the obstruction.

"Anything wrong, Uncle Geordie?" they all asked. Young Geordie's rage made him sarcastic.

"No, there's nothin' wrong," he said grimly. "I'm jist sittin' here admirin' the scenery. Can't you leave a buddy alone with his thoughts?"

"Are you out of gasoline?" asked the older man.

"No, I'm all right. I—I—" Young Geordie searched frantically for an excuse for his ignominious position. "I—well, my brakes ain't workin' very well and I don't like to go on." He had said the first thing that came into his head, but the wise youths of sixteen and seventeen stared. They knew all about a car. "Gosh, Uncle Geordie," the younger shouted, "you can't have brake trouble and you sittin' in the middle of this hill. Let's see." He reached in and released the brake and immediately Young Geordie's confession came true. His brakes were not working. The released car fairly fell down the hill and shot across the bridge before his fumbling hands could interfere with the steering wheel. He missed the railing by a couple of inches and went up the next hill with a speed that even Aunt Bella found more than satisfying. The rescuers climbed back into their car and followed far behind.

He had not quite regained his nerve, nor a legal speed, when he saw the gate of his sister's home rushing towards him. The fatal urge to put on more speed at a hazardous place seized him again, and they whirled in at the gate on two wheels, missing the cement posts by an inch. Fortunately the house was on a hill at the top of a long steep lane. The car went up like a bird. Just beside the house the fence had been let down between the lane and the adjoining pasture field to make a wide parking space for the guests' cars. Tom and a couple of his nephews were stationed at the gap to show the new arrivals in and see that their cars were properly put away. Tom waved to Young Geordie who was coming on at ever-increasing speed, and motioned him towards the gap. But Young Geordie would not have noticed a squad of motor cops had they been lined up to stop him. He was on his way and nothing but a lack of gasoline could delay him. Aunt Bella gaily waved the golden-ring quilt at Tom as they shot past. She did the same to the crowd waiting on the veranda as they swept

past the house and on towards the barn. When Young Geordie finally stopped with the aid of a slope up to the barn and the pig-pen door, he managed to get turned around and came back.

Aunt Bella climbed out radiantly, clutching her quilt, quite pleased with Geordie's dramatic entrance. Granma was on the steps with her cane, ushering everyone into the house. But Young Geordie stopped to explain, to the knot of men and boys at the gap.

"Ye see," he explained breathlessly, "when I turned in at the gate I happened to look at the little clock, and here if she wasn't registerin' a clean sixty. I hollered at her, but she jist picked up more speed, so I did some lightnin' calculatin'. I seen if I could jist get past all yous guys gawkin' away round the door, and go on through the barnyard and the back gate, I could go clean through to the back fields, and I reckoned she'd run outa gas before I got to the bush. Well, I was jist goin' fine, and I'd a made it too, only that there pig pen o' yours jist fair jumped off its foundation and landed clean in front a' me. So I thought I might as well stop there. Bella was anxious to get to the weddin' anyway. I don't think I did any damage except to the door, Tom. It seems kinda loose on its hinges like."

Tom roared with good-natured laughter. No one could ever be angry at Uncle Geordie. "It's a good thing the old sow was out in the pasture," he said, "we might a had fresh pork for the weddin'."

Grandma was still standing outside, hammering with her cane on the veranda floor, and ordering her guests to hurry inside as supper was all ready. She was dressed in her best black satin, with a hand-made lace collar held by the new rhinestone brooch that blazed in the sunset. She was a handsome woman, still erect, and she looked like an old duchess ordering a line of retainers.

But all the women wanted to go round the house to see Jen's garden, and get seeds of the best flowers; and the men kept drifting to the barn to look at Tom's thoroughbred Jerseys. So the glory of the sunset had almost faded and the electric lights and candles had to be lighted when finally the guests were gathered around the beautiful tables. The white cloths shone like satin, the silver and glass glittered, and the abundance of food already laid out was enough to make Steve Laird draw a great satisfied breath of approval. There was a great deal of happy confusion; talking and meeting of old friends and relatives that had not seen each other for years, welcoming of those who had come from afar, chasing of children out to the spare bedroom where their places were laid, and running up and down stairs to stow away the dozen babies that had come to the diamond wedding. When at last they were all in

their places, Granma gave the signal and they stood up and sang “Be present at our table, Lord.” The Lairds were a musical folk. There was always a singer and a fiddler and sometimes even a piper in the connection somewhere, and now their voices blended. Old Uncle Tom’s great tenor, still strong and pure in spite of his years, and Alfred’s rich baritone, could be heard above the rest. And the son from the States was seen to wipe his eyes with his elegant handkerchief as he sat down.

Granma Armstrong sat at the head table with the older folk around her—Old Geordie and his wife, who had been at the first wedding sixty years ago, and the remaining members of her own and Johnny’s families. She had beckoned imperiously to Mr. Carruthers to come and sit at her right hand, and as he made his way thither, Ellen had drawn back looking about for Susie. Liza and Tilly and Gid were at the next table, and Liza pulled Ellen towards her. Ellen happily took her place, especially as she noticed that Minnie Laird was on the opposite side. She looked for Susie and could not find her, until Liza nudged her. “Never mind your aunt,” she hissed. “Don’t you see where she’s got to?” Ellen looked across the room to the place indicated. Susie was seated beside Alfred, and on the other side of him were his father and mother. It was a cosy family party!

The tables were already crammed with plates of delectable food, but the supper had not even appeared. All the food on display was mere garnishing: plates of pink sliced ham, fixed up with parsley and cress as only Jen knew how to do it, salads like flower beds surrounded with moss, gleaming red and gold jellies, piles of homemade bread and buns and hot biscuits, platters of sliced tomatoes and cucumbers, pickles and sauces and relishes. It was impossible even to view all that was there. And now the waiters—grand-daughters and grand-nieces—came running in from the kitchen with plates of hot chicken, savoury dressing, creamed potatoes, steaming white cauliflower, green peas, bowls of rich hot gravy, platters of corn on the cob. Steve looked at his heaped plate and nudged his wife. “This ain’t no collation, Minnie,” he whispered.

For a little there was silence. Nobody had time to talk; but as the great platters of chicken and ham and dressing began to disappear, spirits rose and tongues were loosed. Everyone began looking round to see that nobody had been missed. Tilly Begg reached across the table to Steve. “Say, ain’t that Captain Angus McNabb sittin’ away down there beside Alf and Janet?” she asked. “What’s he doin’ here? He ain’t any kin to either Granpa or Granma.”

“His wife’s Aunt Janet’s sister, and mebby that’s why,” said Minnie, who was always ready to put in a good word for anyone.

“That don’t make him an Armstrong nor a Laird either, and his wife ain’t with him anyhow,” Tilly remonstrated.

“I’ll tell you how it happened,” volunteered Nell Turner, who with Big Jim, her husband, was sitting near. “He came out this morning to Aunt Janet’s and stayed to dinner. And was talkin’ away like a life-insurance agent to Alfred all morning, and after dinner he went off. But in the afternoon if he didn’t turn up again, and Aunt Janet didn’t know what to do with him, ’cause her and Uncle Alf and Alfred was all ready to come over here, and she jist had to bring him along.”

“Well, he’s good company,” Minnie said. “He was always joky.”

“Mebby he’s jist here on a visit. His boat’s in the harbour,” Mrs. Peter Laird contributed. “He was over at our place talkin’ to the boys this afternoon. They wouldn’t say what it was about. I think he’s mebby tryin’ to sell somethin’.”

“He was over to our place too,” cried Marty Peters, another granddaughter, who was seated at the table with her husband. “And you and him was talkin’ fit to beat the band, Bob! What’s it all about?”

“Oh, nothin’ much,” Bob said, “Jist talkin’ about boats and sailin’.” He looked across at Jim Turner, and the two men burst out laughing.

Nell nodded her head wisely. “Whenever he says that they’re up to somethin’,” she muttered.

“Look who’s sittin’ beside Alf, will ya?” whispered Steve, not so low that Ellen did not hear. There was a great craning of necks and much tittering.

“Well, my gravy!” cried Nell Turner. “If Alfie hasn’t got hooked at last! Say Ellen, how d’ye like the idea of Uncle Alfred?”

Minnie nudged her to be quiet, and Tilly scowled. They did not like to make fun of any of the minister’s family. But Ellen was wise enough to take it all in good part, and indeed she was far more pleased than any of them could guess at the wonderful turn affairs seemed to be taking. “Why, I think it would be lovely, Nell,” she said honestly. But as she looked at Alfred she could not be so sure as to his own pleasure. Some one had surely upset him; whether it was Captain Angus or Susie she could not tell. Susie herself seemed prettier than ever, and looked very happy.

But Alfred was giving his mind to his plate and looked dour and depressed. The silken strands that had been slowly woven about him were beginning to smother him. He had a trapped feeling. Susie had not only sat beside him when

he had planned to sit between her and Ellen, but she had separated him somehow from Ellen; and when he had fled to his parents' side, there she was beside him! And now she had promised that they would sing their duet. He knew by the jokes of Captain Angus and Tom Laird and Young Andy that they were all talking about him. Alfred had a feeling of panic. He looked around, and at that moment Captain Angus leaned towards him like the tempter he was. "It would be a great way to see the world," he whispered.

Up at the head table, Granma, flanked by her sons and daughters, looked at Captain Angus and winked at her son Tom across the table.

"I'm s'prised to see Angus," she said. "How did he happen to be here? What's he up to now?"

"Mebby he's out lookin' for German spies," said her brother Geordie.

"Hear from Dick lately, Geordie?" Steve called from the next table. Steve had had three helpings of chicken and ham, and was feeling genial. Young Geordie's face brightened; he loved to tell the latest news of Dick. Yes, he had had a letter that week, but he did not know where the Corvette *Hiawatha* was; Dick never told. "And where's his wife? Gone back home?" Nell Turner asked. "Not her!" Young Geordie boasted. "That lass'll never leave her post. She's away out on a point on the Atlantic, a naval station, with two dozen other girls. She says she can signal to Dick out there. There's a lass!" he cried proudly.

"It's too bad we didn't have Captain Laird here for Mother's diamond wedding," Jen said. Aggie and Jen had places at the head table to be near their mother, but they did not sit. They were up and down the tables from room to room, seeing that everyone had plenty and that the foolish young waiters were doing their duty.

"Eh, don't I wish he could a' been," Granma said. "Wasn't he the image of his father, Mr. Carruthers?"

"I knew the Reverend David Laird in college," Mr. Carruthers said. "He was a grand young man. Like father, like son!"

"David was the finest Laird that was raised on the Bay Shore," Young Geordie declared, and many nodded approval. "And his lad's like him."

"Eh, wasn't he grand?" Minnie said to Ellen. "If our Stevie could only grow up like him——" she stopped, her heart in her anguished eyes as they followed the young khaki-clad figure, that darted between the tables.

"The girls was all crazy about him," grumbled Andy. Florrie was one of

the waitresses, and Andy had elected himself assistant, as had many another lad. It was much better than sitting at the table, for in the many trips to the kitchen and store-room they were able to consume pies and cakes and ice-cream and other delicacies in wholesale quantities. They all felt it was a fine arrangement.

"Well, they needn't bother about him," Aggie said, "He's took. I hear that one of the Drummond girls has got him."

"Yeah, that one that was bridesmaid at the weddin'," cried Nell in her trumpet tones, "Robert's girl. My, wasn't she the stylish piece?"

"And did you ever see anybody so thin?" Liza asked. Liza was stout herself. "She looked like a darnin' needle. Not much like a minister's wife, if you ask me."

"Mebby she was fed on collations when she was growin' up," said Steve. He was eating his third piece of pie and ice-cream, and could now remember that other wedding feast without rancour.

When the guests could not possibly eat any more, and were languidly toying with wedding cake and grapes and nuts, the glasses were filled up with a gleaming ruby-red cherry cordial the sisters had made, and the programme was begun. Young Geordie got through his speech, and then chairs were pushed back and the youngsters from the bedroom began to drift in to find their parents or more wedding cake, or to see if there were any ice-cream left on any one's plate. Mr. Carruthers made a fine speech, and Ellen was happy to note how well they listened to him, and how happy he had looked sitting up there beside Young Geordie. Then Mrs. Dunbar was asked to play some old Scotch songs on the organ. Old Uncle Tom was called upon to lead, and they all sang. Somehow this singing had a sort of disintegrating effect upon the party. It began to fall apart. Granma had promised Steve's Lilianne and Peter's Florrie and the girl who taught the Lairdale school—who was a guest, being an Armstrong—that if they would wash up the dishes for Aggie and Jen, they could take themselves off and go to the lacrosse match in town that everyone was talking about. So the dishes began to disappear, and under cover of the coming and going, the crying of babies from upstairs, the hurrying of young mothers in their direction, and the dodging of youngsters through the crowd, somehow the men oozed out to the veranda and into the darkness, to talk and smoke; and when Susie came back to her seat, she found Alfred had gone.

The dishes and remaining food were being swept away at such high speed by the hurrying waiters that there was no place or time for the rest of the programme. No one seemed to remember that there was to be any, in fact, or

that Alfred and his widow were to sing their famous duet.

Aggie and Jen apologized to Mrs. Dunbar, who was very gracious about it, though Ellen could see she was disappointed and puzzled. And the sisters were too distracted by this time to think about the disrupted programme, for the dishwashing was going on at lightning speed in the kitchen and Aggie and Jen were in terror for their best china and especially for the many borrowed treasures.

The tables were pushed back against the walls, and Marty and Nell arranged the smaller ones for those who wished to play games. Some of the babies were put upstairs again, while others crawled about the vacant floor space. The women took their knitting and sat about and discussed rationing and the latest news from their sons in uniform. Ellen brought out the sock she was knitting for Ronald, and Susie sat by her side looking rather forlorn. Minnie was knitting a sock of air-force blue, too.

"For the chaplain," she whispered to Ellen. She felt that the Bay Shore should take him on their list for socks. He kinda seemed to belong to them. If Cousin Islay and Dr. Mack came up to the Old Home Place for Christmas, as they were planning, she wanted to have the socks ready. They had knit so many for young Stevie that the other boys called him the "thousand-legged worm."

The doors were all open, and the night was so warm that Tom dragged chairs out to the veranda for the men. Even Granma put on her best shawl and went out, against the urgent protests of her daughters, to sit with Mr. Carruthers and the two sons from a distance. Captain Angus was out there, too, moving about among the men and talking earnestly. Young Geordie was seen to have a few words with him, and when he came back to his seat he hinted darkly that there might be a lot more than you thought in these stories about spies going round the country; Angus was in the know about these things.

Then Young Geordie wandered round casually to the back kitchen door, and young Stevie and Andy Armstrong deserted the dishwashing and slipped out to him. They stood for some time whispering in the darkness behind the lilac bushes at the door of the back shed.

Andy went back into the kitchen, his eyes dancing. He motioned Florrie into a corner of the pantry. Hey, what did she think? He was getting the lend of a dandy car to go to town. Uncle Geordie was lending him his, and was going home with Bob's folks. Wasn't that great? It would be a little while before they could get it, but they would be in lots of time for the dance after the game. Would she mind waiting a little?

Florrie was pleased. Of course she would wait. She was beginning to be tired of Andy's old car that was always breaking down. It was no fun to be always sitting by the roadside while Andy did his tinkering, and your friends went whirling past, or, worse still, stopped to help and laugh at you.

Mrs. Dunbar was urged back to the organ to play, and at the first notes old Uncle Tom came in and sang his favourite song, *The Loss of the Asia*, a long melancholy ballad about the sinking of a steamship in the Georgian Bay.

Loud roared the dreadful thunder, and stormy was the day, When the Asia left her harbour to cross the Georgian Bay!

The talk of rationing and high prices and army letters rose higher and louder, to escape being drowned by the storm.

"It's no use gettin' them boughten cakes. Even if they have some sort of smear on them for icing, the kids jist turn up their noses at them."

Jim said the last pies she got at the store were made with axle grease, and wasn't the war-news awful?

The Asia finally went to the bottom, and there were calls for the duet, and where was Alfred? Youngsters running in and out reported that Alfred was out at the barn gate talking to Captain Angus; he said he couldn't sing, he'd caught a cold.

His mother was incredulous. Why, he had no sign of a cold when they left home. What had happened? She believed he just did not want to sing, she muttered. She was rather pleased, for she was not much in favour of this new development in Alfred's affairs of the heart. She had been hoping all along that it was the niece and not the aunt he had had in his eye.

Aggie and Jen came and went, worrying about their mother who still sat on the veranda, in spite of all protests; likely *because* of them, Jen said, with a twinkle in her eye. Poor mother was like that!

All the grand-daughters and great-grand-daughters passing in and out would ask, "Tired, Granma?" or "Ain't you chilly, Granma?" until the old lady grew impatient.

"Tired?" she snapped, when Jen put her head out of the door to enquire. "Yes, I'm tired to death listenin' to yous girls sayin' 'tired, Granma?' And I wish yous would all shut up. Anybody would think I was in my doterage!"

Meanwhile, in a dark corner of the veranda where Young Geordie was sitting, the talk was all about spies and ghosts and eerie happenings.

The party was gradually growing quieter. The music had stopped, and the many tired children were asleep on sofas and stray cushions.

The dishes were almost finished, and some of the dishwashers were already running out to their cars in the field. There was a noise of banging doors and roaring engines, and the blazing lights rather disturbed the ghostly talk on the dark veranda. But as soon as quiet was restored Young Geordie renewed the subject.

Had anyone seen anything more of that queer greenish light that had been up on the ridge?

Granma said Tom had seen a light moving down on the broken front jist beyond their old barn. And Wise Watty told how he had heard a shot away out there one night, out on the water, but he couldn't see anything.

Watty had heard just such a shot the night that Drinny fellow disappeared. Man, them Drinnys that lived away down there on the shore was a bad lot. Did Sarah mind the time Bill Shaw had some words with Drinny, over a heifer he'd lost, and the next night Bill's barn was burned, and him jist threshed?

One story followed another, and whenever the subject showed signs of becoming less ghostly, Young Geordie drew it back skillfully into the realm of the occult.

Granma reminded them of the ghostly old tale of the Frenchman, which had come down from pioneer days. There had been a French ship wrecked out there beyond Pine Point, away back in the early days, when there was a war between England and France. And years later when the first settlers came out along the shore they found a coffin with a skeleton in it, and they buried it. She minded hearing her father saying he'd seen the place where the grave was dug, away out on the point. And whenever there was a storm you could see a light flashing over the place.

Steve grunted his disapproval. He was not moved by the supernatural. But most of the listeners were silent. For a great golden moon had just risen from behind the river willows down in the hollow. The fields were bathed in a white radiance, shadows grew black and ominous. It was a time when one could believe in strange things.

The crickets chirped around the door-stone, trying to introduce a cheery note; but Wise Watty had another story.

He minded the time when that old log barn behind Old Geordie's was said to be haunted. Yes, Old Geordie remembered there useta be a queer fella livin' alone there in a bit of a clearin' and a shanty he'd made for himself. All the old

folks believed he practised black magic. He could stop your cows from givin' milk.

Young Geordie whispered to the minister, who was sitting beside him, that likely the old boy didn't need any magic to manage that, but he did not say it aloud lest he take some of the ghostliness from the talk.

Wise Watty was further of the opinion that there was no good in them Poles that were livin' down in Simpson's shack. The gibberish they talked! There was a queer old fella stayin' with them a few days ago, and they said the police was after him. "Yeah," Young Geordie agreed, "he had a hump on his back, hadn't he?"

Watty was not sure, but thought likely he would have. Jake had seen him sneakin' round the barn, and set the dogs on him.

The orchard that sloped down from the house to the road was black, and the long shadows of the trees stretched over the pasture field. The great bulk of the barn stood high on the slope, the moonlight touching its roof to silver.

You couldn't be too careful about prowlers in these days, Young Geordie agreed, and then he stopped.

"Is Tom out there in the orchard?" he asked suddenly.

"Tom's out in the shed with Angus," Granma said.

"I saw a light down there——" Young Geordie began, and stopped abruptly.

Watty half rose from the veranda step. "There's somethin' movin' down there," he whispered. "Look, there was a green light a minute ago!"

"Some o' the kids," grunted Steve.

"The young folks is all gone to town," Young Geordie said.

"Hey, Tom! You there?" called Old Geordie. Tom emerged from the blackness of the shade beside the house where he had been saying good-night to Captain Angus. He looked down at the queer greenish light, now flitting nearer the barn and out-buildings.

"Some o' the kids, I guess," he said slowly, "huntin' apples mebby."

"Every last one o' them's off to town," Watty declared. "Lookit, it's goin' over to the cow shed!"

A half-dozen children, who had been too young to join the party going to town, came hurriedly around the house.

“Say! Look! What’s that goin’ up to the barn?” they whispered.

Everyone rose, even Granma and the minister. The green light had disappeared, but in the moonlit space they could plainly see a dark figure move from the shadow of the trees and run across to the darkness of a shed. And it seemed to those who had a good view of it that it had a hump on its back.

“Say, Tom,” Young Geordie said, “you might as well see what that is!”

Steve gave a shout, “Hi, there! Who’s that?”—and at that moment the figure left the shadow of the shed and ran swiftly across the barnyard, to disappear in the shadow of the barn. Not even the most sceptical could deny this time that he had an unmistakable hump on his back and that when he disappeared into the blackness there was a flash of pale green light!

The men were all running for the barn now. Even Tom, who was quiet and slow and not easily moved, was rousing up his dogs.

“Hi, Sport! Sic’em, Buster! Fetch him out!” he shouted; and dogs and men and children made a dash for the barnyard gate.

“Run, Tom! Run!” Granma was calling, “He’ll fire the barn!”

Steve caught up a hoe that was leaning against the tool-house. Watty grabbed a pitch-fork, the rest armed themselves with sticks and stones. Some of the knitters from indoors, hearing the shouts even above Uncle Tom’s singing came out and joined the procession, Ellen among them.

Steve was ahead when they reached the barn, and he valiantly flung open the small door beside the large ones. He peered into the fragrant darkness. “You come outa that!” Tom shouted authoritatively. Wise Watty was the next in line. He thrust his head in at the door and roared “Come outa that, or I’ll shoot!”

The besieging army was now all about the door, but no one was ready to step inside. Alfred Laird who was behind Tom, tried strategy.

“Ye needn’t hide there!” he cried cunningly. “I can see ye, quite plain!”

Ellen found when she joined the attacking force that there was a small group still standing at the barnyard gate—her father, Granma, and Young Geordie, the three of them in the throes of suppressed laughter.

“Geordie,” her father whispered, “I remember when you were the best pitcher on the Bay Shore. Look at that hole up there!”

He pointed to the ventilator, a black spot high up against the moon-flooded side of the barn.

Young Geordie gave a gasp of delight. He picked up a stone from the gravel of the driveway, stepped back, paused, and hurled it. It went straight as a bullet to its mark, and the next instant they heard the sharp crack where it hit the barn floor.

There was a yell from the besiegers, and they all stepped back hurriedly.

“He’s throwin’ stones!” yelled Wise Watty, outraged.

“Hi! you cut that out!” shouted Tom in a tone less of authority than of alarm, while Tom’s aged mother writhed with laughter and hung on to the gate for support.

“Come outa that, or we’ll shoot the minute you come out!” bellowed Steve.

There was still silence in the barn; and then a hen, which had been away up in the hay-mow, set up an indignant squawking in hysterical protest against the untimely disturbance.

“Could you give them another, Geordie?” whispered the minister; but at that moment there was a yell from the youngsters.

“He’s off! He’s gone!” they screamed, “into the old orchard!”

There was a small grove of old cherry and plum trees all grown up in underbrush on the farther side of the barn. Evidently the marauder had managed to escape into this hiding place and had disappeared in the darkness. Everybody, men, dogs, boys, women and children went hurtling after him. They ran and shouted and threw stones and urged the dogs into the thicket, though the dogs were behaving in a frivolous manner, running out and back leaping about as though the affair were all a play. Some of the men darted down to the parking field, drove into the barnyard and turned their headlights in all directions, flooding the dark corners of the old orchard with light. But the prowler had evidently been of the supernatural kind, and had vanished in a blaze of green light.

The three conspirators hastened back to the veranda, and Granma sat down in her rocking-chair and wiped the tears from her face with her silk shawl.

“It’s moonlight madness,” the minister said. “I couldn’t have believed it of you, Geordie!”

“I couldn’t a’ believed it myself,” Young Geordie said with great solemnity. “I couldn’t a’ believed that the temptation would a’ come from where it did!”

“It was a miracle,” Granma was gasping for breath, “the way that stone

went in. I ain't laughed so much since the day Johnny an' me stole a—a—*pie* from old Aunt——" Her breath was gone, and she could only sit and wipe her eyes.

Ellen slipped away into the shadows. Why, her father was young and gay and ready for fun like the rest of them! And he and Young Geordie and Granma had planned all this! He was still full of the zest of life, and she had wanted to take him away into a sheltered backwater where his spirit would have been quenched. And all because she was afraid of something that might not happen!

She went around through the garden to the back entrance. She must find Susie. She had seen Alfred among the men, and could not help but be disturbed by his conduct.

She paused beside the back door in the shadow of a big lilac bush, listening to the returning army's loud explanations to those who had remained at home. At that moment a figure slipped silently from the dark shed and passed right beside Ellen. It paused for a moment and then sped swiftly down the garden path that led to the lane. It was Florrie, in her white coat, plainly seen in the moonlight. A car was standing in the lane and a figure in army uniform jumped out and held open the door. Florrie leaped in and the car whirled away down the lane. Ellen stood, her heart filled with indignation. Where was Andy? Out at the barn, likely, hunting the burglar; and Florrie had run off with the soldier boy!

She was turning to go and find him, when she espied Alfred coming through the little gate towards the house. She slipped back hastily into the shadow of the lilac, intending to run around the house to the front again. And just at that moment another figure darted past her from the shed, just as Florrie had done. It was Susie this time, also in a long white coat, looking lovely with the moonlight on her golden hair. She ran swiftly down the path and threw her arms around Alfred's neck and clung to him.

"Alfred! Alfred! My dear, dear boy," Ellen heard her sob, "I've been so terrified! I was afraid you would be hurt, be-be-*killed*!" Susie was sobbing on his shoulder, and Ellen slipped through the door and stumbled blindly through the shed to the kitchen. This was surely a night of revelation!

The burglar chase seemed to have renewed the party's appetite. They all came milling into the rooms again, and Aggie and Jen ran with more ice-cream and cake and coffee and pie and buns. Some of the returned warriors looked a bit sheepish; others were inclined to boast a little.

"A slick fellow, whoever he was!"

“Throwin’ stones, mind ya! They came straight down from the haymow!”

“He was up there all right. Someone saw his light.”

“A good thing he didn’t set fire to the hay!”

Every one of the youngsters was convinced he was a German spy. But Wise Watty leaned towards the supernatural. There was something mighty queer about the whole thing!

In this he was upheld by Young Geordie and Granma. “You never can tell about them appearances,” Geordie said darkly.

Ellen tried to get a word with Andy, but he had no sooner come to the house than the young fry rushed to tell him that his girl was gone, and he, too, disappeared. The great diamond wedding celebration was over, and the cars were snorting and glaring as they came out to the lane.

She found Susie at last, ready for home, with her music under her arm, and she saw, too, that poor Susie was holding back the tears by a great effort. In deep foreboding, Ellen hurried her out to the car.

It had surely been a wonderful party, they all said, as they thanked their hostess who stood, young and gay, on the veranda.

“Wait till you read about it in the *Chronicle*!” she cried, as they bade her good-night. Ellen found Aggie and Jen shoving a basket of wedding-feast delicacies into the back of the car: pies and cookies and cold chicken. It was all overwhelming.

“Wasn’t it just wonderful!” Susie cried gallantly, as they climbed into the car.

Yes, yes, it was indeed a wonderful celebration, her brother declared, as they drove down the lane. He chuckled. “Eh, eh, Young Geordie! Isn’t he the lad!”

“He is, indeed,” his daughter whispered, “and he wasn’t the only lad there, either!”

11

The Fiery Cross

The splendour of the Diamond Wedding celebration was somewhat dimmed by the ghostly visitation that had ended the festivities. Most of the guests were ready to believe that it was the work of a German spy come to lay a mine, or fire a building. Gideon Begg alone disagreed; he was convinced it was one of those objectional summer towerists that were ruining the country; a city swell left over from the summer emigration, trying to act smart. Tom Armstrong and several others had little to say. Even Steve, for once, did not show any inclination to talk.

There was a more sophisticated group, headed by Mrs. Jim Turner, who suspected that Young Geordie and some of those young gaffers of boys knew more about it than they would tell. Aggie and Jen, too, agreed that their mother seemed to be keeping a pleasant secret. She was always talking about the ghost and laughing to herself. Yet no one could understand how there had been any nonsense about it, for Mr. Carruthers had been sitting with Young Geordie and their mother all evening; and with the minister there, even Young Geordie would not be up to any of his tricks. It was all indeed a mystery.

Farm folk never sleep late no matter at what hour they reach home, and the next morning the Bay Shore was astir at the usual time. Mr. Carruthers kept farm hours, and was up early. Ellen rose quietly as soon as she heard him stirring. She knew that poor Aunt Susie had not slept. She had heard her tossing on the old creaking bed in the next room. She dressed quickly and silently and slipped down to the kitchen where her father already had the fire crackling.

He protested. Why did she get up so early? She must be tired. But, no, she declared, she was ready for another wedding celebration, burglar and all.

“If I had been up as late in Harrington, I would have been a wreck the next morning. But the Georgian Bay air is a stimulant. What a grand fire you have already! Now, we’ll have coffee in a jiffy.”

She ran about the kitchen happily. It was a luxury to be here alone for a little again. A home was so interesting! Rowdy seemed to share her joy, for he bounced around her, and Mrs. Gummidge put by her complaining and rubbed against Ellen’s stockings, purring luxuriously.

Ellen set the table with her mother's blue dishes and placed it in the kitchen window. Aunt Susie disapproved of kitchen meals. The dining-room was the only proper place to eat, she declared; but the dining-room was big, and very cold at this time of year, and an extra fire was an extra expense. The congregation had often spoken about putting a furnace in the manse, but had never quite got past the disapproval of the Peter Laird faction.

Ellen loved a kitchen breakfast on a chilly morning; the sun looked in at the window, and the garden was right there, with a few late zinnias making a gallant showing against the dead branches of the hedge. They lingered happily over their coffee and relived the events of the night before. The minister chuckled over the ghostly visitor, but made no explanation.

"Eh, that Geordie," he cried, "he will never grow old. He hasn't even grown up yet."

"I know some friends of his who won't grow old, either," Ellen said, her eyes dancing, as her father tried without success to look innocent.

And what happened, that Susie and Alfred had not sung their duet? They seemed to have lost Alfred entirely after the alarm. "Alf said he went home alone, and left his father to drive the car. And his mother seemed anxious. I hope the boy wasn't sick."

Ellen said nothing. She had a dread suspicion as to what had sent Alfred fleeing home in the night alone, but she might not tell it. She was disturbed. If he were running away from Susie now, what would the future hold? It was quite too bad, for she feared Susie's heart was involved.

When the breakfast things were cleared away and Aunt Susie had not yet appeared, Ellen pulled on her coat and ran out into the garden to get some late blooms for her father's study table. The sun was warm, but the wind from the bay was keen. There were still a few zinnias and asters and petunias along the garden path, for the autumn days had been warm and sunny, and the tall hollyhocks still stood, each bearing one small bloom at the top of a long brown stalk.

She gathered a bunch of mauve asters, her mother's favourite shade, and then she stood for a moment at the gate that led into Gideon's corn field. The corn had been cut, and the tall stooks looked like old withered witches standing there in the brown field, their lank hair rustling and blowing in the wind. What a contrast to the green silken beauties that had stood with their golden hair shining in the moonlight the night she had walked beside them and guessed what rapture life might hold! Such a little while ago it was, and yet it sometimes seemed years away.

Ellen shook herself sternly; she must not stand dreaming. The wind from the bay came up, whipping the leaves into swirls around her. She shivered, and turned to hurry indoors. As she did so she saw a figure hurrying along the path that led from Gid's house to the manse. Since the crop had been taken off it was possible to cross the field instead of going round by the lane. The wind and sun and the frolicking leaves made it hard to see, but she soon realized that it was Liza hurrying over the stubble field. She was wearing a heavy red sweater of Andy's; her head was unbound, and her short hair well frizzed for the diamond wedding, was tossing madly in the wind. She looked like one of the tall corn stooks that had left its place and gone careering across the field.

Liza was large and placid, and except when she had a scrubbing-brush in her hand she moved slowly. And to see her coming swiftly across the field filled Ellen with apprehension. When she saw that Liza jumped the creek to save going a few yards farther up to the stepping stones, her apprehension grew. Could they have any news of Ronald that they had been asked to deliver? Or of the Other One? Perhaps he was gone overseas already and she would never see him again. The war was always present, its sword hanging over your head.

Ellen held open the little gate as Liza came panting up. She knew better than to ask questions. Liza would make known her errand in her own good time. She led her into the warm kitchen, thankful to hear Susie at the piano. When her aunt was disturbed she often soothed herself by playing. It was Saturday morning, and Saturday was a sacred day in the Manse. But poor Susie was too disturbed in her own mind to remember anyone else, and was putting all her disappointment and chagrin into her performance.

Ellen closed the door leading into the rest of the house and plied Liza with neighbourly questions. Did they get any sleep at all last night? Wasn't it a wonderful supper? And the pullets? When would they be laying?

Yes, everyone was all right, Liza said, in a tone that belied her words. And the hens was layin' fine. She knew Gid was mad that they had so many eggs comin' in. He was never done talkin' about how we were goin' to raise eggs for Britain. Him and Andy. " 'Your aunts,' " Gid says to Andy, "your aunts is goin' to stop the war. They're goin' to send over so many eggs Churchill'll be throwin' them across the channel at Hitler. My, when he tries to be funny he makes a fool of himself." Ellen listened and waited. This was not what Liza had come for.

Liza shoved her hair back viciously from her round plump face, but the frizz merely stood up again, giving her a wild look. She stared at Ellen and then looked around to see that the door was shut.

“Well! I ’spose you’ll be havin’ another Laird weddin’ one o’ these days?”

“Why, I hadn’t heard. Who?” Ellen asked. For a wild moment she wondered if Liza had heard rumours of Alfred and Aunt Susie.

Liza looked at her shrewdly. “Now, don’t you go pertendin’ you ain’t heard.”

“No, really,” Ellen declaimed, thankful that she was not just then burdened with a manse secret. “Father hasn’t told me, if he has.”

Liza stared at her fixedly, then sat back with a baffled air.

“Well! D’ye s’pose that mother of hers would be plannin’ it all herself in spite of the girl? What would they be wantin’ a weddin’ cake for, I’d like to know?”

“What are you talking about, Liza? Who?”

“Florrie! Her mother’s gettin’ her ready to be married, I tell you! And she’s promised to Andy. He told me himself; and so did she.”

“Oh, not really, Liza! She surely wouldn’t do that to Andy!” And then she remembered with dismay the figure running out through the dark shed to the car with the soldier in it.

“Well, I’ll tell you all about it. You saw Mrs. Peter there last night in all her glory. Well, she never made a peep about a weddin’ to anybody. She was as close as Captain Angus McNabb about her own business. And Florrie was waitin’ on table with Andy, and they were to go to a dance afterward. Andy had his car all ready and Florrie had promised, and she slipped out on him. And went off with this other fella. And Nell Turner and Bill’s Marty were both tellin’ they know for a fact that Florrie’s mother is gettin’ ready to have them married and slip off on the sly and not say a word to Andy till they’re gone. They say she’s got it all planned!”

“But oh, Liza, how could anyone know! Surely! I can’t believe Florrie would do that to Andy. Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m as sure as death. I don’t believe she’d be mean enough, if her mother wasn’t pushin’ her.” Liza buried her face in her apron and sobbed. “And that poor boy’s silly about her, the mean, nasty little sneak!”

“But are you sure Liza, dear? Perhaps it isn’t true. Did someone tell you last night?”

Liza wiped her eyes and sat up. “It was Marty and Nell told me all about it. And Mrs. Peter thinkin’ not a soul knew. And it leaked out all on account o’

the raisins for Bill's birthday cake."

Ellen was completely at sea, but waited. Liza blew her nose vigorously and went on. "There she was at the diamond weddin' as big as life. And Marguerite and Florrie waitin' on tables, and Andy waitin' on Florrie. And all this planned! Well, Nell and Marty got wind of it and they told us after the supper when all the folks were outdoors on that spy hunt. Trust Marty and Nell Turner to find out anything. I always said there'd never be a murder on the Bay Shore without them two knowin' all about it. Marty says she knows who the ghost was in Tom's barn last night; but she wouldn't tell. She was too busy tellin' about the raisins. Well, I guess you know as well as the rest of us how scarce raisins are? Well, jist three days ago Nell was in town on a raisin hunt. It was for a birthday cake for Jim's brother Bill at camp. And 'count of him being a soldier she wanted the very best. Well, you know what Nell's like. If there's a raisin in town or a can o' salmon she'll smell it out. So she got Bill's Marty to go down one side o' Main Street and her the other and they went into every last store 'ceptin' the hardwares, I guess, askin' for raisins. Then Nell thought she might as well send her mother out on the hunt, so Mrs. Bob she went up a side street to that corner grocery that Barker's runs. You know that place as you turn off the gravel to go into town? Some of the folks on the Bay Shore deals there on account of havin' that vacant lot next it for parkin'. So Mrs. Bob goes in and she says to the woman, 'Do you think I could get a pound or so of raisins?'

"It was Mrs. Barker herself that was tendin' store. She doesn't often, it's mostly Barker himself, and the daughter that's there. But he was down at the market and the daughter was busy at the other end of the store. And Mrs. Barker she says 'Raisins? Oh my!' Mrs. Bob said you'd think she'd asked for gold nuggets.

"Mrs. Barker she don't know many outa town folks, and she's a kinda near-sighted peerin' body anyhow, and she looks at Maggie and she says, 'Wasn't it you was in here yesterday and got a coupla pounds of raisins?'

"And Maggie says no, she'd just got in and hadn't been in town for more'n a week. And Mrs. Barker she says, says she, 'Ain't you Mrs. Laird from out along the shore way?' And Maggie she says, yes, she was Mrs. Laird, Mrs. Bob Laird, senior. But there was more'n a dozen Mrs. Lairds strung along the Bay Shore.

"And then Mrs. Barker kinda laughs and says 'Oh, that's all right!' she says. 'It musta been another Mrs. Laird, but she looked like you. And she was buyin' raisins and we gave her quite a lot.'

"Well, you know Mrs. Bob. She sticks to a thing when she goes after it, and she says, 'But these I want are for a soldier,' she says, 'for his birthday cake.'

"And Mrs. Baker, she's a real nice woman, and she says, 'Well, that's jist too bad, mebby I could give you half a pound,' she says. 'But I gave that other Mrs. Laird a good many,' she says, 'on account it was for her daughter's wedding cake.'

"Well, Mrs. Bob's ears fairly stuck out at that, and she'd like to ask straight out who was gettin' married. And she was goin' over all the Laird girls on the Line in her head like mad, and she says, 'Well, after all, even a weddin' cake isn't as important as a cake for a soldier, these days.'

"And Mrs. Barker she says, 'You're right. Our boy's in the air force and I know. But this girl is marryin' a soldier too,' she says, 'so the cake's for him too,' she says. And then she says, 'I guess I can spare you a pound.'

"Well, there was other folks comin' in. And Maggie took her pound o' raisins and went off. And wasn't Nell and Marty mad at her that she hadn't asked who the Laird girl was that was gettin' married! And they all wondered if any of Old Bill's girls were gettin' married, on the sly, or even Steve's Lily Anne, and she's only sixteen! And they never thought about Pete's girls, for everyone expects that Florrie and Andy would be married, and nobody ever looked at poor Marguerite. And there they were! And what do you think happened next? They were goin' along Main Street arguin' like a pack o' lawyers, and if they didn't walk right into Mrs. Pete and Florrie comin' out of the Jew's Ladies' Wear carryin' a box as big as themselves. Nell said they pretended not to see them and jist shot past and got into the car. And there was that young soldier fellow, Sommers, sittin' in the front seat with young Pete. And that's who the weddin' cake's for! 'Cause they've gone up and down the Line and there isn't anybody else! And there she is playin' fast and loose with Andy, and her weddin' cake gettin' baked! I ain't sorry in a way, 'cause she's a mean, selfish, little sneak, but she's been the only girl Andy ever looked at, and I'm afraid he'll do somethin' dreadful. Run away or somethin'! It's been hard enough for the boy gettin' turned down in the navy and army both, and now this! I blame her mother more than the girl. Andy never et a mite o' breakfast this mornin'. And that ain't all, Ellen." She glanced towards the door and leaned forward and whispered: "I really think Gid's goin' off his head, Ellen! He never came in and went to bed last night when we got home, late and all as it was! And when he did come in from the barn about daylight he lay down with his good clothes on. And he wasn't drunk. None o' the men dast take a drop to Granma's weddin', you bet. She'd hear about it, and woe betide

them! And Gid he hardly et a thing this mornin', and he left all the work and didn't even clean out the stable. He got into the car and away he went to town. And not for any reason we could find out. And Tilly's near out of her mind about him! My, what with German spies tryin' to burn your barns down, and folks marryin' the wrong people, and your family goin' crazy, I declare it's enough to drive a person dippy!"

Ellen tried to say something of comfort. She felt worried about Andy but suspected that Gid's trouble might have arisen from over-eating at the diamond wedding, though she did not say so.

The piano had stopped. Aunt Susie came out to the kitchen to see who was there, and there was no more chance for confidence. She proved a welcome interruption, for Ellen was at a loss what to say or do. She had little hope that Liza's suspicions were groundless, knowing the unfailing accuracy with which the Bay Shore mind ferreted out news. She had a feeling of apprehension, as she looked at Susie's pale dispirited face, lest Liza get on to the trail of their own secret tragedy.

She followed her out to the little gate, the wind tossing their hair and whipping their skirts and whirling the dead leaves around their feet. She tried to speak comfort and solace. After all, perhaps Andy was better without Florrie. He was young, and might forget. But Liza shook her head and sped back over the wind-swept field.

"You haven't any special engagements for the next two weeks, have you, Father?" Ellen asked. He was accustomed to her keeping track of his extra engagements and was always grateful to be reminded. He searched his mind and shook his head. "No, no engagements that I can remember. I go to Presbytery on Tuesday, but that is all I can think of."

"No weddings?" she asked lightly. "No weddings," he answered, "so you don't need to be looking out for a fee," he chuckled.

"Unless it's Florrie and Andy," Aunt Susie said. "Alfred was telling me they are to be married this fall. But Florrie didn't act much like an engaged girl. Did you hear that she ran off from the party last night with that young Sommers from camp?"

Ellen could not help seeing that Aunt Susie was worried and unhappy. She did not find even her favourite radio serial interesting, and turned it off at a critical moment. Crossword puzzles were another pastime, but they too palled. She could not understand why Alfred had not come back to sing the duet, she said.

The war news that came over the radio in the evening as they sat by the fire, was as grim as usual, and pressed heavily upon the three hearts as they sat listening. It had just signed off when a step sounded on the veranda. Rowdy rose, growling and muttering, and Susie's eyes began to sparkle. The knocker was lifted, and fell with a crash. Ellen rose to answer, but Susie was before her. She tripped lightly into the hall and flung the door wide, her head on one side alluringly, her face alight with welcome. And then she stood rigid with disappointment. It was not the longed-for suitor. The doorway was filled with the broad bulk of Gideon Begg. Susie drew back with a curt good evening, and Ellen came into the hall. Gid had been their next neighbour for years, and a good kind neighbour too, but he never called at the manse, unless sent for, and she was surprised to see him, and more surprised when she saw he was alone, not even Tilly with him to take the brunt of an evening call.

She gave him a warm welcome and led him to the living-room, recalling with some misgivings what Liza had told her that morning about her fears for Gideon's sanity. Her father, she knew, was also surprised, but his welcome was hearty.

"Come away in, Gideon, come away to the fire. I am afraid our fine warm weather is at an end!"

Gideon sat down, heavy and silent, on a chair just inside the door, and Ellen and her father did their best to raise a conversation. "Are Tilly and Liza well?" Ellen asked.

"Yeah, they are all pretty good," he admitted, and the silence fell again.

They talked about the diamond wedding, and the hope that the *Chronicle* would give a good account of it. The scare at the barn, and the rumours about German spies, the new pullets that were laying so well—nothing succeeded in lifting the heavy gloom. Aunt Susie in her deep disappointment did not even try to help, and soon slipped away and stole upstairs.

Gideon, balanced uncomfortably on the rear legs of his chair, swung back and forth in silence, while Ellen and her father continued to explore all possible conversational areas. Finally, out of a longer silence than usual, the guest swayed backward to the danger point and spoke.

"The black mare died."

Mr. Carruthers was all concern. Dodd Fraser, Gid's nephew, was always in trouble with his stock. But this time it was Gideon's property that had met disaster, a fine mare loaned to Dodd for his fall work. The loss of a good horse was a serious matter.

“Well, well, that was too bad,” Mr. Carruthers declared sympathetically, “and such a fine mare as Lassie was. What happened?”

“Dunno.”

“Was she sick long?”

“One day.”

“I suppose he had the vet out?”

“Yeah.”

“But poor Lassie was getting old, wasn’t she, Gid?” Ellen asked, hoping to insert some small note of resignation. Gideon made an inarticulate response, placed his cap on one knee, then on the other, and again the silence fell. The fire sent out a cheerful crackling sound. Rowdy got up with a bored air, turned around and lay down again with his nose turned away from Gideon.

At last the voice of the guest came out of the gloom again—“No, she was sick two days.”

Both Ellen and her father expressed their concern again, and the minister added something about bearing trials cheerfully, which to Ellen seemed, for no reason at all, to be funny, and she had a dismaying inclination to laugh.

They were still at a loss for the cause of the visit. The death of the old black mare, though unfortunate, was not the sort of affliction to send Gideon to the minister. Finally, out of another long silence, his voice boomed.

“I’m leavin’ home. Goin’ west. Sailin’.”

His listeners stared at him, and Ellen recalled with a frightened pang what Liza had said.

Her father leaned forward, his hand behind his ear. The men of the Bay Shore did not go sailing in late autumn, nor out west at any season.

“Going—where did you say, Gideon?”

“I dunno. Somewhere’s. Out west.”

They regarded him with deep concern. Gideon was known to take a drink upon festive occasions, but the minister, who kept a guardian eye on the drinkers of his flock, had never known him to be overcome by liquor. Yet here was something strongly resembling intoxication. Then light began to appear.

“Cap’n Angus wants a lot of us guys that’s sailed, to take a boat somewhere. I dunno where. He don’t either.”

“Is he, is Angus recruiting for the navy, Gideon?”

“No. It ain’t the navy. Jist one ship.”

Gideon let his chair down upon its four legs, and the physical security seemed to steady his mental position. Little by little the explanation came out. There was a ship in the Pacific, needing a crew to take her somewhere, England it was supposed, and Captain Angus McNabb had been sent out to pick up a crew of men with sailing experience along the Bay Shore.

Patiently the minister collected the facts. A great ocean liner, the *Empress of Asia*, lying, it was supposed, in Vancouver harbour, or some other port on the British Columbia coast, needed a crew of good sound British stock, who had served their apprenticeship on the Great Lakes, to take her on an unknown voyage. Angus offered them good wages, all expenses paid. They would leave this winter, soon, and be back in time for seeding. The route and the destination were a secret. Along with other inducements he was offering them adventure and hazards aplenty.

When it was all finally explained, his two listeners sat and looked at Gideon, humped in his chair, large, heavy and inarticulate, and saw him clothed in dignity; a man shouldering a dangerous task, unquestioning as to whither or when, merely assured that it was dangerous and a call to service.

“Oh, Gid!” Ellen cried with a catch in her voice. “It’s wonderful! I think you’re simply splendid!”

Mr. Carruthers rose and took Gideon’s huge rough hand. He shook it heartily and slapped him on the shoulder.

“God bless you, Gideon,” he cried. “God bless you!” Then he blew his nose and sat down.

The appreciation seemed to lift a great load from Gideon’s shoulders. He fairly glowed under its warmth. His tongue was loosened. When Captain Angus told him first, the thing that troubled him was how Tilly and Liza would get along with just Andy. He was afraid they would kick up a row. So he said no, he wouldn’t go. “But when I got home I got thinkin’ about it. And I couldn’t get to sleep, so I went into town this mornin’, and signed up. I ain’t told a soul yet!” he said. “But I think Wise Watty’ll come over, and Dodd could take some of the stock over to his place, and Andy’ll get along!” If it wasn’t for them confounded hens the girls could get along all right, he was sure. But he did hate hens.

He was silent for a little, thinking of how much he disliked fowl, and then drew a great breath. “I ain’t told anybody yet. None o’ them that’s from the

Bay Shore has said anything, except Alf."

"Alf?" Ellen and her father stared, and Ellen asked, dazed, "Alf who?"

Gideon nodded. "Yeah, Alf's goin'. He signed up this morning, last thing before Cap'n Angus left. And Jim Turner. And Tom's oldest boy. Steve wanted to go too, but he wasn't sure."

Ellen and her father glanced at each other. Alfred was going! What did it mean? For they knew that to go on such a hazardous expedition was contrary to all his inclinations. Some greater hazard surely was driving him to it!

Ellen went out to the kitchen, and brought in a pot of coffee and a plate of the good things given them from the diamond wedding. When Gideon had consumed his fifth currant bun and his third wedge of wedding cake and unnumbered cookies he had become genial and almost talkative. And now he opened his heart to reveal the true reason for his visit. He sat for a moment, his eyes on the carpet, and then he grinned at Mr. Carruthers boyishly. "I didn't intend to stay," he apologized, "I jist came in to ask you—I wondered if you'd mind jist walkin' over with me. I—I—" he faltered, "I ain't told Tilly and Liza yet, nor Andy, and I wondered if you'd mind goin' over with me and kinda lettin' them know?"

He looked like a large overgrown child pleading for clemency after a naughty prank.

Gideon was able to face the perils of two oceans in war time quite unconcernedly, and even with some pleasurable excitement. But the embattled front of Tilly and Liza, with a rebellious Andy behind them, made him quail.

Mr. Carruthers rose and got his coat and hat; and, under the protection of ministerial authority, Gideon marched to meet the home front.

Ellen saw them go and then went slowly upstairs with her disturbing news.

Granma Armstrong's diamond wedding brought a sleepless night to most of her guests, as many reached home barely in time for milking. But none spent such a night of wakefulness as Alfred Laird. Although he was the first of the guests to leave, there was no sleep for him that night. Something haunted him, something far more terrible than a spectre in a ghostly green light.

He had been floating down a gentle stream to the music of *Come Where the Lilies Bloom so Fair*, drifting happily, feeling he could stop at any minute and find Ellen waiting for him on the flowery bank. But the drifting had become so pleasant that he had never noticed whither it might be taking him. And tonight he had a terrible awakening.

When the chase after the burglar at the barn was over he had gone to the house determined on a bold stroke. All the young folk were going to town to see a lacrosse match, and afterwards to a dance. He would go in and ask Ellen to come to town and see the game. He felt he must do something drastic, after Susie put him into such a compromising position by sitting beside him at the supper table. He would make sure that all the gathering would see him drive away with Ellen, and let them know the truth.

And then the blow had fallen. Susie had met him at the back door, had flung herself into his arms, and wept on his shoulder! He broke out in a cold perspiration at the memory of it. He was certain he had caught the sound of suppressed snickers from the dark shrubberies of the garden. Someone had witnessed the dreadful scene. It would be on every telephone of the Bay Shore before daylight! And, added to the disgrace, he had lost Ellen. There could be no doubt that Susie would poison her mind!

There was nothing for him but flight. He must go somewhere, anywhere. He thought of enlisting; but he had a horror of war, and military training he felt would be humiliating.

He heard his father and mother come in much later, and knew by their voices there was someone with them. They had brought Captain McNabb home with them again. Angus McNabb! Like a rope to a drowning man came the remembrance of what Captain Angus had been urging him to do that very morning. It had not appealed to him then, but now it was like an open door in a prison wall. He heard the guest come upstairs quietly, and go to the spare room at the end of the hall. He would tell him the first thing in the morning that he had made up his mind to go.

Alfred was an experienced sailor. He had served his apprenticeship on the Great Lakes like all the Bay Shore boys. Indeed he had spent two long summer seasons on the water. He returned home from his first voyage convinced that farming was not so bad after all and quite content to stay at home. But the very next summer he had gone back, fleeing in terror as he was about to flee again. That was the year that the pretty Lairdale teacher had taken his casual attentions too seriously. She had never given a public demonstration of her preference, as Susie had done; but she had made it plain that she was thinking of resigning, and the neighbours were all agog. Alfred had gone up the Lakes and escaped. And now he must go into exile again! This time the venture would be much more hazardous, but the dangers of home were worse.

He rose before daylight, and as soon as breakfast was over and Captain McNabb was ready to leave, he followed him out to his car and astonished him by asking to be accepted. When Angus was gone he was overcome by the

dreadful thing he had done. He well knew he was needed at home. His father could do very little, and his mother would surely be heart-broken. The expedition was full of discomforts, and real dangers. The crew might never see their homes again. And yet, not even German submarines could compare with the thought of staying at home and finding himself the butt of all the silly jokes of the Acton Hill store, or perhaps finding himself married to Susie Dunbar, willy-nilly!

Excitement ran high up and down the Bay Shore when the news reached the telephone wires that Captain Angus McNabb had been hunting sailors the night of the diamond wedding and had come out to the gathering on purpose. He was wonderfully successful, and could have signed up twice as many as he wanted. Indeed, Young Geordie gave it out that if he hadn't enough he'd go himself rather than have the Laird Valley disgraced in the eyes of the whole British Empire.

Alfred Laird's name on the roll of recruits caused more amazement than all the others. Everyone guessed the reason. The old bachelor was in a fair way of being caught, and this was his means of escape! The group around the coal heater in the Acton Hill Store lost no time in scenting out Alfred's dilemma, hitting the nail right on the head with their unfailing instinct for neighbourhood secrets.

Ellen came home the next week-end, anxious for Susie, and hopeful of a reconciliation. There was no doubt that Susie was grieved over Alfred's going, and Ellen was grieved for her. The girl's warm heart remembered that Aunt Susie was homeless, that she had but a meagre sum to live on and was partially dependent upon relatives who, her niece suspected, demanded much from her. She had been filled with reasonable hopes of a successful marriage, and was, Ellen felt sure, genuinely attached to Alfred. It had seemed such a suitable match, too; they had so much in common. Poor Susie had seen before her the prospect of a good home and security, and now they were suddenly snatched away. Ellen was genuinely grieved for her and not a little uneasy for herself.

As yet Alfred had not even come to the manse to say he was going. Susie had expected him after choir practice, the night before. The choir had given him a farewell gift, and the minister had gone over to the church to assist in its presentation, but though he had invited Alfred to come home with him he had refused on the plea of being very busy preparing to leave.

"Alfred is acting strangely, as if he were offended," her father said to Ellen. "He and Susie were such good friends, I thought—I really had an idea—that he would at least tell her he was going."

Susie poured out all the disappointment and chagrin of her heart to Ellen as soon as they were alone together. “I really can’t understand it, Ellen! Alfred has never said anything definite, because he is very shy, but we were—well, I am sure we were *almost* engaged. Perhaps I did not encourage him enough. At first I did not like to, because I felt perhaps it was you he wanted; and I felt I should not encourage him, because I knew you didn’t seem to have any chances at all, and I did not want to take away your only one.”

Ellen felt she must interrupt here to assure her aunt that she was not encroaching the least on any territory that could by any stretch of the imagination be considered as belonging to her. Susie however was too much absorbed in her greivious tale to pay attention. “But I soon had to realize that I was the one he was interested in, and I really couldn’t help falling in love with him, Ellen! Any girl would, don’t you think? And he came here so much. Why, all the congregation were talking about us; even your father, who never seems to see anything that’s outside a book. Do you suppose I said anything to offend him at the diamond wedding? We sat together at the supper, and I thought he was so quiet. But he always is, in company. And we were going to sing our duet there, too. And then that dreadful Captain McNabb came between us. I feel somehow that it was his fault. I wonder if I ought to write Alfred a letter, or perhaps call him on the ’phone and tell him I’d like to see him to say good-bye? Perhaps I have been too stand-offish. Shy men have to be so carefully handled.”

Ellen gently but earnestly counselled waiting for Alfred to take the initiative. Remembering the tender little scene in Granma Armstrong’s garden, she felt that even the writing of a note might have the effect of a lightning flash on a run-away horse. She could only murmur her sympathy and advise that they had better just wait and see what happened.

The men for the merchant marine were leaving the next week and the minister had been busy going about making farewell calls. He had seen all of them except Alfred.

“I wish you could come with me tomorrow, daughter,” he said. “Will you be very busy?”

Ellen had a guilty feeling that it would be a great relief to say good-bye to Alfred, and assured him she would not be at all busy. She had a sudden inspiration. They would take Susie too, and who knew what might be the result!

All the next morning a cold November rain came sweeping across the fields. The bare elms swayed and sighed, the brown leaves raced hither and

thither, and the grey billows of the bay came roaring up on the rocky shore in a protest against winter that could be heard all up and down the valley.

The minister looked up from his study desk, where he was putting the last words to the farewell sermon. He watched the rain stream across the pane and run in brown rivulets down the garden path. The bay was blotted out behind a curtain of driving mist.

"We are living in stirring times, my dear," he said to Ellen, who was reading by the window. "Captain Angus McNabb, now. There's a figure of romance! We need a poet to sing what he has done. A message comes across a continent, a message from the Pacific to our little valley. The great ocean liner calling for help to the smaller Great Lakes' craft. And one of the Great Lakes' sons comes along her shore with the fiery cross, and young and old spring to answer. Yes, it is a great day! The fiery cross in a Canadian glen."

"*Speed, Malish, speed*," Ellen quoted. " '*The dun deer's hide,*' how does it go, Father?"

Her father, pleased, rose for his volume of Walter Scott's poems.

"I think Captain Angus McNabb ought to be ashamed of himself," said Susie, coming in with her sewing, "Mrs. Peter Laird says it's a crime to take so many men from the land, when they are so badly needed."

The Peter Laird family, with three able-bodied men on one farm, was not considered an authority on the needs of the land, and no one had any comment to make. Meanwhile Mr. Carruthers, who did not quite realize how deeply his sister's affections were involved, had found the stirring tale of the Fiery Cross being carried through the Highlands to rouse the clansmen to battle, and he was standing up by the window speeding Malish on his way:

Bend 'gainst the steepy hill thy breast,
Burst down like torrent from its crest!

Poor Susie, unable to bear it, slipped out tearfully and made her way upstairs.

When life's troubles bore down heavily upon Ellen, she instinctively turned to someone else who needed help, and forgot herself. So, immediately after their midday dinner, she persuaded Susie to take some aspirin for her headache and lie down. And then she decided to run over to the farm and see Liza and Tilly. For the rain had cleared away and shining white clouds were racing across the dazzling blue.

"But you'll be back in time to come with me to Alf's," her father reminded

her, and she promised.

She tied her bright hair up in a scarf, put on a sweater and her high rubber boots, and set off. Rowdy came leaping after her, but had to be sent back. His difference with old Sailor had never yet been settled.

Andy had lately finished ploughing the field between the manse and the Begg house, and Ellen had to walk around to the big gate and down the lane. The cornstalk witches were gone from their place, and the orchard trees beyond waved their bare arms in melancholy greeting. The spruce trees at the end of the garden whistled and sighed as they rocked in the wind. Everything was gone that reminded one of the magic night when the corn whispered to the hollyhocks in the moonlight. And yet the memory seemed more vivid than ever. She ran on down the lane where the scarlet rose-hips brightened the weeds along the fence. She was always running away, she told herself, and running away most from haunting memories.

The sisters saw her coming, and Liza threw open the back door, calling a welcome. Gid and Andy were both gone to town, they cried, and they were getting through their work before they got back. And they were more than glad to see her.

Ellen followed Liza into the kitchen, picking her way carefully among pails and tubs and heaps of stove wood. It seemed as if the storm of the morning had invaded the sisters' kitchen, for the usual Saturday upheaval was many times multiplied. The big room was filled with steam and the strong smell of boiling soap-suds. The dinner dishes were still on the table, and pots and pans stood on the stove in which a great fire was raging. A washtub full of soapy water on the floor, and another on two chairs, and Tilly at the ironing board, showed that an unusual Saturday laundering was in full swing. A row of men's heavy woollen socks and underwear dripped from a pole behind the stove, and a clothes-line across the kitchen was hung with beautifully ironed shirts and ties, pyjamas and overalls. Evidently Gideon was to be sent to sea with a wardrobe sufficient for the whole crew of the *Empress of Asia*.

"Why, Tilly!" Ellen cried, skirting two suitcases that were lying open in the exact centre of the floor. "Surely Gid won't need all those! Why, he'll be back before he can wear them once!"

"It ain't Gid's clothes that's so much trouble," Tilly said, standing holding the hot iron suspended. "That Andy has to have so much, you'd think it was a bride's trousseau!"

"Andy!" Ellen backed up against a pile of wet overalls. "Not Andy too!"

Tilly put down her iron on the stand and stared at her, and Liza stood holding a pair of streaming pyjamas over the tub. “You didn’t know?” They screamed at her.

“What? No! Father never heard! Oh, not Andy too!”

The sisters turned and looked at each other and nodded as much as to say I told you so. “Jist as I said,” Tilly cried, “yous folks is the only family on the line that doesn’t listen in on the ’phone. Andy signed up too!”

“He wanted to go awful bad,” Liza said, “but he felt he oughta stay when Gid was goin’! And Tilly and me thought so too. But he felt that bad, and”—she lowered her voice, “that mean little sneak gettin’ her cake ready and not a peep outa her! Till and me jist said we’ll get along, you go too! And he was jist gone like scat!”

Liza picked up the corner of her wet apron and wiped her eyes.

Ellen looked around for a place to sit down, saw none, and leaned against the table. She looked in amazement at the two women preparing their men without complaint to take on a hazardous task while they shouldered the heavy work of the farm.

“Oh, oh! But, how will you manage?”

“We’ll get along all right,” Liza cried. “If it wasn’t for them hens. Three hundred of them! and they’ll all be layin’ like a hailstorm by Christmas!”

Tilly held her head high. “We’ll get along,” she repeated. “You see it’s like this, Ellen, a woman can shame a man makin’ him stay home when he’s got a call to go in time of war. Gid woulda stayed if I’d kicked up a fuss, but I didn’t. Only I didn’t think Andy would want to go too. They’ve been takin’ on older men——”

“Andy had far more call to go than Gid,” Liza cried, rushing to his defence. “He’s young but he’s as good a sailor as there is on the Bay Shore. There wasn’t near the need for Gid to go.”

“If Gid wanted to go I wouldn’t be the one to stop him,” Tilly argued, bringing her iron down heavily upon the bosom of her husband’s shirt. “He couldn’t sleep that first night for worryin’ about it. He didn’t think Andy would be off too.”

“Well, Andy,”—Liza countered, but Ellen interrupted. “Do tell me all about it. I’ve been away, and I don’t know anything.”

This was the right note. Each wanted to tell her story. It was rather difficult

for the listener at first, for the sisters began to talk at the same time, one about Gideon, the other about Andy, but Ellen managed to gather the general sense of it all.

"I could tell Gid was worried to death that night comin' home from Granma's," Tilly commenced. "I asked him twice if there was anything the matter and he jist said no. I thought mebby he'd et too much. Everybody did. So I didn't say anything. But he never came up to bed. He jist went out to the barn and I could see him walkin' around with the lantern and——"

"But you should of seen poor Andy when he heard!" Liza interposed, driving a pair of heavy socks through the wringer with powerful strokes. "He was like a wild colt. He wasn't here when your Pa came over with Gid to tell us what he'd done and——"

"Oh, say, that night!" Tilly broke in. "I suppose your Pa told you about it."

"Gid went off right after supper and I knew he hadn't gone to the barn and it was gettin' late. And it had got out what Captain Angus had been after and the telephone was goin' like nobody's business, and Liza and me knew what was the matter then. And then Sailor give that funny kinda half bark when it's Gid that's comin' and I went to the door and there I sees the minister and Gid behind him. And I jist knew as well as if they'd hollered it at me that Gid was goin'. And I jist said——"

"You see Andy didn't know, because he wasn't here," Liza broke in, sloshing a pair of overalls up and down on the wash board. "He'd been actin' crazy all day sayin' he was goin' to run away to sea. And I says, 'Aw, well, run then,' I says, thinkin' it was jist some of his antics, and then——"

Liza paused to place a kettle of water on the stove, and Tilly snatched the thread of her story.

"I knew jist exactly what Gid had done. And I says right out to your Pa, I says, 'Gid's signed up with Captain Angus!' I says, without takin' time to even say how-do-you-do to the minister. And what do you think he said, Ellen? He says, jist as quiet and smiling, and I'll never forget it to my dying day, he says jist as calm, 'Yes, Tilly,' he says, 'your husband's signed up to serve his country, and you ought to be a proud woman today!' That was what he said, Ellen, '*A proud woman*.' " Tilly put down her iron and buried her face in her apron.

"And so you should, dear!" Ellen cried. "It's a grand and splendid thing Gideon's doing, and Andy, too!"

"But you shoulda seen Andy when he found out!" Liza cried, leaping into

the breach left by Tilly's emotion. "He didn't know till the next morning, when Gid told him. And all day Sunday he jist wasn't fit to live with. He went off to the bush all morning with the gun, and Till and me was scared he'd do himself some harm. And Monday mornin' we jist knew there was no use tryin' to keep him. And we jist told him to go, we'd get along, and he got out that car o' his and went to town that fast it was a mercy he didn't land in jail! And he near missed gettin' on too. Angus had his list filled."

"But he took Andy all right," Tilly cried, "because he said he was such a good sailor. Captain Reid of the *Magnetawan* gave him a great recommend!"

When the stories had finally been told and re-told, Ellen rose to go. Liza went with her to the woodshed door.

"Oh, we'll get along all right," she said. "Dodd and Watty have promised to help. We'll miss them all right, but," she glanced over her shoulder and lowered her voice, "as far as runnin' the farm's concerned, Gid Begg could go sailin' round the world for the rest of his life and things would be jist as good when he got back."

At the top of the lane Ellen met Andy's roaring car as it whirled in at the gate. He stopped hastily in a spray of mud and gravel. " 'Spose they told you?" he shouted.

"Oh, Andy," Ellen cried, "I'm so glad and so sorry. But I don't know what's to become of your aunts."

The reckless look that presaged rebellion darkened his face.

"Yeah, I bet they were sayin' I ought to stay home and feed the hens while Gid went gallivantin'!"

Andy was in one of his dark moods. Ellen climbed into the car and sat with him. The lost motherless look in his eyes troubled her.

"No, Andy, they were grand about it, and they're proud of you, too. We're all proud, and I'm glad you've got your chance at last."

"Well, I gotta get outa here, after what happened the night o' the diamond weddin'," he muttered.

"But you should not pay attention to the story of the wedding cake, Andy; after all it's only gossip, and built on guessing."

But Andy did not care, he vowed, if she was to be married tomorrow and had two wedding cakes with all the raisins in town. He was through! Fed up! She surely put one over on him up at Granma Armstrong's, but that was the

last!

Ellen sat and listened, hoping the telling might relieve some of the bitterness. Andy poured out the whole story of Florrie's perfidy.

She had promised to go to town with him after the supper. But he had promised Uncle Geordie just before supper that he'd dress up and get a flashlight with green paper over it, and scare the daylights out of Watty and Uncle Tom. And Uncle Geordie had promised him his car to go to town afterwards if he would. And that was dandy of him. Well, he couldn't tell Florrie that, 'cause nobody but him and Granma Armstrong knew what Uncle Geordie was up to. But Florrie promised to wait, and there was no hurry anyhow.

Well, it all took longer than he'd thought, he confessed, while a wry grin spread over his face. It sure was a holler to see Uncle Tom and Steve runnin' an' yellin' as if they were after Hitler. Well, when he got back to his own car and put all the stuff away and then drove up in Uncle Geordie's car, all the kids at the party came tearin' out an' hollerin' at him that his girl had run off with a soldier.

"And whadda ya think?" he cried, his eyes flashing. "She wrote me a note the next day and gave it to Charlie to bring down. And she said she only did it for a joke, 'cause she thought I wasn't comin' back when there was a burglar hunt on. And she said she didn't care half as much about the Sommers guy as she did for me. Well, I didn't answer that one. I couldn't swallow that and the weddin' cake stories too. So I'm runnin' out on her this time."

"Andy," Ellen said earnestly, "she has behaved badly, and I think it is better that you let her go. She's not the girl for you. You go and forget her, and when you come back——"

"I ain't comin' back, ever. Captain McNabb says anyone that wants to volunteer for the Merchant Marine when this trip is over can stay on, and you bet I'm one. I hope I get drownded. Nobody'll care, anyhow."

Ellen did not quite know how to deal with this new Andy. She could not bear to see him go away in that reckless mood. She strove to show him a better way, to stir his pride and his undoubted affection for his aunts.

She and Tilly and Liza would be looking for him to do well, so they could be proud of him, and Uncle Geordie would too, and her father.

She doubted if her words had any effect. Andy had been too badly hurt. She gave up at last and was going to step out, but he whirled the car around and drove her up to the door. "Be seein' you!" he called, as he splashed away

without even a word of farewell.

Ellen found Aunt Susie sitting by the window looking down the dreary wind-swept road. When she asked her to go with them to say good-bye to Alfred, Susie refused at first, but when Ellen went to get ready she suddenly changed her mind and ran upstairs to prepare. She kept them waiting a long time, and when she came down at last she was dressed in her best fur-trimmed coat and smart hat, and looked pleased and excited and very pretty.

As the minister went out to the shed, to get the car, the telephone rang. It was Old Alf Laird's number, and Ellen was passing it by, but Susie stepped back and, with a roguish wink at Ellen, gently lifted the receiver.

No, Alf wasn't home just now, his sister's voice said. He had gone out to make one or two good-bye visits to neighbours. He said he wouldn't be long.

Susie came slowly from the telephone, unbuttoning her coat.

"He's out," she whispered, "and she says he's round saying good-bye to his neighbours. I believe I'll stay here, Ellen. I feel sure he'll be coming here."

"I think we had better go, anyway," Ellen said, considerably relieved. Susie and Alfred here in the manse while they paid their visit was an arrangement entirely to her liking. "Father will want a visit with the old folk, anyway."

"I really cannot understand this decision on Alfred's part," Ellen's father said as they drove away. "His father is not fit for much work, and his mother will be heart-broken, and there seemed no reason for his going. He is a little older than the other men, too——"

"He's younger than Gid," Ellen said, fearing her father might think it his duty to persuade Alfred to stay home. But she did not voice her ideas on the reason for Alfred's unexpected conduct.

They found the old people, old Uncle Tom with them, bearing up better than they had expected. Indeed it was plain to see that Old Alf was trying hard to conceal his pride; and the mother, though tearful, seemed resigned. She, too, was proud of him, and as she knew her son better than anyone else, she had a suspicion of the real reason for his sailing. She had never approved of Mrs. Dunbar for her son, and had been greatly disappointed when it seemed evident that Alfred's choice was settling upon the aunt instead of the niece.

To make matters still better, one of the daughters was home, having come out from her home in Carlisle to cheer her parents and help get her brother ready for the voyage. Nettie had made no secret among the neighbours that she was glad Alf was getting away from the toils of the American widow. But she

was careful of her tongue before the minister and his daughter.

"I came out yesterday to help cheer up Mother and Father," she said. "I've been telling Dad it serves him right for not staying in town in that lovely place we got for him. Alf couldn't have got away if he had stayed put."

The kitchen was a warm cheerful room with plenty of light for the dark afternoon, for the Alfred Lairds were the first to have the electric light in their home along the Bay Shore, and the big house had every convenience and comfort. The kitchen walls were lined with modern cupboards, and a fine electric refrigerator and white enamel sink were in one corner. But the good old-fashioned wood stove was still the pivotal point of the home, especially now as the short November days ended in chill wet nights.

Ellen could not help feeling how wonderfully Aunt Susie would have managed this big house, and all with a precision that would have suited Alfred perfectly.

"Yes, Alf won't be gone long," his father said, trying to keep the exultation from his voice. "They will go, you know, these young fellas!"

"Sorry Alf's sailin' on that ship," Uncle Tom volunteered. "It's called the *Asia*, bad name for a ship. Bad luck. D'ye mind the *Asia* that was lost out here in the bay, Mr. Carruthers?"

Mr. Carruthers was forced to confess that he remembered the talk about it when he was a boy.

The old man turned to Ellen. "Ever hear that song about the loss of the *Asia*?" he asked.

It was such an inappropriate selection on this melancholy occasion that Ellen hesitated, and Nettie broke in.

"Mercy, Uncle Tom, everybody on the Bay Shore's heard that old thing. And you sang it at the diamond wedding too, don't you remember?"

Mr. Carruthers did not like to see the old man disappointed, and was about to ask him to sing *The Rowan Tree* instead, but Uncle Tom was not one to deprive a visitor of entertainment just because he did not know enough to ask for it. He knocked his pipe on the stove damper and, without introduction, or even clearing his throat, he burst into song:

Loud roared the dreadful thunder, and stormy was the day,

His melancholy voice had still something in it of the rich warm resonance that had made Old Tom the best singer in the township in his younger days. It

was impossible to listen to him without some enjoyment, even through the interminable number of melancholy stanzas.

When the song was finally ended, Alfred had not yet come home, and to Ellen's great relief her father said they must go, and would hope to see him some other day before he left.

He read a comforting psalm, and led in prayer, commending the son to the care of his heavenly father. And the faces of the parents were brighter when they left.

When they reached home they found Susie still waiting despondently beside the sitting-room fire, with an unfinished cross-word puzzle neglected on the table beside her. Alfred had not come.

12

Yonder Shining Light

The men for the crew of the *Empress of Asia* were to leave for the West at the end of the next week; and when Ellen returned to the city she spent the first evening in her chilly boarding-house bedroom writing to Andy.

And then there came an unexpected opportunity to do something for him. Ellen was beginning to feel that there was really something rather wonderful underlying one's prayers. Answers surely did come in most unexpected ways.

This one was in the form of a letter from Islay Wallace. She was living in a couple of rooms near the military camp outside Toronto where Doctor Mack was stationed. They had just received word of the contingent of Great Lakes' sailors who were going west to man the *Empress of Asia*.

"They are to be a whole day in Toronto, I believe," she wrote, "and as five of them are from Lairdale, and therefore my kin folk, and Mack's ex-patients, we thought we might try to do something for them." Would Ellen send her a list of the men from the Bay Shore and their Toronto headquarters, so they could get in touch with them.

Ellen answered at once, and added a word about Andy. She shrank from any appearance of trying to get in touch with Captain Laird, but she felt she must risk even that for Andy's sake. If he could have a talk with Andy he would be able to set his feet in the right way. For Andy had given his young heart's hero-worship at the chaplain's shrine from the day he had preached in Lairdale church. So she made the suggestion to Islay, knowing she would do her best.

With the departure of the mariners for unknown ports, the whole of the Bay Shore seemed to change. Ellen had left home on a mild autumn day, but when she returned the next week-end it was winter. Autumn had been so warm and sunny that folk had forgotten the lateness of the date. The northern lights had been dancing in the sky over the river flats, and Orion's belt had glittered in the heavens, but they seemed the only signs of approaching winter. And now the whole Laird Valley was lying deep under a white snow blanket.

Ellen, looking out over the dazzling fields as the bus sped along the Lake Shore, spied the little car, far down the road, a small black spot on the shimmering whiteness. She had no sooner climbed joyfully into it beside her

father than he revealed another drastic change; this one in the domestic field. Winter had descended upon the manse too. Susie was packing her clothes and was almost ready to return to Cleveland.

"She is quite determined to go," her father said helplessly, "and I cannot dissuade her. I hope you can do something about it, Ellen."

But Ellen found Susie's big trunk standing in the hall downstairs already packed, and her mind even more firmly settled for the journey. Irene had written that she needed her, and Ellen must forgive her for hurrying away in this fashion.

"But you will understand, my dear," she added when they were alone, "how hard it is for me here now, with everyone saying that Alfred went away to sea to escape me."

"Oh, Aunt Susie, dear," Ellen cried, "surely nobody would be so absurd and unkind as to say such a thing," wondering as she said it, if Aunt Susie were right, for she knew Lairdale.

But that was just what they were saying, Susie declared tearfully. They always said the manse folks never listened in on the telephone, so they didn't think they had to be careful. And she had heard them say it—Nell Turner, and Marty Peters, and even Alfred's own sister Nettie.

While Ellen remonstrated and pleaded, another reason for the hurried departure appeared. It was evidently not a broken heart alone that was driving Susie away.

Irene's elderly aunt, Mrs. Wainwright, was going to Florida right away to spend the winter. She was all alone in the world and she wanted both Irene and Susie to go with her and look after everything. Irene was to be nurse and companion, because the old lady was not very well, and Susie was to look after the housekeeping. Aunt Wainwright would not stay in hotels; she said their kitchens were never clean. She was just a little difficult to manage, Susie confessed, and Irene said she could not undertake it unless Susie came too. The young people were quite settled in the home now, and Irene thought they would be better left to themselves. Aunt Wainwright was to take a house in Miami or St. Petersburg or somewhere, and there was no time to lose.

Ellen could not help seeing that it was difficult for Susie to keep her pleased excitement under cover of a broken heart. In spite of the snows of Alfred's coldness, the trip to sunny Florida kept poking its joyous head above the surface. Ellen, too, began to feel some of its genial influence.

"I feel so bad about leaving you and dear John," Susie said with genuine

regret, “but I know you will both understand how unhappy I would be here—after what happened.”

“You must not worry about us,” Ellen said, though she had no solution for the difficulties ahead. “We will manage, I’m sure. But we will surely miss you dreadfully, Aunt Susie, dear—I mean Suzanne.”

Susie blew her well-shaped Roman nose and wiped her eyes. “No, no, dear, I believe I like to hear you say ‘Aunt Susie’ best. It reminds me that I belong to you and John. Perhaps it was silly, after all, to try to be young again and have a fancy name.” She brightened. “But I really think I will see that Aunt Wainwright and Irene call me Suzanne from now on. It is more dignified.”

So, in spite of many loving protests from brother and niece, Suzanne finished her packing, and the next morning Ellen made up a dainty lunch and a collection of crossword puzzles for the journey, and drove her aunt to the station at Carlisle.

After a tearful parting from her brother, Susie grew cheerful again on the way to town. Already the palms of Miami Beach and the possibilities ahead were waving a welcome.

“After all, I feel I ought to go home,” she said nobly, “for I must not forget that my own dear country is at war. Irene writes me that they are all working night and day for the Red Cross.”

Her niece bade her an affectionate farewell, thanking her from her heart for all the loving service of the past months, and most of all for a service of which Susie never dreamed. And Susie was in tears again at their parting. Ellen must write and tell her all about Alfred. She could not bear it if anything happened to him.

At last the moment came for Ellen to stand on the bleak, wind-swept platform, waving and smiling at the retreating train, and then it was gone and she was standing waving at the towering white elevator that reared its majestic form above the wharf and station, silhouetted against the dark tumbling waters of the bay. It stood there erect and serene against a stormy winter sky, holding tons of food for the coming days of need.

Ellen ran shivering to her car, grateful for the elevator’s challenge. For now that Aunt Susie was gone she realized how utterly serious the home situation was. Winter was upon them, and the snow of the country roads would soon make her homecomings hazardous at best, and often an impossibility. And with Tilly and Liza already overworked, she could not look for any help from

them. And she knew that with the demands of the war upon the young folk there was not a girl in Lairdale who could be spared for an hour's work.

She found her father in good spirits on her return. There was a letter from Ronald, short and non-committal as usual, but nevertheless a letter saying he was well.

Mr. Carruthers expressed his regret at his sister's departure, but Ellen noticed that he had fallen back already into his old easy habits. There was a book, open face downwards, on the kitchen table, and the Carlisle *Chronicle* was strewn about on the study floor.

"I think I'll ask for leave and come home for the winter," Ellen said recklessly at breakfast the next morning.

Her father looked up with such a sudden amazed delight that her heart smote her. But while he smiled he shook his head.

"No, no, that's too good to be true. I cannot let you give up your young life and bury yourself back here. I am sure I will be all right, dear, if you can get home occasionally. My wants are few. I can make my own porridge in the morning, and if Liza or Tilly could come over once in a while I'll get along splendidly."

Ellen smiled and shook her head. He could not understand how impossible his position was, she well knew. It was her problem, and she must solve it somehow alone. And she must not spoil this Sabbath morning talking about it.

But it haunted her all through the church service. The church seemed empty this morning, with five more men gone. Tilly and Liza came in alone. Though Gid and Andy always sat by themselves in the back seat, somehow the two women looked forlorn and lonely. Nell Turner sat straight, and gallant as ever, with her long pew full of little bobbing heads. But there was no broad-shouldered father sitting at the other end to keep some semblance of order. The choir leader's chair was empty, and even the manse pew, without Aunt Susie's bright dress and hat, looked dull and bare. Ellen knew there would be as much talk at the church door afterwards about Susie's departure as about the five mariners.

And then she noticed that her wandering mind was missing something her father was saying, something that applied exactly to her case. '*Let not your hearts be troubled*' was his text; his message to the many troubled and fearful hearts before him. But Ellen was arrested by an illustration he was giving. It was from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, that well loved story-book of childhood days. She remembered her mother reading this very story to her and Ronald on

a Sunday afternoon; the thrilling tale of Pilgrim's venture away from old associations out into the unknown. There was a gate somewhere, a Way Out, but he could not find it.

Then said Evangelist, 'Do you see yonder wicket gate?'

The man said 'No.'

Then said the other, 'Do you see yonder shining light?'

He said, 'I think I do.'

Then said Evangelist, 'Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the gate.'

The words sang in her heart all the rest of the day and long after she had reached the city——

Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto.

It seemed like a direct challenge. There must be a Gate, a Way Out of this difficult situation. But she might never find it unless she stepped forward in faith. The shining light was ahead of her, her duty and love for her father. If she only dared go forward she would surely, sometime, find the Gate.

She could not but be impressed by the way the road had been opening before her since she had made her difficulties a matter for prayer. Susie had come, and Susie had been the cause of Alfred's removal—for the present, at least. And yet in the face of all this she had not faith to go out boldly towards the shining light, knowing there would be a Way Out on the other side of it.

She sat up very late that night, with pencil and note book, adding up her expenses and subtracting them from her meagre salary, and when finally she went to bed there came into her mind another message from *The Pilgrim's Progress*:

Then said the pilgrims one to another, 'We have need to cry to the Strong for strength.'

Ay, and you will have need to use it, when you have it, too.'

What was the use of crying to the All-wise for wisdom when you did not use the wisdom already given you?

When she reached her desk the next morning she found a message that seemed to have been sent directly from heaven: 'Call Mrs. Malcolm Wallace,'

it said.

Islay! The one person she wanted above all others to consult, was in town! She called the number—it was Kate Lawrence's. She was breathless with delight at the sound of Islay's soft inviting voice.

"Mrs. Reilly!" Ellen cried, using the old name Artie had given her. "It's the Hired Girl, ma'am."

"Ellen! You darling! What do you think? Mack's ordered to Halifax. Right away! I ran up to say good-bye to the family. We're going the end of the week."

"Oh, oh, oh!" was all Ellen could say, in her dismay. "Halifax! Couldn't you manage to get a little farther away?"

"Let's have lunch together and I'll tell you all about it. What hour? One. That will suit me exactly. At the old place? Good! Look for our old table."

"*We have need to cry to the Strong for strength*," Ellen kept repeating as she drove through her morning's work, and thought of what she must tell Islay.

There were a couple of books on her desk waiting to be reviewed. She would take them to her room and do them in the evening. She glanced at the titles. Why, one was a volume of sermons based on *The Pilgrims Progress*! She ran through the pages hurriedly. Yes, here was a sermon called *Yonder Shining Light*! And here was the message her father had given her yesterday in the little home church:

'Do you see yonder wicket gate?'
The man said 'No.'
'Do you see yonder shining light?'
He said, 'I think I do.'
'Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the gate.'

She laid the book down with a feeling of awe.

She found her friend waiting at the door of the Tea Room. Islay was always pretty and well dressed, but today she was looking young and radiant as a bride, for it seemed as if Mack were at last to have a permanent station and they could have something like a home again.

"You look like all the glamour girls, only more glamorous," Ellen said. Islay looked her over critically, as she always did. "You look pretty fine yourself, Miss Carruthers. What's all the inward shine about? Have you been left a fortune?"

“I didn’t think it would show on the outside already; but on the contrary. I am dying to tell you about it and I know you fell right down from heaven here today. But it will wait. Tell me about you first, and Dr. Mack.”

They were like two school girls with all their secrets to share, and had scarcely time to give to ordering their lunch.

“And now all our Christmas plans to be at the Old Home will be gone with the wind,” Islay mourned. “I must tell Cousin Dallas. The poor boy will be so disappointed. Why can’t you ask him up?”

“It’s too soon to think about Christmas,” Ellen said hurriedly. “Tell me, did you see our Mariners?”

Yes, Mack had got them all together for lunch, and she had gone down afterwards to bid them good-bye. They were all there, poor chaps, Big Jim Turner and Gideon dying of homesickness even then.

“But the one that looked as if he were almost dead already was that Alfred that was running around after you at the wedding. What did you do to him? And poor Big Jim! Remember the night Big Jim brought Mack across the river when the bridge was washed away?”

“And Andy? Did he look homesick?”

“Poor Andy! He looked so much younger than the others, except young Bob. I told Cousin Dallas about Andy. He couldn’t come to the luncheon, but do you know, Ellen, he went over to the hotel afterwards and I think he must have been there all night talking to that boy.”

That was what Ellen wanted to hear. Andy would be all right, she felt, having a sublime faith in the powers of the chaplain. It was not safe to let Islay go on with that subject, however, and she asked all about the proposed journey. “And you’ll see Harry, perhaps.”

Yes, Islay hoped to see Harry, and perhaps Dick, if he were anywhere near. But poor Dick, on a corvette! “Oh, Ellen, where is it to end? Are all our boys to be taken? Your Ronald, and our Pete, and Dick; and Kate’s Athol will be away the minute he is old enough! Well, well, we must not let our spirits down. Ellen, you will soon have to stop going out to Lairdale. We are promised snow for tomorrow.”

“That’s what I want to talk about.” Ellen made an inward cry ‘to the Strong for strength.’ “Islay, Aunt Susie went back to Cleveland on Saturday.”

“Your aunt? Oh, not really? Why?”

“Her sister-in-law needed her. They are going to take care of an invalid aunt in Florida for the winter.”

“Oh dear! What will your father do? Will Tilly or Liza come over?”

“With Gid and Andy both away for the winter, I cannot expect an hour’s work from either of them. And there is absolutely nobody else.”

“And what will you do, Ellen? You’re not thinking of giving up your work here and going home? Wouldn’t your father retire?”

There was disapproval in every word, and Ellen made another appeal for strength.

“Father would retire if I insisted, and it would break his heart, and probably shorten his days,” she said.

Islay nodded. “What then?”

“I have a plan and I am frightened to death of it and I want your approval more than anything. I think I could go on if you don’t think I am quite mad.”

“I’m all attention.”

“Well, as an introduction! You know, perhaps, Mrs. Reilly, that I am a graduate of the University of Toronto, honour mathematics and physics which are supposed to help your brain function, provided you have any left.”

“Honour course!” Islay cried gaily, trying to lighten the story.

“Never mind that. Well, yes, we might as well drag in the honours as it makes the rest of the story look sillier. Being such a brilliant mathematician, I never bothered until the last day or so to add up my liabilities and see what they looked like beside my assets. Last night, though, I did it: Sabbath day and all. And I got a jolt. You know what my salary is?”

“Yes, horribly mean and inadequate.”

“I don’t know. Not as business women’s salaries go at present. I’m just a good plodder. And I have no doubt I’m getting what I am worth. Well, when I got through last night, adding up my room and my board, and carfare, and incidentals and office clothes, and, oh dear, dear, stockings! Francis and Blair might object to slacks and a shirt, and anyway I have to strive to come somewhere near the high standard set by my predecessor. She was very beautiful and extremely *chic*, they all tell me.”

“Now, we’re getting off into the realm of pure fiction. Get back to your mathematics.”

“All right, ma’am, all right. Then I have to go home as often as possible, and my ticket alone, without other incidental expenses, is ten dollars. And I paid Aunt Susie, of course, while she was with us. She is an excellent housekeeper and cook. And before that I paid Liza. I could not trust my dear father to pay her. He would tell her just not to bother about him and would give the money to missions. Now, when everything is all added and subtracted how much do you suppose I have left at the end of the month?”

“Not much, I was often in the red myself, even when Pete paid half of our apartment.”

“Well, last month I had managed to save two dollars and thirty-five cents. And last Saturday I had to buy my father a pair of warm woollen mittens with that. Now where is it getting me?”

“Just where every poor women gets who tries to run a business and a home at the same time. And your problem is worse because the home is so far away. But, Ellen, do you—you aren’t going home, are you?”

“Financially it looks to be the only sensible thing.”

“But, dear—”

“We’ll really be almost as well off, living on Father’s salary. I will save a housekeeper’s pay, and our grocery bills are cut by almost a third when I am home.”

“Oh, I well remember the magic that could make a banquet out of bread-and-butter and apple-sauce. But Ellen *dear*! The future!”

“That’s the thing that staggers me. I don’t want to do anything foolish and erratic. I love the work here. And I might never get anything so good again. And when I think of all the training you gave me I feel like a worm leaving it!”

“Oh, nonsense, dear girl. You allowed me to get out and be married earlier than I had expected. But, Ellen, you must not go and bury yourself away back there in the country. You will be sacrificing all your future! And that Alfred! You wouldn’t marry one of those Laird farmers, Ellen, even if they *are* my relatives!”

Ellen was forced to laugh in spite of her anxiety. “No, dear, I am afraid I couldn’t, even for the honour of being related to you, especially as none of them has ever asked me. But Islay, Father needs me *dreadfully*. And he won’t be very many more years in the ministry.” She hesitated. It was very difficult to speak even to such a close friend as Islay of how she had prayed and had her prayers answered, and that this was another venture of faith, about which her

father was always preaching.

“Something happened today,” she faltered. She went on to tell of her father’s sermon on Sunday morning before she left: the story of the shining light for the one who could see no gate, no way out of his plight. And then how she had come down to the office, and there was the same story in the first book she had opened for review! “It was like a message,” she managed to say, her eyes on her plate. If you went on because the light was there and you knew it was the right way, then there would surely be an open road. *So shalt thou see the gate*, was the promise.

She looked up, and was concerned to see tears in Islay’s eyes.

“It’s all right, dear,” Islay said when she could speak, “I understand. There are some things one has to do, and there is only faith to show the way.”

They were silent for a few minutes. Then Islay suddenly sat up straight. When anyone she loved was in trouble she had to do something about it, and at once.

“Look!” she said. “I often used to take work away from the office up to the apartment. I could do far better work there alone. Book reviews and lots of other things! Why couldn’t you—why don’t you?—Ask Mr. Francis. No, wait! Let me ask him! He’s a horrible crank, but the poor old thing has ulcers; and he has a good heart: Let’s go and see him right away.”

“Oh, Islay,” Ellen said brokenly, “you’re such a—such a—*Rock in a weary land*!” She stopped, overcome.

Islay rose briskly. “Come along! We’ll go and see the old Boss this very minute, and I’ll tell him this is a war measure and you simply have to go, and take some work with you.”

13

The Homemaker

Whatever doubts Ellen had had over the wisdom of her adventure of faith were soon dispelled. This was her place, no matter what it entailed. When her father's first dismay over what he considered too great a sacrifice on her part had somewhat subsided, he settled down in perfect content and seemed to take on new strength and courage.

"Well, well," he would say, "life is just one continuous week-end. I am being thoroughly spoiled in my old age."

And Ellen was happy, too. She loved home-making and the beauty and freedom of country life. Even the many discomforts of the old manse in winter: the big kitchen stove that smoked on windy days, the old tin bath-tub that would never look clean or shiny, the wide creaking boards of the bedroom floors, and the periodical leak in the kitchen roof that had worried Aunt Susie, were all a challenge to her resourcefulness.

And the work from the office which was sent regularly seemed like a relaxation after the battle with the old soft-water pump in the back shed.

Yes, this was her place. She was sure now. The light had led her aright, and she would follow, knowing there would be a gate somewhere ahead.

When she had her household running smoothly she sometimes wished she had more to do back here in the quiet of the country! If she were not fully employed she had a tendency to recall too often that meeting under the apple tree, and the star-hunt out in the corn field. And on scenes like that it was folly to dwell. She went to all the women's meetings, and knitted for the Red Cross. She took a class of riotous boys in Sunday School and helped Tom Laird with the difficult task of superintending. As Christmas approached she helped the Lairdale teacher prepare for the school Christmas tree, always devoutly thankful that the menace of Alfred had been removed, for the time at least.

Christmas held no hopes for her, now that Islay was so far away. She knew that she had been cherishing foolish dreams. She would not even hear of him now. He was still stationed near Toronto, and impatient to be away, reports said; for Lairdale got news of him, somehow. And his name was always coupled with that of Angela Drummond.

The Bay Shore had been blessed with a warm lingering autumn, and two

weeks of real golden Indian Summer. The wedges of honking geese, and the long black lines of ducks, winging southward, were later than usual. December crept in gently on softly falling snow, and for days the manse garden was a fairyland, with late zinnias and petunias holding their bright heads up above their white blanket. Then there came just enough snow to give the children a good time but not enough to impede car traffic and just enough frost to cover the ponds in Gid Begg's beaver meadows and make a grand ice rink for hockey.

People prophesied an open winter and a green Christmas. There were many signs of both—the crop of beech-nuts and butter-nuts, the down on the ducks, some potent sign in connection with pig-killing, the flocks of blue-jays that flashed and scolded among the boughs of the cedars. Only Wise Watty, the weather prophet, scoffed at them all, and soon his superior wisdom was vindicated.

The moon had been giving out a strange yellowish glow, and the Northern Lights had been staging an eerie dance as a sort of announcement of greater things to come, and then suddenly, a few weeks before Christmas, old King Winter rose up from his lair in the musk-ox country and swept down with his cohorts across the Georgian Bay. For three days and three nights the snow came down without stopping. And then the wind came up from the bay and whipped it up into tremendous drifts, and brought snow and more snow. It seemed to come from every direction; now sweeping down from the Blue Ridge, now raging in from the grey tortured bay. In the morning a storm would howl along the Bay Shore road from the west, buffeting and blinding everyone who was trying to struggle by team and sleigh to market in Carlisle. And in the afternoon it would swirl around to the east and fight and push back and smother those who were struggling homeward. And always it snowed and snowed. The beaver-meadow rink was lost under a white mountain. Fences disappeared, cars that had been left at the gate became soft mounds of whiteness. Charlie Cameron, with horse and cutter, laboured through the drifts once or twice in the first week, but all the mail boxes were soon buried. And, worst of all, the telephones all failed and gave out hideous shrieks, weird echoes of the storm, that made communication impossible.

Wise Watty's gloomy prophecies were fulfilled beyond his dourest dreams. Granma Armstrong was the only person on the Bay Shore who remembered a winter that started so early. When she was a girl she minded how her father's log stable disappeared altogether one night, and the men and boys had to dig down to the door to the poor beasts that were bawling inside for their feed and water. Nobody could get along the bush roads for weeks, and they used up all

the flour and oatmeal in the house, and for several days they had nothing to eat but pork and mealins, which was boiled wheat. Mother would keep a pot of mealins boiling over the fire all day, and it tasted mighty good for supper with milk or maple syrup.

Whenever the storm ceased for a day the snow-plough came raging down the Line and cut out a road as smooth as paved marble, with a straight gleaming marble wall on either side as clean and smooth as if it had been cut with a knife.

Then the school bus would run in and out of town with the high-school pupils and Charlie Cameron would ride down the white way as if heading a royal procession. And all the farmers would shovel out their cars and go to town. The telephone wires would be mended, and neighbours would call each other to ask did they ever hear of such a winter.

And then in a few more days the roads were all filled in again and all activity ceased.

On the days that the mail got through, Ellen always slipped on her overalls and windbreaker and made her way down the almost unbroken path to where the mail box sat crouched in its little snow cavern. There was a wide view from the manse windows, and when the roads were not laid out like a marble pavement she could see Charlie's cutter like a little row-boat in a storm on the bay, now rising on the crest of a snow bank, now sinking into the trough of the snow billows, till old Prince's forward-pricked ears alone were visible, above the sides of the tunnel. The bells could be heard before he appeared. They made gay music on a calm day as the cutter came jogging along. Charlie liked bells, and always carried as many as possible. There was a string around Prince's neck that rose and fell when he trotted, and a row of heavier 'danglers' along each shaft of the cutter. And they all rang out on the frosty air, telling that His Majesty's Mail was coming.

Ellen was always on the lookout to be ready to go before her father. For he was careless about his coat or cap when he thought there was a letter from Ronald, and she feared he might take cold. Rowdy was always on hand to go with her. When he saw his mistress come out to the kitchen hooded and booted, he went wild with rapture. Ellen always sent him off ahead, for when the snow was very deep he made a path for her. She always had to wait while he had his snow bath, however. He would first bury himself in a drift and wriggle out, making a snow storm all around him. Then he would lie on one side, then on the other, and fairly scour himself as he squirmed along. Next a crawl on his stomach, and a roll on his back, and the bath was complete. And he always came close to Ellen to shake his shaggy coat and cover her with

snow.

She ran out early one afternoon, for this was the day Ron's letter should come. It was a day of blinding sunshine. The plough had been through on the previous afternoon, and the wide white road and white walls were satin smooth. All the world was glittering in the sun. The tree shadows on the fields were an intense blue.

The rose hips shone scarlet on their bushes, and down in the hollows the deep crimson stems of the dogwood bushes made a beautiful splash of colour. In the spruce trees, and in Tilly's orchard, the blue-jays screamed and flashed, lovely and noisy and arrogant. The little nut-hatches flitted in and out, and the chickadees twittered sweetly from the cedars.

Charlie flew past in a musical storm before she reached the road. He waved his whip towards the mail box in its little cavern and shouted that the General had written today. Ellen quickened her floundering steps. It was such a glorious day! Just the sort of day to get a letter from Ron. And there it was down in the box, and two others beside it. The second one was written in lead pencil and the address was scrawled all the way across the envelope. It had a Vancouver postmark and she realized with joy that it was from Andy. And, strange coincidence! Here was the announcement of Florrie's wedding. So the raisin rumour had been truly interpreted.

She hurried back, for her father was watching anxiously at the window. She waved Ronald's letter at him as she ran. She came in, breathless and lovely, her face flushed with the exercise. Her father read the letter while she removed her snowy outer clothing. Ronald was well, and expecting to have a Christmas leave. A relative of Marjorie's, living in London, had invited him for dinner. As usual it was very brief, and they read every word of it again and again. Ellen always wondered at her brother's letters. Ron was so clever, and such a good talker, but when he came to set anything down in writing it lost all its life. He belonged to the school, she wrote him teasingly, of the young naval officer who reported: 'Sighted sub. Sank same.' Ronald replied that that was a perfect type of letter and he thought it saved a lot of trouble. She knew her father craved for more; they both yearned for details that would help them see his daily life. But her father's face was radiant over even this meagre note. Ronald was well and in good spirits, it seemed, and that was enough.

Andy's letter was mis-spelt and the grammar had but a remote relationship to the English language, but Ellen had to confess that it told her more of the writer's life than all Ronald's brief notes.

They were expecting to sail in a little while, he wrote, and he guessed it

was up to him to get a letter off to her before he left, as though he greatly grudged the effort. They sure had been having a swell time. And a swell trip. Only Gid was homesick and Big Jim too. And Alf hated it. Alf was awful down. Guess somebody turned him down good and plenty. They had a swell time in Toronto. The padre and him sat up near all night talking. After that he had sort of felt he had been hollering for Momma and a bottle. But Ellen was not to worry any more about him. He was fine and dandy, and the padre sure was a swell guy. He got her letter at Vancouver, and was that something! The padre wrote too. Andy would write again if he could find any mail boxes out on the Pacific ocean or wherever they were going. But she must not worry about him. He was going straight.

Ellen's heart grew lighter with every line she laboured through. The padre again! He had turned his charm on Andy once more, and called the lad to something higher. It was hard to be always hearing such wonderful reports of him from every hand. Especially when one was set sternly to the task of forgetting him.

To keep from remembering she plunged into her work sent from the office, and was complimented by Mr. Francis, himself, on her promptness and her good work. She could not tell him that some of the books sent her for review had to be read and returned as quickly as possible lest her father take a notion to look into them. They were very modern fiction, most of them, and she knew he would be shocked and grieved to see what his daughter was reading. Sometimes she was depressed by the sordidness of a tale, and once she confided in Islay that after reading one popular book she had felt she must take a bath and read the twenty-third psalm before she could talk with her father.

"But somebody has to review them," she said to herself with a sigh, "and I suppose life has its terrible aspects!"

But many of them were in happier vein, and she shared them with her father and received sound advice upon what points to stress in her review.

Sometimes when she craved more outdoors she would run down to Tilly's mail box after Charlie had passed, and take their mail to them. She generally found the sisters sitting beside the kitchen stove, cleaning and packing eggs. They were very happy over the results of their venture. Once a week a man came out from the creamery in town and collected the cream and the eggs, and each week there were more than the last. Yes, they were doing fine. There were only the five cows to milk, as Dodd had taken over all the other stock. And Dodd or Reenie telephoned nearly every day when the wires weren't out of order. Ellen shared with them the news of letters from Gid and Andy. They would be out on the ocean by now. Well, one thing, Liza said, they were

missing this awful winter. Did she ever see anything like it? And before Christmas! Her and Tilly said every day, what in the world would her Pa have done without her? And in this awful snow.

"Well, you know," Tilly said, "I sometimes think it's kinda nice to be snowed in. Reenie was sayin' that over the phone yesterday. She was sayin' that us farm women had to run around an awful lot since everybody got cars, and it seemed they didn't know how to stop. And she was glad she had to."

"Yes," agreed Liza, "and we was jist sayin' it's kinda nice to know you couldn't go nowhere, even if you was dyin' to go."

Then Tilly, as usual, told how lonesome it was without Gid, and when she went down to the cellar to get a jar of her special cherry jam for the minister's breakfast, Liza nudged Ellen and whispered,

"Till takes on about Gid bein' away, but believe me, we're doin' fine. We don't have to spend all our days bakin' pies and cookies and things for them two fellas! We've got time for other things. And the hens are doin' jist great."

There followed another two days of storm, and on another day, when the world was dazzling white and blue, the snow plough came through in the morning. Ellen had kept open a path to the gate and she went down it to watch the oncoming monster, Rowdy barking madly at the outrageous noise and bluster. It was a thrilling sight; a great ship in a sea of foam. Its mighty dragon wings were spread far out on either side, and the spray from its oncoming prow rose in a tremendous snowstorm and was thrown out on either side to the line of fences. Four men were riding high on the deck of the ship, and greeted Ellen with a wave of their shovels. Three small passengers, whom she recognized as members of her Sunday School class, were riding in rapturous delight beside them—youngsters who had arrived at the public school down the road a little early and had come off for a ride on the chance of getting another ride back in a passing car before school opened.

"This is the newest thing in tanks, Miss Carruthers!" shouted Steve's Billy, and Ellen laughed and waved to him.

"She's a waltzing Matilda!" another cried shrilly.

"We're on our way to Berlin!" screamed Artie Pierson.

"You'd better be on your way to school!" Ellen cried, and they looked back in alarm, realizing how far they had strayed from their prison.

"Hey!" shouted Bob Laird's Bob, who was in command, "yous kids better get back mighty quick," and they spilled off and went screaming down the

road.

The shining marble highway was so perfect that Mr. Carruthers decided to drive down to see Old Geordie who, it was said, had not been well since the night of the diamond wedding. He left early in the afternoon, and when Charlie came jingling down the smooth pavement Ellen went out to the box for the mail. The wind of the past few days had packed the drifts hard, and in some places it was possible to walk on the smooth surface far above the fencetops. Rowdy took advantage of this sure footing to go after a jack-rabbit across the field. Generally he found such sport ended in exhaustion and humiliation, with the enemy far beyond scent or hearing over the yielding fields. For while a dog sank in the snow and laboured on, floundering and panting, Jack went over the fields like a great bird. He always seemed to find some solid place for his feet, from which his great hind legs sent him, as though jet-propelled, through a soaring flight to the next take-off. No mere dog could keep him in sight. But this packed snow offered fairer competition, and Rowdy was away, a brown raging streak, still far behind the leaping hind legs of Jack Rabbit.

Ellen smiled as poor Rowdy fell farther and farther behind. Then the bay of a hound on the scent came up from the blue-grey line of woods behind Gid's farm. Someone was back there hunting, and Jack might get caught yet.

There was only the *Carlisle Chronicle* in the box today. As she turned to go in, she raised her face to the dazzling blank blue above and watched the blue-grey column of smoke from the two manse chimneys go straight up into the air like a mass of blossoms on a smoke tree. The snow on the roof was nearly three feet deep, and a glittering fringe of icicles two yards long hung from the eaves. The church was similarly decorated, and shone like a fairy palace in the sunshine. Then she looked across to Tilly's, and was surprised to see no smoke rising from the farm house. She went inside feeling some apprehension, and rang Tilly's number. But the telephone was giving out another series of the maniacal shrieks that always followed a storm, and raised no answer. It was just possible someone was sick at the farm. She took a basket with some simple remedies and a jar of broth she had been making for her father's supper, and hurried out.

She ran down the marble pavement and turned in at the lane. It was always Liza's habit when she came up every day to the gate for the mail to leave jars of milk and cream in the box for the manse. On account of the storm Ellen had not gone over to the box the day before, and she was disturbed to see there was no jar there. And there was a letter from Gid, and two Carlisle daily papers! No one had been up here for the mail the afternoon before. She hurried forward, filled with anxiety.

There was not even a rabbit track in the lane, but the snow was packed and she moved easily over the high white surface.

As she passed near the barn she could hear the cows bawling; they had evidently not been either fed or milked. Sailor shouted at her from the woodshed. She entered, and he jumped up to her in wild welcome. Fortunately doors were never locked at Gid's place, and even with the men away Liza and Tilly had never taken up the foolish town custom of bolts and bars at night. Ellen opened the door into the kitchen and called.

There was no answer, and she went on to the foot of the kitchen stair. The house was cold; no fire had been lit for the day. She called up the stairs. "Hoo, hoo! Tilly? Liza? It's Ellen!" The sisters slept in the warm room above the kitchen, since the men had left, and Ellen went up hurriedly. She was answered by a muffled sound and a rasping cough.

"It's Ellen," she heard Tilly sob. "Oh, Ellen! We knew you'd come!"

They were lying in their old, four-poster bed, and both were apparently very sick. It was the flu, Tilly whispered, but Liza lay with her eyes closed and only groaned. Ellen looked at the flushed faces, and took the rapid pulses. When you had a bad cold in the winter and had to go to bed, it was the flu, and in summer if your digestion was upset you had summer flu, Dr. Mack always said, making fun of them. Ellen had no idea just what this might be.

Liza opened her eyes. "Go away, Ellen," she groaned, "go away; you'll catch this. Oh, if Dr. Mack was only here!"

But Ellen was already dealing with the situation. First she ran downstairs and put on a fire in the kitchen stove, and almost immediately the damp chill was removed from the room above. When she had warm water she gently bathed the flushed faces and hands and made the bed comfortable. She heated the broth, gave them each a few spoonsful, and was rewarded by seeing that even Liza looked a little brighter.

"The poor beasts, and the hens," Tilly faltered. "Perhaps Watty——"

Ellen made them promise not to move if she went to fetch Watty; and having dampered the stove she hurried away up the lane, leaving Sailor in charge.

She had a stroke of wonderful fortune. As she emerged from the lane a car was passing and there were Steve and Minnie on their way down to see Old Geordie! Minnie was the best nurse on the Bay Shore, and wherever there was sickness, there she was. And, for all his complaining, Steve was a great help when anyone was in trouble.

The car could not go down the lane, so they left it at the road and walked down over the drifts. While Minnie took over in the sick-room, Steve went to the stable and fed and watered and milked, all in record time. And, after some instructions from Tilly, Ellen ventured out to the hen-house, to the clamouring sea of white leghorns. They all shrieked and flew in dusty clouds to the roof at the terrifying sight of a stranger, but she moved among them quietly and soon had them eating frantically from the hoppers and drinking from their water pans. The gathering of the eggs was no small task, as every nest was overflowing and eggs were scattered broken over the floor. She ran to the house for more and more baskets. Ten dozen! She went upstairs to report in triumph.

Minnie had taken over to such good effect that the sick women were almost cheerful by the time Ellen came upstairs with the news that the chores were done and everything going fine. Steve brought in the milk and the cream, and handed over the parts of the separator to Ellen, saying he hoped she knew how to wash it. Gosh, he complained as he brought in wood and water, what did Tilly and Liza mean by both gettin' sick at the same time? This would be a great story to tell Gid! He never thought Gid should a' gone anyhow. Wasn't the war lookin' bad? What would happen next?

When they left, it was with the promise of more relief. Minnie would come over on their way back, and she would send over a bottle that Dr. Mack had given them for the flu. There was nothing like it. And Steve would tell Watty to come over and do the chores until the girls were better. It was just the flu, she felt sure, Minnie said comfortingly, and they would both be all right in a few days.

Ellen ran home to see about her father's supper, but returned early. He was in distress about her, but a call for help was something that had to be obeyed. Steve came down with his team on his return, bringing Wise Watty, who promised to take over the affairs at the barn; and Minnie had sent the medicine and a jar of chicken broth.

Ellen promised to take over the sick-room and affairs in the house if the barn were attended to. But Watty made it plain from the first that while he was ready to clean out the stable and do the milking and all ordinary chores, he wanted everyone to know he was not going to waste his time on a bundle of hens. Feeding hens and gathering eggs was no job for a man. In his day hens used to pick up their meat round the barnyard, and why couldn't they do it now? He had no sympathy with this silly habit of shutting them up. No, he'd turn them out and mebby throw them a handful of grain now and then, but he wanted everyone to know he would not be nursemaid to a lot o' squawking

fowls.

Ellen consulted her father over the telephone, which had been once more repaired after the storm. She thought she had better stay all night and keep a fire on. The sisters protested, and Tilly even threatened to get out of bed. But Ellen scolded them, and said they were bad girls and she would bring the minister over to tell them they must behave, and left them half crying and half laughing, but warm and comfortable, while she went home for her clothes.

Her father was determined that he would go back with her and keep the fire on, but Ellen overruled him this time and set off down the moonlit lane with a high heart. Minnie was there ahead of her again; and before long, Marty Peters and her husband drove in with the sleigh, coming across the fields through the bush road. The telephone had been fixed, and everyone knew that Tilly and Liza were both sick in bed. Broths and soups and jellied chicken and custards came in, and Ellen was put to it to see that nothing was wasted. She slept that night in the little room next to the sisters' and got up in the night to give them cough medicine and see that the fire was kept burning. And in the morning she was rewarded, for they were both very much better. But it was a full week before they were up and around again, and more before either of them was able to go out, as the weather had turned very cold. At night when Ellen had piled up the fires the old house cracked loudly with the frost and the stars fairly glittered in the deep blue of the night sky.

Meanwhile Ellen had begun to master the art of egg production, and was rather enjoying the novel pastime. The hens were accustomed to her now, and had got back to their regular laying habits. Liza had been the one who fed them, and they resented a stranger, and went into hysterics if Tilly so much as came to the door to look in and admire them. Now they had accepted Ellen, and came running to her as soon as she entered.

After Tilly and Liza were able to take over the stable duties again, and Watty came over no more, Ellen kept coming morning and night to look after the hens. For, in spite of Dr. Mack's medicine, Liza's cough continued, and she was still pale and without appetite. Liza had always been strong and vigorous and was disgusted with herself, but Ellen insisted on coming, until they both were completely recovered.

She came in with her last basket of eggs one evening in high spirits. It had been a mild sunny day, and the hens had reached their highest peak of production. Thirteen dozen!

The sisters were full of amazement and admiration.

"I'm scared to go back," Liza said. "I know they'll quit the minute they see

me."

"Don't be in a hurry," Ellen said, "I'm coming until you are quite, quite well. It's really so little work. And I like it. And I really need the walk: I don't get enough outdoor exercise."

"Well mebby we shouldn't a' done it," Tilly said. "Gid thought we were crazy, and, of course, if we'd a' thought we were goin' to be alone all winter we wouldn't but on account o' Rosamond I don't see how we can let them go now! Poor Rosamond! It was that letter saying they were only allowed two eggs a week that started us!"

It was then that Ellen offered to assume responsibility for the biddies till Gid and Andy came back in the spring. The sisters were tearfully grateful, but they would not hear of it unless she would share the profits. They must do it in a business way or not at all, Liza said. So they finally agreed upon wages, and Ellen went home to report proudly to her father that now she was doing real War Work, producing eggs for Ron and Rosamond, and perhaps Dick and even Gid and Andy! And she was earning money, too!

Her father was the only one who was doubtful. She was doing too much, he felt sure. Could he not go over and help her, say in the morning?

Ellen was rather glad that the biddies themselves would ensure her against such an arrangement. They would not tolerate any interference; Ellen was their accepted Providence now, and might not even put on a new sweater without sending them up to the rafters with screams of protest.

So every morning she rose an hour earlier and had breakfast by lamplight, the arrangement suiting her father, who loved early rising. As soon as breakfast was over Ellen dressed in overalls and high snow-boots, a windbreaker and fur-trimmed hood—her battle dress as she called it—and went off down the lane to her charges.

Another visit in the late afternoon, when the eggs had to be gathered and the hens fed again finished her day's work. She took the baskets of eggs to the house, and in the evening the sisters cleaned and packed them. And every Friday, if the snow plough had been through, Jim Peters came with his great truck gathering cream and eggs. And he was very proud of the Begg farm production. It never failed; and it was always up to the highest standard, he reported.

Ellen was glad of the work. She was doing something for Ron. Perhaps when she learned all about hens she would start up herself.

Perhaps this was the gate opening out into a New Way!

14

Christmas Leave

The hens continued to do their duty nobly by the Empire and Rosamond. Tilly wrote to Gid, and Liza to Andy, boasting of their success, and how much money they were making.

Both sisters were quite well again, but they were thankful for Ellen's help. And neither of them, they well knew, could show her face in the hen-house without provoking hysteria and a consequent lowering of production.

To Ellen her charges grew more interesting every day. Many of them had a marked individuality, and she gave names to the more original ones. Her special pet was Jenny-Biddy with the soft enquiring "Kut, Kut?" She came every morning and sat right upon Ellen's feet, spreading her white wings as if making a curtsy, and there she would sit until Ellen picked her up and caressed her beautiful white feathers. There was Raggedy-Anne who had been so badly pecked and abused that she had to be placed apart in a little pen for protection, and who, when she came out, recovered, and much refreshed in spirit, saw to it that if pecking were done she did it, and prospered in consequence. And Rosie the Riveter; she had a voice like a jazz orchestra. When the chorus, which always greeted Ellen's appearance at feeding time, rose to the dusty roof, Rosie's voice could always be heard above the clamour.

As soon as Ellen opened the little low door of the hen-house and looked over the three hundred little white busy figures milling about, she was received with joyous acclaim. At first only a few of the best soloists, led by Rosie, struck up the song of praise, but they were quickly joined by others as they gathered about her. No matter what one was doing, it was dropped: sitting on the nest, fighting with one's neighbour, hunting a more awkward place to lay one's egg, chasing others away from the water pan, or scratching up stray grains from the straw-covered floor—everything was abandoned, and they all ran towards the heavenly portal where their goddess had appeared. And by the time she had moved across the stable to the little granary where their food was kept, she was scarcely able to wade through the milling, shrieking importuning, white whirlpool of hens, all raising their voices in deafening clamour for food.

The hoppers were soon filled and the uproar died down immediately to a continuous dab-dab-dab from three hundred sharp beaks. She was able then to

wash the water pans, gather the eggs and put fresh straw into the nests.

Gathering the eggs was always exciting, a real treasure hunt. The few hens left on their nests did not like to be disturbed, but they trusted her and allowed her to move them aside, with only a little murmur of protest.

She could never understand their peculiar taste in nests, for all nests seemed alike to her. But some were never occupied, while others were as much in demand as an empty apartment in the housing shortage. The social leaders all fought for these. Sometimes she found three hens jammed uncomfortably and fretfully into one nest, with a dozen or more eggs under them, while on either side were empty nests lined with fresh straw.

Then there were some biddies who were original and resourceful, and turned their tails upon the neat houses to wander off to some obscure corner behind a barrel, or inside a pail there to deposit their treasure. These hidden eggs had to be hunted for, too, after the regular harvest had been gathered.

It was all very interesting, and Ellen was happy when she carried heaping baskets to Liza and Tilly to be cleaned and placed in crates for the arrival of the truck.

She took home all the sisters' pamphlets on egg production and studied them carefully. Liza's and Tilly's procedure had been rather haphazard, and under Ellen's careful methodical treatment the egg count rose rapidly.

She was conscious, too, of a feeling of physical well-being as she tramped down the lane on frosty mornings. The regular outdoor exercises four times a day was having a beneficial effect; her eyes were bright and her cheeks rosy.

She went down to her task a little earlier one afternoon. The roads had been ploughed the day before, and her father had driven to town to a meeting of Presbytery. He would be home early, and she wanted to be back before him to have the house warm. It had been a mild sunny day, but the shortest day of the year was near, and well she knew her biddies would scramble up to their roosts at the first sight of an evening shadow, no matter how hungry they were, and the next day her count of eggs would be down. They knew how to take a swift revenge for any neglect.

This had been a good day. The sun had been streaming into the little windows, and even Rosie the Riveter seemed to have a less strident voice than usual. And the harvest of eggs was abundant: fourteen dozen, the highest this week! Ellen counted them as a miser counts his gold. Tilly and Liza would be so glad.

Tilly was just coming out to the stable with her milking pails as Ellen

carried her last basket to the house. Tilly was dressed in an old pair of Gideon's overalls, and a discarded coat of Andy's. She was tall and thin, and Gid was short and broad, and the flapping garments could not be called a very good fit. Liza always said she wouldn't be found dead in the kind of a rig Till wore to the barn.

"My goodness, Ellen," Tilly cried enviously, "you always manage to look all dressed up no matter what you wear."

Ellen looked down at her overalls and leggings; they were trim and neat but far from dressy. "What, my battle dress?" she asked, laughing.

"Well it's kinda smart anyhow. It don't seem much use to dress up these days. Here we are about a week from Christmas and Liza and me don't seem to have any heart to get anything ready. What's the use o' bakin' mince pies and plum pudding when there's nobody to eat them?"

Ellen went on to the house thoughtfully. She had planned to ask Annie Pierson and the children for Christmas dinner. She might have the sisters too. It would surely be a dreary Christmas for them.

"Your Pa's jist got home!" Liza called, as Ellen put her last basket of eggs into the cool pantry off the kitchen. "I seen the car drive up."

"Oh, dear! And I wanted to be home first!"

"Well, he's home all right. And he's got a fire on in the study. I could see the smoke comin' out jist as soon as he got in. So he won't be cold. Don't forget some eggs for his supper!"

Ellen hurried away, swinging the little basket containing a half-dozen new laid eggs and a jar of cream. Supper was almost ready, so he would not have long to wait.

The early sunset was already lighting up the snowy landscape. The cold blue bay had changed to gold. The deep rose of the sky at the horizon faded higher up to pale pink, then to lemon, faded into jade green, yet again to crystal, and finally deepened into the blue above. There was one pale silver star, shining in the crystal. The Heavens were declaring the glory of the Lord and the earth was repeating the tale in a wealth of colour; the shadows of the spruce trees were a deep glowing blue, the weeds along the fences were gold. A filmy covering of rosy gossamer spread over the fields, and the snowy roofs of houses and barns.

It was a magic evening when anything good might happen, she thought, as she walked up the lane facing the sunset. She never came home of an evening

now without looking at the glow above Tilly's gate and remembering the shining light that had led her forward. She shaded her eyes to look at it now and saw a man's figure in the gateway, against the glowing background: a tall figure in a long overcoat that blended with the blues of the snow—a coat of air-force blue!

She stopped suddenly in the path. This was nonsense, she told herself sternly. She had allowed herself to think so much about him that every soldier she saw—but while her mind argued that this was foolishness, her heart knew who it was standing at the gate in the sunset waiting for her.

She came on noiselessly over the hard packed snow, but he turned his gaze from the coloured skies and saw her, and came striding down the path to meet her.

Ellen made a desperate rally of all her resources and called out, "Welcome to Lairdale!" And then his glove was off and they were greeting each other in formal fashion.

He was all apologies for coming unannounced. "I hadn't expected a leave," he declared, "it was handed to me only this morning. So I remembered all the summer invitations from my relatives, and ran for the train to Carlisle. I had hoped to meet a Laird on the street; then I heard about the meeting of Presbytery, and whom should I find there but your father, and he brought me along! I know I'm taking liberties. But I could go to Aunt Bella or Mrs. Steve."

Ellen managed to protest hospitably, though rather breathlessly. No, no, he was most welcome. And her father would be so happy to have him. He must stay. He took the little basket from her, and they walked side by side down the smooth coloured alabaster of the road, through a world of unbelievable beauty: a dream world, appropriately decorated in rainbows for the occasion. She felt relieved when her father met them at the door. It was safer to get back into a real world.

"So you found your way," he said.

"Oh, easily," the guest answered, his eyes shining. "I met Rosalind in the lane."

"What a compliment to my poor old battle dress," Ellen managed to say, as she left him to her father and ran upstairs. Her mind was busy with thoughts of supper. What would one do, she wondered, when one's world was turned all upside-down in whirling rainbows, if one hadn't some homely tasks to steady one?

A few minutes with soap and water and hair brush, and Rosalind was transformed into a smart young modern. She slipped on her rose crepe. It was very old, but soft and glowing like the world outside. She wished she could have had something very special for supper. It ought to be a banquet. But she would have to serve what was ready. The shepherd's pie she had left in the oven for her father's supper was brown and fragrant, and it was large enough for four. And here were the home-made rolls that needed only to be popped into the oven to make them seem newly baked. There were muffins, too, made that morning, and she would put some of the biggest spy apples in to bake while she set the table. Tilly's cream would whip up in a jiffy. Perhaps it wouldn't be such a poor supper, after all!

There were some big knots of old apple wood in the living-room fireplace. She put a match to them and set the small table with her mother's best china near the blazing hearth. And she lit the candles, just before summoning her father and the guest.

Evidently he thought the supper a feast, for he apologized for his soldier's appetite. He had not had a real home meal for so long he had forgotten how good everything tasted.

Her father was unfeignedly delighted to see him again, and kept asking about his father and the work on the prairie. And what was a chaplaincy like in comparison to a pastorate? Ellen wished it were possible to be as frank as her father, and let him see how rapturous she was at having him here at their table. But she played the gracious hostess, carefully, attending to the guest's wants, and listening to the talk. It was still like a dream. She would likely wake up and find it had never happened!

He made his presence very real, however after supper. He followed her out to the kitchen and insisted upon helping with the dishes. She was sure he wouldn't know how to do them properly, she protested laughing, Ron always broke all the handles off the cups if she let him help.

But he was an expert, he boasted. Just let him show her! "My poor mother had never a girl to help her, and Dad saw to it that we boys learned to make ourselves useful about the house. Being the youngest, I came in for the largest share!" He was polishing her mother's fragile glasses with alarming vigour as he talked. "Dave and Rob were away before me, and I was all the daughters of my father's house, which was very hard on the Lairds!"

It was wonderful how similar their home life had been. They lingered over the dishes, talking about school days and laughing over the joys and sorrows of their early life. "I had two tutors," he declared. "I got most of my education

from Dave and Rob. It was sometimes painful, but I have no doubt it was wholesome!"

It was the same with her, "Ron brought me up, mostly on insults, but I suppose it kept me from being a prig."

The dishwashing took so long that her father came to the kitchen to see if he could be of any help.

Then there was the evening around the fire with the rose-shaded lamp glowing in the centre of the old polished table. Mr. Carruthers was eager for news of the church on the frontier, and the guest told of his mission fields far up in the wooded regions of northern Alberta. He had liked it up there. The first season he went in with an old hired Ford as far as the road could take him, and the rest of the way on horseback. And he had had a grand summer down the Athabasca. He had his pilot's license and he and his pal flew in and passed over a forest fire. The people back there were grand, hardy, pioneer folk. And they needed a church so badly. They ought to have more men.

Ellen sat knitting a sock for Ronald, listening and learning more about their guest, all to her undoing. Personal ambition was not for him. He was all enthusiasm for his work, filled with a compelling purpose to serve his country and his fellow men. She saw her father regarding him with a look of wistfulness. This was the life he had always hoped Ronald would choose. He had been deeply disappointed when his only son had refused to enter the ministry.

"It is too bad the war should interrupt," he said sadly.

"It would not be so bad if they did not keep chaplains doing the goose-step at camps for so long," he said ruefully; he had expected to be overseas long before this.

"And I suppose you have no idea where you will be sent?"

No, but it did not really matter; he would be with the men. It might be England or Italy or Africa, or even Iceland.

Though she send you as she sent you long ago,
South to desert, east to ocean, west to snow

—the elder minister quoted.

"Ah, that's what old Professor Fraser always used to quote to us when he handed us our appointments to mission fields. We were always pretty sure it would be 'north to snow' for us."

"*Where the young Star-captains glow*," Ellen added softly, and he turned

swiftly to her with a look that made her bend her head over her knitting, to hunt for a dropped stitch that was not dropped.

When at last Mr. Carruthers said that he must be tired after his journey, and that they had all better get to bed early, he broke out contritely.

"Oh, here I have been enjoying myself and forgetting that I simply walked in on you. This is an imposition, and I know there are so many of my father's people . . ."

But his host silenced his protests, and Ellen reminded him that the visiting minister must always stay at the manse, and he admitted it. He really wanted to stay, he declared honestly.

Ellen explained about their early breakfast, and that he must not get up for it. This was her special war effort, supplying eggs for Ronald and for Rosamond, Liza's niece who was a nurse in England. And she had to be at the barn early, for the biddies scrambled down from their roosts at the first peep of dawn.

But he would go with her and help. He was even better at raising poultry then he was at drying dishes, he boasted.

"Father always kept a cow and hens, and when we kids were growing up we had to take care of them. Why can't I come and help?"

Ellen explained that her biddies, being thoroughbreds, were very exclusive and would have nothing to do with outsiders.

"And the Cabots speak only to the Goddess," he teased. "You ought to mix some democracy with their laying mash."

"I don't believe it is so much snobbishness. They're like my father here, and can't bear any change about them. I always wear my battle dress, but one day when it was very cold Tilly gave me an old red sweater, and when they saw it they all went into hysterics."

"Well, I'll come along, anyway. I can clean out the stable for Cousin Tilly or Liza or whoever it is. Do you know, sir," he said, turning to Mr. Carruthers, "on my first mission field, preaching was merely incidental, though we didn't put that into our reports for our Superintendent. I even had to show a couple of English lads how to chop down a tree."

"Ah, the minister of the Gospel has to be all things to all men. How did a prairie lad like you learn to fell a tree?"

"Oh, there were lots of bluffs of small timber near home, and we soon

learned to use an axe. And my father was a mighty axeman in his younger days, Uncle Geordie tells me."

"And I could have told you, too. Well, well, I remember once when your father was just finishing his first year in theology. He was home one week-end over here at the Old Home Place when there was a chopping bee down at Johnny Armstrong's, Granma Armstrong's you know, and . . ."

The talk of the old days was so pleasant that it was late when at last they went up to their beds.

Nothing more was said about the morning arrangements, but the guest was down as soon as the coffee began to boil. He smelled it, he declared, and had to come. They went down the lane together in the rosy dawn. It had snowed the night before and he tramped ahead to make a better path for her. The early sun was sending the long blue shadows of the spruce trees across the lane, a great grey jack-rabbit went leaping across the lilac fields.

"Eight more days," he was saying, "I can easily recall eight cousins or second cousins who have invited me to stay with them. I could stay a day at each place and nobody would have time to get bored with me."

"Oh, but you must not," Ellen cried. It was much easier to talk to him this way, when his back was turned, "Father won't hear of it. I wish I could tell you how much pleasure your visit is giving him already. When the roads have cleared a little he will take you to call on all the relatives. He will enjoy that, too, and then nobody will be hurt."

"If I could be sure I am not adding to your burdens, I'd gladly stay," he said.

She hastened to reassure him, though she was telling herself that eight more days of this sort of comradeship and there would be no more peace of mind for her ever again. But when the present was rapturous how could one be troubled about the future?

This was Andy Armstrong's home, she told him, as they entered the yard, and Sailor came roaring out at the stranger. Liza and Tilly had seen them coming and they followed with loud welcome. But when he demanded a pair of Andy's overalls and a fork they were aghast to think that a minister would so far forget his calling as to go cleaning out a stable. But there was no way to stop him and he was soon at work with the sisters running around him in mingled distress and delight.

He had finished the work and had turned the separator for Tilly before Ellen came out. He did not venture into the hen house, but he was waiting at

the door to help her carry the eggs.

"What a grand bit of war work you three are doing," he cried, "and with all your men away, too. I wish Churchill could see you!"

And Tilly and Liza felt as if they had received a decoration. They hastened to tell him that they could never have done it but for Ellen, and while she put the eggs away in the pantry they told him how she came to take on the work of egg-production.

The glory of the morning had faded to a soft, faint grey as they walked up the lane together. A few feathery snow flakes came floating down and rested on Ellen's hair and the fur of her collar. They fell silent as they moved through the hushed whiteness. When they turned out onto the road he spoke.

"Cousin Islay told me how you built a bridge of faith to come home on," he said in a low tone.

"It was not so hard," Ellen said shyly, "with my father at the other side."

She wished she could tell him how she had come to it by following the Shining Light, but she felt safer on more common place ground.

At the noon day meal Mr. Carruthers planned their visiting. They would go down and see Young Geordie and stay for supper and on the way they must call on Old Geordie who was up and around again. All this was provided the snowfall did not fill up the road.

But the snow continued, with a wind to add to its work of blocking the roads, and Ellen telephoned Young Geordie and said they would probably be over the next afternoon.

When they returned in the yellow sunset from the evening chores the snow was still falling, and they moved slowly through the softly piling flakes. Ellen was starry-eyed and radiant. It was impossible not to be happy. They came in covered with the snow, and shook themselves on the back porch. He took the broom and swept her feet.

"You mus' wipe your feet on de outside door," Ellen said lightly, recalling the Habitant poems they had been discussing. "You dead man sure if you spit on de floor," he added, and they looked at each other like a pair of delighted children, and laughed. It was always happening like that. There was something magical about it. If one quoted a line, the other added the next one, whether it might be from Henry Drummond, or Tennyson, or Masefield. She wished she could ask his opinion of some of the modern stories she had to review. But she tried to keep their conversation at a light casual level. When you were skating

on very thin ice, she warned herself, you had better keep near the solid frost-bound shore!

15

The Girl He left Behind Him

The next day was as full of magic as the first; another day of close comradeship, as they tramped down the lane, or sat by the fire, or hunted through the book shelves. He wanted to hear all about her; school, university, and the work she had left to serve her father. And he confided his ambitions; all the things he wanted to do when the war was over. And unconsciously he revealed a nature so large and generous and self-forgetting that Ellen's heart slipped from her last feeble control.

She clung tenaciously to her rôle of gracious hostess, continuing to argue sternly with her wayward heart. He was her father's guest, under his roof for a brief vacation, and remaining only because he was caught in a storm. He was trying to make himself useful to her, lest he be a burden; and she was reading into the attentions of a courteous guest far more than he could possibly mean. He would be exactly the same if he were visiting Tilly and Liza.

She had had the spectre of Angela Drummond to stiffen her, but he dispelled even that as they shovelled and swept a path to the mail box in the glittering, diamond-strewn, snow of the sunny morning. She had been telling him of his Laird relatives, especially those of his immediate family. He was so glad he had found Cousin Islay and Doctor Mack, he said. Weren't they the grand pair? He paused for a little there, leaning on his shovel. It was sad, but didn't it seem that wealth had a corroding effect upon character, especially if one were brought up with it? Money! It did something to you! He and Rob and Dave had always grumbled about their poverty; and their mother would always say very likely the Lord knew He could not trust them with more than just sufficient to scratch along on. He had no doubt she was right.

So poor Angela had failed to charm him! Another support gone. And there were eight more days! Where would she get the strength of character to withstand the magic of eight more such days?

Christmas was only a few days ahead, and while trying to make preparations for Christmas dinner, Ellen was embarrassed by a wealth of invitations. Tilly and Liza had felt that Christmas would be but an empty show with Gid and Andy away at sea. But suddenly they decided to have a bang-up dinner with the folks from the manse and all Dodd's family. Their two biggest turkeys were hanging frozen in the shed, all stuffed and ready. Then Aunt

Bella, and Steve's Minnie, and Granma Armstrong had also telephoned urgent invitations. The reason for all this hospitality was at a loss to know how he could eat five Christmas dinners in one day, even with a soldier's appetite.

"Whether we have a dinner or not we must have Dickens's *Christmas Carol*," he said that evening, running over the books on the living-room shelves. Supper was over and the applewood fire he had made was burning brightly, sending out a subtle perfume of blossoms and springtime. They had tried to listen to the radio for the latest news from the front, but the storm had interfered. Mr. Carruthers was busy in his study and Ellen and the guest were alone. She sat in her low chair by the fire knitting on Ronald's sock.

"All, here it is," he said. "Why, you have all Dickens! Father and Mother read us the *Christmas Carol* every Christmas from the time we were old enough to listen."

He took down another volume, *David Copperfield*.

"Mother read it all to Ron and me in the evenings when Father was out," Ellen said. "How we loved Peggotty, and hated the Murdstones."

"And here's poor old Mistress Gummidge. Is this where you got your name for your cat?"

"Of course. Haven't you heard her telling everybody she's a 'lone, lorn cretur'?"

He laughed. "I surely have. That's why I like dogs. Eh, Rowdy?" Rowdy came jumping up on him in delight. "They never complain, do they, old boy?" He patted the brown head affectionately. "And here's *Oliver Twist*. Old Fagan and his boys. Ah! The Artful." He was silent for a minute. "*The Artful Dodger*," he finished softly.

Ellen glanced up, startled, to find him looking down at her with laughing eyes. She was annoyed to find a flush rising in her cheeks.

"Andy told me," he confessed, "but it was all my fault."

"Oh, Andy!" she cried. "That boy's imagination runs away with him."

"He didn't really mean to tell. It was that night before he left. I had been acting as a sort of father confessor to poor Andy, and I'm afraid I got more out of him than his confession."

Ellen laughed nervously. She longed to ask him what Andy had told, but dared not.

"I've been so grateful to you for helping Andy that night," she said,

striving for a change of subject. “The poor boy was in a reckless mood when he went away.”

“I hope I did something for him,” he put the book on the shelf, “because,” he hesitated and walked over to the fireplace, “because Andy did something wonderful for me that night.” He paused again and added in a low tone, “I may tell you about it some day.”

And then her father came into the room and Ellen was left to wonder and speculate.

Mr. Carruthers settled himself happily before the fire.

“There’s a ring around the moon tonight, and the roads are all blocked again. I’m afraid there will be no visiting for us tomorrow, Captain.”

The guest took an apple from the shining rosy pile on the table. He leaned back luxuriously and stretched his long legs out towards the fire.

“This Ontario winter meets all my ideals,” he said. “Who knows but it may be good enough to snow for eight days more. There might even be no church service on Sunday!” He glanced at his host. “Do you know, sir, I begin to fear I’ve mistaken my calling!”

Her father burst into such a spontaneous laugh that Ellen looked up at him in delight. It was a long time since she had heard him laugh like that.

“Ah, well, well,” he said, “a comfortable fire on a cold night always brings me that fear even yet!”

“And what about your marooned pets,” the guest asked, turning to Ellen, “if this keeps up.”

“Oh, I still have to make my calling and election sure,” she said gaily, “I have Ron’s snow shoes.”

“There ought to be a new kind of Victoria Cross,” he said.

Mr. Carruthers had risen and was searching through the shelf where he kept the poets.

“Ah, here is what we want, Whittier. We must read *Snow-bound* and see what is ahead of us tomorrow.”

He settled himself with the book and began to read the poet’s description of a great winter’s snowfall, so much like the one that was filling the air outside—-

A night made hoary with the swarm

And whirl-dance of the blinding storm.

He was interrupted by the telephone ringing the manse number. Ellen moved to go, but the guest jumped up and strode out into the hall. “It will be another invitation to Christmas dinner!” he declared. But Ellen listened with some apprehension. It was the long brisk ring that came from central. She could see him stiffen as though to attention at the first sound of a voice.

“Yes,” he was saying, “yes, Dallas Laird speaking!” And now the two by the fire were listening breathlessly.

“Leave cancelled. I see. Yes? Thursday; eight a.m. Tomorrow? Please repeat it. Yes, thank you. Right O! I have it!”

He came striding back into the room. The other two were on their feet.

“A telegram,” he said quietly. “We’re moving at last. What train can I get tonight?”

“Train?” Mr. Carruthers cried in dismay. “Did it say tomorrow morning? In Toronto?”

“Yes, I’ve got to get there. There must have been some oversight. I should have been notified sooner.”

“But you would have to catch the midnight train from Carlisle tonight. And how can you get there?” Ellen whispered.

“I could go on skis. How far is it? Ten miles?”

“You couldn’t!” Mr. Carruthers cried. “Not in this storm. Wait! We’ll see. If somebody could get you out to a road! I’ll call Steve.”

He hurried to the telephone, and Ellen noticed in a dim dream that her father was suddenly alert and masterful. Already the manse number was ringing again. Everyone on the Bay Shore knew that their chaplain, who had come to them for the Christmas holidays, was summoned back to headquarters. Steve was there and everyone else. Sure! They could try, anyhow! Steve declared. No, there was no road. But they could take a team through the fields.

The Bush Road was all right, another voice cried. It was Tom Armstrong. He had come down that way this afternoon by the Big Crick.

Another voice from the lower farms: folks said the ice was fine along the shore since last night. Mebby they could drive in on the ice, if they could get down here. If they kept close to the shore!

A loud authoritative voice broke in; Bob’s Bob from Acton Hill, who ran the snow plough. He had just been down the road three miles on the Lake

Shore. He was telephoning from Piper's place. If they could get the Padre up to the Lake Shore he would see there was a road to town. He'd start as soon as they did.

Sure, Steve shouted. They could take him across the fields to the Bush Road and up to the Lake Shore that way. Was Bob dead sure the Lake Shore would be open? Which everyone knew was an insult to the new snow plough.

Steve was bellowing orders now to the whole Bay Shore. This was a rôle he loved. "Hi, you guys! Everybody get your teams out! We'll take him through the fields as far as the Big Crick and up the Bush Road! We'll need a lotta teams and there'll be some tall shovellin' before we get outa this road here."

Offers were coming from all down the line. But the voice of Young Geordie drowned them all. This was surely his great hour, his triumph over man-made motor cars. He was coming himself, he thundered; was hitched up now! Everybody else was silent. It was a night of terrible storm and deep snow, but if there was a man in Ontario who could get a team of horses through drifts it was Young Geordie. He was coming with Prince and Peggy to go through the worst part. They would make it!

A far faint voice was trying to make itself heard. It grew louder as the others listened. Bob's Bob shouting again from up on the Lake Shore. Some fellas had just got out from town and said the road from the Hill in was fine. They'd take him from here in a car! Get him up here to the Lake Shore and they'd run him in. The Lake Shore wasn't like that rabbit track down there. It was a road! Bill was ready. Bill would take him in his car.

Mr. Carruthers turned from the telephone, a spot of excitement burning in each withered cheek. His eyes were shining. The Lairds would do it. Every man was getting out with his team to break a semblance of a road down to where Young Geordie could turn off into the fields. Pete's boys would take him up the Bush Road to the Lake Shore. And after that the cars would be running.

Mr. Carruthers had scarcely described the line of march when there was a storm of sleigh-bells at the gate, and the light of a lantern came wavering up towards the door. The guest grabbed his cap and ran out, Rowdy leaping at his side. Ellen saw her father about to follow, caught him in time, and brought his overcoat and cap. It was their nearest neighbour across the road, Old Alf Laird, with his hired man, Bud Armstrong, driving the team. Old Alf was sitting erect on the snowy platform of the wide sleigh, holding a shovel. Out to do his bit to get a soldier off to the war, he cried. Everyone said that Old Alf had dropped

ten years since his son Alfred had sailed on the *Empress of Asia*.

Ellen stood for a moment, looking out at the figures moving about in the driving snow and the wavering light of the lantern. The cold air rushed into the house, she shut the door and went shivering back to the fire. She went out to the kitchen with the desperate feeling that she must do something—anything. For a moment she could feel nothing but the overwhelming pain of his going. He would be away in a few minutes. She would likely never see him again. He was gone from her already, his mind all set on the means of getting away.

She looked around for something to do; something to hold back this flood of despair that threatened to overwhelm her. He would have nothing to eat until he reached Toronto in the early morning! She must make him a lunch.

There was cold chicken left from supper, and a piece of fragrant ham that Liza had given her that very evening, so long ago! She would make him some sandwiches. And here were some of the oatmeal cookies he had liked so much. She had used up recklessly nearly all her sugar coupons to make them.

As she worked she heard the two men come back into the house, stamping the snow from their feet. Her father went to the telephone again. She could hear the guest go up the stairs, three at a time, and the sound of his military boots tramping about overhead. He was packing his bag. His hostess should go up and offer to help. Men forgot things. But she dared not go near him. She was possessed of only one thought, a desperate determination not to break down, not to be another Aunt Susie.

She must stand up and bid him a kind and dignified good-bye. If she let him see what his going meant to her she would die of shame afterwards. She called desperately upon all her resources and beyond them. This was surely the time to call upon the Strong for strength!

Her father was calling up the stairs. Young Geordie was on his way, but the road through his fields was pretty heavy. Steve would be here soon, though. Dallas had better drive down with Steve a bit to meet Geordie. Then he was back at the telephone again. There were more bells and lanterns, and the flash of shovels at the gate, and she heard her father go out again.

The lunch was ready, packed in a box and securely tied. She took it out to the hall and placed it beside his cap which was lying on the table—the cap with the dark cross between the white outspread wings.

There was nothing more she could do. If he would only hurry away so that she would not have to bid him good-bye! She slipped back into the kitchen and out into a small chilly hall that led to the study. It was dark here. If she could

only hide here till he was just leaving!

She heard him come running down the stairs and drop his bag with a thud on the hall floor. He was putting on his great-coat.

The door before her was ajar and she could see into the study. She heard him tramp into the living-room and then into the kitchen. He was looking for her to say good-bye, and she must go in and speak to him. Then she saw him come into the study!

"Ellen!" he called hoarsely. "Where are you?"

She realized in a dim way that this was the first time he had called her by her first name. And then she saw his face in the lamplight. He was pale, and his eyes were full of anguish and, being Ellen, she forgot her own pain at the amazing sight of his.

She came out to him quickly. "I was making you a lunch," she faltered.

He did not hear her. He was talking, uttering wild, unbelievable things.

"Ellen! I can't leave you like this! I have no right to speak yet—but it's my last leave!" He was breathless as if he had been running. "You surely must know that I love you! I loved you the first minute I saw you under the apple tree! I knew you were the only girl—and I thought—I was told I was too late! Do you think? Could you ever——?"

He stopped suddenly; for Ellen was standing looking up at him with her heart in her eyes.

Mr. Carruthers came back into the house. There was a light coming over a far field from the direction of Young Geordie's, a lantern blinking through the driving snow.

"It may be Young Geordie, Captain," he said.

There was no answer. He thought he heard low murmurs coming from the study, and stepped to the half-open door. And then he stumbled back hastily and tiptoed out into the night again, filled with wonder and amaze over the manner in which his daughter and their guest were bidding each other farewell. He stood on the veranda in the cold and darkness but noticed neither, feeling only a strange warmth stealing through his anxious heart.

There were shouts, and the sound of bells, and the misty glow of a lantern at the gate. Steve's two younger boys, who had come out to see the sport, were storming up on the veranda, sending the icicles crashing and tinkling over the steps. Steve, looking twice his size in a blanket of snow, came floundering up

to the door.

"All ready, Mr. Carruthers!" he shouted. "Where's the passenger?" He flung open the door.

"All aboard, Padre!" he boomed. And the next moment the soldier was gone out into the night and the storm, and Ellen was standing in the lighted doorway, straining her eyes through the whirling snow to catch one last glimpse of air-force blue!

There was quite a knot of neighbours at the gate, and they went plunging after the sleigh. Tilly and Liza were there. Tilly carried a shovel and Liza a broom. They didn't know whether they would be any use, they said, but they thought they might as well go up to the gate and see if anything was to be done about the big drift there. They had heard over the 'phone that Granma Armstrong was out. She went to the barn to help Tom get out the team.

But Young Geordie was coming, and would meet Steve below the hill at the corner. If there was anybody could get a team through the drifts, it was Young Geordie!

The war had been over for years before they stopped talking about that night on the Bay Shore. All the summer visitors were told, over and over, the story of how the Lairds and the Armstrongs got their chaplain out to catch the midnight train at Carlisle through the biggest storm of the winter. If there had been a poet in Lairdale, the minister said, he would surely have told it in verse and Uncle Tom Armstrong would have sung it.

It was a great night; the night of the Old Brigade, all out to win the war with their teams and their shovels. And Young Geordie was the hero. It was a sight, everyone said, to see him coming through the worst spot opposite the Old Home Place, and something even better to hear him. He was standing up on his sleigh; his legs far apart, roaring like the bay when the ice is breaking up, as his team floundered and plunged through the drifts. Sometimes they went down till their backs disappeared, sometimes they reared and snorted indignantly, and sometimes they had to lie for a minute against the packed snow till they recovered their wind, for the next plunge.

And all the time Young Geordie never stopped talking to them. He threatened, he coaxed, he cajoled. He flattered and praised when they did well, and reviled when they seemed to fail. And Prince and Peggy understood every word he said and put every ounce of strength they possessed into the mighty task.

Yes, it was a great night, everybody said, and the chaplain himself said it,

when at last they reached the sheltered Bush Road and a new team and sleigh took him up the hill to where the glaring lights of the snow plough shone through the storm.

"A great night!" he shouted back, as he drove away. It was a big storm, he declared, but the Lairdale men were bigger than any snow storm old Ontario could muster!

Old Bob Laird's Bill was waiting in the track of the snow plough with his car, and they were off down the newly ploughed road like skiers coming down the side of the Blue Ridge. But in spite of the good work done on the road they had to report that the car got stuck twice, and Bill and the Padre had to dig furiously to get away again.

And wasn't that just like the Lake Shore folks! the Bay Shore declared, as they stabled their horses and put away their shovels. The folks up there on the Lake Shore were that uppish about their road being a paved highway, and look what happened after Young Geordie had got the Padre through the drifts! But Young Geordie blamed the car. If Bill had only had sense enough to take a good spankin' team to town they'd have got there far sooner. Never trust a car!

But they caught the train, Bill reported, though with not a breath to spare. Ellen and her father had been sitting by the telephone listening to every call. The manse had completely lost its unique reputation for never listening in on its neighbours' conversations. But Ellen had been promised a last message if he had time, and she sat and waited, wondering how it was possible for a human heart to be filled at one and the same time with rapture and anguish.

And then the message came, but it was only Bob's Bill. The Padre had had to run for it, he reported. But he left word for Bill to thank them all. He said he guessed there never was anybody had such relations as he had. He hoped they'd be half as anxious to get him back as they had been to get rid of him; because he was coming back as soon as the war was over.

"And he left a special message for the folks at the manse," he added.

"Yes, Bill," Ellen's voice answered promptly, but very faintly.

"He said to tell yous both he was awful sorry he hadn't time to phone," the boy answered, "and he said to tell you he'd left something at your place, Ellen."

"Something he forgot to pack?"

"I dunno. The train was movin' and he was standin' on the steps hollerin' at me. But he said to be sure and tell you he'd left something there that

belonged to him, and he'd be back for it."

Ellen made a little sound, half sob, half laugh.

"Oh, yes. I know, Bill, thank you. I'll keep it for him."

And Liza and Tilly said afterwards they thought it was so queer that Ellen would never tell anybody what it was he left behind.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

[The end of *Yonder Shining Light* by Marian Keith [M.E.M. MacGregor]]