As A Watered Garden

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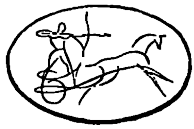

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Transplanted

ISLAY DRUMMOND PAUSED AT THE LOW WINDOW. THROUGH it she looked at the old apple orchard, at green fields stretching behind the barn—far to the blue sweep of Georgian Bay. Islay looked with a feeling of satisfaction and of emancipation. She looked with an owner's eye.

This was the last room, Islay remembered with relief. They had concluded their tour of the old farm house, poking about from the dim, cool cellar to this hot, stuffy little bedroom over the kitchen, her fastidious sisters becoming increasingly dubious as room after room was explored. There was an 'old house' smell, a smell of old plaster, a 'closed in' smell of old furniture, old clothing, old air. Now Jeanette sniffed delicately, drew her trim, tailored skirt from contact with Great-Aunt Christena's old feather bed. Tiny curls of soft down sprouted from its striped bed-surface, drifted lazily up, as Kate prodded the soft depths, gingerly. Like stirring up old memories, old ways, thought Islay.

"There's the identical old log-cabin quilt we slept under, remember Jen? Three in a bed. Twenty years ago!" Kate spoke with mounting irritation. "For heaven's sake, Islay, don't invite any of our friends out week ends this summer, if you're still determined to stay. This is just too quaint!"

Jeanette was amused. "Scared the elegant Wades or old lady Halliday might view the dirt from which the Drummonds were digged?"

"Don't be archaic! It doesn't suit you." Kate had decided that old houses didn't suit *her*. "Can't imagine why Great-Aunt Christena left you the place," she complained to Islay's back.

Kate was not imaginative, Islay remembered.

"More sensible if she had left it to me." Jeanette had been wanting to say this ever since the will was read. "What a wonderful place to leave the children summers!"

Islay was preoccupied with the view.

"A wonder she didn't saddle us with it, she knew how I hated the old farm. She was quite capable of it!"

Kate was like Great-Aunt Christena, Islay supposed, wearily, and turned her attention again to the view. Below were the rosebushes and lilacs, the sprawling, untrimmed orchard trees that her forebears had planted. Beyond, the fields her great-grandfather had cleared, laboriously with his axe. A smile, probably prompted by intense speculation, broke slowly over her face, wiped away a vaguely defined discontent, which had been settling into something chronic.

"I never hated it," she declared. "I always loved to come here when we were little. I'd really love to try it!" Islay was the youngest sister, and even yet had the absurd feeling that Kate must be deferred to, placated. "Just for one summer!" She felt herself almost pleading. Like a little child coaxing for sweets. "Poor old Mr. Francis will never give me such a vacation again, I don't suppose. And when the summer's over I'll be glad enough to take up the old routine again."

"You'll perish of loneliness in the interim, hon." Jeanette was singularly cheerful about the scheme.

"There'll be absolutely no social life you can join in." Kate was reminding her. "Unless you're planning to raise pigs or something equally revolting, I can't see how you'll put in your time."

Islay was looking far out—across the bay. Silent. Difficult to think things out with this staccato in the background. So much to think about . . . Would they soon go . . .

"Mum-*my*! Mums Mitchell!" It was a young voice, flute-like, but strangely shrill. "What's keeping you? We're all waiting and Uncle Foster's car is red-hot!"

Jeanette Mitchell turned, abruptly. She and her husband prided themselves on being modern parents. Their children expressed themselves and they obeyed. Kate Lawrence followed her directly. She had a distinct picture of the red-hot car, and of her husband, Foster Lawrence, smouldering in it. Not safe to keep him smouldering.

"You don't suppose for a minute, do you," Jeanette turned to whisper to her sister, as they managed a cautious descent of the narrow stairs, "that Islay has another reason for wanting to spend her summer back here in the sticks. You know . . ." Kate glanced surreptitiously over her shoulder to see that Islay was not within earshot. "Mack Wallace? Oh heavens no! Not at her age. Anyway Islay's too good a hater. She'll never forgive him!"

Islay felt vaguely guilty of family disloyalty. She lagged behind her sisters.

Out in the summer kitchen where they had made a fire that morning to boil coffee for the picnic, she felt warmth still radiating from the huge farm cook stove.

"And she has an electric range in her apartment!" Kate looked briefly, and with no great favour on this sulking substitute.

"And frigidaire," Jeanette marvelled at such perversity in the family.

"And three radios above her and two pianos beneath," said Islay, bringing up the rear.

Outside, four cars were lined up at the head of the lane before the front door, ready for the return to the city. This had been the Drummond's first visit in many years to their mother's old home. In their childhood they had scampered over these fields and romped about the hay-mow. Now their mother was dead. And her children, no longer children, had been too intent on success to take time to look back. Great-Aunt Christena Laird had lived here alone for years, and had never encouraged visits from relatives, anyway. When the old lady died, and the will was read, it had been a matter of great amazement to find that the farm, together with the Old Laird Home had been left to her great-niece, Islay Drummond. The whole Drummond family had taken a holiday, and had driven out, protesting but curious, to picnic under the orchard trees, and to see the new tenant established.

"You girls leave her alone, if it's what she wants." Robert was the head of the family, and liked telling his sisters what to think. "Islay's had a few knocks. This place may give her a new lease on life. She'll be fed up with it by September anyway."

Pete was younger. Younger than Islay. He was already in his smart little coupe, in a hurry to get off. What girl was waiting for him tonight, Islay wondered. Pete was nice!

"Bye, Sis," he called gaily, "when you bring your butter and eggs to market give us a shout."

She laughed as she caught his arm and shook him. Pete was a pet!

"What do you think, Pete? Do you think I'm crazy to live here alone for the summer. Do you?" she persisted.

"It's your party. Why shouldn't you stay. The only thing . . ."

"What?"

"Well, of course I'd be bored stiff in a week, myself. But. . . Well. . . Rob

says there's a doctor from Carlisle runs up and down this little old road peddling pills an' everything." Pete looked a little embarrassed, but his eyes twinkled, genially.

Islay stiffened. Hard to be angry with Pete though. "I can't see why that should affect me, Pete," she said, quietly.

Pete laughed. A certain relief. There, she'd been warned, and he hadn't had what might be called a rebuff. That was that. "Atta girl! I'll run out and see you some day," he promised, his foot on the starter.

"Do, Pete," she cried cordially. Yet in her heart she half-hoped she might be left alone by her family. Pete was different, of course. He really counted.

Jeanette and Syd Mitchell were assembling their family. There were four little Mitchells, but it was unusual to find four little Mitchells in the same place at the same time. The flute-voiced Mitchell, who had instigated the home round-up, was discovered high up in the old apple tree. He was enticed down, and finally three other little Mitchells appeared from somewhere or other, and were bundled in the car without ceremony.

"This *would* be a wonderful place for them while I'm at the I.O.D.E. convention, Islay." Jeanette had not given up hope.

"No you don't!" Syd spoke squarely. "Don't go wishing this pirate crew of ours on Islay, while you're off lecturing on Child Care."

Islay's regard for Syd deepened.

"I never lectured on Child Care, but it's a thought." Jeanette tucked her hair under her smart little hat.

Robert's car was a long, sleek beauty, with soft, feline purr. Robert had acquired a sleekness too, Islay reflected. 'R. Fraser Drummond' was what Rob had lately evolved into, she reflected in quiet amusement. He was prosperous, and Mrs. R. Fraser Drummond and daughters were social. '*My husband's great-grandmother, the Lady Islay Fraser*', Mrs. R. Fraser was given to bringing her out at the tea tables. A subdued, incidental mention, in harmony with the well-bred tinkle of old, thin silver on egg-shell cups. 'The Lady Islay!'—she was half-myth, half-tradition. She had married beneath her, fled across the ocean with courage in her heart and a husband at her side, had helped to found a home in this Canadian backwoods. And the husband, Robert Laird, a memory now, a slab in the old country churchyard, had felled the first tree on this very farm. Had made land. Had lived a good life.

"Well, Islay Isabel," Rob was speaking in his urbane, but kindly fashion.

“Mother must have had a second sight when she gave you our great-grandmother’s name. The Lady Islay has returned to her inheritance,” he bowed, mockingly.

Two smart young daughters in the back seat were frankly bored.

“Step on it, daddy,” Angela urged, sweetly. “Gwen has a date.”

“Aren’t you a lamb!” Gwen raised one expertly shaped eyebrow, skeptically. “Angela’s dithering over two dates. Why don’t you toss up?”

“Well, if you get too lonesome for us, Islay, just shut up the old place and come out to us. We’ll be at the lake all month.” Mrs. R. Fraser Drummond was human enough to hate leaving her.

In fact Mary was always kind. Islay waved, and watched them off, serenely aware that Foster was waiting, impatient, behind.

Kate’s husband had started his car fully ten minutes before. It was against his principles to turn off the ignition. That would be an admission that *he’d* been kept waiting. All right to be late—that was something you did to other people. Now, both Foster and Foster’s motor were spluttering and inarticulate.

“Where’s my handbag?” demanded Kate, looking at Islay as though she might have it.

“Where’s *everybody*,” fumed Foster. “What do you think this is! I’ve got an appointment. And I’m half an hour late now!”

Mr. Drummond, junior, appeared miraculously, leaned wearily against the car door. He grinned affably at Islay. “Dad’s always half an hour late,” he confided. “It’s chronic.”

Foster Drummond looked at him murderously.

Kate and the handbag reappeared, and Harriet was with her—a tall, graceful girl, with pouting, discontented dark little face.

“I really don’t know what’s got into her lately,” Kate was telling Islay. “Fancy, Mrs. Wade asked her to stay with them till we got back! I thought she’d be thrilled! Just as good as admitting she’s engaged to Denton Wade! And here . . .” She gestured, helplessly, caught an expression in Foster’s eye, and hurriedly climbed to her place beside him.

Harriet was in no hurry.

She turned to Islay. “This old dump of yours is a riot, Islay. Even the telephone won’t function.”

"Certainly not. It hasn't been connected yet. Did you want to use it?"

"Shush up," whispered Harriet, "can't you see mums' ears hanging out of the car window! Darling! I honestly think this place is tops and you're the only one in the family with a mind. I might come out and live with you. What say?"

Islay looked so frankly dismayed that Harriet roared. Kate's spoiled, over-dressed daughter was the very last one of Islay's relatives she wanted with her.

"You'd be awfully bored, Harry. Nothing to do here."

"Don't coax me so!" Harriet grinned, boyishly.

"Harry! CAN'T you see I'm in a HURRY. I'm half an . . .!"

"There, there! Foster's fuming! DON'T FUSS, father! I'm *coming*!"

"Don't forget, Auntie Islay," she persisted from the car. "I *might* toddle out. I've warned you."

"What nonsense are you talking, Harry?" asked her mother suspiciously. "I'll write you from Vancouver, Islay. Hope you won't be too lonely. I think this is the most absurd sch . . ."

Both Foster's temper and his car were finally unleashed, disappeared down the lane, leaving a little cloud of dust.

Islay stood watching. The little procession turned out on the dusty road, up the long white highway that led out of the valley. She waved till they passed out of sight. A faint, farewell blast sounded from somebody's horn. That would be Pete, she thought, and smiled softly. She went back to the old house and sank down on the smooth old door stone. She leaned back against the cool stone wall of the house. It had sheltered four generations of her family. It was good to feel its solid backing now.

A great stillness fell on the old garden. Bees hummed in the tall lilac bushes like a far rumbling of thunder. Or was it thunder? The old farm dog, Great-Aunt Christena's dog, had slunk about all day. Now he crept up to her and dropped at her feet. Islay patted his head, glad of a friend. Now they were all gone she felt her resolution a little shaken. She was town-bred, and the old farm house was silent and isolated. Her nearest neighbour, Cousin Steve Laird, lived on the other side of a low hill, his barn just visible above the trees. Peace and quiet was what she wanted, though, she told herself. She hadn't been *living* at all. Ten years a secretary. Ten years was a long time. A long time sitting at an office desk, doing work the irritable and exacting Mr. Francis didn't like doing. Ten years going to club meetings, ten years being a minor Drummond social light, struggling, in off hours, through a welter of bridges,

teas, dinners, receptions. Her sisters expected it. But now this amazing thing had happened to her. It made you rather take stock, think what you'd grown into. Like stepping outside yourself to look in. What did you see? Did you *ever* see yourself, or was self-scrutiny an impossibility. Assets? Vitality, Islay thought, and an urge to make something of her life yet. Liabilities? She'd got to the middle thirties. Nobody believed in your doing much now. If you hadn't mapped out your course by then. Nobody cared much whether you did do anything or not . . . You had to care yourself, she told herself. Had to think what you tried to do was important yourself. Had to think the thing out alone. Then you could do things . . .

She had another, immediate reason for wanting to be alone. It was her secret. Even Pete didn't know it. That winter when she broke her ankle . . . she'd been laid up for weeks. And somehow she'd started scribbling—little sketches of the office staff—'profiles' the editor had called them, whisking through them, competently. Ought to be a story. Must have a plot. Make a real yarn out of it. That's what people asked for . . . Well, this summer she was going to see what she could do.

What a sensation she would have aroused at the orchard picnic, if she had said, complacently, 'I'm going to write a book this summer. So I want very much to be alone. Please don't give me a thought.' She could hear Pete's delighted laughter (Put me in your book, Islay), Kate's caustic comments on literary women, the pained incredulity of R. Fraser Drummond's sophisticated daughters.

When Pete had assisted her to unpack and arrange her belongings, he had exclaimed at her typewriter, as he carried it in from the car.

"Hey, Islay, what in heck did you have to tote this machine out here for? Better swap it for a churn."

"I'll write to you on it," she told him.

Now she looked about her with some satisfaction. It might be lonely. But that's what you needed for writing. Everybody said so. She'd pray for absolute quiet. And if Dr. Mack Wallace's medical practice extended to her neighbourhood, that was just another reason for keeping strictly to herself.

"For the first time in my thirty-five years," she patted the old farm dog, stretched out at her feet, "I'm going to live my own life in my own way."

2

Water from the Old Well

THE OLD LAIRD HOUSE STOOD ON A HILL, WHERE ITS VINE-COVERED stone face could look out over the valley, its log back to Georgian Bay. It was a landmark in the Laird settlement, and was known throughout the neighbourhood as the Old Home Place. Seated on the front door stone, its new owner could see for miles over rolling farm lands. Great-Grandfather Laird and his two brothers had made the first clearings in the forest along this valley, and their children's children occupied nearly half the township of Wappitti that bordered Georgian Bay. Good, honest farm folk they were, every Laird woman a famous cook, every Laird man a staunch Liberal, no matter what the issue facing the country.

Islay's eyes wandered down the valley to the little stone school house, set against its background of stately elms. Her mother had taught there, and along that white road leading out from the town of Carlisle, young Doctor Drummond used to come driving in his smart top buggy. The little Drummonds had been brought up in Carlisle, but the Old Place was their playground too. Memories of childhood holidays came over her with the scent of the lilacs and the vesper sparrow's song. How had they grown away from it all, Islay wondered. How easy it had been! How hard to find the road back. . . .

She had been back to the Old Place only once—that had been last autumn—when Mack Wallace had written her—a humble, regretful, sort of letter. It had come like a blow! After ten years' silence he had been able to speak of reconciliation! Ten years of suffering. Ten years of hiding how you felt. That was pride, the thing that kept you going. Ten years! Ten years of anger burned inside her when she read. Like fire! She had chosen her words well, she thought, when she answered. Scorching words spreading like little flames across the page. Next day she was not so sure. She remembered the letter had sounded petulant. She was suddenly very tired. She had an unaccountable longing to see the Old Place again. Like turning back the present to run away from bitterness.

Her mother had done that. Deep within her was the thought that she had always known that *she* would do it too. Her mother must have been younger then than she was now! It was when the doctor had died. Died suddenly. Mother had come back with the two littlest children, back to the Old Place to

ease her sorrow. Great-Aunt Christena had been frying pork and potatoes on that same old kitchen stove the day they came. Grammy was churning in the cool winter kitchen. What a tower of strength Grammy had been! She had sat with mother all afternoon, sometimes reading a comforting promise from her Bible. Grandpa had come in, 'Old Gentleman Laird', the neighbours called him, and he had said to mother, very gently, 'Run away out to the well, poor lass, and pump yourself a drink. There's strength in the water'. And mother had gone, along down the garden path to the well, gone slowly, holding by the hand a little boy. That had been Pete.

Even so, Islay in her bewilderment and suppressed self-loathing had had a feeling that if she could get out to the Old Home, she, too, might find direction. Grandfather's well was become a symbol of healing and of strength.

It had been a golden, hazy, autumn day. She had found Great-Aunt Christena alone. 'Grandfather's youngest sister, who never married, who didn't like noise or the children that made noise', that is how they spoke of her, and that was how Islay had learned to think of her. She was over ninety now, but Islay had found her straight, strong, and proud, as she had been in the old days. Her clearest memory was of her mother, and that she had been the Lady Islay Fraser. She had seemed but moderately pleased to see Islay when she came. But she had shown her all the old photographs, had told again the story of the Lady Islay and the bear, how she had chased the bear up a tree, kept it there until her husband had come home and shot it. How she had then turned to and cooked bear steaks for her children's supper. Islay had driven out that day, intending to return the same evening. But an early storm had come roaring up the bay. Great-Aunt Christena had actually *urged* her to stay the night. Had even seemed touched that she should have wanted to come. Islay had slept in the vast feather bed in the chilly spare bedroom. She had drunk again and again from grandfather's well. She had gone back refreshed.

She had thought she would drive out to see the beautiful Old Home and the lonely old woman again. She would go quite often, she told herself. But the Old Home became like a good and precious memory. Something you kept inside you. She had not gone back. There had been so little time, so many immediate demands. She had remembered at Christmas, and had bought a flowered silk scarf and sent it, with a brief but well-meaning note. Early in the new year Great-Aunt Christena had died. Suddenly. She had not been ill. And she had died quite alone, in the night.

It had been bitterly cold the day Pete drove Islay out to the funeral, weaving through long, deep trenches of snow—white walls scooped out through drifts. She had meant well, she told herself, swallowing self-reproach.

She had meant to go back again. She had got something from the Old Home, had taken something back. But she had left something . . . something of herself that Great-Aunt Christena had sensed, if not acknowledged. She *would* have gone back, she told herself in justification. There had been a slender something, an undefined pact, a sympathy. . . .

When Great-Aunt Christena's will was read the family was astonished to learn that the Old Home Place—house, farm, all Christena's worldly effects had been left to Islay Drummond. Islay had never thought of this. She had thought of Great-Aunt Christena lonely. She had never thought of her as dying. But the will had not surprised her. She had understood.

She rose now and made her way all around the house, trailing through rank, coarse grass. The old dog followed, trusting but watchful of this newcomer. The Old Home had never been constructed to any plan, Islay thought. It had evolved in response to a family's requirements, and the history of the Lairds had been built into it.

This long woodshed and summer kitchen, with its sturdy log walls! This had been part of the original pioneer home—the building grandfather had put up for the Lady Islay when the first, temporary log shanty became too cramped for the steadily growing family. Grandfather's eldest son (that had been her own grandfather) had added the next wing—a low, stone building that they always called the Old House. Very grand it must have looked when grandfather first built it, set up in front of the logs. Now it was dwarfed by the New House that Uncle Robert's progressive family had induced him into building. The Old House was long, low, lying close to the earth, as though it had grown out of it. But the New House was like Uncle Robert's family, flaunting and arrogant. Both were constructed of the beautiful Wappitti township stone—good solid blocks hewn out of the hills. 'Hard heads', they were called, and they held in their grey surfaces all the colour of the wild flowers of the Wappitti Valley.

Islay opened the door of the New House and went down the cool, bare hall. At the right, a door opened into a long, gloomy parlour. She and Pete had been allowed to enter this holy of holies but rarely, as children. It had been Great-Aunt Christena's pride, and here it was, just as she had left it. A second generation had induced her to effect certain improvements. The taste of Uncle Robert's wife and daughters was reflected in the red plush of the sofa, and in the carpet with its huge, very pink roses. Uncle Robert and his family had moved away to the States. A long way away, and they had become quite wealthy. Yet, Islay reflected, when you looked at the red plush and the monstrous welter of roses, all they were and stood for was *here*, fastened up to

look at occasionally with fascinated awe.

The heavy chenille of the curtains, you called them drapes, she remembered, the pattern of the wall paper, the long picture of the Battle of Waterloo that had filled Islay and Pete with vague terror, these were unchanged. She shut the door on this room and continued down the oilcloth-covered hall. Her click-clacking heels started weird echoes sounding through silent spaces. She shivered as she opened the door at the end of the hall and stepped into the Old House.

She was in the large dining-room, used for a kitchen in winter. A shallow step and you found yourself in the inner room, a hushed, withdrawn place with a narrow veranda running along one side. This had been called the Ben. After grandfather's death, grandmother had used to sit there alone knitting or reading her Bible, or often doing both of these things at once. 'Grammy's Ben', little Pete had called the room, and Grammy's Ben they had all come to calling it.

Here were grandmother's treasures—the old spinning wheel that had belonged to the Lady Islay; the tall cupboard with the blue tea-set twinkling behind its glass doors; the old clock above the dresser, ticking time off as it had done twenty years ago. A sudden whirr! Islay started. It was striking out the hour now. Sharp, steady strokes! How was it that made you feel more alone. Cut off in time! Here was the hair wreath Great-Aunt Christena had fashioned, photographs in ornate frames made of Georgian Bay shells—family groups. Those would be Uncle Robert's daughters, handsome in their long evening dresses; Uncle David in his pulpit robes, this picture had been the joy and pride of Grammy's heart; here was grandfather shut up in a black walnut frame that held in his flowing beard; the Lady Islay, herself, smiled down out of a leather case, bordered with brocaded velvet. Here were great-uncles aplenty, stalwart men, keen of eye, shaggy of head as though they had just stepped in out of a high wind. Here was mother, in quaint long curls, sleek and tight, and great-aunts graceful in shaped bodices and billowing skirts. Here was everybody. Everybody but Bessie, Islay recollected. Bessie had been great-uncle Peter's only daughter. Great-Aunt Christena had burned Bessie's picture up. You never talked about Bessie. Never even said her name. Even when you were very small you knew not to do that.

Islay was glad to find herself outdoors again, wandering vaguely about the neglected garden. Those rooms had not been vacant. Space in there was filled, shaped to insubstantial forms receding into shadows where they lurked to watch you. Silence came alive to feeling, more poignant than speech, secret thoughts locked deep inside some heart.

Something moved softly behind her now. She turned to look. It was the old

dog, following close, sniffing at her heels. He had accepted her as his mistress. Now he must get acquainted with her. Ginger was his name, called after the colour of his shaggy, faded coat. Islay looked at him, dubiously. He was Airdale shape and size. His eyes were a soft spaniel. With the children he had shown a nervous playfulness. Like a terrier. He was an epitome of dog, Islay thought, smilingly, and stooped and patted him.

Suddenly he stiffened. Barked sharply. Islay looked apprehensively down the long row of lombard poplars bordering the lane. What if the Mitchells had experienced tire trouble and Jen had decided to return with her riotous family! But Ginger was barking a welcome from the back of the house, and had run to meet the visitor half-way. He was a little, old man padding along the path that led from the next farm along through the pasture field. This would be old Watty Wiseman who worked for Steve, she remembered. He had his place, somewhere in the Laird connection, one of that wide outer ring of second cousins you never quite straightened out. Anyway he belonged to Steve's branch of the family. He lived in a little house on the corner of Steve's farm. When he wanted to work, he worked for Steve.

He lifted himself over the fence behind the vegetable garden and padded warily along the path. Small and wiry, he had a pair of blue eyes that looked sharply for flaws. They took in the 'high-falutin' ' car drawn up in the orchard, and now rested bleakly on the 'flighty get-up' of this successor to Christena. Watty had this in common with the Laird connection. He thought very little of the surprising will Christena had made.

It was like letting the Old Home Place to an outsider. That was the first injustice. Mary's stuck-up family always thought themselves above the rest of the clan. Might almost as well have left it to the Chicago Lairds, who were rich as Jews anyway, and hadn't set a foot in Lairdale these twenty years. Watty's grievance was impersonal. He had never harboured the slightest hope that old Teenie might leave him any of it. Far too mean for that! he reflected. Anyway she had hated him thoroughly like he hated her, though he had served her after his own fashion throughout many years. But to leave it to a woman! That was the heinous offence. Watty hated women in all capacities. But his hate was deepest when they stepped out of their appointed place. Watty, himself, was a bachelor. His love was deep for the land. A farm was something you cared for, something you watched, something you understood. What did a woman know about a farm! Hadn't old Teenie almost brought the place to ruin in the years she tried to run it? And now it was passing from the incompetent hands of one woman to the totally inexperienced hands of another woman. Watty was a staunch follower of John Knox. He believed that the monstrous regiment of

women spelled ruin.

Now he avoided having to meet her, making steadily for the barn. He paused at the pump for his customary drink. It was a sort of established rite with old Watty, Islay was to find. She was reminded that she needed fresh water. She stepped inside the kitchen, took the old blue pitcher from the shelf and followed him down the orchard path. Old Watty stood peering across the field of young green oats that bordered the orchard.

"Good evening," she felt shy in spite of her thirty-five years, and her sense of innate superiority, common to all the Drummonds. Like a usurper. "You are Watty, aren't you?" she held out her hand. She was smiling.

"Evenin'." His handshake was brief and reluctant. He turned his back to her, pumped himself a second dipper of water and drank.

"Would you mind filling this?" she held out her pitcher. He looked at it ungraciously, then pumped it to overflowing.

"It's a lovely evening, isn't it!" Islay persisted.

Old Watty replaced the dipper on its rusty nail, turned, allowed his blue eyes to scan the cloudless sky. "Goin' to be one o' the worst storms *you* ever seen, inside twenty-four hours." He spoke with satisfaction.

Islay looked incredulous.

"You'll find the rain'll likely come in through the roof of the Old Place. This whole place is awful run down, barns and everythin'. Your Aunt Teenie never got anythin' fixed. Hated spendin' money." He looked at her fixedly. "Man, you favour Christena though. Awful like her when she was about your age, steppin' on to forty."

"How cold the water is," said Islay, clasping the pitcher with both her hands. "Grandfather dug this well didn't he?"

"He did that. Old Gentleman Laird, your grandpa. Hundred and fifty feet! It's grand water. Kinda quenches your thirst better than that new well over at Steve's."

"Grandmother used to say it had something in it that cured sickness. Don't you remember?"

Watty sat down on the pump platform and took off his straw hat. He was lost. The door of the past was opened to him.

"Mind *that*?" He looked at her accusingly. "I mind more about her than *you* ever knew. Yes, she always said it was drinkin' from this well that kept

them all so strong. But folks didn't ail as much in them old days as they do now, since they got to thinkin' up germs. Look at your Aunt Christena. And there wasn't a man in the settlement as strong as your grandfather. And his brother Peter was jist such another. It was what Bessie done that killed your Uncle Peter and made your Aunt Christena hard."

He was silent for a moment and Islay sat on the well platform beside him.

"And they used to say the well never went dry," she prompted.

"Eh, man, and it niver did! No sir, not even in the big druth. Man that was the time! No rain for weeks! Up on the ridge, yonder, was burned as red as that there thing you've got round your neck. All the cricks was dried up and they usta bring the cattle down from as far as the Tenth, to water them in the bay. You could hear the poor beasts bawlin' for miles on still nights like this. And every well on this line was bone dry except this one here. Folks came here from all over Wappitti township for water, and your Aunt Teenie usta say it ought to be stopped, or there wouldn't be a drink o' water for anybody. But your grandpa'd say, 'Let them come,' he'd say, 'let them come. And when the well dries up we can all go to the bay together,' he'd say. But man, it niver dried up, though it got awful low. They say it comes from springs away miles down in the earth. I mind the minister that was in Laird Valley church then preached a sermon on it. That was old Doctor Colin Campbell, he married your ma and pa shortly before he passed on. Yes, sir, he preached a sermon about this well never gettin' dried up. Yes, Old Gentleman Laird was a grand man."

Old Watty sighed nostalgically. Islay listened. A sense of having inherited something infinitely more precious than lands and houses stole over her; something that still lingered over the Old Home Place like the scent of lilacs and the comfort of the old well.

Wise Watty sprang to his feet, suddenly angry. "Man, them kids'll never finish the chores if I don't get back." He had moved again into the present and carried with him a very present sense of disaster. "Here it's the middle of the week and nothin' done."

Islay looked surprised. She knew it was only Tuesday, but she did not know that this attitude was chronic with old Watty. When he had taken on the self-imposed responsibility for both farms, he had also assumed a special sense of the flight of time and the irresponsibility of people about him.

"You've forgotten something," she called after him, and picked up a basket he had left on the well platform. He half-turned, gestured weakly.

"Aw, it's somethin' Minnie would have me bring. A man's always to be

truckin' somethin' for weemin." He snorted derisively.

She watched him making his way back along the path to the pasture fence. He loitered in the vegetable garden behind the house, looked witheringly at the rows of vegetables that Steve had planted for her.

"Ye'll need to get at them cabbages and weed 'em," he shouted. "And them radishes needs thinnin'. Man, they look awful bad."

He was gone. Islay followed as far as the vegetable plot.

Was she responsible for weeds? She had hired Steve to work her farm and surely it included the garden. Early in the spring she had run down on a hurried tour of inspection, and had arranged everything, she thought. Not the vegetables for her table though. Certainly Steve had been very considerate about this, and his wife, Minnie, had made the whole house shining for her arrival. What would she do with all these vegetables? Long neat rows—standing at pale green attention. Regimented. Hers to command. Peas, with their delicate, coiled springs of tendrils; small fern-like carrots; coarse, dark little radish leaves that collected soil grains. Row upon row of small, sturdy plants, each holding high the withered walls of its little house. "Beans!" she cried delightedly. She remembered *them*. Nine rows! How appropriate! She smiled. Well, Steve couldn't have known and intended it. Nothing is *quite* perfect, she reminded herself. Only Pete would have thought of that, and have told her he was an incurable romantic anyway. That he knew it was a little trite, but he couldn't resist it! And they'd have laughed together.

She remembered about the basket and peeped inside it. Under a cool rhubarb leaf and a paper napkin was a loaf of home-made bread, incredibly light, a jar of fragrant jam, rich crimson, a pitcher of thick yellow cream and a half-dozen big brown eggs! What a welcome to a new tenant! This was Minnie, Steve's wife. She was always doing something for other people. That was the roof of Steve's barn she looked at above her orchard trees. The shouts of the children, the bark of a dog, the bawling of new calves and the bleat of little lambs floated across the fields; a pleasant sense of nearness. She hoped that they would all remain beyond her pasture field. She would go over and consult Steve and thank Minnie for her gift and for the shining cleanliness of the house. But she hoped she would not be expected to visit back and forth with any of her neighbours. She wanted to be alone. So she could find out if she could write. So she could forget her old life and start living another.

A sparrow chirped from the orchard fence. The bay shone with the burnished gold of the sun. She moved slowly up the path towards the house. All along the fence that bordered the orchard grew the garden flowers, now

running wild, choked in long grass and weeds. They had been planted years ago by hands now far away or still, forever more. The history of the Laird family was written here as well as in the old house, she thought. Down at the far end of the path near the barn were clumps of money musk and ragged robin, survivals of the garden the Lady Islay had planted in the back woods. The yellow rose bush was something she had tended and loved too. Bessie had moved it to the corner of the summer kitchen, the better to see it.

That row of sunflowers and hollyhocks against the fence was grandmother's and Great-Aunt Christena's contribution, and now, each year they sowed themselves. Theirs too were the bleeding heart, with its graceful, waxy sprays; the showy red 'piney'; fragrant clumps of 'old man' and patches of sweet william. These clumps of cloudy blue, now still and flag-like in the quiet air, were Bessie's iris. Bessie had, in fact, planted and tended the entire garden in her day. Islay had a dim, childhood memory of a tall girl with shining hair and bright eyes stooping over the flower beds. There used to be a row of canterbury bells, swinging like delicate little cups on their green stalks, growing along the well path. You called them *Bessie's bells*. That was before Bessie's name was forbidden in the Laird family. That sprawling grey-green clump behind the house, that caught the yellow of the early sun in spring had been *Bessie's willows*, too. Islay had a vivid recollection of her fear and wonder when her mother whispered to her and Pete, 'Hush! They aren't Bessie's willows any more. Don't say so!'

In line with the lilacs, fragrant syringa blossomed already, and other shrubs grew vigorously. Perhaps Aunt Louisa planted them. Islay forgave her the red plush and the pink carpet roses she had planted indoors, in that case.

Suddenly she felt the blue of the iris fading; the long June day was waning, shadows of the lombard poplars stretched long, across the field, a splinter of moon curved against the pale rose sky above Bessie's willows. She hurried. In the dark of the house she put away the precious basket, made a light supper out of the remains of the picnic sandwiches. A twilight meal. Lighting a fire in the stove to make tea was too difficult. She drank the water from the old well. There was Ginger to feed. Then it was quite dark. A row of kerosene lamps were ranged on the old dresser in the winter kitchen but she was not sure she remembered how they lighted. Tonight she would use the flashlight. She went round the house to the door of Grammy's Ben. Fire flies winked down in the orchard. Eerie lights streaked along the highway, cars that slipped past, silent and ghost-like. The old barn had become an unfamiliar, dark blot against the fading gold. She groped her way inside. Ginger was close at her heels.

Islay had chosen for herself the one bedroom in the Old House that was on

the ground floor. It opened off Grammy's Ben. It was bare and clean and had a real mattress on the old creaking spool bed. Opposite the doorway the narrow curved stair ascended to the floor above where were stored all the old feather beds, hooked mats and fancy quilts that were Great-Aunt Christena's special pride. Great-Uncle Peter and grandfather had built that ladder-like stairs, built it straight up cutting the blackness above. Islay undressed quickly. The moon looked in through the orchard trees and laid its light in a pattern of lace on the curving steps. A silver stair. Like the ghostly stairs in De La Mare's verse. She was the Traveller coming to the empty house. Was there anybody there? Were They listening? On the stairs. Bathed in misty light. The Lady Islay, stately and sad; grandmother; Old Gentleman Laird; her mother. All watching. Reproachful. Again the strange, insistent sound of the silence in the quiet.

She moved about thinking to shake off the spell. Moon madness! Should she lock the doors? Nobody locked their doors in Lairdale. They came with the moon, anyway. You couldn't blot it out. Couldn't keep Them out. They slipped in with the soft night air at the low window. She made Ginger a bed. He would rather be outside. But not tonight. She lay down on the old bed, stretching herself to full length. How could she have thought she could do it! Stay here. She lay still, silence pressing in upon her. Smothering her! Afraid to stir. Afraid of the intangible. The unheard. Outside seemed safer. How bright a country night could be. A silver night. Magic!

But the old house had come alive. So it could listen. Listen while They whispered to her. From where she lay she saw out the low doorway and up the ghostly staircase. There on the narrow steps, silent shapes, accusing . . . They had been strong to endure these people . . . 'you are weak', They jeered . . . 'filled with self-pity . . . you are Hate and Resentment . . . afraid of yourself . . . of what you've grown into . . .' a strange rhythmic chant, swaying with the light night wind blown up . . . swaying into sleep . . . sleep that dreamed . . . She was grown old and hard. Unforgiving. Exactly like Great-Aunt Christena.

3

Summer Showers

IT WAS MORNING. THE SUN WAS STREAMING IN THROUGH the low window. It was shining on the stairs where the ghostly shapes so lately stood. It was shining on Ginger, standing with his two paws on the log-cabin quilt over Islay's feet. How *could* anyone lie a-bed a morning like this! A coughing and a wheezing from Grammy's Ben. The old clock was going to strike. It whirred, rattled, then banged out the hour with clear, rapid strokes. Five o'clock! Islay's watch confirmed this. Whenever had she been awake at five before! Outside, high in the great elm behind the house a shower of song shivered in the cool air. She ran to the window. There he was, making for the orchard now. So much melody contained in one small, feathered body. It was too much! No wonder his notes burst out in reckless abandon. The Canadian mocking bird! She and Pete had used to follow him, far over the fields, a trail of song! An oriole now took his place in the elm, singing while she dressed.

She had never dressed so quickly! Smock, sandals and a wash in the old tin basin beside the kitchen door. She and the blue pitcher went for a walk to the well. The morning was flawless, jewel-like, despite Wise Watty's prophecy. The earth was polished, the sky a dazzle of blank blue. You smelled a soft earth smell and things growing. Behind the Blue Ridge sunrise still showed in a rose mist. Beyond the jagged line of cedars she looked for the stretch of blue water. There was no bay, its blue had merged with the blue sky, the soft mist of morning. The orchard was alive with bird song—robin, bluebird, song sparrow, oriole, singing good morning to each other, an outpouring of intense joy. The mocking bird returned to his elm, sang louder, sweeter, improvisations of all spring songs, an essence of all joy for all time. The air was charmed, intoxicated with the scent of dew and lilacs, the sweet spice of clover.

A clear, silver stream gurgled out of the old pump. Islay thought of her city apartment on Prospect Avenue. There you looked out on somebody else's brick wall, listened to the rattle of garbage cans and milk bottles below, the blare of radios filled your ears, commercials made your soul cheap. A piano thumped out Junior's morning scales.

Far down the valley a bell was clanging for an early farm breakfast. Islay

came back up the path to the house with the blue pitcher, washed cloudy now with filmy dew. She found herself pleasantly hungry. She really wanted breakfast. There was Minnie's basket. She would boil one of those brown eggs and make herself a cup of coffee. That was easy. She brought out the basket, not without a faint feeling of self-reproach. She had come to the Old Home determined to keep to herself and to do her self-appointed writing. That had seemed important. But she would have to call and say a thank-you to Steve's wife. When you planned your routine from the city, you didn't anticipate kindnesses like this.

She looked around the big summer kitchen with the tall narrow cupboards, rows of heavy pots and pans above the table. She knew little about housekeeping. She was no cook. Each morning she had made toast and coffee for herself on an electric plate. She had lunched in town, dined either at a nearby guest house or at one of the many dinner parties their friends gave. Kate and Jeanette moved in a giddy swirl of social functions, Islay was at least firmly established on the inner outskirts—the limit her leisure time afforded her. She hadn't prepared a real meal since her mother had died—high school, university, career—these things had filled her life. No time to take up homemaking. Just as well, she reflected bitterly, seeing that the home to which she had been looking all through her youth had been snatched from her, swept away by a man's perfidy.

She surveyed the great black cook stove dubiously. She looked at her well-kept, white hands, her carefully coloured nails. Kate had warned her that her hands would be ruined if she so much as touched that monster. But Islay was thinking of the first Islay who had cooked bear's meat for her hungry children over the open fire in the shanty right near where she stood. She lifted the stove cautiously, gloomed down into the ashy depths. And suddenly memory stirred. . . . She knew exactly what to do!

Her grandmother was calling her. 'Run and pick up some chips, wee lassie, it's time to make the fire for supper.' Her mother was standing, young and smiling, at the kitchen door, little curly-headed Pete, stocky in his short frock, clutching her skirts. They were watching the little girl filling her pinafore with sweet, white chips.

Out in the shed Islay found chips, some kindling wood, some old paper. In a moment she'd made a fire blaze. There was something dream-like and unreal about it. Where had she been reading about just such an experience. She put the tea-kettle on the stove, and went back to Grammy's Ben where Pete had left her books, piled on the old drop-leaf table. Of course! Edna St. Vincent Millay's verse-story of the woman who came back to her deserted home and

kindled a new fire on its hearth. Would she ever write like that, she wondered wistfully. Not likely, she decided, when you'd lived to thirty-five without writing anything.

The coffee was made at last, and the egg boiled. The home-made bread and butter was perfect. She set an old tin tray with Grammy's blue dishes, carried it out to the steps of the veranda and sat down to the best breakfast she had tasted in years.

But living here alone, she thought, was not going to be as idyllic as it had looked from her office desk. There were the nights. And that staircase. But in the light of morning she dismissed these. More explicitly, there was the house to be kept clean, and no efficient char to clean it like Mrs. McKinnet of the Prospect Apartments. She would need three meals daily. Who would prepare these? The drive to Carlisle for provisions was ten miles. How did you cook a roast? Or how did one person consume it when it was cooked? What about refrigeration? Did you poke into the depths of that cavernous cellar beneath the winter kitchen? There was a great trap door in the floor with a heavy ring in it. What if it shut you in? She remembered seeing Grammy and Aunt Christena raise this ring and disappear in the gloom. What about laundry? You wanted your own home, somebody gave it to you, and then you couldn't run it for lack of training!

She washed her dishes and set the great kitchen to right. Steve's wife and daughters had made everything clean and shining for her reception, but everywhere were signs of yesterday's festivities. Jeanette's children had never been taught to take care of anything. The kitchen floor showed muddy tracks and the old stove was peppered grey with ashes.

She turned her back on it all and determined that even if she did not eat much she was going to get launched this very first morning on her big task. She went in for a table, finding one in the parlour. She swept away the ornaments that poor Great-Aunt Christena had cherished; a cluster of wax flowers under a glass globe, a couple of huge sea shells, and a dozen other treasures. A plush photograph album filled with family pictures was almost her undoing, until she put it sternly from her. The removal of the hand-painted velvet table cover displayed a marble top like a tombstone, but it was solid and smooth and she dragged the table down the long hall and out through Grammy's Ben to the narrow veranda, set it in the green shade of her Virginia creeper, opened up her typewriter, arranged her paper, brought out one of Grammy's cane-bottomed chairs. She was ready for work.

A squirrel flashed down from the edge of the veranda roof and scolded and chattered at the spiders, spinning silver threads along the creeper. The wasps

buzzed that they had a home in the corner, high up, and better not bother *them*. Why was the veranda so narrow. That question had to be settled in her mind. When the family sat here they must have seated themselves in a row, side by side, like family groups in an old tin-type. But not likely they ever sat. She could not remember ever seeing Grammy or any of the aunts or uncles resting anywhere.

Ginger had gone off down the orchard, lost in the long grass, hunting a chipmunk. Now he came bounding back to tell her that somebody was coming —a nice somebody. He barked down by the back fields. Islay got up and went around the house. A thin, freckled little girl of about thirteen appeared in the pasture field. One of Steve's daughters, the pert, chatty one, Islay remembered. She was starched in gingham, and her hair, which was the same reddish brown as Islay's was frizzed and curled into an amazingly intricate tangle. Her poise and assurance would have done credit to Kate, herself.

"Momma sent me over, Cousin Islay," she said in a composed, starched little voice. "She thought if you wanted any work done I could help you. And she told Watty to ask you to come over and have supper with us tomorrow, but Watty often forgets so she said I was to tell you too, and here's something for your dinner."

She uncovered a basket of feathery biscuits, hot from the oven.

"Oh, wonderful!" Islay exclaimed. "Fancy having biscuits baked at this time of the morning! Thank you very much, er,—Celia? No, you're not Celia, are you?"

"No, I'm Lily Anne. I wish you please wouldn't call me both names, though. Momma wanted to call me Lily after Aunt Lily, her sister, and poppa was bound I'd be called Anne after his sister, so they made a bargain and called me both names. But I don't like two names. I wouldn't mind being called Lilian though. I think Islay is a lovely name. I hope it's all right for us to call you Cousin Islay, when we're really not first cousins. Momma said, when we heard you were coming to stay here this summer, that us children had better call you Miss Drummond. But poppa said what in thunder would we do that for cause we were second cousins anyhow. And so momma said it would sound better if we said Cousin Islay. So I said I was going to ask you first thing right off if you'd rather we called you Miss Drummond. Cause if you do, it's all right with us."

Islay tried to look at her severely. The excessive dignity had not the smallest effect upon her visitor.

"You thought I was Celie, didn't you?" she rattled on affably, "and we

don't look a bit alike. Celie's eighteen, and she's fair, and I've got kinda red hair, like yours, haven't I? And I'm only thirteen, and Celie has been to normal school in Stratford. She got home yesterday, the very day all you folks came. Celie came on the bus and we didn't expect her till the afternoon train. My, we were that glad! Momma was sayin' it was wonderful to think we've really got a school teacher in the family at last. Celie's not quite sure, of course, but she says maybe she'll take honours. Of course she don't even know if she's passed yet, but one of the professors said to her that he was *sure* she'd take honours. He said, 'Miss Laird, if you don't take honours in your teaching, then I'm a Dutchman!' Wasn't that awful funny, Cousin Islay? If you don't take honours I'm a Dutchman!"

Islay had had no opportunity to ask her caller to be seated, even if she had wanted to, but she had been moving slowly on the flood of talk towards the bench that stood outside against the kitchen wall. She sat down and motioned the girl to her side. Lily Anne seated herself without in the least disturbing the easy flow of her talk.

Poppa had taken pneumony last fall, and so Stevie, that was her oldest brother, hadn't been able to get started to high school, and he'd passed Grade Eight the June before. Momma was worrying for fear he wouldn't get to go. She, herself, was ready for high school too, for she had passed this month, and Jackie would be in Grade Eight after the holidays and he'd be wanting to go. Jackie could play the mouth-organ jist wonderful, and yodel too. And there were still Billy and Audrey. And Miss Hammond, the teacher that had been in Lairdale this last year, said all Steve Laird's family was smart, but little Audrey was the smartest of them all. But it cost so much to go to school. Poppa said it seemed as if there would always be a kid in this family sittin' on the steps of the high school hollerin' to get in. There were two with her and Stevie now. She had been out of school for a week now, because she had passed without writing. Only the best could do that.

"We all wanted to come over and see your grand visitors. But momma wouldn't let us. So we were awful glad when so many came over. Aren't the little Mitchell boys cute? Celie liked Harriet best. She's Cousin Kate's daughter, isn't she? She's got lovely clothes, but she's not very pretty, is she? I think you're a lot prettier. Momma says the Lawrences are awful rich, but I guess money ain't everything."

Nice if Kate could hear how lightly the dignity of the House of Lawrence was held by this young person, Islay thought. "My, but they were all dressed lovely, though!" she sighed enviously. "Harriet and Celie were laughing and whispering. Something goofy! Big girls are always like that."

Islay was surprised that Harriet Lawrence had troubled to go across the field with the children to see the country cousins. Rob's girls had remained bored and aloof all afternoon. She would have liked to question Lily Anne on the subject but there was no opportunity. The flood of talk swept on.

Islay was about to rise and say she must be excused as she had work to do when Lily Anne managed to come back to the real purpose of the early morning call. Momma said she was to stay if Cousin Islay wanted her, and do any work that was needed. Momma felt sure the place would need to be fixed up after all the visitors that were here, and likely the back kitchen would have to be scrubbed again and the stove polished. Islay snatched eagerly at the offer. She took the girl into the kitchen and found that Lily Anne saw its needs much more clearly than she did. She knew where everything was too—brooms, dusters, stove polish. Islay left her with relief and went back to her new desk on the veranda.

But unfortunately, Lily Anne not only did her work well, but swiftly, and, in the course of dusting and tidying she arrived at Grammy's Ben before the authoress had typed a half-dozen pages. Islay set her to dusting her books and arranging them on the hanging shelf above grandpa's old pine desk. Soon a flood of talk began to pour out through the door and to inundate the veranda. Islay tried not to listen, but she could not but gather some information about poppa's pneumonia, Celia's chances for honours, Jackie's musical ability, and, above all, the ever-present craving for high school.

"Momma's always been awful set on us all goin' to high school. You see she was a school teacher herself. Momma is very well educated and she says we must all go to high school. So I jist gotta get goin', only I gotta wait till Stevie gets a start. He's near fifteen and I'm only thirteen. But he'll go this fall if Celie gets a school. But I can't, cause poppa says he won't stand for two of us startin' in at high school at once. So I guess I'll have to wait for a while. Stevie's been waitin' a year. Momma gets awful worried for fear Stevie won't get to go. It all depends on Celie now. Say, it must be grand to be able to go to high school. Celie says it's wonderful!"

Islay could not but be interested. The view point was entirely the opposite to that of her nieces and nephews. Kate's and Rob's children had all been sent to expensive boarding-schools, and all regarded schools and teachers as convicts look upon their keepers.

"Jackie's next to me and he says I gotta hurry and get outa his road. He's crazy to go to high school too, and he thinks he'll pass next summer. I kinda hope he don't. He's awful smart at playin' but he don't learn as fast as I do in school. He's all for singin' an' playin' the mouth-organ. And yodel! Say,

Cousin Islay, you wouldn't believe how that kid can yodel. He taught himself. But I can beat him in school lessons. Miss Hammond who teached at Lairdale last year she said I was very clever in mathematics."

"When you've finished with those books, Lily Anne," Islay finally said in desperation, "that will do for today, and you may go."

"Oh, that's all right," Lily Anne cried genially, "I'm in no hurry now that Celie's home. She's the greatest worker you ever saw. Momma said I was to stay all morning if you wanted me. I could come over any time to help you, cause I guess you have an awful lot o' type-writin' to do, haven't you?" She came to the door and stood swinging her duster.

"My, you write awful fast. I'd like to learn typing when I go to high school, if I ever get to go. When poppa had the pneumony he said he had a typewriter goin' in his head. He made us kids laugh. Only momma didn't. She said it was because he was so awful sick. My, the doctor's bills were awful though! Our doctor's awful good too. He don't charge high. But he had to come out here so often and it was winter too and the roads were blocked. We usta have Doctor Porter but he's dead now, and we go to Doctor Wallace. He's awful good. He'll come to see you if you're sick no matter what. Momma said that if it hadn't been for Doctor Wallace—"

The talk stopped suddenly. Islay had something of the sensation you have when the car brakes are applied too jerkily. She looked up to see Lily Anne staring at her, eyes full of dismay. She held her apron over her mouth, an instinctive, if belated, guard against conversational exposures.

"Oh, I'm awful sorry! Oh, Cousin Islay I'm so sorry I said that! Momma warned me not to, but I forgot."

"Said what?" Islay asked in bewilderment.

"Sayin'—that name! Saying something about,—about *him*. Momma said none of us was to say a word about—the doctor, on account of you—on account of—and I clean forgot."

"What utter nonsense!" Islay cried, annoyed to feel her face growing hot. "Why in the world should you not talk about Doctor Wallace or any other doctor if you want to?" Her voice had grown sharp and she checked herself quickly. "It's quite too ridiculous," she added with a forced laugh, "and now if you will please excuse me I must get on with my work. I am very busy as you see."

"Oh, sure! I'll be as *quiet*—!" Lily Anne skipped through the house into the kitchen, and Islay could hear her bustling about whistling and singing in no

whit disturbed over her rebuff.

Islay redoubled her speed though she had no idea what she was writing. ‘Now is the time for all good men,’ were the only words that would come. She rattled them off again and again. How did these people know all her private affairs? But of course they knew. All the world, it seemed, knew that Dr. Malcolm Wallace and she had been engaged, that she had waited seven years for him, until he was through his medical course and when all was ready he went off and married another girl. This was just one of the things a man did to you when he threw you aside; he exposed you to the pity and contempt of every idle gossip in the countryside. She wished the Old Laird Home had been placed in the middle of Saskatchewan.

When Lily Anne was paid, thanked for her work and finally dismissed, Islay could not write. She was dismayed to find she was so easily disturbed.

She had come out here to the country to find peace and rest and she was more upset today than she had been since that unhappy day she had sent off her unkind letter.

She brewed herself a cup of tea in the tidy, shining kitchen and made her lunch of two of Minnie’s biscuits. She tried to resume her work but the afternoon had grown sultry, and the problems of housekeeping were still unsolved. Lily Anne was efficient but impossible. Better to be smothered in dust than drowned in talk. As she sat, disturbed and unhappy, she was surprised to find it getting dark and yet it was only mid-afternoon. She stepped out from underneath the vines and looked about. The shining cloud mountain that had piled in glory above the bay at noon was now dark and mounting rapidly. A distant growl of thunder rolled behind the black pall. She remembered Wise Watty’s promise. A storm was surely coming. A sudden, cool, refreshing breath blew from the bay, the orchard trees waved a welcome, Bessie’s green willows over by the spring turned silver side out. The robin that had been sounding his loud rain song from the crab apple tree beside the shed, flashed away into the orchard.

Rapidly it darkened. Islay could see Steve hurrying from the field with the team. Another rumble of thunder, this time more pronounced. A flash of lightning. She must go indoors. She gathered up her typewriter and her precious papers just as a gust of wind lashed the vine leaves against the table. She ran inside, Ginger at her heels. Not a moment too soon! Great splashes of rain drove across the veranda floor. The door slammed behind her. A terrifying finality about that. A sound that cut off safety. At the same instant a splintering crash of thunder, and Islay, city-bred, and unused to electrical storms, cowered in terror! No time to be frightened! Windows and doors must be closed. Rain

drove in great splotches through the west windows. The old sashes stuck, she tugged and wrenched, while lightning flashed and thunder rent through rain. She was certain the old house would tumble about her ears, and was rather surprised when, finally, all doors and windows had been made secure and she found herself in Grammy's Ben, damp but unharmed, with Ginger pressing close to her. She recalled childhood warnings against sitting too near a chimney or stove pipe during a lightning storm. She drew grandpa's arm chair into the centre of the room and sat with Ginger at her feet and watched the storm rage over the valley. She was amazed at its fury. The orchard trees and the syringa and the lilac bushes writhed in torture. The whole valley that so lately slumbered under the sun, was turned to grey whirling mist. From the back windows she could see nothing of the bay except when a flare of lightning lit up its black, raging waters. Everything familiar was blotted out in the maelstrom of rain and wind. Swift streaks of lightning showed Bessie's willows, pale with terror, bent beseeching to the earth, while thunder roared an inexorable sentence. Rain teemed down, a flood gate of some infinite reservoir, swept away. In the orchard path fountains of muddy water leaped, spouted to meet the descending streams. Suddenly Islay thought of the roof. She ran out to the shed-kitchen. Here the rain thundered down, a steady stream soaking through the wood pile. She dragged a wash tub from the corner and placed it under the flood. She went through the house. The roof of the new part seemed intact, but there was a steady drip through the sloped ceiling of a bedroom above Grammy's Ben. She ran with pitchers and bowls, anything she could find. A subdued Ginger followed.

Gradually the first fury of the storm spent itself. The rumble of thunder grew faint and distant, the lightning was feeble. It rained now; rained quite heavily and steadily, but with a calm normality. Islay wandered out to the winter kitchen, and looked through the windows into the back garden. A worried hen had brought her brood of chickens from the barnyard to a safe haven under the edge of a wood-pile beside the shed. Her strategy would have functioned perfectly but for the fact that in her hatching days, somehow, a duck egg had got into her nest. The little alien had lived in harmony with his foster family, until today. But here was his first rain storm, and while his brothers and sisters nestled warm and dry under their mother's wings, he had abandoned this home and gone out to greet the storm. Islay caught sight of him darting about in the rain, in duck delight, while his distracted mother clucked 'Come back'. He ran, unheeding, sliding his little yellow bill into every pool, a downy ball of yellow glee. No sooner soused in one puddle than he darted to another, fearing he might miss one. He quacked with infantile enthusiasm, twitched his little yellow tail in spasms of aquatic joy. This was his first taste

of real life—water life. He, who had been brought up under the arid feathers of a mere hen, had suddenly discovered his birthright. Some wild mallard heritage, winging far over reedy lakes, called to him. He heard the voice through the storm and reeled with the joy of it. He staggered from pool to pool, drunk with rain.

Islay was standing at the window watching the mad little performance with amusement, when, with a leap, and a flirt of his tail, splash he went, yellow web-feet over yellow bill, into a low trough of rain water and away he sailed on his first swim, a miniature ship on a miniature sea.

Islay was startled by a squeal of child laughter. There was no one in sight, but by peering sideways through the window, she could see a small figure squeezed up against the back kitchen door. It seemed to be a boy, small and ragged and incredibly thin. Water spilled from his sodden garments and his long hair; a dilapidated bicycle leaned against the door post.

Ginger had been fussing and grumbling at the door for some time, but Islay had supposed he was still disturbed by the storm. This would be Steve's youngest boy, Billy, come over on some kindly errand. She went out to the summer kitchen, opened the door, and the visitor, still absorbed in the antics of the duck, fell backwards into the room.

Islay stared at him. Had she been living so much in the past that she was a child again? For this youngster looked, on first sight, remarkably like Pete, at this age—the same reddish-brown hair, the same ingratiating blue eyes; but this child wore a ragged shirt exposing bony freckled arms, his tattered overalls secured by one brace over his thin shoulder, and a pair of rubber-soled canvas shoes much too large for him. Yet Islay could see Pete, at ten, coming home from a berry-picking bout.

"Well, hello!" she cried. "Are you Jackie, or Billy?"

He stared. "No, I'm Artie," he croaked in a hoarse treble.

"Oh, isn't your father Mr. Steven Laird?"

He shook his head. "Nope, my dad's name's Wilf."

"And where do you live?"

"I don't live nowhere," he said. "Leastwise not now. We jist have a car and we keep a-goin'."

"Well! And what do you want here?"

"Could ye lend me a darning needle?" was the surprising request, "and

some strong string and a pair o' pliers and a bicycle pump?" He was not bold in these astonishing requests, his was a childlike assurance that the place would provide all his needs. And the ingratiating grin on his thin little face was disarming.

"Well, well," she said with a laugh. "You don't want much. Perhaps you'd like the cook stove or the lawn-mower . . ."

But the sarcasm sailed over his small head. He looked curiously at the big stove and shook his head.

"No," he said patiently, "that wouldn't be any use. It's my bike. I gotta puncture, and somethin's wrong with the sprocket. But I could fix it all up dandy if I had a pair o' pliers and a pump."

"I'm sorry," she said firmly, "but I haven't anything like that. I don't own a bicycle. But there are boys over on the next farm." She nodded in the direction of Steve's house. "I think they have a bicycle. Perhaps you might get some of their tools."

He turned away with a gallant attempt at nonchalance.

"Yeah, guess I better get goin'," he said. He lifted the derelict bicycle carefully, paused and looked back.

"Say, that duck o' yours," his thin face twisted into something resembling a smile. "Ain't he cute, though?"

Islay suddenly noticed that while they had been talking the storm had been gathering for a new onslaught. Darkness was descending again. A darting spear of lightning and a low mutter of thunder came from the blackness above the bay. The boy looked around apprehensively.

"Say, is she goin' to bust up like that again?" he asked with a shiver.

"You'd better come inside till the storm is over," Islay said with some reluctance, for it was like inviting the storm into Lily Anne's shining kitchen.

"Wait, take your bicycle over there to the shed door, and I'll open it."

His face lighted up with relief, and when she opened the big shed door he was standing waiting, shivering in his wet clothes. He placed his treasure very carefully against the wood pile and followed her into the summer kitchen. Water dribbled from his limp overalls and ran in little streams along the floor. Ginger hopped around him quivering with hospitality and the boy patted him. The clean floor was a moist pattern of boy and dog feet.

Islay had a vivid recollection of the story she and Pete used to love: the

visit of the West Wind whose dripping garments left rivulets all over the floor.

The child shivered where he stood in a pool of water. Islay looked apprehensively at the stove. She would have to light a fire. She took off the lid and looked in to see if there were any remains from her noon fire. She picked up a stick from the wood box.

"That ain't the right wood," the small guest said, "that ain't kindlin'. You want a bit o' pine or cedar."

"Well, you light the fire," Islay said, "and we'll have something for supper."

She found he really did know all about making a fire. He padded to and from the woodshed, leaving a wet trail, but bringing kindling and wood and soon he had a fire burning merrily. He stood before the stove and the steam rose from his wet garments.

Islay went up into a bedroom above Grammy's Ben and rummaged through the drawers of an old dresser. She found a pair of warm flannel bloomers, and a man's sweater. Both garments were much too large for the boy but they were warm and clean.

He was not at all grateful. He was determined to keep on his wet clothes. They would dry on him in no time, he argued. She finally persuaded him and he took the garments and went into the shed to change. He crept back to the fire looking not unlike Mr. Disney's dwarf, Dopey. She could hardly restrain a smile as she hung his wet garments on nails behind the stove, and set about preparations for their supper.

He stood at the window looking out to where the duck was still celebrating good ducking weather. He chuckled softly. "Lookit! Ain't he awful cute?" he said. "Didya hear his momma squawkin' at him? And he never listens. Say, ain't he havin' a time?"

"You didn't have such a good time as he had." Islay said.

"No, but I like rain too. Gee, it's grand! Only I don't like the thunder." He looked out in awe at the gathering clouds. "Say, God must have been awful mad about something. Did ye hear him slammin' his fist?"

Islay knew she ought to correct this unorthodox view but was not quite sure how to go about it. The little Mitchells had never given her much practise in theology.

"I think God is very kind to send us this rain," she ventured, improvingly, "it was badly needed."

“He wasn’t kind to us folks in the West,” remembered the freethinker resentfully. “He never sent us any rain, and mommy used to pray every night, and sometimes dad too. Mebby He just looks after Ontario.”

“Why, where did you live?”

“Saskatchewan.”

“And how did you get here?”

“In our car, me and daddy and mommy. We drove. We was dried-out.”

“How long did it take you?”

“Oh, I don’t mind. An awful long time I guess. We been on the road for ever so long. Ever since Charlie died.”

“Who is Charlie?”

“He’s my brother. He was the last one that died. First it was Mamie died, and then Jimmie died, and then mommy said when Charlie died we’ll go back East, and so we came. Charlie was the baby.”

“And how long were you dried out?”

“I don’t mind. I guess ever since I was born. I don’t mind about rain. It never rained like this. It never rained at all out West. It jist blowed. And nearly everybody moved away. And then our horses died. And then we moved away too.”

Islay placed what food she had on the table and they sat together near the fire. The night was cool and the warmth from the stove was pleasant. She was surprised to find her guest did not eat much. Even some fancy cookies left from yesterday’s lunch did not tempt him.

“I ain’t hungry,” he said, “I guess I’m full.”

“Where did you have your dinner?” Like old Omar he was very vague about whither and whence. ‘Away down there where the car broke down.’ He could not remember where it was.

“But where is the car now?”

“It’s down the road aways. I came out to look for a job,” he said importantly. “Ain’t this an awful big house?” he said peering through the door that led into the winter kitchen. “Do you live all over it? In every room?”

“No. I’m new to it. I just came yesterday.”

“Oh! Do you stay here all by yourself?”

“I have so far.”

“Haven’t you got a man?”

“No.”

“My! Who does your chores?”

“My cousin, over on the next farm works this place too.”

“Oh, he must be awful busy. Maybe I could get a job with him?”

Suddenly he began to chuckle again. The duck had come into view again, swimming rapturously across a puddle near the doorway.

“Aw, ain’t you cute!” He rose from the table.

“Say, I’m full. I don’t want any more to eat. Can I go out and get him? Wouldn’t you like me to bring him in here?”

“Oh, I think you better not,” she said hastily. “He won’t want to come, and you will get those dry clothes all as wet as your own. See, the rain isn’t over yet. The duck likes rain.”

He sat down with a look of deep disappointment. “I kinda hate to go back on him,” he said, “cause he brought me here.”

“Who? The little duck?”

“Yeah. It was good luck for me all right when I followed him. Him and his mommy and the chickens was all down near the road there chasin’ flies when I came along. I was goin’ straight on, cause there’s a gas station down the road and I was goin’ there and my bike bust up. And then ducky and all the rest started comin’ up your lane. And he looked so cute, I jist followed them to see what they were gonta do. He was always gettin’ behind, cause them chickens they can get over the grass faster than him, his web-feet, and his legs is so short. And he was havin’ a bad time and his mommy always hollerin’ after him. So I followed and kinda helped him along. And by the time they got up here, say it started to rain and the old hen didn’t she get goin’. She ran into that place under them boards and he wouldn’t go in. Cause he wanted to get into the rain. I knew how he was feelin’, and I ran out with him, only I got scared o’ the lightnin’. And I squoze up into your doorway and watched him. And then you came to the door.” He looked across at her and suddenly smiled, a smile that lit up his little face and stretched the skin over its sharp bones. “That was good luck for me all right,” he said.

Islay felt something warm stirring in her heart. He was so much like what Pete would have been—if he had been starved in the dried-out area of

Saskatchewan.

"Well, I'm glad you came too," she said. "But what about your father and mother. Won't they be anxious about you?"

"Mebby they will," he said. "Leastways mommy will. Daddy knows I can take care o' myself. They said they would be goin' down the road there a piece lookin' for a job. I was goin' to meet them at the gas station."

"I don't know how to get in touch with them," she said, "my telephone isn't connected."

"Oh, I'll just walk down the road," he said easily, "they'll be lookin' for me and I'll see them."

"But the gas station is two miles farther on and it's still raining," she said with a feeling of dismay.

There was evidence that the storm was not yet over. The distant rumblings had been growing louder and the darkness was gathering. The little duck had at last responded to his mother's cries and had gone to the warm bed under her feathers beneath the pile of boards.

Then Ginger announced that someone was coming; and there was Old Watty at the door, dripping wet and looking disgusted.

"Minnie was wonderin' if you was all right," he said, standing out in the rain, and refusing all invitations to come in.

"That was so kind," Islay said gratefully. "There's a couple of leaks in the roof."

"Yeah, Steve said he bet there would be. He'll come over in the mornin' and fix them."

He had been looking at the bundle of clothes on the chair beside the table and suddenly exclaimed, "Hey! Is that a kid? You got company?"

"He came down in the rain," Islay said. Watty stared, and the boy looked at her puzzled. "I'm worried about him. He's lost."

Islay had yet to learn that Wise Watty was the Laird Valley detective agency.

"Ain't you the kid that came from Saskatchewan?" he asked. The little fellow nodded.

"Well, say! Your dad's down at Shaw's gas station right now waitin' till the storm's over, and lookin' everywheres for you. Your ma's in a state about

you."

"Say, I better get goin'," he cried, rising. Islay looked out to where the rain was once more driving through the doorway and against the windows.

"He'll have to stay here all night," she said much against her inclination. "Could you telephone his father and they can come for him in the morning?"

Old Watty gave her a glance of approval, nodded, and went splashing away down the orchard path.

Islay lighted a lamp with some difficulty and went in to Grammy's Ben and brought out a warm blanket. She spread a bed for the little traveller from Saskatchewan on the old bunk behind the stove. He was loath to go to bed, and she let him sit and talk as she put away the food and washed up their supper dishes. He told again about the life in Saskatchewan. His name was Arthur Pierson, but they called him Art. Dad's name was Wilfred and mommy's name was Annie. Grandma used to live with them but she died, too. Most everybody died. It used to be nice before Jimmie died. They used to play in the coulee, and they, used to ride the horses to water. It was dandy in the coulee. They caught a badger once and had it for a pet.

His voice had been growing fainter. Suddenly he flopped over on the couch. He was fast asleep.

Islay reflected that probably she would not be able to find any night-clothes for him anyway, so she straightened him out and covered him gently with the blanket. In his sleep he looked more than ever like Pete. Ginger curled up under the couch and when Islay took the lamp to go to her room, he sunk lower, head flat on the floor, lest she order him to follow. But she did not feel the need of his presence tonight. The thunder still rumbled far over the bay, the lightning occasionally lit up the blackness, but within the walls of the Old Home was warmth and a feeling of security. The ghostly loneliness of the night before was gone. It was good to have a human being near, especially one you were guarding. The Listeners took on a protecting attitude. Even the Old House seemed to have grown friendly, pleased that it was sheltering someone.

4

Beyond the Garden Gate

NEXT MORNING THE STORM WAS OVER; THE DRENCHED earth, washed and clean, and sparkling in a glory of sunshine, was smiling through her tears in apology for the tempers of the night before. Islay found her visitor up and dressed in his own clothes. Those she had given him were lying in a heap beside the couch where he had slept. He was out in the yard, working manfully at his broken bicycle, amidst a bewilderment of small gadgets strewn over the damp flag stones at the kitchen door.

As Islay set about preparations for breakfast he darted in, anxious to show his skill at lighting a fire again. When he had it blazing she sent him to the well for water and while she prepared the meal he hammered at his machine.

He had been very quiet for some time and when she had set toast and milk on the table for him, she went to call him and was surprised to find he had disappeared. He had somehow assembled the various parts of his machine and had actually succeeded in making them work, for he was already riding the wreck, wobbling down the lane towards the road. Ginger was sitting alone, whining and trembling as he watched the wavering little figure disappear down the valley.

"And without so much as a thank you," Islay said in disgust, as she sat down to her solitary breakfast. She hurried through her morning tasks. Ginger had to be fed and she noticed the hen and her mixed brood were venturing too near his sacred plate and there were rumblings as if another storm were rising. She drove the intruders back to the barnyard where they belonged, but with some compunction. They too, would have to be fed. Another problem on her hands. To live one's own unhampered life on a farm was not so simple as it had looked from an office desk. If she had to raise vegetables and chickens and ducks, and entertain stray youngsters, and do her own housekeeping, she might be driven to hiring Lily Anne.

And here came yet another visitor before she got started on her day's work. It was Steve, her manager, and Ginger did not even take the trouble to announce him. A tall youngish man, but with that earthward stoop the land seemed to demand of all that served her, he was striding down the path from the pasture field. He had the typical farmer's gait, rocking from side to side, as

though he were treading over ploughed land. He hoisted his long legs over the back fence, disdaining to go up to the gate. Islay went out to meet him. She did not like Steve. He was talkative and boastful. She remembered vaguely that she and Pete had always avoided him when they were children, as the big bullying cousin on the next farm.

"Morning," he called, looking round with a critical air. "Get drownded last night?"

"Not quite," she said pleasantly. "But there are two leaks in the roof. I am afraid I am going to be a trouble to you, Cousin Steve."

"I'll betcha she'll leak all right," he declared striding into the kitchen. "You'll find this old dump is awful run down." He tramped out to the shed, and looked up at the roof. "Hear you had company last night. That Pierson kid!" He burst out laughing. "Talk about tramps! Hope you don't find he's left ye a few hundred bed-bugs. The three o' them jist arrived from some place in Saskatchewan. Drove all the way. Can ye beat it? You should see the car they have. Golly it looks like some old threshin' machine. Say, this here shed roof's jist about gone. You'll find this whole place will need some money spent on it. Them Pierson folks drove through here yisterday and the kid got lost somehow. The father's huntin' work. He'll likely get a job with some o' the neighbours till the hayin's over anyhow. Not likely any good, though. He don't look it. I wouldn't hire him on a bet."

"Poor things, somebody will have to hire him," Islay said stiffly. She led him upstairs to show where the rain had come through the bedroom ceiling above Grammy's Ben. Steve smelled strongly of the stable and his heavy boots held something more than the odour of manure. Islay shivered as he tramped after her.

"Yeah, this old place needs a lot o' fixin'," he declared. "You'll find it'll be a big expense to you," he added with an air of satisfaction. "Your Uncle Robert and his family never had much interest in the farm and they let everything run down, after your Aunt Louisa got the bug for goin' to the States. That rich brother of hers in Chicago upset her completely and nothing would do but they must all pick up and go to Chicago too."

"Well, they're much better off than if they had stayed on the farm," Islay said.

"Oh, I don't know," Steve declared. "They're rich, I guess, if you can believe all they write to the relations. But I wouldn't want to live in the States, and they say Chicago's an awful hole. No sir, give me the farm every time, if it's managed right. Now take this place. It's all gone to pot. Old Aunt

Christena was too mean to hire a good man and she let anybody tinker round here. And your Uncle Peter never mended a thing while he was livin'. He kinda lost interest after Bessie kicked over the traces."

"Here's where the rain came in," Islay interrupted rather shortly. Steve examined the leak in the roof without pausing.

"Yessir, old Aunt Teenie was the near one. She wouldn't 'a saved so much money if she'd had a gang o' kids like what I've got all crazy to get to high school. Gosh, ain't it the limit, now, how much it takes to get kids eddicated? There's Celie, our oldest, she's jist home from the Normal. She was eighteen last September and she's been at school every day of her life since she could walk, and she's not earned a cent out of it. And I've been payin' out money hand over fist for her every year. She ain't likely to get a school now, either, even if she does pass. There's ten teachers to every section, they tell me, and salaries goin' down. And now young Steve's got the bug. I tell him I never got my Entrance and I never missed it. But his mother backs him up, and nothing'll do him but to go to high school. And when they once turn their backs on the farm you never see them again, let me tell you."

"But what would you do with them all at home?" Islay argued mildly. "You've got to give them a start in the world, and an education is the best thing you can give them."

She repented her words immediately, for Steve was now off on a new subject and her precious morning was flying.

"You weemin's all alike," he declared leaning against the door post of the bedroom. "That's jist what Minnie's harpin' on day and night. Now see here. This is what an eddication does to farm kids . . ." He plunged into his argument. He gave overwhelming statistics to show that Canada was turning out far more young people from schools and colleges than there were situations. They were all hunting for white collar jobs while the real work of the country was left undone. In the old days the college graduates all went to the States, and now that they couldn't do that, they were just running round idle. What the country needed was a school that would learn the kids to make things with their hands. Look at Uncle Geordie Laird, now! He'd given that boy of his, Dick Hartley, a college education—Guelph for three years. And the binder broke down last summer and do you think that guy could fix it? Had to send for old Wise Watty here to go down and do it for him. When you sent your youngsters to school all they got was something out of a book that didn't do them any good, and made them think they were too good for farming.

Islay was relieved to hear Ginger barking; it provided an excuse for escape.

She went downstairs to investigate. She found he was merely doing his duty like a good watch-dog, and was protesting because the hen had decided to move her family back to the sheltered nook under the wood-pile. Ginger knew the proper place for the lesser breeds. The barn harboured a cat too, and he saw to it that she did not put paw beyond the barnyard. Islay gave him some more breakfast in gratitude for having released her.

Steve brought a ladder from the barn and went up on the roof. He hammered for a while and then descended saying that for once them old shingles was nailed down and if she sprung another leak Islay was just to let him know.

She sighed as she went to the work of making the place tidy. Steve had left some rusty nails on the kitchen table, a hammer on the doorstep, the ladder leaning against the house, and, worst of all, the odour of the stables through the rooms. The couch upon which her little visitor had slept was still in a state of disorder behind the stove. She hung the blankets and the clothes he had worn on the wire line in the orchard, shuddering at the remembrance of Steve's horrible hints. She dragged the old couch out into the sun beside the kitchen door.

Islay was fastidious about her personal belongings and the complex problem of her housekeeping had begun to worry her. If she were to be cook, laundress and housemaid, how could she find time to sit at her desk. She longed, too, to remake the inside of the Old Home to suit her taste. What a joy it would be to fix up Grammy's Ben, to stain the low raftered ceiling and open the fireplace which had been boarded over. Aunt Christena's money could be spent on redecorating. But she had neither the time nor the ability to do it.

And then the noise of the outside world intruded yet again Ginger announced that this time a stranger was approaching. There was the rattle of a car in the lane. She stepped out, wishing her lot had been cast in the days of oxen and stone-boats when people stayed home.

But here was a welcome visitor. The little box-like car bore the name of A. B. Coppy, and told the world in large shining letters that it carried Sea Foam bread and buns and every sort of confection known to the baking industry.

She went down the path to where the car had stopped near the pump. Out jumped a little man with white hair under a big straw hat, and blue overalls the colour of his bright eyes.

"Good-day, missus, good-day,—miss, I mean," he cried genially. "They were tellin' me all up and down the line that you'd come to live in the Old Laird Home and I thought I'd jist drop along and see if you wouldn't like me

to call twice a week when I'm out this way. The folks down the line was sayin' that you wouldn't be wantin' anybody to call, but I says she's gotta eat, ain't she? Everybody wants bread, I says, unless she bakes her own. And that got me a laugh, you bet. I'm always that cheery kind, I can always raise a laugh all up and down the line here. Yessir, I says, she's gotta have bread: the staff of life. Odd or no odd, odd or even, I says, she'll enjoy a loaf of Sea Foam. Old Doc Williams down there now, you know him, don't you?"

No, Islay said rather stiffly, she hadn't heard of the gentleman. He was amazed at her ignorance. Not know Doc Williams? Why, he thought everybody knew him. "Eh, he's a character. He lives jist at the foot of the hill there as you go into Carlisle. Well, old Doc he says to me, says he, 'A.B.C.' he says—That's what they all call me on account of my initials—'A.B.C.' he says 'if you can raise dough as easy as you can raise a laugh, you ought to be some baker,' he says. Yes, I'm always the cheery kind. There ain't no harm in a good laugh. Now, you'll be wantin' a loaf of my Sea Foam, eh?"

"I don't think I will need very much," Islay said, "I'm alone here, and I like home-made bread."

He leaped to the car and threw open the door at the back. "Home-made bread! That's my speci-*al*-ity. Here you are, home-made milk loaf."

"But it's bakers', just the same," she said to herself, remembering Minnie's feathery loaf, and remembering too all the tough, uncooked loaves Jeannette was always buying under the name of home-made bread. "I'm afraid I'm spoiled," she said. "My cousin's wife on the next place here has been sending me over her bread."

"That's what they were tellin' me down the line," he said, "but I says Minnie can't keep that up with the family she's got to bake for already. She can't even keep Steve filled. She gets Sea Foam too. She's about the only woman in Wappitti township that bakes her own bread and it's jist because Steve has to be pampered."

Islay sighed and said she would take two loaves. Evidently there was no privacy for anyone in this neighbourhood. 'Down the line' knew your very thoughts. She bought tickets and asked him to call when he came back.

The little man leaned in at the door of his wagon and carefully lifted out the loaves. The little bake shop on wheels was spotless inside and fragrant with the aroma of cinnamon buns. Islay noted, too, that the baker's blue overalls were immaculate but patched beyond belief, that the hair beneath his old straw hat was white and thin, that his small frame stooped. He was evidently making a gallant attempt to be young and gay, and if he could raise a laugh up and

down the line over the odd woman who had come to the Old Home Place, she really should not grudge him his tiny bit of fame. She smiled and when Islay Drummond's face smiled it was beautiful. He smiled in return, a relieved smile, and fastening the door, turned to the well.

"I must have my drink before I go," he cried. "When your aunt, the old lady, was alive I always came here with bread and I never went away without a drink." He pumped a dipper full and took a long draught. "Eh, eh," he cried, smacking his lips. "There's no water like it. Course you know that. Did they tell you that old Dr. Campbell who was the minister here when your mother was a wee slip of a girl preached a sermon about this well? Yes sir, he did. He never named no names, but everybody knew he was talkin' about Old Gentleman Laird and his well. I mind that sermon, and I wasn't old enough to understand it. But I mind the text better than I mind the text of last Sunday's sermon: 'And thy soul shall be as a watered garden.' Yes, that was it". His voice dropped to a whisper, " 'Thy soul shall be as a watered garden'. Yes, we don't get preachers like that these days."

He hung the dipper on its nail and turning to Islay said in a low, diffident tone.

"D'ye believe the Bible, miss?"

Islay was slightly taken aback. Life in the country it seemed was not at all like life in the city. In her rooms in the Prospect Apartments the baker left a wrapped loaf on the back balcony in exchange for the ticket she put out for him. She never spoke to him and he would not likely have stayed to answer if she had. But here business deals were human contacts. You even mixed your theology with your bread.

"I,—why, yes," she answered. "Yes, certainly I do," wondering if she were speaking the truth.

He gazed at her with an air of profound relief. "Well, well, now, I'm mighty glad to hear you say that, missus, I mean miss. They tell me there's so many city folks that's infidels these days, that I'm glad to hear you say that. They tell me that there's men goin' through the cities sayin' that the Bible's all lies, even ministers in their pulpits," he added gazing at her with worried eyes as though beseeching her to deny it.

"I never heard of a minister saying any such thing," she said gently. "And I've lived for years in the city and gone to church."

His face shone. "Eh, well, now that's good news! Grand news! I'm mighty glad to hear you say that. The Word of the Lord still stands. Eh, that's good!"

He was as pleased as though an old friend had been vindicated. Islay could not but feel touched.

"Yes, it makes a body feel afraid when you hear about them throwin' the Bible overboard. But now, you would know. All the Drummonds was highly educated and I knew you'd know. And I thought I'd jist ask you first chance I'd get. I mind your father was the great doctor, and he used to say, sometimes a word o' Scripture was as good as a dose of his medicine. Eh, well, well, I must be goin'. And welcome to Lairdale. Good-bye now, ma'am, good-bye, and thank ye kindly. And don't forget that text! 'And thy soul shall be as a watered garden.' Good-bye!" He leaped aboard and went rattling down the lane.

Islay went slowly up the path to the house. She paused beside the flower bed at the end of the veranda. Grandmother's iris and peonies, 'flags and pineys' she had called them, were waving in the sunshine, refreshed and lovely after the night's rain. '*As a watered garden*', funny little man had said. Perhaps her soul had been growing arid and unyielding in these past years of self-absorption. Perhaps if life had been different . . .

She wandered about the place going back through the deserted barnyard. There was no stock here, fortunately, in barn or stable, not even a cow. But the hen and her little brood were fussing about and ought to be fed. And the big airy barn with its sweet-smelling hay-mow produced a yellow and black cat with emerald eyes and a persistent whine that demanded a saucer of milk.

When all were fed she went back to the vegetable garden where the weeds were racing with the tiny sprouts. She really ought to get the hoe and cultivate her nine rows of beans; but as she went for the implement she glanced across the pasture field and noticed the path that led up to the belt of woods beyond the hill. How often had she and Pete raced up that hill and down the other side to the forbidden paradise, the shore.

She ran inside, found her bathing-suit in the bottom of her still unpacked trunk, took one of Aunt Christena's heavy towels and went over the hill and down into the rolling surf. Before she realized it she found that the entire day had swept past on fleet wings and it was time to go over to Steve's for supper. She reflected with satisfaction on the ease of her preparations. What laborious hours she had had to spend on dressing to go out to dinner! What hours at the beauty parlour! She looked back upon them with a feeling of relief. This afternoon she merely ran a comb through the bright waves of her red-brown hair, and slipped into a fresh linen dress.

She closed the door, called Ginger from his chipmunk hunt in the orchard,

and went along the path through the pasture that led past Bessie's willows. She walked slowly. This was the beginning of the encroachment by the outside world, even though it were done so kindly. And she wanted above all things to be alone. So she could write.

As she came over the first green slope she saw a figure coming to meet her, a young girl, small and dainty, in a frilly dress of orchid muslin. From the crown of golden curls on her uncovered head to the toe of her trim white shoes she was a charming picture. Islay Drummond in her severe, tailored linen and dusty, brown shoes was not without some misgivings as she went forward to meet this vision. It lost none of its allure as it drew nearer. The girl had a rose leaf complexion, a pair of demure blue eyes and a charming, ingratiating manner with a pleasing absence of Lily Anne's assurance. Islay could see on a nearer view that the pretty dress had been picked up at a cheap bargain counter, but had been washed and starched and carefully ironed.

"Why, Celia!" she cried with real pleasure. "You *are* Celia, aren't you? I wouldn't have known you. I thought you were supposed to be a little girl yet!"

Celia laughed shyly, a quick indrawing of breath ending in a little chuckle. She had been charming when she merely smiled, and she was adorable when she laughed. Islay remembered that Minnie had been like this in her girlhood, but not so pretty.

"We did the milking early," Celia said, "and we saw you coming over the bend and momma said I'd better come and meet you. There's a short cut through the bars."

Celia was, mercifully, not one of the talking Lairds. She had to be questioned regarding herself. Yes, she had just got home two days before. Her last examination was just finished. No, she didn't know yet if she'd passed, but she hoped so. And then she would be looking for a school. Oh, she did hope she'd get one. But there were so many teachers, she said wistfully.

They crossed a tiny stream, picking their way from one white stone to another, and paused to listen to the kingfisher calling gaily from the cedars down by the bay. The air was warm and still and laden with the spicy scent of briar rose bushes still wet from yesterday's downpour. The pasture field narrowed to a lane leading down to the barnyard. On one side was a field of alfalfa, a rich carpet of royal purple, on the other blossomed a great stretch of yellow sweet clover. Islay and Celia walked between the purple and the gold, and Islay's spirit was filled with a serenity she had not known for years.

Steve's home appeared through an opening in the orchard trees, a red-brick house surrounded by a neat garden. From the wooded end of the pasture above

came a boy's voice, a clear soprano singing like a very nightingale.

Celia chuckled, "That's Jackie. He's always singing or dancing or playing the mouth-organ. I took organ lessons in my last year in high school, and I always gave them to him as soon as I got one. But he's gone back now that I've been away."

Two little boys were moving across the field, with their big yellow dog, driving the newly-milked cows back into a farther pasture. Ginger bounded ahead to join them. From the same field Lily Anne and little Audrey, the youngest of the family, trailed, herding a flock of unwilling turkeys towards the barn. As they entered the lane, Lily Anne spied the two approaching and waited. She was talking to them long before they reached her.

"Say, we thought yous was two girls!" she cried in astonishment. "Till we saw it was Cousin Islay!"

Celia, looking embarrassed, brought forward the little sister, a small brown sprite of seven, barefoot and shy, and presented her to the city cousin. Lily Anne did not stop talking though her elder sister was making signs to her.

"We've been hours and hours tryin' to get them home. And mind ye, Celie, we counted them and we've got too many. And whose do you suppose have got into our flock?"

Celia looked disturbed. "Oh, Lilanne, they must be old Aunt Betsy's. Oh, she'll be in an awful way."

"Well, you bet I've been in an awfuller way tryin' to drive 'em! And what were they doin' down there in our bush, anyhow? Oh, my land, will you look at that gobbler, Cousin Islay!"

The gobbler certainly was a spectacle. He was strutting before his family, his wattles blazing red, his feathers erect, swollen to twice his size. And he was coughing and whooping in great indignation. Celia grabbed up a stick, and together the girls herded the gypsies towards home. It was quite exciting, for, while the gobbler evidently disapproved of his owners, it was plain he had taken an especial dislike to the newcomer. He sidled up to Islay with menacing gestures, spreading feathers, and trailing wings. Lily Anne drove him off with violent flourishes, never stopping one moment in her stream of talk.

"They say that if you bring turkeys home for sixteen evenings without a break that they'll come home theirselves after that. Don't you mind, Celie, we brought them home fourteen times last year, and then we went to the ball game and forgot one night, and then we had to begin all over again? And then I had to go back to school before I got up to ten again. We're only to six now."

The raging black ball was sidling towards Islay again with evil intent, and, alarmed, she too, caught up a stick and joined the chase.

"I think you might bring that fellow home every day for a year, and he wouldn't learn," she said. And the girls laughed and ran around stone piles and briar bushes and Islay ran and laughed with them, feeling very young and gay.

The rebel was finally subdued by little Audrey. She was bold and fleet and before her onslaughts the gobbler's defiance broke down. The great feather balloon collapsed and he sulked homeward in a great hurry before her menacing stick. They passed through the barnyard. It was a busy place, with pigs squealing, calves bawling and hens screaming for their food, and the smells were as loud as the clamour. The path skirted an odorous manure heap, and they finally passed into the yard beyond with the air of a triumphal procession, preceded by lambs and calves and turkeys and announced loudly by the trumpetings of the gobbler.

Steve's wife came hurrying out of the milk house where she had just finished whirling the handle of the cream separator. She wore a heavy pair of men's boots, and a big dark apron enveloped her. Her hair was pushed back under a cap and her face was shining with perspiration. But there was no sign of embarrassment at the sight of her smartly dressed visitor. She radiated welcome.

"Well, well, now," she cried in genuine delight. "Here's our new neighbour! My, my! It was so good of you to come. See, I can't even shake hands, but you know how welcome you are. Celie, take Cousin Islay into the parlour and I'll be along in one minute. Poppa and the boys'll be in for supper right away."

Celia led the visitor through the barnyard and a neat vegetable garden. Minnie was still giving orders to her little band. "Audie, run and feed the wee pet lambs and the kitties. Lilanne, don't forget the calves, and see that the little boys gather the eggs as soon as they get back, and then we'll all be done!"

She followed Celia around the house to the front door, passing the kitchen from which issued waves of heat. There was a pretty flower garden along the side and front of the house and a trimmed lawn. The parlour was cool and pleasant, with signs that Celia's hands had been at work. There were gay coloured prints on the walls and the stiff lace curtains were tied back with bright ribbons. Islay looked wonderingly at Celia, trying to guess what her place could be in this busy family. She seemed too ornamental to be useful.

"Tell me about your year at the Normal," she said. "Do you think you will really like teaching?"

Celia looked surprised, as though the question of liking it had never arisen. Oh, yes she was sure she would love it, she said with a quick indrawing of her breath. Especially if she had lots of little ones. They were so cute when they were just starting to school.

"But, oh, if I can get a school of any sort!" she cried. "I won't care what it's like."

Islay listened in wonder. This Laird girl was entirely unlike the young girls of her own family. She tried to imagine Kate's indulged Harriet or Rob's sophisticated Angela being sent out to teach a country school, or to do *anything* useful for that matter.

Steve's wife came in from the kitchen. She had put off her barnyard apron and her gingham dress was crisp and clean and her hair was smartly dressed. She had much of the good looks that Celia had inherited in such abundance. Celia slipped out as soon as her mother entered.

"My, it's grand to have Celie home again," Minnie said. "She looks after the meals and that leaves me free for other things. It's great to come in from the barn and find supper on the table."

Islay was amazed and her amazement grew when she was led out to the supper table to view what Celie had prepared. The dining-room was the winter kitchen, and was cool and shining. The long table covered with a white cloth was set out with gay flowered dishes and crammed with plates of food.

Steve and the boys had been washing in the shed and came in, the boys silent and awkward, Steve loud and talkative. There was another boy with them, a young fellow, hired for the haying season, by the name of Reddy. It was very plain he was trying desperately to make an impression on Celia.

Islay looked with interest at the yodelling Jackie. He was a strange, freckle-faced little boy, with big eyes and long slender hands, the hands of a musician.

There were ten at the table but Minnie had hoped for more. "I telephoned Uncle Geordie to ask him to come to supper on his way home from town, but he wouldn't promise. He was hoping that Dick might come on the Guelph bus and went in on a chance o' gettin' him and, oh my, how Uncle Geordie hates drivin' a car! He's jist all set up over Dick comin' home. You mind Uncle Geordie Laird, Cousin Islay?"

Yes, Islay remembered Uncle Geordie better than any other relative. He had no children of his own and was the hero of all the youngsters.

"He always stopped for us to hang on to his sleigh and always had his

pockets stocked with maple sugar!" she said. "But who is Dick? I didn't know him."

"No, he's young, jist twenty-two. He's my brother's boy. You wouldn't know my brother Richard. He was mate on the Madawaska, that big ship that went down in the terrible storm off Manitoulin Island." Tears filled Minnie's eyes. "His wife was with him. So Dick's father and mother were both lost. Dick's mother was a sister of Uncle Geordie's wife, Aunt Aggie, you mind. So Aggie and Geordie took the boy and Uncle Geordie's jist set on him. He's sent him to the Agricultural College and given him such a good education."

As Minnie chatted away about this relative and that, she was seeing that everyone was served. The food was all set on the table, the heaping dishes were passed and each one helped himself. There was a big platter of thinly sliced ham, pink and fragrant, deep hospitable dishes of hot fried potatoes and a picturesque cabbage salad. There were ginger cookies and hot biscuits, chocolate cake and rhubarb pie! Islay looked across the table in wonder at little Celia who had produced all these delectable dishes.

Steve, who was silent and morose during the early part of the meal, began to grow more cheerful as he filled himself with great platefuls of food. There was one topic that interested everyone, the newly arrived family from Saskatchewan. Even the younger children had heard strange tales about them, and Lily Anne was ready to retell them for anyone who was too shy. Reports varied, from Reddy, who had heard that the man was a fugitive from justice, to Minnie, who was sure they were good people but just unfortunate. How could anybody get on in the world if he had rain only once in seven years? Islay found herself something of a heroine in that she had harboured one of the tramps.

"Aw, you mostly find that kind that goes trailin' over the country lookin' for work don't want it any too bad," Steve remarked. He had a great slab of home-made bread laid out on his palm and was lathering it with butter, complacently.

"One of the most serious aspects of the case," Islay said to Minnie, ignoring Steve, for whom her dislike was increasing, "is that the little boy hasn't been in school for a year. The school nearest his home has been closed."

Steve grunted. "Oh, I dunno that it'll hurt him much. Folks mostly put too much store by schoolin'. Ye can't learn a kid farmin' out of a book."

Young Steve, the eldest boy, a tall, silent lad, stole a glance at his mother. Minnie remained unperturbed.

"When Celie gets teaching we'll be glad we let *one* go to school," she said cheerfully.

"Yeah, *if* she gets a school."

"Celia, there's an ad. in tonight's paper for a school teacher, over across the Beaver somewhere," Lily Anne said.

"Winter Green," said Reddy, "Yeah, that's it. Apply in person, it said."

"You'll have to go there, Celie," Lily Anne said. "That's what apply in *person* means, ain't it?"

"Isn't it," Celia said under her breath.

"That's what I'm asking," Lily Anne said smartly.

Minnie looked at Steve.

"Hayin'll be on any day now," he said with finality.

Islay thought of her idle car standing in the big shed. Surely she might—No, she would be too busy to go running about the country. But she felt she would like to help the girl get a school just to put Steve in his place.

The moment the last bite was swallowed the men and boys rose as one and went off to finish their chores, for the long day's work on the farm was not nearly over. Minnie led Islay out to the front porch overlooking the valley. She sat down with a pile of mending.

She hoped Lilanne did her work well yesterday. She was generally a good worker, but sometimes she talked too much. And it was too bad that Cousin Islay had been bothered with the wanderer. Eh, what a family that was! To think they'd left their farm in Saskatchewan, and drove all the way back to Ontario! Lost everything in the drought, poor things. It was awful what some poor folks had to endure. She did hope they'd find a home somewhere.

The telephone in the dining-room had been ringing incessantly, and Celia came hurrying in. It was Cousin Millie across the road. Freddy had run a nail into his foot, and she didn't know what to do. Minnie rose with a hurried apology to her guest.

"Run, Celie, and tell her I'll be right over, tell her to keep the foot up. I won't be a minute."

She was gone down the lane and across the road dropping all her own affairs at the call for help.

Islay went out into the summer kitchen where Celia and Lily Anne were

struggling with the dishes. It seemed a vast job to turn chaos into order and cleanliness. In spite of Celia's protests Islay took a towel off a rack behind the huge stove and began to dry the dishes in a helpless, slow fashion that showed she was unaccustomed to the task. The fire had gone down but there was quantities of hot water in the big tank at the end of the stove and its heat still lingered in the shed. The floor was scrubbed clean, plain rough boards that sagged under the foot. The pump was out in the yard a good ten feet beyond the four steep steps. The cellar, too, led from the winter kitchen and was as hard of access as the pump. Like the arrangements at the Old Home everything was as inconvenient as possible. The girls worked deftly and swiftly. Soon stacks of shining dishes were piled on the dresser or placed in the cupboard, and the oilcloth on the table was scrubbed to shining cleanliness.

"How did you learn to cook a supper like that, Celia?" Islay asked, "and at the same time get your teacher's certificate."

Celia looked surprised again. Oh, cooking! You didn't have to learn that. She had always cooked, since she could remember. Perhaps it was watching momma.

When Minnie returned dusk was stealing down the valley, though the Blue Ridge still smiled in the sunset. The younger children were out on the lawn playing baseball, young Stevie and Lily Anne loudly captaining opposing sides. The men had come in from the barn and were sitting on a bench outside the kitchen door. Islay rose to return home. Wasn't it lonely over in the Old Home at night, Minnie asked as she went with her around the house. Wouldn't she like Celie to go over and stay all night? It was kind of ghostly being all alone, Minnie added, looking round happily at her noisy brood.

Islay accepted the offer gratefully. She had really been feeling that she must ask for help, but had feared she might get Lily Anne. They went off together over the dewy pasture field, Celia carrying a basket with cookies and a jar each of cream and of milk. The hollows were filled with purple shadows, the hills still touched with gold. The bay was a great sheet of crystal, delicately tinted. Birds twittered sleepily from the bushes along the fence. Above in the pale green heavens a night-hawk swooped and zoomed with his harsh cry of 'bee-*ying*'.

"I like it up here," Celia said softly. "It's like being in church, somehow, isn't it?"

"It's a sanctuary," Islay said, with a deep sigh of content. "I can feel all the trivial things that have been bothering me for months slipping off my shoulders."

5

New Garden Plots

THE DAWN WAS STILL IN THE SKY ABOVE BLUE RIDGE WHEN Islay awoke the next morning. Though it was so early, Celia had already slipped out and gone home. While Islay was grateful, she was a little disappointed, and a little irritated that she should be disappointed. What a grand arrangement it would be to have a girl like Celia come over every day and do the troublesome work of cooking and cleaning that was to take so much of her valuable time. But she was ashamed to ask for her, knowing how Minnie must need her help. And she might find herself with Lily Anne on her hands. And then she would be obliged to leave, would be swept away on a tide of talk. Islay was a little suspicious of that smart young lady, too, not being quite certain whether her distress over the mention of the name of Dr. Wallace were entirely genuine.

She got her breakfast, making it as simple as possible. Though she ate little she noted that a trip to town for provisions would soon be in order. And that would be another lost day. She was making her bed, and putting her room in order, generally, when Ginger announced a visitor. He was faithful as a well-trained butler. She must write and tell Kate that she had a servant who announced all callers in a most punctilious manner. For Ginger's announcing voice indicated to his mistress whether a guest were a complete stranger or not. Just now he was woofing from the back door that *this* visitor was an old friend, and entirely welcome as far as he, Ginger, were concerned. Islay went out to find her guest of the rain storm wavering into the yard on his shaky bicycle. Ginger circled round him, rollicking and barking with delight. The boy dismounted and fondled the dog.

"That Steve sent me," he said, motioning towards the other farm. "Steve, over there, he said I'd better come over and work for you today. He said you was lookin' for a man." He stood staring at her with his old worried eyes, so seriously that it was impossible to be annoyed, even though she saw through Steve.

"I thought you were going to get a job the morning you went away so suddenly," she said.

He shook his head. "We moved, and I was helping mommy and dad. Did you know we got a house?" he asked, brightening. "Oh, say, it's a dandy

place! It ain't so big as this house but there's a spring behind, and water runs all the time, mind ye! So when we got all settled I thought I'd come up and see if Jack and Billy could let me help them. But Steve he says they's too many kids round there now. And they's more down where my dad's workin'. He's workin' at Ike Simpson's down below there, and they's ten kids there, and two goats. So they don't need me, and I thought you didn't have any help and Steve said mebby I'd do some weedin'."

Islay called up all her resolution. Life was going to get far too complicated as it was. She would be courting disaster if she allowed this child to bother her and she had deep suspicions of Steve.

"No thank you," she was kind but firm. "I need a hired girl, but not a hired boy." She hesitated at the look of desperation and dismay in his solemn eyes. "Would you like to stay a while and see how the little duck is getting along?" she added, weakly.

He nodded and went to place his bicycle against the shed. He seemed to take an unreasonably long time getting it balanced, and, as she watched him, she was dismayed to see that he was trying to conceal the tears that slipped down his little old face. She went indoors and busied herself sweeping up the kitchen floor.

The boy slipped away silently to the barn and she heard him calling to the hen and chickens.

He came hurrying back in a very short time, lugging an armful of squirming, furry balls and followed by the large and anxious tortoise-shell cat.

"Lookit! Look what I found in your barn!" he cried in glee.

He carefully placed the four soft little bundles on the door stone at her feet and stretched himself beside them, squirming in sympathetic absorption. "Jist lookit! Oh, ain't they cute." He was as tenderly careful of the kittens as the mother was herself, but she was greatly distressed. She gathered her furry children close to her, and, catching up each one, scrubbed it vigorously to remove any contamination.

"Oh! Oh! Ain't they cute!" He was transfixed. Four baby tails held jauntily erect, four balls of fur capered over the stones. "Say, they're nearly big enough to drink milk. Do you want me to get them some out of that blue jug?"

Islay braced herself. No, she didn't think she had better. She'd have to send them all over to Steve's, probably.

The little old child was a mind-reader.

“But they’ve jist got swarms and swarms o’ cats and kittens over there already! Say, did you see their big old cat, Michael? He’s Billy’s cat! Oh, boy! They squirt the milk at him hot, right outa the cow and he takes it down and never misses a drop. If you had a cow I could train these kittens to do that and it would save feedin’ them. Say, why don’t you have a cow? You wouldn’t have to get milk from Steve’s then. You’d jist have to go to the barn for it. Aw, look at that little yaller chap! Oh, *lookit*!”

The little fellow was worth looking at. He was almost golden, while the rest of the family were piebald or grey. He evidently knew he was being admired, he stretched, arched his back gracefully, in feline appreciation of this audience. Ginger pressed close to the boy, growling ominously, wanting attention. He was jealous of the fur baby. But the little ball of tawny down, snapping into action, lithe, leopard-like, leaped like a little yellow spurt of flame. Furry tail bristled belligerently. Diminutive paw moved deftly, struck defiantly at the mighty foe.

The boy rolled over on the grass in a transport of sheer bliss. Such happiness racked his small frame.

Islay sat down on the stones beside him to join in the fun.

She finally persuaded him to take the furry friends back to the barn, promising to see what could be done about their future. Perhaps she might keep them . . .

Perhaps he would go away if she disappeared, she thought, so she went out to the veranda and settled to her desk for a quiet morning. But the distraction was right on her heels. He followed the sound of her typewriter and stole round to the front of the veranda staring in under the vines, looking more than ever like a gnome.

“Say! say, missus,” he said. “I could make you a house for them kittens. They need a house to live in. And the old hen needs a coop. The chickens is all runnin? away on her. And that duck! He won’t go away from that puddle at the well. I could make a little fence round the coop to make him stay in. There’s lots o’ boards round behind the barn. Say,” he drew nearer, his eyes shining, “what’s that machine you’re rattlin’? Oh,” his eyes lit up as he slowly stole one foot up on the veranda, “is it a typewriter?”

“Yes.”

“My! Say you can go lickety-split can’t you? What are you writing?”

“A letter.”

“Say, you’ll soon get done, won’t you!” He was approaching, fascinated.

“No, no, you mustn’t touch it,” she cried, “I’m busy now. Run and see what Ginger is barking at.”

That didn’t take long. He came charging back in no time. “Missus! missus! It’s a groundhog! And he’s et all your garden up! Ginger chased him up through the field. He’s a great big fat fellow!”

Islay drew the cover over her typewriter and followed him to the scene of combat.

The child capered ahead of her in great excitement. Ginger was barking wildly before a heap of stones up in the pasture field. “He’s up there!” The boy shouted. “He’s up in his hole where Ginger can’t get at him. He was sittin’ up there on the stones as bold as anything and chitterin’ away at Ginger like the dickens!”

There was a place where the lettuce had been removed as though it had been shaved off neatly with a sharp knife. But there was still enough left to feed all the Lairds on the Wappitti River. Islay was more disturbed over the weedy state of the garden. Steve and his boys had taken the trouble to plant the vegetables for her and she must not let them go to waste. Besides she needed them. There were berry bushes too, and other fruit; raspberries and currants and a patch of strawberry vines, already in white blossom. There were long rows of little plants, delicate silver-green, that she did not recognize at first. Then she remembered. She remembered Great-Uncle Peter giving Pete and her five cents a row for weeding cabbages. Soft green, like the lawn grass when you saw it early mornings, washed with dew sheen. There had been big cabbages and small cabbages. And Pete had carefully pulled out the small plants. They had dwindled, limp and dark on the garden soil. Only people said he’d weeded out all the cabbages and left the lamb’s quarter. Why did they call it lamb’s quarter, she’d wondered. And how they’d laughed, till grandma had comforted Pete, overcome with shame because he hadn’t known lamb’s quarter. She remembered, too, the thrill of earning that money! Uncle Peter, against the earnest advice of Great-Aunt Christena, paid them every night. Shiny nickels. They laid them in two rows on the wide window sill in Grammy’s Ben. A double road of gleaming nickel! They gloated over it.

She stood now, looking down the rows of pale cabbages. Over by the barn mother and father would soon drive up in the buggy. Time to take Pete and her back home to school . . . She pulled herself up, sharply.

The boy had been off on a swift journey up to where the enemy was still ‘chittering’ defiance at Ginger. He came trotting along the path towards her.

Islay stared down at him. He looked more than ever like Pete at that age. But a wispy, frail Pete. All Islay's defences went down before him. It was too much to have him running to her, down the old path, trustful and eager, barefoot, ragged. He was very like Pete!

"I do believe I *should* have somebody to hoe these weeds," she decided, out loud. "But do you think you could do it?"

He took a sudden caper over the tomato plants. Like Ginger.

Oh, boy! Could he do it? Course he could. Why he knew all about weeds. You had to pull them. Right up by the roots. His dad had showed him. No, you didn't use the hoe, not at first when the plants was so little. Then you pulled 'em by hand!

He went down on his knees and tore frantically at the soil to demonstrate how well he could do it. Ginger had returned from his expedition against the groundhog, and, thinking this present performance was designed to dig the enemy out, began scratching madly, scattering earth far and wide, snorting and whining.

The boy was convulsed. Difficult laughter twisted his whole frame. He rolled around in the dirt, while Islay succeeded in convincing Ginger that his help wasn't wanted. One gardener promised sufficient destruction.

After watching for a while to see that the boy did not tear up the whole garden in his excessive zeal, she left the two to do their worst. She was rather dismayed over what she had done. A boy would have to be fed, and the preparation of meals was burden enough when she was alone. She would arrange with him to come a couple of hours every morning and go home before dinner. Then she would not be worried with him. But she knew she could not turn him away. Even his laughter was like Pete's. But not carefree. This child laughed like an exercise. As if it hurt him.

She walked slowly around the house. Lingered at the front door. She could never get enough of the view here. The wide valley lay lovely in the June sunshine. She counted its varying greens—bright green of new alfalfa fields, olive green like the high pastures, soft jade oat-green, rich, brilliant wheat-green, deep woods blue-green, russet-green of the far heights of Blue Ridge. It was hard to turn from it. The page she had just written seemed drab, colourless, now. She took it out, threw it into the old clothes-basket she was using for waste materials. She slipped a new leaf into the typewriter. Starting a new, fresh leaf, she thought, smiling.

She had written one line when a pair of big eyes loomed in an opening in

the vines.

"Missus," said her hired man, "say, missus! Is it all right if I stop to get a drink? I'm awful dry and so's Ginger." She nodded, and he trotted away, the dog at his heels. She heard the pump rattling quite enough to water all Steve's cows and horses. He came back to report.

"I gave the chickens a drink, too," he explained, "and the kittens and the little duck. The old cat was awful thirsty. They all need milk. And I let Ducky have a swim in the trough. Oh, gee, didn't he have fun! He's crazy over water. Say, do you know? The new house we live in has a spring jist back of it, and it goes all day and all night too, mind ye, even when you're asleep. Mother said she never thought Ontario would be like this. So much water! Say, did you know water would run like that all night without nobody to pump it? My mother says she's goin' to wash every day, jist to feel the water."

"Very nice I'm sure," Islay said absently. "Now you run back to the garden and see how many weeds you can dig up. Try the hoe, for the big ones. It's in the shed."

But he was back in a few moments to show her a strange new shiny green bug, and to ask its name, and in the course of twenty minutes had paid her almost as many visits.

He was so eager and so overflowing with happiness that she could not bear to quench his enthusiasm. But he was playing havoc with her work. She managed to explain at last that she must not be disturbed. "You see, I have writing to do," she said. "And any noise or anybody talking disturbs me. So you just keep at your work, like a good boy, and soon I will come round and see how well you have done." He slipped away at that, looking very solemn and subdued and she heard the steady scrape of his hoe on the stones. But only for a few minutes. She paused a moment in her typewriting and heard a low hissing from the other side of the vines. "Missus," came a whisper, then louder, "Mrs. Reilly!" Evidently the children at Steve's had told him her name and he had not quite caught it. "Mrs. Reilly!" he was calling softly.

"Well, what is it?"

"Listen!" he whispered, dramatically, "do you hear that?"

She listened and from far down the orchard aisle came a soft muffled 'Coo-Coo-Coo'.

"What is it?" she enquired, also in a whisper.

"A cuckoo!" he cried, as though he announced the discovery of an ostrich

in the orchard. “Say, d’ye know what? Them cuckoos lays eggs in other birds’ nests and then goes off and leaves them. Say, don’t you want me to chase him away? There’s a bluebird’s nest down there in the apple tree. He might lay his egg there. Say, he might! And then the cuckoo would shove all the little bluebirds outa the nest and he’d fill it all up.”

“Where did you learn all this about birds?”

“Daddy tells me. He knows everything. But there’s lots more birds here than back West. Daddy says it keeps him jumpin’ to keep up with them. Say, though! They’ve got an awful big bird to Steve’s there, I never seen before. I’ll ask my dad about it. Billy and Audrey said it was a bird, but I dunno. It’s awful big!” He was up on the veranda now and had forgotten to whisper.

“What is it like?”

“Oh, it’s awful black and has a red rag hangin’ over its nose. I think Billy was spoofin’ me. I bet it ain’t a bird. I bet it was a little bear, a black bear. But it howled like a coyote. Say, don’t you want me to chase that cuckoo away?”

She gave him generous permission to do what he willed with the intruder, and from that time on he and Ginger made an uproar in the orchard sufficient to frighten away every feathered creature, even the black bear. She tried to work but the tumult became so violent she had to go out to investigate. It had broken out behind the house among the vegetables, and here was cause, indeed. The boy came running to her yelling for help. The bear, itself, had taken possession, he declared. All Lily Anne’s turkeys, led by the gobbler were there! Up and down the rows helping themselves to lettuce and green pea shoots and everything else they could lay their beaks on!

The ‘bear’ had swelled himself up to a great black ball of fury, his long headpiece swollen and scarlet with rage, and was marching up and down gobbling defiance. Islay went rather reluctantly into the fray. Ginger did not relish trying conclusions with the gobbler; and her hired man, though valiant in spirit, was timorous in deed. It was a long time before the intruders were evicted, leaving the battlefield strewn with sticks and stones, and the plants trampled into the soil.

Islay realized that if she kept her hired man all morning she would be exhausted and nothing would be done. So, though it was near dinner time, she salved her conscience by giving him a half-dozen of the cookies Celia had brought over the night before, and by paying him generously. He might come three times a week, she said, yielding weakly against her better judgment. She felt sure the garden would not need any more attention, she declared, firmly, when he generously insisted that he should come every day. She did not add

that three days a week was all she would be able to endure. So it was finally settled and he rattled away on his old bicycle, so gloriously happy that she felt ashamed.

She took this new problem with her down to the shore where she had chosen a secluded nook bounded by thick cedars for a bath-house. This lovely tangle of woods along the bay was no place for problems. The waves advanced on the stony shore in little, laughing raids. White gulls soared and flashed in the sunshine, and from the high spruces little notes of silver sounded where the veeries answered the call of white throats from the far green recesses —'Canada! Canada! Canada!'

The green nook in among the cedar clumps made a secluded dressing room, and the refreshing plunge into the waves washed away all problems. As she came out of the water and clambered back over the stones, she felt a little self-conscious. She could not help wondering if this little strip of shore were as secluded as it seemed. And then she was startled by an outburst of derisive laughter from far down the shore. A loud, insulting 'ah-ha, ha, ha, ha!' She scurried back to her shelter. Peeked out cautiously. Once more the ringing laughter burst forth, but this time she joined it. A flock of birds circled about in a sunny little bay far down the shore. Loons! Why hadn't she thought of it at once! She remembered now how she and Pete used to join their fun, answering across the water—a loon-like conversational effect.

It was mid-afternoon before she was seated at her desk again. The fire and the kettle had been more difficult than ever, and the hired man had left tracks all over the kitchen floor. Well, they must just stay there until she felt able to endure another day of Lily Anne's prattle. After all, this was going to be a carefree life compared to her crowded days in the city. She never left the office until five-thirty, or even six o'clock, for old Mr. Frances had a fatal aptitude for remembering things that had to be done late in the afternoon. Her evenings were always full. She belonged to a bridge club that met two nights a week. Tuesday nights she always dined with one of the family, either Kate or Jeanette, or Robert. Wednesday night the book club met, she had to go to that for she had no time to read a book. She could not remember when she had read one through. Friday night, twice a month, the music club met, but she was on the executive and had to go every Friday. There were concerts and lectures and plays on Friday nights too, and then there was scarcely a week that she was not invited somewhere, and one had to entertain in return for these favours. There was the dressmaker and the hairdresser and the manicurist. And endless shopping, alone or with her sisters. Sundays, she tried to keep up the habit of church-going, because she had been so trained, and because her conscience

demanded that she go. But very often she was so weary with the whirl of the week that she could not get up in time. And then some one of the family always had a tea Sunday afternoon and she had to be there to help Kate or Jeanette or Mary. A full life. But full of what!

Surely here, where she was relieved from the whirling round of engagements, she could accomplish something. She went back to her desk and briskly typed a page or two.

And there was her butler again, announcing guests! Saying, too, that these guests were strange to him and that they were coming by the proper way, up the lane to the front door. She rose, and her hands sought her damp hair, patting it hastily into semblance of order.

The first glimpse of the car was enough to reassure her. No Drummond rode in a car like that! It was a small runabout, a ten-year-old model at best, set high on its chassis like an old top buggy, and it puffed, rattled and wheezed up the hill and in to the lane.

Islay remembered that grandmother had never waited indoors for her visitors to knock, as inhospitable city folk did, so she stepped down from the veranda and waited on the edge of the lawn. The car stopped beside her and a tall, thin man stepped from it. He was shabby and stooped, and wore a long, rumpled linen coat, popularly known in the old days as a ‘duster’. But as he took off his straw hat and came forward to greet her, Islay knew him for a very fine gentleman. This must be the minister of Lairdale church, Mr. Carruthers. She recognized him from something she had heard Minnie say about him yesterday. “I dunno what it is about Mr. Carruthers,” Minnie had said, “but somehow, he kinda makes me think of the old prophets in the Bible. There’s an air about him.” Islay sensed the air.

“It’s Mr. Carruthers, is it not?” she asked holding out her hand. His thin, scholarly face was radiant. “Yes, yes, and you are Miss Drummond. We just drove up to say welcome to Lairdale. Welcome back, I should say. It is good to see the family returning to the Old Home.”

He handed his wife and daughter from the car. Mrs. Carruthers was a small, sad-looking woman, with the wistful air of one whom life had not treated as well as she felt she deserved. Their daughter, who had been driving the car, came next. She was tall like her father, pale and stooped, and her drab linen dress was ugly and old-fashioned. But she had a pair of lovely grey eyes that asked you to like her please, and a warm smile that said she was ready to like you.

Islay led the way into Grammy’s Ben. These were her first real callers and

she was conscious of the broken veranda step, the height of the weeds around the doorway, and the long coarse grass of the uncared-for lawn. She would really have to put away her typewriter and give her mind to the fixing up of her home. She had not noticed that Lily Anne had placed the chairs in one stiff row along the wall. As she went to pull them out of place she was a little surprised to find the minister hastening to assist her. Men in the country, she was learning, did the hard work of the fields, and when they entered the home they expected to sit and be waited on. It was pleasant to meet again a man who belonged to her old world.

These were nice people, she decided at once, her own kind, especially the girl. Celia had told her about Ellen Carruthers with many gasps of wondering admiration. She had reported, in hushed tones, that Ellen had graduated from the University of Toronto this spring in honour mathematics and physics. Islay looked, with interest, at the tall, stooped figure, at her unattractive clothes, and her discouraged air, and thought how little learning could do for a woman, after all. Mrs. Carruthers was not long in bringing up the subject of her family's attainments.

"We have just the two children," she said, "Ronald, our son, is at present in Montreal. I suppose you know he was a Rhodes scholar."

Islay was thankful for Celia's preparatory gossip. "Yes, indeed," she exclaimed. "He is a very brilliant young man."

"Oh, the boy hasn't done badly," the minister said, apologetically. "Ronald was always a hard-worker, and that is what counts."

"His father will never admit that Ronnie is clever," Mrs. Carruthers said. "You know what Sir Robert Falconer, himself, said of him, papa."

"Oh Sir Robert is always very kind," the minister excused.

"And I hear," Islay said, "that the son is not the only brilliant member of the family." She turned to the girl who was sitting in silence. "What was your course?" She wanted the girl to speak.

"Honour maths. and physics," she said, shortly.

"*Mathematics*, dear," her mother corrected, disappointed that she had been thwarted in the matter of Sir Robert. "I really disapprove of the way young people of today abbreviate everything. Don't you, Miss Drummond?"

"Miss Drummond is a university graduate herself, mother, and likely she's never heard the word mathematics." A lovely, shy smile illuminated the pale face.

“Not in college, certainly,” Islay said, smiling back at her. “But I have a profound respect for anyone who can graduate in that subject. Celia has been telling me about you.”

But she could by no means induce the girl to talk about herself, and Mrs. Carruthers steered the talk to Rhodes scholars again, this subject being dear to her heart. The minister chatted away, when his wife would let him, said how glad they would be to see the owner of the Old Laird Home in the church again. Then he rose, saying he had seen Steve in the back field and wanted to speak with him, so if she would excuse him . . . This was his most courtly manner. Islay saw him to the sagging veranda steps with some ceremony, like taking leave of royalty. Back in the living-room again, she slipped down on one of Aunt Christena’s haircloth chairs and listened. Mrs. Carruthers plunged gustily into the subject of Ronald. It was a clear field, uninhibited, now that her husband had retired from it. Ronald had taken work in Montreal, with a large firm. Next year he hoped to go to Oxford . . . The daughter was plainly embarrassed. Or was she bored. How many times had she listened to these exploits, Islay wondered, pulling herself back to formal seating posture on the absurd, slithery horsehair.

“How do you like country life?” Islay realized, with a start, that Mrs. Carruthers was commencing what might be a barrage, in her direction. Had she exhausted Rhodes?

“I should like it very much,” Islay spoke dubiously, “but I am not accustomed to house work and I am not very good at it. I wonder if you could suggest anyone who would come in a few hours a day and wash and iron and clean . . . yes, and cook,” she added with a wry smile. “I have a great deal of work I brought with me, and I haven’t time for housekeeping. And this old place needs fixing up.”

Here was an interesting topic, so Mrs. Carruthers took it up. She went up and down the line inspecting all the farmers’ daughters. Each was rapidly disqualified. There was no one like little Celia right near her. She was a treasure. But, of course, Mrs. Steve would need her this summer. But, her mental tour completed, she returned to the subject of Ronald, with its inexhaustible possibilities. I mustn’t be inhospitable, Islay worried, listening politely. What could I serve them? Grandfather’s well, that’s never depleted, she thought, stupidly. Ought to invite the minister and his family to stay for supper. But it’s only four o’clock. Anyway there is no food. And I don’t know how to serve a meal if there were. Three guests . . .

She jerked her mind back from its domestic day-dreaming. Mrs. Carruthers was asking her opinion. Did Miss Drummond not think that there were a great

many ministers with brilliant minds who had never been given an adequate charge?

Islay was like Alice. She had really no opinion on the subject, never having thought about it, and looking a little bewildered, agreed that likely it was so. Mrs. Carruthers sighed sadly. She had always felt that Mr. Carruthers had never had the opportunity that his gifts deserved. But some ministers were so aggressive, and he always took the lower place.

Islay could see that the daughter was extremely uncomfortable, and tried tactfully to steer the talk to something else. She managed to get in a word about the problem of an old house, and the girl's eyes brightened.

"Oh, I love an old stone house. And this part, so long and low, is the best of all, isn't it?"

"Yes. I like it. Grandmother called this part the Ben and when my brother Pete was little he called this room Grammy's Ben and the name has stuck to it."

The girl was delighted. "What a quaint pretty name. And see how deep the windows are. A house like this gives one a sense of security, doesn't it?"

It was evident to Islay that the minister and his family had done little visiting here in Great-Aunt Christena's day.

"Perhaps you would like to look over the house, would you?" she asked.

"Oh, could we?" the girl asked, as though she had been invited to go through a palace, and Mrs. Carruthers politely murmured that it would be a pleasure indeed.

Islay led them through the cool winter kitchen, still shining and clean from Minnie's ministrations. "This will be the heart of the home in winter," the girl said, nodding at the shining cook stove. They moved along the bare hall into the high-ceilinged parlour, and stepped gingerly over the huge pink roses of the carpet. Islay shook her head and sighed, but the girl's eyes shone. "Oh, look at those wonderful windows! Right to the ceiling! And they look out over the valley, and—yes the bay!"

"If I tore down those curtains and burned them I might see the view," Islay said.

"But what a wonderful thing to have a house like this to fix up," the girl said, turning a shining face to Islay.

"I wish you'd come and help me do it," Islay said, and was surprised at the

sudden animation in Ellen's eyes. But Mrs. Carruthers, who had been looking around politely bored, announced that her husband was returning, and that they must go.

It was almost dark when Celia came across the pasture field to stay the night. Islay had almost decided she was not coming and was much relieved. She was sorry to be so late, Celia said in her sweet ingratiating manner; but Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers and Ellen had called, and momma made them stay for supper. "Momma was so sorry we didn't send for you, but we didn't know they were staying till it was too late. They went down as far as Uncle Geordie's and called on their way back and we were all sitting at the table when they came in."

"Unexpected company is sometimes embarrassing."

"Oh, but we were glad to have them!" Celie declared. "It was wonderful!"

Yes, it was truly wonderful, Islay agreed, far more wonderful than Celia knew. How did one arrive at the place where three or four extra for a meal made no disturbance?

The next afternoon Islay had just returned from her daily swim when she was surprised to see the minister's little black car come rattling up the lane again. She was pleased to see it held the girl, alone. So Rhodes need not be resumed, at least! Miss Carruthers wore the same shabby clothes, but not her discouraged expression. That was discarded. Her face glowed. "I know a maid-of-all-work you can get for the summer, Miss Drummond," she began, breathlessly, as soon as they were seated on the veranda.

"Oh, how good of you!" cried Islay. "Can she come for part-time? Does she belong here?"

"She can come just as long or short as you want," Miss Carruthers explained. "You may not like her, for she's rather dumb about a lot of things, but the poor thing's strong and willing. And, above all, she needs the money badly. She's twenty-three, and her name is Ellen Carruthers."

Islay was half-dismayed. Half-delighted. "What? Oh, no, never! An honour graduate of the University of Toronto washing my dishes!"

Ellen laughed, ruefully. "Anyway, I'm far more at home slopping round in the dish water than wrestling with differential calculus. And far happier. Nature intended me to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. It was my parents who led me astray," she accused, darkly. "Ron's unfailing successes all through his academic career rather went to their heads, poor dears, and they were determined to repeat these glories. Well, it just didn't work. I'm not

Ron!”

“I shouldn’t mind too much about that. I’d simply love having you. But should I? Can’t you get something more interesting for the summer. Or something better paid, perhaps?”

“No, I really couldn’t,” Ellen declared, flatly, and with extreme honesty. “I’ve tried for nearly everything you can think of, but nobody wants a mere university graduate. Better if I’d gone to a business college for a year.”

Islay nodded. She remembered her own difficulties, and the lack of suitable positions in these present days of unemployment. “I know, it’s really appalling. But you have something in view for the future?”

“Yes, Ron is going to put me through O.C.E. and I’ll turn into a high school teacher then. I’m hoping to register this October. But, in the meantime, I want something to do. And I really mustn’t leave mother, entirely. She needs me, she’s not strong, you know. Daddy either. He needs me as much as mother does. And you mentioned that . . . three or four days a week? It would be wonderful for me. If you think I might do . . .”

“I do, indeed.” Islay excused herself, mentally, for poor punning. “I’d consider myself blessed of heaven to have you. I—I have my own work to do, you know. And I can’t be bothered with house work, and this place all needs something doing to it . . .” she wandered on, vaguely, “. . . and I’m no good at anything like interior decorating . . .”

She had been startled that morning when she saw tears on the face of the little waif who had come pleading to hoe her garden, and now she was dismayed to see that Ellen Carruthers, graduate of a university, was struggling to keep her lips from trembling, because she had a job.

“I’ll be so grateful,” Islay hurried on, till the girl would regain her composure. “I really haven’t known what to do. Mrs. Steve is so kind, but I daren’t ask her for help. She needs Celia, and Lily Anne was here one morning and—” She hesitated, looked at Ellen doubtfully, and they both burst out laughing.

“I promise not to talk about poppa’s pneumonia,” Ellen said, her eyes twinkling. “And Ron couldn’t yodel to save his life.”

“Then you’re hired! But I’m afraid the work here will be drudgery. The washing problem is impossible. There is soft water in those two barrels beside the shed, only when it rains, and the water in the well is so hard. And look where it is. Half-way to the barn! And you haven’t seen the back kitchen stove yet!”

But Ellen Carruthers laughed. “I was brought up in the country. And our manse never had a cistern. And wells are always as far away as possible.”

She was so simple and honest that it became increasingly easy to arrange everything. She was to come three days a week. She had a bicycle and it was only a little over a mile to the manse. Her father could let her have the car on rainy days.

“I’m sorry I have no one to give me a recommendation,” she said, “but I’m really not a bad cook, and mother says I have a fairly good temper. Oh, and I never have any followers,” she ended.

Islay looked at her shining eyes and her happy face with its rose flush of excitement.

“I wouldn’t trust you,” she said, merrily.

She offered her higher wages than she had intended to pay, guessing the girl’s need. And why not use the money Great-Aunt Christena had hoarded, for some good? She could see that Ellen Carruthers was having difficulty again in maintaining her self-control.

“It seems a great deal of money for such a little service.” Ellen struggled with her sense of values, but when everything was settled and she climbed into the little car, she drew a deep breath of victory. “Oh, it’s wonderful! Father will be so happy. He works so hard, and the three charges are so heavy. I can be with him every evening. It’s wonderful!”

Islay watched the little car disappear down the lane, and reflected on her own life. She had had no experience in being pitted against the world. When she graduated from college she went home gaily to prepare her trousseau, and Mack wrote from New York, where he was taking his post grad. work, confessing that someone else had his heart. There had been brothers and sisters and a strong mother to shield her and make life tolerable. Then, when mother died suddenly, the year Mack married the New York girl, Rob took her affairs in hand. He found a position for her and helped her prepare for it. Then her father’s estate, modest though it was, had been all hers, for Pete was already making his own way. She was a success in the business world—a career woman, now, and had held an important position for years. Yet she had always had the feeling that somehow life had passed her by, had defrauded her of something that should have been hers. Ellen Carruthers, happy with this modest, temporary competence, made her feel like a pampered child.

6

Winds from the Desert

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING BEFORE ISLAY HAD TIME TO CLEAR away her breakfast dishes her new maid came whirling up the lane on her bicycle and leaped off at the kitchen door.

"I was so anxious to get started that I came a wee bit too early, I know," she cried gaily, striding into the kitchen, looking like a nice bright boy in her blue slacks and shirt, and short wind-blown hair.

"I hope you don't mind my unconventional get-up," she said, looking doubtfully at Islay's smart morning gingham. "Mother was shocked at my slacks, and made me bring a skirt in my bag. I'm so glad to be here that I'll wear a little cap and apron if you like."

Islay laughed. "Indeed I think the slacks are the most sensible thing. I couldn't live up to a uniform. You'll be having me dress Artie in a page's suit. Oh, you didn't know that I have a hired man. And here he comes, alas!"

As he came rattling up the lane Islay explained how she happened to engage him.

"Oh, the little Pierson boy!" Ellen was all interest. Yes, she knew about the family from Saskatchewan. "My father knows every dog and cat within the borders of our three churches, and of course he discovered these people right away. And he got work for the man with one of the neighbours down here. They hadn't a drop of rain for seven years! Oh, I'm so glad you've hired the little boy. You're wonderful!"

Ginger ran down the lane barking his welcome. At the sight of Ellen the boy slipped round the other side of the house and went out to the garden.

"I'll have to go out and show him what to do," Islay said, "though it will be the blind leading the blind," she added to herself.

When she returned after having convinced her hired man that she preferred having the cabbages weeded to a house built for the kittens, she found Ellen standing in the big front room of the new house staring with a frown at the pink roses in the carpet.

“Oh, but it’s such a beautiful room,” she breathed. “It has such possibilities! I’d love above all earthly things to fix up an old house like this. I lie awake nights planning how I could make over our old manse, but there’s never enough money to buy even a can of paint. Just look!” She stole diffidently across the room and pulled back the heavy curtains and ran the blinds up to the top. The two high, deep windows made a picture of the sunny valley between the towering Blue Ridge and the shining bay.

“Why, it’s changed the whole room,” Islay cried. “Only the sunlight makes the carpet shout louder than ever.”

“But the carpet can be dyed!” cried Ellen enthusiastically. “And the curtains too! But I think I had better go out to the kitchen right away, before this room gets me.”

Islay showed her the summer kitchen with its huge stove and meagre cupboards, the spacious cellar with its swinging shelf, and the woodshed with its piles of kindling, and went off happily to her work on the veranda.

There was not much in the house, Islay reflected, out of which to make a dinner, but Ellen produced a substantial and tasty meal; bacon and eggs, lettuce and salad dressing, hot muffins and stewed rhubarb. The small hired man came round the corner of the house sniffing hungrily, and Islay dispatched him with a paper bag of hot muffins.

“Don’t you think,” Ellen suggested shyly, “that before the flies come, it would be nice to eat out under that big duchess apple tree?”

Islay was enthusiastic. They hauled an old table out from the shed. They found a bench there and a couple of old kitchen chairs. Ellen scrubbed them all and arranged them under the low green boughs and placed one of Great-Aunt Christena’s blue bowls filled with June roses in the centre of the table.

Islay sank down on the bench under the spreading boughs, feeling young and carefree and disinclined to work.

“Do sit for a minute,” she begged, “you’ll wear yourself out if you race round at such a rate.”

Ellen perched on the edge of one of the chairs, reluctantly. “But I must hustle around and earn a little of that generous sum you are paying me.”

“Why didn’t you go in for decorating or something like that? Celia tells me you paint landscapes.”

“Oh, I just daub a little. I never could afford lessons. You see, I studied maths, for four years, so in the summers I just had to paint to save my soul. I

wanted to study interior decorating, but the courses were all too expensive and Ron had taken maths., so I followed, for no good reason."

It was a moment for confidences and Islay felt impelled to respond. "I'm struggling at something I can't do, I'm afraid," she said, and confessed her secret ambition and the reason for the constant rattle of her typewriter. Ellen was so deeply impressed that Islay hastened to assure her again and again, that this was merely an experiment and she doubted if she could write.

"Most likely it will only fill the waste-paper basket, but I enjoy trying anyway. But you see I have neither the time nor the ability to straighten out this queer old place, so I need your help badly. But I may be out of a job after staying away all summer, so we will have to do it economically."

And now Islay Drummond found her determination to live her own life, solitary and independent, growing daily weaker. She had resolved to push away from her everything and everybody who might interfere with her freedom, but they came crowding in on her, bringing their problems to be solved.

Yet she found herself welcoming the days that brought Ellen, just for her companionship. Under the girl's drab exterior was a gentle, playful spirit. She had the rare ability to laugh at herself and everything unpleasant in her surroundings.

"When things get too troublesome I just pretend they're something else," she said. "Ron says it's very bad for one to live in an unreal world. But I think it's fun, and it doesn't cost anything."

"I think I'd like to try it when my old Mr. Francis gets cantankerous," Islay said. "How do you manage it?"

"Oh, it's easy, things just become transformed of themselves. Like the calèche, for instance."

"The calèche?"

"Yes, our car. It's such a dreadfully queer-looking bus, so high and old-fashioned. When we go to town everybody looks at us and laughs. And when the paint began to chip off it was beginning to be unbearable for poor mother. So I named it the calèche, and it reminds her of our one grand trip to Quebec, and she gets quite happy.

"It was my one real vacation," she told Islay as she vigorously scoured the table under the apple tree. "Isn't old Quebec City fascinating? Mother's sister took us down the St. Lawrence one summer and I didn't want to come back

ever. One day in Quebec City we went riding in a calèche. Remember those quaint little carts? I've never really enjoyed riding in anything else since. So the nearest I could come to recapturing that first and only rapture was to name our car after it."

Islay recalled Quebec City and the delightful little two-wheeled vehicles behind the jogging horses. But she did not tell Ellen Carruthers that she had been with her brother Robert and his family, the Fraser Drummonds, that they had spent most of their time in the elegant rooms of the Chateau Frontenac, and had merely dashed about in Rob's expensive car to glance at Wolfe's Cove and the other historical sites.

Just one vacation and one trip had been the extent of Ellen Carruthers' leisure. For she did not go to any social affairs at Varsity, she confessed, not in any spirit of complaint but merely explaining her position.

"I had to work so hard there wasn't really much time for fun. You see, Ron is clever. He could get his exams, and take in everything else at the same time, but I couldn't. And then," she hesitated, "well, a girl who does not have any special boy friends can't go anywhere except just to girls' things. And they all cost time and money. So I just buried myself for four years and I've been blinking at the sun ever since I came out."

And she laughed at herself as she always did.

Celia was equally interesting, though her problems were of an entirely different nature. At first Islay doubted that such a light and airy creature, all dimples and giggles, could be staid enough to teach school. But Celia soon showed her that her talents were not bounded by the ability to put a perfect meal on the table for ten people. Underneath her gay exterior lay a strong womanly spirit. Like all Minnie's family she considered an education life's first necessity. She was excellent company too, for where Celia was there was laughter. And though the cause might be trivial, Celia's laughter was so infectious that Islay found herself in gales of merriment often without any apparent reason.

Celia would undertake to relate some amusing incident, some tale of Wise Watty's last remarks, or something that had happened in her normal school days. At first she told her story well until she began to see the joke ahead. Then the going became very difficult. She would pause, with deep indrawings of breath, struggle for self-control, and try again, only to be overcome. If the joke were a very funny one she often failed entirely to get the story told, ending in helpless gasps, a long-drawn, "Oh, ah, ah-ah-ah! Oh, heeeeeee! Heeeeeeeeee! Heeeeeeeeee!"

Celia came faithfully every evening, and like the child of sunshine that she was, departed in the dewy morning while the fields were still golden and the bay rose-flushed with dawn. Islay soon found she was not under any heavy obligation, for the arrangement suited Celia to perfection. It allowed her to get away in the evening, or receive a visit from whichever of the young lads around happened to be the lucky one.

David Gardner, a distant Laird relative on his mother's side was the favourite at present. David was a quiet, steady lad, the only son of a prosperous farmer. Minnie liked David. He was fond of books and since his high school days had been looking longingly beyond the bounds of a farm. Steve disapproved strongly of David, having had a difference over a trading deal many years before with his father. So calling on Celia at her home was an ordeal needing some courage. Then, too, there was an embarrassing flock of little brothers and sisters to stand around and stare, led by the sharp-tongued Lily Anne. So it was a most convenient arrangement for Celia to escape over the field and meet the young man at the Old Home Place.

David had a car, a big noisy machine that Steve said he could hear before it left the Fraser's barn, and sometimes Dave had to go around by a back road and meet Celia at a place known vaguely as 'beyond the crick.' Islay felt a little anxious over these arrangements until she learned that Minnie smilingly winked at such youthful subterfuges. It was evident that Minnie knew how to manage Steve.

Sometimes this dodging of father and brothers entailed all sorts of elaborate rearrangements and changing of dates that made life very difficult as well as thrilling.

"But why can't you and David make your arrangements over the telephone when your father and Stevie aren't in the house?" Islay asked one afternoon when Celia made a hurried trip over the fields to send a message with Ellen on her way home.

At this helpful suggestion Celia went off into one of her fits of helpless laughter, and Ellen explained.

"That question shows what a dear innocent city lady you are. If David or Celia phoned each other making a date it would be just the same as asking my father to announce from the pulpit on Sunday morning to the assembled congregation that David Gardner would not be able to take Celia Laird to the North Inlet Garden Party on Tuesday evening, but he would call and take her to a show in town the next evening."

Celia was completely crumpled up with laughter by this time, but when she

recovered she gasped out that it was all quite true.

"Listening to the neighbours' talk over the telephone is a most pernicious habit," Islay declared primly. "How I hate people prying into my affairs."

Celia seemed to think this was funnier still, and went off into another period of choking giggles.

"It's not really right, I suppose," said Ellen, who always showed a generous tolerance for the failings of other people. "But when you come to think of it, it's rather like listening to the radio, isn't it? When you hear a familiar ring you don't know but what somebody may be sick, or in trouble—or anything. I think there's really not so much harm in it."

After some such discussion Islay went back to her desk to find that the characters in her story seemed pale and anaemic compared to Celia and Ellen and Artie and their problems.

The boy, too, was coming regularly, and though the weeds did not seem to suffer much from his activities, the kittens and the five chicks and one duckling throve under his care.

"He needs to be fed himself," Ellen said watching him put out a saucer of milk for pussy, noting his great care that each little furry ball got its share. "I never saw a child so dreadfully thin. Do you think we might——"

She hesitated shyly, and looked at Islay. "Yes, we really ought to feed him and see that he gets one square meal," Islay added. "But it makes more work for you, Ellen."

Ellen did not mind that in the least, so the boy was kept for his noonday meal, much to his delight.

"He reminds me of someone, or some picture I've seen," Ellen said several times, and then one morning she came out laughing from Grammy's Ben where she had been dusting Islay's books.

"I've found Artie's picture; the one that's been haunting me. It's here in Oliver Twist!" It was the picture of the Artful Dodger in his long coat. The resemblance was very plain, and Artie became *the Artful* from that time, a name that Islay found suited him perfectly.

They had gay meals, the three of them, sitting under the low boughs of the duchess tree, with a bowl of roses or bouncing bet on the old oilcloth-covered table. Sometimes when they sat in the cool shade eating fresh biscuits and honey and new-laid eggs, Islay remembered that in the hot city or in the fashionable hotel by the Lake Shore, Mary and Jeanette would be dressing

hurriedly to attend a bridge or a meeting, and she felt a blessed sense of peace.

There was always some pleasant surprise at meal time, some new bird song, or June blossom that had to be identified. One day a chickadee put on a performance for them that sent the Artful into spasms. He came out on a limb, quite brazenly, right above the table and gave a loud clear "*Hee*—hee!" to attract attention. Then he crawled along the limb, upside down just to show off, stopped suddenly and sang very sweetly "Chic-a-dee-dee-dee!" And flew away down the orchard.

The Artful left the table and went after him and, on his return, had to have a lesson in table manners administered by Ellen.

Ellen kept an eye on the weeding too, and saw that the gardener did not make too many excursions around to the veranda to show Mrs. Reilly a new kind of bug or worm.

Celia seldom managed to arrive before Ellen left, for the milking and the chores consumed most of the pleasant summer evenings. But sometimes she would run across the fields in the afternoon just to see 'divinity' at work and to discuss the prospects of school teaching.

"You and Celia make such a funny pair," Islay said. "You are always lost in admiration of her and she thinks you are beyond human praise."

"Oh, dear!" Ellen groaned, running the heavy black smoothing iron carefully over Islay's linen skirt, "life is so simple for Celia. All she needs to do is to wash and iron her old orchid muslin, and put that little white hat at a coy angle on her golden curls, and she could make a king abdicate for her. I'd rather be like Celia," she finished up, "than get a scholarship."

"But Celia isn't the only girl with glamour," Islay said gaily, "a girl with beautiful eyes, say, and hair with amber lights in it, if she would only take pains with her appearance."

Ellen made a grimace and shoved her short boyish hair back off her forehead. "I really will do something with it some day. But I've always kept it cropped close because it took too much time and money to make it decent. When I get through this year in O.C.E., and when I get a position, and a whopping big salary, and when I've paid back mother and father something of all they've done for me, then I'm going to get me a permanent wave, and a manicure, and have my face lifted and be a tearing beauty ever after! Oh," she added in an awed voice, "what does it feel like to have a cheque handed out to you every month! It must be simply heavenly!"

There likely was no hope of living your own life with bean rows and a hive

for the honey-bee, like Mr. Yeats, Islay confessed when her second Sunday came round and, very reluctantly, she prepared to go to church and meet the assembled relatives.

She made arrangements to call for Celia, so that she would not have to face the congregation alone. As she drove down the road in the glory of a quiet sunny morning she found the girl standing in the long grass by the roadside, looking like a rose in her pink muslin dress and a wide white hat. Celia was quiet and dignified this Sabbath morning as befitted the day, and there were no excursions into the realm of laughter where she spent so much of her working days.

Lairdale church was beautiful for situation, like Mount Zion, set on the top of a hill at the lower end of the Blue Ridge. But while nature had dealt bountifully with it, the congregation had not been so generous. Islay found it had changed little since the days when she came here to Sunday School with her grandfather, old Gentleman Laird. The place was bare and bleak still, but very clean. And it had six high arched windows that gave a spacious view, on one side, of the lovely slopes of the valley, on the other, of the winding river and the bay.

Celia led her to the family pew where Minnie and the younger children were already seated. They were all there except Steve and his eldest son who sat near the back with the men. The stiff pews were filled with Lairds, and the drabness of the place was alleviated by the flowered hats and gay dresses of the girls and women.

Islay picked out a few faces that childhood memories had retained. The tall thin man who led the little choir seemed familiar. He must be second cousin Tom’s eldest son. And the girl at the organ must be his daughter.

Mr. Carruthers stood up in his high old pulpit, and looked away over the heads of his people to some far vision beyond the shining Georgian Bay. Perhaps that was why his sermon, also, went far over their heads. Islay tried conscientiously to follow him, but he read his sermon in a low monotonous voice that seemed like a lullaby. Childhood memories were crowding about her too, and she had to struggle desperately against a pleasant drowsiness.

Most of the men of the congregation were asleep. All week they had been out in the fields in the sun and wind and rain, and this unaccustomed inactivity in the warm, close air would have been enough to lull them to sleep, but with the quiet voice above them, droning on and on it would have been a strong man who could have kept his head in the soothing flood. Islay felt she understood the tragic look in Ellen’s lovely eyes and something of Mrs.

Carruthers' unhappiness. And she understood, too, why this scholar who was capable of bringing a real spiritual uplift to thousands had drifted away down to this remote back concession.

Ellen had to hurry away with her father. He had two more preaching appointments and his lunch must be served immediately. Mrs. Carruthers lingered to shake hands and welcome Miss Drummond back to Lairdale Church.

Some of the older people, who had known Islay's mother, came forward to shake hands and tell her they were glad she had come back to the Laird settlement. But the younger people stood aloof. Her city clothes, her smart car, the reputation the Drummonds had for being proud, were all against her, and second cousins once removed showed no signs of wanting to come any closer.

Minnie, in her warm-hearted fashion, caught the arm of one young matron after another, saying, "This is your cousin, Islay Drummond! Don't you remember her?" But they shook hands limply, and in a scared fashion. Islay was relieved to find herself going down the stone steps with Celia and Lily Anne.

As she crossed the grass towards her car she was conscious of a stout elderly man, leaning on a heavy stick coming scrambling down the steps after her.

"Well, well, well, now!" he was booming, "if that ain't little Islay Drummond then I'm no Laird! Come back here, you huzzy, and speak to your Uncle Geordie!"

Islay turned swiftly. Well she remembered Young Geordie Laird, as her mother had called him. He was known even yet as Young Geordie, though he was over seventy, but that was because he lived opposite Old Geordie who was over ninety. Besides, Young Geordie was the sort who could never grow old. Islay ran back to him, remembering how often she and Pete had scrambled through his pockets hunting for candy.

"Oh, Uncle Geordie!" she cried, "you're so young I didn't know you!"

"Of course! Did you think I was going to get old? Hoots, lassie!" He was shaking her hand till it hurt. "Well, well, well, now! If it ain't good to see you again! And you're back on the old place! Ain't it a caution, now, how things turn out? Many's the fine talk we had round the fire up there, when your father and mother drove out from town with a buggyful o' kids. Eh, my, my!"

"I remember! As soon as we arrived father always used to say to grandma, 'send down and tell Young Geordie to come up'."

“Eh, well I mind it! And we’d sit round the kitchen stove all night swappin’ yarns, and laughin’ till we near killed ourselves! Eh, the doctor was great company.”

“He thought Uncle Geordie was the best company in the world,” Islay said, embarrassed to feel her eyes smarting. “You must come and see me, too, Uncle Geordie.”

“Of course! Of course! Here’s Bella. Come here Bella! She’s lost her hearing completely, poor body. But she remembers you!”

Uncle Geordie’s sister, who was Aunt Bella to the Laird community, came forward swiftly. She was older than Geordie, thin and wiry and incredibly smart. She shook her head, when Islay spoke, but she patted the girl’s arm and said how glad everybody was to see her and that she must come down and have supper with them—all in the soft tones of the totally deaf. Islay could not hear much of it but the nods and becks and wreathed smiles of Aunt Bella did not need language to interpret them.

Islay drove away with Celia, feeling her heart strangely warmed.

The peace of the long, sunny Sabbath day continued into Monday. She had wisely arranged that her gardener was to come only on the days that Ellen was present, to protect her from constant interruptions, so Monday proved a rare day of undisturbed quiet. In the stillness of the afternoon she put aside her work and wrote her promised letter to Pete, telling him all the simple details of her new life; the doings of Celia and Ellen, the Artful and his many pets, and his new name for her, Mrs. Reilly. It made better reading, she had to confess, than her attempts at fiction.

She took the letter down to the mail box that stood on its pedestal outside the gate. It still bore the name of Peter Laird, for Great-Aunt Christena had never changed it. The lane was rough and stony, but she enjoyed the walk. On one side was a row of stately lombard poplars, on the other a low stone fence smothered in wild grape vines and raspberry bushes. Song sparrow and robin, bluebird and thrush sang on every bush and the long grass was starred with field daisies and blue fringed chicory.

She went out to the white powdery highway and placed her letters in the box, then walked slowly along the grassy edge of the road, remembering how she and Pete had learned to ride his bicycle right along this stretch of gravel.

A car was coming from behind her and she stepped off farther into the grass. The driver was shouting as he approached.

“Hi, there! Hi! Come on for a ride! Come along! Jump in! Jump in!”

It was Uncle Geordie, and she waved her hand gaily. But in spite of his hearty invitation to come for a ride he swept past her in a cloud of dust. He was evidently making desperate efforts to stop, however, pulling and pushing at brakes and gear shift and shouting “Whoa! Stop it! Haw up there, ye brute!” as if the car were a runaway horse.

Islay ran and caught up with him just as he managed to stop, perilously near the ditch.

He turned towards her, his face blazing red, his bright blue eyes furious.

“This danged machine!” he shouted, “she’ll neither stop nor start! Man alive, cars is the curse o’ this country. Give me a good span o’ horses and lines in my hands and I’ll get anywhere; but this here dang—. Well, well, this is no way to be talkin’ to a lady. But did ye see the way the she-devil acted up jist because I wanted to stop and ask you to take a ride? Man, man, it’s more than a fella can stand. Get in, get in now, and come along.”

“But I’ve left the house all alone. Even the dog’s gone off somewhere and every door is wide open.”

“Tuts, tuts! There ain’t anybody in the Laird settlement that’ll steal anything, nobody locks their doors. There’s a crate of eggs an’ a cream can in the back there that’s got to go up to the store. You get in here, and if this machine’ll behave herself, I’ll have you back in less than an hour.”

Islay laughed light-heartedly and jumped in beside him.

“Eh, it seems jist like yisterday that you and wee Peter usta hang on to my sleigh when I’d be haulin’ logs from the bush. And the day before yisterday when your mother usta do the same thing. Eh, I must be getting on a bit. But I’ll never get old so long as I can pick up a pretty girl on the road and take her for a drive. My, my, and to think ye’ve come back to the Old Home Place. Life’s jist like one o’ them old horse-power threshin’ machines, that ye hitched the teams onto and they jist went round and round all day long. Always gettin’ back to the place they started from.”

Islay was listening to him with some interest, but at the same time she was keeping an eye on the car and on the road ahead. Uncle Geordie was a most peculiar driver. He had never succeeded in getting away from the feeling that he had reins in his hand and a horse before him, and the lack of intelligence on the part of the machinery under his hand kept him in a state of nervous irritation. She ventured a few gentle suggestions. The brake and not the accelerator was to be used going down the slope, and it was well to shift into intermediate before attempting some of these steep hills.

He took her advice gratefully and soon they were speeding smoothly up the long slopes and dipping into the valleys. Lairdale was lovely in its June dress. How was it, she wondered, that she had never realized what a place of beauty it was? Many streams went winding and singing through the green fields down to the sparkling line of Georgian Bay. Some of them were bordered with towering elms, others disappeared into cool green woods where the water lilies were getting ready to open their golden cups. The little dells were cool and shady, the hill tops warm and sunny, and always there was a breath of clover blossom and lilacs on the breeze.

The little store and gasoline station was high on a hill overlooking the valley they had just traversed. As she stepped from the car Islay could see far back, along the Wappitti River, miles of Laird farm lands. She even recognized the tiny row of green needles near the horizon as the line of lombard poplars in her own lane. The store was kept by one of the many second cousins, and mindful of her larder, she went in and bought tea and sugar, also some chocolate bars for the Artful. Other customers came and went, the little bell over the door tinkling a sharp signal. Uncle Geordie must introduce everyone to her and explain just what relationship each bore, until she was completely bewildered.

They got away at last stepping carefully through the narrow lane between barrels and kegs, bulging canvas sacks, brooms and fly swatters and hoes and rakes. Uncle Geordie stopped for another word with the storekeeper, and for still more words with the boys who filled his tank with gasoline, and then went back for a last bit of gossip with a man who had just entered the store. When he emerged finally he was almost obscured with parcels.

“Eh, Bell’ll pull my hair if I’ve forgotten anything. It’s a great drag on a fella to be such a gossip as I am. I can never get away when I go anywhere. And I’m gettin’ worse the older I get. When I get good and old I’m afraid I’ll go for a visit and I’ll never be able to get back. But that last fella there was Jake Simpson. He’s Ike’s boy. I was gettin’ all the news about the family that’s jist arrived from the West. Well, well, now it’s their wee laddie that you gave the job to, weedin’ your garden. Eh, well, the poor buddies! They tell me he’s the only one left of a family of four. I guess they were jist about starved. The man’s got a job with Simpson, he’s married to my sister Lizzie’s girl, ye mind. Ikey Simpson’s not a bad sort, but he’s put them away down in a bit of a shack beside the bay, that’s not good enough for a hen house. Well, well!”

Meanwhile he had taken his seat and was fumbling with the starter, the emergency brake, and the gear shift, in turn, muttering sadly—“Eh, me! Eh, me! Seven years dried out! Seven years waitin’ for a crop and seein’

everything blow away in dust. Seems as if some folks had jist too much misfortune."

By some chance he finally hit upon the combination that started the car. It burst into a thunderous roar and rattle that shook the seat.

"Hey!" he cried triumphantly, "she's goin' to get us home after all! Now," with a whirl of the steering wheel, "if you'd kinda keep an eye out till I turn her round we'll get away without bringin' any o' the store with us. She's not so bad when I get her on a straight road, but I need a ten-acre field to get her turned. Come on here now! Haw, there! Haw! None o' yer tricks!"

They managed to get turned with merely scraping a sliver off the lowest step of the veranda, and the slightest bump against another car, and were off down the hill at top speed.

Islay made several more suggestions that brought them down to a more moderate pace, and they bowled along for a time without any mishaps. But in spite of all her careful tuition the car remained somewhat temperamental, now leaping forward with a roar, now slowing down, again stopping altogether for no apparent reason.

"Ah, give me a horse every time!" he mourned. "I've been pullin' on lines so long I can't ever get used to shovin' on something to get goin'. It's contrary to nature anyhow. That boy o' mine's comin' home this week, an' when he gets here you'll see this car doin' something on the road. Dick's a great driver."

"I hear he is a very clever lad," Islay said.

"Ah, well he's always been a good boy to me, Dick has. We've always hung together since poor Aggie died. He was Aggie's sister's boy, you know, and Minnie's brother's. But he was just a wee tad when the Madawaska went down and he's jist been like our own. I sent him to Guelph and he'll be home soon, full o' all sorts o' high-falutin' notions about farmin', I'll bet."

"He's not a Laird, then, is he?"

"No, praise the Lord for that! I don't mean that the Lairds ain't all right. But two in the family's enough. Dick and me get along just like a knife and fork, but there's a nasty streak in all the Lairds and I got it too, and if he had it we'd be like flint and steel!"

"What's this nasty streak in the Lairds? I always thought we were rather nice people."

He laughed. "Some of us is jist the clean wheat, you bet. Look at you and

me. Two specimens like us is enough to give a family a good name. And you oughta be fine, I tell you. Look at the forebears you had, from the Lady Islay down. Your Grandma and Old Gentleman Laird was the finest pair that lived on this line. Everybody ought to get themselves fine grandparents. You get such a good start."

"But what's this mean streak in the Lairds?" Islay persisted.

"Well, I don't mind tellin' you, cause I've got a good bit of it in my own heart. The Lairds is all fine folk, honest as the day, good neighbours and ready to give a helpin' hand. But every last one o' us is related to Tam o' Shanter's wife. D'ye mind her? When poor Tam was out havin' a bit of a jollification she sat home nursin' her wrath to keep it warm. That's it. The unforgiving spirit! I've got it. And I've fought it all my life. There was a chap over in Shoreline township that cheated me in a horse-deal twenty-five years ago. Well, that poor devil's dead and gone these ten years but I get mad yet every time I think of him! Mad for twenty-five years! Can you beat it? And at a dead man!"

"Well, he deserved it," she said.

"But that's not the point. Course he did—the mean skunk that he was, and if he was alive now—well, anyway—it's what it's doin' to me that matters! Stayin' mad for twenty-five years! Gosh! It makes me sick when I think about it! Yes, the Lairds has all been good haters. And what's the use o' hatin'? And stayin' mad? It don't get you nowhere."

Islay sat silent, watching the white flower-bordered road ahead.

"That was what spoiled poor old Christena's life. She jist doted on Peter's Bessie and when Bessie went wrong poor Christena got mad at everybody, and stayed that way to the end of her days. Eh, eh, what a waste!"

"I remember Bessie just vaguely. But mother never talked about her and we weren't allowed to speak her name."

Uncle Geordie sat silent for a while shaking his head sadly "Eh, poor Bess! Man, she was the pretty thing. And that proud! Her mother died when she was little and your Aunt Christena brought her up. Bess was the only thing your Aunt Teenie cared about. Everything was for her and it made her life bitter when she ran away."

"And poor Uncle Peter too. His only child!"

"It broke yer Uncle Peter's heart. But it was your Aunt Christena's pride that was broke, and that's always harder to bear. You know the good Lord has

a cure for broken hearts, but He don't say anything about what He could do with broken pride."

For a moment she wondered if he were trying to tell her how vain and harmful were *her* pride and resentment; that it was pride ailed her, and not a broken heart; but the next moment she put the thought from her as unworthy. Uncle Geordie was so direct and simple if he wanted to give her some good advice he would never adopt a round-about method.

"I've almost forgotten poor Bessie's story," she said, "it was so long ago."

"Eh, poor Bess! She married Gideon Shaw, against Christena's wishes, and he was a kinda mean complainin' sort. Poor Gid's gone now, and I heard last winter that Bessie had died too, away somewhere in the States. They can't both be in Heaven, for there'd be a lot of unheavenly doin's if them two red heads was to get near each other again. Gid was a nagger, and Bess would flare up and go on like the dickens. And she flared up once too often and took her baby and off she went. If she'd a' come home it wouldn't a' been so bad. But she went off with another man! Off to the States! The fellow she went with wasn't much either, and he's dead and gone too. Eh, me, death is the one that puts an end to all our feuds and fights and makes them look foolish and small. Well, well; so Christena hated all the Shaws after that and Gid's people all hated Bess's people, and they've kept it up to the next generation. Ye see, when you start hatin' you never know when it's goin' to stop."

Islay found herself saying, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and children's teeth are set on edge."

"Aye, that's it," Uncle Geordie said. "Eh, the Good Book hits the nail on the head every time. I wish I could say more pieces from it now. I like to say some verses over when I'm lyin' in bed, when the danged rheumatism keeps me awake. But I don't know as much as I should. I'm goin' to learn more. But, of course, you can't expect a lively young spark like me to be sitting home readin' the Bible all the time.

"Well, man alive, what started me on all this family history? Oh yes, Dick! My boy! Well, Dick can flare up and be mad as blazes, and the next day he's forgotten what it was all about. That's one reason I like him. Ye see he's a Hartley, something like Minnie. Eh, there's a woman! Look at Minnie, now! Well, Dick'll be home in a few days and me and this here blamed car is goin' to part company. I hope he'll stay, that's all. Education kinda gets young folks unfitted for farm life. They won't stick to the drudgery. He's talkin' a lot o' nonsense already. Says the old place is only fit for sheep. But I'll give him his head. If Guelph ain't spoiled him he can take over the farm and I'll have

nothing to do but ride round the country and play the gentleman. I'll buy me a spankin' team, no cars for me. And I'll start out courtin' again. There'll be no young spark in the country to hold a candle to me." He pulled up carefully, only a few yards past her gate, and Islay stood and waved good-bye as he went off down the road weaving dangerously from side to side. She went slowly up the blossoming lane. A fence corner full of ragged blue chicory with a pair of bluebirds in a hawthorn bush directly above added the last touch to its beauty. But she passed it all neither seeing nor hearing. The old man's simple talk had moved her deeply.

'When you start hatin',' Uncle Geordie had said, 'you never know where it's goin' to stop.'

The woman who had been the last owner of this farm had let her life wither away in cherished resentment, and now the woman that had fallen heir to it, was *she* not in danger of letting her life dry up in the same arid channel?

7

Wild Clover

ONE MORNING CELIA CAME RUNNING OVER THE PASTURE field, waving the Carlisle *Herald*, and followed by all the children. She had passed! In the honour list! Lily Anne in the rôle of showman made the dramatic announcement before Celia was capable of speech. Lily Anne had been sure Celia would take honours. They were all going to be at the head of the lists when they got to high school, and Celia, being the first, just couldn't help starting in the right way. Celia herself had not been so sanguine, and could only gasp, "Oh, boy! I don't believe it!"

Ellen made lemonade and brought out a plate of cookies to celebrate, and the Artful dropped his hoe and came to the party. Ginger came too, tearing back from an excursion after the groundhog, and the cat and her kittens came up from the barn and were followed shortly by the hen and her chickens, and last, the water sprite, his short legs and webbed feet scrambling hurriedly through the long grass.

It was a very happy gathering, snatched from the middle of a busy morning to celebrate a great triumph. Celia had learned some new folk dances at the normal school, and little Audrey was anxious that Cousin Islay should see them. So they all lined up on the rough lawn, Islay and Ellen with them, and danced and sang '*Do you know the Muffin Man*', and '*Here we go Louby-Lou, all on a summer's day!*'

And then Celia, who was always staid and womanly under all her gay pretty exterior, said they must hurry back to their work. The men were going to cut the lower back field this afternoon and dinner would be early. And then she and Lily Anne looked at each other in dismay, and screamed with laughter. Why, they had forgotten what they really came over for! It wasn't to tell them about passing, it was to say they were taking the men's supper back to the field tonight to save them coming home, and momma wanted Cousin Islay and Ellen both to come, and Artie too, of course. And then they were gone, racing over the field, capering and shouting.

"That's the way to take one's recreation," Islay said, laughing, as she, too, returned to her work. What hours of preparation she had been accustomed to spend for a little play. And after the amusement she used to be more weary

than when she set out for it.

They had just cleared away their mid-day meal when a car whirled in at the open gate and came up the lane at a dangerous pace. The driver was shouting and nervous as he swerved towards the ditch on one side, or careened towards the opposite bank.

“Whoa, I tell ye!” he was yelling. “Steady there, ye brute! Ah, ye would, would ye?”

Fortunately the car lost momentum on the steep hill that led up from the gate, but it gained in speed as it passed the door. Islay and Ellen ran out, for, in spite of the driver’s command to ‘whoa’ and ‘back up’ the machine kept on. It grazed a flower bed and went straight across the lawn for a head-on collision with the duchess tree and the dining table.

“Push down both feet, Uncle Geordie!” Islay screamed.

He obeyed frantically and came to a sudden stop, that almost sent him through the windshield and set the table tilted up on end, with the new green oilcloth and the bowl of briar roses sliding off to the grass.

The car was back-firing like a machine gun, and Ellen ran forward and expertly shoved down the spark and shot on the emergency brake.

Young Geordie clambered out, too full of wrath even to greet his hostess. His cap was off and the heavy white hair of his large shapely head was standing erect. His blue eyes blazed in his crimson face.

“Gol! Every time I go out in this cursed threshin’ machine I say it’ll be the last, but I mean it this time! I’m through! Ye can have the devil’s contraption for scrap iron! What d’ye think?” he was shouting now, “she balked on me comin’ down Simonses’ hill! Down hill, mind ye! And she ran away on me goin’ up! Can ye beat it? Eh, she’s possessed of the devil! Seven o’ them! What was the danged thing shootin’ off jist now for, like a machine gun?” he demanded of Ellen in wrathful bewilderment.

They tried to explain about the spark regulator, but he was only half-convinced. He sat down heavily on the veranda steps and wiped his face with a red handkerchief as big as a table-cloth.

“Aw, what’s the use, tellin’ me,” he complained, “if she didn’t do that she’d be up to some other trick.” He glanced at the table, still standing on end, and his eyes twinkled. His good humour was returning. “Say, now; if ye’d left me alone I’d a’ moved all the furniture back in the house where it oughta be. I was making straight for the shed door.”

Ellen straightened the table, and set back the roses, then she brought him a pitcher of water from the well.

"Ah, that's grand!" he cried, draining a third glass. "Nothing like the old well Old Gentleman Laird dug. Man, man, an old codger like me shouldn't be monkeyin' with them new instruments o' torture. Why did we ever give up horses? Eh, give me a pair o' good lines in my hands and I'll get anywhere. But when you gotta jiggle, joggle a wheel on top o' your stomach, and remember to stick one foot here and the other yonder like a Hielandman doin' the Sword Dance, an' when you gotta sit down so low your knees is in your whiskers, where does it get ye? Jist into the ditch, that's all. Eh, horses, now! They're flesh and blood, like ourselves. They've got some sense. Eh, well, well, guess you can't teach an old dog new tricks."

Ellen went back to her work and Islay brought out the rocking chair and made him sit in it. He leaned back and sighed happily.

"Dick's mebby on his way home," he announced. "I had a letter yesterday. Hitch-hikin' from Guelph, mind ye. Them young gaffers that's in college jist march out on the road and point a thumb, and they can go round the world."

He sat silent for a little gazing across the sunlit valley. "Eh, it's a great view you have from this place—a great view. Your grandmother used to sit at that window there and look out over the valley and she always had her Bible at hand, but she didn't need it to repeat a verse. She'd look down there when the grain was ripenin' and say, 'The valleys are covered over with corn, they shout for joy they also sing.' Man, I can hear them singin' right now," he whispered. They sat listening to the sounds of the busy summer afternoon; the deep organ undertone of the bees in the lilacs, the song sparrow in the elms, the bluebird in the orchard, the high voices of the children over at Steve's house, Ginger barking in the pasture field, Steve shouting to his horses, the mower singing its song of plenty as it moved slowly across the fragrant hay field.

"Aye! 'They shout for joy, they also sing'," Young Geordie quoted softly. "That's it. The Good Book always says the thing jist right."

He began to heave and shake, a sign that something was amusing him.

"Man, it would all make a better song if Steve, back there, didn't think he had to be singin' a solo all the way through. Ain't it a caution now, that he thinks he has to holler as if the team was at the other side o' the bay and stone deef as well! He could save his lungs. Horses mostly have as much sense as humans, and lots o' them have more. And dogs, now! It's a caution how much they know. You'll jist have to come down some day and see them three collies o' mine. Bruce goes down to the road every day to meet Jimmy Bain and bring

home the mail, and Wolfe can sing better than I can, and Wellington can do everything but talk, and I bet he'd learn to speak if I was only smart enough to teach him. There's Dick now, he's as smart as most young chaps, and he had to go three years to college and spend the price of a good farm to get learning into his head; and there's them collies, know as much as any three professors and nobody spent five cents on their eddication. Take Steve, back there now, yellin' at them horses. I bet they know far better than he does how that mower ought to go. But Steve's got only one way o' managin' anything and that's to knock it down an' jump on it. He'd never a' got where he is today if it hadn't been for Minnie. She's one woman in a thousand, is Minnie. And what a mother she is to them kids! While Steve's hollerin' at them she jist says nothing, but lines them up and sets them goin' like a gang at a raisin'! She'll get every last one o' them eddicated too. See if she don't!"

"But Steve is so—overbearing," Islay said, "Minnie should assert her independence."

Young Geordie looked at her as if surprised. He sat thinking it over for a time. Then he shook his head slowly. "Well, well, I dunno. Independence is a grand thing but you can pay too much for it. Life's a funny business ye know. We seem to have jist so much gasoline in our tanks to get to the journey's end and we can use it all up the way I do, geein' and hawin' instead of o' goin' straight ahead. Now, take Minnie there, she's got lots o' spirit, and she could use it kickin' over the traces, or she could use it pullin' her family along and she does the pullin'. You'll see them kids will all do well. Just you watch. And Steve'll get kinda toned down too. He's a mighty sight better than he used to be. But she's no martyr, don't you believe it."

Islay listened surprised again at his insight. He was right about Minnie. There was nothing of meek endurance in her air.

"Well, well, well," he cried suddenly rising, "here I am haverin' away like an auld woman. I seem to lose my memory when I'm with a couple of young ladies. And I came to give Steve a hand with that back field there." He rose and took his hay fork out of the car.

"I came this way up your lane because it would bring me nearer, and here I am gossipin' as usual."

"We've been invited to have supper with you in the hay field," Islay said as she went to show him the way through the gate to the back lane. "So don't eat everything before we get there."

He waved his fork gaily and strode off up the lane. She stood and watched his sturdy old figure, leaning far forward as though against a strong gale.

“Do wait and come to the field for supper, Ellen,” she said. But Ellen was needed at home and must leave early.

“Besides I couldn’t go out to tea in these slacks,” she said. “Wise Watty will be there, and he’d never go to church again. And father’s been trying so hard to keep him going regularly. Please give my thanks to Mrs. Steve, but I must go. Mother is expecting me.”

Early in the afternoon the Artful announced that, as he was invited to the picnic too, he thought he’d better go over and help Billy and Jack carry the dishes up to the hay field. When Ellen had left for home, and Islay saw the children toiling up the back lane, she laid aside her work and followed, reflecting how pleasant it was to go to a party without the long hours of preparation to which she was accustomed.

The hay field ran along the back of her farm, skirting the bay and the back lane led along one side of it. She climbed the high rail fence gingerly, she had not acquired the agility of the country women. Even Minnie went over the highest fence with scarcely a flutter of her skirts. She sat for a while on the top rail looking down over the lovely scene. The field sloped gently to the deep fringe of evergreens that divided it from the shore. The mower moved up and down the golden pathway, singing a song that mingled with the ripple of the waves on the white stones. The air was sweet with the fragrance of the new-mown hay, the perfume of cedar, and the glorious freshness of the breeze from the far reaches of the Great Lakes.

Steve was riding the mower, Uncle Geordie the rake, and Reddy, Watty and young Steve were going up and down piling the hay that had been cut earlier into fragrant mounds, a process called coiling. The whole field was a moving panorama of life and colour.

Minnie and the family were already established in a fence corner under a wild apple tree beside the lane. Islay half jumped, half fell, off the fence and went along the flowery border to join them.

“Come away, come away!” Minnie called in delight at the sight of her. “We’re all ready and Steve’s going to stop when he comes round next time.”

Minnie was sitting on a big rock throne and the supper was spread on the grass around her, a cup and plate for each, set in a semi-circle. She had a can of hot tea wrapped in a quilt, and a quart jar of cream wrapped in cool wet papers. Celia and Lily Anne were putting huge servings of salad on each plate and two substantial ham and beef sandwiches. There were pies to be cut up, baskets of cookies and tarts and currant buns to be piled on plates, jars of fat dill pickles, bowls of hard-boiled eggs decorated with radishes and lettuce; all to be set on

the grassy table among the daisies and clover.

Steve unhitched his team and came striding over to the table. Uncle Geordie and the other men followed. The boys were already there, sniffing hungrily. There was no washing of hands before eating, but it would have seemed unnecessary. The workmen were covered with the clean dust of the hay field, the pollen of millions of flowers, and the minute seeds of grasses, blown by the fragrant winds of the lakes.

“Man, now,” cried Uncle Geordie, seating himself on the end of a log near Minnie’s tea pail, “jist look at the stylish table-cloth, will ye? I suppose now, Minnie, Audrey embroidered all them daisies on it, didn’t she?”

The little girl gave a delighted giggle, but the Artful stared at Uncle Geordie suspiciously. He was always on the lookout for anyone who might be making fun of a fellow.

They had just seated themselves before their well-filled plates, when a noise broke out in the pasture field. Everyone looked up, for, strange happening, a car had appeared above the crest of the hill and was bumping down the lane where no car had ever been driven before.

“What in the name o’ thunder? . . .” Steve was mystified.

“Say, it looks like your car, Uncle Geordie!” cried young Stevie.

“Warlocks and witches!” Uncle Geordie shouted, twisting round to get a better look at the apparition. “D’ye think the deil’s got hold o’ the thing at last, and she’s after me? I wouldn’t put it past her. What on earth? . . .”

There was no doubt that it was Uncle Geordie’s car, and that it was coming towards them at some speed, regardless of the absence of road. It left the lane and floundered through the gap, crashed over some loose rails with every indication of demon possession. But, as it drew nearer it was plain that it was being driven by human, if by reckless hands. It swayed and clattered over the stubble, and finally came to an abrupt, triumphant halt beside the picnickers.

“Hey!” shouted the driver, “anybody see a young fella by the name of George Laird hanging round here?” He leaped from the car. “I hired him for the summer and he ran out on me while I was away.”

Uncle Geordie scrambled to his feet, dealt the young man a resounding blow in the chest that sent him staggering.

“Eh, ye good-for-nothin’ tramp!” he yelled, and they fell upon each other like a pair of school boys.

The children were up and dancing around the combatants.

"Oh, oh, it's Dick! Momma! Dick's home!"

Minnie dropped her pail of hot tea and ran to them, shoving the boxers apart.

"Eh, Dickie, lad! Is it you?" Her arms were about his neck.

Islay sat back watching the hilarity. So this was Uncle Geordie's boy! He was surely worth looking at a second time. He was tall and athletic, strikingly handsome. He had a reckless, daring air. His clothes were rumpled and dust-stained, and he looked like the lad Minnie had once described as 'here-away, there-away'.

Evidently Uncle Geordie detected no flaw in him, nor did any of the family. Even Steve was genial, considering that he was hungry and supper had been delayed.

"Well, professor," he jeered, "I hope you learned at college how to get in hay before it rains."

When everyone, even Wise Watty had welcomed him home, Minnie brought him to Islay.

"Now, here's a new cousin for you, Dick," she cried proudly. "Miss Drummond. You know she's on the Old Home Place."

Islay was prepared to be most cordial to Uncle Geordie's boy, and was concerned to see the animation wiped from his face with a surprising swiftness. Like passing cold water abruptly over warmth. Was *he* shy, too, she wondered. Country boys were. Even Minnie's boys avoided her. Even wise-cracking Reddy's wit deserted him when she was near, she'd noticed. But it wasn't that. This lad wasn't shy, it was something more complex. She was still bewildered, when, after a limp, ineffectual handshake, he turned hastily away. He had spoken no word to her!

Minnie and Uncle Geordie were too happy to notice. Nobody noticed. Everybody was too busy eating. Celia and Lily Anne made a place for Dick between them. There was always food for one more at Minnie's table even though it might be set under a tree in a hay field. Dick's plate was piled with good things. Dick, himself, was piled with questions. What had he been doing the last week? Had the exams been very hard? Where'd you pick up the stolen car, Uncle Geordie wanted to know.

Then *he* must hear all the latest family gossip. How was Aunt Bell's rheumatism? Did Bruce and Wellington miss him? Anyway, the best and most

important news was that Celia was now a full-fledged school teacher, and only needed a school, he teased.

Schools again! The very mention of schools irritated Steve!

He hoped Dick was through at last. A caution how long schooling took a fellow! Didn't see how they managed to put in the time learning farming out of a book!

Dick laughed good-naturedly. He was too wise to tell Steve anything.

"Aunt Min, is that a strawberry pie I see crowning that stone? Don't pass it to Red," he implored. "Let me have first go at it."

Red protested. He had been feeling that Dick was getting an undue amount of attention. Even Celia! Celia was so busy passing Dick good things she had no time for anyone else. No time for him! He recalled a bit of information he had heard. He'd been conserving it for use at a moment, suitably strategic. He turned the matter over briefly in his mind. This must be the time.

"Say, Celia," he spoke awkwardly, a conscious nonchalance. "They're advertising for a teacher at Payson's Corners. Saw it in the paper."

It worked! Celia drew a deep breath, looked at Reddy gratefully.

"Payson's Corners! Oh, that's a lovely school. I know the girl who taught there last year." She had forgotten Dick.

"Oh, Celia," her mother objected, "but that's away up in Bruce Peninsula!"

"Yeah, it's an awful place," Reddy declared. He took a thick sandwich of home-made bread and ham, doubled it to eating proportion, crammed a huge section into his spacious mouth. When speech became again possible, he concluded. "You have to walk three miles through the bush to the school and you often meet bears or deer, mostly bears."

Celia squealed. "You're crazy! Why Millie Marshall taught there two years. She says it's a lovely place. She boarded just across the field from the school."

"Lots o' room for a dozen bears in a field in Bruce Peninsula," Reddy warned, downing another section of sandwich.

"Why is Milly leaving?" asked Dick. "Too many bears?"

Celia twinkled. "She's going to be married."

"Then it was too many deer," pronounced Reddy, weakly, and silenced himself with the remainder of his sandwich.

The whole circle broke into laughter. Young laughter. They were anxious to be amused, and at a picnic it isn't hard. Steve was not amused. He was only into his third roast beef sandwich, and had not graduated from the morose stage.

"Milly's a foolish girl," he grunted, "marryin' that kid of Jim Lauder's down there, an' goin' in with the old folks. Bet she'll be wishin' she was back gettin' a good salary, before the year's up."

"Then there *are* worse things than teaching?" Islay took him up on it. But Steve sat silent and a little sullen. Thinking for an answer, Islay thought.

"Livin' with the old folks mightn't be so good," Young Geordie said. "You'd better watch out Stevie and not be bringin' home a wife. Your mother'd give her a dog's life."

Young Stevie yelled in mock horror, blushed furiously, while his small brothers jeered in high glee. But Islay noticed the tall, shy lad cast a glance towards his mother that told how absurd he thought it was to think *she* could be hard on anyone. That is something good to see, thought Islay, and remembered her own nephews and nieces with some misgivings.

"Is that why Dick hasn't got married yet?" asked Lily Anne, smartly, and now the laughter turned on Uncle Geordie.

"Fair Valley is advertising too, Celia," Minnie tactfully changed the subject. "It's much nearer."

"But it said 'apply in person'. If I could only get over there." She glanced at her father, wistfully.

Steve was beginning to want to join in the conversation. Three helpings of sandwiches, a potato salad, two hard-boiled eggs, had mellowed him. He had progressed to the stage of buttered biscuits and amiability. But he did frown at Celia.

"Twenty-five miles and more, and all the hay out! Yous kids think that all you have to do is to run round the country and burn up gas. We ain't got a spare tire either."

"There ye are," Young Geordie put in. "It's them cars that's the root of all our troubles. If ye had a good team now, ye'd never need a spare tire. Wish I had a buggy and a spankin' driver, Celie, and I'd whisk you over there and *make* 'em give you the school. What d'ye think is the latest dodge o' the cratur, Dick? She'll start now, but she won't stop when I tell her. If I took Celie up the Bruce Peninsula I might go clear to Tub Murry before I got her

yanked up. Dick here could take you . . .”

“I’ll take you, Celia,” Islay interposed. She couldn’t bear the dismay struggling for supremacy over Celia’s dimples. Minnie shot Islay a glance of gratitude that reproached her. “Oh, Cousin Islay!” Celia gasped. But Steve did not seem pleased at all. Islay’s dislike of him increased. What was the matter with the man that would not help his own daughter on in the world?

“There’s Beaver Crossing too, and that’s only ten miles away,” Young Stevie muttered.

“I’ll tell you, Celie,” Dick cried. “Come along down with us when we go home and we’ll run on to Beaver Crossing. I guess I won’t be piling into work till tomorrow?” He looked at Young Geordie. The old man tried to conceal his pleasure.

“No, you run off with the girls tonight. I’ll keep your nose to the grindstone after this. You’ve got to show everybody in the township how they farm in Guelph.”

Steve scoffed. “Guess we were farming round here before them Guelph fellows knew the difference between wheat and alfalfa.” Dick said nothing, and Reddy, feeling he had been shoved from the centre of the stage once more, began to aspire to wit again. He had taken his third piece of pie, and explained to Lily Anne that the reason he needed it was because he was awful pious, which produced satisfactory shrieks of laughter among the very young.

The moment the men were finished they were back at their work. Dick threw off his coat, and seizing Uncle Geordie’s fork, went out and gave Steve a demonstration of what a Guelph graduate could do. The remainder of the food and the dishes were piled into the baskets. Minnie hurried everyone forward. They must have everything done and Celie ready before Dick came from the field.

Islay helped carry home the baskets. “It’s nice havin’ supper in the field, cause there’s not so many dishes to wash,” little Audrey cried, dancing ahead along the lane, swinging the empty tea pail.

But there were plenty, nevertheless, and while Celia and Minnie and the boys went out to do the milking, Islay gave Lily Anne and Audrey a hand with the cups and saucers. It was growing dark when Dick and Uncle Geordie came down the back lane in the car and whisked Celia away. She was looking very solemn over the prospect of meeting her first school board.

When the long day’s work was done, the men came in from the field, the children played outside the barn, and young Jackie yodelled and sang like a

bird. Minnie sat down on the veranda steps to catch the last glimmer of daylight for her mending.

Islay sat, well-kept hands in her lap, and watched her patch and mend a heavy farm shirt. Minnie's hands were hard and rough. Her hair was brushed back in an unbecoming knot, and her dress and apron were faded with many washings. She had thrown an old sweater of young Stevie's over her shoulders as the night air was cool. But Islay, in her white coat and smart blue dress, had a feeling of inferiority. She had a sudden surprising remembrance of seeing a soldier in war-time, just back from the front, standing in his worn uniform and battered helmet talking to Foster Lawrence's younger brother, dressed in immaculate white flannels, idly swinging a tennis racquet. Had she let herself get out of the battle of life, with her multitude of clubs and social affairs and her endless, inconsequential bridge?

The evening was fading. It was very peaceful here after the busy day. The vesper sparrows sang from the garden fence, the shouts of children echoed from the playground.

"Eh, this is a great day for Uncle Geordie," Minnie declared. "He's that set on Dick. I hope the boy'll steady down now and stay on the farm."

Islay was thinking about Dick. What a good thing for a boy like that to know a girl like Ellen Carruthers. She would give Ellen some of her dresses, and take her to the hairdresser. "Dick's a fine lad, but kinda here-away, there-away." Minnie stitched her thoughts into her patching. "Ye see, he lost his father and mother when he was so little and at first Geordie had a kinda hard time with him. They had none o' their own, ye know, and I guess his wife didn't understand boys. Poor Aggie was one o' them terrible tidy people. She always had the house jist like a band-box and poor Dicky was always trailin' in dirt from the barnyard. And Geordie too. Poor Aggie was always scoldin' the two o' them. Dicky was always a kinda comical youngster, and he came up here one day and he says to me, says he 'Aunt Min, I'll bet Aunt Aggie is the evenest tempered woman in Lairdale'. And I was that glad to hear him talk like that. I said 'Eh, Dicky, that's fine' I said, and he waited a while and I began to suspect something. Then he said, 'Want to know why?' And I said 'Yes, course I do', and he said, 'Cause she's always mad!' "

Minnie broke into a little chuckle. That was where Celia got her engaging chuckle, Islay thought, with quiet amusement.

"He even ran away once and went off up the lakes. But he came back. And then poor Aggie took to her bed and Geordie was that good to her you couldn't believe it. She told me jist a little before she died, poor thing, that she wished

she'd bothered less about the house and more about the people in it."

"Surely he won't leave Uncle Geordie now that he is getting old."

"I hope not. But you know the boys that graduate from Guelph get all sorts o' good places offered them. Dick was telling Reddy jist there at supper that he's got an offer from some big firm to go to South America. I don't know. The farm, you know, Cousin Islay, is a hard place. I'd like to get everyone o' mine off it!"

There was a fire in the mother's eyes as she said it and her mouth closed in a firm line.

"And you're going to do it!" Islay cried. "Celia'll get a school. I'll take her to Fair Valley next week." And Islay Drummond who had come to the Laird settlement determined to live her own life in her own way, unhampered by her neighbours, went home over the dew and fragrance of the pasture field, feeling an inner exultation over the thought of getting little Celia launched in the world.

8

Brier Rose

SHE SAT UNDER THE GREEN SHADE OF GRANDMOTHER'S VIRGINIA creepers, her typewriter making the only sound in the quiet of the morning. The day was warm, the air still and sweet. The lombard poplars stood straight like sentinels. Birds peeped softly in the orchard. No wind in the lilacs. No activity at all, for the sprawling, lavender flower clusters were faded and dry. No haunt for bees. The flower garden, which she was slowly rescuing from its wild state, smiled in the sunshine; ragged robin and money musk, heritage from pioneer days, the yellow rosebush beside the rain barrel, the long row of Bessie's blue bells. Beyond, Blue Ridge showed its deep ultramarine. Across the bay the far shore mirrored itself in the glassy surface. Steve and Reddy were hauling the hay into Steve's barn. She could hear the sharp rap of the horses' hoofs on the board floor. Someone was hammering in Cousin Andy Laird's barn, far up the side road. Each stroke echoed a second later in her own barn. Yet a stillness held the world suspended. It had cast a charm even upon Ginger. He lay on the veranda step, only opening an eye occasionally lest some errant fly might think he was sleeping and take liberties.

This was Islay's very best morning. She was alone. Her story was taking shape at last. The characters were becoming human. She was making her hero strongly like Uncle Geordie's Dick, as handsome and engaging, only she would give him better manners and decent clothes. And her heroine would be as pretty and sweet as Celia with all her fine womanly qualities.

Celia! She must not forget that she had promised to take the girl to Fair Valley tomorrow to apply for a school. How was it she was allowing herself to be turned away from her purpose this way? After this one excursion she would settle down and not let anything else interfere with her plans. How fine it would be if one could only be shut away from all distractions. If life could only be like this. In the days that followed she remembered this morning as her Day of Peace—and the last day too!

The Great Disturbance did not arrive without warning. It was ushered in, appropriately, by the arrival of the Artful. Ginger was instantly alert. He leaped up and set off joyously toward the back gate, and here was her hired man lugging a basket. She could scarcely hide her annoyance. This was not one of

Ellen's days and she had expressly forbidden him to come when she was alone. But as usual he was overflowing with enthusiasm and perfectly certain of his welcome. He was carrying in his basket a pair of half-grown cockerels, presented to him by Jack and Billy from a brood that contained too many of their kind. He set them down proudly on the door stone and the moment they were released they leaped at each other like a pair of fighting cocks should. Islay was secretly dismayed. But she merely ordered them banished to the back yard. She went back to her desk and soon she heard the sound of his hoe in the cabbage patch. He was planning to spend the day, evidently, and she would have to stop her work and get him some dinner.

She had copied just one line when Ginger came from the cabbage patch, leaping and barking.

"Somebody new!" he was shouting. "Somebody strange!"

There was a car coming up the lane, and it was neither the baker's nor Young Geordie's. Ginger became fiercely excited and the Artful left his hoe in the exact spot where he had placed it and stood frozen to attention.

A smart, streamlined little runabout came swiftly up the lane, and stopped smoothly right in front of the veranda. The door flew open and out leaped—Kate's pampered, sophisticated Harriet! Of all her nephews and nieces, Islay liked Kate's children least; and of all Kate's brood Harriet was the most objectionable. A spoiled brat! She was her niece, though. Kate's little girl. And the thought ran rapidly through Islay's mind that she was strangely pleased to see any one of her family, even Harriet.

She hurried out to meet her. "Harry! You dear child!" she cried in real pleasure. "What a surprise!"

Harriet, very smart in a fashionable white wool suit with touches of red that set off her dark gypsy beauty, turned a nonchalant cheek and allowed her aunt to kiss her.

"Hi'ya, old dear," she hailed. "Didn't I warn you? I'm running away, if you're interested. Thought I'd just detour into the backwoods and see how you were getting on feeding the pigs. No, the family didn't send me out to report. Don't grouse. No family! The distinguished House of Lawrence has bust up. Dad and mum sailed for parts unknown yesterday. Athol has been spirited away to camp, and little Harry is supposed to be on her way to Lake Rosseau with that dim wit, Denton Wade. But I was so keen to see dear Auntie, lost up here among the hay! Aren't you delighted I'm here!"

Islay laughed comfortably. This was mostly fictional, she felt.

“Well, come and sit under your ancestral trees,” she said. “I’m glad to see you, whatever the reason, and later perhaps we’ll hear the truth. I never knew you without your little axe to grind, Harriet Isabel Lawrence.” She looked at Harriet with keen scrutiny.

The girl made a dramatic gesture of defeat, sank into one of the old rocking chairs. “You win,” she cried, ruefully, “sort of hoped you’d have rubbed the corners of the ‘perfect secretary’ off against the fences by this time.”

Islay winced. Perhaps she had been a bit stiff and dictatorial with her nieces. There was appeal and anxiety in the girl’s dark eyes, too. It was plain that Harriet was making a lame effort to appear at ease.

“Well,” she said, “let’s forget the secretary. Tell me all the family news. Pete is the only one who knows how to write a letter.”

“Well, it’s a miracle that he has time, he’s so busy chasing that Stanley girl; no I mean dodging her; *she’s* doing the chasing.”

Islay winced again. “And your mother and father got off for Vancouver?”

“At last. Aunt Mary and the girls were leaving for the lake today and Aunt Jeanette and the kids went the very minute school closed. Mums was quite demented with all her social engagements before she left, and Aunt Jen’s was a mad house with all the kids yelling to get away.”

“And Uncle Rob? Will he not get any vacation? My dear, have you had lunch?”

“Whoops!” shouted the girl, “here’s an interesting subject. Woman alive, I haven’t had *breakfast*; and I’m dying of famine. I was rather in a—er—a hurry when I left. When do we eat?”

“We dine at mid-day, like all right-minded farm folk,” Islay said, running over in her dismayed mind the possibilities of her larder. “But this is the day my cook doesn’t come so we will have to see what we can pick up. Why, I forgot, there’s a whole rhubarb pie and some scones and cookies that Minnie gave me yesterday. Come along and help me get the dinner.”

Harriet flung her white buckskin gloves and her smart little red hat right on top of Islay’s precious manuscript and followed her indoors.

“Hi!” she cried, “what have you been doing to this old kitchen? My, it’s grand! You didn’t splash on all this paint yourself, did you?”

“No, I’ve got a wonderful girl who fell from heaven right into my kitchen. She’s the cook and everything else, she’s even started to redecorate the old

house."

"Who in the world? One of Cousin Steve's gang?"

"No, Ellen Carruthers is her name. From the manse. She's the minister's daughter, a Varsity grad., and yet she comes over here and washes my dishes."

"Pretty snooty! Is that the butler in the potato patch? He seems to have a spell on him, whoever he is. Does he ever *function*? I'll bet he hasn't as much a breathed since I came."

Out in the garden, the Artful leaned on his hoe, transfixed.

"Probably thinks you're a vision," Islay smiled, dryly. "Car, costume, and accessories have corrupted him. He literally fell on my doorstep, you know. He rained down, to be exact. But come, I'll show you how to get a dinner in the country." Islay smiled suddenly at her newly-acquired air of competence!

"I'll set the table," Harriet cried, following her into the shed kitchen. "Where do we eat? In the orchard? Oh, heavenly day! What can I do?"

"You can keep away from this stove with that white outfit!" Islay cried. "Here, put on this smock. Cover yourself up!"

"Can't be bothered!" Harriet flung the smock over a chair. "Wait! She darted out to her car, rummaged in the trunk, hailed the Artful, who by this time showed indications of awakening animation. Into the house she dashed, and Islay heard the clattering around her bedroom. Click, clack, click. She flashed back in a moment, picturesque in white slacks, red shirt and matching red sandals. A lithe, gypsy-like figure.

"Now!" she cried, "right an' ready! What a love of a room you have, Islay! I suppose that's yours, where I went to change. Off Grammy's Ben. But I wouldn't stay in a *house* here. I intend to sleep in the barn on the hay, if you'd be good and invite me."

Islay, intent on bacon and eggs, was spared a reply. But her mind registered dismay. Could the girl be wanting to stay! Harriet was hilariously happy. She danced in and out with the dishes. Guided by the admiring Artful, she rushed to the pump for water, to the cellar for butter and cream, followed closely by both boy and dog, the Artful in convulsions over her antics. Islay noted his carefully washed hands—no admonition required—his meticulously slicked hair, which made him look thinner, more forlorn than ever.

Assistance was gratuitous, but erratic, and Harriet had consumed three scones and a cookie before they finally sat down, explaining, with her mouth full, that it was better to lose three scones in a good cause than one whole

niece, since she was just about to fall over dead with hunger. She was playfully threatening to devour the gnome, as she dubbed the Artful. But the meal was declared ready under the duchess tree, and the Artful was saved.

Bacon and eggs, lettuce and onions, fried potatoes, home-made bread and scones, Ellen's muffins and Minnie's rhubarb pie followed the way of all food, so quickly that Islay was perturbed. Harriet declared she had never eaten anything so good in her life, nor so much. She challenged the Artful to finish the pie between them, which was swiftly accomplished and she even snatched away his cookie right under his nose and ate it in one gulp. She kept him in spasms of laughter, expressed in agonized squeals as though his little frail body was not acquainted with the motions of laughter and was rudely shaken in the experiment. His eyes never left Harriet and Islay could see that, without an effort, she had made such complete conquest of him in an hour as weeks of kindness had failed to do.

When the meal was finally consumed Harriet awkwardly helped with the dishes, making more work for Islay. When everything was cleared away Islay slipped out to the veranda, and gathering up Harriet's hat and gloves, put away her guilty manuscript and covered her typewriter. Likely Harry would stay only the day, and she had better devote it to her. For there was some strange reason for her coming that her aunt did not understand. She sent the boy off over the pasture to Minnie for more cream and butter, and glanced out to see him waving good-bye to Harriet. The girl was sprawled out on the orchard bench smoking a cigarette which she waved to him. Islay went into her bedroom to arrange her hair and stared about her in dismay. She might have known! This was exactly like Harry's room at home when her mother or a maid did not attend to it. Her clothes were all over the place. The beautiful suit she had worn was flung across the bed in a rumpled heap. One costly buckskin shoe was on the table, the other under the bed. The dresser had disappeared under a wave of filmy lingerie, the floor was liberally peppered with fine face powder, the open suitcase an island, surrounded by chaos.

Islay shut the door on the confusion that was Harry and went out to the orchard in disgust. Harriet was stretched out on the bench in the shade sound asleep, childlike and helpless, like the little girl Islay had delighted in before she had grown up. She had been a sweet child. Islay felt strangely protective. Something was wrong she knew and perhaps the girl had fled to the old home as she herself had done when life pressed too heavily. She took a pair of curtains that Ellen had started to hem and sat down to work in the green rocker. An hour passed before Harriet stirred. When she did she sat up and gazed about in bewilderment. "Oh," she cried in astonishment, "I can't

remember when I ever had a sleep in the afternoon before! Oh, Islay, this is heavenly." She stretched her slender arms and yawned and laughed. "What a snooze!" She looked at her wrist watch. "An hour! But I didn't get any sleep last night and I left Harrington before seven."

"What made you take such an early start, child?"

"I was running away, I tell you. Keeping up the family tradition. Wasn't that what great-great-grandmother did? Besides when you're hurrying to a deathbed at the same time, you just have to get an early start."

"A death bed!" Islay stared, but asked no more questions. She could wait, Harriet would tell it all in time. So she asked for more news about the family. Well, Aunt Jeanette's speech at the Canadian Club was a wow, and Uncle Syd was an old meanie. He didn't want her to go to the convention at Ottawa. Certainly the kids were behaving like demons. Mums and dad nearly broke their necks getting away. A luncheon and two teas for mums the day they left. We kids couldn't see them off because we were all at a party at Uncle Rob's—for Angela. She's got herself engaged to Porter Fieldings, you know, the one with the silly 'Haw-haw,—*railly*!' I don't see how Angel stands him, but he's got oodles of money. Aunt Jen's gang went away first. Uncle Syd's sister and her kids were coming for a visit so they lit out to the cottage early so there wouldn't be room. Smart. Looks out for number one all right, all right. Harriet suddenly stopped and looked at Islay with a disarming grin.

"I suppose you're not listening to a word of this stuff, just waiting for the prodigal to trot out her confession."

"No! I didn't even recognize you as a prodigal with a confession," Islay said laughing. "But if you want to make one, why I don't mind."

The girl looked at her earnestly. "You've really changed, Islay. I always knew you'd be a dead game sport if you ever did change."

Islay had been listening to the girl's sharp comments upon the various members of the family, amazed at her unflattering insight. Had the girl characterized her as correctly? But she laughed good-naturedly, not troubling to defend herself. Something in Harriet's fitful, nervous gaiety disturbed her. Something wrong. This sudden change of plans had surely been the result of some catastrophe. "Perhaps I need more young people around," Islay said on a sudden impulse. "I suppose you'd be bored to death here, but, do you think you'd like—would you care to stay and pay me a little visit?"

Harriet gave a whoop, threw herself back on the bench and waved her long legs and her trim red sandalled feet in the air. "Would I ever! She's come

across at last! Yes ma'am, yes, yes!" she shouted. "You can bet your old stone house I'll pay you a visit! Haven't you seen my tongue hanging out for an invitation?"

"Harry! I didn't think—I never dreamed"—Islay faltered.

"How long d'ye want me? Woman, alive, how long? Don't keep me holding my breath like this!"

"Forever. Or longer if you want to stay. Why I thought you'd die of boredom in this quiet place. Why, Harry, *dear*!" She was amazed and disturbed to see tears in the girl's eyes.

"Just you try me. I'm invited now anyway and you'll never get rid of me. I warned you I'd come back." Islay had considered Harriet hard and unfeeling, since she had grown up, and now when she saw her struggling for self-control, was ashamed of her harsh judgment and grieved that she had been so slow of heart in coming to the girl's aid. She forgot entirely that she had determined on a leisurely literary summer.

"Dear child, I'll love having you," she cried quite truthfully. "I've been a little nervous alone at night and have had to drag Celia across the fields to protect me. I'll be glad of company," she finished, recklessly.

"I'll do the housekeeping," Harriet said with large generosity, having not the vaguest notion, as Islay well knew, what that promise involved. "Of course you will," Islay said gaily, "perhaps we'll take over the farm from Cousin Steve and run it ourselves."

Harriet wiped her eyes and was silent for a little. "Now that the suspense is over," she said, "here's the whole story. You know I was invited to Denton Wade's place in Muskoka for the two months mother and dad are to be away. Mums was tickled pink when Mrs. Wade asked me. Thought it was just next door to asking me to become a member of the family. We were all going North in a motor party today—the two Spencers, Patricia and Todd, and the Greers and Dent and myself. I stayed all night at Uncle Rob's with the girls because we closed the house yesterday. There wasn't much night left because we all went to a dance for Angel and Porter, at the Beach Club. It's a terribly swank place, and it was simply awful." She paused for a few minutes.

"You're too young and innocent, Auntie mine, to be told everything." Islay gulped. "Everybody simply goes the limit," she continued. "Denton was lit, and I didn't think we'd ever get home alive. And when I did I made up my mind. I was through. I might as well tell you the truth about Dent. He's all gone on Poppy Livingstone! He's simply nuts about her! And he never so

much as looked at me when she was around all evening. Poppy had gone with Paul Greer, but she dished him and came home with Dent and me, and I really had a lovely time, no kidding! So here I am. And I'm all off Denton—through!"

Islay listened in dismay. Harriet had not proved the social success her mother had hoped. And now, when her prospects for a successful marriage were brilliant, for the first time in her career, she had flung all aside. And Islay Drummond knew her sister Kate well enough to be assured that the blame for it all would fall upon the aunt to whom she had fled.

Harriet was regarding her with startled eyes. "Are you crazy to have me marry Dent Wade, too, Islay?" she asked sharply.

"Heaven forbid!" Islay cried with a shudder.

"That's what I said myself. But heaven didn't seem to give a hoot what happened me, so I took a hand myself. And I knew I couldn't go anywhere but to you about it, Islay, except Aunt Jen, and she's always too busy addressing meetings. You and Aunt Jen are the only ones in our family who don't put money first. And mothers never know anything nowadays. Mums was crazy when Athol and I got taken up by the Wades and she went away thinking Denton and I would be engaged this summer. And she *must* know what he's like."

The girl's face was bitter, her eyes tragic. Islay's heart cried out for her, young and disillusioned. Why didn't parents stay home and take care of the children they had brought into the world? The girl needed protection. Islay wanted to take her in her arms and comfort her, but the Drummonds had always been afraid of any demonstration of affection. She patted the bare brown arm. "Good girl," she said, "I'm glad to see you've got so much spunk." Harriet's lips trembled and she turned away. Fortunately the Artful created a diversion. On the day that Islay wished to be rid of him he had hurried back from his errand in double quick time. He carried something very carefully in his basket. It was a jar wrapped in a green rhubarb leaf, and filled with Minnie's special lemon cordial. Islay lifted it out. "Hurrah, this beats all the cocktails that ever were shaken, Harry! I never met anyone like Cousin Steve's wife. She's in a class by herself, all other women are lesser beings."

"She sent it for you," Artie said shyly to Harriet. "I told her you'd come and Celia made it."

He brought glasses and they all drank to the health of the newcomer. Then Harriet had to go to the barn with the Artful to see his collection of pets, especially the new roosters.

Islay went upstairs to a bedroom under the eaves that Ellen had cleared out for Celia. It was bare but clean and fresh with pretty muslin curtains at the little window overlooking the bay. She gathered up Harriet's widely scattered clothes and carried them upstairs. There was not one closet in the old part of the house but there was a huge wardrobe in the hall at the bedroom door. It was clean and dusted, as if Ellen had been expecting a guest. Here Islay hung Harriet's beautiful clothes, the dresses that were to have worked such a havoc in the Wade palace on their Muskoka island.

Harriet came running up the stairs and went into raptures over the room and the bed and dresser. She took the unpacking of her clothes as a matter of course; she was accustomed to being waited upon and did not notice. There was another suitcase in the car and she dashed down and spent the afternoon stowing away her wardrobe and singing at the top of her voice. When Artie was gone they strolled down to the shore for their afternoon swim and Harriet romped around in the water and afterwards lay on the sand and slept again. When their supper was over they sat at the kitchen door in the cool evening and watched the sun go down in the flaming waters of the bay. It was the hour for confidences and Harriet returned to the subject of her runaway.

She leaned back in the old rocker and put her sandalled feet on another of Ellen's painted chairs.

"You see it's this way, Islay," she said humbly. "I've never been really what mums calls a social success. I'm not so very bad-looking, am I, but somehow the boys never bothered much about me. Aunt Mary told Angela I was too aggressive and masculine. Dear Angel and Gwen are so sweetly feminine. It was an awful trial to mums, I know, that first winter I came out and couldn't get asked to anything worth while. It's perfectly awful to be a girl when the boys pass you up. Some girls can go any length to get attention. Gwen can get dates with boys just by the smartest tricks I wouldn't think up in years.

"I wouldn't have cared so much for myself if all the cousins and relations hadn't been saying 'Poor Harry! too bad about her!' There was only one boy I ever—it was that year I went to Mac Hall. You knew about him—no, that was the spring you were away.". She turned on Islay a sharp penetrating glance and stopped suddenly. "Oh, well, never mind. Mums wouldn't have him, anyway. So you can imagine the stir when all at once last winter Dent started rushing me. I was flattered to death, too, of course. Last winter was wonderful. But I never really liked Dent all the way through. He's such a baby! Always getting badly used and running to his momma to patch things up.

"But everything came my way when I was his best girl and I didn't dare

kick. I had to be thankful to have him on any terms. Poor mums nearly died of joy when Mrs. Wade started asking her to everything. And I might as well take my own share of the blame. I hated like sin being left out of things and pitied, I wanted to be engaged and flaunt a diamond like Angela's. And Angela and I are getting past the age when we can run around with the younger set. Out three winters, and twenty-two! Well mums was beginning to find out what Dent was like and I knew that often she was sorry for me, but when I'd begin to go into reverse she'd get in such a panic and I'd look ahead and think what it meant, so I'd shut my eyes tight and go on. And she was certain I'd be engaged when she got back. And maybe we would have, I don't know. Poppy's been chasing him for months and he adores that. But that day we were all up here with you, I found out something—well—anyway I knew then I just couldn't go on. But I hadn't the courage to quit till Mr. and Mrs. Foster Lawrence were out of the way. But the minute they were on the train I wrote Mrs. Wade, spun her a great yarn about my dear auntie being sick, I hinted at a death bed, and that I simply had to rush to you. And that's the end of the life story of Harriet Isabel Lawrence."

Islay sat staring at the flag stones at her feet amazed at her own self-absorption. She had seen Harry almost every day for the past three years, but had never dreamed of her need, never offered a helping hand. She knew Kate would be bitterly disappointed, and she would blame Islay for her influence over her daughter. But she kept these reflections to herself. A wave of reckless rebellion came over her; rebellion against the worldly ambitions of her family, against the self-centered life she had been living. Harry needed her. She needed a home and protection and guidance and What use was Islay Drummond if she could not give her both?

"You're absolutely right, Harry!" she declared. "I know something of Denton Wade and he's a spoiled brat; spoiled by money and indulgence. You would never be happy. Better end it now than later. I'll stand by you, to the last ditch."

"I didn't want to bring you into a family row, Islay," Harriet said, grateful tears rising in her dark eyes. "So I wrote mums and dad last night, or this morning before I left, I told them I was coming away before I got thrown over. I told them that dear Dent had left me for Poppy and so I *couldn't* go to the Wade's. So you see I've put you in a good light, you're sort of saving the family pride, and they'll be eternally grateful to you."

"But Harry! It's not quite true, dear!"

"What's the matter with that? You simply have to fib to dad, Islay. You couldn't live with him if you didn't. Mums does it all the time."

Islay threw up her hands in despair. “What on earth is the . . .”

“Younger generation coming to.” Harriet finished neatly.

“Well, well, never mind. If things come to what Wise Watty calls a ‘disruption’ we’ll fortify Laird Castle and you and I will hold it against all invaders.”

Harriet tried to laugh and failed, uttering a little sob instead, and hastily and impatiently wiped her eyes. Islay gave her attention to putting away her work. Dusk had fallen, the vesper sparrows were stilled, and the night-hawks zoomed through the still air. Night had fallen on her precious work too, Islay felt, as she carried her typewriter indoors.

“I won’t be a burden on you,” Harriet was saying meekly. “It must cost something to live here,” she added with forethought that surprised Islay. “But dad gives me an allowance, and he gave me an extra cheque to make a splurge at Dent’s place. So we can pool expenses. How do you eat away out here anyway? Or does the blessed Minnie person send over pies all the time?”

Islay felt it was a good time to explain her financial position. The farm, except that it gave a roof over her head, was rather a liability. She paid Ellen to do her housework and the little boy to weed the garden, and she had asked leave from Mr. Frances for four months and the future was not very bright. He wasn’t very pleasant about it and he might not want her back.

“But never mind!” she cried. “Come, we’ll run over to Steve’s and tell Celia she doesn’t need to bother about me any more! I’ve got my very own niece to look after me!”

9

Tangled Vines

ISLAY WAS AWAKENED EARLY THE NEXT MORNING BY screams and laughter and the pounding of feet. Above the shouts of the Artful and Harriet, and the wild barking of Ginger rose the hysterical scolding of the gobbler. A strong smell of smoke floated in from the back kitchen. Islay dressed in desperate haste and ran out to investigate. Were they going to burn the Old Home down over her head? She found the stove crammed with wood and paper, all in a blaze, while all the dampers were tightly closed. Smoke was belching from every crack. She shot open the dampers, and snatched the empty kettle from where it was crackling and burning on the hot stove.

"Good-bye to peace and comfort," she sighed. A little rhyme that she had found in Artie's school primer kept repeating itself:

Anything for a quiet life
Said the little small Red Hen!

She could see the two, Harriet in shorts, dashing through the barnyard, shrieking and hurling sticks and stones, the gobbler and all Lily Anne's turkeys ahead of them.

In a few minutes they returned in mad haste, carrying a pail of water between them, spilling most of it over the path and themselves.

"Hi!" Harriet shouted. "Us farm folks is early risers. We intended to get the breakfast and I was going to take you in a tray."

"We chased the turkeys out!" cried the Artful, righteously. "Say, it was a good thing I happened to come early. They'd a' et up every one o' them green peas, you bet!"

The boy was not supposed to come till after breakfast, but seeing how happy he was, Islay could not do less than commend him.

Breakfast was a mad scramble. The Artful set the table, Harriet made the coffee, boasting loudly that she was expert at it, and Islay attended to the toast and eggs. It was a simple meal and it seemed that this division of labour should have produced satisfactory results, but the toast was burned, the coffee boiled

over, and there were neither forks nor spoons on the table When they were seated. But there was a great deal of hilarity and everyone had a ravenous appetite.

"Oh, boy, isn't this grand?" Harriet cried half a dozen times. "I'm going to settle on the farm, did you know? Yes I am. I'm going to learn to run it and never, never dress up nor go back to a city again forever more, amen."

They were still sitting at the table when a figure appeared in the lane announced by a loud welcome from Ginger.

Harriet gave no time for introductions—"Hi, there, Ellen!" she cried. "I'm Harry, at your service, youngest of the family. The stork dropped me here last night!"

"Now, if you want to be useful, Harry," Islay said, "here's the girl who can show you how to do everything. Ellen is in full authority here. She's your boss, so watch your step."

She said it gaily, but she did not want any false notions about Ellen's position to get into the head of Kate's spoiled daughter.

"Sit down, Ellen, dear, and drink a cup of this superfine coffee. The new cook made it," Islay added, her eyes twinkling.

The two girls were on friendly terms before the dishes were cleared from the table and Islay left them discussing painting and decorating. She set the Artful to his task and slipped away to her work much relieved, but peace and quiet had fled. There seemed to be a great deal of noise and fun and running to and fro and she could even hear Ellen's rare laugh. Islay tried to shut out the sights and sounds and give her attention to the pages before her. Then she saw Steve's wagon lumbering down into the hay field. Wise Watty dropped off and came across for his morning libation at the old well.

Islay rose to call Harriet.

Celia had managed to tell her, though much impeded by gasps of laughter, that Wise Watty had been scandalized by the sight of Ellen going about the kitchen in slacks and a sweater! The minister's daughter prancin' round the house in pants, and not in her own house at that, was what Wise Watty considered a sign that the end of the world was not far distant. Islay realized that if he caught sight of Harriet in her scant attire he would be sure the dread consummation was at hand.

Fortunately the girl was out of sight for the moment, as she was chasing the Artful through the orchard, and came around the corner of Grammy's Ben just

as Watty left. Islay devoutly hoped he had not seen her, which showed how little she knew about Wise Watty.

"There you are!" Harriet cried, dropping upon the veranda step and fanning herself with a rhubarb leaf. "I thought the turkeys had come back when I heard the typewriter. What's all the office work about? I thought you were supposed to be taking a holiday."

Very much against her better judgment, Islay felt compelled to confess. Harriet was not as impressed as Ellen had been. "Goodness, what a dreadful lot of work! Will you get much money for it?"

"I don't even know if I can do it, Harry. It's entirely an experiment, and please don't mention it to anyone. Ellen is the only one who knows."

"I'll be a clam. It'll be grand to have an author in the family. Aunt Jen would go on a lecture tour across Canada if she had a sister who wrote a book. I must get away and not bother you." However she still sat and chatted, contentedly fanning herself. To Islay's surprise she seemed deeply interested in the Laird relatives and who married whom. Beyond Steve's family, Islay was rather vague on details. "You'll have to ask Minnie," she said. "She'll tell you, she or Uncle Geordie."

"Who's this Uncle Geordie? Is he really your uncle—that would make him my great-uncle."

"No, he's mother's cousin. But we all loved him as children and called him uncle. You must meet him, Harry. He's the grandest old dear. It's fun to see him drive a car. He hates machinery of all sorts."

"I'll run you down to see him any time you like," Harriet said. "Could we go today?"

"But we're going to Fair Valley with Celia today," Islay said.

"Oh, bother! so we are, I forgot."

Islay was pleased at the girl's interest in the old man. "I'll tell you, we might go around that way on our return, drop Ellen at her home and we'll all stop and see Uncle Geordie and Aunt Bella. By the way Harry, Uncle Geordie has an adopted boy, Dick Hartley. He's just graduated from Guelph. Did you ever by any chance meet him when you were at MacDonald Hall?"

Harriet leaped to her feet. "Oh, good-night! I promised the kid I'd help him plant some watermelon seed," and she was gone so suddenly that Islay was bewildered as well as much relieved.

“I do hope she’ll dress up for this drive or Celia’ll never get a school,” Islay worried. She saw the baker’s car turn into the lane and decided that they would need much more bread than heretofore. She went down the steps and met him at the well.

“Yes, yes,” he cried, “you’ll be wantin’ a few more loaves of my Sea Foam. They were sayin’ down the line that it would soon be like old times here when there was a big family in the Old Home Place. I see you got two boys, eh?” He looked across at the Artful in his blue overalls and Harry in her shorts industriously hoeing a long trench for their watermelons, each whistling a piercing tune.

Islay thought it wise not to enlighten him. “Yes,” she said shortly. “I think I’d better take double the number of loaves.”

“You’ll need them,” he cackled. “They were tellin’ me down the line that your niece, Kate’s girl, was comin’ too. Man, you’ll be keepin’ a summer hotel.”

Islay felt cornered. She might as well tell him everything. He would know anyway.

“She’s here,” she said. “That’s my niece over there with Artie.”

He stared for a moment and then jumped into his car doubling up with laughter. “Gosh! I’ll raise a laugh this time!” he chuckled. “A girl! Haw, haw! Wait till I tell Old Doc. Williams—wait till—pants! Short pants! An’ whistlin’ to beat the band! Haw, haw!”

His high shrill laughter sounded above the rattle of his car. Islay stood rigid with indignation until she turned and saw the two had heard. Harriet was shouting with laughter and the Artful had twined himself around his hoe in a sort of spasm, choking and squeaking in gnome-like glee.

Islay took the bread to the kitchen where Ellen was putting away the breakfast dishes that Harriet had promised to wash.

“ ‘Anything for a quiet life
Said the little small Red Hen’,”

Islay quoted with a groan. Ellen smiled, but her eyes were tragic. But she turned to Islay with her usual composure.

“You won’t need me. I suppose I won’t be coming here any more now?” she asked.

Islay cried out in dismay. “Ellen? What is it? Have you something better?”

“Oh, no. But now that your niece is here you won’t need me,” Ellen faltered. “And I don’t want you to keep me on just to give me something to do.”

“Oh, oh,” Islay gasped in relief, “is that really the only reason? If it is you may stay till the end of time. Why, Ellen Carruthers, haven’t you seen enough of Harry already to realize that I need you far worse now than before?”

Ellen choked between laughter and tears, and Islay patted her arm. “Run along now to your work, and don’t go scaring the life out of me. I told Celia we’d be ready at two-thirty, and remember you’re coming.”

She went back to her work feeling as though she had had a narrow escape from bodily injury. She sighed heavily. It was well nigh impossible to concentrate in the midst of these interruptions. And yet, as she sat there she could hear Ellen singing at her work, and the two in the garden whistling tunelessly but joyfully, and her heart insisted upon being light.

She started right after dinner getting the family ready for the ride to Fair Valley with Celia. She was finding that country folk did not adhere as strictly to the clock as people in the business world. ‘We’ll be along in the afternoon,’ or ‘We’ll see you in town in the evening’, was always sufficient arrangement for a meeting. Even the smart, efficient Celia was loath to name an exact hour for starting anywhere. Then Ellen felt she should not go. She really must finish painting the floors upstairs. And she had only her slacks, and how could she go visiting trustees in such a costume? There might be some Wise Wattys on the school board.

But Islay was determined that she should come. She went into her room and looked through her ample wardrobe. She had been longing to give Ellen a dress. This was her opportunity. She took out a soft rose-coloured muslin, one that she had worn till she was tired of it but which was as good as new. She went out to the kitchen. “Look,” she said. “I believe we are just the same size. You must wear this, because we won’t go without you.”

Ellen was hard to persuade, though her eyes shone as she held up the soft misty folds.

“Oh, but,” she faltered, “it’s so terribly beautiful.”

“Not any more so than you will be when you get into it,” Islay declared. “Now, run into my room and put it on.”

“What do we do with the gnome when we all leave?” Harriet called from the garden patch as she gathered up her tools. “Guess we’d better bury him, and we can dig him up when we get back.” She seized a spade. “I’ll do it right

now and it'll be done."

There were shouts and yells, and much chasing around trees amid flying dirt. The prey was finally captured, bribed with cookies, and sent off home for the rest of the day. He went trotting up the path that led through the pasture field, looking back frequently like a forlorn puppy.

Harriet spent a long time in her room and to Islay's surprise came down dressed in a very handsome cream-coloured flannel with touches of scarlet that set off her olive complexion. Islay had been afraid she would want to dress in slacks and an old shirt, and was relieved and not a little surprised that she had taken such care with her appearance. And she could hardly keep from staring at Ellen when she emerged in the rose muslin, and she could not keep from smiling.

"Oh, what a beautiful dress, Harry," Ellen said, her artist eye catching the perfect harmony of its lines.

"Your own's smart too," Harriet said indifferently. She was not given to noticing or admiring other girls.

Islay shook her head at Ellen who looked as if she were on the verge of a confession. She smiled to herself, remembering that Harriet had seen her many times in that dress, but had no recollection of it. Her nieces, she knew, were not much interested in what Aunt Islay wore. They regarded her as old and long since consigned to the non-matrimonial shelf. But she was happy that both her girls looked so handsome, especially Ellen. And she did not know that she looked as young and prettier than either of them.

Harriet was in high spirits and great haste. She ran off to the barn for Islay's car, for her own little runabout was too small. Islay found *she* was eager to be off too. Why should there be so much more real joy in driving off to get a school for a little country school teacher than driving out to some lakeside hotel to sit on a veranda and play bridge? Perhaps it was Ellen's glowing face or Harriet's evident delight. And what magic was there in this little expedition that Harriet should be so excited and radiant? She came whirling up to the veranda steps, having elected to drive without asking anyone's opinion. The seat beside her was reserved for Celia who was to act as guide, and the other two, having shut the whining Ginger in the shed, climbed gaily into the back seat and sped away.

Minnie ran out to the car so full of gratitude for their kindness to her girl that Islay felt humble. She had almost forgotten, and this school might mean everything to Minnie. It would vindicate her policy and give a chance for the next in line to get to high school.

“My, my, if she can get this school then Stevie can be away this fall,” she whispered to Islay. “Stevie should have been in high school last year. I’m that thankful to you, Cousin Islay, I just can’t say.”

“Celie didn’t want to go,” Lily Anne said, “cause it’s ironing day, but momma said she’d be glad to do all the washing and ironing alone all summer to get Celie a school.”

Minnie welcomed Harriet again and admired their smart appearance, and especially Ellen’s. But none of them could compare to Celia who just then came through the kitchen door like a flower unfolding in bloom. She was wearing a hyacinth-blue dress, the very colour of her eyes, and a little white hat set daintily on the side of her shining curls. Her canvas shoes were newly whitened and her crisp little dress had been in the washtub that very morning. Her whole outfit, Islay knew, had not cost as much as Harriet’s tailored blouse.

Celia was breathless with excitement and gratitude. She held in her little white gloved hands the weapon with which she hoped to conquer the school board—a large, white documentary envelope containing her certificate and her application, which was written with painstaking neatness.

In the car Islay could not help noticing that Harriet looked sallow and Ellen more colourless than usual. Harriet had money and Ellen had a brain, Islay reflected, but Celia had the world at her little white canvas toes.

Harriet looked at the rose petal face beside her with undisguised envy and Celia looked at Harriet’s New York outfit with a like sentiment. She had a glance of wondering admiration for Ellen’s frock, as well.

“Oh, my, you girls look so grand,” she said, with a long indrawing of her breath. “Oh, Harry, your suit!”

“Feel smothered in it,” Harriet declared, as they drove out of the yard, followed by a chorus of farewells and good wishes. “I’d like to wear nothing but shorts. Only when you’re going to interview a school board . . .”

At the mention of shorts Celia went off into a gale of laughter. Wise Watty, it seemed, had been telling her mother about seeing Harriet in her shorts . . . here Celia was reduced to laughter all over again . . . shaking and helpless with mirth . . . The Drummond woman . . . Celia had another attack here . . . had got a new girl, one that knocked the pants off Ellen Carruthers. This new one, whoever she was, hadn’t no clothes on at all, she was tearing round the orchard . . . oh . . . h . . . ah . . . Celia lapsed into further incoherence . . . and, when the laughter had subsided, they had arrived at a cross road. She sobered immediately and gave her attention to the route to be followed.

You went down this line till you came to the Ninth, and then you turned off on it and went on till you came to the Leaford Gravel—that was a better road than the Tenth. There was a detour on the Tenth. The men were fixing the road. Harriet was puzzled and highly entertained. How did you know the Tenth from the Ninth? Why were they numbered? The Tenth of what? And how did you know the Leaford Gravel? All these country roads seemed to have gravel on them.

These questions sent Celia off again, and they all joined in the laughter. However they found the Ninth, without difficulty—a narrow sideline, bordered by tall grass, starred with white daisies and wild sweet clover. It dipped into lovely purple clover hollows, curved around orchard hills, with always the great shining reaches of Georgian Bay to smile at them every time they reached a height. They topped a crest overlooking a wide valley. Tiny men with tiny horses and wagons toiled away down on the level, checker-board fields. The air was sweet with smells of new-cut hay.

"That's it!" Celia cried in great excitement. "That's Fair Valley all down there! And there's Georgeville! On the Leaford Gravel! Oh, I'd like teaching here!"

They were to stop at Georgeville, Celia's instructions said, to ask for the whereabouts of a gentleman named Silas Thompson, who was secretary-treasurer of the school board.

'Ask at the hardware store on Main Street in Georgeville,' Young Geordie had told her. 'He might be *there*, for that matter. Whenever you lose a farmer always go look for him in a hardware store. You'll find him there gettin' rid of his money.'

"But haven't you got this Mr. Thompson's address, Celia?"

Yes, she had. It was R.R. No. 2, Fair Valley. But, of course, Celia explained patiently, nobody lived at his address.

Islay was so obviously bewildered by this that Celia began to laugh again, and Ellen explained. Everyone in Fair Valley, and for miles around, had the same address, and there were six Thompsons and three of them had 'S' for his initial.

"Why, I don't live at my own address, for that matter," Islay remembered, quite astonished to find this out. Harriet and Celia screamed with laughter. It was contagious. Everything was absurdly funny and needed to be laughed at!

Georgeville was a big, sprawling village. Almost a town. Islay counselled a more sedate manner as they drove down its long, winding Main Street. There

might be a school trustee staring at them through that very window, she warned. They had stopped in front of a hardware store.

It was a very sedate but dainty Celia who stepped out on Main Street with the utmost dignity and decorum, and was swallowed up in the recesses of the hardware with the creaking of the screen door behind her. She was gone a considerable interval. She reappeared, a little flushed, and much pleased. Inside there was a boy who knew Mr. Silas Thompson and he . . .

At this very moment the screen door swung open and a good-looking young man in shirt sleeves and a very bright pair of blue braces came out.

"Thought maybe I'd better tell you again." He was looking with some concentration at Celia. "You drive along the Fourth, you know, till you come to a brick church."

Celia was perplexed. "Oh, I thought you said a *stone* church."

"Er—I guess you're right now, stone." He was still intent only on Celia. "Yes, yes, it's the stone church you turn at. I mis-spoke myself. The brick church is on the Seventh. It's the Fourth you're on."

"Yes, the stone church . .?" Celia began, encouragingly. Then, suddenly, it seemed unaccountably funny to both of them and they burst into gales of laughter. Harriet and Ellen joined. But not Islay. She was not encouraging Celia to go of! into a prolonged bout of laughter. They might never find Mr. Silas Thompson before night fell at that rate.

But the young man had stopped laughing. Across the street, an even snappier looking youth, smart in breeches and red shirt, had been watching from his gasoline tower. Now he strolled across the sunny road, routing up two yellow dogs that slept on the edge of the sidewalk.

"Good-day." He was most genial. "Need any help?"

Young Mr. Hardware thought they didn't. But Celia was not so certain, and smiled a welcome. "Oh, yes, we do! Could you tell us whether that church on —where was that church now . . . on the Fourth . . ."

"Yeah, the Fourth," Mr. Hardware was somehow less cocky. "It is the Fourth. Couldn't remember whether Old Knox Church was stone or . . . I think it's stone all right but it don't matter anyhow."

"Knox!" young Mr. Gas sputtered. "You're nuts. That's Wesley you're thinkin' about, or the Old Baptist. Knox ain't a stone church."

"Concrete perhaps." Celia was disposed to impartiality.

"Say, what yuh want with a church *today*, anyhow?" Mr. Gas was much mystified. "Ain't this Thursday?"

More laughter threatened, in which Mr. Hardware did not join. But when Mr. Gas was told the whole story he was able to say exactly where Mr. Silas Thompson lived. "Gee! That old guy's my uncle," he assured Celia.

The ingrate, Celia, beamed at him in admiration to the evident discomfort of young Mr. Hardware. "Your uncle? Is he really?" she marvelled. What sort of uncle was he, she wondered. Did he think there was any chance she might get the school?

This was one point on which the two young men were agreed. She was certain to get it, they assured her, and Mr. Gas, being the authority on where his uncle lived, told them to keep along the Fourth till they came to the church. Which church? Well . . . anyway you turned to the left at the church, then you climbed an awful big hill, and when you got over that you came to the highway. But you didn't turn on the highway, you kept straight on, about a mile further. Then you turned to the right, it wasn't a real turn, jist a jog in the road, and Uncle Silas' house was the third place on the left after you crossed the crick. It was a big brick house. You couldn't miss it. It had a row of poplars down the lane. But it was after you crossed the crick.

"Not the big crick," Mr. Hardware was anxious to improve on this itinerary, complete though it seemed to Islay. "You're gettin' her all balled up. That's the Wappitti River further down. This here is Keppler's Crick, and you crossed it first about a mile after you passed the corner."

"Which corner?"

"Town line." Mr. Gas looked crossly at young Mr. Hardware.

Islay leaned forward at this point. Time to take matters in her own hands if they were to get talking to Uncle Silas or to any other school trustee. They'd be smothered in directions.

"We must be going," she said briskly, in her best perfect secretary voice, which invariably had a deadly effect. "You've been very kind, and I'm sure we'll do splendidly now."

But Mr. Hardware, feeling he had been somehow shadowed by Uncle Silas' nephew's brilliant performance, was determined to have at least the last word. "If she wants a school," he told Islay, confidential like, "she better go see Jim Dilly. He only lives on the next concession from Silas Thompson. He's a trustee too, and he's got more pull hirin' the teacher." He blandly disregarded Mr. Gas's gathering wrath. "Better see Dilly! Keep straight on after you come

to the cement block church on down the hill towards Argyle Centre . . .”

Celia was listening with some attention. This was important. But Islay was of another mind. “If you give us any more directions we’ll be completely lost,” she declared, firmly. “Jump in Celia, we’ll look for Mr. Thompson. Thanks a lot, and good-bye.” She sounded final.

Celia climbed in.

“Tell you what,” Mr. Gas volunteered. “I’ll call up Uncle Silas and tell him you’re coming.”

“Would you *really*,” Celia was overcome.

Harriet had her foot on the starter when young Mr. Hardware, who had darted away across the street, came leaping back, carrying, on a paper tray, four delectable ice-cream cones. What was a phone call to an uncle-trustee now! Cheers greeted his effort, but did nothing at all to stay Islay’s resolve. “I’ll hold yours till we get going Harriet,” she whispered. “Hurry!” And they whirled away, leaving the road to the rivals, while Celia leaned far out and waved a friendly cone at both boys.

“I remember that gas station boy,” Celia said, nibbling daintily on a fast diminishing cone. “He’s on the Georgeville football team. Don’t you remember, Ellen, the time they played Lairdale? He ate umpteen pieces of lemon pie that night. *You* remember!”

Ellen didn’t remember. “Ever been at a garden party, Harry?” she asked.

“Not that kind, I guess,” Harriet said. “I’ve been at oodles of stiff affairs where you stand around for hours and hours in the hot sun and have an olive and a teaspoon of lemonade handed to you.”

“Weren’t they nice kids to help us like that?” Celia enjoyed being helped.

“Dandy,” Harry agreed, “but I sure was hipped on your technique.”

“Technique?” Celia was wide-eyed. Harriet laughed, but would not explain.

Celia was happy without knowing, anyhow. Perhaps she would get the school. Did they really think she would?

They swept to the top of another hill. They were nearing the bay and could see a long line of white curving shore. At its end the town of Carlisle showed above the tree tops, a grain elevator towered high into the heaven, and a red and white lighthouse loomed, showy and incongruous in a dazzle of sun. Islay’s eyes grew misty. Carlisle was her old home. She had grown up here.

Father and mother were both buried here. Mack had lived just across the street, and often came with her and Pete when her father drove them out to Lairdale for a week-end with Grammy. She had not gone back to Carlisle since Mack's return. She had not wanted to risk meeting him.

Ellen leaned far out. "Oh, if I came and lived up here I think I could forget all the maths. I've had to remember! See the sunlight dancing on that hill top! And the bay! There's no end to it."

Harriet said it was lovely, in an absent-minded sort of voice. As though she was looking there and seeing somewhere else, Islay thought. What was Harriet up to? Islay had a vague, undefined suspicion she was up to something! Celia had her eyes on a young man loading hay in the field directly below. So she didn't bother saying anything at all.

"Well, here's the church!" cried Ellen, "and Blue Braces was right, Celia, it's stone."

They turned and climbed the hill and crossed a creek all choked with water lilies, but still no third house from the left, and no house of red brick with row of poplars. They went on, crossing more creeks.

"He said we weren't to cross the big creek. That's the Wappitti River," Celia remembered. They crossed yet another creek, avoiding a mud turtle pulling himself laboriously across the road, ran along a bit of way hedged with bulrushes and pink joe pye weed, and before them rose a red brick house, a lane and a row of poplars! Celia sprang out, opened, and carefully closed the gate. There were cattle on the road, and Celia knew better than to leave a school trustee's gate open for even a brief interval.

The lane led to the kitchen door. Celia got out again, slowly this time, her shaking hands clutching her precious envelope. The shaggy farm dogs leaped around her, and the farmer's wife came and looked at her, through the screen door.

"Guess you're another," she was friendly though.

"Yes. I guess so," stammered Celia. "Is Mr. Thompson in?"

"Well he jist happens to be. You're in luck. He was away off in the back fifty all mornin' and he says to me he says, if any more o' them school ma'ams comes you tell 'em I've had to skip the country. But he had to come in for a phone call. He won't be no time."

"A telephone call!" whispered Ellen. "It would be the smart nephew in Georgeville! Like he said. Wouldn't that happen to Celia!"

Mrs. Thompson did not invite her in, and Celia drifted slowly down the steps. Then the door swung open and Mr. Silas Thompson, secretary-treasurer of the Fair Valley school board, towered above her. He sauntered to the edge of the veranda, leaned against a post. “Good-day,” he said, shortly.

It was quite evident that he recognized a teacher applying for a position, and that he knew and enjoyed his sense of power. He took out his knife and began to whittle a stick tantalizingly.

Celia was so pleasant to look at, so ingratiating, so humble, and so young, that she might well have moved the heart of a stone trustee, but this man was a secretary-treasurer of a board, a solid citizen!

She shyly made known her errand and told her qualifications while he listened in silence, whittling steadily. When she had finished and stood looking up at him, anxiously, yet trustingly, there was a long pause. Then he shifted to the veranda post at the other side of the steps and spoke from this vantage point.

“How many applications d’ye think we’ve had for this here school?”

Celia shook her head, but looked apprehensive enough to please him.

“Siventy-five!” He made the announcement in a tone of triumph, looking over at the occupants of the car to note the effect on them.

“I suppose he expects us to applaud!” said Harriet, hating him.

“Ain’t had time to read even the half of ’em,” he added, with deep satisfaction.

Celia looked dismayed, and glanced back at Islay, who smiled an encouragement. She took courage and handed up her written, formal application in its long white envelope.

“Well, this will make seventy-six,” she said brightly.

He took the envelope gingerly, balanced it on the veranda railing. Another long silence ensued.

“Ever teached before?” That was the question Celia had been dreading.

“No, only at normal school,” she faltered.

Islay thrust her head out of the car. “Tell Mr. Thompson your qualifications, Celia,” she called, recklessly. “Don’t forget you’re an *honour* graduate!”

Celia remembered, drew a long breath and said her lesson, rapidly. She had

graduated from Normal, taken honours in all her teaching, had a ‘First’ with honours, had taken music lessons and could play an organ. She could teach music in the school if they didn’t have an extra teacher. She thought it was right to have a hot lunch at school in the winter, and she could cook, she concluded, modestly.

Trustee Thompson listened in stolid silence, whittling industriously. At last he snapped his knife shut and made his second pronouncement. “Well, I might as well tell ya, we hired one last night.”

Celia took back her envelope, managed a thank-you, and scrambled foolishly back into the car.

The secretary-treasurer came down the steps after her; he seemed to become almost human for the moment.

“They’re advertisin’ for a teacher over yonder in—,” he began, but Harriet was too quick for him. She whirled the car around in the narrow yard, scattering dogs, cats and chickens and making the secretary-treasurer step back hastily. There was scarcely time for Celia’s polite words of farewell; the car leaped forward and shot down the lane in a cloud of dust.

“Look back and see if he’s dead,” cried Harriet. “I did my best to knock him down, but I’m afraid I missed him!”

“Oh stop, stop, please, Harry!” Celia cried, as they whirled out into the road. “The gate!”

“I wouldn’t shut his old gate. Leave it. I hope all the cattle on the road get in and trample him to death.”

But Celia was a farmer’s daughter and knew this would be against all the rules. “Let her out, Harry,” Islay said, “after all we mustn’t punish the cattle.” She watched the girl go back to shut the gate, her heart reproaching her. For days she had been telling herself that she should take Celia on a school hunt. If she had only come here last week!

“Never mind,” she said as Celia returned, “we’ll go to another school tomorrow. If you’d only waited, Harry. He was going to tell us about another.”

“I wouldn’t let that dim wit speak to us again!” Harriet cried, with the independence of a young woman who did not have to please anybody if she did not want to.

“He *might* have told me at first,” Celia said.

“Well, we might as well go home,” Harriet said, driving at top speed.

“What say we stop at Georgeville, Celia, and tell that nephew we don’t think his ideas on uncles are so hot.”

“Strange, how a little authority goes to some people’s heads,” Islay marvelled.

“Do you know,” Ellen was thinking on reasonable lines, “I think this swanky car scared him stiff, and when Celia stepped out of it, he was determined to hold his own with the situation. Like having Queen Elizabeth drive up to ask for a favour in the blue car that made the Royal Tour.”

It was pleasant being likened to the good Queen, and Celia’s spirits rose in no time. Not so Islay’s. She reproached herself for this. Tomorrow, they would certainly go out again tomorrow, and find a school if she never wrote another line.

The afternoon was lengthening to evening when they turned off the Leaford Gravel and sped back over the lovely hills of the Ninth. Harriet was hurrying. Again and again Islay urged a more moderate gait. But Harriet was a hungry horse, bent on getting home in the shortest possible time. Not like Harriet, Islay reflected, while the car, licking up road dust, threading its way around the gently rounded shoulders, rapidly ate up distance and made miles and minutes mean the same.

“Come back with us, Ellen,” Islay said, “and see Uncle Geordie. We’ll run you home later.”

But Ellen would not hear of it. “Mother has a woman’s meeting over at Acton Hill, and I promised to be home early. It’s nice of you. Oh, yes . . . what about the dress . . ,” she whispered.

Islay shook her head. “It’s yours. Wear it every chance you get.”

They dropped her off at the manse gate beside the church. Ellen wanted them to come in, and Islay hesitated, but, to her surprise, Harriet declared they had really better be getting back; Celia had promised to be home early. So away they sped.

Young Geordie Laird’s farm, like most of the Lairdale land, was spread out along the shore of the bay. The house lay in a hollow at the end of a sloping lane. It was one of the older places, built of the grey Wappitti township stone, long and low, hiding behind great sprawling lilacs. It looked as if it had been fashioned by the same hands as Grammy’s Ben. The gate was open and they slipped up the lane and stopped before the low sloping veranda. Three great collie dogs came cantering up from the barn announcing their arrival. A mowing machine whirred its way along the field opposite the house. It was

coming towards them, Dick riding like a conqueror, the fragrant hay falling prostrate in his wake.

Uncle Geordie came up the path from the barn carrying two pails of water. He gave a shout of welcome as he saw Islay step from the car, and setting his pails down, hurried forward. Aunt Bella, frantically tying on a clean apron, came down the veranda steps whispering something about supper.

"Eh, if it ain't the lady Islay herself!" Uncle Geordie was shouting, "and little Celie—"

"And this is Harriet, Uncle Geordie," Islay said, when the greetings were over, "Kate's girl—" she turned to introduce Harriet. Where was Harriet? She was gone! Gone out of the car and over the fence to the hay field!

"What in time!" Islay spoke as in a void.

"Where's she going?" Celia's round blue eyes were following.

Where was very plain. Harriet was bounding across the hay field and towards the mower. The mower had suddenly ceased its whirring, and the driver, abandoning his seat, hurried to greet Harriet!

They stood silent in the lane. Unbelieving. Down in the field the boy and girl stood splendidly, oblivious to all watchers, forgetful of place and of time, bathed in the soft fragrance of early summer.

"Well I'll be danged!" Uncle Geordie came to.

Islay was still speechless, but Aunt Bella, almost stone deaf, was by no means blind. "Well, for ever more!" she whispered, softly.

It was Celia, who, with a little squeal, summed up the situation.

"Oh . .! It's her! It's Ha . . . ha . . . Harry! She's it! The Mac Hall girl! Dick's Guelph girl! Oh . .!"

Of course! Islay remembered. Harry *had* gone to MacDonald Hall. A strange notion she'd had. Gone for one term, and took music and domestic science. With no visible result, Islay thought grimly. So *this* was the farmer Kate had been worried about! He'd cost Foster and Kate a trip to the continent, that they'd given Harriet to give the farmer up. Then Denton Wade had come along. And that was that. That was it. That accounted for Dick's reaction to her, Islay, the night she first met him! And that's why Harriet wanted to come here. Why she hurried home! Sly puss!

Harriet and Dick were leisurely in returning to the low, lilac-fronted farmhouse. They unhitched the team, drove them to the barn, slowly,

blissfully. At the house, Celia was in a state of high glee. Here was young love. Something she knew something about. Schools, trustees and interviews faded far in the past.

Uncle Geordie's tongue was idle tonight. Aunt Bella wanted them to stay to supper, and was all for getting out the best dishes, feeling this was an occasion. Islay thought they must get home. Ginger was tied up, she remembered.

They came into the kitchen together, Harriet and Dick, hand in hand, but shyly. Dick very brown and handsome. And Harriet? She was suddenly a new Harriet, Islay noticed, with little rush of feeling. As though some part of her rushed out to touch some hidden part of Harriet. It was a feeling strangely new to Islay. But strangely old. When had she felt like this before. Down through the years . . . memory racing . . . they must be going, she said again.

10

Random Blossoms

ISLAY AND HARRIET TALKED FAR INTO THE NIGHT; TALKED till the moon came up out of the hay, making a silver path across to their strip of shore. They were still talking when the moon bridge was gone.

"You know, Islay, you're the best old sport in the world, bar none!" Harriet was curled up on the foot of Islay's bed. "I never intended to be so mean and secretive with you but I couldn't tell you anything because I didn't know whether Dick would ever speak to me again or not. But when I saw him in the field I just knew it would be all right."

"But I can't understand yet why I didn't know anything about it. Your mother simply won't believe me if I tell her this was happening right under my nose and I didn't see!"

"Don't you remember the rumpus mums made about the Guelph boy the term I was in Mac Hall? Dick was the Rugby hero that year and I was his best girl. I had the one grand time of my life, that is, until I invited him down home for the Easter holidays."

It was coming back to Islay. She had been in New York that Easter and remembered she had paid very little attention to Kate's complaints on her return; some lament about a young farm hand from Guelph that Harry had taken up with. Islay had not been much interested.

"Dick was working his way through college, and working on the farm here, too, in the summer; and, well, you know Islay, things are different. And when he got to our place—well, mums said I had taken up with a common farm hand, and dad wasn't too cordial. And the bunch! You know the Wades, and how snooty they are. And Angel and Gwen are frightfully high-hat. Dick got mad and went home before the week was half up. And when I was expecting to go back to Mac Hall after Easter, didn't the folks just pack me off to Uncle Rob's. Mums thought I'd never dare even think about a farmer with the Fraser Drummonds around. I should have got my back up and refused to go, but I was squelched and docile. That was the time Uncle Rob took us abroad and showed us the castle where the Lady Islay lived. I was ashamed that I hadn't had her courage when I saw where she'd come from. I hated every minute of that trip.

Dick and I were writing but not very often. I answered the minute I got a letter from him but we were tearing round so, letters couldn't catch us. When we got back mums didn't want me to go back to Mac Hall, and I didn't care, because Dick had gone away up near James Bay with some mining engineers. He's always on the go. Loves change. Well, you know what a whirl last winter was. Mums bought me everything I looked at in the shops, and dad doubled my allowance, but he wasn't kidding me, I knew what for. We just tore round from one affair to another, and half the time I didn't even know where Dick was. And then Denton Wade began rushing me. And I was sort of flattered, because Gwen had nearly run herself ragged after him. And so I just drifted along.

"But when I heard you were coming out here, I pretended I wanted to see the old place where our family came from, and I coaxed Angel and Gwen to come too. I went over to Celia's and I got the news out of Lily Anne without her knowing what I was after. You know she talks—like your typewriter. She told me everything about everybody. Said she had a cousin who went to college and he was likely to go to South America with a big cattle firm. Well, that put me all on the rocks again. So when the family moved out and I was dumped on the Wades and knew that Denton was getting fed up on me, and me ditto, I knew I had to do *something*. When you find you're going down for the third time you'll do most anything to get to land. I—I knew you'd let me stay with you, Islay, but I didn't know how utterly tops you were. But I had to come anyway, and now it's all okay and nobody can stop us this time, you bet. We're going to get married before the folks get back. Right after harvest. I'll be married before Angel, after all. Whoops!"

Harriet came racing down stairs early next morning, happy and almost beautiful, and the two started where they left off the night before. They lingered long at the breakfast table under the duchess tree. The morning grew hot and a cicada shrilled from the lilacs, but still the two sat and talked, and argued. Islay was dismayed. What would Kate say, and Foster? Their only daughter, the girl upon whom they had lavished so much and who was to make a great match, a farmer's wife! It was unthinkable. And well Islay knew that Kate and Foster and Jeanette and Rob would blame *her*. And even if they didn't she felt it would be suicidal for Harriet to marry Dick. To live down in that old house beside the bay! And the old people to care for! She argued and pleaded and denounced. But Harriet was too happy even to listen.

"Go to it, Auntie mine," she cried blithely, "and if you're thinking of turning me out, that's all right with me, because I told Dick that likely you'd throw me over the fence after last night's performance, and he said goody, he hoped you would, for then we'd go and get married right away and we

wouldn't need to wait till after the harvest. So heave ho, old dear!"

Islay was on the brink of tears. "Harriet Lawrence," she protested, "you know as well as I do I wouldn't think of doing that. All I ask is that you and Dick should wait till Kate comes home."

"That'll be the day! But don't you worry, darling, and don't waste your time crabbing at me. Won't get you anywhere. As Lily Anne says, 'Save your breath to cool your porridge'."

But Islay was determined to use her breath for more important work.

"And there are the old people, Uncle Geordie and Aunt Bella. Dick will have to support them when they aren't able to work. And farm work is so desperately hard. Look at Minnie's life; milking cows, baking, washing. There will be hired men for you to feed, and—"

She hesitated, but Harriet had no such inhibitions.

"Kids," she supplemented promptly. "That's what you're trying to say, isn't it? You bet! We're going to have two boys and a girl right away."

"I think Dick is a fine lad," Islay resumed, when she was able to speak again. "And if you love each other I don't think the family are justified in opposing your marrying, provided he has some way of supporting you. But child, you haven't the faintest notion of what a farmer's wife has to do."

"Have *you*?" said Harriet, shrewdly.

"Well. But Dick could do something besides farming," she countered. "What about this South American business?" Harriet's face took on the dark stubborn look Islay knew so well. But she kept on.

Dick had a good education and ambition, she argued. He shouldn't waste his talents on a farm, such a farm as Uncle Geordie had to offer him, too. Why couldn't he go to South America, or take some other position. "Your father or Uncle Rob would help get him a position. You can wait. You're both young. And you are not prepared for hard work and poverty."

Harriet was looking away across the orchard to the blue line of the bay. "It isn't always safe to wait," she said callously. "You should know that after *your* experience."

Islay felt her hands grow cold in the heat of the morning sun. Of course, though she might be ignorant of Harriet's romance, all her young relatives discussed hers.

Harriet continued evenly. "And it's quite true about the South American

business. There's a man from Columbia, in Guelph, giving lectures or something. He belongs to some big cattle company and he wants two or three young men from the O.A.C. to go back with him. Something about thoroughbred cattle. But they have to sign up for at least a year, and they won't take a married man. Dick didn't tell me that, Celia did, and Reddy told her. And if we're married he can't go." Harriet regarded Islay shrewdly, and her face looked set and determined.

"Oh, but you wouldn't tie him down to that little farm, Harry! He loves change and seeing the world. It would mean unhappiness for both of you."

But Harriet only laughed. She had always managed to get what she wanted and always would, she was sure. And it was silly to wait for something you could have right away.

"I'm dreadfully sorry if it bothers you, old dear. But the family separated Dick and me once and it's not going to happen again. If I let him go off to South America who knows what might happen? No, ma'am, thank you all the same. We're going to get married before anybody can do anything about anything, and I'm so happy I can hardly stand it!"

She sprang up on the bench, flapped her arms and bobbed up and down uttering a loud discordant "Cock-a-doodle-doo," a very good imitation of Artie's newest pets.

There was no more opportunity for confidences now. The busy day had begun. The Artful had captured a strange new butterfly on his way across the fields that morning and it had to be identified in Islay's little book. The cuckoo sounded his dull horn away down in the orchard again and had to be routed out. The little duck waddled away from the arid paths of his foster mother and was found, after a long search, in a dirty puddle behind the barn. And the pet roosters put on one of their prize fights on the well platform which made an adequate stage for their wickedness.

"Those two gladiators of yours are fighting again, Artie," Islay called. "Hurry away with the tray."

It was the boy's job to carry the dishes from the orchard to the table in the back kitchen, and as he snatched up the tray a little green apple dropped like a bullet from a high limb right into the cream pitcher, splashing the contents over his face and hair. But he did not pause, for there were signs that the demon battle at the well was to be fought to a finish. He dashed into the kitchen with his load, landing the tray with a crash, ran down the orchard path at top speed, and fell upon the tattered combatants.

“You bad glad eaters!” he screamed, as he chased them round the trees and out to the barnyard. “I’ll kill you, I will! I’ll kill you dead! And we’ll eat you too!” he added as the last most terrible threat.

Islay went slowly about the house making it tidy. Her bed was not even made, and Ellen was not coming today and the kitchen fire was out. Harriet was washing the dishes in lukewarm water singing at the top of her voice, a tuneless ditty about love in a cottage. This was no time for a paper romance. Islay covered her typewriter and put away her manuscript. The story seemed dead. Life was writing real romance right under her eyes. She felt herself deserting her sister and going over to the side of youth. Surely, she reflected, she had seen what worldly ambition and wealth could do to harden and deaden the soul. Wasn’t the sort of life Minnie lived far better than Kate’s or her own? She thought of the long hours and the concentrated thought the women of her family put upon dress alone; sports clothes, afternoon gowns, evening gowns, hours with the dressmaker, hours at the beauty salon. Harriet would be happier using her hands in making a home.

“It would really be the very life for her, even to go off to South America and live in some herder’s cabin on the Andes, or wherever they would live,” she reflected vaguely. But what would Kate say? Her childhood awe of her eldest sister still persisted through her adult years. Kate would blame her for coming back to the farm and for luring her daughter into the same pit. For while her sister was reasonable and sensible in every other relationship in life she was quite extreme in her attitude towards her children.

Strange odours from the kitchen demanded her attention. Harriet had already resumed her culinary interests. She had Ellen’s cook-book and all the bowls and spoons in the cupboard and was launched on the concoction of a chocolate cake. The kitchen was like a fiery furnace, for the Artful, in his eagerness to help, rushed in at short intervals to cram the stove yet again with wood. When Islay appeared he ran to display the wilted little pile of radishes he had dug, and she led him back to his task. The garden did not look very thriving. The turkeys, the groundhog, the rabbits, the hen with her brood, had all taken their toll of it. It resembled a battlefield more than a garden.

“There seem to be so many carrots,” she suggested, “aren’t they too crowded to grow?”

Oh, yes, he agreed, they had to be thinned. “Yous folks don’t eat enough of them. They have to be et up as fast as they are thinned.”

“Well, you pull a good dishful and wash them at the well, and Harriet will cook them for our dinner,” she suggested, without much hope of any result.

She was just turning in at the kitchen door when he gave a shout. “The Greyhound! The Greyhound! She’s eating our cabbages!” and away he went racing down the hill, Ginger following madly.

Islay snatched up the hoe and ran after them. Harriet passed her swiftly, yelling and waving the broom.

The Greyhound was Steve’s most troublesome cow. Reddy had given her this name, and well she deserved it. She had leaped every fence and broken into every field on the farm. In her vaultings she always managed to carry away enough of the fences to allow her less nimble sisters to follow. So someone was always chasing Steve Laird’s cows out of their oat fields. They were all here this morning. Islay ran to superintend their exit. The Artful and Ginger were apt to be over enthusiastic, and angry as she was, Islay remembered that Minnie had cautioned the children not to make the milk cows run. But to command this campaign required much more speed and lung power than Islay possessed. Harriet chased one group, the Artful another, Ginger a third. The marauders obeyed no one but charged up the orchard aisles and through the rows of tomatoes and cabbages. Around the house they ran, trampled Grammy’s peony bed, tore up the sod, and left general devastation in their wake.

The last one had been sent leaping through the broken fence, when they spied Celia coming along the path by Bessie’s willows. Celia was looking grave and that in itself was serious.

They had lost the berkshire sow, she announced breathlessly. She was a very special animal. Poppa always fed her himself. But she had got into the garden and was eating the lettuce. The little boys were away picking berries and Celia and Lily Anne had driven her out. And they were so mad they chased her and chased her and she had run so far they hadn’t seen her since. And Lily Anne threw stones at her and she could throw awful straight and—if anything had happened to that sow poppa would—Celia didn’t know *what* he might do. Her round face and dimples somehow managed to register deep apprehension.

“Well, if she’s alive she’ll be along here any minute,” Harriet said, all undisturbed, “our garden is very popular.”

Islay understood better the seriousness of the loss and led a search down into the trampled garden. Ginger and the Artful had just returned from their battle with the cows, and Ginger had no sooner vaulted the fence than he dashed into the vegetable patch with roars of indignation. There, right on top of Islay’s poetic nine bean rows was Steve’s missing thoroughbred, munching

her second breakfast of lettuce! She was driven out with an uproar of shouts and shrieks, sticks and stones, and Celia came back to the house filled with relief and laughter.

"Where's that school we're to hunt today, Celia?" Harriet asked, and Islay stopped in her walk as though she had been struck. She had completely forgotten her promise.

Celia's shy glance was an apology. "Barwell's Corners is advertising, but it's so far!" she said wistfully.

"But we must go," Islay declared recklessly. "Can you be ready by two o'clock, or shall we go in the evening?"

"She can't go in the evening," Harriet cried, "because I want to go, too, and I have a date in the evening, so I have."

Celia laughed with delight, and the two girls strolled towards the gate whispering and mysterious. Celia called good-bye in a voice tremulous with joy and relief. "It's just too much to find the berkshire and go to Barwell's Corners both," she cried.

Islay went into the hot kitchen and looked around at the mess in dismay. "Anything for a quiet life, said the little small red hen," she sighed.

Harriet came back gaily to her baking. "I do believe she'd rather that horrid pig than the school," she declared, "they're all scared of Boss Steve. Dads seem to be cut all from one pattern."

Islay did not offer an opinion on this subject. She was remembering that her brother-in-law slaved to give his family everything they wanted, and it seemed that neither of his children was at all grateful.

In spite of the fact that the dinner was very late and the cake was not quite a success, they managed to get away early. Barwell's Corners was not so difficult to find, as Celia had been there once at a church social. But the school trustees proved more elusive than the berkshire sow. One was cutting hay at the back of his farm, and had to be hunted down lanes and over fields, and another had just left for town. At the third place a car was standing in the lane and as Celia went nervously up the steps a smart looking girl-rival came nervously down. The prospects did not appear very bright, Islay had to admit, as they drove home at a terrifying speed.

"There are so many teachers this year," Celia said, "there aren't enough schools to go round. Oh boy, I wish I could get one!" she sighed deeply and Islay once more forgot her own plans.

“We’ll go again, just as soon as you wish,” she promised, and was rewarded when she looked at Celia’s face.

Dick came whirling up the lane in the evening. Uncle Geordie’s car recognized its master and came to a stop under perfect control. Harriet had dashed upstairs early in the evening to dress and had left the supper dishes without so much as a backward glance.

Islay was still hot and indignant from her unaccustomed kitchen work, but she managed to go out and welcome him. He was very shy and self-conscious, and Islay mentally visioned him, awkward in the Lawrence home. Kate put so much stress upon externalities. Harriet appeared, a gypsy in scarlet, and leaped into the car. “We’re off to a show in town!” she sang happily, “don’t wait up for us! We might be a trifle late!” And they both shouted with laughter as they sped away.

Islay went slowly back to her veranda corner. But the evening shadows were falling and there was too little light under the vines for work. She came out and sat on the step in the soft dusk. The evening was still. The very air had taken on a golden glow. The bay was a fading rose, the sky above a delicate green deepening to blue. The vesper sparrows sang. The dew lay heavy on the grass at her feet. She could hear the rattle of the wagons going into Steve’s barn with their last load. She would walk over the field and get the milk and tell Minnie her troubles. Minnie would know how to advise her.

But she was amazed to find Minnie sitting in the midst of a disorderly kitchen with her foot up on a chair. Celia had just finished bandaging the injured ankle. Lily Anne and Audrey were struggling with the piles of supper dishes.

“Just see how bad I’ve been acting, and in haying time too!” she cried, but she was still gallant.

They all rushed to explain, but Lily Anne took the lead.

That loose board in front of the stove. Poppa had promised to mend it, but he was so busy with the haying and everything and momma stepped on it and it went down! . . . “And I went with it,” Minnie said. “By good luck we’d finished all the chores and I was just scaldin’ the pails when away I went.”

“Is it very painful, Minnie?” Islay asked, noting the whiteness about her mouth.

“Oh it isn’t bad,” Minnie declared, “but it’s that awkward.”

“Have you broken a bone, do you think?”

No, Celia said gravely, she didn't think it was more than a sprain, but a bad one.

"Celie studied first-aid at Normal," Lily Anne said proudly. "She's next thing to a doctor."

"Why don't you have Steve take you to town to see a doctor?" Islay asked. She stopped suddenly. She might feel it her duty to take Minnie to town, herself, to see a doctor, and this household were among Dr. Malcolm Wallace's loyal patients. "You ought to be in your bed this minute!"

Minnie was evidently in pain but her thoughts were all for the haying and the worry she was causing others.

"And I was just saying to Celia I must go down again tomorrow and not a day later and see the poor body that's living down on Ike Simpson's lower place."

"Artie's mother?" Islay asked, with a pang of conscience.

"Yes, eh, such a poor kinda place they've got there, all the plaster's falling off, and the roof leaks, but it was the best they could get . . . and mind ye"—Minnie glanced across the kitchen to see if the little girls were listening and lowered her voice. "She's *expecting* again, poor body."

Islay was indignant. "Oh, these people who—" she was going to add 'who have no business to have children,' but stopped, wondering if she were competent to judge.

"And it's soon too," Minnie mourned, "and all that awful trip from the West in that car! But she never complains. I never saw the like of her."

"But what will she do, living away back there?" Islay asked.

"I promised I'd see Doctor," Minnie hesitated—"A doctor," she amended hurriedly, "and she'll have to go to the hospital. But they haven't a cent, and I wanted to see her before her time."

"Well, you can't look after everybody, Minnie," Islay said, "you'll have to spend a few days taking care of *yourself*. I'll go down and see her some day and take Ellen, she knows her, unless"—she looked at Celia—"you won't be able to get away now to look for a school, will you, Celia? Unless they'll take you at Barwell's Corners."

Celia shook her head hopelessly. Minnie interposed eagerly.

"If you're going to be so good as to take her again, Cousin Islay, she can go. The little girl'll get along fine. Yes, Celia, that's more important. We'll get

along."

Islay hesitated to introduce her own troubles, but Minnie was not the sort to allow her own affairs to take precedence. She whispered that Celie had told her about Dick and Harriet. But Islay could see that she had no idea of taking the thing seriously. It was just one of those boy and girl affairs she was sure, and Islay need not worry about it. Minnie shook her head over the notion of Harriet settling on a farm. Her face was always set against farm life for her own young people. Dick should look for something better. What would a city girl do milking cows and feeding hens?

Their whispered conference was interrupted by Steve. He came tramping in from the barn carrying a couple of pails.

"Say, ain't this the limit?" he felt put upon. "Here I am with the chores on my hands in the middle o' hayin'! Say, Minnie, you sure did pick an awful time to get laid up!"

Islay noticed the indignant glance that passed between the two elder girls. Her dislike of Steve took the wheel. "If you hadn't been too careless to fix the floor, it wouldn't have happened," she said icily. She rose before he could retaliate. "I must go, it's getting quite dark. Where is this new school we are going to, Celia?"

Celia led her into the coolness of the dining-room. There was a look of terrified elation on her face. This was possibly the first time she had heard anyone speak defiantly to her father. A road map was spread out on the dining table. "It's here," she said, "on the road to Carlisle. Wait till I get a lamp. You can't see it."

Celia went out to the kitchen and Islay took the map over to the window to examine it. As she did so Steve and Wise Watty passed just below the window on their return to the barn. Steve was evidently highly amused, and haw-hawing gustily.

"Ya should a' heard her givin' me what for," he declared. "She's the spit o' old Aunt Christena all right!"

"Them old maids is that full o' ginger!" Wise Watty chuckled, as they disappeared round the corner of the house.

11

Thorns and Nettles

WHEN ISLAY WAS ABLE TO STEAL A QUIET HOUR FOR HER own work under the vines she often found herself sitting with idle hands stretched out over the marble-topped table, studying the problems of her family. She seemed to have less chance for that coveted life of the red hen than the distracted biddy of her own farm yard that was trying to mother the little duck. So many people were unconsciously looking to her for help; the patient, gentle Ellen with so much responsibility on her young stooped shoulders, little Celia looking around in deep anxiety for a place outside the home nest so that there might be a chance for the younger fledglings pressing behind her, the little derelict boy with his old, anxious eyes, the wilful Harriet with her gay defiance of all authority, even the gallant Minnie straining every nerve to get her family educated. They all needed her. And, in spite of her self-absorption she was enjoying these family cares. It gave one a thrill to think one might get a school for Celia. It was a delight to share Ellen's joy over the beauty of an old chair after she had polished it to a satin lustre, or Harriet's joy when she drew from the oven her first successful chocolate cake. It was interesting even to help the Artful with his latest problem, the two small roosters with the wicked eyes and the fierce claws, who caused him such distress by fighting all over the arena of the barnyard like the pair of miniature gladiators they were.

She was beginning to realize that her contacts with life had become more and more impersonal in the last ten years. There was Mrs. McKinnet, the woman who had done her washing and cleaning so efficiently for five years or more. What did she know about her? She always gave her an extra cheque at Christmas to buy something for the children, but she did not know how many she had. And what did she know about the staff she worked with in her office? Life was far too crowded for mere human relationships. Even the people she met socially, those whom Kate decreed were worth knowing, scarcely touched her life. Here hands were stretched out to you, you had to help.

Harriet was her chief anxiety. The girl was headstrong, and so completely infatuated. And young people nowadays were so uncontrolled. And what did she really know about this boy, Dick? And yet she was constantly discovering that Harriet was capable of wise judgment and good common sense. Once a week she drove into Carlisle to do the family shopping, and from this was

learning a family's needs. And Islay was surprised to discover that she was as anxious to have a part in fixing up the old house as Ellen.

The house and its problems became more absorbing every day. Ellen was slowly transforming it into a house beautiful and Islay could not stay in her veranda retreat when the newly-dyed curtains were being hung, or the old red plush sofa re-covered. Great-Uncle Peter had built queer narrow cupboards in odd corners and nooks. Their shelves were crammed with old dishes, many cracked or discoloured with age, for great-Aunt Christena, it would seem, could never bear to part with anything. Ellen loved to rummage in these queer nooks, excavating, she called it and often came forth with a treasure.

"I've got something priceless this morning," Islay heard her call, as she ran out to the orchard table. Harriet's shouts of derision brought Islay to the scene. Ellen was excitedly showing an old cruet stand—tall, glass-stoppered bottles set in pewter.

"Oh, it's old, *old*!" she said in an awed whisper. "It must have belonged to the Lady Islay. It's real pewter!"

"Oh, piffle!" Harriet cried, "I'll buy you a far better one in the five-and-ten. And I'm not so sold on the Lady Islay either. She didn't really have a title, and I think she did our family a lot of harm. Stuffed their heads with dumb ideas."

Ellen laughed helplessly. She laughed at everything Harriet said as though she was a funny child. But the Lady Islay's namesake thought it over. There was more truth in what the girl had said than she cared to confess.

"The trouble with you, Ellen," Harriet was rattling on, "is that you're an artist, and they're all cuckoo!"

"Islay, she's making Grammy's Ben look like something in an old museum. Come along in and I'll show you what *I'd* do!"

She ran towards the house, Ellen after her in terror lest she lay profane hands upon her work. They were like two little boys, in their slacks, as they ran and screamed and slammed doors. Islay ran gaily after them.

"Now what this needs is some life and colour," Harriet was declaring, while Ellen held her hands to her head and called for help. "Look, she's been polishing that silly old chest of drawers for a week, and when I wanted to give it a good coat of shiny paint she nearly swooned."

Islay was seized with a sudden idea. "Harry, why don't you choose a room upstairs for your very own and furnish and decorate it to your taste?"

The girl gave a shout of delight, "Hurrah! I've wanted to do that all my

life, but mums wouldn't hear of it! We always had to get a decorator to make everything look like something else."

She dashed upstairs and chose the largest bedroom in the new house, overlooking the road, where, as she looked down, she could see Dick coming up the road. In a few minutes she romped down to the car, bundled the Artful in with her, and, dressed as she was in her slacks, drove off to town for materials.

She returned, the car piled up with cans of paint, and yards of gay chintz. It was apparent she had undertaken the decorating of the Artful too. He was dressed in a resplendent sailor suit with long blue trousers of which he was inordinately proud, and besides, had a pair of new overalls under his arm.

And now the interior decorating went forward with tremendous vigour. Harriet enlisted the help of the Artful and very proud he was as he ran up and downstairs leaving a trail of garden soil on the polished steps and looking like a small Indian chief bedecked with war paint.

As if there were not distractions enough in her own home, Islay found herself unwillingly drawn outside the domestic circle. She had forgotten in the many interests about her that the church garden party was approaching.

It was brought to her attention forcibly one morning, however. Harriet suddenly decided to abandon interior decorating and go berry-picking. They started off for the pasture field, she and Artie, promising to bring more than enough wild strawberries for dessert. Ellen laughed at them good-naturedly. She knew from experience what picking wild strawberries involved.

"They are talking of serving strawberries at the garden party," she called to Harriet. "If you get enough I'll report to the convener."

Islay puzzled. The church garden party! How could she get out of going to it? And yet she was determined that she would not go. She was lost if she allowed herself to be drawn into the affairs of the community. Had she fled from the breathless confusion of social life in the city, she asked herself, only to plunge into the stupid events of a countryside that had encroached too much on her private affairs already?

But the Lairdale church garden party was no more to be put aside by an argument than was a rain storm. It came down upon the community in somewhat the same way. It was an affair of such magnitude that voluntary withdrawal from it was like moving to another township. For over a week the whole valley had been humming like the bees in the lilac bushes. Farmers' wives glued their ears to the telephone that they might get the latest decision

on the burning question whether to serve strawberries and cream or strawberry short-cake. Those east of the river took sides against the westerners and the battle was fought all up and down the valley with Steve Laird's wife the only appeaser.

Then the younger generation were even more excited. For there was to be a football match between Acton Hill and Lairdale in the afternoon, and a three-act play which they were presenting in the church shed after supper.

Islay realized that a great deal of the burden of preparation was resting right on Ellen's stooped shoulders. Mrs. Carruthers, as the minister's wife, was responsible for many of the details, and Ellen appropriated them.

And now Harriet was as interested as Lily Anne or Celia. For Dick was coaching the Lairdale team and they must all go down every evening to see them practise in the field next the church.

And Minnie with her sprained ankle was one of the conveners of the women's committee and was speaking in terms of dozens of pies and hundreds of sandwiches. Islay's defences all began to go down before Minnie's selfless spending of her life. She would yield sufficiently to help Minnie. She must do that. But what could she do? If she promised pies or cake Ellen would have to make them. She would telephone Minnie, this very morning and promise her a donation of money to buy tea or whatever she needed. That would solve her problem and ease her conscience. She went out at once to the winter kitchen where the telephone hung. Cousin Tom from Acton Hill had recently come out and connected it, and Lily Anne had given Islay minute instructions as to the manner of using it, which was quite different from a city telephone.

Islay did not use the telephone oftener than she could help. It made her uncomfortable to know that likely her neighbours were eavesdropping, and she resented it, even if she were only asking Cousin Jim Laird's Jim at the store to drop a pound of tea at the gate on his way into town.

Very carefully she took down the receiver. 'Line busy?' That was the way you started. But Islay stopped, her breath suspended, for she heard her own name spoken in her own ear, clearly and distinctly—"Your cousin, Miss Islay Drummond."

"Get out!" it said, "she's your cousin, too!" and then two voices joined in a duet of loud giggles.

Islay had spoken out more than once against the rural habit of listening in on the telephone. She had pronounced it a pernicious habit, as well as horribly ill-bred. But she was physically incapable of putting up the receiver at this

moment. Indeed it had scarcely dawned upon her that she should when Voice Two said in a more subdued tone, “Better watch out. You never know who’s listening!”

Voice One giggled again. “No danger of her. Steve was tellin’ our Jim that she says it’s shocking bad manners to listen to other people talking. Simply shocking!” This was such a good imitation of her own voice that Islay could not but recognize it. It produced a long series of snickers.

“Well, *you* call her up,” said the voice that recovered first, “and ask her. She can’t bite you over the telephone.”

“Not me! I got cold feet. Get Steve’s Minnie to do it. She likes her, says she’s awful nice when you get to know her.”

“Oh my gravy, Minnie says that about everybody—say—”

There came a sharp clicking sound and a man’s voice boomed: “Line Busy?”

Voice One answered promptly.

“You bet it’s busy! You stay off there, young Bill, till we get the food for the garden party rounded up!”

There was a good-natured laugh from the masculine voice. “Aw, you weemen’s tongues is hung in the middle,” and a receiver slammed down.

“It’s jist Lizzie’s Bill wants to gab with Celie, I’ll bet. Well, say, you tell Minnie. She’ll ask her. And tell her to ask for a good lot. She’s rich as Midas.”

“Yeah, and the Old Home Place on top of everythin’. Talk about luck!”

“No wonder she’s so dressy. And say, she’s not bad-lookin’ for her age either. Wonder why she never got a man?”

“My goodness didn’t you ever hear about her and Doctor Wallace?”

“Mercy, no! What?”

“I kinda hate to talk about it over this line.”

“Oh, gosh, go on. Who cares? Nobody’s listenin’.”

“Well, near everybody knows anyway. Why her and him were engaged for years, all the time he was studying medicine And she was all ready to get married and he skipped out and married a New York girl.”

“Well, my gravy! Say, I do believe I did hear Aunt Flo talkin’ about that long ago, but I forgot. That’s mebby what makes her so stand-offish. Well his

wife's dead. Mebby they'll make up."

"Not her! She's a real Fraser Laird to the back bone. And they never forgive. Say, though, ain't she the very spit of old Aunt Teenie—"

There was a crashing noise and the masculine voice boomed.

"Say! Don't tell me you two's gabbin' yet! Looky here, I gotta get a team for this afternoon, can't you get off for half a minit?"

They screamed protests, but let him have the line, and all the time the negotiations for an extra team were in progress, Islay sat dazed, receiver in hand. At last she hung up, and sat staring at the mouthpiece. It seemed like some hideous gargoyle from which had come words of horror and shame—and truth.

Slowly she returned to her desk and sat staring at her silent typewriter. Silly gossips! She must not heed them, she told herself. Little people with little minds! The part that rankled most was the suggestion that she was the 'Spit of old Aunt Teenie.' Well, wasn't it true? All her family had said she looked like her. And Aunt Christena had always said, 'A Laird never forgives a slight!' What was that Uncle Geordie had said, 'There's a nasty streak in all the Lairds!'

All the years of Islay's hurt and resentment stood out before her in accusation. But wasn't there good reason for it, her heart asked indignantly? For years Mack Wallace had filled her life to the exclusion of all other interests, and then had cast her aside on the eve of their marriage. They had lived just across the street from each other in Carlisle; his father's dental office facing her father's medical office. They had been playmates in childhood, chums in high school and sweethearts at college. They became formally engaged on the day that she graduated in Arts and he in Medicine. They set the date of their wedding for a year later, for Mack was posted for a year's work interning in a great New York hospital. So she had gone home to spend the time with her mother, filling her hope chest and waiting happily for her wedding day. Then gradually his letters changed. Their warmth was gone. They grew merely friendly, then less frequent. At last, she found courage to write and ask if there were anything wrong. And his answer, at least, honest. He was humble and ashamed and begged her forgiveness. He had not meant to be unfaithful. Something just happened when he met the other girl. Could she forgive him? He would never forget their long years of friendship—She wrote at once and released him, wrote as carefully as possible to spare her pride. He married immediately and settled in Montreal where his prospects seemed very bright. Mother had died about the same time. She had lost everything in one

year. So she sold the old home and followed the rest of the family to the city to make a new life for herself. Miss Drummond became a successful secretary, became socially prominent in the small-city circle in which her brothers and sisters moved. She was prosperous, smartly dressed, up-to-date. She had retained her good looks, too. And she had succeeded in putting the memory of Mack out of her life, but not the memory of the wrong he had done her.

And Mack's life had not been either happy or successful. Old Carlisle friends gossiped about his wife. Islay had experienced a sadistic pleasure in hearing of her infidelity. Montreal was too cold in the winter so she spent most of it in the South. Equally it was too warm in summer, and she joined her relatives at the seashore. And then suddenly she had died, the result of a motor accident with some scandal attached. Mack had given up his practice in Montreal and gone back to Carlisle. He had gradually become what Rob considered a complete failure, with a meagre practice mostly among country people.

And then one day without any warning, Mack had written her. A very humble letter, asking if they might not be friends again. Even now she felt her face grow hot when she recalled with what chilling contempt she had answered him. She had been amazed at herself afterwards. She had not realized that her accumulated resentment could be whipped to such ferocity. It was a few days later that she had fled to the old farm to see if somewhere, anywhere, she could find a refuge from her own bitterness. Here she had found renewed courage at least.

How long she sat she had no idea. Voices awoke her; Harriet and the Artful were home, ragged and scratched and sunburned, carrying a very small pail of very crushed and sandy berries. They were clamouring for food, so there was no time to sit and think of herself.

That evening Celia came across the fields to meet David. He was coming up, and the four young people were going off to football practice. Celia came to Islay with her sweet, ingratiating air. Uncle Bob's Nell had called her on the phone, she began. Islay was instantly alert. Who was Uncle Bob's Nell? She was a Laird, too, Celia explained, one of the Town Line Lairds. Nellie was married to Jim Turner and lived down there near the river. Ah, yes, Islay had her placed now, Public Pest Number One, she was the louder voice of the two. Islay had seen her one evening at a football practice shouting at her husband who was playing, and with a brood of youngsters as ill-behaved as herself. She was one of the conveners for the garden party supper, Celia explained, she and Uncle Jim's Martha—Martha was married to Walt Peters. That would be Pest Number Two, Islay reflected. She remembered meeting *her* also, a pert, pretty

creature. They were asking for donations, Celia was saying, and they wondered if Cousin Islay would like to do something. They said they did not like to ask her themselves, the innocent Celia went on, because of Cousin Islay being a newcomer. But they said as it was the Laird garden party they thought she might want to donate something, a salad or a cake.

Islay laughed mirthlessly. “Well, Celia,” she said, “of course I’ll do something; but I know that both Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Peters know perfectly well that I wouldn’t like to make either cake or pie. And I don’t intend to ask Ellen to do it either, for she’s doing more than half the work for this thing right now. But here, give them this.” She took a five dollar bill from her purse. Celia gasped out her protests, but, Islay insisting, finally took it, much impressed.

The price of coals of fire, Islay thought.

But the garden party was not to be bought off. She had still to deal with it. The next evening Ellen looked weary, and as Harriet was busy getting ready for Dick’s visit, Islay took her car and drove Ellen home. They stopped at the church, for the girl had a dozen details to look after. The men were there fixing up the platform in the shed where the play was to be staged.

Uncle Geordie was sitting on a pile of benches at the shed door and he hurried over to her and settled himself on the running board of her car.

“Eh, it’s great to have somebody from the Old Home comin’ to the church again,” he declared heartily. “And you jist haven’t seen the Laird clan assembled until you’ve been at the garden party.”

Islay found it difficult to convey to him the unbelievable news that she had no intention of coming. Uncle Geordie looked at her aghast.

“Not comin’?” he repeated, “not comin’ to the garden party? What, what, what, lassie? You must be out o’ your mind! Ye might jist as well pass up the coronation, or say you wouldn’t look at the King and Queen when they was here. Why, all the Lairds in the township and their relations by marriage will be here. An’ the half o’ them’ll be comin’ to get a look at the Lady Islay that’s got the Old Home Place. Losh! Tod! Ye jist can’t mean it.”

Islay’s defences all ran away like water down the face of the Blue Ridge. She couldn’t think of a good reason for not coming. “Oh, I just thought—well, I wouldn’t know anybody very well, and I wouldn’t be any help, and Minnie would be so busy—”

“Man, I tell ye what I’ll do. If I was forty years younger, and had a driver and a top buggy I’d a been up to ask you two weeks ago, before any other fella got ahead o’ me. But I’ll ask no lady to risk her life in that black-hearted

infernal machine I have to ride in now. Dick's runnin' it now anyhow, and he's got a fine girl to put into it. Eh, but she's the lass! Ready to settle on the farm. There'll be no more from him about South America! He's got to be here early to collect that gang o' savages he's got in his football team. And he's promised to set the car in a good spot where I can sit and holler fer him. So you come along when you're ready and I'll keep the front seat beside me for you; and then I'll beau you in to supper. Man won't I be puttin' on the airs! Takin' the first lady in the land to the garden party! And then you'll protect me from them widows that's always doggin' me."

It was impossible to refuse. The gay dance of his young eyes was irresistible. Islay's protests were swept away in a tide of laughter.

"Oh, Uncle Geordie, I had no idea I was going to get an invitation like this. Of course I'll come! And thank you. What about the poor widows."

"Well, now, I think I'll appoint you my guardian. You know sometime when I'm not lookin', I think one o' them may nab me yet."

Uncle Geordie had been left a widower when scarcely past middle age and was shrewd enough to guess that the neighbourhood gossips would be likely to make themselves busy over a possible second marriage. So he took all the zest out of their tales by telling more about his matrimonial schemes than they could ever manufacture. Even young Mrs. Jim Turner confessed there was no fun making up a yarn about Uncle Geordie, he was always two jumps ahead of you with a worse one.

Well, she would go with Uncle Geordie and forget all her enemies and their jealousy and their gossip, Islay determined, as she watered her flower beds along the path to the well. It was evening. She was alone. A blessed peace lay over the orchard and garden. Her decision brought peace to her mind. The thirsty pansies and petunias looked up to smile as she refreshed them with water from grandfather's well. Scent rose from them and from the sweet damp earth. It was so, surely, when you tended the human flowers that you found about you in life's garden. Your own soul was refreshed, became in turn as a watered garden.

12

A Seedling Planted

BUT SHE HAD TO KEEP BUSY TO RISE ABOVE THE MEMORY of the telephone and her gossiping relatives, so the next day they all set out with Celia for Beaver Valley. Ellen pleaded the coming garden party and the work of the house as strong reasons for staying behind, but Islay knew the girl was working too hard, and insisted upon her taking the afternoon's holiday and wearing the rose muslin dress.

Ellen's conscience was finally lulled because she was needed as a guide to the expedition. Beaver Valley lay on the other side of the hills. 'Over the Ridge' the Lairdale people called the locality, and the Carruthers had been stationed there before they came to Lairdale.

"Oh, yes, I know every weed in the fence corners on that road," Ellen confessed, "so perhaps I may be of some use."

The Artful was sent home directly after dinner, Ginger was locked up, and they set off a few minutes early so that they might have a little visit with Minnie and see how the ankle was progressing. They found her, contrary to all orders, hobbling round the kitchen with the aid of a crutch that Young Stevie had made. She flopped guiltily into a chair as soon as Islay entered.

"I haven't been round much at all," she maintained stoutly. "I was jist out here for a few minutes to show Celie how to finish up the canning. She and Lily Anne did all that," she added proudly. There were thirty imperial quart jars of green peas and twenty of strawberries ranged on the table. Lily Anne was mopping up the floor. The heat from the stove rose in waves.

"But your foot?" Islay cried in protest. She hadn't really been on it, Minnie declared, she just came out to slap up a couple of pies for supper. It was awful good of them to take Celie, maybe she would get the school this time and they wouldn't need to be bothered with her any more.

"Why can't the men do without pies for one day," Islay cried indignantly.

"Without pies?" Minnie looked blank. "But they work so hard," she said, "just at this time o' year—haying; and it's pretty heavy this year."

"Not half as heavy as working in a hot kitchen," Islay declared.

“That’s jist what I say, Cousin Islay,” cried Lily Anne pausing in her mopping. “I wouldn’t mind changin’ with the men any day. I was tellin’ poppa it’s nothin’ to drive round all day on a mower, not half as hard as scrubbin’.”

Celia came to the door dressed in the hyacinth-blue dress. It looked dazzlingly new having just been starched and ironed. Her white shoes were cleaned and her little white hat and white gloves were immaculate. Islay could not repress a smile of pleasure at the sight of her.

“Put your best foot foremost, Celie,” her mother warned. “Mebby you’ll get this one. I’ll jist be prayin’ that you do.”

They drove away down the valley, between fields rich with the ripe hay and the coming wheat harvest; green pasture, gold hay, bronze wheat rippling, purple alfalfa, the pale yellow of oats. And then they began to climb, up over wheat and hay and corn-lands, up to the far, high sheep pastures, and still up, beyond the pastures to the cool woods and along the border of a little reedy lake. Here was the peak of the Blue Ridge and they got out to look down over the Lairdale valley. There was the winding white road, bordered by stately old elms. Islay picked out the Old Home with its tiny poplar row. Away beyond swept the white curve of the bay and the great, blue floor of the inland lakes.

They began the descent of the ridge on its south side. Here lay the Beaver Valley, another wide view, with tiny checker-board farms laid out in exact squares.

Ellen pointed over the tree tops. They had to go away down there along the river road. Did they see the church spire and that line of elms? The manse was beside the church. That was where they used to live when father preached there. Mr. Samuel Patterson, the chairman of the school board, lived just beyond the church.

Harriet was at the wheel and they sped down the winding road; down and down, curving around cool, green woodlands and along upland pastures, down past the haymakers and the ripe wheat fields, out on the white gravelled highway.

“The house beyond the church,” Ellen said. They drew up at the gate, and the tremulous Celia got out.

In the field next the road a hay rake was clack-clacking up and down gathering up the windrows into fragrant bronze-green heaps, leaving the smooth field a softer, tenderer green. A young man was riding the rake, and, nearer the road, an older man skirted along the edge of the field with a scythe. He was tall and strong and swung his scythe with vigorous rhythmic strokes.

Celia climbed the fence and stood on a stone half-concealed by an alder bush, waiting for him. Blue and gold, she looked like a new, exotic flower sprung up in the fence corner.

The farmer's sweeping stroke levelled the tangled beauty before her. Then he stopped suddenly, straightened, took off his hat and mopped his brow. He looked down at the bright flowers against the fence and his eyes twinkled.

"Hey!" he cried, "ye can't even go through the field without steppin' on a schoolma'am! Bet you're another!" Celia's nervous fears vanished before his fatherly smile.

"Yes, but—I'll be the last if you like," she twinkled.

He shouted delightedly.

"Well, sir, we might do worse. You're a mighty likely lookin' girl. I don't think you'd be too hard on the kids. I guess you ain't teached yet have you?" It was not a condemnation this time for he made it a compliment to Celia's youth. No she hadn't, she confided becoming grave.

"Well, well," he said kindly, "we've all got to start. Got your First?"

Celia told him her qualifications. In the warmth of his kindly eyes they seemed much better than when she had recited them to other trustees. He nodded and smiled, but he stroked his face and shook his head.

"A bit young, I'm afraid," he said as if to himself.

As they stood talking, the rake that had been cleaning up the opposite side of the field approached. The driver was young and he drove very slowly, his eyes on the blue flower in the fence corner. The nearer he approached the more fascinated he became. In fact he was so bewitched that he forgot to turn his team and drove right into the fence.

There was a great deal of backing and hawing and geeing before they were righted and the young driver with a very red face was in the line of duty once more.

"If only they put sons on school boards instead of fathers," whispered Ellen, softly.

But the big trustee was looking down at Celia with still deeper doubt in his kindly eyes.

"I dunno," he said shaking his head, "I'm afraid you'd have all the young gaffers in the section slammin' into the fences. I dunno."

But he was still kind. Mr. Martin, he said, was secretary-treasurer of the

board, he wasn't at home, but if they'd just drive down that hill they'd find him near the crick. He was doing road work with a gang of men, and they couldn't miss him. He bade her good-bye and good luck and went swinging along the edge of the field. He paused to call after her.

"You'll pass the school jist down there a little ways. Mebby you'd like to stop and have a look at it."

They came upon it within the next mile, a neat little brick building set in a spacious, grassy yard. Celia leaped out and ran in, Harriet with her. The doors were locked but Celia scrambled up on the wood-pile and peeped in at the windows.

"Oh, oh! Single seats!" she cried, impressed. "And weeny, teeny ones for the kiddies. And oh boy! Look! There's an organ! A school organ!"

She could hardly tear herself away. The yard proved as entrancing as the inside. "Look at the flower beds. A garden for the kiddies! Oh," she sighed, wistfully, "it would be too good, if I got a school like this."

Harriet stared at her uncomprehending. "You're a funny kid, Celia," she said, puzzled.

"Wee, wee blackboards, 'way down low for the little ones to work on," Celia whispered as she turned toward the car.

"Oh, Celia," Ellen said, "I wish I could get up as much enthusiasm over a school. I couldn't if it had marble walls and mosaic floors." Harriet climbed into her seat. "Hi, Celia, don't go off the deep end! You may not get it."

Celia came away reluctantly. "Oh, look! Petunias! And boxes in the windows for plants!"

"Look at it all you want," Islay said, "Harry's in a desperate hurry lest we might be five minutes late for that football practice, but we're not."

Harriet laughed with delight. Nothing tickled her more than to be kidded about Dick. Celia's dimples returned as she sprang into the car. She had been reminded that there were other things in life to think about beside schools and teaching.

There was no difficulty in locating the next trustee. When they topped the next hill the road became almost impassable. Deep gravel and sand, and great excavations with warning notices, made the driving hazardous. The face of the hill beneath was alive with workmen.

They were stopped by a smart young man in leather leggings. They would

have to wait a minute till the grader came up, he said politely. Celia stepped nervously out on the loose gravel and asked if she might speak to Mr. Martin. The request was made with many indrawings of breath and timid glances about her, for at least twenty young men had discontinued their work and were leaning on their shovels, staring. The smart young man in the leather leggings was most obliging. “Martin? Sure, he’s the boss. He’s just half-way down the hill there, beside the engine. That’s his tent.”

He glanced down at her small white shoes. “But it’s wet here and I don’t see how you can walk down. Here! Wait and I’ll bring him up!”

“Oh, no!” Celia gasped. “You see he’s a—on the school board; and I’m trying for the school. I couldn’t—”

He nodded. Evidently he knew that it would be high treason for a prospective teacher to disturb a school trustee at work.

“We’ll make a Queen’s Chair and carry you down to him!” suggested one bold young shoveller who was standing near.

Celia turned pink and made heroic but quite ineffectual efforts to keep from laughing.

“Come along!” another cried, “and we’ll level the road for her!”

A dozen spades and shovels sprang to the task and began building up a causeway with frantic haste. Blushing and gasping, Celia stepped trembling on to the swiftly constructed pathway. The number of road builders grew, momentarily, and the unfortunate members of the gang working at the foot of the hill suspended all efforts and stared up in jealous chagrin at the smart car full of girls and the enviable task of their comrades.

Meanwhile Celia was making slow progress and seemed in danger of having to accept the offer of being carried. There was one place where a stream of water had made a large puddle and one young and gallant Raleigh whipped off his leather wind-breaker and spread it over the dampness. This was too much. Celia went off into one of her uncontrollable spasms. She stood before the carpet spread for her feet and bending over uttered her “Oh, oh!—Ah—ah—ah!” And the construction gang waved their shovels and joined her with roars of laughter.

“Atta girl, Queen Elizabeth!” shouted Harriet. “Come on!”

Harriet was screaming with laughter, and even Ellen was overcome; but Islay stepped hastily from the car. She saw that if Celia were to make her approach to the secretary of the Beaver Valley school in this fashion her

chances of being engaged as teacher were very slim. She followed the girl along the improvised pathway with chilling dignity and immediately the little scene lost its hilarity and took on the atmosphere of decorum. The gay road-builders slunk back, and when Celia reached the overseer's tent, she had recovered, with Islay, at her side, lending an appropriate dignity.

She waited at the tent door while Celia was interviewed inside. Young Raleigh and his gay associates resumed work furiously, and the boys down below the hill chanted as one man, "Drill, ye tarriers, drill!"

The interview was brief, and Celia came out looking subdued. Trustee Martin followed her. He was kind and sympathetic but not very encouraging.

"We felt we ought to have someone with experience," he said. "But we'll see. Good-bye, and good luck! And now," he added, looking about him good-naturedly, "maybe you guys will be able to get a little work done."

The hillside gang waved their shovels in salute as the car passed slowly down the hill, and Celia waved her white gloves in return. Harriet blew her horn in a farewell blast and they drove away amid cheers.

"This was no place to bring Celia," Ellen said, still helpless with silent laughter, "if you hadn't been here, Islay, we'd never have got over this hill."

"But they really all seemed to be nice boys," Celia said, "don't you think so?"

Islay was reflecting that Celia's charms were likely to be her heaviest liability in the difficult enterprise of securing a school. Trustees wanted someone older and wiser. They missed entirely the sterling qualities that Celia possessed. Ellen or Harry would have a far better chance, she thought dismally.

Ellen had been looking about with tender eyes at the old familiar scenes; the little church and the old manse with the lilacs before it. She knew where the last trustee lived, Jim McNabb was his name, and he had the old McNabb place along the river.

"His father lived on it in our day. He's a young man with a little family, Celia, and they'll be your pupils. So speak up and tell him you brought up a family of little brothers and sisters."

The McNabb farm was not imposing. The gate was open and pigs rooted in the lane. The McNabb family, two dirty youngsters playing at the kitchen door, looked as if they needed the discipline of a school. An untidy young woman with her hair in curlers came to the door.

“He’s up on the barn patchin’ the roof,” she said, in answer to Celia’s request. “Jist drive into the barnyard. You’ll have to holler if you want to make him hear. Come back here, you, Johnnie! Didn’t I tell you not to go near the barn?” she screamed.

Harriet drove slowly into the barnyard, Islay reflecting that it was good for her to see the sordid side of farm life. The whole place had the air of a farm whose owner might have to stop in the middle of haying to mend his barn roof. Everything else looked as if it needed mending. Old wagons lay about and bits of discarded machinery and heaps of half-rotted boards. Harriet carefully skirted the manure pile and a litter of pigs mingled with hens and chickens and drew up beside the barn. Celia stepped out gingerly. “We should have brought Sir Walter Raleigh,” Ellen said, but Celia did not even smile. The trustee was high on the peak of the barn roof, his back turned to them, and hammering so industriously he had not noticed their coming.

Celia approached the barn, her face raised. “Are you Mr. McNabb?” she called up in a very inadequate voice. There was no cessation of the hammering. “The missus said you was to holler, Celia,” Harriet mimicked. “Go to it.”

Celia called, “Mr. McNabb! Mr. Mac*Nabb*!” but only louder blows of the hammer answered. Then Harriet added her voice, but to no effect. But Celia was Minnie’s daughter and not easily daunted. She picked her way to the hay wagon standing near and climbed nimbly into it. She stood up on the rack and putting aside the dignity suitable to a would-be teacher, shouted and called, “Hi! Hi, there! Yoo-Hoo! Say—listen!” Harriet began to laugh and could give no more help and Celia herself was showing signs of subsiding when Ellen came to the rescue. She leaned forward and tooted the horn.

The man gave a start, turned, gazed down in bewilderment as he caught sight of the car and the small figure in his wagon, hopping up and down, waving and screaming.

“Hey there!” he shouted in alarm, “what’s up?”

“I want to apply for your school,” screamed Celia.

“Oh, another teacher!” he cried. He looked down at Celia with no great animation. “Then I guess I gotta come down.” He peered down at her wearily.

“It’s too bad to bring you ’way down here,” Celia called. “Maybe we could talk where you are?”

His face brightened. “Say, that’s a good idea,” he cried gratefully. “This’ll do all right.” He worked himself slowly down nearer the edge of the roof

where his ladder stood.

"Did ye give in yer application?" he called. "Yes," Celia shouted up. "I saw Mr. Martin and I gave it to him. And we saw Mr. Patterson."

"Ye ain't teached yet?" came down from above.

"No, not yet."

"Got a First?"

"Yes," ("With honours," Islay prompted). "With honours," Celia called brazenly. Ellen exploded. "It sounds like a high church service I once heard, a pompous dean in a high pulpit and a weak little congregation doing the responses."

"Can you play the organ?" yelled the pulpit.

"Yes, I play a little," the congregation was growing weaker.

"What salary d'ye expect?"

Celia could hardly get voice to answer that astonishing question. Stammering, she managed to convey the fact that she didn't expect anything. Would leave that matter entirely with the trustees. There were a few more questions and at last the power above said with an air of finality, "Well, all right. We'll see about it!" and looked up at his work.

"The service is over," Ellen said, as Celia prepared to descend.

"Better wait till he pronounces the benediction, Celia," Harriet called, not too cautiously.

But Celia was too disturbed to respond in kind. She climbed down like a nervous witness leaving the box, and the judge turning his back upon her crawled back up the roof, and resumed his hammering. The farmer's wife was standing at the door as they approached the house, having made a lightning transformation. She was quite smart in a clean print dress and frizzed hair, and the children were standing about looking limp from the effects of an apparently vigorous scrubbing and combing. The mother came out to the car evidently longing to talk.

"Hope you made him hear," she said. "I could hear you hollerin'," she peered in at the rear seat. "Say, ain't you Ellen Carruthers? Well, of all things! I thought I'd seen you somewhere before. How's your ma? My, it's ages since I seen any o' yous. Don't you remember me?"

"Why, you were little Elsie Jenkins, weren't you? And now you are grown up with a little girl of your own."

“My sakes, don’t time fly? We heard about your brother Ronald getting a prize or something, didn’t he? My, he was in college a long time though, wasn’t he? Are you lookin’ for a school too? Say, there’s about ten teachers to every school these days.” She turned to the crest-fallen Celia. “I suppose you’ve been to see the other two trustees? Well, that’s all right, but it won’t do you much good. My man’s really the one that appoints the teachers. He’s had a lot more schooling than most farmers and they just leave things like that to him. He knows when a teacher’s doin’ her work right. He has a cousin teachin’ back there on top of the Ridge. She’s a dandy too, and there’s some talk of her leavin’ there and takin’ this Beaver Valley school. I don’t know whether she’d leave there or not, because it’s a good school and pays more than this one. What salary was you askin’?”

Celia stammered that she hadn’t asked any salary, she left that to the trustees. “Well, you’d best tell ’em what you’ll take,” she said, “cause they generally take the cheapest and if you name a figger you’ve got more chance. Teachers’ salaries have been awful high lately and the taxes is something terrible. If you’d take my advice say what you’d take and mebby—Johnny! Didn’t I tell you if you went near that apple tree I’d whip you?—Well, g’bye, hope you get a school somewhere, but if you’d take my advice—”

Harriet released the car with a jerk and it sprang forward in the midst of their attempts at farewell. “Sorry,” she said, “but I had to break away in the middle of a sentence, or Celia’d never be ready when school opens in September. Her old boy’s sensible to stay on top of the barn all the time. If I had a wife and kids like that I’d build a tower a mile high.”

They were turning out of the lane when they were startled by a piercing yell from the direction of the barn. A scream from the house. They turned and saw the woman running wildly to the barn, a cluster of children screaming after her. “Something’s happened,” cried Islay, “turn back, Harry!”

Harriet backed the car around and sped up the lane and into the back yard. A man was lying in a crumpled heap at the foot of the ladder, blood streaming from his head. His wife was bending over him screaming hysterically, the children were clutching her skirt and adding their terrified shrieks to the pandemonium. Celia was out of the car and at her side in a moment. “He fell, he fell!” the wife was screaming. “He was half-way down the ladder, when I saw him fall. He turned to look at yous folks and he fell!” She put her hands over her mouth and her eyes were wild. “He’s killed! I know he’s killed!”

Celia was going over the prostrate figure with skilful hands.

“He’s not killed,” she cried. “He’s only stunned from this cut in his head.

Somebody help me straighten him out." His wife only moaned louder and Ellen ran to Celia's side. Harriet turned away and stumbled-back into the car and hid her face. Islay stood and looked about helplessly. The frightened children were crying and clinging to their mother and Islay coaxed them away.

"Come and see inside this pretty car," she said. "Daddy'll be all right if you're good and quiet. Don't disturb him."

"Mrs. McNabb, listen," Celia said, cool and efficient. "Please get some clean linen, any old rags will do, and I'll tie up his head and stop the bleeding." But the wife continued to rock and moan. Ellen sprang up. "I'll find something Celie," she cried.

"And something to put under him! A warm quilt," Celia called. "And Ellen, the doctor! Telephone for a doctor!"

Harriet was still sitting crouched in the rear seat, her hands over her face. Islay spoke sternly.

"Here, Harry, don't be such a coward! Take care of these children, do! I must go and help Ellen."

She sprang from the car and ran towards the house. Ellen was already rummaging through untidy drawers and cupboards.

"I think I can find the clean rags if you'll call the doctor," she cried. "There's the telephone, above the sink."

Islay snatched up the telephone book. "Who is it? Where?"

"Carlisle!" Ellen called from the bedroom. "Doctor Malcolm Wallace. He comes out here. If he's out call Doctor Mitchell."

The telephone book dropped from Islay's shaking hands.

"I—I'll get the things for Celia," she faltered, "if you telephone, Ellen!"

She caught up the heavy warm quilt from the bed and the bundle of clean linen Ellen had collected, and fled. She wasn't any better than Harry, she told herself, as she ran back to the barn. But she just *could* not do it.

"Oh, bandages!" Celia cried in relief. "I've got him in the right position, but I'm afraid his leg's broken."

She had the head bandaged, and the bleeding stopped when Ellen returned, breathless.

"I've got Dr. Wallace. He'll be here in a few minutes. Here, we'll slip this quilt under him."

They managed to draw the folded quilt under the inert figure, and Ellen sat beside the stricken wife and patted her hand.

“Dr. Wallace is on his way, and we’ll be all right when he comes.”

“He’s dead, he’s dead,” she wailed hysterically.

The children were restless under Harriet’s care, so Islay returned to them. She remembered the small box of candy she had put in her bag for the Artful and had forgotten to give him. She produced it, and at once the children swarmed about her like bees.

They waited for hours, Islay thought. Would he never come! The air grew sultry. The children were sticky and getting restless again. There was a car! It raced down the highway in a cloud of dust, whirled in at the gate. There were three men in it, and the driver, with a bag in his hand, leaped out almost before it had stopped and hurried to the prostrate figure.

The young wife saw the doctor, and at once resumed her hysterical sobbing. “Oh Doctor Wallace! He’s killed! I know he’s killed! He wasn’t half-way down the ladder. I saw him fall! Oh—!”

“Now Elsie.” It was a firm, kindly voice. Islay remembered, it had always been a kind voice. “Pull yourself together. Jim’s not killed. Can’t get a good man down, you know. Get hold of yourself.” Strong, brown hands ran over the injured man expertly and gently. “You run to the house and get a fire and some hot water, that’s the girl. Got to have hot water right away.” He might have been speaking to a little child, Islay thought.

“I’ll go,” Celia cried, jumping up.

“No. Stay here,” the doctor said. He noticed Celia for the first time. “Why, it’s little Celia Laird! No. You stay here. Go yourself, Elsie, atta girl. We’ll look after Jim.” He beckoned to the two men. “Get a stretcher, boys, got to get him into his bed. Don’t think there’s any internal injury. Don’t see much wrong except this leg. Celia, you did a grand job on his head.”

More help was at hand. Neighbours had heard the news over the phone and came running across the fields. Men and women both, anxious to help, sympathetic, some curious. Strong hands raised the injured man and carefully carried him to the house.

“Come with me, Celia,” the doctor called. “You’ll know what to do.”

The children were crying for their mother again, and as there was plenty of help, Islay let them go.

“Oh, this is dreadful!” Harriet groaned. “Can’t we get out of here!”

“It’s useful experience for anyone who is planning to be a farmer’s wife,” Islay reminded her.

“You’re all tired out!” Harriet was contrite. And Islay had the fleeting feeling that Harriet must be the older, and was excusing her!

Certainly Islay was more shaken than tired, and more shaken than she would like Harriet to guess. So this was Mack Wallace! Why he was middle-aged and shabby! Not a person you despised as Rob had despised him. As she had learned to do from Rob’s reports. He was grey and stooped. But not a failure. Something splendid in such kindness, such powers of alleviation. Good that he hadn’t seen her. How tired he’d looked. Well, she’d watch out never to have an opportunity of seeing him again. If she got off safely this time! So she’d never need to see how tired he was!

“How good Celia was,” she said gently. “It’s wonderful to be like that in an emergency. She’s a lot like Minnie. Suppose we drive down the lane, Harriet. Shadier there.”

Harriet dabbed at her red eyes and took the wheel. They drove slowly down the lane, and stopped opposite the house. They sat in the car waiting for Ellen and Celia.

After a long time two or three neighbours straggled out on the veranda. Celia and Ellen were behind them, and behind *them*, again, the doctor was speaking earnestly with McNabb’s wife. How old he looked, now he was nearer, Islay thought. She felt a slight shock at this thought. He was older than he should be. How old was he? Did people think *she* was old, she wondered. But Mack Wallace was thin. Too thin for his suit. But he was chatting cheerfully with the dishevelled Mrs. McNabb. Jim would be fine. He’d be fine. Don’t worry. Strong as an ox, Jim was. Suffering from shock, of course. And a broken ankle was a broken ankle. Celia had fixed up the head. Nobody could beat Celia. Elsie just had to brace up. Just don’t let Jim worry . . .

“Us fellah’s’ll look after his hayin’. He’ll have no call to think about it.” A tall, rangy fellow in the foreground was spokesman.

The young wife wiped her eyes on her dirty apron. “Everybody’s that good,” she sobbed. “And it’s a mercy you were here, Miss Laird.” She turned to smile wanly at Celia. “Don’t know what I’d a done. I hope you make out gettin’ a school.”

“What! Celia a teacher?” The doctor paused, looked about him with a sort of weary amusement. “Well, if these fellows don’t hire you after all *this*, you

tell me. I'm through with the lot of them. They can break every bone in their miserable bodies!"

There was an awkward guffaw. A releasing of tension.

"She's as good as hired right now, doctor," cried one of the men, and Islay recognized the boss of the construction gang. "She's got my vote, and Jim McNabb's if he was fit for votin'."

The doctor was called back into the house at this point. Ellen and Celia came on to the car. Celia's eyes were two stars, her face flushed with excitement. Well! The last injunction got over; the last good-bye had been said. He had not appeared. Harriet, too, was in desperate haste to get away. Celia wanted to take home the good tidings. Islay thought, as the car skimmed down the smooth highway, that she had lived years since the starting, and that was why she was so tired. 'Years were weary, years were weary . . .' her mind reiterated to the rhythm of the engine's smooth hum, while the grass-choked fence posts whizzed by. But ahead, the road ran endlessly, and with regularity, taking shape.

13

The Garden Party

ISLAY AWOKE THE NEXT MORNING TO THE WARM TOUCH OF the sun, with the feeling that something unpleasant had happened, a sense of burden. When you had encased yourself for years in an armour of righteous indignation and had it suddenly stripped from you, you were left defenceless. She dressed hurriedly and went out to the kitchen. Celia was almost sure to get the school, she thought. That was something.

Harriet came bounding down the stairs in a new pair of sky-blue slacks. She was going to do her washing today for tomorrow was the garden party. They were all going down to the church tonight for the last football practice. Celia, too, if she could get away. Wasn't Celia a wiz? Why she was a regular Red Cross nurse or something.

"I wish I hadn't been such a nut myself," she said contritely, "but I couldn't stand the sight of that man lying there. Mercy, weren't you glad when the doctor came? Say, Islay, I think Doctor Wallace is tops, don't you? I know you didn't used to like him, but he was grand yesterday. Dick says he's a good egg!"

"That's the last word, no doubt," Islay smiled, in spite of herself.

"Celie said he was sorry he didn't know you were in the car, guess I shouldn't have hurried you away so fast."

"Set the table, Harry," she said, shortly. "I'll look after the bacon and toast. We must get our work done up today. Just as you said."

The embarrassing moment had passed.

She was glad to see Harriet undertaking the washing of her own clothes without constant reminder, though in spite of Ellen's coaching she still did it very badly, indeed. Islay cleared away their breakfast dishes while Harriet got out the old tub, carolling at the top of her lungs.

Fortunately it had rained in the night and there was plenty of water. Islay had listened to the rain whispering with the leaves before she had fallen asleep. Now, in the morning sun, the earth was damp and fragrant, the sky washed and polished. The yellow rose bush was still hanging heavy with the dew. The

world was sheathed in a blue sheen. Over the slopes of the ridge blue settled deep; the bay was an intense blue quilted sheet, the leaves on Bessie's Willows turned softly, washed to azure.

Islay walked out along the well path. What was that? Thunder? On such a glistening blue morning? No. It was an aeroplane zooming along through its blue heaven. Everything on the farm came out to watch. Down in the hay field Reddy halted his horses to stare up, up, in the blinding blue. The hen bustled out of the barnyard with her busy family, clucking a warning. Even the deep blue sailor heeded her and froze to attention when the mighty bird went whooming its way through the blue weather.

Ellen came hurrying up the lane, having been given a lift that far by the minister, who tooted a friendly horn at Islay.

"Another blue day," Ellen called, gaily. "If we can only have another one like this tomorrow! Look down the valley. The sky ran in the washing, and stained the whole earth blue!"

She made her way to the kitchen where Harriet functioned in a welter of steam and soap-suds.

Islay finished her household responsibilities and retired to her desk. It was hard to get going. The story didn't write itself. *You* wrote it, and that was wrong. What was that? A new sound, unobtrusive yet continuous. Like the sub-surface chatter heard at afternoon teas. It wasn't Ellen or Harriet. They were in the kitchen. Too far away. These voices were soft, high and musical. Now a loud coughing. Ginger sprang into action. Turkeys! In the garden again!

They were very polite turkeys. They strolled up and down, inspecting the rows of vegetables with some dignity. They gazed with well-bred superiority at Harriet and Ellen, advancing with hoe and broom. Islay caught up the dust mop and joined the brigade. But three women were valiant enough to make only a weak stand on the extreme edge of that battle ground. Even Ginger hesitated, prudently. He had never tackled the gobbler. That great, black ball of raging feathers with the red hot streamer in front. This was no object for a lone dog to attack. He kept his self-respect by dancing up and down on the edge of the cabbages, barking madly.

Fortunately the Artful arrived at this moment, his shaky bicycle skimming precariously down the pasture path. Several skirmishes with the little bear, (with Billy and Jack, Audrey and Lily Anne at his side) had made him a turkey veteran. With Harriet to help, he soon had the intruders scurrying through the fence and over the pasture.

Islay went back to her writing. How much people were like animals, she thought. That old turkey-hen had eyed her for all the world like old Mrs. Halliday, president of the bridge club, putting fear into an erring partner. Every time she watched the gobbler strutting up and down, spluttering out his rage, she thought of Foster Lawrence.

Harriet came back from the chase, hot and breathless, the Artful at her heels. She stopped at the pump and took a drink in true farm style, using the dipper from which all the men drank. She hitched up her slacks, sailor-fashion, singing, 'Heave-ho, my hearties, the gale's on our lee,' (Dick's favourite song) and went back to her washing.

"Hey! Mrs. Reilly!" She reappeared in front of the veranda slapping out a pair of wet pyjamas.

"Yes?"

"Who'd that old gobbler remind you of?"

"What do you mean?" asked Islay, guiltily.

"Well, he's exactly like somebody you and I know."

"Is he? I hadn't noticed."

"Think hard now! Don't be dumb!"

"Not yourself, is it?"

"No ma'am! I'm bad enough but not quite that bad. Why, he's 'the spittin' image' of dad, you dope! Foster swells up his feathers just like that when he's mad. After the row's over Katie and the kids just go on, same as ever and Foster goes off and gobbles about it for ages and gets all red and black and puffed up!" She waved the gay pyjamas and laughed uproariously.

A humming bird shot past, suspended itself, tiny wings whirring above the holly hocks. Ellen came out with a tray of blue delft dishes and began laying the orchard table. "We won't be able to eat out much longer," she told Harriet, "when the apples begin to fall and flies come."

"Let's eat out anyway. It's easier. Who minds a few flies?"

Harriet had her clothes all pegged on the orchard line. A little breeze came dancing up from the bay and flicked through the leaves above her head.

"Feel that," Ellen said softly. "There's velvet in the wind today. That's what your Uncle Geordie Laird always says when there's a soft, warm breeze."

Islay raised her face to its soft caressing. 'Velvet in the wind.' She had

heard Uncle Geordie use that expression, and he had added, ‘There ain’t enough of it when the Lairds raise the wind. It’s more like sand paper.’

“You mustn’t come up here tomorrow, Ellen,” Islay said as they sat around the dinner table under the duchess tree. “You’ll be too busy. I think you have taken on too much responsibility for this garden party.”

Ellen had an unanswerable argument. “It’s on mother’s account,” she said smiling. “She takes on the responsibility, and I can’t see her swamped.”

When the time came to get ready for the great affair, Islay was relieved that she was going. No use to stay at home alone all afternoon and evening, nursing a wrath that had suddenly gone cold and dead.

Everyone seemed to be giving up the whole day to it. Minnie had been baking all morning in spite of her ankle, and was planning to go down to the church right after dinner. Harriet had decided to be off early too, taking her own car. For Dick had to be at the church early to look after his football team and would not be able to come for her until just before supper; and Harriet could not possibly wait. So she had offered, very generously, to drive Minnie down just as early as she wanted to go. When the Artful heard of her plans he looked so forlorn that he had to be dressed in his best new suit and stowed into the car with her.

“I’ll drive back for you later, just whenever you want to come,” Harriet said. But Islay sent them all away saying she would come in her own car when she was ready.

Celia telephoned. Wouldn’t Cousin Islay come over and go with them later? Reddy was driving her and Lily Anne down with the food, in his own car. Momma hadn’t had time to take anything but the sandwiches and they were taking everything else. So Islay dressed in one of her prettiest gowns, to please Uncle Geordie, and went over the pasture field to join Celia.

She was surprised to meet Watty going for the cows. He was actually helping with the chores and allowing the young folks to go to the garden party. But he was grieved over the day’s idleness. Here he was, he complained, him and Steve, left with all the chores and not a kid to help even with the milking. Why they had to go and always put the garden party on in haying time beat him. Just some more weemen’s foolishness and here it was the middle of the week and nothing done!

She found the house all set in order and Celia and Lily Anne dressed in their best. The cakes and pies and buns and cookies and strawberry short-cakes Minnie had baked early that morning were piled high on the kitchen table.

They were just waiting for Reddy, Lily Anne explained. The younger children were all gone long ago, Audrey with momma, and Billy and Jack and Stevie were thumbing a ride. They'd get picked up, for sure.

Lily Anne's hair had been crimped and curled and tortured till it stood out around her small freckled face like a flame, and her new green muslin dress was tied as tight around her thin little waist as possible. Celia in her orchid muslin with a wide white hat, looked so beautiful that Islay felt a momentary pang for the plain little sister. But a second glance at Lily Anne showed that that young lady needed no one's sympathy. She was completely satisfied with her appearance.

Reddy came tearing down stairs, and dashed out for his car. His face was shining and his hair was as smooth as his patent-leather shoes. He was in a smart new suit and smelled strongly of perfume and shaving soap. He was on the football team, too, and carried his purple and gold sweater rolled up under his arm.

"Poppa and Watty are doin' the chores all themselves, mind you, Cousin Islay," Lily Anne cried, amazed, "because Stevie had to go early to help momma put the tables in their right place. Mind you, Cousin Islay, the boys put the tables up last night and they all had to be changed cause they forgot one and left it in the shed and Dave Fraser and Uncle Tom's Billy noticed it last night after the rest was gone and—"

Reddy came roaring up to the kitchen door. He had just lately bought this second-hand car and was tremendously proud of it. He might take Celia home if Dave Fraser's car broke down which he hoped it *would* do, tonight.

"Not such a bad ole crate, eh?" he asked Islay, "and lots of room!"

It was a five-passenger with a generous rear seat. Islay stepped in, feeling a little nervous, as it throbbed and rattled.

"I got her for twenty-five dollars!" Reddy declared proudly. "Quite a bargain! Course the licence cost me seven dollars and that run the price up a bit. Hi, girls! Bring on your load. This bus'll hold it."

Celia and Lily Anne ran from the kitchen to the car with cakes and pies, jars of cookies, bowls of salad and baskets of currant buns. Islay looked in wonder.

"And this ain't all," Lily Anne boasted. "Harry took all the sandwiches, stacks of them. Momma was so set up about what Celie did that—"

"Oh, hush up, do," Celia whispered, looking distressed.

“Gosh!” Reddy cried as he helped stow away the provisions in the capacious depths of his car. “Is your ma feedin’ the whole shootin’ match?”

Islay thought how flustered Jeanette could get over an afternoon tea, with a maid and an extra woman to help.

“Some of the Lairds are degenerating rapidly,” she said.

“Pardon, Cousin Islay?” Celia said politely.

“I was just thinking out loud, my dear,” Islay said laughing. “I was comparing what your mother does every day with what some women accomplish. And I was comparing what you did yesterday with—”

“Say, gosh!” Reddy broke in. “Lily Anne was tellin’ me about that! Say, Celie—”

But Celia turned pink and fled into the kitchen.

It was no small task getting everything arranged for the journey. There were some wonderful confections of Celia’s that were too fragile to be packed away. They did not even admit of being covered. There were two lemon pies piled high with foaming meringue, tinged a delectable brown. “I’ll hold these,” said Islay, and balanced one in each hand. Lily Anne brought out two mountainous cakes covered with what was known as seafoam icing, tinted an exquisite green. And there were two strawberry short-cakes, piled high with whipped cream and looking as substantial as a summer cloud.

The proud chariot jerked convulsively, spluttered. Stopped.

Celia peeped anxiously over Reddy’s shoulder, clutching her parcels firmly. Could *she* do anything, she wondered, solicitously. Should he try cranking it? As though these words had loosed some evil spell, the monster gave a bellow that made the back seat quiver, leaped forward and went roaring down the lane.

Islay was thrown back in her seat. The pies slithered precariously, but she retrieved them! The monster thundered on at a terrific pace. Ahead, the gate post loomed up, a menacing barrier to progress! Loose fitting doors rattled, shook, threatened to fly open and send Minnie’s delicate confections hurling into the dust.

“Put on the brakes! Stop it!” She found herself yelling madly like Uncle Geordie. But her screams were drowned in the uproar of the monster released.

For some unaccountable reason this seemed highly humorous to Celia who began to laugh merrily, still gripping her precious cooking with both hands and

feet. Lily Anne shouted with sheer glee and abandon!

They whirled out into the highway, rounded the gate post with full two inches to spare, streamed down the road, obscured in a cloud of boiling dust, peppered with road pebbles.

Fifteen minutes of terror, and they drew up before the church, triumphant.

Already a score of cars were parked along the elm-shaded fence, facing the pasture field where the games were to be held. A few of the boys were fixing the goal posts at each end of the field, she could see Dick in his shirt sleeves working at them and, of course, Harriet at his side helping. Islay followed the girls into the cool basement. It was humming like a bee-hive. Minnie and Mrs. Carruthers and a crowd of helpers were there. The long tables were covered with snowy paper and decorated with big vases of garden flowers. A group of younger girls were rapidly filling the tables with pies and cakes and tarts and sandwiches.

Minnie was sitting in a corner surrounded by baskets and boxes of sandwiches and cake. Her lame foot was elevated upon a box, but she seemed to be doing as much work as any two other women. She took time to whisper her thanks and her hopes to Islay. She and Celie had talked half the night, about the accident and the school.

“Eh, if she gets that school!” Minnie could say no more.

Aunt Bella was there, her little bony arms and claw hands snatching swiftly at thin pink slices from a ham, for still more sandwiches. In the midst of the confusion and din of talk she worked away, in a wall of silence, smiling and nodding to everyone. She undertook to introduce the newcomer to a group of cousins and Islay had no difficulty in identifying the two telephonic pests, young and smart, both of them, with elaborate hair-dos and gay aprons.

At the rear end of the basement a wide door opened out into the shed where the furnace wood was piled, and where, in winter, the church-goers stabled their horses. There was a coal oil stove in one corner of this shed, installed on a platform. It had been lent by a Laird who lived near the church. A great wash boiler of water was heating on the stove, and beside it sat Cousin Lucy Laird, the official tea-brewer of the neighbourhood, with three large bags of tea ready to drop into the boiler at the auspicious moment. An aroma of the stable still lingered in the shed, but the place was high and airy, and the workers of the night before had covered the earth floor with clean straw. At the far end, the platform for the Young People’s play had been erected. Islay caught a glimpse of Ellen, behind the curtains, waving instructions to some boys who, high on the rafters, were adjusting ropes. It was a busy, happy scene, and as Cousin

Lucy welcomed her back to Laird Valley, and recalled how her mother had always enjoyed the church suppers, she was ashamed that she had ever thought of remaining away.

When Islay had been welcomed by all the relatives, Mrs. Carruthers led her upstairs and out into the sunlit church yard. Crowds were beginning to come and many cars were now parked along the pasture field. Everyone was drifting towards the level pasture field below the church ready for the football match. Men in their shirt sleeves were perched along the fences like grotesque birds. Already a few purple and gold 'home heroes' were distributed about the diamond, engaged in a bit of preliminary practising for the benefit of the admiring 'girlfriends' who were screaming out encouragement. Islay noticed with dismay that Harriet was the most vociferous of them all!

"Your niece is such a free, friendly girl," Mrs. Carruthers said tactfully.

Islay had a vivid image of Kate viewing this animated scene!

Under a great maple near the church a canteen had been set up and the men took turns selling ice-cream, soft drinks, candy and every sort of confection calculated to ruin juvenile digestion.

Islay saw Artie, swanking about with Minnie's two littlest boys, all three oozing ice-cream, and plastered very stickily down their fronts.

Young Geordie was watching for her, standing on the running board of the car and waving his stick. "Hey!" he shouted, "Hey, there's my girl! Come along! I was gettin' scared you'd gone back on me. Here! We've got the best spot possible to see the game."

Mrs. Carruthers had to hurry back to the manse to see if her husband had got home yet, and Uncle Geordie suggested that they sit down to supper at the first table so they would not miss any of the game.

"Them lads won't get here till it's near dark anyhow," he said. "Most of them's still hayin'. And I don't know how you feel, but I'm gettin' that empty I'm liable to blow away like one o' them fancy balloons."

They found Steve and another Laird cousin selling tickets at the door leading to the basement.

"Hello there, Young Geordie!" he shouted. "You're goin' to get into trouble. There's a lady down there lookin' for you with a gun. They've been tellin' her you've got a new girl!"

Uncle Geordie tried to look a little alarmed, and Islay tried to smile. She disliked Steve more good-natured than morose, she thought.

Uncle Geordie led her, with old-time gallantry, down the steep little stairs to the basement. The tables were stacked with food, so they'd even had to remove the flowers—plates of sandwiches a foot high, cakes and pies, tarts and salads, dozens of strawberry short-cakes oozing crimson juice and piled high with whipped cream.

The benches were filling rapidly and the waitresses in their pretty aprons, Celia and Ellen among them, flitted about like butterflies. Out in the shed Islay could see the older women washing and drying dishes. Minnie had disappeared behind boxes and baskets, but Islay could sense that she was keeping an eye on everything, though the noisy Mrs. Jim Turner was taking all the glory to herself.

"Hi there, Uncle Geordie," she shouted. "What d'ye mean goin' back on me this way? You promised me last year you'd take me to this garden party."

"Do come and sit beside us," Mrs. Carruthers said, in genuine sympathy, and Islay accepted gladly.

Great cups of strong hot tea and great pitchers of rich cream made their rounds. There were salads cunningly arranged in every picturesque shape, garnishes of radish roses, carrot marigolds, ingenious edible water lilies; hard-boiled eggs to the unimaginative. There were so many varieties of sandwiches that Uncle Geordie began to worry lest he miss some. Provisions kept coming on and on from Minnie's corner. She must be growing the strawberries back there, Mr. Carruthers declared, catching the spirit of the crowd, as a good minister should.

There was noise and talk and laughter and the clatter of dishes. The hungry crowds pressed down from the upstairs entrance, while the satiated surged out through the shed and back to the field where the football game was about to begin.

Large families, fathers and mothers with a half-dozen children crowded in at the tables and were seated; groups of adolescent boys and girls all trying to see who could consume the most pie and cake; young men, awkward and self-conscious, squiring their girl friends, all these came and went. Islay caught a glimpse of Billy and Jackie, with the Artful between them, being waited on by Celia.

Under Uncle Geordie's guidance they managed to squeeze through the throng to the exit provided by the shed door. Cousin Lucy, standing beside the coal-oil stove, was ladling out the strong black tea for the waitresses who scurried out with their pitchers. Her tea was always strong and yet she never used much. She had a simple method, too. She placed the big bags of tea in the

boilers early in the afternoon and kept them boiling till the last dishwasher had staggered home. When a waiter took away a jug of tea Lucy just added that much water and her boilers were always full. And the last cup was as strong and as black as the first. Just like the widow's Cruse of Oil, Uncle Geordie had said once, but Dick had said Uncle Geordie was always talking about widows. So Young Geordie had been afraid to try that joke again.

It was good to get out into the fresh air and sunlight after the hot reek of the basement. Mr. Carruthers drifted away to talk to a group of men, but Mrs. Carruthers came with Islay, glad to sit and rest in the car.

"Ellen is doing all my work," the tired little woman said gratefully. Islay made her comfortable beside her in the back seat, but Uncle Geordie had to leave them. The game was on and he couldn't sit; he was off and away, out in the front line waving his stick and yelling.

"Acton Hill is one of our charges as well as Lairdale," Mrs. Carruthers said, "so we can't take sides. I just brought my work along," and she took her knitting from her work bag. "Ronald likes home-made socks and I knit his Christmas presents in the summer. It's been so good to have Ellie with you, Miss Drummond," she said. "It's brightened the poor child's life. She is so shy and has so few congenial friends here." How strange to be thanked for letting a girl like Ellen Carruthers scrub your floors, Islay thought.

"She will have a really suitable position some day. Ellen is capable of the very best."

Mrs. Carruthers sighed. "She is, I know, and if Mr. Carruthers had ever been given a congregation capable of appreciating his talents the children would have had a much better chance. It has always seemed strange to me that some ministers—"

She droned on, alternating between the joy of Ronald's success and the humiliation of her husband's failure. Islay looked at the minister leaning against the fence with a group of big-fisted, brown-faced farmers gathered around him, and thought of his influence in the community. Perhaps he was not a failure after all, like another she had so lately seen ministering to his flock.

"Such a wonderful carefree life as yours is, Miss Drummond," Mrs. Carruthers was saying. "You surely ought to be supremely happy."

"Here we are wasting a great opportunity," Islay said lightly, "this game is getting really furious."

The field was moving pattern, purple and gold, scarlet and white, sweeping

now this way and now that, accompanied by shrieks, shouts, commands, and punctuated by the sharp, shrill whistle of the referee. Islay had witnessed many a rugby game in her college days, but never one that roused such fury, not even when Varsity met McGill, or sent Queen's reeling to defeat. Here the girls did most of the yelling and all of the abusing. Dancing, shrieking, in a mad frenzy of enthusiasm, the young ladies of the home team reviled the enemies of Lairdale, heaped contumely upon the head of the girl friends of Acton Hill, all of which was returned upon their own heads, with interest, by the screaming sisters of the White and Scarlet.

Islay could see Lily Anne's red head in that seething mass and beside her, yes, Harriet—Kate's delicately nurtured daughter, in this mob of country cousins and farm hands, yelling louder than any of them! She could see Uncle Geordie too, evidently the game was going against Lairdale for he was hobbling up and down the side lines yelling at Dick, and demanding to know why he was layin' down in the middle o' the field and letting everybody walk over him!

Even Artie had caught the team spirit. He was perched on the fence between Billy and Jack, the three of them yelling on Reddy and Young Stevie, to give it to 'em! Beyond, in the adjoining pasture, the cattle bunched against the fence, staring in dumb wonder at the mad antics of humans. Evening crept on, but the battle still raged to the shriek of the whistle and the thud of the ball. Cars still swept up the hill with their hungry loads. The sun went down in a flaming bay, and the tower of the little church turned gold. And then suddenly the raging and the yelling ceased; the battle was over. Acton Hill had won by one goal. There were cheers for each side and then Purple and Gold, White and Scarlet mingled, dashed to the fence corners for their clothes and went tearing down to the bay.

The Acton Hill girls capered about the deserted field, screaming their triumph, and the Lairdale girls turned their backs on them and marched up to the church in chill dignity, declaring they were thankful *they* didn't have to live in Acton Hill! The football fans tumbled off their perches on the fences and swarmed over to the canteen. Victors and Vanquished dashed up from the water, clothed, clean and shining, with hair still dripping, and all swarmed into the basement for their long-delayed meal. The best of the provisions had been carefully saved for them, and all the girls were there to wait on them; Acton Hill and Lairdale, all together and all quite friendly now, ran with sandwiches and cake and pie and strawberry short-cakes. Lucy's tea was still hot, stronger than ever. Reddy was himself again and kept the Lairdale girls in shrieks of laughter explaining that Acton Hill was always actin' ill anyhow, and that was

how they got that last goal. Harriet and Celia divided their attentions between him and Dick while Lily Anne attended to Stevie, and everyone was happy.

"Them Acton Hill boys," Mrs. Jim Turner reported to her sister committee members, "has et up everything but the tablecloths, and it looks as if *they* were going too." But at last there came a stage when even the last section of strawberry short-cake was looked at with langour, and the last reveller staggered into the shed to hear the programme. Some women, Minnie among them, were still clearing up the remains of food from the banqueting tables, Lucy still boiled the swollen bladders of tea, and the dishwashers were still wearily rinsing plates and cups in lukewarm brown water and rubbing them with their last dripping towel.

Uncle Geordie was disgusted over the loss of the game. "Aw, they jist lay down on their job," he grumbled. "Our boys could a' licked them Acton Hill fellows if they only had one good foot like me." But he grew more cheerful when they were finally seated in an old church pew in the shed with their feet in the straw, waiting for the programme to commence. There was plenty of time to enjoy this interlude. The play took its time in appearing but the audience did not mind. They were all jammed into their seats together, laughing and talking.

The curtains were being hung on the stage and a great deal of hammering was in progress. Some young men were suspending lanterns from the rafters where half-grown boys were perched aloft, assured of a good view. The younger children chased each other up and down between the benches, screaming and trampling on their elders' feet. Mrs. Carruthers sat down with a sigh of relief. "I do hope Ellen can soon come and rest," she said. "It's been a great success. Mrs. Tom Laird told Mr. Carruthers they'd taken in over two hundred dollars at the door alone, and there's the canteen besides," she sighed. "When the garden party is a success we're always sure of our salary."

Islay felt a shock of pity. She was learning a great deal these days about the struggles in other folks' lives.

Uncle Geordie had been bustling in and out and now returned, bringing them each an ice-cream cone, downing one himself in exactly three gulps. The noise increased, babies cried, children romped in the straw, played tag with each other over their elders' feet, and still the hammering continued and stage hands toiled hard over the curtains.

Islay looked about for her family: Dick and Harriet, Celia and David were located, sitting on a bench in a dim corner, Ellen was behind the curtains working, the Artful, his new white and blue suit brown as his face, and flanked

by Billy and Jack, was perched high on a beam, eating peanuts.

Islay sighed happily and finished her cone. Strange how much more enjoyable a pleasure excursion was when you had your family along and were responsible for them.

At last everything was ready, and Johnny Laird's Sam, who was president of the Young People's Society, appeared in front of the curtain and, amid cheers and cat-calls, announced that Mr. Carruthers would open the programme with a few words. But Mr. Carruthers was not to be found, and here was another delay. Mrs. Carruthers looked anxious.

He was found at last, sitting out under the trees with two of his elders, and hurried in full of apologies, amazed that they were ready so soon. The minister, it had been arranged, was to introduce the play, explaining some of those finer points which the actors felt might be obscure to the audience. Mr. Carruthers was apt to be rather prolix when he stood up before his congregation, so young Sam announced emphatically that the minister would introduce the play in a *few* words, just a *very* few words, he added significantly.

Mr. Carruthers came forward and a respectful silence ensued. The dishwashers laid aside their wet towels and ordered the workers in the basement to hush up. They leaned against the wood-pile or sat down on benches to listen, glad of a little rest. The minister went on and on for some time, and Islay marvelled to see how attentive they all were, how the babies were hushed, and all the games of tag sternly suspended. Mr. Carruthers told tales of his boyhood days, and the tea meetings they used to have in the old times and the long speeches that ministers used to make, and Islay saw Uncle Geordie's eyes twinkle and he began to heave, a preliminary to laughing.

The long introduction was over at last. The play itself was introduced rather sketchily, for by the time Mr. Carruthers had come to it he had forgotten what he intended to say.

There was long and hearty applause and then the curtains of the stage were drawn aside, revealing the interior of a living-room furnished with chairs and a sofa from the manse. The curtains remained open for a few moments and then were hastily closed again. No one in the audience knew until afterwards that Frank Laird's Frank, who had been goal-keeper for Lairdale and was the first actor scheduled to appear, was suddenly discovered to be missing. This was worse than losing the minister. Sam plunged into the audience, went straight for the basement, and here was the young man, oblivious to histrionic demands, finishing a last piece of lemon pie. He and one of the 'actin' ill'

youths had been having a contest over two pies the girls had hidden away. The president fell upon the pie-eater in a rage and dragged him off to dress for his part.

Another delay! The babies cried again, there were cat-calls and boos from the smaller boys perched on the rafters; peanut shells rained from above and the games of tag were renewed with great vigour. But at last everything was really ready, the curtains parted again on the manse furniture. This time Frank did not fail. He marched on, stumbling and nervous, mumbled a few words quite inaudibly, and sat down behind a newspaper. Another boy, much inconvenienced by a black beard, entered and did likewise; then two girls hurried in, evidently mother and daughter; for one had powdered hair and a long black dress. The four began to talk; the play was launched. Islay, not being initiated, found the plot a little hazy. There were a great many characters, most of whom she recognized as young people she had seen at church. But she could not always catch what they were saying. There seemed to be a rich man with a haughty wife and a good son, whom they used very badly and for no apparent reason, and a wicked daughter whom they indulged in every wicked whim. Then there was a very nice girl, always coming and going, with whom the good boy was in love, and a villain whom the bad girl fancied, but who, in turn, fancied the nice girl. Then there was an Irish man-servant, and a Swedish maid-servant, a large coachman and a half-dozen others who came and went till Islay got completely lost. The rest of the audience was in the same condition but did not seem to mind, for everyone was interested, not in the plot, but in the son or daughter up there on the platform putting on such a grand performance. Everyone knew that the Irish servant and Swedish maid were young Tom Turner and his sister Sadie, respectively, and everyone laughed over their love-making till the shed roof rang. And all Steve Laird's family were watching breathlessly, because Reddy was the villain.

It was lots of fun, and Uncle Geordie roared with laughter and hammered his knees in ecstasy, and nudged Islay to notice the fine points.

The night was far spent when at last it was all over and they stood up to sing *God Save The King*. There was an hour's work still to be done in clearing away the baskets and boxes from the basement. Islay conferred with Harriet about home going, gathered the staggering Artful from the crowd around the canteen where he was absorbed in still another bottle of pink fluid, helped Minnie collect her dishes and her children, thanked Uncle Geordie for a lovely evening and saw him and Aunt Bella piled into their car for the return trip. She herself drove back in Reddy's roaring chariot, feeling she had not had such a good time since the days when she and Pete and Mack went to picnics in the

giddy teen-age era.

14

Canterbury Bells

THE DAY AFTER THE GARDEN PARTY ELLEN APPEARED EARLY, happy because the big affair had been such a success. Harriet resumed the decorating of her room, but early in the afternoon decided she must have more paint. With a grocery list and some errands for Islay she drove off to town taking the Artful with her, and returned with more orange and black paint, and still another suit for the boy. They were late, for they had gone to the picture show. He did not appear too highly pleased with his new suit. It had short white trousers and a resplendent blue tie, and he regarded it with masculine disfavour. He liked his old one better, he declared.

He rolled it indifferently under his arm and trotted away home.

"Now why *wouldn't* he like it?" Harriet cried indignantly. "I think he needs a spanking. He's been cross and dumpy all day, and wouldn't tell me what was the matter."

"Boys are funny about clothes," said Ellen. "I remember Ron played truant from school because mother made him wear a hat that all the boys laughed at."

"Perhaps he ate something that disagreed with him yesterday," Islay suggested. "I cannot understand why a child who had been practically starved should eat so little."

"Celia says all undernourished children are like that," Ellen answered, "their stomachs contract after a time. But he's eating far more now."

"Isn't that kid, Celia, a caution, as Uncle Geordie says," cried Harriet. "She knows everything and can do everything and she looks as if she hadn't an idea in her head beyond dates. When I have kids of my own," she went on solemnly, "they'll wear what I put on them and they'll eat what I put into them, and no tantrums. Parents, nowadays, are simply goons!"

They were having a cup of tea under the duchess tree before Ellen left. Islay set down her cup with a choking cough, and Ellen went into one of her spells of silent laughter.

It was quiet and pleasant under the orchard trees, with the Artful gone home, and the menagerie of pets banished to the barnyard. Even the gladiators

seemed to be holding a rare truce. The bird war that had raged around the cherry trees was over, too, for Minnie's family had come over and stripped the trees of their rosy fruit. And now, where the grackles and waxwings had swept to and fro, and shrieks of rage and cries of defiance had kept the orchard lanes in tumult, there was soft music, the gentle song of the bluebird, and the sweet call of the goldfinch.

Harriet yawned and lolled against the table. It would be several hours before Dick could possibly arrive, and she was tired after the excitement of yesterday. She rumpled the pages of a book of poems Ellen had brought out from Islay's collection.

"Walter De La Mare!" she groaned. "Ho! hum! I remember him because we had to write an essay about him when I went to Mac Hall. And I hadn't time for anything but getting ready to go out with Dick. When you teach high school, Ellen, what are you going to do with kids like me? I was always wanting to do something with my hands and they were always making me do something with my head. I guess I was cut out for a farmer's wife all right, all right."

Islay picked up the book and read The Listeners aloud. She was still conscious of their presence every night on the crooked little stairs that led up into the darkness above Grammy's Ben. Ellen listened appreciatively, Harriet was absorbed in the descent of a gay little caterpillar from the limb above to the table, by way of a slender silken thread.

He was dressed in a fine suit of white fur trimmed with bright yellow and touched up with vivid red and green polka dots. His costume was finished off with a very stylish little tail set straight up on his rear end.

Harriet was delighted with him, and ran off right in the middle of the poem to find a box to house him till the Artful returned.

But the Artful did not come to his work the next day, nor the next. Enquiries of Steve's family produced no news of him. "Likely he ate too many strawberries at the garden party," Minnie said, "those poor prairie people are not accustomed to fresh fruit."

When the third morning passed without any word of him, even from Steve's family, Islay determined to leave her work and make the long deferred visit. She went in search of the girls. Harriet was slapping paint on her bedroom floor, singing loudly and tunelessly. No, she didn't want to go even to get Artful. She had to finish this floor before Dick came. He had said she wouldn't get it finished in time for the wedding if she didn't hurry.

Islay went down the long stairs of the New House, speechless. Harriet was getting the place all decorated for her marriage! She felt as she had on her way to the garden party when she dashed down the lane in Reddy's car, balancing a lemon pie in each trembling hand.

She found Ellen in Grammy's Ben kneeling before an old chest of drawers she had been polishing and looking up at it with the face of a saint before a shrine. She had been slowly transforming the place. She had stained the great wide boards of the floor a deep warm brown and laid out the best of the hooked rugs from a big kist upstairs. She had found some old thin blankets, too, for Aunt Christena had never given away a thread; these she had dyed a lovely blue, though Harry had fought for orange, and had hung them straight on the sides of the deep old windows. She had tinted the plaster walls with a soft buff wash and had gathered all the old blue delft dishes and put them in the chimney cupboards.

"Oh, aren't old things wonderful!" she cried sitting back on her heels and looking around. "When you get a log blazing in this fireplace next fall and light all the candles and draw the blue curtains . . ."

Islay looked at the girl. She was an artist. Her joy was in the creation of beauty. There was no smallest thought of possession. "You've made it lovelier than I thought it could possibly be," Islay declared. "But put away your work for a little and come with me to find what's the matter with Artie."

"I'd love to," Ellen said leaning back to get the effect of the old kist in the sunny corner by the window. "But you make me neglect my work. And as Watty says, 'it's the middle of the week and nothing done.' You're paying me to go joy riding over the countryside with you and Harry."

"This won't be a joy ride. It's a duty call. Do come, that child's on my conscience."

Ellen sprang up and began putting away her dusters. "Would it be all right," she asked diffidently, "if we took a few of those sweet scones I baked this morning?"

"Oh, yes, yes, and anything else you think they would like!" Islay cried remorsefully, realizing that she was about to go to this poor family empty-handed. And she added a bunch of fresh lettuce and a box of ripe strawberries. Then Ginger had to be shut up in the barn, for Artie had brought ominous reports of the yellow dog they kept.

"Do you know," Ellen cried suddenly, "that Simpson's farm goes down to the shore just beyond the point down there and the old shack where Artie lives

is right near the water? Do you want to take the car and go round by the road or shall we go through the woods, along the shore?"

"A tramp through the woods!" Islay decreed, "and a swim on our way! Where are the bathing-suits?"

Harriet heard the word swim, as she leaned from the window of her room, and came whooping down the stairs. She had decided to go, too. So bathing-suits and towels were packed into a second basket and all three went down the back lane to the bay.

The water was cool and invigorating, but the breeze was warm. It rolled the waves in, upsetting the bathers and flinging the spray up on the white stones. White gulls dipped and soared and flashed in the sunlight. Far down the dim green aisles a call rang up to them, clear and sweet; a late white-throat singing his love song to his country:

"Canada! Canada! Canada!" The phoebe piped his plaintive little melody, and crows from the highest tree-tops cawed warnings against the intruders. And as they came up from the water there was the same burst of derisive laughter that still startled Islay: "Ah, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" laughed the loons.

Islay would have lingered but Ellen's conscience was driving her. They spread their wet bathing-suits on the hot white stones, and set out on their journey along the water's edge.

This wooded fringe of the shore, the Broken Front, as it was called, was a cool green tangle of vines and underbrush—bracken and cedar, sumac and blackberry bushes flourished in the little sunny openings, and white-stemmed birches rose pillar-like to support the green canopy above.

Steve's cattle had come down for water and a bell made music through the green, marking time for the song of the waves on the shore. They scrambled through a tangle of sweet-smelling briars and clumps of jewel plant hanging its golden pendants, and staggered out of the way of tall burdock plants covered with sticky purple clusters. Ellen was ahead dodging adroitly along the rough path and leaping fallen logs, Harriet at her heels. Islay struggled breathlessly to keep up with them. And always they were accompanied on the overland route by a sentinel crow swooping from tree-top to tree-top, and announcing to all his kind just what progress the intruders were making.

"He's talking about us," Ellen cried gaily, "telling everybody where we're going."

A fence running down to the shore marked the boundary of Islay's property. They climbed the rails and sat for a few moments to rest.

“The next place is Mr. Steve Laird’s,” Ellen said, “and then we are on the Simpson land.”

Islay looked back over the green tangle of her own property. It gave her a sense of well-being to feel it was hers. There was slowly growing in her heart a love for the soil that had nourished her people. There was growing in her, too, a feeling that she ought to know something about the working of a farm. She had no smallest notion of what profit Steve got from it, or whether the rent he paid her was adequate. The first faint struggling of an idea was working in her mind; the idea that she might take over the farm herself, as Harriet had suggested, and manage it. She considered it breathlessly.

As they stumbled along the rough track Ellen recalled that Uncle Geordie had said that you were likely to get a broken back if you didn’t move carefully on the Broken Front. This brought the conversation to the only subject that interested Harriet, and the other two listened for the rest of the way to a recital of what Dick was saying and doing.

“This is the place,” Ellen announced as the bark of a dog came ringing down the wooded aisles. “This is the only house for miles and miles along this shore. What a place for a woman alone!”

A sunny clearing sloped down to the shore. In the centre stood a little cabin made of the small logs from the surrounding woods. It faced the water, and in front there were signs that someone had tried to make the place tidy and even beautiful. Rows of stones bordered the path to the shore and a couple of large wood-ferns had been planted on either side of the low door. The cabin had but one door and one window but the latter had a white muslin curtain and a geranium bloomed in a salmon can on the sill. In front of the cabin in the patch of sunlight a woman was hoeing the stony root-bound soil. She was dressed in a faded cotton smock and a pair of men’s boots. Even the shapeless gown could not hide that again the burden of motherhood was laid upon her. And yet there seemed something dainty and refined about her. She was small and her fair hair, streaked with grey, curled around her thin face. Islay recalled vividly the *Man with the Hoe*. Only the misery of the situation was doubled when it was the woman who wielded the hoe, with the added burden of child-bearing on her bowed shoulders.

The big yellow dog broke into a storm of barking, but fortunately he was tied to a tree. The woman turned with a start, and then came forward with a look of relief, when she recognized Ellen.

“Oh, Miss Carruthers, is it you?” she cried gratefully.

She was like Artie, thin and starved. But the anxiety in his child’s eyes had

become tragedy in the mother's. They were the eyes of a woman who had seen her children droop and die before her for lack of bread.

She greeted Islay and Harriet with shy cordiality, and led them to the door of the little cabin.

"We've only got two chairs," she apologized.

"Oh, let's sit out here on this bench, and these wonderful stones," cried Ellen. "It's lovely here."

"We were wondering what happened to Artie," Islay said, when they were seated around the doorway. "When he didn't come back we were afraid he might be sick."

"Oh, that's too bad," she said, deeply embarrassed. "I told him to go back, but he seemed kinda ashamed. He's workin' with his daddy today." There was a long silence. "Did he say why he left?" Islay asked. "He always seemed so happy, especially since my niece came . . ."

The woman hung her head like a naughty child caught in a prank. "It was jist because—" she glanced apologetically at Harriet. "It was too bad. He—It was the *pants*."

"The pants?" Harriet asked bewildered.

"Yes, the ones you gave him. He—Oh it was too bad! But they were short, and he wanted long pants. He didn't like to say anything because he said the girl he calls Harry got them and said he must wear them and he looked like a baby and so he wouldn't go back."

It was impossible not to laugh and even the poor mother achieved a strained smile.

"You'll find there is much to learn about the masculine mind, Harry," Islay said laughing. "Poor Artie!" She had a sudden feeling of relief. If there was anything his father could give him to do she would be rid of a troublesome responsibility and the garden would not be much the worse.

The little woman sat, her hard hands folded in her lap. She looked as if nothing mattered very much. Ellen gently led her to tell of the trip from the West. They had started in April, it took two months, because they had to stop and work whenever there was a job for either of them. The gasoline cost a lot.

"And how did you happen to come here?" Islay asked. Her tragic eyes took on a frightened look.

"We didn't have a crop for so long," she said, "and Wilf, that's my man, he

always wanted to come back to Ontario. He was born up in Bruce Peninsula and he always said he'd like to live beside Georgian Bay."

"Are you from Ontario too?" Ellen asked. Again the frightened look came over the stranger's face.

"No, I belong out West," she said shortly. There was a silence broken only by the soft whispering of the waters on the shore.

"It must be wonderful here beside the bay after all those dry years," Ellen said.

"It wasn't so bad at first," she answered, as if determined that no complaint would be uttered. "We always thought it would rain next year. But when all the stock died, and the dust was so bad, and the children took sick we came away."

There was another long silence, and Harriet, always bored with inactivity rose.

"Oh, you've got a tiny waterfall, and what ferns!" she cried, looking up the hill behind the house.

The woman's face brightened. "Come and see it," she said. "It's jist wonderful!"

She rose and led them up the little muddy path behind the house. Here buried in clumps of bracken, a bubbling spring trickled out of the hillside over the mossy stones. It was a common enough sight to the Ontario women but to the eyes of the woman from the dried-out prairie it was a miracle.

"When I saw it first," she whispered, "I called to my man to come quick and stop it. I couldn't stand to see that much water wasted."

"There are so many nice things here," Ellen said comfortingly. "I hope you'll like it."

"Oh, yes," she said. "Only there's so many trees. You can see so far on the prairie, it—you kinda feel shut in. Only it's awful pretty," she added as if in apology for anything like criticism. There were no complaints, only a thankfulness for their new home and the abundance of water. But for all the desert dust of Saskatchewan the alien's eyes were homesick with longing as she looked up into the green canopy of the Ontario woods.

They moved back to the door of the little house. Inside there was a bed and a table, an old cook stove and a bench. Floor and table and bench had been scrubbed clean and a bright curtain hung over a corner where shelves had been

built. Islay recognized the curtain and the rocking chair. She had seen them at Steve's. Minnie had been here, of course, bringing gifts from her own meagre supply.

"This is too cute for words!" Harriet stood in the doorway. "This is the kind of house I'd like to live in. I'm going to be a farmer's wife myself, and I'd like to have a place just about this size."

"I guess we all find we can do without a lot o' things. I have more time now for a garden," the woman smiled faintly.

"Why, you've been planting flowers, too," Ellen stooped to examine the rows of tiny green shoots by the door.

"Not many. I was so awful late gettin' things in. But I wanted to plant a few seeds I brought with me from home. I always had a few. Even when we hadn't no rain all summer I tried to keep a few growin'. But there was no water at the last."

"It will be lovely to see your Saskatchewan flowers growing in Ontario," Ellen said, tremulously. "What did you plant?"

"Jist these bluebells," she said, "the others are all from Mrs. Steve. She gave me all them slips. My, she's awful kind. But I brought the seeds of the canterbury bells because they were growing where the wee graveyard was, back o' the barn. I thought *they* were all dead, too, and one day when I went out there if there wasn't one wee bell wavin' away in the wind, jist as blue as blue. I picked it and put it away. It was the last thing that grew. See, I pressed it and I've got it here."

She led them inside, moved aside the curtain of the corner cupboard and took out an old, faded catalogue. She carried it to the sunny doorway and gently opened it. Between the rumpled, yellowed pages were newspaper clippings, snap-shots, and pressed flowers and leaves. Tenderly she lifted out a piece of folded tissue paper to show a wilted blossom with just a hint of blue in its grey dust petals.

Ellen's eyes filled with tears. Harriet was silent. Islay tried to say a word of comfort but failed. She recalled what Minnie reported of this woman, that she would seem less pitiful if she uttered even a small complaint. They looked at the children's pictures. There were four of them, one a babe in arms.

"You must tell Artie how much we want him back," Islay said, with a complete change of front. "And tell him Harry will change the suit for one he likes."

“Oh, I’d be so glad,” the mother said, “he’s awful set on yous folks, and he’s learnin’ so much, how to behave and all that. Are you sure he isn’t too much bother?”

“Why he’s our hired man!” Harriet burst out. “We can’t get along without him.”

“Oh it’s so nice to have some folks to talk to! I’ll send Artie up tomorrow if you like,” she added shyly.

She turned to walk down the path with them. “Let me put your book back,” Islay said, feeling, like a physical pain, the need to do something. She took the basket of provisions to leave on the table so she might escape the burden of being thanked for a gift she had not thought of bringing.

She stepped back into the tiny house and set the basket on the table, beside the water pail. Carefully she laid the catalogue on the narrow shelf behind the curtain. There were two other books there—one an old Bible with a worn, stiff brass-bound cover. It slipped from its place and she lifted it to replace it, glancing, with the interest of one who loves all old things, at the fly leaf. Then she closed it hastily and dropped it back upon the shelf as though it had burned her fingers. For across the yellow page in beautifully formed, old-fashioned handwriting was the inscription:

> Presented to Bessie Margaret Laird,
>
> A prize for Scripture Memorization from Lairdale Sunday School.
>
> Lairdale, Ontario, December 25th, 18—

15

Flower of the Nightshade

THE NIGHT WAS LONG AND BROUGHT LITTLE SLEEP TO THE owner of the Old Home. The Listeners stood watching all night but the problem remained quite as perplexing in the morning. Islay longed for someone in whom she could confide. Her thoughts turned to Minnie. But it was evident that the stranger was taking pains to hide her identity, and Minnie and her daughter Lily Anne had the same weakness. If Minnie were entrusted with such a stupendous secret she would just have to tell the other Laird women—probably over the telephone.

To add to her troubles Islay found a letter in her mailbox from her sister Kate. There was one brief page about their travels, the beauties of Vancouver harbour, the wonders of the Rocky Mountains, and five closely-written pages about Harriet.

Kate bewailed the fact that Harry had broken with the only eligible young man that had ever shown her any attention. And what made her go to the farm? There must be some secret reason. Did Islay remember that young Hartley who went to O.A.C. when Harry was at MacDonald Hall? He came from somewhere in the direction of the Laird settlement. He was nothing but a farm hand, so surely Harry wasn't going to take up with him again! Islay must watch very carefully and let Kate know if she heard anything about him. It seemed incredible that such a fine girl as Harry with her education and prospects should display such strange taste, but one could never understand the modern girl. Islay was fortunate in having no family. There was never an hour's peace of mind while they were growing up. Poor Athol was not at all happy at Mohawk Camp. Kate felt that the leaders were not congenial. He was writing his father continually asking to come away. It was hard for Foster to do anything about him when they were at the other side of the continent, and he was worried to death over his business. 'I will just have to put the responsibility for Harry on you, Islay,' the letter concluded. 'You will have to remember that she is young and very impulsive and see that she does not do anything foolish.'

Islay was filled with righteous indignation. Kate and Foster had indulged both of their children and now when they were going their own way, the

responsibility must be laid upon Aunt Islay. She threw aside her manuscript and pounded some of her wrath into the typewriter, producing a letter that brought some relief. Then the memory of Kate's years of kindness and generosity to her younger sister shamed her. She took the letter out to the kitchen stove, lifted the lid, watched it curl up into ashes, with much more satisfaction than the writing of it had brought.

"You look as if you were burning your worst enemy and enjoying it," Harriet said.

"So I was, burning a bit of him at least," Islay said. Ellen was not present today and here was a fine opportunity to wrest some concession from the wilful Harriet. She was in high good humour, toiling in the heat over the mysteries of a lemon pie. Islay sat down beside the table and begged a promise that there would be no wedding until her father and mother returned.

"I don't believe they'll object, after they've seen Dick, and had the facts put before them," Islay argued, "but after all, dear child, they're your parents, and they love you beyond your deserts, and you owe them some consideration. Get ready and be married then as early as you like, only wait till they come back."

Harriet was grating the rind of a lemon and the fragrance filled the kitchen. She moved the fruit slowly up and down, as though considering the proposition. Islay was agreeably surprised.

"Well," she said slowly, "I'd really *rather* wait till they came back. Honest I would. And, as things are now, I guess I could. You see, it was like this, Islay. Dick loves to go places. Uncle Geordie's had a hard time getting him to stay on the farm, and he was all sold on South America. I was scared stiff he might go. And that's why I said we'd be married right away. But now, that's off. Mr. Cowan has another man, and Dick's decided to settle down on the farm. So, I guess we'll wait till they get back. If Foster got off on his high horse too furious he might cut me off without a penny, so I guess we'll wait. But, mind you, if they make a fuss, I'll just do what the Lady Islay did! Tra-la-la!"

Islay went back to her desk, relieved. She listened to the girl singing at her work and was filled with wonder. Harriet Lawrence had been given every advantage possible. She had been sent to select private schools, had had the best music teachers, riding lessons, dancing lessons, travel, everything, and here she was toiling away in an old back kitchen of an old farm house, singing at the top of her lungs, entirely out of tune, but ecstatically happy, because a young farm-hand loved her.

Harriet had promised to prepare the supper. She was learning quickly how to do individual jobs, but had no smallest knowledge of how to co-ordinate them. Islay knew by experience that the meal would be half-done and she would have to remember everything that was forgotten, so she quietly slipped out of the house and across the garden.

"I'll run over to Minnie's and get the cream and milk, Harry!" she called, "and I'll expect a banquet on my return."

"It shall be served, Madame!" the cook shouted, and Islay could hear her tuneless singing till she had passed beyond Bessie's willows.

Bessie's willows! The graceful, drooping branches touched her head gently as she passed under, as if to remind her that Bessie's daughter should be here sitting in their shade. She wondered if Minnie had the smallest suspicion of the stranger's identity. She recalled now that the first sight of the woman had reminded her of someone. She had the *Laird* look.

She found Steve's place humming with industry as usual. Though it was early the milking had been done and the little boys were away with the cows back to the pasture. Celia was in the shed at the end of the kitchen washing the separator, stopping every minute to make a violent onslaught on the flies with a wire swatter. Islay had never dreamed that the fly menace was so grave. Now that the summer days had grown long and hot and the cherries were ripe, and other fruit ready in the garden, they had become a plague.

Celia called a delighted welcome. "Oh, we were going to see you after supper," she cried. "It's just about ready, won't you come and have it with us?"

No, she could not stay, Islay said. "Harry's getting up a marvellous supper all by herself, and I promised to go back and help eat it. But I'd far rather stay here."

Minnie came limping to the door and called to her to come in, repeating the invitation to supper. Lily Anne held the door open and waved a towel to keep the flies away as Islay darted through. Little Audrey came running in from the barn where she had been feeding the kittens, and Celia laid aside her work and followed. Everyone who entered swept the clouds of flies off the screen door and then darted in.

"Come away. Come away!" Minnie was saying heartily. "Eh, I wish you could stay and have supper. The flies is jist terrible, but you're more than welcome. And the men won't be in for a little."

The table was set in the kitchen at the opposite end from the stove. Minnie

was frying pork and potatoes and had just taken a pan of feathery biscuits from the oven and shoved in a pan of muffins.

"Don't tempt me!" Islay cried, dodging the strips of sticky fly paper that were suspended from the ceiling. "I'd love to stay, but Harry is alone. I must run right back when I get the milk."

She sat down beside the table where Lily Anne was beating eggs, and noticed that the four were standing around her as though waiting for something. There was an unmistakable air of excitement over everything.

"Have you told her?" little Audrey whispered to Celia.

Celia said, "No; hush!" Her mother laughed tremulously.

"No, we haven't told anybody yet. Even her pa don't know!"

Everybody was trying hard not to smile.

"What is this I haven't been told?" Islay asked, looking at Celia.

Celia looked at her mother. Minnie's face twitched.

"Well," she said trying not to look too pleased. "What d'ye think's happened to our Celia?"

Islay thought at once but she knew better than to spoil the announcement.

"What? Not a school?"

Audrey gave a little squeal of delight at her astuteness.

"It's just that, and nothing else," Minnie declared, her voice trembling. Her eyes were shining so that Islay felt her own eyes sting. Celia's smiles were all gone. She looked solemn, awed. Little Audrey began to dance up and down silently on her bare toes. Minnie's family had been taught restraint even in their joys.

"Celia!" Islay cried, "not the lovely Beaver Valley school?"

Celia could only nod, speechless.

"How did they let you know so soon?"

"Telephoned." Celia whispered.

"This afternoon! The contractor man did." Lily Anne burst out, unable to wait. She ran and brought Islay a paper from the telephone. Celia had written down what he had said. She showed it to Islay.

They had met at Mr. McNabb's bedside Lily Anne explained, for no one

else seemed capable of speech. And the contractor man had said it was—was—"what was the word, Celia?". . .

"*Unanimous*," Celia said shyly.

"You-nanimuss!" Lily Anne repeated, "and he said that Mrs. McNabb was there too, and they all said that any girl that did what Celie did, was—was—what was that other long word, Celie?" she asked consulting the paper.

Celia snatched the paper away. "It's nothing. It doesn't matter," she declared. "But, oh say! I was sure I wouldn't get it! And oh—the little seats! And the flower beds! And oh, Cousin Islay, it isn't an organ I saw through the window! It's a"—her voice failed her—"a piano!"

Everybody looked at Islay to see if she were properly impressed.

"A piano!" she repeated with awe.

"And there's something else we haven't told you, Cousin Islay," Minnie said. "We haven't told you what the salary is."

"No, I hope it's good."

The children looked at their mother. She alone was capable of announcing this last momentous piece.

"Nine hundred dollars a year!" Minnie said trying hard not to look too proud.

"Nine hundred dollars!" Islay repeated.

Celia was past speaking. She could only gasp. "Oh sakes! Oh my!"

"Nine hundred dollars," Lily Anne whispered. "It's a fortune."

"Nine hundred dollars," little Audrey said, and burst into an hysterical little squeal.

"And oh, Cousin Islay!" Minnie declared tearfully, "if you hadn't trailed Celie all over the country, and if you hadn't taken her away down there to Beaver Valley, she'd never a' got the school at all—it's all owing to you—"

"Nonsense!" Islay cried, feeling an absurd surge of happiness. "She'd never have got this school if she hadn't been the smartest and most competent girl—"

"*Competent*," Lily Anne cried, clapping her hands. "That's the word he said, Competent."

"Well, it's just the right word," Islay cried, "she's showed herself to be

perfectly competent in a very difficult situation and she owes it all to the competent mother she has!"

Minnie sprang to the oven door. "Mercy sakes I near forgot those muffins!" she cried, and Islay saw her wipe her eyes with the corner of her apron.

"Stevie'll be goin' to high school in another month!" she whispered.

"And Celie tells me you went down to see Artie's mother," Minnie said, slipping the brown muffins expertly from the pans.

"Yes, Artie hadn't come back." She hesitated. "Poor creature! How can they live down there in the winter, Minnie?"

"Dear, dear! You may well ask. And her that way. Eh, me! You run out now Audie and feed the wee chickens."

"The doctor was out to see her today, and he called here," Minnie said, when little Audrey was gone. Islay noted that Minnie tactfully turned her back when she made this announcement. She sized up the situation.

"Dr. Wallace? That was good of him."

"Eh, wasn't it?" Minnie said with evident relief, "for they haven't a cent. But he don't mind that."

"Mack Wallace was always generous," Islay said calmly, annoyed that his name should disturb her, and determined to put Minnie at her ease. "Did he tell you how Celia's patient is?"

"Oh didn't he! Yes, he'd been out to see him," Celia cried, "and Mr. McNabb's fine and he'll soon be better and—Oh, that school!"

"Dr. Wallace was asking about the Old Home Place, Cousin Islay," Minnie said shyly, when they were alone. "He said," she hesitated as she put a plate of muffins on the table, "he said he'd like to see the old place again."

"Did he really?" Islay answered in her best secretarial manner. "We must all go over to Beaver Valley with Celia some day, and get her contract signed, Minnie. And you must come too."

She went back over the pasture field with her milk pail. She had received no help for her problem, but she could not but be happy over little Celia's good fortune. Steve was driving his binder from the field. They were cutting the fall wheat; harvest days and the end of summer were not far off. She waved her hand to Steve, she could forgive what he had said regarding resemblance to Great-Aunt Christena now that she had triumphed over him. Steve would have

to bow before that nine hundred dollars. And Mack had been asking about the old home! Well, he had shut himself out of it. She would never ask him to enter her home!

The rejoicing over Celia's success was tempered by anxiety for the Artful. Two more days passed and still he did not appear.

"I do miss that Dopey kid," Harriet mourned. "I believe I'll take the fly swatter and go after him again."

"Mother and father were down last evening," Ellen said, "and mother said Artie had a cold. And she said it was quite chilly down there after the sun set and they didn't seem to have much bedding; only what they brought with them in the car. I was wondering . . ."

Islay interrupted her remorsefully. "Oh, dear! Think of all those blankets and quilts up in that back room, Ellen. I'll go up there and haul out a dozen this very day. Why don't I think of these things!"

She went up the little winding stair right after dinner. How often had she planned to send down a consignment of warm clothes to the Saskatchewan family, and how often had she forgotten!

Her conscience accused her as she looked over the piles of warm blankets she would never use. Bessie's child should be here in the comfort of this old home instead of away down on the rocky shore in a tumble-down shanty like something cast up by the waves.

The old sea chests, 'kists', Grandmother had called them, were in the back bedroom above her own room. These huge boxes with the heavy hinges had come across the ocean with the Lady Islay. Islay Drummond had only glanced through them. One was crammed with dresses and Paisley shawls and ancient underwear, that either Grandmother or Great-Aunt Christena must have worn when they were young. The other was filled with quilts, marvellous creations of small patches, worked into beautiful patterns by hands long quiet. There was one called the 'Dresden Plate,' another the 'Double Wedding Ring,' elaborate and intricate. They represented long hours of patient toil; more than what was required to write a book, surely. She chose three of the heaviest and warmest and laid them aside for Ellen's bundle. Then she returned to the other chest. Surely out of all those dresses and clothing she could find something for the poor woman down by the shore whose place she was usurping.

It seemed as if Great-Aunt Christena had been like herself and had prepared a hope chest that she never used. There were three dresses that had apparently never been worn. They were high of neck and tight of waist and

voluminous of skirt. There was a pale grey poplin, trimmed with bands of purple velvet, a brown silk dripping with long fringe, and a stiff black silk, heavy with glittering jet beading. There were piles of old-fashioned underwear too, heavy linen garments, beautiful with hand-embroidery and yellow with age. There was also an abundance of warm flannel underwear that awoke memories of Christmas holidays at the farm; long full red flannel drawers, elaborately scalloped at the knee, and embroidered with purple wool, and full heavy petticoats to match, trimmed with yards and yards of woollen lace. Islay remembered seeing Grammy knitting just such lace in the long winter evenings. She touched the ancient garments gently.

She was about to replace the treasures when Harriet came up the stair bringing a sample plate of her cookies. She fell upon the piles of ancient clothing with shouts of laughter, tumbling them about with ruthless hand. She tried on all the dresses, and finally arrayed herself in the red flannel drawers and the basque of the black silk dress. It was much too tight to be hooked at the waist and the long tails, heavy with jet beads, almost reached her knees. A queer, shapeless fur cap completed the outrageous costume, and she danced away downstairs to show herself to Ellen, looking not unlike a bad cartoon of a French Zouave.

Islay could hear Ellen's gasps of laughter. She leaned from the little window that overlooked the kitchen door to watch the fun. Harriet had found a cane, and was strutting up and down the garden path, Ellen coaxing her to come in. Someone was struggling across the pasture field—Wise Watty, coming for his afternoon drink at the old well.

Islay leaned far out the little window and called to Harriet. For she suspected that old Wise Watty had lived in the Red Flannel Era, and that the sight of these intimate garments being aired in the orchard would be infinitely more shameful than a parade of slacks or even shorts. But Harriet was only sped on her abandoned way by the restraining voices behind her. She strode down the path to the well arriving just as old Watty raised the water to his thirsty lips. He stopped, his eyes bulging balefully over the rim of the dipper, then he flung away dipper and water, and turning, ran down the path to the barn, somewhat as Tam O' Shanter must have fled from his drunken, visionary pursuer.

Islay went back to her search through the ancient trunks, still laughing. She remembered that little incident later as the end, for a time, of carefree laughter.

A few minutes later she came upon the letter. There was a small leather trunk in the bottom of the kist. Islay had peeped into it before—a treasure chest. There were old photographs in leather cases which she had remembered

her mother showing her, pictures of great-uncles with long beards and great-aunts in crinoline. Here was a box of jewelry; large cameo brooches, a dull gold locket with a curl of fair hair in it, long heavy gold chains, agates set in gold rims; a small fan of sandalwood that might have belonged to the Lady Islay; a large pink sea shell; and, at the very bottom, a packet of old letters. Islay untied the faded ribbon gently. They were all Old Country letters, yellowed and faded. She had promised herself a reading of them one day and was about to put them back when she noticed one lying by itself, written on modern paper, new and white.

It was unaddressed and open. She drew out the heavy white paper. She read it twice! It was Aunt Christena's writing. It was dated just a few months before Aunt Christena's death. It was Bessie's letter—evidently the only letter that Christena had written her. Aunt Christena had meant to mail it. She had stamped it! She hadn't known the address! A hard letter! Great-Aunt Christena was in every line of it. She had even omitted the salutation, lest the receiver interpret this as an expression of affection, an admission of weakness.

She read it again!

'Well, Bessie, I expect you will be surprised to get a letter from anybody in this family. None of us had much reason to write to you after you brought disgrace on us all. There is nobody left here now but me. The Lairds are all dying off and there soon won't be anybody on the Old Home Place. Your father left me everything he owned in his will, and well he might, because I slaved here for him all my life and very little I got out of it. All our family left this place, they got stuck-up, too, and forgot the folks they came from. But you were the only one that brought disgrace on the good name of Laird. We could all hold up our heads till you brought them down. I have years to live yet, because I am strong and hearty and I can do as good a day's work as ever, but I've got to make a will and do something with this place before I go. I won't leave it to you to spend in sin and shame, but I can't leave it to anybody else. There is only my niece Mary's family anywhere near now. Mary got far beyond herself when she married Doctor John Drummond, and her family are all like her, proud and stuck-up. They think they're above us farm folks.'

This was her mother, Islay recollected, and the 'family' was she, and Pete. All of them, of course.

'But they needn't hold their heads so high. One Laird is as good as another unless it's like you, Bessie. You forgot you was a Laird, and your father never held up his head again after you disgraced him. But I have to think about this farm and I don't want any of Mary Drummond's stuck-up family getting a penny of my money. I have some in the bank too. I am not going to leave it to

you, Bessie. I don't want you coming back here to let the neighbours crow over us. But I'm going to leave it to your girl, the baby you had when you left your lawful husband, if she is living. She is to have everything. It wasn't her fault she had a bad mother. Mind you, I am not leaving anything to any of the Compton bastards if there is any. But I am going to leave it to your lawful girl. When I am gone she can come back and live on the Old Home Place, but I hope she don't turn out like her mother. She don't need to be in any hurry seeing I'm strong and fit and like to be here for many a long day yet, and I don't want none of your family showing their face here while I am alive . . .'

How unkind she had been! How awful to have kept her hate hot through these long years! How cruel to Bessie! How much more cruel to herself. She had cut herself off, unyielding, granitic, set solid in hate. Was *she*, Islay, building up, slowly, but surely, layer upon layer, a fibre like this within *herself*? What happened to you when you gathered resentment to yourself, fed it with your pride, so it smoldered, hidden but consuming.

What about Bessie's daughter? *She* was living in this miserable shack on the borders of *her own land*! Aunt Christena's letter was dated the very day before that first visit Islay had made to the Old Home Place—that time she ran away from hate and resentment, back to the Old Home. Hate had met hate somehow there that day. Like confronting like—a recognized affinity. Islay shivered slightly. Had that been it? Or had a sort of compromise of hate effected itself? Had Christena's sudden decision been prompted by a latent affection, an unaccustomed struggling toward something good, like a withered plant reaches toward the light, palely but instinctively.

Was the Old Home left to her *in trust*? Not hers to have, but hers to administer, wisely and with justice.

Something else was in the letter—a tiny something, made into a package by white tissue paper wrapping. Islay opened it carefully. A couple of willow leaves, curled, withered, with a few flower seeds. A potential flower garden, wrapped useless in decay! Islay swallowed painfully on the lump in her throat. Canterbury bell seeds! Tiny seeds of love and kindness waiting to germinate! Love and kindness that must have lived miraculously but untended in the withered heart of Christena Laird. So she had inserted this symbol with her message. These were the flowers Bessie had loved and tended, the same blossoms that her daughter had brought from her arid farm to replant again in the kindly Ontario soil.

Islay Drummond put the letter back into the box and closed the trunk. The girls were calling from below. She looked at herself, white in the small swinging mirror that topped the high dresser. How much she looked like

Christena!

She wandered out through the garden. The weeds were getting ahead of the vegetables now that Artie had left. And this was his rightful home. Here he would have a chance, he and the child that was coming. She wandered on through the barnyard, unseeing. There was a sound of hammering behind the old log henhouse. Surely Wise Watty would not dare to remain so near. She rounded the corner of the building and, to her surprise, came upon, not Watty, but the Artful hammering industriously at his bike.

"Why, Artie! I'm so glad to see you again."

He hung his head.

"Aren't you coming back to work in the garden?"

"Momma said I hadda come and—and tell you," he said, scowling.

"Tell me what?"

"Why I wouldn't come."

"Was it because you didn't like the new clothes?"

"Naw. I hate them pants, but I didn't care about that. I won't come here no more, long's *she's* here."

"Who? Not Harry?"

"Yeah. Her."

"But I thought you liked her."

"Yeah? Look what she done. She went back on me."

"What?"

"Well you can ast her. She promised; and then she went back on me."

Islay waited.

"Went off with that there Dick. After she'd promised me we'd get married and live here soon's I got big. And Lily Anne told me her and that Dick is goin' to git married. You bet I ain't goin' to work no more for her. I'd like to work for you. But I won't do no more for her after the way she went back on me."

Islay considered the matter for a moment and then she spoke with the gravity that the occasion called for.

"You're not quite fair to Harriet," she said. "I'm going to tell you

something that will make you understand her better. This is a secret between you and me and I don't want you to talk about it to the other children."

He looked up at her with a flash of pride in his big eyes. He was being treated like a man. "I don't blab," he said with great dignity.

"I know you don't. You see, Harriet and Dick knew and liked each other long ago, and they had been separated. But they liked each other all the time and they met, well, unexpectedly, one day when we were driving past Uncle Geordie's place and had gone in to call. And when they saw each other again they made up their old friendship. You see you are only a little boy and Harriet is a young lady. She loves you very much, and every day she says she wishes you would come back. Because she loves you as a grown lady loves a little boy; the way I love you. And we need you here. You are the only man we have. And Harriet did not mean to break her word. She was just trying to tell you how much she cared for you and she cares just the same, even though she wishes to marry Dick."

He pondered over this, his bicycle lying idle on the straw.

"Did she know why I didn't come back?"

"No, your mother thought it was the suit she gave you that you didn't like and Harriet thinks that too."

"You won't tell her, will you?"

"No, of course not, if you don't want me to."

"Well, I guess if she thinks that way about me," he said at last, "I guess I better come back. I need the money."

Islay nodded.

"Yes, I'm sure you feel you ought to be earning something. Would you like to go round and hoe the cabbages for a little, now?"

He had scarcely put his hoe into the ground when Harriet came bounding down upon him with cries of delight.

"It's Dopey! Oh, Dopey, darling, did you jump out of a woodpecker's hole? Where've you been?"

She was still in her Zouave costume to which she had added a fringed Paisley shawl, and after gaping at her for a minute, the Artful went off into gales of laughter, twining himself round the handle of his hoe in a very agony of mirth. Then Ellen came out with a plate of cookies to celebrate the happy event.

“For the return of the prodigal!” she cried happily as she came back to the kitchen.

“The return of the *heir*,” Islay whispered to herself.

16

The Garden Wall

THE TYPEWRITER WAS SILENT THESE DAYS. ISLAY FELT NO interest in the written page. Her days were restless, her nights disturbed. The Listeners crowded the crooked stairs above Grammy's Ben. Silent. Accusing. Her days were given to gardening, and to other work. Anything to keep from thinking. Garden flowers burned bright in the sun. Never had the Old Home looked more beautiful—or more desirable. But the garden spoke forcibly of the one subject she wished to put aside. Here was the yellow rose bush the pioneer Laird woman had planted. The fragrant southern wood, the striped ribbon grass, the sweet mary and the flaming hollyhocks belonged to Grammy's day, and all along the well path the canterbury bells Bessie planted swung blue in every breeze and made invisible music—an air half-heard, half-seen, half-thought about.

It drew on to midsummer and the warm days slipped by in bright chain of sequence, without effort. A sense of wealth and well-being stole over the land, a sense of maturity. The Spirit of the Harvest spread down the sun-bathed valley. Apples hung scarlet on the trees, early tomatoes flamed on the garden vines. On the shed roof young chipmunks frisked madly. Birds busied themselves with their families, bustling and hurrying to and from nests where wide mouths opened all day long. Song sparrows and goldfinches made music, the flickers shouted raucously and hammered on the roof at dawn, their wings flashed with the scarlet of the apples in the orchard. The crab tree towering above the corner of the back kitchen was glorious, decked from its topmast branch to the lowest, heavy limb with shining balls of ruby-flushed gold.

The raspberries were ripe in the garden and along the fences. The high slopes of the Blue Ridge were famous for their blackberry and thimble berry patches. Steve's whole family went off on berry-picking parties, and came home stained purple, laden with full pails. Harriet went on some of these expeditions and then spent long hours with Minnie, learning how to make jam.

One still, warm morning Islay heard the chug-chug of an engine just as she was laying out their breakfast under the orchard tree. A procession came rumbling up the lane. Today the rippling expanse of bronze wheat field behind the barn would be laid low. Dick was driving his tractor and Harriet threw down a handful of knives and forks and dashed out and danced up and down in

excitement to see him pass. Islay abandoned her preparations for breakfast and joined her. Something in the sight of men going out to harvest the fields stirred her heart. This was symbolic. An indication of goodness and fruition. The powerful red tractor thudded up the lane, behind was the binder, its fierce shining knives held high aloft. Steve was in the seat guiding the machine and behind walked Reddy and Wise Watty, pitch-forks slung over their shoulders. Harriet waved and shouted, and Dick raised his hand in salute, too intent on his task to do more. But Islay caught his flashing smile as his eyes rested for a moment on the girl. The Artful came over the pasture field like the wind with the news that supper was to be taken to the wheat field that evening and everybody was to come.

It was a delightful picnic, as good as the one in the hay field except for the plague of flies that always came with the warm harvest days.

"No more meals outdoors," Islay decreed regretfully, for though Harriet and the Artful always came to the table armed with fly swatters there was no peace from the black swarms. The Artful, ever ready with a solution for every problem, declared that if they would only let his pet toad sit up on the table he would eat every fly that came near. Harriet was the only one who encouraged this idea, and the fly catcher was introduced at the next meal. But as half the family were rather violently opposed to his hopping about among their food, and declared they preferred flies, the frog prince was abandoned and meals were eaten in the cool safety of the winter kitchen.

Islay gave much of her time to the vegetable garden. Every growing thing there was a problem needing attention and took her mind off greater anxieties.

"There seems something specifically created to destroy each useful plant as soon as it puts up its head," she declared, pessimistically.

"*That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten*," Ellen quoted. "This looks like something the prophet Joel talked about," she added, examining the pecked tomatoes critically.

Harriet and Ellen were busy at the washing, whisking through to return to their beloved decorating schemes. Pussy had gathered her family on the door stone, the better to wash *them*. The kittens were growing less tractable. They played further afield, gathered more dirt in their furry coats, and were not in the least concerned about putting themselves in order.

"It's a hard life being a woman with five children and every day wash day," Ellen said as puss grabbed another child and scrubbed it.

"It's a hard life being a woman anyway, when there's washing to do,"

Harriet said, sousing her handkerchiefs in the tub. Washing had been fun at first, but the glamour had worn off, long since. “I’m all for drycleaning.”

“Wait till you have to wash and iron a dozen or so men’s greasy farm shirts,” Islay said, “did you ever look at the clothes line over at Steve’s? I counted fifteen shirts there last week.”

“It’ll be grand doing Dick’s!” Harriet was undaunted.

Islay took a small pail and went up beside the fence that bordered the oat field promising Ellen she would pick enough raspberries for dessert. There was a sound of bare feet pounding over the path behind her and the Artful caught up with her. He had sighted Billy and Jack coming over the pasture field.

“The old sow’s gone!” Jackie gasped as they ran up. “An’ all her little pigs —thirteen of them, an’ we can’t find them anywhere!”

“Somebody left the bars down into the orchard,” Billy explained. “An’ she got out—she’s an old sneak anyhow . . .”

“Can I help find her?” the Artful asked, and Islay gave him permission, glad to be rid of him. They raced up along the pasture field towards the woods and Islay sat down on a stone pile beside a clump of berry bushes. The morning was hot but a breeze from the bay stole up here. She could hear the children’s high voices from the woods beyond. Down below her the old house nestled in its orchard setting. She could see the flowers in the garden, and Harriet’s red sweater drying on the grass. Beyond lay the valley, the long highway cutting through it like a white ribbon. Motor cars were little beetles shooting over its white surface. Even the pastures were burned dull gold, and here, near her, the oatfield had turned to soft yellow; yonder the wheat shone like a sheet of dull bronze.

Over to the left a groundhog was walking, lumbering back sleepily from his lettuce lunch, Islay suspected. There was a roar from Ginger who had somehow missed going with Artie. He flew up from the barnyard like an avenging army and the little lettuce thief quickened his pace. Ginger came on with tremendous leaps, and suddenly the fat little dawdler disappeared into the stone pile in the centre of the field. This was the front door of his house, and Ginger took up his station here and barked valiantly for the besieged to come out. Islay was attracted by a whistling sound on the hill above, and there was Mr. Groundhog, sitting up on a piece of turf, holding his fat sides with laughter. He was in the neighbouring pea-field at the threshold of his *back* door.

Islay laughed with him and for a moment forgot her troubles. As she

watched the groundhog she saw him suddenly dart into his hole again. A man was coming down the edge of the pasture field from the woods above. He swung easily over the fence and Islay saw with surprise that it was Dick Hartley. She waved her big hat at him gaily. Harriet absorbed every moment of his time and Islay had never had an opportunity to speak to him alone. He was still a little diffident with her, connecting her in his mind with Harriet's immediate family.

He came on with an easy stride over the rough field, smiling shyly when he saw her.

"This is great luck," he cried. "I had to run up to Steve's to borrow a chain and I saw you from the barn. I thought I'd run across and tell Harry I couldn't go to the ball practice tonight."

"And a good thing, too," Islay said. "You can't load sheaves all day and be up all night. I scold Harry every day for keeping you up so late."

He leaned against the fence, his bare brown arms on the top rail, his restless blue eyes roving the fields. "Whose fault is that!" he looked at her with his disarming smile.

"Come down and have dinner with us," she said. "Ellen's there so we're not afraid to ask anyone for a meal."

"That'd be fine," he said, "but I must get right back, thank you. Now that I've seen you, I think I'd better get back . . ." he lingered, looking down toward the house. For all he had been away to college he had the rural inability to leave quickly.

"Will you be up after the ball game?" she asked, liking him better every minute.

"No—I—I've got to go to town to meet a fellow—a fellow from—Oh it's that man, Cowan, again, from Columbia, who's been at Guelph. He just wanted to see me again. It's"—he stammered, "perhaps you'd better not say anything to Harry about it, she gets in a lather over that South American business," he laughed.

"I won't say a thing if you don't want me to," Islay said gravely, "but I thought the affair was closed."

"So it was, but one of the fellows who was going took sick, and they want to see me again. It's not easy to get fellows for a job like that. But I'm not going, and I must tell him so finally, tonight."

"It would be a wonderful experience for a young man," Islay said, more for

something to say than because there seemed any likelihood of the thing materializing. Then she looked up at him and was amazed and disturbed by a look of longing in his face.

"The Andes," he breathed. "Gee! Think of seeing the *Andes*!"

She looked at his handsome profile. Somehow it looked like Harriet's, too rebellious and self-willed for happiness.

"But you like farming, don't you, Dick?"

He shrugged his broad shoulders. "Oh, it's all right, but a farmer is tied to the soil. I'd rather do something that took me to new places once in a while. Say! What's that in the oats there?"

Something was furrowing a path through the tall grain. A huffing, puffing something, squat and ambling, showing pink between the tall shrivelled oat stalks. Dick burst into laughter.

"The runaway and her family! And the kids half-way across the township hunting her! Here, missus, home you go."

The old sow grunted a warning and immediately thirteen little pink cylinders stood motionless in the grain forest. Dick quietly let down a section of the rail fence. Islay stepped down from the stones.

"If you'll just stay there for a minute, so as not to scare her," he said, "I'll drive her out. If she gets scared she'll have all Steve's oats threshed for him ahead of time."

He vaulted the fence a few yards farther up and slowly circled the marauders. The mountain of pink stirred, signalled again, and, as though each had been thrilled by an electric current, the thirteen pink cylinders leaped to life. Slowly and with many protests over the unwarranted intrusion upon her dinner table, the runaway waddled out into the pasture, her family keeping close, each uttering a little squeaking treble to the mother's gruff grunts. Dick replaced the fence rails.

"You know how to manage animals," Islay said admiringly. "We run head on at them when they get into the garden and they go everywhere but to the exit."

"Pigs seem to hate fences. Guess there's some pig about me. I hate them too."

"Like Frost," smiled Islay. "Remember his poem about fences. Though he did say that good fences made good neighbours."

“That’s so. Say, farming isn’t all raising stock and feed; a farmer spends most of his life driving animals out of some field where they shouldn’t be back into their right place.”

He laughed ruefully. “Got to hustle! As Wise Watty says ‘it’s the middle of the week and nothing done!’ ”

He went off across the pasture field and Islay looked after him anxiously. He wasn’t happy. He hated fences, and Harriet was building one around him.

Shouts arose from the hill above and the three little boys emerged from the woods. Islay called to them and pointed to Dick disappearing into their home barnyard with the stray-aways.

When she had filled her little pail she went slowly toward the house. She could not forget the young face with its look of longing for something beyond the ranges. Was Harriet holding him against his will? Artie came running down the slope. “We hunted and hunted!” he cried. “Say, ain’t she the limit, Mrs. Reilly, that old sow? She’s a bad old mother, too. Cause Porky, that’s the teeny-weeny one, he never gets anything to eat and she doesn’t care. She jist rolls over an’ grunts!”

“But how is it that Porky doesn’t get the same as the others?”

“Well, you see, it’s like this.” His little old face was wrinkled up over the problem. “He never gets his turn. It’s this way. She ain’t got the table set with enough places, see? Jist twelve, and Porky’s thirteen. Maybe she was afraid it would be bad luck to have places for thirteen. Mommy says it is. Anyways there’s only twelve and all the big fellows gets there first.”

“Well, I suppose it’s hardly her fault then.”

“No. Mebby not. Anyways,” he added brightening, “Jack and Billy gave him milk. They have a bottle with a nipple on it for the pet lambs and Porky always runs over to them and they give him a good drink. I hope he grows bigger’n any o’ them. Boy! I hope he grows bigger’n his bad old mother!”

Harriet was inconsolable when she received Dick’s message.

“And he was so near and never came down!” she wailed.

“It was the fault of the old sow and her brood, Dick had to see *her* home or she’d have been in our garden again.”

“But why can’t he come tonight? What’s he doing? Is he going anywhere?”

“Why, I suppose there are a hundred things he might be doing. He’s a

farmer and it's harvest time."

But Harriet was not to be reasoned with. She went away up to her room directly after dinner leaving Ellen to do the dishes alone.

Celia came over in the evening to meet David, looking even more lovely than usual. She brought a message. Uncle Geordie had telephoned and Aunt Bella wanted them all to go down for supper any night this week. "She wants us before the threshing, and they're expecting to be hauling in this week!"

"Suppose I run down in my car and tell her we'll come tomorrow," Harriet suggested.

"That'll not be necessary, Harry," Islay said hastily. "Besides Dick might not be home and your trip would be wasted," she added shyly.

"I think he had to go to Carlisle," Celia said innocently. "It's too bad, but tomorrow night's the Acton Hill garden party, Harry, did you forget?"

"How revolting!" Harriet was incapable of remembering anything but the desolating fact that she would not see Dick this evening. "I'm fed up on garden parties."

Celia's blue eyes were wide open in surprise.

"I'll tell you, Celia," Islay said. "We'll go the day you are to sign your contract and we'll drive down to Beaver Valley and stop at Uncle Geordie's on the way home. And we'll force that mother of yours to come with us. Now, you make all the arrangements. We idle folk here can go any day that's convenient."

To Islay it was a relief to have some plan to occupy her mind. They would go to Uncle Geordie's and she would tell him her troubles. He was the one person whom she could trust, completely. And his advice would be wise and kindly.

The next morning she started a campaign to get Minnie to go. The harvest days were on and the tempo of the farm was stepped up, and at first Minnie was aghast at the suggestion that she and Celia both leave home for a whole afternoon and supper as well. It was not to be thought of. But Islay telephoned and sent the Artful over with messages. Harriet and Ellen, Lily Anne and Reddy were all enlisted in the good work. Opposition at last gave way. Minnie finally yielded when Islay telephoned to say that any woman who didn't appreciate having a nine-hundred-dollar daughter didn't deserve one.

Minnie was still laughing and repeating this sally when Islay and Harriet drove up the lane for the great expedition. She was dressed and ready but full

of forebodings. Lily Anne was in charge, mightily pleased with her authority, and everything that could be got ready for the supper was prepared. The kitchen and pantry shelves were piled with pies and cookies, buns and biscuits. Reddy and Wise Watty had promised to do the milking. Stevie would do the separating. Each of the three younger children had a task. They were clustered around, aghast. Here was their mother leaving home in the day-time and nobody sick!

It was a wonderful drive, better than the first one for now there was no anxiety over the encounter before them. Harriet drove and they sped up and up over the great hills of the ridge, dipped down into the valleys, through cool woodlands and out along broad stretches of white highway. Minnie sat with her hard, discoloured hands lying idle in her lap and her eyes were like the eyes of those who look towards the Celestial City. They topped the last hill and swept down into the lovely greenness of Beaver Valley and drew up at Trustee McNabb's gate with its half-shingled barn. Islay could not keep back a childish fear that perhaps the doctor would be here seeing his patient.

The signing of the contract was a wonderful ceremony. It took place in McNabb's bedroom, where the other two trustees were waiting. They all praised the little teacher, until Celia's rosy face grew grave and Minnie's grave face grew young and rosy. Then they gave her the key of the school, *her school*, and she went through it. She played *O Canada* on the piano, and counted the maps and the blackboards and said so many 'Ohs' and 'Ahs' over the teeny-weeny seats for the teeny-weeny children that even her mother was moved to laugh at her.

17

The Cuckoo's Nest

CELIA WAS VERY QUIET ON THE WAY HOME, OVERWHELMED by the magnitude of her new honours. She was *Miss* Laird, now, of the Beaver Valley School. But Harriet grew gayer as each fleeting mile between herself and Dick diminished. Islay noticed that the habitual look of strain on Minnie's face, the look of a runner in a close race, had vanished. She had won the first lap and was getting her breath for a second.

"Think of Stevie being in high school in another month! And what do you think? Celie's bound Lily Anne will go too! I just can't believe it."

Dick was going to hunt up some of his old high school books for Stevie. My, but Uncle Geordie was pleased that Dick would be settling down now. He had always wanted to be up and away before. But did Cousin Islay really think that Harry would be contented on the farm? Minnie was working night and day that she might shove her own family off the farm, and was puzzled to find anybody who was ready to come back to it.

Well, Dick was a fine boy anyhow, a good boy. Maybe he wasn't as given to staying at one job as Uncle Geordie would like, but he had never had an awful happy home when he was little. Poor Aggie, Uncle Geordie's wife, was a Henderson, and the Hendersons were all red-headed and awful clean. Did Islay see the parlour when she was there? No? Ah well, Aunt Bella would likely have it opened up today. They kept it shut mostly, since Aggie died. It was just as she left it. Did Islay remember when there was a craze for painting on tidies and plates?

Islay said she did, indeed, that the parlour at the Old Home Place was full of just such daubs, and she and Ellen were trying to clear them all out.

"Eh, well, well," Minnie said, rather taken aback. "Some of poor Aggie's painted plates were lovely. You'll see yourself. Uncle Geordie used to like to sit in the front room by the box stove and play the fiddle in the evening. But he wouldn't sit there when Dick couldn't. Aunt Aggie made the boy stay in the kitchen, he was always knocking the tidies off the chairs. So Uncle Geordie kinda got into the habit of sitting with the boy when he was doing his lessons, and after a while he kinda got out of the way of playing his fiddle and that was

too bad, because Geordie was such a fine fiddler. Geordie and Dick were always chums. Dick was always threatening to run away and go on one of the lake boats, all the boys here were wild to get sailing on those big freighters. Eh, I've got a lot to thank you for!" she laid her hard hand on Islay's silk-clad knee. "Stevie's always saying he'll be off sailing some day, and I've been that scared he'd miss his schooling. My, My! It was a great day for us when you came to the Old Home Place!"

Islay could make no reply, thinking how easily she might have missed this great day. She tried to turn Minnie's thoughts to the harassing subject of Artie's mother, to see if there were any help available.

Eh, eh, the poor buddy! Wasn't it awful to have her away down there alone all day and her so near her time? But the doctor had got a place for her in the Carlisle hospital. She was worrying about the money but the doctor said never to mind. Wilfred, that was the husband, said he had a little saved, and he would pay some now and the rest later, after the harvest. He seemed a kinda good enough fellow. Ike said he was a hard worker. But Uncle Geordie said he was just a poor little deedle-doddle buddy.

"I feel that bad about her sometimes when I go to bed," Minnie said, "that I can't sleep for thinking about her. Mr. Carruthers said the last time he was down there he thought he wouldn't feel so bad if she'd complain a little, and that's the way I feel. There's never a whimper out of her and she left three little graves behind her. Eh, eh, if she takes sick down there alone I'll never forgive myself."

The heat of the day had been growing more oppressive, but as they topped the last hill overlooking Laird Valley a sudden breeze swept up from the bay. Dark clouds rolled over the horizon. Thunder growled ominously behind them.

"Oh, it looks like rain," Minnie cried. "We'll have to get home, Celie. Your poppa'll be tryin' to get in the last load from the field, and the boys won't be able to milk."

They were sweeping down the hill and Uncle Geordie's house was peeping up above the orchard trees, like a shy child.

"It won't hurt the cows to go unmilked for one night," Harriet declared. "We've just *got* to go to Uncle Geordie's for supper."

"A fine farmer's wife you're going to make," Islay cried, "leaving the cows unmilked. But keep on. This woman just has to learn to get away from home once a year anyway. If it didn't rain, something else would happen."

Celia turned. "Momma, I'll go home and look after everything. Harry,

could you take me, and then come back?"

"Nothing doing! We can't have a nine-hundred-dollar teacher messing round the barnyard with cows. You're going to the tea party too." Harriet was adamant.

Dick stood holding the gate open when they came sweeping up the road. Behind the house the bay was a livid, threatening purple. Lightning forked across its surface, the dust of the lane swirled in a black column. Dick sprang up on the running board.

"You folks all hurry in. It's going to be a downpour in a minute. I'll put away the car."

They all leaped out and ran up to the old veranda, all except Harriet, Islay noted with annoyance.

Uncle Geordie was on the veranda to hurry them in and Aunt Bella came forward with her silent but hearty welcome. Even the dogs came out, waving their tails and showing they understood that this was an occasion.

"Now, this rain was sent so you could stay, Minnie!" Young Geordie cried. "Even Steve can't haul in any more tonight."

The two young folk came running hand in hand from the barn, not before some heavy drops swirled across the lane. They leaped in, laughing, and slammed the door. None too soon. Lightning zigzagged, a slender serpent of fire in an angry sky, split by thunder. The storm burst.

It was plain to Islay, that while Uncle Geordie liked and admired Harriet, Aunt Bella did not share his sentiments. She belonged to the days when girls stayed at home helping their mothers and waiting for Providence to send a husband.

"Eh, eh, my, my!" she said in her soft whisper, turning to Minnie and shaking her head. "Young people ain't much like they were in our day, eh, Minnie? Come away! Come away, now, and put away your things. Eh, I'm that glad you've come! And we're near ready to sit down!"

"And we've got all the chores done!" Uncle Geordie shouted. "We've been gettin' ready for you since daylight."

The long table, with the best linen cloth, was set in the cool winter kitchen. Aunt Bella led the guests through the sacred room that had been Aggie's pride, to the hushed, airless spare bedroom where they deposited hats and sundries on the high white feather bed. Aunt Bella ushered them back to the parlour where they seated themselves primly and in state on the ornate chairs. All but Harriet.

She ran out to see what Dick was doing. Celia soon followed her. Minnie looked about her, nervously. Islay looked too, and wondered what Ellen would do with this room. Every nook and corner, every foot of wall space was crammed with ornaments and dabs of fancy work. Rows of large china plates covered with hand-painted roses were set up on shelves around the room, on the organ, on the tables and on the whatnot in the far corner. Paintings of stiff flowers of known and unknown variety cluttered the walls; winter scenes, most of which featured a robin on a bare branch, vied with the flora. Aggie had evidently considered herself good on robins, and had painted them very red like the illustrations in the old English child's annuals. Uncle Geordie came to the door and looked in.

"These were poor Aggie's pictures," he whispered, and Islay's good heart prompted her to get up and go round the room to admire them. Their beauty was not in them, but in the way Young Geordie spoke about them, she thought. Here was the work of a woman who had felt the urge to create but had succeeded in producing clutter. No decorative effects, nothing utilitarian. She lived only in a boy's resentment and in a man's patient endurance. When Islay turned to speak to Uncle Geordie she found him gone. Minnie had gone out too to assist in the final preparation of the supper. Islay was glad to be alone. She thought of Minnie. She had seen the kitchen table at Steve's set out with art of a utilitarian nature; rows of fruit jars, jam pots, deep purple cherries, clear shining amber jelly, crimson raspberry preserves, and over all was the warm atmosphere of a home. Ordered beauty. Islay thought with a sudden distaste of the story she was writing. What would it be? Something stiff, forced, artificial like the robins Aggie painted on the plates?

She went to the low window that looked out over the fields to the bay. Darkness settling down over the afternoon skies. Dick came tramping in, Harriet close at his heels. They seated themselves circumspectly on Aggie's unyielding sofa.

Harriet gaped at the robins.

"Aunt Aggie painted 'em." Dick read her thoughts.

"Gosh! Pretty screwy aren't they!" And then it seemed unaccountably funny to both of them and they rocked with laughter.

Islay went out to look for Uncle Geordie. She hoped there might be a chance for a quiet word with him before supper. She found him in the woodshed kitchen feeding more fuel into the big cook stove, already smoking hot. Rain pounded on the sloping roof. Islay went out to the woodshed beyond and watched the jets of water bounce from the path by the door. The fields

were swirling silver, the bay obscured in rolling clouds. The air was sweet and rain-fresh.

"Man, I like to hear the rain on the roof like that," Uncle Geordie said, pulling up an old bench in front of the door. "Takes me back to the old days when all us lads slept up in the loft. It gave you a good kinda feelin' hearin' the rain poundin' away and knowin' you were safe under cover. When we were wee codgers, mother used to tell us a psalm to say when there was a storm outside. It was that one that goes:

The Lord is thy keeper, thy shade upon thy right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night . . .

"Yes, I can say it all from start to finish. Well, well," he added rubbing his hands. "Wouldn't it be grand if Dick and this fine lassie o' yours would really settle down here. Eh, man, I hope they will," he added wistfully.

"I don't know," Islay said. "Harriet has never learned to do anything useful. But I believe if she learned . . ." she hesitated. "If they would only wait till she was more ready to take on the duties of a farmer's wife . . ."

Uncle Geordie sighed. "I don't know," he said, "Dick's never been strong on farming." He lowered his voice. "That there fellow from South America, Barran Quilla I think is the place, he's been after him again. And he's all upset."

"Would he really like to go? If they could only go together . . ."

"That's it. But, 'no married men', is the rule. It's a good job too. They're sending a big shipment of thoroughbred cattle from Canada to Columbia it seems. But he'd have to sign up for a year."

"I really think you had better advise him to go, Uncle Geordie. Harriet would be far better prepared for marriage in a year."

Uncle Geordie shook his head sadly. "A year's eternity to you when you're young," he said, "and ye can't map out folks' lives for them, least of all young folks. I was hopin' Dick was settled down. But eh, man, all these boys raised along the Georgian Bay is jist like a cob o' hybrid corn. They're neither farmers nor sailors, but a mixture of both. And they all have to get the sailorin' out o' their system before they can plough a straight furrow. A few summers sweatin' on the lake boats generally takes it out o' them. But it kinda made Dick more of a wanderer."

He sighed heavily. There was a minute's silence. Islay seized her

opportunity.

"Uncle Geordie, I have another problem beside Harry. I need your advice." Rapidly she told him of the visit to Artie's mother and her discovery of the old Bible. Uncle Geordie was amazed. Bessie's daughter! Why he remembered well the day Bess had that Bible presented to her by the old minister, Doctor Campbell. "Eh, eh, Bessie's girl! Did ye ever hear the like of it? But are ye sure?"

"One good look at her is proof enough. She's like every one of the Lairds of my family. And the little boy looks like Pete. I always thought so."

Young Geordie sat speechless, able only to nod his head again and again.

"But I have more to tell you," Islay whispered. She drew the old letter out of her handbag. She told him of the date of her visit to Great-Aunt Christena, and explained that this letter had been written just the day before. Then she handed it to him. The old man brought out his spectacles and adjusted them carefully. The rain rattled down on the shed roof unheard, as he sat and read and re-read, shoving his spectacles this way and that as though he doubted the witness of his eyes. Then he sat with it in his hand for a long while shaking his head sorrowfully.

"Eh, man, man, but poor Teenie was the hard one! Eh, eh! And she was trying to do what was right at the last minit. And it was too late! She jist couldn't! Eh, we're all like that. Put it off till we're not able."

"Yes, she intended to do what was right," Islay said softly, "and she would have if I hadn't happened to come that day. And what am I to do? I want your advice, Uncle Geordie?"

The old man looked out into the rain. "There's no question about your rights," he said.

"No, but isn't there a big question about the *right*," she answered. "I know what I ought to do, but I suppose I want someone to tell me I don't need to do anything about it."

She waited, but Young Geordie sat silent. He was not ready to tell her, she realized, that nothing should be done about it.

"The wisest man I know," he said at last, "is our minister, Mr. Carruthers. He would say what you're thinkin' about was more than right. He'd call it the Second Mile. It would be the kinda thing your grandfather, Old Gentleman Laird would do."

"And you think I ought to do—something?" Islay whispered.

“Eh, eh, I’m no one to advise ye, lass! It doesn’t seem right or just, somehow. You wait now. Think it over. Don’t do anything rash. We must find out more about this Pierson buddy. Ike thinks he’s all right, but kinda beaten like. Eh, eh, it’s a hard bargain Christena set for ye. She may not have intended it but it was like her to do that. But you wait. Keep the letter to yerself for a little. Mebby the poor bit thing doesn’t want any one to know Bess was her mother. It looks like it. You jist wait.”

Islay sat silent and dismayed. It was quite evident that Uncle Geordie expected her to do the generous thing by these tramps. Must she take them into her home? The place had become so dear.

He was sitting silent, his brows drawn together, looking out into the gray wet fields. Then his face suddenly brightened.

“Yes, that’s it! You keep quiet and something’ll happen. It always does, when you don’t know what to do. Somehow, when you think the fences are all up, you find the bars down and you drive through!” He lowered his voice. “When I’m kinda stuck like that, somethin’ always happens. The Lord kinda gives me a shove in the right direction. Then I *have* to do it, ye see. I’m jist the opposite to St. Paul, the evil that I would, that I do not, and the good I would not, that I do. It ain’t because I want to. I kinda get a shove. Yes, that’s it! The Hand of the Lord! Jist you wait!”

Minnie came out with her knitting, to sit on the bench with them, and Islay slipped the letter back into her bag.

The three dogs were curled up in a dry corner of the shed, and Uncle Geordie called them to show their tricks. They came waving their tails graciously, three fine collies. Each one had an accomplishment. At a command Wellington leaped at the wide door and shut it with a bang, slipping the big latch into place. Wolfe trotted to the wood-pile and choosing a big piece of stove-wood, carried it into the kitchen and placed it carefully in the wood-box, Bruce sat up very straight and set up a dolorous howl when urged to sing *Home Sweet Home*. And these were only samples of their repertoire, Young Geordie explained. Wolfe would lie in the gap when they were hauling in and keep the cattle out of the field, and Wellington would run down to the bay and bring up a pail of water.

The storm was gathering for a new onslaught, with increased rain, thunder and lightning. Aunt Bella pulled down the dark paper blinds to shut out the storm and Minnie lit two lamps for the table. Celia summoned them all to supper and they sat down in the airy kitchen in the soft glow of the lamp light. Aunt Bella had served her best. There were new-laid eggs, and home-made

cheese, mild and delicious, and honey from Uncle Geordie's bees, pouring out of the comb like liquid gold. There was home-made bread and buns too, as good as Minnie could make, raspberry pie, cookies and layer cake, and peaches with cream.

"This is a pattern for *you*, Harry," Islay said.

"Just you wait and see!" Harriet declared, "only, Aunt Bella's spoiled both these fellows long ago, so I won't be able to do anything with them anyway." Aunt Bella demanded what was being said, and when Minnie told her, she shook her head dubiously. "No girl's got any business to get married if she can't cook," she whispered to Minnie, but Islay's sharp ears listened too.

"Eh, Minnie, this is a great day!" Uncle Geordie cried, beaming from the foot of the table. "You've got your first chicken from under your feathers, and off to roost for herself. And a nine-hundred-dollar roost the smart chicken's got for herself! Can ye beat it?"

Celia tried not to look important.

"We've all had good luck since the Old Home Place was taken," Minnie said with a glance at Islay.

"I'm thinking about that place right now. I'm wondering if we shut the windows, Harry." Harriet assured her that quite likely they hadn't, but was entirely unconcerned.

"I wanted to show you the zinnias behind the house, Minnie," whispered Aunt Bella. "They'll be grand in the morning after the rain. Couldn't you all stay all night, now?"

Minnie raised her hands in vigorous protest at the bare idea.

"My, my, my! The little ones would be frightened out of their lives!"

"Well, there'll be lots o' folks glad of an invite to stay all night tonight," warned Uncle Geordie. "It'll be mighty bad if they're on dirt roads. That's the trouble with cars, my land!"

"They say the big bridge at the Carlisle road isn't safe," Dick said. "Gosh, wouldn't it be a thriller if it was to be swept out into the bay!"

"Losh, it might happen!" Uncle Geordie cried. "The Wappitti'll be comin' down from the ridge like Niagara Falls, and if that bridge holds through the night it ain't the fault of the guys that's been tinkerin' at it."

When the supper dishes had been washed and put away they sat around the kitchen, Minnie near the window, with an anxious eye on the storm, to see

when it would be wise to venture home. Young Geordie sat beside her, his eyes wandering often in sympathy towards Islay. He liked a storm, he declared. His rheumatism was always bad when there was one coming on, but when it burst he felt fine.

"So she can tear away all she likes," he declared, "most folks has their grain in, except them fools that stook-threshes."

The young people went back into the parlour. Harriet opened the organ and Celia played. Harriet had had music lessons from the most expensive teachers all her life, but she could not play even the simple songs in the old yellow book on the organ. But Celia could play, and they sang: *Annie Laurie*, *Comin' Through the Rye*, *Believe Me*, and *Silver Threads Among the Gold*.

The rest of the party in the kitchen sang with them, and even Aunt Bella's foot kept time.

Then Dick and Harriet came out. They were carrying something between them and they handed it to Uncle Geordie.

"Get away with ye!" he cried, "get out! Me play a fiddle at my age! Don't be makin' a fool o' me!"

Aunt Bella was all smiles. "Eh, it's years and years since you played, Geordie," she whispered. "Do, now, that's a good boy."

"He used to play the fiddle just great," Dick declared. "Come along, Uncle Geordie, be a sport."

"Oh, please, Uncle Geordie," Islay cried. The old man continued to refuse stubbornly, till Harriet put the instrument to her shoulder and drew the bow across the strings with an agonized screeching. He grabbed it from her, as a mother would reach for her crying child.

"Ah, ye monkey!" he cried, "such a caterwauling!" Still grumbling and muttering he twisted and turned the keys and touched the strings, tuning it carefully with his ear held close. Then slowly, as though afraid, he drew his bow gently across the long-silent strings in a soft chord. The sound seemed to awaken something in the heart of the old man that had long been dormant. He sat erect in his chair, his feet far apart and put the fiddle to his shoulder.

At first he went feeling about for a tune, softly and hesitatingly. Then suddenly a change came over him. He brought down his bow with a sweep and away he went into the thrilling, foot-lifting lilt of *The Soldier's Joy*.

Dick leaped to his feet, caught the big table and swept it back against the wall, the two girls followed with the chairs. Aunt Bella and Minnie and Islay

laughingly fled to the old sofa beside the stove, Uncle Geordie, without pausing in his tune, shoved his chair back against the wall. Dick caught Harriet's hand and Celia danced over towards Islay. Uncle Geordie swung into a reel and in a moment was calling off in the best possible style. "*Aunt Jinny's Curran' Buns!*" Bella whispered, her eyes shining. "I'm awful glad to hear him play that. He was terrible fond o' that tune, and it seemed as if he'd never play it again!"

Uncle Geordie was far away; he had played himself into his lost youth, his head up, his foot tapping, the notes fairly dancing on his bow. When he noticed that even Harriet and Dick were leaning against the wall he drew his bow across the strings in one long full chord, and looked around laughing, as though he had awakened from sleep.

But he scowled at Dick and Harriet. "Ah, ye young wastrels," he cried, shaking his bow at them, "look what ye did to me! Look what ye made me do!"

He dropped into slower music, old tender tunes—*My Faithful Fair One*, *Ye Banks and Braes*. Harriet and Dick were up again swaying and turning in a langorous modern dance.

"Dick's been workin' awful hard all day," Aunt Bella grumbled, "he oughta be resting."

Uncle Geordie stopped at last. "Tod!" he declared, "do ye call that dancin'? Man, it ain't even good walkin'." He turned to Islay. "These poor auld buddies, there's not much zip to them. And their grandmothers could dance the Hielan' Fling all night and jist get home in time to milk the cows!"

The storm had eased off into mere rain for some time, and lest another storm burst, they made haste to leave.

Minnie was so anxious to get home that Uncle Geordie could not resist teasing her.

"Man, Minnie, I'm sorry we gave you such a slow time," he declared. "I never saw anybody so glad to leave. Ye needn't come back again for ten years more. Ye know that's how long since you were here last."

Minnie, helpless with laughter, could do nothing with him. "Oh, Geordie, Geordie!" was all she could say.

"Take care o' that nine-hundred-dollar teacher, now," he cried as he helped them into the car. "And watch out, lassie," he warned Harriet, "if the road's slippery by the crick there, you go easy, like a good girl." He whispered to

Islay, “I’ll be round to see ye, lass, and the Lord bless ye! Watch for a sign! It’ll come!”

Dick and Harriet had so many last words to say that they were long in getting away after all, and by the time they were half-way home the last gleam of daylight had faded and a fitful moon could be seen behind ragged clouds. The river was roaring, almost to the level of the bridge. Harriet paid no heed to the warning to drive slowly, and Islay had a moment of terror as they sped across and saw the raging brown water beneath.

“This is a new bridge,” Minnie said, “it’s all right, Steve says. But the one Uncle Geordie was talking about earlier is that one we crossed today over the Wappitti. It’s on the road to town and Steve says it might jist go out into the bay any night if there was high water. My, what a rain! I can’t forget them poor folks away down in that shanty. The water’ll be running right through the house. Dear, dear, and her so far on!”

Islay had nothing to say. If Minnie were worrying about her how should *she* be feeling, the usurper in the comfortable big house on the hill with far too many rooms for her use.

“We’ll go home with these people first, Harry,” Islay said as they approached her home and the car lights showed the turn in the road beside her gate.

“Why, there’s a light at your gate, Cousin Islay!” Celia cried.

“It’s a car,” Islay cried. “Look out, Harry, they’re right in the middle of the road!”

Harriet put on her brakes just in time. A man was swinging a lantern in the road, and an old car was pulled up just opposite the gate. Even in the darkness Islay recognized them—the derelicts from Saskatchewan, come to her door again, in a downpour of rain!

18

A Late Rosebud

A MAN'S FIGURE WAVERED TOWARDS THEM, HOLDING THE lantern.

"Steve!" Minnie cried out. "What's the matter? What's happened?"

"Minnie!" Steve's voice was hoarse with relief. "It's Piersons! The wife took awful sick and he started to take her to town! The car broke down right here. And he had to leave her and come back for help. And me and Watty's been' workin' at it, and—what'll we do, Minnie?"

Minnie was out in the rain and splashing through the mud to the other car before he had finished speaking.

"Steve!" she called sharply. "You'll have to go back and get our car. We'll have to take her home. She can't go any further. Hurry!"

Islay stepped out into the rain beside Minnie and heard herself say, feeling sure it was someone else. "Put her in my car and we'll take her up here. We can walk up the lane."

And so Bessie's daughter came back to the Old Home, and was carried across the threshold and laid upon her great-grandmother's bed.

Minnie took everything into her capable hands. Quietly and swiftly she issued her orders. Celia was to get clean linen for the bed; Steve to run back home and bring a bundle from the bottom bureau drawer; Watty was to put on a fire in the cook stove. She sent the helpless shivering husband to see that there was plenty of water in the house, and to Islay she gave the hardest task of all.

"Telephone Dr. Wallace, Cousin Islay! Get him somehow! He'll come!"

Like the others, Islay ran at her bidding, wondering dimly at the unbelievable tasks fate sometimes set. Minnie had said he wanted to see the Old Home again, and she had decided she would never ask him. The thought passed dimly through her mind as she went through the difficult process of getting connection on a rural line. The doctor was evidently prepared for night calls, Islay felt her heart jump as the familiar voice answered. Then she forgot everything but the desperate need of the woman lying in her bedroom.

"It's—Islay Drummond, Mack," She said simply. "They've brought Mrs. Pierson here tonight. She has been taken ill—They tried to take her to town but —Can you come out here, do you think?"

His answer was prompt. "Yes; I'll come. Where is she?"

"Here—at the Old Home Place. Minnie says it's urgent."

"Mrs. Steve? Is she there? Let me speak to her please. No, wait! Hold the line."

A man's voice had broken in. "Hello! Hello, doctor! Is that you, Dr. Wallace? This is Jim Turner speakin', on the Ninth! The bridge across the Wappitti was swept away an hour ago! Ye can't get through!"

"What! What about the bridge over on the Seventh? Or the one further up?"

"All right I guess, but no car can get through that dirt road down there. Water's runnin' four feet deep!"

"Haven't you a boat there, Jim?"

"Yeah, but there's a heck of a current. I dunno if we could make it."

"Yes, you can, Jim! There's a woman up there in Lairdale having a baby, and you've got to get me through. Call Peters, Jim! Call him and tell him to get all the Laird boys out, every mother's son of you is a sailor . . ."

"Hello, doctor, hello!" A low voice broke in. "This is Walt Peters speakin' doctor, I guess we can get that boat across."

"Atta boy! I knew you old sailors could navigate that creek! Islay, are you there?"

"Yes, Mack."

"Can anybody meet me at the other side with a good car?"

"Yes, yes, Steve . . ." Islay began, but another voice broke in. "That's all right doctor, this is Dick Hartley. I'll meet you. We'll get two cars!"

"Hello! Hello, doctor!" The first voice was shouting again, "it's all right here! All the guys is gettin' rounded up, doctor. You get out as far as the river on the Carlisle road and we'll do the rest!"

"Stout mariners! You bet you will! I'll be there in half an hour! Are you there, Islay?"

"Yes, Mack."

“Can I speak to Mrs. Steve now? And all you other guys get off the line so I can hear. I’m done with you for a little.”

“God bless all eavesdroppers,” Islay whispered half hysterically as her trembling hand put the receiver into Minnie’s steady one.

When Minnie was finished Islay noticed for the first time that her dress was dripping. She felt her own clothes wet. She looked about her in bewilderment. Most of her wardrobe hung in the room where the sick woman lay moaning, but her trunk was in the upper hall. She started for the stairs and almost stumbled over Harriet, crouched on the bottom step crying. Celia ran past the kitchen door on an errand for her mother. Her muslin dress was damp and bedraggled. Minnie came out of the inner room for a moment. “Everybody’s dripping wet,” Islay faltered—

Minnie was equal to this too. “Celie, you take wee Artie and run away home, and Harry too. Perhaps she could drive you. Put Artie in the wee bed in the boys’ room. Run away now, dearie.”

Islay found Artie in the kitchen with the men, he was clinging to his father’s hand, his big eyes full of terror. He shivered and cowered as though struck every time the sound of his mother’s anguished cries came from the inner room.

Islay found a warm sweater and wrapped it round him and the three ran out and jumped into Harriet’s car. Harriet was relieved to escape, Celia reluctant lest her mother need her. Islay had a cowardly impulse to flee with them, but put the thought away from her sternly. Minnie must have dry clothes. She found a warm dress and underwear in her trunk and insisted upon Minnie putting them on.

“I hope the doctor’ll be here soon,” Minnie whispered, as she hurriedly slipped out of her wet garments. “The poor body has no strength!”

The moans and cries were too much for Islay, she found a warm sweater for herself and went out to the kitchen. Steve already had fires roaring, both in the outer and the winter kitchen, and Wise Watty who had appeared from nowhere had filled the tea-kettle, and the wash-boiler with water. The men were wet and their clothes were steaming as they stood helpless around the fire. The husband seemed dazed. Suddenly he looked around startled. Where was Artie? he asked sharply, and then suddenly remembered that he had gone with Harriet. Islay could see that his eyes were gentle and pathetic, and his hands were long and not shaped for hard labour. He was as thin as Artie, and stood shivering in his wet clothes. She took a lamp and went upstairs again. There was a chest of old Uncle Peter’s clothes in the back room. She came

down with a warm shirt and overalls and sent the shivering waif upstairs to dress. She handed out warm coats and dry sweaters to the others. It was good to see them put to some use. She was glad to serve even Old Watty and Steve. The latter seemed transformed. He sat on the step of the door leading up into Grammy's Ben ready to do Minnie's bidding. At a sound from her he was up and at her side.

The rain still pounded on the back kitchen roof, but the place was warm and dry. Islay placed chairs beside the stove for Old Watty and Artie's father, but the latter remained standing, staring at the floor.

"Did the rain come through the roof of the little house?" Islay asked gently.

He stared at her now, as though he was seeing her for the first time.

"I dunno as it was the roof," he said, "it jist came in everywheres. The spring behind the house just bust out. Water was two feet deep all over the floor." He looked about him in a dazed manner. "We've been *flooded* out!" he whispered in a sort of patient bewilderment. "Us *flooded out*! We got our crop all dried up for six years in the West and we come back East and we get near drownded!"

He displayed no sign of resentment against his fate, only a sort of dull wonder.

"I guess she's awful bad, ain't she?" he whispered with a jerk of his head towards the room.

"The doctor won't be long now," Islay said, "he said he'd be just half an hour getting to the river."

She rose and walked through the winter kitchen, already hot and steaming. In the long hall it was damp and dark. The front windows commanded a view of the road. The doctor could not possibly be here yet, but she could not keep from looking out into the blackness for the light of a slackening car. Patches of ghostly sky showed where the ragged clouds cleared.

There was nothing to do but wait. Up and down the dim hall and back again aimlessly! The agonized cries from the bedroom seemed to be growing fainter. Minnie came out and rummaged in a drawer. She looked haggard. "Eh, I wish he'd come! She's got so little strength," she faltered, as she hurried back. Islay continued her futile pacing of the hall. What if the doctor could not get through? What if he were lost in the floods.

'He never refuses,' Minnie had said, 'no matter how bad the roads are, or how little money folks have.'

She could hear the slow ticking of the old clock in Grammy's Ben. It had marked the slow hours for all the Laird women who had born their children in that little room. Islay put her hands over her ears and fled down the hall again. Staring out to where the lamp light from the window shone silver on the driving rain, she felt a surge of humiliation. There was nothing she could do. All the pain and misery of the world passed her by, unfelt. She had avoided everything unpleasant. She had cushioned her life on every side and now when life's tragedies pressed around her she was helpless. Like a child.

Wise Watty put more wood into the winter kitchen stove. The place was stifling already but Islay watched from the hall with something like admiration. He was an old man. He could have been at home in his comfortable bed. But here he was, trying to do something, anything, to ease a fellow-mortal through hours of anguish.

Steve came stumbling in to her in the semi-darkness.

"Is there a lantern in this place anywheres?" he whispered, "mine's burned out. Thought I'd better go down to the gate."

Islay recollected that Ellen had cleaned and filled the old lantern for Artie a few days before. She found it hanging in the shed.

"You'll get all wet again, Steve," she said, as she found matches for him. She was touched by his self-forgetting.

He looked surprised. "Oh, that don't matter," he said casually, and plodded out into the rain. Islay watched the little light bobbing through the blackness down the lane.

Wilfred was standing in the place where she had left him, Wise Watty sitting silently beside him. She went back into the hall. It seemed as if she had been walking up and down in the darkness for many weary nights. She could see the light of Steve's lantern. It must be at the gate. She stood watching it. The old clock in Grammy's Ben whirred, coughed, struck one solemn emphatic stroke.

Then she saw something—a glow far down the road, a long shaft of light piercing the darkness like a lance! It was a car! Another shaft of light! A second car behind it!

Steve's lantern waved frantically. Would they stop? They were slowing up. Perhaps they were only passing cars slackening because the lantern signalled. No! They were turning in! The blazing lights raced up the lane! She ran back into Grammy's Ben to tell Minnie.

Then she rushed out to the kitchen door. The first car halted with a spouting of mud and gravel and the doctor, bag in hand, was out of it and at the door. Islay flung it wide open. “Oh, Mack, you’ve come!” she cried wildly.

He wrung her hand till it hurt and then he was in the kitchen flinging aside his wet coat and shaking the water from his cap. Minnie met him and he followed her swiftly into the inner room. Islay noticed that his boots were sopping and his clothes heavy with water. Then to her amazement Steve came tramping in. Then some people dashed in out of the rain and seemed to crowd the kitchen; there were two men who had brought the doctor and two women with them. Islay recognized them—her two enemies of the telephone conversation and their husbands.

“The boys was comin’ with the doctor,” Mrs. Jim Turner whispered breathlessly, “so we thought we’d better come, too, and lend Minnie a hand.”

Islay led them into the winter kitchen. Their arms were full of bundles which they laid on the table. They took off their wraps in a professional manner. She felt a great surge of gratitude and relief.

“We brought some baby clothes,” this was the crisp voice that Islay remembered had said she was the ‘Spit of old Aunt Teenie’. Its owner unfolded her bundle and spread out an array of tiny garments, all soft and fine.

“I had these left from last time—” she faltered. Tears slipped down her round pretty face.

“Marty lost her last baby,” Mrs. Jim Turner of the raucous voice now explained gently, “and she brought all her little things here. Minnie was makin’ some things but we knew there wouldn’t be much. I brought some things too.” She unrolled a bundle containing a heap of old soft linen, a small warm blanket and a little woollen shawl.

“It seemed kinda wrong to keep these,” Martha Peters said, tenderly fingering the precious little shirts and diapers, “I said to Nell, they’ll never be needed worse.”

“Eh, me, I hope there’s a baby to put into them,” Mrs. Turner whispered. “Here Marty. We’ll hang them up beside the oven door. My, you’ve got a grand fire on.”

Marty wiped away her tears. Mrs. Jim tied on her apron and the two busied themselves in preparation for the little guest. Mrs. Turner looked into the wash boiler.

“Goody, lots o’ hot water too!” She turned to Islay apologetically. “Do you

think you could get us a wash basin? It's awful that everything happened to come down on you this way."

"Oh, but I'm so thankful to help! And you people are all so good. Just take anything you want, everything! Yes, yes, I'll get the basin from the bedroom upstairs."

Islay waited on them in a warm rush of gratitude, running for olive oil, soap, the dipper, warm water. They pulled up a small table to the open oven door and covered it with a warm blanket and a sheet.

"Now, we're all ready," Mrs. Jim said, warming her hands over the stove.

The three women seated themselves by the fire. From the summer kitchen came the low sound of men's voices. The terrible moans from the inner room had ceased. The heavy odour of an anaesthetic stole out through the hall. Wise Watty came in again with yet another armful of wood and Steve followed with another pail of rain water.

Suddenly the lights of a car glared past the window and Islay went out to the door.

"Harriet!" She was astonished.

"I saw the cars go up!" Harry whispered breathlessly. "Celie and I hadn't gone to bed, and so I just came back. It seemed awful to run away and . . ."

"Oh, Harry, it was good of you! You are wet, child. Come on in."

"Is she very bad?" Harriet whispered, awe-struck, as she followed Islay into the hall. "Fine the doctor got through anyway!"

"You still have on those wet clothes, Harry! Come on upstairs! What is that you have?"

"Celia sent it. It's a ham, and I have six loaves of bread in the car and a pail of milk. Celia said the men would all be hungry."

Islay had forgotten completely about food. She followed Harriet upstairs. "Harry!" she cried, "you and I have a great deal to learn from these farm folk!"

"I'll say we have!" Harriet peeled her wet dress off over her head. "That's why I came back. I felt like a piker, running away. Celia and I listened over the phone. I guess from what we heard they had an awful time at the river. Dick was there! And Dave Fraser. He called Celia and told her that Dick waded out into the water with a rope and caught the boat. So I thought I ought to come back. Oh, Islay, isn't it awful? Is she still suffering? Say a woman's a darn fool to get married, anyway!"

Islay had no answer for this, but an answer came the next moment. As they stole softly down stairs there floated out from Grammy's Ben a new sound; a thin penetrating cry.

"What's *that*?" Harriet halted, breathless, on the bottom step.

Islay felt the tears stinging her eyes. Mrs. Jim Turner ran out into the hall, her face red with excitement.

"Oh, my gravy, thank the Lord for that! There's a good pair of lungs!"

Many hours later, how many Islay had no idea, she found herself in the summer kitchen making a third pot of coffee, while her two late enemies cut and spread more and still more sandwiches. Celia's ham and bread had disappeared but more provisions had come out of another basket.

"Marty and me brought along some stuff," Mrs. Jim said casually, as she produced a big cold roast of beef, and a couple of pies. "We knew you couldn't be ready for a crowd like this. Men are always hungry."

Everyone seemed hungry by this time. The tension of the long night was lifted. Everyone was happy and smiling. The men sat in the kitchen around the stove and the women waited on them.

The warm winter kitchen was given over entirely to the newcomer, a fine strong boy, with a lusty voice. Harriet had taken charge of him for the present, sitting breathless with the precious bundle held carefully before the oven door. While Mrs. Jim Turner had undertaken the tremendous task of washing and dressing him, Harriet had knelt before her watching the proceedings, fascinated!

Oh, oh! Did they see that? His eyes! Why, he had opened them! And look at the darling lamb's wee head! All covered with hair! She thought babies were supposed to be bald. His was like black satin! And would they look at his wee wrinkled face. Seemed to be peeved about something! Oh, wasn't he the lamb! Why he had toes, too! Ten of them! And finger nails! Why, he was all finished off perfect before he came!

All this and more, until the two young mothers, intent upon his first toilette, were rendered incompetent with amusement. When his last bow was tied and his last pin fastened Minnie came out, all smiles, and took him in for his mother to look at.

When he was brought back, Minnie warmed yet another soft shawl, and with infinite care enveloped the small bundle. She was about to sit down with it when Harriet begged the privilege of holding him for a moment. Minnie

gave her the low seat beside the stove, with an indulgent smile.

Harriet sat down and held out her arms. She glanced down at her slacks doubtfully. “I guess they’re not the right sort of costume,” she said apologetically.

“No, I guess they’re not,” Minnie said, a smile lighting up her worn face. “A woman needs a broad, comfortable lap.”

Islay went out to the kitchen and poured more coffee. She filled the doctor’s cup again and listened as in a dream to the chatter and laughter.

It was all a dream surely! She and Mack here together, smiling at each other in Grammy’s kitchen.

The men were crossing the river once more.

“It was jist touch and go there for a little while,” Jim Turner said. “I thought you was all goin’ clean out into the bay.”

“Guess you would have, ’cording to all I hear,” Steve said, “if it hadn’t a’ been for you, Walt.” Steve’s generosity was still warm.

Walt Peters, a mild giant with a soft voice, looked embarrassed. “Oh, it wasn’t so bad,” he protested, scouring his big hands.

“Us folks that was waitin’ on this side for the doctor, couldn’t see why yous wanted to go for a boat ride, when he was in a hurry,” Turner said. “You was a good mile down below the road ’fore you landed.”

“Wanted to watch you fellows run along the bank,” the doctor said.

“Pretty fair sprinters, you and young Hartley.” And the laughter broke out again. The men were looking at the doctor with shining eyes, that told more than they would ever say. Islay felt her throat contract. She slipped away into the inner room to see the baby again.

“There ain’t anything them boys wouldn’t do for Doctor Wallace,” she heard Mrs. Jim Turner say.

“And well they might,” little Mrs. Peters returned, “They know he’d risk his life for them.”

Mrs. Jim Turner stopped suddenly and stared at the window. “Well, my gravy!” she shouted. “Say, you, Jim Turner, it’s *tomorrow,* do you know that! You come along home and milk the cows!”

Wise Watty pulled himself up from his warm seat behind the stove. He looked accusingly at Steve. “Say, ain’t that a caution now? Here it’s the middle

of the week and nothing done!”

19

New Bloom on the Old Tree

ON THE DAY THAT ROBERT LAIRD PIERSON WAS THREE weeks old he held his second reception. Big brother Artie had been boasting to Steve's children about his new brother. Even the exploits of the 'Glad Eaters' paled when *he* waved a wee pink fist over the edge of his basket. 'Due to insistent demand', Islay invited all the children over one afternoon to look at the baby.

He was quite worth looking at for his own beautiful sake, but, surrounded as he was by billows of lace and embroidery, silk robes and satin coverlets, he was really quite special. All his magnificence was due to Harriet. She was the baby's abject slave, always on hand to wait on Minnie or his mother in the matter of bath or bottle, putting forward her opinions, and arguing loudly, even with the doctor, when his did not coincide with her own. A few days after the baby's arrival she and Artie had dashed into town, returning with everything they saw in the shops that a baby could possibly need in his first year. The prize purchase was an elaborate bassinet, lined with blue silk and lace, hung with filmy curtains and bedecked with blue satin bows. All the clothing was of the same quality, but fortunately Minnie insisted gently that he be dressed in the little garments that Cousin Martha had brought, as the ribbon-bedecked trousseau was pronounced entirely unwashable.

When Coppy had rattled up and down the line distributing Sea Foam loaves and the astonishing news that Bessie Shaw's grandson had been born at the Old Home Place, the whole Laird settlement was unanimous that his name must be Robert Laird. He would be the fourth to hold the name.

"And we'll call him Robert IV," Harriet declared.

To Islay this was all a part of the marvellous force that was surely urging her forward to her great decision. 'Watch for a sign,' Uncle Geordie had warned her; 'It'll come.' Well, she had had many of them. The good that she would not do must be done, and the sooner the better.

On the day before the baby's party she went into Grammy's Ben to find that his mother had left her chair and was peering anxiously into the bassinet.

"Is there anything wrong with him, Annie?" she asked.

The mother dropped back into her arm chair with an apologetic smile.

"No, no. It's just that I'm so silly. Every once in a while I have to take a look at him, just to be sure he's there. I—I can't believe it, somehow."

Islay felt her eyes smarting. "Oh, he's there all right," she cried gaily, "why, he's hardly a baby any more! Harriet will soon have to buy him regular boys' clothes! By winter, I daresay."

Annie smiled but shook her head. "Winter! We must be far away long before that." She said it with a firmness that reminded Islay of Aunt Christena. "You've been far too good, but we mustn't be a burden. Wilf will find work somewhere when he's through the harvest. We're here too long now."

Islay looked out at the plumes of Bessie's willows waving in the sunny pasture field. Wilfred had just passed under them on his way home from his day's work. She went out and called him into the room. She must speak now before her courage failed.

She sat with them and told them all the story of how she came to inherit the Old Home. She did not show Annie the letter, it was too harsh, but she confessed that Aunt Christena's first intention had been to leave the farm to Bessie's daughter and her children, so it must be saved for Artie and Robert IV. Wilfred must work the place with Steve. As for her, all she wanted was a corner in Grammy's Ben where she could put her typewriter and her papers.

She had stopped there, for the man was staring at her in silence, a red spot burning in each hollow cheek, and the woman who had stood up under the blows of ill fortune for seven years of famine, bowed her head in her thin hands and burst into a violent fit of weeping. Islay tip-toed out and left them. She had looked forward with dread to this day that she knew was inevitable, when she must hand over her inheritance to strangers, but now she found herself going about the house singing.

Harriet met her in the hall, coming down from a painting orgy in her brilliantly decorated bedroom.

"Hey, Mrs. Reilly," she cried, staring at her. "You look mighty swell today. Have you eaten the canary?"

Islay laughed and went on her way. She had dropped Artie's song about the little red hen and a quiet life, and adopted the one the children sang when they danced on the lawn to Louby-Lou:

'I give my whole self a shake, shake, shake,
And I turn myself about!'

So the day the new baby made his first public appearance was a greater celebration than the guests knew. Minnie came over with the children to spend a few minutes of the afternoon between baking and milking. She was supremely happy these days. Both Stevie and Lily Anne were getting ready for high school. Steve had been deeply impressed by Celia's nine hundred dollars, and on the strength of this, Minnie had managed to get the next two launched in higher education. And she was even now in the midst of a campaign to get Jackie to take music lessons.

The children came trooping up the veranda steps on tip-toe to look at the baby. Artie was the proud showman and carefully lifted the blue satin spread for each one. Nobody had ever seen a baby in such elegant surroundings, and there were long gasps of admiration. Little Audrey gazed at him with wondering eyes, her little brown hands clasped ecstatically. "Oh, oh," she whispered, "it's the loveliest doll I ever saw."

Afterwards they ran all over the orchard for apples. Steve's orchard had more apples than the family could use, but the children were as eager to taste the apples of the Old Home orchard as if they had none.

When the cookies and lemonade and home-made candy were finished Celia lined them up on the lawn to show Annie the new folk dances. And they all marched and sang about the Muffin Man that lived in Drury Lane, and the song that had taken Islay's fancy: 'Here we go Louby-Lou.'

'I put my whole self in, I put my whole self out,
I give my whole self a shake, shake, shake,
And I turn myself about.'

In the middle of the dance everyone stopped and cried out joyfully. For here came Uncle Geordie pounding up the lane in a rattling old buggy, driving one of his biggest and clumsiest farm horses. He pulled up in front of the house with a proud flourish.

Ah, this was the way to get over the road, he cried. Yes, siree! He had driven that devil's threshin' machine for the last time. He was ready now to go anywhere. He'd have been here to see Bessie's girl long before this but he'd been waiting for two weeks to get his horse shod. Dod, what a degenerate day we were living in! Hardly a man in Wappitti township who could shoe a horse. He'd been spending the whole afternoon at Jimmy Peters' place next to the gas station. They *called* it a blacksmith shop, but Jimmy hadn't the right sized nails and he hadn't this that or the other.

"Not sure if he has a hammer of his own," Young Geordie clambered out

of the tall buggy. “Might jist as well take Queenie to the dressmaker! Dod, I believe Liza’s girl down there that makes all the frills for you weemen could a done a better job. But jist you wait till I get a new set o’ harness and get spruced up, and I’ll be comin’ up here every evening to take one o’ yous young ladies for a drive. And don’t you all speak at once for it’s goin’ to take me a while to make up my mind.”

Islay led him up to the veranda and seated him beside the drooping little figure in Grandma’s arm chair. They left him alone with her, Islay knowing he would have something kindly to tell of her mother. When they came back from a tour of the house to show Minnie all the good work Ellen had done upstairs, they found that Uncle Geordie’s magic had worked. Annie was laughing, a feeble laugh, but a real one. All the kindness of the women of her clan, the warm hospitality of her mother’s Old Home, that had warmed and cherished her in her dire need, and, last, the unbelievable news that it was to be her permanent home had been too much. It was overwhelming! The old man’s gay, fatherly welcome was the tonic she needed.

“Oh, Uncle Geordie,” Islay cried, “stay and have supper. Let’s have a farewell party for Celia. Minnie, can’t you stay too, just for once!”

Minnie was already rolling up her knitting and preparing to go home. She laughed at the absurd idea. No, no, that would be impossible. She’d had a grand visit already. But Celia could come back after the chores were done. “Come, children, come away! Take one more look at the doll, Audie, and we must run back to our work.”

They had just left when a battered grey car, that Islay recognized far down the road, turned in at the gate and sped up the lane. This was the doctor’s second visit since the night he had come through the floods. Islay went down the veranda steps, but Harriet was ahead of her and was shouting that they were having a party and he must stay for supper and taste her cookies. They had become great friends already, squabbling gaily over the treatment of the baby. She was denouncing his latest orders now, standing before him in the centre of the lawn.

“Now, see here, Doctor Malcolm Wallace, I won’t allow Sweetie Saskatchewan to be put out on the veranda for his sleep when it’s cold and wet.”

The doctor scoffed; what an old granny she was to be sure! What did she suppose air was for? Wasn’t it to be breathed?

“Bologny!” What did he know about wind, living away down in a hole in the ground like Carlisle? The place was too dull to have even a breeze. There

were real winds up here on Georgian Bay.

The baby's mother plainly did not approve of this wise-cracking, but the doctor laughed heartily as he came forward to his patient. Islay's heart warmed when she saw the look of eager gratitude with which he accepted her invitation to Celia's party. She left him on the veranda with Annie and hurried out to help Ellen.

She spread one of Aunt Christena's best tablecloths on the long table in the winter kitchen, the place Ellen, with a can of apple green paint and a few yards of rose chintz, had converted into a picture. She brought out Grammy's best brass candlesticks and put long yellow tapers in them, and in the centre of the table she placed a green glass bowl of nasturtiums, crimson and gold and flame-coloured blossoms, blazing with the warmth and beauty of the late summer. Then she called Ellen in to give her approval. She was childishly eager that this supper should be just right.

The preparation of it proved no easy task, for Harriet insisted upon running everything, and somehow all the guests were soon underfoot. Celia came back early, looking like a rose in her pink frilled muslin, and Uncle Geordie tramped into the kitchen after her. The doctor wandered in from the veranda, on the pretence of wanting a drink, and insisted upon helping to lay the table, getting the forks where spoons should be and being scolded roundly by Harriet.

Annie was brought in from the veranda and seated in the sunny window where she could enjoy the fun. And Harriet insisted that the blue bassinet should be enthroned on the end of the couch beside her.

"What will happen to Robert IV when you desert him?" the doctor asked as Harriet gently and tenderly arranged the precious basket beside his mother's chair. "What if he should sneeze when you and Dick are away on your honeymoon!"

Harriet laughed gleefully. Any reference to her approaching marriage was a delight to her.

"Can't say I don't worry about that," she admitted, "hate to leave him with two amateurs like Islay and Annie to tinker at him. Wonder if it wouldn't be a smart idea if Dick and I took him with us on our honeymoon?"

Annie was shocked, but the doctor shouted with laughter.

"I'm afraid auntie wouldn't think that was good form," Harriet said primly. "I really don't believe it's done in the best circles."

The doctor followed her out to the kitchen where there was more fun and

laughter than work. Islay found her attitude of polite aloofness growing momentarily more difficult. Mack seated himself on the corner of the kitchen table, where Islay remembered he had sat many a time in the old days when he had come to the farm with Pete and her.

Celia had been cutting up an onion for her salad, and was wiping her eyes, and Uncle Geordie, seated right in the pathway between the stove and the table, was full of sympathy.

"There, there, Celie!" he cried, "here's the poor girl cryin' her eyes out on account o' leavin' Dave. Too bad!"

Celia, doubled up with laughter, an onion in one hand and a knife in the other, was trying to wipe her eyes with her pink frilled elbow.

"It's the on-on-on-" she was protesting, voice growing fainter and fainter, and finally changing to choked silence.

"Now, I'll tell ye what we'll do," Uncle Geordie said. "If Dave's car won't take him all the way down to Beaver Valley, all us young fellows'll get together and we'll tow him up to the top of the ridge, and push him over on the other side. If he jist keeps to the middle o' the road he'll coast clear down to your school gate."

"But it's worse than you think," Harriet cried. "Dave's going away too! To University! He's afraid Celie'll get ahead of him."

Celia looked proud. Minnie had managed this too, Islay felt sure.

"Eh, eh, ain't it a caution now." Uncle Geordie cried, "how the best o' the young folks shakes the dust o' the farm off their feet the minute they can walk alone! Well, well!"

"I know one who's the very best and he's going to stay on the farm," boasted Harriet.

Everyone laughed except Uncle Geordie. He shook his head and looked at Harriet doubtfully, but said nothing.

In spite of the fun and confusion supper was ready at last. The best seat in a corner away from draughts was arranged for Annie, and she slipped into her place shyly, trembling and smiling at the wonder of it all. The Artful sat close to her, shy with the company. He had been scrubbed and combed again, and still wore his grand new suit of the afternoon, though it looked a bit the worse from climbing trees and fences.

The supper was a great success. It was cool and pleasant in the winter

kitchen with the hollyhocks and the golden glow nodding at them through the windows, and the scent of ripe apples floating in through the screen door. Ellen's fresh biscuits were even lighter than usual. There were new-laid eggs in the little old blue egg-cups, golden apple-sauce beaten like honey, Minnie's home-made bread, Harriet's cookies, and a Johnny cake just hot out of the oven. Celia's salad was as delicious as it was beautiful—a combination of all the lovely things in the garden from ripe tomatoes to the tiny nasturtium seeds. Islay had made her best brew of coffee, remembering Mack's preference, and Celia had made a pot of strong tea for Uncle Geordie.

"Eh, man, it's good to be back at the Old Home Place," Uncle Geordie said as he reached for his fourth biscuit, stabbing it expertly with his fork. "Many's the fine meal I've had at this table, with your mother here, Annie, and yours too, Islay. It's grand to have you Annie, ye fill up a lot o' empty places."

Annie blinked away tears trying to smile.

"Oh dear, won't there be an awful empty place when Celia goes," mourned Harriet. "I was sorry you got a school, Celie. Tracking down trustees is great sport. Do you remember that place where Dick took us and we had them all rounded up in one field? Celie went across the field to attack one, and Dick took on another, and I watched the fence to see that the third didn't jump over and get away on us."

"I hear Celie knocked one trustee off the top of a barn, because he wouldn't hire her," Uncle Geordie said solemnly. "I hope it ain't true."

"We'll all miss our rides round the country, Celia," Islay said, "we had some lovely trips."

"Ye'll have far more now that I've got my horse and buggy," Uncle Geordie cried. "I'll be round to take you for a ride, Annie, jist as soon as the doctor here says you can come."

"Well she can't take Robert IV then," Harriet cried, "I won't have his precious neck risked behind that prancing elephant you're driving."

Uncle Geordie delighted to argue with Harriet, and soon they were shouting at each other across the table over the rival merits of cars and horses. Cars! Uncle Geordie scoffed. Why, the farmers round here were always getting their teams out to pull a car out of some hole. Did the doctor remember the time his car got stuck in the snow one Thanksgiving, up on the Ridge, and it took two teams to haul him out?

"Yes, and the worst of it was, it was my own fault," Dr. Mack said. "I wasn't paying any attention to the road and took a wrong turn, I ran into a

sheep track and buried myself in drifts."

Islay, sitting at the head of her table was enjoying the fun, but she added little to the conversation. She was afraid of reminiscences. You never knew where they might take you. The argument between Harriet and Uncle Geordie swelled again and Mack leaned forward and said under cover of the uproar.

"Ten years ago I repeated that mistake. I wasn't watching the road, took a wrong turn and found myself mired in a blind track."

He kept his eyes on his plate. Islay glanced at him. A sudden pity surged through her.

"I did something worse than that once," she insisted, in the same low tone. "Worse because it was done wilfully. I crashed into an old friend from sheer ill-temper."

His eyes twinkled. "I wouldn't be sorry. No doubt the fellow deserved what you gave him. Wholesome medicine!"

Between sallies Harriet had caught something of the brief conversation and was regarding them curiously.

"Well, I don't know what you two are yarning about," she exclaimed, "but it sounds as if either of you could qualify for the world's worst driver."

They looked at each other and laughed.

When the supper was cleared away and the shadows of the poplars in the lane stretched dark across the field, Wilfred came home and moved about silently doing the small services that had fallen to his lot. He filled the wood-box and the water tank on the kitchen stove, and tip-toed in for a look into the blue bassinet. Artie dragged him out to the barn to see that the pets were all safe for the night and that the 'Glad Eaters' had subsided. Annie was sent off to her bed protesting that she could help with the dishes and that they were spoiling her.

Uncle Geordie declared he must be away early or Bell would have all the chores to do herself. Islay went out with him to where his horse was tied.

"So ye told them," he whispered. "I knew it the minute I set eyes on the poor lad when he came in jist now. He looked jist like a picture I remember in mother's old Bible, the picture of the man born blind jist after he had his eyes opened. It was the same dazed look, as if he couldn't believe it. Eh, lass, I'm sorry it had to be done, but ye're the descendant of Old Gentleman Laird all right and ye jist had to do it." He gathered the reins into his hands. "Ye'll not be leavin' us, I hope?"

She told him something of her plans. No she would stay on here for a while, perhaps all winter if she liked it. She did not tell him about the unfinished manuscript up in her room. That seemed strangely remote tonight. She would live for a while in Grammy's Ben, she thought, and after that. . .

As she hesitated, the screen door of the kitchen swung open and as if to finish her sentence, Doctor Mack came out. Harriet was with him, still arguing. Uncle Geordie nodded as if he had settled something in his own mind. He chirped to his old horse and thudded away down the lane.

20

Harvest

ISLAY WANDERED DOWN THE GARDEN PATH IN THE DEWY moonlight. They were all gone. The golden harvest moon had looked over the shoulder of the Blue Ridge before the doctor had finally left. Dick had come whirling up the lane and he and Harriet had just strolled over the dusky field with Celia. Wilfred had finished persuading Artie to wash his feet and go to bed. Robert IV had long been tucked away in his nest. His father and mother were sitting on the little narrow veranda under the vines. Islay could hear their low voices; no doubt going over again and again the circumstances surrounding the miracle that had come into their lives.

Islay put her watering-can in its corner beside the back kitchen door and sat down on the old bench. The moon was bright. The orchard trees and the barn traced delicately dark in contrast. The Katy-dids sang and crickets chirped in the grass. Cars sped with subdued sound along the highway; resolved themselves into this modern night-piece! Scent from the watered garden stole over her. Life was mysterious. Elusive like the shadows and the moonlight. When you thought you were losing everything, then something came to you. Young Geordie was right. And grandfather was right, too. What was that he was always quoting? '*He that saveth his life shall lose it.*' How was it that law of life had escaped her for so many years?

She was roused by voices from the little gate leading out to the pasture field—Harriet and Dick returning from seeing Celia home. Dick's voice sounded distinctly through the still air. It would not be for so very long, he was pleading. Only a year. He'd be back home before she knew it. Harriet's voice was sharp, protesting.

"But South America! It's so *far*! And you told them you wouldn't go!"

"But it's different since Len Harris took sick. They've been after me ever since. But I didn't say anything about it because it would worry you. But last night, after I got home, the telegram came, and then Cowan 'phoned. I—I won't go if you say not, Harry. But don't you see—it would be wonderful. I'd make money. I'd be in a far better position for us to get married. I'd be able to give you a better home."

Islay rose noiselessly and slipped into the house. Her heart was heavy with pain and fear for Harriet. She had always been given whatever she cried for. How would she be able to meet this ordeal? She stumbled into the dark kitchen and waited.

After what seemed hours, two figures came round the house and crossed the moonlit garden towards Dick's car.

Islay peeped through the hollyhocks. Harriet was standing beside the car. Dick was already seated. Islay slipped back praying that the courage of the Listeners would be given to their descendent in this, her hour of trial. The car whirled down the lane. Harriet came slowly back to the kitchen door. Islay found her leaning against the door frame looking out over the misty moonlit bay. Better to be casual.

"Dick went home early."

"Yes." Harriet's voice was steel. "He could hardly wait to tell Uncle Geordie his good news."

"Good news?" Islay enquired at last.

Harriet turned. Even in the moonlight Islay could see that her face was white, her young eyes tragic.

"That Cowan chap telegraphed again. Dick's been chosen for this South American post. He's leaving Carlisle tomorrow night on the seven-forty."

"Leaving? Not for South America?" It was astounding when one heard it put into words. Easy to be innocent.

"They won't take a married man," Harriet went on calmly, expressionlessly. "So we decided to hold everything. He thought—we agreed that it was too good a chance to lose. So, I—I told him he'd better go."

But the girl's strength was not equal to more. She turned and ran through the house and stumbled up the dark stairs. Islay wandered about helplessly taking up an article and putting it down again aimlessly. Finally she went up to her room. A letter to Kate, still unfinished, was lying in her table drawer. She did not need to make any confession now. But she experienced no relief at the thought. Her heart was sore for Harriet.

She went down the hall and knocked on Harriet's door. There was no answer, but she went in. Harriet was lying face down on her bed, shaking with sobs. Islay had nothing to say. She could only sit beside her silent, gently smoothing the bright, rumpled hair.

When the sobs subsided a little she said: “After all it won’t be so long, dear. Perhaps he may not like it and may be back sooner than we expect. You are both so young, and he has his way to make . . .”

Harriet sat up and stared out through the moonlit window. Her face was swollen and distorted with weeping. The gay colours of the room she had decorated so happily were mocking and grotesque.

“It’s not that,” she said hoarsely, “if he’d *had* to go I could stand it. But, oh, Islay, he’s just *crazy* to go!” her voice rose in a wail. “I could have made him stay. He said he’d do whatever I said. But how could I? And I’d love to live on a farm, and have a home and a family. And I know now *he’d* hate it!” She flung herself on the bed once more.

That was the tragedy of it. They were different. Further apart in inclination than Lairdale was from South America!

“I know all about what you’re suffering, Harry. But think how much worse my case was. Dick still loves you and he is leaving you partly to give you a better home.”

But Harriet was in no mood to listen. “It wasn’t worse!” she burst out. “Doctor Mack was just carried away by that woman. The world’s full of them. And he was sorry ever after, and anybody can see with half an eye he’s crazy about you yet. But Dick would rather go and see the Andes than stay home and marry me.”

Islay awoke early the next morning with the feeling that something tremendous had happened. What was it Harriet had said to her last night? Then the memory of Harriet’s sorrow blotted out any thought of happiness for herself. As soon as she was dressed she hastened to Harriet. She found her still in the depths of despair. She was sure she had not slept. No she didn’t want any breakfast and she didn’t want to get up. She didn’t care if it was a lovely morning. Her head ached and all she wanted was to be left alone.

The telephone had been ringing insistently and suddenly Islay realized that it was her own number. Wilfred had come back to answer it, just as he was leaving for his work, and was calling Harriet from the foot of the stairs. It was Dick, of course. The next moment Harriet dashed past Islay on the stair and fairly flung herself upon the telephone.

Annie was up and moving about and Robert IV was shouting for his breakfast. The conversation on the telephone was prolonged till Islay feared that everyone on the Lairdale line would be filled with wrath unless they found it so absorbing that business could wait. When Harriet did finally tear herself

away she ran in to Grammy's Ben to see why the precious honey-plum was crying. A good sign! Islay drew a breath of relief and hummed as she made the coffee:—

'I put my whole self in, I put my whole self out.
I give my whole self a shake, shake, shake,
And I turn myself about!'

She went out to view the morning. The sky and the bay were rival blues, blank and motionless. The fields were gold with the harvest. Over the grain the little gold finches danced in the sunshine, calling 'So-sweet! *So sweet!*'

The grain was ready for the threshing machine. Its quick rap-rap-rap sounded through the valley, nearer every day. They must all go over to Minnie's when the threshers invaded Steve's farm. She would need their help. The red astrakan tree had a wealth of rosy apples in the green grass at its roots. Ellen had said she must make jelly from them. The zinnias and asters blazed along the old stone wall. On all sides were fragrant bloom and abundant fruit. The Old Home Place was beautiful inside and out. Islay had begun to love every stone pile and fence corner on the whole place, just as she must give it up. But she had no real regret. She went down to the well for a pitcher of fresh water, full of day dreams. She would never have to return to the office, and the unsatisfying whirl of her old life. She would stay here until—well until she finished her story, of course. Annie would soon be strong enough to do the housework, Harriet would go back home, or stay with her as she pleased, till Dick returned. Ellen would be in school. Artie and the baby would have a home. All her family were established!

When she and Annie had finished their breakfast and Robert IV had been appeased and had gone peacefully to sleep, Harriet came down for a cup of coffee. She was pale and hollow-eyed but composed. She had promised to drive Dick to the station in the afternoon, she said briefly.

"Good girl!" Islay cried, with a breath of relief. "That's a brave lass, as Uncle Geordie would say. And, Harry dear, Uncle Geordie will be heartbroken, we must go down and comfort him."

She was still more relieved when Harriet nodded. "Dick—" the girl faltered and then went on. "He was on the 'phone. He feels so bad he almost said he wouldn't go. So it's up to me. I've *got* to give him a decent send-off!"

Islay looked at her in pride and amazement. She had found the solace for all sorrow. The cure for ills, that she had so recently only stumbled on, was here. "You're a gallant lady, Harriet Lawrence!" she exclaimed. "It's you who

should have been called for the Lady Islay."

Harriet blinked, but regained her composure. "When you come back," Islay continued, "I want to have a talk about the Piersons and their future. I have something to show you. And I want your advice." This was the best time to confess all her past perplexities. It would give Harriet a new interest just when she needed it most.

"I suppose the folks will be on their way home now," Harriet said. "I'll go home and meet them, but if you are going to stay here longer, Islay, I'm not going back to that mad house again while Dick's away. I'm going to stick to you like a burr."

"That'll suit me perfectly. Because I don't want to go back myself. Not for a while anyway. We'll be two burrs!"

Ellen's bicycle sounded on the gravel and Harriet rushed out in a fresh outburst of tears to tell her the news.

Annie was sitting at the kitchen door in the sunshine peeling the potatoes. She was eager to take up any household task Ellen would allow her. Islay sat down beside her.

"Eh, if mother could have lived to see this day," she whispered. "Poor mother always said, 'Annie if you ever go back to Ontario never tell anybody who you are.' And we never intended to stay near here. I was afraid. I said to Wilf we'll jist drive through and see the place where mother was born and then we'll move on. And then that night Artie got lost and came here of all places! And you kept him that night! And when we came out to get him Simpson was lookin' for a hired man and Wilf says I'll work here for the summer and then we'll slip away. And then you came—and—and—" Tears came again, and she stopped to wipe them on the corner of her apron.

"Poor mother had a hard life. It would a' made her so happy if she'd known."

"Perhaps she does," Islay whispered, remembering the Listeners. Annie smiled through her tears. "Eh, perhaps. I hope she does."

Ellen had managed to coax Harriet to eat some breakfast. Very much relieved Islay went up to her room. She looked at her long neglected manuscript laid out upon her table. She felt no interest in it. Perhaps some day when she had learned how to work a farm—she placed it in the bottom of her dresser. Her typewriter was on the table. She decided to run off a letter to Mr. Frances. Harry would mail it in town. She would tell him she was not coming back. She would tell him she had decided to go farming. He would likely make

a fuss. He had never wanted her to come in the first place.

She felt young and adventurous as she slipped a sheet into the typewriter. ‘Dear Mr. Frances’ ...

There was a low hissing sound just outside her door; it resolved itself into a whisper, “Mrs. Reilly! Say, Mrs. Reilly!”

The Artful was standing on the threshold, his eyes bulging.

He had been toiling for days in his carpenter shop at the barn constructing a kiddy coop for the little brother. It was just about finished. Wouldn’t she come and see it? Oh it was great! He was irresistible, she covered her typewriter and went with him.

“Mind ye, Mrs. Reilly,” he cried, “whatta ye think? Billy found a cuckoo’s egg. Yes, sir, he did. In a martin’s nest too!” Did she mind that cuckoo he chased out of the orchard that day? “Well, Billy said it musta gone over to his place. And there if it didn’t lay its egg in a martin’s nest! And if Billy hadn’t found it and threw it away the cuckoo would have shoved out all the little martins! Gosh! Wasn’t that the limit!”

And cow-birds were just as bad. Dad had told him. Didn’t she remember them ugly black birds like crows up in the pasture, only not so big as crows? Well, they did the same mean trick as cuckoos! They didn’t bother building a nest for themselves, but used somebody else’s. Wasn’t that mean? They might lay in a bobolink’s nest. They were just as bad as the glad-eaters, weren’t they?

Islay agreed. They certainly were. She looked down at the eager little face growing round and rosy, and wondered what had led his busy little mind to this subject on this morning. She felt her heart grow warm to see that he still ran to her with any great news, even with his father and mother and Harriet at hand.

When she returned from admiring the carpenter’s work Ellen was shaking her dust mop at the kitchen door, in the sunshine. Harriet had gone upstairs. Ellen was looking pale this morning.

“Are you tired, Ellen?” she asked. “Don’t worry too much about Harry. She’s really good stuff.”

Ellen made an effort to smile. “Oh, she’s wonderful. No, I’m not worrying —about her. I guess it’s my annual hay fever. I always start sneezing at the first sight of rag weed in August and never stop till the first frost.”

But Islay could see Ellen was making an effort to be casual, a gallant effort but not very successful.

“I think there’s something else troubling you beside rag weed, my dear,” she said.

Ellen stood the mop carefully against the kitchen wall. “I shouldn’t bother you,” she said, “you take on everyone’s troubles. But, I—it isn’t altogether hay fever. I just said that. It’s—”

“Is it anything you can tell me?”

“It’s Ron. He wrote that—” Ellen waited a moment to regain her self-control and then went on steadily, “Ron—is going to be married. Next month. He wrote last week.”

Islay was silent from sheer dismay. All the family at the manse were looking to this only son for help, and now . . .

“Oh, can he not wait till you—”

His sister hastened to defend him. “He was perfectly dear about it. He wrote me first to ask if I would mind. He said if I felt too badly about not getting my teacher training he would wait, but that he would like to be married this autumn. You see, Ron has helped me all through my university course. And it’s too much to expect from him. So I wrote and told him he must get married. But dad feels very much disappointed. He has been feeling he ought to retire. And I don’t quite know what to do.”

She was struggling for composure, and Islay said nothing. Her heart was crying out against the selfishness of all men and especially Ronald Carruthers.

“Please don’t say anything to Harry just yet,” Ellen whispered. “I will tell her later.”

Islay put her hand on Ellen’s shoulder. “Something will turn up,” she said, without the smallest idea as to what it could be in these days of wide-spread unemployment. Her mind ran over every possible avenue. Ellen was not equipped to face the world, for all her education. She went slowly back to her room. Harriet; and now Ellen! Her family was far from settled.

Harriet left early in the afternoon. She came down dressed in her smartest clothes and looking wonderfully well after her night of emotion.

Islay went with her to the car, giving last messages of love and sympathy for Uncle Geordie and Aunt Bella.

“You and Dick will come back here to say good-bye, won’t you? And all good cheer attend you, dear child!” Harriet drove away and as Islay returned slowly to the house she noticed that the telephone was ringing. She became

conscious that it was her own number, and the loud rapid ring that told Central was calling. Someone beyond Lairdale. She took down the receiver with something of apprehension. What could happen next?

"Harrington calling Miss Islay Drummond," said a brisk voice.

She could hear the click of receivers coming off their hooks all up and down Laird Valley. Everyone down the line knew there were exciting events pending up in the Old Home. But she felt no resentment.

Then a man's voice with a highly overdone Irish accent sounded.

"Aw, and would that be you, Mrs. Reilly? And what would you be chargin' for hawgs today?"

She gave a little cry of delight. "Pete! Pete Drummond! Are you all right? Is everyone well?"

"Everybody's O.K. Jen had a wire from Kate, they'll be home tomorrow. Better pack Harry home unless you want the family up there."

"I will if she'll go."

"Queer kid! Nuts like her aunt. Say, Islay, I'm calling on business. Urgent! Your old man's blown a fuse! Made me call you. New secretary's got him down! And I mean DOWN!"

"Oh Pete . . ."

"No, honest! He's really in a mess. Says he'll get you an assistant—two assistants, anything you want if you'll only come back and put things straight."

"But Pete, dear! He doesn't understand—I don't—"

"How about that mathematical prodigy you're always writing about? One that makes pies. Bring her. He'll give her a dandy job!"

"Pete! Do mean Ellen Carruthers? Could I?"

"Sure! He'd let you bring your hawgs an' pasture 'em in the office. He'd love 'em! He's a good egg, really. Told him I'd try what I could do. How about it, old dear?"

"Oh, Pete! Oh, wait a minute! Let me think!"

Islay had always liked to deliberate before taking a new step. She thought desperately. Here was Ellen's problem settled, if she went back to the old daily grind she had been so glad to leave. But she wanted to stay here in the peace and quiet, to learn how to run a farm, and to watch for the grey car coming up the lane.

Just then Robert IV lifted up his big voice and Ellen came tip-toeing to the door and closed it softly that she might not be disturbed. Islay glanced up at her. It was such a gentle, patient face. Uncle Geordie's words flashed into her mind. 'The hand of the Lord! The Lord gives me a shove in the right direction.'

"Taking a siesta?" Pete spoke on tip-toe not to waken her!

"Oh, Pete, I'm sorry. I was trying to think."

"Think what? Your leave's nearly up. Stay there much longer and the family'll think you've gone native. If you can't bring yourself to sell the old homestead, hand it over to some of the folks out there that might want to work it! Come on home!"

Islay's whole being rose up in indignation. That was all he cared about this wonderful place. Hand it over indeed! And then there came a flash of self-revelation. She had not really parted with the place. She had given it to Wilfred and Annie with one hand while she held firmly to it with the other. She had experienced all the warmth of a generous act while she held tight to her own possessions. Here surely was the hand of the Lord again.

"All right, Pete," she said steadily. "Tell him I'll come."

"Goodo! Thought you would. Right away? He's not kiddin'."

"Let's see. This is Wednesday. It's the middle of the week and nothing done," she added hysterically.

"What say?"

"Saturday. We'll come Saturday and be ready for work Monday morning. But Pete, that's only if Ellen is sure of a position."

"It's a deal. See you Saturday then. Hurray! Bye."

Islay felt giddy. She leaned against the wall, and called Ellen in a feeble voice.

Ellen ran in, the broom in her hand.

"Islay! You didn't get bad news, did you?"

Islay slid into a chair. "No—I'm not sure. Ellen Carruthers, put down that absurd broom! Don't you know that you've been appointed assistant-secretary to the firm of Francis & Blair, in the city of Harrington!"

Later in the afternoon when Dick had left, and Ellen was going about in a happy daze trying to get ready to go home with her wonderful news, Islay, also

dazed, went down the garden path to the old well. Perhaps a draught from its cool depths might clear her head. Her world, which had been so beautifully settled in the morning, was in a state of upheaval. Eve must have felt like this when she left her garden. Only Eve went out with Adam, she reflected dismally. She would have to go without a chance to tell Mack why she was going. Suppose he interpreted her sudden, unexplained departure quite differently.

And then there came a sound from the road and an old battered grey car came up the lane. It stopped beside the well.

“Should apologize for coming back so soon,” he said as he stepped from the car and stood before her. He looked scared—exactly as he used to look when he and Pete had broken a window and had come in to explain. “I—I dropped something here last night, under these orchard trees of yours.”

“Oh, something valuable?” she exclaimed looking around where the astrakans were lying strewn like roses in the long grass.

“No. I threw away ten years last night when I stood out here with you in the moonlight. Reckless? Anyway I beat it. I felt young and giddy. Afraid I might say something that could never be unsaid.”

“Perhaps I could help you find them,” she said looking down in the grass to hide the dancing in her eyes.

“I’d really rather not find them, if you don’t mind.”

“Let them go!” cried Islay Drummond. “Come let’s have a drink from grandfather’s well. Let’s wish them away forever.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *As a Watered Garden* by Marian Keith]