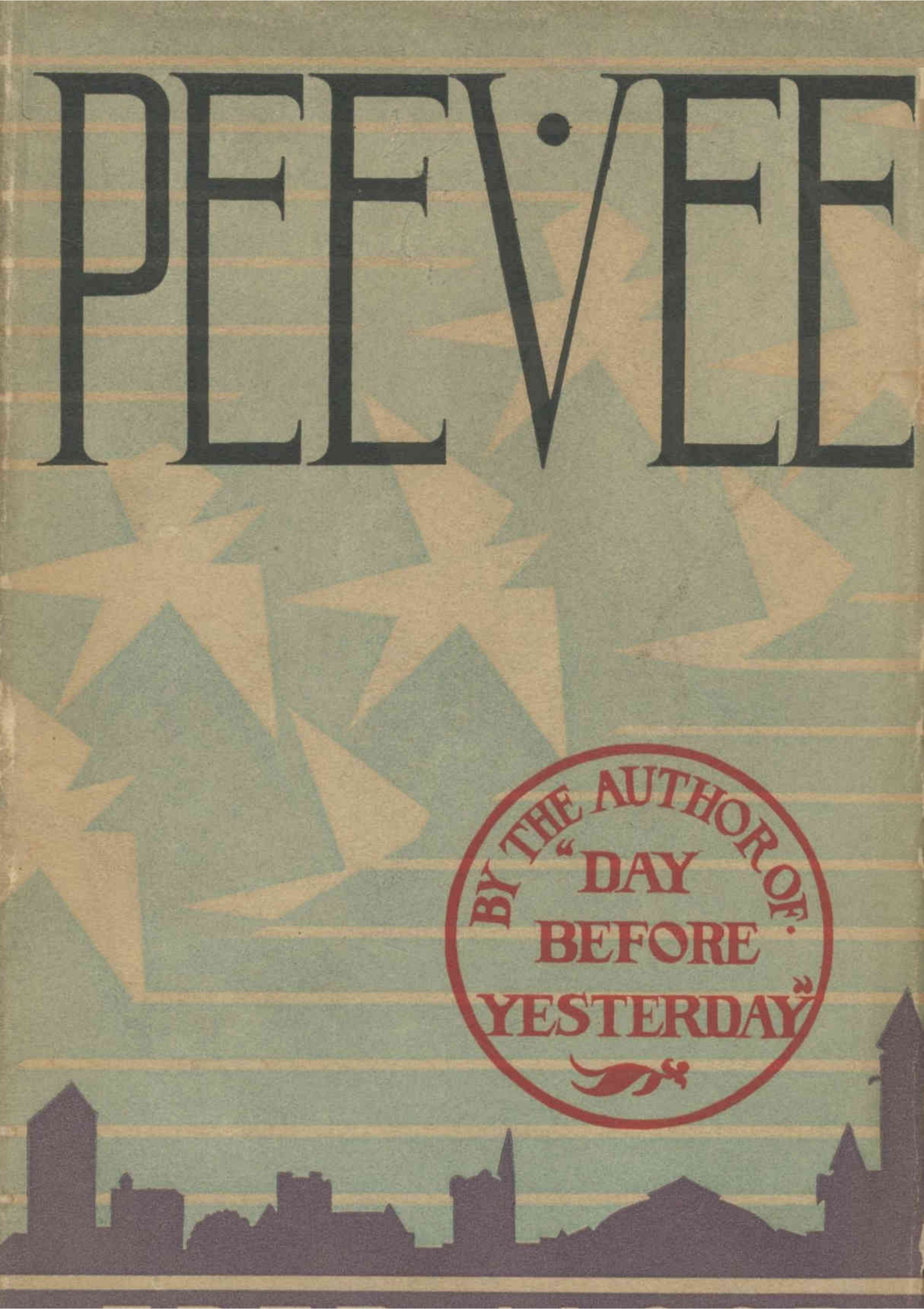

PEE·VEE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY"

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PEEVEE

A NOVEL

BY
FRED JACOB
Author of *Day Before Yesterday*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED,
AT ST. MARTIN'S HOUSE TORONTO

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TO F.E.H. AND H.M.F.

THE DEDICATION OF A BOOK MAY TURN OUT
TO BE LESS OF A COMPLIMENT
THAN THE AUTHOR HOPED,
BUT IF YOU ARE WILLING, WE THREE CAN
TAKE A CHANCE TOGETHER.

FOREWORD

My purpose as a writer is not to turn out a few vagrant novels in the hope of making an extra dollar or two. I believe my novels are the first the chief intention of which has been to preserve an impression of the Canadian scene. My plan is to picture several phases in the development of Anglo-Canada, of which Ontario has been the hotbed. *Day Before Yesterday* was intended to picture the last days of the Tory regime, when society was dominated by the upper classes.

In *PeeVee* I have attempted to give a picture of a period in Anglo-Canada when two things were happening; it was the first decade of the present century. First, there was the rise to domination of the Middle Classes, (the only hereditary title in Ontario is possessed by a man who started life keeping a general store in the town of Lindsay). My second purpose was to depict the period when Canada was growing self-conscious in the arts. I have lived through that generation and have tried in my novel to preserve an impression of the posing and affectations, which, I am certain, are not peculiar to this young country. My chief characters are a group of young people all starting life in what was then a new sort of national environment in Canada. I have taken as my central figure PeeVee, of whom great things are expected at the start of the book. As the tale progresses, he keeps on making occasional lucky flashes, but is really petering out all the time owing to certain deficiencies in his own character. His friends succeed in their own (sometimes worthless) ways.

My hope is to do a third novel, *Barbara Gardener*, about the days just before the War, and then a fourth *The Front and the Back*, which ought to be the biggest of the quartet, picturing the replacement of the so-called ruling classes by the descendants of what were the lower classes among the pioneers.

F. J.

CONTENTS

BOOK ONE—TORONTO

I The Hortops
II A New Century Waves its Wand
III The Doors are Thrown Open
IV Ruby and David
V The Macreadys
VI Three More Musketeers
VII Simpson to the Rescue
VIII “A Smart Young Man on his Way”
IX The Drama
X Pumping up a Renaissance
XI Pulling up Stakes
XII Sport
XIII Ruby Makes a Decision
XIV Towards Broadway
XV Change

BOOK TWO—MILLTOWN

XVI The Gift of the Gab
XVII Gertrude Comes to Town
XVIII Brother and Sister
XIX Callous Milltown
XX David Pays Some Calls
XXI Two Women
XXII The Hortops Again
XXIII Laura Bateman
XXIV Christopher: Chris: Kit: K.

XXV In Politics
XXVI The Voice of the People
XXVII Aunt Ann Handles the Pawns
XXVIII Mrs. Macready Comes Home
XXIX At Georgian Bay
XXX Afterwards

BOOK ONE
Toronto

CHAPTER I

THE HORTOPS

I.

In the Hortop family, innovation was looked upon as something to be combated. The Hortops began combating innovation about the time that they commenced to regard themselves as a family. For nearly a hundred years, nothing new had happened in Toronto against which a Hortop voice had not been raised, ineffectually in most cases, but none the less earnestly. Bess Hortop realized the power of the tradition, and when she made up her mind to earn her own living by conducting a teashop, she prepared to face the unanimous opposition of mother and sisters. That was why she made her plans, as Clarine afterwards said, on the sly, and then challenged an attack upon a well fortified position.

The married daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Simpson Hortop frequently discussed Bess among themselves, and confessed that she baffled them. She spent her time being interested in the most extraordinary things; no woman bearing the name of Hortop had ever before wasted her energy attending a university. She made friends for herself quite outside the Hortop circle, but she never came home trailing behind her a possible husband. Only once did she show a normal tendency, and that was when she took a course in domestic science. They always expected Bess to do things wrong side before; perhaps she intended to learn to cook first and to get married afterwards.

The girls agreed with their mother that Aunt Madie was largely to blame. Following that tragic period in the family history, described among themselves as “the crash”, Aunt Madie had taken Bess to live with her. Mrs. Hortop did not wish it. She regarded her husband’s aunt as strong-minded, and said that her influence could not possibly be good for a young girl. But it was not diplomatic to speak too harshly against Aunt Madie, whose generosity had kept the crash from being twice as uncomfortable as it had turned out to be.

No member of the Hortop family knew what Aunt Madie was like before her fiftieth birthday. They assumed that she had been eager to be married, and that her subsequent bitterness was the measure of her disappointment. Mrs. Hortop held a hazy theory that cleverness in a woman’s old age was a compensation for lack of beauty in her youth.

“Where would you have been, Aunt Madie, if everybody else had held your views on marriage?” Mrs. Hortop demanded, which, besides being an unanswerable question, was a decidedly delicate subject for Mrs. Hortop to mention, even by innuendo.

But Aunt Madie would not be silenced. She went on making rude remarks on the love affairs of her grand-nieces, who were, at that time, still unmarried.

“Are you really trying to fall in love with these silly young dudes that come round here?” she would enquire.

Or again, “They’re a poor-looking crowd, and no mistake. I don’t think that any of them will ever amount to much as men.”

Not unnaturally, the Hortop girls were annoyed, for they had succeeded in falling in love with the most eligible of the poor-looking crowd, and fully intended to marry them.

When Aunt Madie, at last, turned her face to the wall and ceased scoffing at romance, she left what remained of her money to Bess, who returned at once to her parents’ home, but showed no signs of becoming a real Hortop. She worked hard learning to do things—to swim, to speak French and German, to fence, to master the mysteries of book-keeping—that could not possibly be of any use to a sweetheart, a wife, or a mother.

“I believe that Aunt Madie has turned her into a man-hater,” complained Clarine.

“Love will come to her at last, and she will awaken,” said Nesta, clasping her hands. Nesta’s assumption that love came to you, like measles in childhood, without a determined effort on your own part, made Clarine shrug her shoulders.

The inheritance of a few thousand dollars that came to Bess Hortop enabled her to be independent of her sisters. When she commenced the study of domestic science, they thought that they were beginning to understand her at last. At the worst, she intended to be a dietitian. It was the practical Stella who got her husband to enquire the amount of salary that a good dietitian could command. They felt sure that Bess would be a good one; her most pronounced peculiarity was that she never rested content until she could do a thing well. If their sister preferred to stay single and support herself, at least she would not look as completely defeated as an idle spinster.

When Bess announced her matured plans for opening “The Only Teashop”, the family approval was chilled with a sound like a quenching hiss. What ailed the girl? Whatever Aunt Madie might have said about independence, she had never done menial work for a living. True, Clarine and Stella and Jessica had taken positions after the crash, and had earned enough to dress themselves, but they remembered, not without pride, that they had never given satisfaction to their employers. The friends who had made places for them had heaved a sigh of relief when they resigned to get married.

“One of my daughters running a nasty, ordinary restaurant!” wailed Mrs. Hortop.

“I have been trying to tell you that it is not going to be either nasty or ordinary,” replied Bess patiently.

She had been laboriously explaining that she hoped to cater to fastidious people who disliked the commonplaceness of restaurants.

Her mother had not been paying attention to a word.

“Then am I to understand that it is to be a dirty, smelly lunch-counter?” she demanded.

And Bess concluded that it had better remain a restaurant.

Mrs. Hortop’s haggard expression touched Bess; she could not have looked more broken if it had been her daughter’s avowed intention to open a brothel.

Bess took less trouble to explain to her sisters. As she expected, they talked themselves into the conviction that she had only thought of opening a restaurant after making certain that they would object to being connected, even remotely, with any such enterprise.

Agitated debates brought another grievance to the surface. Bess was going to squander money, to which they all had, in a sense, a moral claim. She knew perfectly well that her sisters, with the exception of Nesta, were married to husbands whose incomes made it necessary for them to scrape and plan. If Bess would only be content with a good salaried position, so as to keep her nest-egg intact, what nice helpful presents she could give them from time to time!

“And she might have considered father and mother,” said Clarine Clark, whose husband managed an unimportant branch bank.

“If only Bess would fall in love!” sighed Nesta. “Being single hardens a woman so.”

“Then her husband would grab all the money,” said Stella.

“Even Aunt Madie would not have liked a restaurant,” declared Jessica.

“It is all Aunt Madie’s fault,” complained Stella.

“Oh, hush!” from Nesta.

“I can tell you girls something,” Stella went on, and their heads came closer together. “Aunt Madie left a letter for Bess to read after her death, in which she advised her to spend the money on herself.”

“No!” exclaimed Jessica. “What a strange thing to do!”

“She told Bess that the money was intended to buy any experiment in life that appealed to her. Yes, and she advised her not to let any of us assume the right of dictating to her because we happened to have husbands.”

“A restaurant was a strange thing for a refined girl to want,” observed Nesta, as though the thought had just come to her. “After all, she is a Hortop.”

And Jessica commented: “It is hard to believe that dear Aunt Madie would speak so cynically about us.”

“How do you know that any such letter exists?” Clarine asked Stella, directly.

“I know,” replied Stella with certainty.

She did not feel it necessary to add that Bess still had it, safely deposited in a leather case, in a black box, under the laces at the back of her top bureau drawer.

The two sisters eyed one another, and Stella noted with resentment the suspicion in Clarine’s attitude. Clarine was contracting an insulting habit of locking up every interesting place in her house, when there was a chance of Stella’s being left there alone.

Nobody asked Ruby’s opinion of the undertaking, for Ruby, being still unmarried, hardly counted. It was taken for granted that she would follow their lead, and she thought it just as well not to mention that she had other fish to fry. She was tired of hearing her mother talk about the high breeding of the young Toronto ladies in the first generations after Confederation. Those days were buried, and she was out to have some fun. She felt certain that there would be more excitement for her in “The Only Teashop” than in the homes of her married sisters. Their households were all much duller than any one of them seemed to suspect.

II.

Five generations of Hortops had lived in Toronto. The first Hortop to make his home in Muddy York sprang from Loyalist stock; his father had moved to Halifax from Marble Head as soon as he knew that his cause in the American Revolution was hopelessly lost. When Warren Hortop left Nova Scotia early in the nineteenth century and settled in Upper Canada, his social connections gave him, at once, a position in the ruling classes, and he lived patriotically and comfortably until Lord Durham came out from England, and, in a manner most becoming in a proud aristocrat, upset things for the Family Compact.

With the rise of responsible government in Canada, the Hortop family retired from public life. They had sufficient money to keep up their position, already well established in the most thriving of the younger cities. By a coincidence that was in keeping with their natural conservatism, fate saw to it that only one son in each generation grew to maturity, and he inherited the bulk of the fortune. Unfortunately, the surplus girls were not so considerate as to die young. For nearly a hundred years, there had been Hortop spinsters floating about in Toronto. They could not be permitted to starve, so each one had to receive an allowance. In the course of time, the estate showed a gradual shrinkage, so that when Simpson Hortop became head of the family, he found himself in possession of a badly-depleted treasury.

It was in the days of Simpson's father that their friends began to note that the Hortops never managed to move into a smart neighbourhood until just before it began running downhill. First the Hortops found a residence that they could afford, and shortly afterwards the first boarding-house appeared brazenly upon the street. Promptly, the best people moved away and left the Hortops stranded among neighbours to whom they did not speak, until they discovered a sufficiently cheap house in another district that was nearly ready to go to seed.

Simpson Hortop took a degree in a local college, and spent about two years at Oxford, so that he would not sound altogether Canadian when he spoke. He had theories about the restoration of the family fortune. He would declare: "The Hortops should produce sons. We need men with business enterprise and acumen to seize the opportunities that this growing city affords."

He also said: "The Hortops have too many daughters. Daughters are a liability in a well-bred family, unless they marry."

Then Simpson married and had six daughters at refined intervals, but not even the one son usual in the Hortop brood. When much too late, it came to his mind that Mrs. Hortop had no male relatives except her father, and he was inclined to feel indignant about it; somebody should have mentioned the fact. It hardly compensated that his wife's family was quite the most genteel in the city; they attended no functions where people showed any signs of enjoying themselves.

In his efforts to display business enterprise, Simpson Hortop was equally unlucky. Until his daughters were quite big girls, he sat about in his library waiting for the opening that was sure to come, and talking about it. Then the city experienced one of those real estate booms that rob a community of the power to reason clearly. The price of land,—what it was yesterday and what it might be tomorrow,—eclipsed every other subject of conversation. Speculators bought all the vacant lots in the suburbs, then the lots outside the city limits, and then the farms beyond that again.

Determined to be more far-sighted than anybody, Hortop made the most remote of all the purchases. Occasionally, he picked up, in an inaccessible district, a bargain that nobody wanted, a bit of ravine or an impossible hillside. When the boom deflated, he hung on desperately from year to year, letting a partial payment fall in here and dropping a hopeless sub-division there. In 1894 came the crash, when all his city property, including his home, went for arrears of taxes and other accumulated debts.

Simpson Hortop boasted that he did not run about making a fuss over his misfortunes; he sat at home and wondered what had happened to him. At last, old friends came to the rescue and secured a position for him in the civil service—that seemed to be the one thing he was fitted for. After he became accustomed to going to work at almost regular hours, he made the discovery that the governmental departments contained some very congenial companions. Immediately, he resumed the wearing of the rough tweed Norfolks, which gave him, so he thought, the air of an English country gentleman. He spent as many hours as possible each day talking in secluded corners with his new friends about the abominable salaries paid by the Government.

In the evenings, they dropped round for a pipe and a whiskey and soda, and were all agreed about the various political and historical subjects that they discussed. They disapproved of Mr. Gladstone as a "molly-coddle", whose outstanding acts had been the murder of General Gordon and the transplanting of Irish bad feeling in England. Hortop held that Gladstone had done more than any other Englishman to belittle religion by introducing it into politics and everyday life. These grave topics occupied them until midnight, when they shouted hearty farewells to one another outside the front door and annoyed the neighbours. Simpson felt himself to be an admirable figure, standing in the midst of the ruins of the House of Hortop with a stiff upper lip.

As Simpson spent so much time keeping a stiff upper lip, Mrs. Hortop found it necessary to do the unpleasant things that are part of a move from affluence to poverty. First of all, she went and found a house to rent. It was the sort of house she detested, one of a red-brick row, with identical stupid faces, identical bay windows, identical porches, and identical Mansard-roofs. There was a long dark hall, with all the doors opening off one side of it. The sink in the kitchen looked rusty from many years of usage, and upstairs there was a tin bath, with its enamelled surface badly scratched, built into a wooden base. The tiled grate in the living-room required much coaxing, and then smoked badly. Altogether a deplorable place to call home.

As a housekeeper, Mrs. Hortop developed a latent genius for cooking and economy. She went to market twice weekly, and always got eggs and butter two or three cents cheaper than anybody else. Hardened farmers frequently asked themselves why they literally gave their produce to the pitiful little woman in black who drove her bargains in such a tiny voice. Late on Saturday evenings, she visited the bakery, patronized for many years in a lavish manner, and got cakes and buns, frequently not at all stale, at half price. Their Sunday roast was usually a week-end bargain also, found after much searching from butcher-store to butcher-store. Naturally, Simpson could not regard his wife's part in the struggle in the same dignified and heroic light as his own.

At intervals, she indulged in the one extravagance of a hired Victoria, to pay calls upon her acquaintances of other days. They were sorry for her, and very kind. She dressed as though the fashions had not altered since the crash, her old laces emphasizing her down-at-the-heel gentility. Her favourite recreation in the warm weather was an occasional ride on the street-cars round the belt line. That cost her five cents, if she travelled alone, or twice that sum when Simpson or one of the girls accompanied her. Also, there was a church on their street,—High Anglican,—where she could find a comforting service at any time when the disappointments of life weighed too heavily upon her spirits.

Three of the girls took positions as soon as they were settled in their new home; Nesta's marriage had been the last incident of importance while the crash was still impending and the debts running on. Permitting her daughters to go into offices was Mrs. Hortop's greatest trial. Simpson grew tired of hearing about it.

"I am glad they have created another alternative for a Hortop woman," he declared testily. "They used to have to choose between getting married and going on the streets."

Of course that was quite untrue. No Hortop girl had ever lost the edge off her virtue. Even Simpson's father's sister, the rebellious Aunt Madie, had done nothing worse than run about with an elderly and eccentric bachelor,—whom she persistently refused to marry,—until he died and left her a generous sum of money as a remembrance.

Contact with the business world had its effect upon the Hortop girls. At least, their mother feared that they were growing more common, and she kept a guiding hand upon any of their movements that might end in love affairs. She reminded them frequently that though they worked for a living, they were "better born" than the women who considered themselves "Toronto society", and she urged them to behave accordingly.

There was a park at the east end of the city which consisted largely of woodland, with a clearing along the lake front for picnics, band concerts, and other innocent forms of pleasure. But rumour said shocking things about the happenings in the quiet depths of the woods; nice girls would not go walking there in the dusk. Mrs. Hortop divided young men into two groups,—those who offered to take her daughters to hear a band-concert in Munro Park and those who did not. The former were discarded as soon as possible.

The twentieth century girls, as their elders called them even in the nineties, were quite forward enough without inviting temptation. "Unmarried women take an interest in nasty things that we never thought about when I was their age," said Mrs. Hortop, quite forgetting how she and her friends had fluttered in their day at the mere mention of the name of one, Mortimer Herndon, who was said to have introduced the heart-rending vices of the late Lord Byron into the otherwise immaculate society of Toronto.

Mrs. Hortop need not have worried about Jessica, Clarine, and Stella. True to their family tradition, they hated social independence, if they had to earn it, and only wanted to follow the paths that led to the altar. Like their father, they took no pleasure in regular hours devoted to working for an employer, and spent all their spare time finding eligible men to invite to the house. While Bess was still at 'Varsity, the three of them married.

Nesta gave her sisters weddings to which they were not ashamed to invite a number of well-known donors of expensive presents. Nesta liked to feel that she was the centre round which the entire family revolved. She was always on hand, in trouble or in joy, to meet an emergency or to give advice.

Although Nesta was the plainest of Simpson Hortop's daughters, her devotion to romance began early in life. She became engaged when only seventeen to a lanky college boy, whom she called "the little man". At her suggestion, he called her "the little woman". Later on, he graduated from college and from calf-love, and Nesta engaged herself to a short succession of men before she finally met T. Hannisford Holmes, and he turned out to be the ideal for which she had been seeking all along—nothing could have convinced her otherwise.

As she had named all her fiancés in turn, Nesta called T. Hannisford Holmes "the little man", and of course she was "the little woman". She had made up her mind that they were quaint and distinctive pet names for a married couple, and in such matters she was most persistent.

She had another idea, discovered in a sentimental novel, that it was very beautiful for a bride to sit up in bed on her wedding morning and exclaim, with clasped hands: "O sun, shine brightly on this day of days! One life, one love, forever and ever!"

On the morning of Nesta's wedding-day gray clouds were hanging dismally over the earth, and she awoke with a cold in the head that made her small round nose both red and sore. Undaunted, she sat up with clasped hands and exclaimed: "O sud, shide brightly od this day of days! Wud life, wud love, forever and ever!"

And a splash of rain against the window answered her.

The perfect contentment of a satisfying marriage made Nesta bloom into stoutness. Broad-shouldered, full-busted, and heavy-hipped, her virile bigness dominated a room as soon as she entered it. She had much more face than feature, but every square inch of it was cheerful. Her friends spoke of her as "a nice old thing", and smiled to hear T. Hannisford call her "the little woman".

Sentimentally in his home and derisively among his acquaintances, T. Hannisford Holmes was known as "the little man". While his wife expanded, he seemed to shrink. He looked thoroughly dried out by the responsibilities of being head of a steadily-growing family. He shirked nothing. He helped Nesta select her clothes, and he knew how much of everything ought to be found in the larder, unless the maids were extravagant or nibbling between meals. Periodically, he went over his home from cellar to attic, and made a mental inventory of their belongings. He liked few things better than being left to mind the babies, and there was nothing that he could not do for them, provided they were bottled. Simpson Hortop did not approve of such old-maidishness in a man, but he admitted that his son-in-law was an indulgent husband and a good provider. Nesta always had plenty of money, and that was more than could be said for her unmarried sisters.

Still, it was not poverty that sat most heavily on the soul of Mrs. Simpson Hortop; it was the conviction that a subtle, indescribable change had taken place in the city of her birth. New standards had superseded the old ones, and vulgarities flaunted themselves in high places. The decision of Bess to go into business was merely a symptom. A Hortop running a restaurant and consorting with shop-keepers! That could not have happened in the Toronto of her girlhood. Mrs. Hortop blamed the spirit of the new century and cried out against it even in her prayers, though she felt in her heart that there was nothing to be done. A new century did such things, just as definitely as a new season affected vegetation.

CHAPTER II

A NEW CENTURY WAVES ITS WAND

The idea that a new era had been ushered in by the new century was not held by Mrs. Simpson Hortop alone. One of the country's most eloquent politicians was credited with saying, in a burst of oratory, that the nineteenth century had belonged to the United States, but that the twentieth century would be Canada's. A few persons said that the boast had no meaning at all —what about the rest of the world?—but many an audience cheered it, as if they had earned a magnificent award.

Undoubtedly, there were new impulses abroad. National consciousness! The phrase cropped up like a weed in editorials and general conversation. The word "colonial" had fallen into complete disfavour. Even the ardent imperialists resented it, and never mentioned the dominions of the British Empire without using the prefix "self-governing". Colonials! The status was obsolete, and the suggestion distasteful.

Young men just out of college described themselves as nationalists, and when accused of disloyalty gave an elaborate definition of the new meaning of Empire. Women students, together with nurses and school-teachers, organized themselves into small suffrage societies and politely expressed a desire to vote. Clubs were multiplying steadily at which business and professional men listened to addresses on national resources and national opportunities. Promoters with golden promises were at large in the land. The cronies of Simpson Hortop talked about the domination of the plebeian.

To a casual visitor, the community looked respectable and stolid and permanently bound to ancient convictions, but underneath the surface there was fermentation. In small but aggressive circles, they claimed that the century would see the arts come into their own in Canada. To them, national consciousness meant patronage of the country's painting and literature. One earnest professor travelled from Halifax to Victoria lecturing on "The Canadian Renaissance". In every educational centre, little groups of men and women sought diligently for signs of genius in their midst, and cackled happily when they thought they had found them. Canadian painters and writers would no longer have to go abroad for recognition and reward, they said. A renaissance indeed!

Naturally, Bess Hortop and her friends were not uninfluenced by the new optimism, but they thought of it only in connection with Pierre Macready. They believed he possessed some form of genius, undefined as yet, and that he would take a prominent place in any renaissance that happened to be on the way. There was something about Macready that had given people the impression, all his life, that his gifts were not ordinary. At school, his masters had predicted that he would be heard from, someday, and he had grown up with the prophecy dinning in his ears until, now, he accepted it as a matter of course. It was pleasant to think that somewhere, beyond the commonplace rut of the present, he would step into a glorious hour.

“PeeVee is different,” said David McLean, and that summed up everybody’s attitude, including his own.

“PeeVee” was a nickname that he had borne from childhood. A slightly-built lad whose initials were “P.V.”—naturally schoolboys saw in the combination a certain appropriateness. When he put on height and breadth he preferred to remain PeeVee; he could think of only one worse fate than being called Pierre, and that was being called Vincent.

David McLean left ’Varsity with a reputation as an athlete, and no one seemed interested to know whether he had succeeded as a student or not. With David’s popularity as an asset, the shrewd Ted MacHenry saw possibilities in a store to be patronized by the men who followed sport, and “The Two Macs” came into existence; it prospered from the very first day.

Watching their progress, Bess Hortop felt moved to start out in life. It was a greater conception than it may sound, for no Hortop in a hundred years had started out in life. They had slid into existence among the Hortops, and continued and died there.

When her family railed and refused to be reasonable, Bess looked elsewhere for encouragement.

Laura Bateman supplied enough enthusiasm to have started a new religion. Laura would join the teashop staff, and show her doubting father that she had other aims in life besides providing him with a cause for profanity. What was a girl to do for entertainment in a city that had lost even its ability to generate a decently juicy scandal, asked Laura. But Dr. Bateman feared that many orderly citizens saw scandalous possibilities in his daughter and were watching her expectantly.

“Anyway, if she actually goes to work, it will keep her from trolloping round with that infernal runt,” he told his wife.

“If you did not say so much about that young man, she might not stick to him so persistently,” suggested Mrs. Bateman.

“Damn her stubbornness!” exclaimed the doctor.

The empty flat over “The Two Macs” was the very place for a teashop. In his clipped, high-pitched voice, Ted MacHenry enlarged upon the perfections of the location. Ted never missed an opportunity to demonstrate; he felt that he was steadily becoming a more fluent and convincing talker.

Bess Hortop and her body-guard, including Ruby, inspected the premises, and when they sat down to talk things over, MacHenry started an inspirational speech in his best manner. Of course, he said that the twentieth century would belong to Canada; he had used the epigram so often now that he believed it to be his own. On that foundation, he reared the expanding thought that the city would grow with the country, and that Bess Hortop’s teashop would grow with the city. Somehow, he dragged in the recent South African War; he wanted to express the opinion that Canada’s fighting contingent had been a great advertisement.

Only Laura Bateman was rude enough to interrupt the speaker. She yawned immensely and, when Ted flowed on, sauntered away.

There was a silent feud between Laura Bateman and Ted. He had always disapproved of her. He disliked her habit of addressing him as “Deacon MacHenry” before people who mattered; and once, when she had added at the finish of a few of his remarks: “Amen, says the Hon. Mr. Mouthy,” he had felt that she had flattened out the entire effect.

They had devoted one meeting to the selection of a name for the teashop.

Ruby favoured calling it “The Peg Woffington”, so that the waitresses might wear fancy costumes; it was her first intimation that, in spite of family objections, she intended to be a waitress. Bess refused to consider any proposal that would incur unnecessary expense.

Laura Bateman suggested that a name like “The Dead Rat” would hit the public in the eye.

“And probably upset nice-minded people,” commented MacHenry.

“We live in a squeamish city,” sighed Laura.

“A neat little name is what you want,” said PeeVee. “Why not call it ‘The Only Teashop’?”

Promptly, Ted made his objection: “If it proves popular, it will not be the only teashop for long.”

“ ‘The Only Teashop on the longest street in the world’,” continued PeeVee, holding it out for everybody’s consideration.

“Who said Yonge Street is the longest street in the world?” asked Ted.

“The only piece of Canadian history that I retain after fifteen years of schooling is now suspect,” complained PeeVee.

“Are you talking nonsense?” Bess enquired.

“Old Briggs, who was cracked on the subject of Canadiana, told us that. Do you remember, David?”

David remembered faintly. He added:

“You have the damnedest collection of queer items in your memory, so you are probably right.”

PeeVee began to give details about an enterprising pioneer governor who laid out the street for the benefit of trappers, who might want to travel from the remote Up Country to Muddy York.

With fingers in her ears, Laura shouted: “Give us a rest, PeeVee! You are getting as bad as Deacon MacHenry.”

But Ted did not hear her. He was enlarging on the possibilities of the name, “The Only Teashop”, and then, in smaller letters, “on the longest street in the world”. It would make people talk, and talk was the best of advertising. Months afterwards, Ted believed that he had given the name to “The Only Teashop”.

“So that’s settled,” observed David, sprawled deep in a cane chair. He had a way of recognizing when there was no more to be said.

Laura Bateman leaned over the back of McLean’s chair and ran her fingers through his hair. The sporting fraternity knew him as “Reddy” McLean, but that was hardly an accurate description of his colouring. His hair contained too much of the lustre of brown to be called red and too much of the tone of red to be described as brown. Women noted the difference more quickly than men.

“You’re handsome, Reddy,” she whispered loudly. “Someday I’m going to fasten my teeth in your cheek.”

From her corner, dimpled Ruby scowled at long-armed Laura. It was shameless of Laura to act as if she did not know that Ruby and David were engaged to be married.

When Bess was addressing the invitations for the formal opening of her enterprise, Mrs. Hortop made a final appeal.

“Surely, you are not serious about doing this thing?” she asked with a slight suggestion of heroics.

Her daughter looked up and smiled.

“I can hardly draw back now.”

“And you have no consideration for the name that generations of Hortops have kept untarnished?”

Bess never permitted her voice to grow impatient when speaking to her mother.

“The Hortops didn’t have to work, but times have changed,” she said. “What I am going to do is perfectly honest, and I intend to make it successful.”

“I know what has come over you,” cried Mrs. Hortop. “It is the spirit of this terrible twentieth century.”

“But the poor twentieth century is only a few years old.” Bess spoke with a slight laugh. “We can’t blame it for everything.”

CHAPTER III

THE DOORS ARE THROWN OPEN

I.

One Saturday afternoon in November, a reception was given to open “The Only Teashop”. Bess had planned the affair to show that her tea-room was as little suggestive of the heavy dignity of the best hotels as of the steaming haste of the Boston Beanery. The rooms, with their deep window-seats, chintz curtains, and pumpkin yellow shades, had the friendly atmosphere of a private home.

Two young girls, fresh from the Conservatory of Music and eager to experiment, had offered to provide a programme; they were quite prepared to be chattered down and would not take offence. Laura Bateman had also volunteered her services.

“I’ll bring the runt,” she said, “and we’ll do our latest stunt. It is a good one and nobody has seen it yet.”

During the week, Laura warned the runt that men dressed for receptions to look as though they weren’t there. She knew that her friends did not like him and she hoped that he would not show up too badly. But she was dealing with a man who did not know what it was to desire to appear absent. He liked to feel as conspicuous as the occasional motor that snorted in among the smart turn-outs at a social affair, causing the aristocratic horses to rear and shy.

He arrived early, in a suit that went up and down the room like clashing cymbals. Laura was glad that her father and mother had not been able to come. Whenever he saw the runt dressed for display, Dr. Bateman went home and swore loudly at his lanky daughter.

“God dammit!” he would shout, “If you marry that flashy little cad, I’ll horsewhip the pair of you.”

To which she would reply: “God dammit! Who said I was going to marry him? Just keep your vest down, father! I’m out for a good time, and I know how to take care of myself.”

Laura would not have minded such scenes, but they always ended with her mother in tears.

Also, she was not sorry Ted MacHenry failed to appear at the reception. The deacon always seemed to her to be scoring when he looked at the runt's ties.

Ted MacHenry found an excuse to be absent on account of his wife. He knew that Mildred would not go without him and, secretly, he did not want her to be there.

No one could convince Mildred MacHenry that there was not an immoral undercurrent, somewhere, in any social event that she would describe as smart, and Ted knew, from the list of guests, that the reception was to be what his wife regarded as a function. He could see Mildred oozing through the crowd with her "Excuse me! Excuse me!" speaking for long to nobody, but endlessly making mental notes: here a gown cut too low, and there a remark that she "would not have made to a perfect stranger". After it was all over, few guests would remember Mildred's presence, a neat little woman, slipping through the crowds with "Excuse me! Excuse me!" but to Ted she was certain to bring home a catalogue of social laxity that would last her for weeks.

Although MacHenry accepted many of Mildred's verdicts when they affected strangers, he still avoided giving her an opportunity to criticize the friends of his pre-marriage days.

Bess regretted the absence of Ted; it was the first time that he had not been present when an occasion seemed important to the other boys, but she was just as well pleased that Mildred could not see Ruby's costume.

Without warning, Ruby had appeared dressed with all the brevity of a French maid in a musical comedy. It was her conception of a natty waitress, and her plump knees, glimpsed through black silk stockings, seemed to be bobbing audaciously in every direction. It was their first public appearance, and she fully intended that it should be an adequate one. Next day, they were to disappear discreetly among the folds of her skirts, but for the time being they gave her great satisfaction, especially as Nesta was the only one of her married sisters present to see her.

Unless it were absolutely unavoidable, Nesta never missed anything that concerned a Hortop. When three of her sisters announced their intention of boycotting the reception, Nesta took a night to think it over. Then she called up Clarine and expressed the conviction that it was her duty to attend. Of course, she would have preferred to back them up, but if they all stayed away, think what the gossips would say! They might even conclude that there had been a row in the Hortop family!

Large-busted and beaming, Nesta Holmes swept through the crowded room with one of her little daughters in tow. It was Nesta's habit to go nowhere without a sample of her offspring. The ushers in all the local theatres knew her by sight as the woman who was always having rows at the matinées with those persons sitting near her who could take no pleasure in prattling, childish contributions to the entertainment. There was not a theatre aisle in the city down which Nesta had not, at one time or another, lugged a screaming child, scattering woollen bonnets, rubbers, and mittens along her path.

Little Marjory was the smallest person in the room but the most discussed, for she was her mother's one topic of conversation.

To every friend that Nesta found in the crowd, she said, sooner or later:

"Oh, I must tell you what a certain little person said today!"

Nesta Holmes considered herself an authority on the bringing up of children. It made boys and girls objectionable to know that their elders regarded them as clever, and she disapproved of parents who used names in their domestic anecdotes. She never said the word "Marjory" during the entire afternoon. Instead, she elevated her eyebrows, and grimaced with the side of her face in the direction of the certain little person. After that subtle indication, she looked steadfastly over Marjory's head while relating the anecdote, and never even noticed that the certain little person was the only eager listener.

After Aunt Bess had found a glass of milk for Marjory and removed the rich insides from several sandwiches, Nesta picked a vantage point near the piano, where Laura Bateman was just about to give her imitation of May Irwin, including a cake-walk to be danced with the runt. Laura's coon-shouting had been popular in local drawing-rooms for several years. To Nesta, who now witnessed the performance for the first time, it seemed rowdy, almost vulgar. She doubted if it were a good thing for Marjory to see such an unrefined exhibition. Laura's clinging black dress was much too tight, and when she threw herself into grotesque attitudes it showed more of her form than a nice girl displayed among ladies and gentlemen. And then, that horrid, flashy little partner!

Nesta felt that the unmarried set had changed for the worse since the days when she was single. Imagine them copying May Irwin and boasting that she was a Canadian! Her own ideal among actors had been the venerable Sol Smith Russell, and she regretted his death chiefly because it left more space for brash newcomers, who made sport of his touching comedies, “A Poor Relation” and “A Bachelor’s Romance”.

Her mother’s misgivings about the modern taste were not shared by Marjory. She laughed shrilly at the prancings of the long-legged lady. Already, at the age of six, Marjory was showing a distinctly depraved leaning. Nesta seized her by the hand and hurried her away.

II.

The arrival of Mrs. Georgina Macready surprised her son. He had posted an invitation to her, but regarded it merely as a formality. She did not know Bess Hortop, and had frequently informed him that there were certain of his city friends in whom she took no interest. Besides, how could she come away from Petersville on Aunt Ann’s birthday? Aunt Ann still felt her birthday to be of the utmost importance; to her, it looked as red on the calendar as the natal day of her late dear queen had been for as long as she could remember. During the week, PeeVee had written to Aunt Ann that she might expect him by a late train on Saturday, after the reception.

In her own estimation, Georgina Macready was an ambitious woman. She had always wanted to be a somebody, by which she meant a person who could treat with contempt anyone who possessed less brains or reputation. She regarded herself as the superior of all the people among whom she had to live, and it tortured her to know that none of them recognized it. In vain she snubbed the nincompoops; all she got was the satisfaction of knowing that her snubs were brilliant and cutting. In Petersville, the citizens had never shown deference to Mrs. Macready, and after her husband’s death hardly even courtesy. She longed to take them by the ears and force them to cringe before her, even though they refused to like her.

While her children were still young she found signs of talent in two of them. She suggested at once that they should go abroad and complained bitterly to her husband that her own gifts had been wasted as a result of living all her life in a half-baked country. Thomas Macready never combated his wife’s wishes, but, by a sort of passive resistance, he avoided being ruled by them. Seemingly, he surrendered to all her commands, but time slipped by and they were never carried out. He lived and died in Petersville.

The knowledge that her son, Pierre Vincent Macready, was regarded in the town as being unlike ordinary boys delighted Georgina. It justified her faith in him. She changed from the rôle of an ambitious woman to that of an ambitious mother. In his third year as an undergraduate, he attracted attention by winning a prize for a poem which was published in the

Christmas Number of a Toronto weekly paper. It was like a personal triumph for Mrs. Macready. When she heard the lecture on "The Canadian Renaissance", she thought of only one thing—herself and Pierre walking on the bowed shoulders of all the other mothers and sons she knew.

One dread worried Georgina. Why did Pierre sit back so contentedly in the office of the trust company? Why was he not cultivating the people who could do so much for him, Mrs. Pentley Dickenson and Professor St. Quinton? What folly to travel about with nobodies who opened shops and restaurants!

She had decided to attend the reception in order to look into the matter for herself.

At the foot of the staircase leading to "The Only Teashop", Mrs. Macready and her two daughters paused. A shallow show-case in the entry had been turned into a mirror, and Mrs. Macready glanced at it to pat her hair into place. Other guests passed her, and looked all she could have wished. Perhaps, it was not going to be such an impossible crowd after all. Whenever the door above opened, the babble of tongues flowed down to her,—quite well-bred voices, she decided.

Mrs. Macready smiled at herself in the mirror, a hard, narrow-lipped smile that she preserved intact to make her entry. She was certain to be noticed, followed by the towering Medora, a Valkyrian young woman, and the slim elegance of Diana, her blonde shadow.

Near the entrance, they found PeeVee.

"You didn't tell me you were coming!" he exclaimed.

Mrs. Macready patted her son's arm.

"We only decided at breakfast," she told him.

"And where is Gertrude?" he asked.

His mother's smile faded a trifle, and Medora spoke for her:

"She got into one of her tantrums and stayed at home."

"I thought she might have stayed at home for Aunt Ann's birthday." PeeVee looked at Diana, who confirmed his suggestion with a faint "Yes."

Mrs. Macready started to move and drew them after her.

"Come, Pierre!" she said. "I am here especially to meet your friends."

When Georgina moved across the room, she was conscious that many eyes were upon them; she knew that people frequently exclaimed: “The Macreadys are a wonderful-looking family!”

For a few moments, they talked with Bess Hortop, who was not as Georgina had pictured her. No one could ignore the dark, earnest eyes, but Mrs. Macready was thinking that Bess lacked a feeling for style. Here she was, the hostess of the occasion, with her hair coiled in braids about her head, so different from the majority of her guests, with their pompadours of all heights and shapes, surmounted by hats that were spiked in their perilous positions by ornate pins. Georgina had looked for an aggressive, twentieth century woman and here was an old-fashioned girl.

The names of the guests that she heard mentioned were impressive. She had hardly expected to find so many of the best people present. She understood that the Hortops were poor. How did Bess happen to have such friends? Her father was in the Civil Service and that sounded shabby enough. Probably it was all Pierre’s doing, thought Georgina.

One familiar Petersville face met her in the crowd. David McLean was passing to and fro, carrying endless trays and cups. Mrs. Macready bowed stiffly to him. She had always refused to be cordial to any of the higgledy-piggledy McLeans.

Now David was talking to one of the most august young men in the room; Georgina had noted him hovering in the offing, waiting for an introduction, she felt certain. He was the only guest, so far as she could see, who wore a frock coat. He had large features, a thick nose, and blonde hair that looked as if a careless contractor had neglected to supply sufficient covering for such a round head. But he was giving a masterly exhibition of courtesy, studied and deferential. His bows were magnificent.

The two men came over together to join the Macreadys. The impertinence of David McLean, in making such an advance, would have been resented by Georgina if it had not been for his companion.

“Mrs. Macready,” David said, “my cousin, Mr. Stan Spencer, is very anxious to know you.”

The fat hand, whiter than the gleaming cuff, took hold of Mrs. Macready’s fingers with something like reverence.

“It is too much to expect you to remember me,” said Mr. Spencer.

Medora came to her mother’s aid.

"Aren't you the Stan Spencer who used to visit Dr. McLean in Petersville, years ago?"

Of course he was. He had been a white-headed urchin, and he had worshipped Mrs. Macready as a beautiful, beautiful lady. Naturally, she did not know what a goddess she had seemed to an impressionable little boy. How could she?

Georgina radiated appreciation, and Diana laughed her tiny tinkle of a laugh, which was her only contribution to social intercourse.

Mr. Spencer continued. What a coincidence that they should have met, after all those years, at such an unconventional affair! Before Mrs. Macready could work it in, he added the grave conclusion that it was a very, very small world, after all.

The elaborate conversation of Stan Spencer was interrupted by the arrival of PeeVee, who had located Mrs. Pentley Dickenson; and of all her son's friends in Toronto, Georgina regarded Mrs. Dickenson as the most valuable. She was glad to be able to leave her daughters with such a suitable companion as David McLean's cousin.

It was Mrs. Pentley Dickenson's ambition that her home should be regarded as the centre of the artistic and intellectual life of the city. She could not openly challenge the supremacy of Professor Goldwin Smith, but she frequently suggested that The Grange drew the celebrities who visited Toronto because it was the only house possessing a tradition. To understanding friends, she did not mind hinting that Goldwin Smith was himself nothing more than a tradition, musty and out of place in a new century. He could have the men with established reputations, frowsy writers and lecturers and politicians whose best work was done; she preferred to foster youthful talent, the notable men and women of tomorrow, whom she had been among the first to recognize.

To Mrs. Pentley Dickenson, art was, in its highest form, an amateur undertaking to be practised by amateurs. When an artistic production did not possess loose ends, she suspected commercialism at once. If she could discover a symbol or a spiritual significance, she felt satisfied. Her mission was to encourage faint signs of promise and to keep them unspotted from the influences that were to be found in the arts of other countries. In her day, she had battled against any admiration for Aubrey Beardsley; had pronounced Mrs. Humphrey Ward "too intellectual for a woman" when everybody was exercised over *Robert Elsmere*; she had predicted that Thomas Hardy would "undermine the Empire's sense of God"; and had felt personally justified when Oscar Wilde went to prison. But Mrs. Pentley Dickenson would have denied indignantly that she disliked Bohemianism; —"There can be no self-expression without freedom, but we must never confuse liberty with license." However, she saw to it that, in her own set, the Bohemianism preserved a rigid, evangelical tone.

While the two women talked, sitting on the cushioned benches that formed an inglenook in front of an open fireplace, Mrs. Dickenson held Georgina's hand in hers.

"We all love your son so much," she said. "You are a lucky mother."

"I am very proud of him," Georgina murmured.

"He will go far," continued Mrs. Dickenson. "He has been born at the right moment, just when our nation is awakening."

"The twentieth century will be Canada's century," Georgina contributed.

Mrs. Dickenson beamed.

"I can assure you, Mrs. Macready, that I find this city overflowing with talent—I might almost say, genius."

"Pierre belittles himself so," Georgina said. "He declares that he has no more gifts than hundreds of others."

As she had hoped, Mrs. Pentley Dickenson hastened to be reassuring. She predicted that Pierre Macready would be a famous man. She regretted that he lacked self-appreciation. Or was he shy? She found it so difficult to draw him into the little gatherings of stimulating people who met at her house.

"I know that my son regards it as a great privilege to visit your house," Georgina exclaimed. She recalled things he had told her of this one and that one who were going to be heard about some day. And then, the celebrities that Mrs. Dickenson caught as they passed through the city were always such reputable men and women.

Again, Mrs. Pentley Dickenson was pleased.

"I like to be just a little fastidious in selecting my notable guests."

It was a matter of pride with her that she never extended an invitation to a celebrity whose personal reputation was not a sweet odour in the fetid atmosphere of the arts. While *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush* and *For Auld Lang Syne* were still the novels of the hour, she had invited Ian Maclaren, who was making a lecture tour, to stay at her house; and among travelling play-actors, J. H. Stoddart was one of the few possibilities, and Mrs. Kendal another.

Georgina felt that Mrs. Dickenson was the sort of friend that Pierre needed. She believed in him and was willing to say so.

III.

The brief interval spent with Professor St. Quinton was less satisfactory. Professor St. Quinton was known for the interest he displayed in students who showed literary promise, and his kindnesses to Pierre had been numerous. But when she held up her son as a delectable subject for conversation, he paid little attention.

Under his bushy brows, his beady eyes blinked cheerily. He asked her if she knew the tall young woman in black and gold, who had been singing coon songs. Although a little rough, she could cast a spell. He was waiting to hear her just once more, after which he intended to go home.

“Then I am glad that I found you in time,” said Mrs. Macready. “I know you are interested in my son.”

“Your son? Oh yes, your son!” St. Quinton was watching Laura Bateman absent-mindedly.

“I think you know more than anyone of his early promise,” Mrs. Macready persisted. “Do you feel that he may become a famous man?”

The professor replied reflectively:

“One must not build too sanguinely on early promise. The flowers that bloom most profusely in the spring have disappeared by midsummer and left no sign.”

Of course, that was not what Georgina had wanted.

“But real genius frequently does reveal itself in youth,” she contended.

He pulled his scant whisker and shook his head.

“I have spent a lifetime—it will soon be a lifetime—trying to determine the nature of genius in its early displays. I have encountered much talent, or what seemed to be talent, but little of it has ever come to anything. It is always so difficult to diagnose the potential character behind it. That is the vital thing.”

“But Pierre has character,” protested his mother. “I feel certain that he is a good young man.”

Professor St. Quinton smiled; different persons had such different definitions of the word character.

"If that is what's necessary, then—" and the old man nodded his head.

Mrs. Macready made up her mind that he was a cynic, a much less helpful friend for budding talent than Mrs. Pentley Dickenson.

Before she could try again, St. Quinton leapt to his feet.

"The tall girl is going to sing!" he exclaimed. "Now you will see something that does look to me like decided talent."

Accompanied by her gaudy partner, Laura Bateman had mounted the platform, and Macready was at the piano. She wore a large-brimmed hat and when she flopped the front, knowingly, at the audience, there was laughter.

Following a few bars from the piano, the little man swaggered towards Laura, standing insolently with arms akimbo. He addressed her in a flutey tenor, while she eyed him from head to foot.

"Tell me, pretty maiden, are there any more at home like you?"

She flounced past him, and replied provocatively:

"Oh yes, kind sir, but what is that, I pray, to you?"

A travesty! On the darling musical comedy number of the decade. Also an addition, unheard before, to Laura's repertoire. Everybody leaned forward to see and to listen. When at last the Amazon departed, holding the captive masher by the nape of the neck, she had a wise wink to add to the "Florodora" nod.

The singers had to repeat the duet, and as Mrs. Macready watched the men in the audience, rocking in an abandonment of mirth, she felt convinced that the performance contained a bawdy meaning which she was missing.

Georgina Macready believed that she now saw clearly what was happening to her son. What advancement did he hope to find in the company of that bold-faced woman, who adopted such doubtful methods to amuse people? He had been drifting away from Mrs. Dickenson who could do so much for him. Pierre seemed to have a cheap taste for unimportant companions. His father all over again! Perhaps that was what the professor had meant by lack of character.

In the corner where Stan Spencer was still palavering, Mrs. Macready found Medora and Diana. On their way to the door, they passed Laura

Bateman, whose excited laugh could be heard in the centre of a male group from which PeeVee emerged to join them.

“We are leaving now,” his mother said. “I suppose you will come with us?”

They paused while he went for his hat and coat, and he brought back Bess Hortop to bid them “good-night”.

“It was awfully good of you to come to the city just to be here,” she said, shaking hands gratefully. “People have been so encouraging.”

“We are catching a train,” replied Georgina shortly.

Medora saw that something had upset her mother and tried to cover her curtness.

“Your teashop is such an original idea,” she said. “What made you think of it?”

“I have always enjoyed my own cooking,” Bess laughed. “I thought others might do so too.”

Mrs. Macready was more suave.

“I hope, Miss Hortop, that you have forbidden onions and cabbages to the premises.”

The answer was slightly surprised:

“I hadn’t intended to do so.”

“Oh, you really must,” returned the older woman. “I have always thought that if I had to be a cook, I’d refuse to smell of onions and cabbage. They are such a label to the profession.”

She had come to the city with the partially formed intention of snubbing at least one of Pierre’s undesirable friends and now she had done so. She never waited to see the effect of her blows, but always turned on her heel and departed abruptly.

Medora was accustomed to such scenes. Almost everybody in Petersville, from the clergy to the latest social climber had received an elaborate snub from Georgina Macready at one time or another. Medora did not altogether approve of them; she feared that they only made people say mean things about her mother, but she always kept step with Georgina in her retreat from the stricken foe.

Diana caught her brother by the arm.

“O, PeeVee!” she said. Tears brimmed in her helpless eyes. “And Miss Hortop is so nice, too!”

“You go on,” he said. “Tell mother not to keep the cab for me. I’ll catch the train.”

Mrs. Macready was sitting in the carriage, gazing stiffly out of the window, when she received the message. She was still angry, partly with Professor St. Quinton, but a little bit with herself; perhaps she had said too much. She only remarked:

“We have seen the sort of friends that Pierre is making in Toronto. It is hardly surprising that he does not hesitate to be rude to his mother.”

CHAPTER IV

RUBY AND DAVID

Ruby Hortop always refused to submerge herself in silence in order that the attention of the people about her might wander in the direction of some other attraction. At concerts or musical comedies, she invariably joined in the more familiar melodies, using a low and distinct hum, and though irascible neighbours occasionally told her to “Hush!” she had sung duets, in that impromptu manner, with some quite notable artists in her time.

When amateurs were performing, Ruby ignored them. They went ahead with their business and she went ahead with hers. She saw no reason for listening to the vulgar singing of Laura Bateman, whom she disliked, when she had so many things to say to Stan Spencer who was so anxious to be friendly.

Naturally, Stan Spencer knew that Ruby was going to marry his cousin. He thought David lucky to have won such a charming girl and, during the afternoon of the reception, the impression grew steadily stronger.

No matter how the crowd surged and eddied in the rooms, Stan and Ruby were always finding themselves in the same group. She accused him of doing it deliberately and, before long, she was right.

She put her hand on his shoulder and whispered in his ear:

“I believe you think that you can cut out David!”

Laughing, she ran away from him, and five minutes later, they found themselves cast together in a remote corner, chattering and giggling, while someone in the distance was casting a ballad on the semi-silence of the room.

Laura Bateman, who had been standing nearby, sauntered across to say:

“I hope the singing doesn’t interrupt you!”

Ruby did not reply to this trite sarcasm; she had heard many versions of it at different times. After Laura was out of hearing, Ruby talked of her brazen manner with young men.

In matters of sex, Ruby preferred the maidenly approach. She had great confidence in her own attractions and frequently told herself, when gazing into her mirror, that she could take away any boy from any girl she knew. She liked to exert her powers but did not play fast and loose with her victims. She prided herself on having returned any number of men to their original owners. She could count young husband after young husband who had been crazy about her, but who were contenting themselves with second bests.

At a dance, Ruby seized any moment alone with another girl's partner to whisper: "Oh, I have heard something about you!" and, passing him on the floor, would tantalize him with reproving shakes of the head. At picnics, she lured away flattered youths to consult their wisdom, but at the last moment invariably demurred about mentioning the matter after all. If they coaxed to hear her problem, so much the better. Ruby believed in suspense, and her existence among men was a mass of implied secrets.

After the candles were lighted, Stan, whose head was in an infatuated whirl, asked permission to walk home with her.

"David expects to," she replied.

"Oh, David has all the good fortune!"

"You are only being polite," she said. "You men never mean a thing you say."

He assured her with unction that if he had won favour in her eyes, his sole purpose in life would be to dance attendance upon her.

She realized that David had deserted her all afternoon in order to carry trays of coffee, and reproached him when he came to see if she were ready to go.

"You were the daintiest girl in the room," he said.

The fond admiration in his tone was so genuine that she gave him a pleased smile.

Ruby had resumed her ordinary clothes, and her long skirts flopped about her boot-tops and covered her dimpled knees after their one satisfactory glimpse of freedom.

There were moments, especially after the companionship of men like Stan Spencer, when Ruby felt thoroughly dissatisfied with David. She thrilled in the presence of his physical strength and found gratification in remembering that scores of girls would gladly have taken her place. But why wasn't he showy? She wanted to make a more impressive match than any of her sisters and it irritated her to have even Nesta hint that she might be throwing herself away. What if David McLean were not the most advantageous choice after all!

When Ruby's nerves were on edge, she liked to make David suffer for it. She enjoyed sending him to Coventry because he seemed so puzzled and patient and eager to be friends again. He did not pretend to understand her little ways, but even in her pettishness, she was a darling. After they had made it up, he sometimes pressed her to tell him what had been wrong, but as she usually did not know herself, she would give him a little squeeze and say:

"David, you are such an old stupid!"

And David wondered if all fascinating girls were as unreasonable.

When they left "The Only Teashop" and started slowly northward, David soon discovered that he was in disgrace again. His cheery attempts to talk about the afternoon were crushed by deadly monosyllables. Ruby said "yes", or "no", or nothing at all, and there was a set glumness about her walk. David recognized all the signs.

The city had reached that stage of its growth when each of the main streets possessed one prosperous side, while the other had fewer buildings and more vacant ones. On the west side of Yonge Street, the windows flamed with invitations to the purchasers of week-end supplies, and the lights and the throngs gave an air of carnival that disguised, for an odd hour, the narrowness and shabbiness of the thoroughfare.

David attempted to converse as though he felt no chill.

"Shall we cross to the other side? It is not so crowded."

"No."

A long pause.

"Bess gave her guests wonderful refreshments. I'm sure they were appreciated."

"Yes."

More silence.

"PeeVee has handsome sisters, don't you think? And a handsome mother, too, for that matter."

"I didn't notice."

It was becoming a strain.

Whenever Ruby began to hum to herself, David sought a short cut to their destination. They turned abruptly into a side street. Under the trees, now practically bare, it was gloomy and depressing. Pads of wet leaves stuck to the soles of their boots as they trudged along, and Ruby stopped once or twice to scrape them off against the curb.

On one of these occasions, David faced her.

“What is the matter, Ruby?” he asked.

As he expected, she answered with feigned surprise:

“Nothing at all.”

They reached the park, still silent, and instead of following the path, they walked across the long grass, under the screen of the wide oaks. David followed her lead towards one of the deserted benches, where they sat down as if by a common impulse.

“It’s not cold,” she said. “We may as well sit here and talk things over.”

“Pretty dreary, isn’t it?” he commented.

South of them, the Parliament Buildings made a black shadow in the dusk of the early night. Spots of light here and there showed where a belated official or a cleaner was at work; at intervals, they went out, and the dark pile grew more forbidding.

Ruby leaned close to him, with a suggestion of trustfulness that hardly ever failed her.

“David,” she said. “I wish you had a little more ambition!”

He coughed and scratched the back of his neck. The nervous gesture irritated her; Stan Spencer never squirmed like a schoolboy.

“Why are you so set against the shop?” he asked, a little wearily. They had discussed the matter frequently.

“With your education, you could have done so much better. ‘The Two Macs’! It sounds so common, and I want you to be more important in the city than my sisters’ husbands.”

A delivery waggon was clattering round the park, and he watched it for a few minutes before replying.

“We are all just starting in life. Don’t you think it is going to be fun to see how we all rise to our capabilities?”

“But why start so low down?” she protested. “It’s not for myself. I want to be proud of you; to feel that everybody knows and admires you, and envies me.”

To avoid any dispute, he said:

“Of course, you know that PeeVee is the one among us who has been fore-ordained a celebrity!”

“Oh, PeeVee!” she exclaimed, scornfully. “I believe you think more of him than you do of me.”

“If it is publicity you want for me, I do get my name in the newspapers fairly frequently,” he reminded her, good-humouredly.

Immediately, he realized that he had blundered. Ruby disliked his athletic activities even more than she disliked the shop. David’s name in the sporting pages, especially when the writers called him Reddy McLean, was only a little less disreputable than it would have been in the police court news. The Hortops had never taken any interest in games, except an occasional swagger event like polo at the Hunt Club. There had been a time when the lacrosse matches between Toronto and Montreal had been attended by the bloods as well as the sporting fraternity, and in those days the male Hortops had talked knowingly of the fine points of the game. But Ruby could not remember the time when her father had not denounced all sports, especially the professionals, as vulgar. The entire family deprecated David’s devotion to his teams.

It seemed to her a good opportunity to extract from him a promise that he would not play hockey during the coming winter. She could see that he wanted to be friends, and he might give way in this one thing so that he would not seem to be refusing every request she made. She asked him, in a little purring voice, to drop all sport, just to please her.

“Ruby,” he said, “you know that I promised last March to remain with the General Wolfe’s for another season.”

She moved pettishly down the bench.

“And I suppose you would not disappoint that horrid sporting crowd for anything?”

“They are an awfully decent bunch of fellows,” was all he said.

“You have no pride,” she fired at him. “I want you to be more of a gentleman. I was so mortified today when Mrs. Macready snubbed you.”

“Did she?”

“You know perfectly well she did. And how cordial she was to Stan Spencer!”

David despised men who bickered with their womenfolk, but he was sufficiently nettled to take pleasure in enquiring:

“Do you know that Stan Spencer never sticks to one job for more than a few months?”

Ruby corrected him triumphantly:

“He is always bettering himself. He has his own office now. He is going to be a manufacturers’ agent.”

What function a manufacturers’ agent performed in the community was unknown to Ruby, but the phrase itself rang with importance. She could see the poor, helpless manufacturers standing with limp hands, wondering what next to do with the goods that they had manufactured; she could see Stan arriving, urbane and efficient, to save them from the predicament of being crushed by their own creation. And David was content to keep a shop, to handle neckties, and shirts, and pajamas!

But David only remarked:

“He has a few more things to try. He hasn’t been a stock broker yet, or an advisory engineer.”

Ruby got up stiffly.

“Let’s go home!” she said.

She had never been more deeply offended with David. He was treating the two biggest requests that she had ever made of him as though they were childish. It would serve him right to be told that her patience was coming to an end, but by the time they reached the door of the Hortops’ home, she had decided that the possibilities of her tact were not yet exhausted. It had never failed her in the past.

“You know it is not for myself that I urge you to be more ambitious,” she said, in the caressing voice that invariably thrilled him. “I would always love you. It is for dear mamma and father. They have had so many humiliations in their lives. Someday, I’ll tell you all about it.”

It was always a good idea to send a young man home pondering her farewell remarks.

As she ran up the steps, David was thinking what a darling she was, so tender in her concern for her poor, faded mamma.

The door opened, and he caught a glimpse of Mrs. Hortop. Evidently, she had been coming to interrupt their “good-night” at the door, which she regarded as middle-class. He caught a few plaintive words of protest.

Mrs. Hortop was a queer old thing, he thought, and a little pathetic too. She puzzled him. She was so determined not to like other families on this respectable back street and to make her daughters old-fashioned. Evidently, this frail lady had gone through some terrible ordeal in which Ruby had been her one unselfish protector. If the girls out of such a home cherished some odd ideas, who could blame them?

CHAPTER V

THE MACREADYS

I.

The town of Petersville lay in a large basin. The river valley ran between two undulating plateaux of rich farm land and the slopes were heavy with foliage, maple woods that were a shimmering green in the month of June and a blaze of crimson in September. Where the valley broadened and flattened, as it did at intervals on the way to the lakes, pioneers had planted communities, and Petersville was one of them.

It had not been considered convenient to have the railroad climb down to the level of the river, so the trains passed by along the rise a mile from the market square, and passengers could see the tops of spires in the distance, which gave the impression that the entire town had slipped down, a huddled mass, into a large hollow.

There had been a time when the citizens expected Petersville to become an important little city. Everybody looked upon the river as a source of water-power, and upon the water-power as a source of wealth, but it turned out to be a most capricious stream. In freshet time, it went mad and showed its resentment of the intrusion of houses and mills into the valley. On the flats, cellars were flooded and outbuildings swept away, and the small industries near the big dam had an annual fight against inundation. Having made its yearly protest, the stream would shrink between its banks, timid and tranquil, a little less robust each summer as the bushlands were cleared and the swamps drained in the northern townships.

Nobody dreamed any longer that Petersville might have a future, but it was old enough to be rich in mature trees and mellow houses. People boasted of its cleanliness, its beauty, and its peace.

Several generations of Macreadys had lived in Petersville, and Thomas Macready had loved the town as few men in a new country love any one spot. In the days before millionaires had begun to abound in Canada, he had been considered comparatively wealthy, which may have been one of the reasons why Georgina had married him. In her girlhood, Georgina had hated Toronto; all the people with whom she was not invited to associate were stupid snobs, she said, but she resented their satisfaction with their own superiority. She attended a fashionable school, and went home night after night in tears because she felt that the girls looked down upon her. She was not an upstart. She would show them that she had more brains than any of them. “Why are you such hopeless vulgarians?” she would scream, stamping her foot at her timid mother, who was conscious that her English sounded queer, but did not know how to correct it. Georgina married Thomas Macready in order to escape from the city.

In Petersville, Georgina was still more unhappy. True, she had a position, and she let people know it, but she soon grew tired of expressing contempt for the dullness that she found all about her. Her great desire was to get away from her native land, but her husband proved a dead weight that would not be moved. He played at being a lawyer, though his office was mostly used as a centre for games of euchre, whist, and pedro. He went fishing in the spring and shooting in the fall; in the winter, he loved a snowshoe tramp, especially by moonlight, and he pottered in his garden in the hot weather. He never told his wife in so many words that he had absolutely no intention of leaving Petersville, but he passed away in the rambling house where he had been born.

One cause for resentment in Georgina’s life was her husband’s devotion to his elder sister, Ann; he treated her like a rather foolish sweetheart. Aunt Ann was another subject that Thomas Macready avoided discussing with his wife, and the most she ever said was:

“I am sure I am as nice as possible to Ann, considering that she is too silly to be companionable.”

When Thomas Macready died, he left sixteen hundred dollars a year in trust for Miss Ann Macready, and the remainder of his money went to Georgina. She felt keenly the implied mistrust in the legacy to Ann; it was as if he said after his death, when she could not answer him, that he had no faith in her affection for his sister. She made no complaint, but from that day onward, her life seemed to be filled with disappointments due to the need of another sixteen hundred dollars in her income.

She was always talking of things that ought to be done for the benefit of the children, and when Aunt Ann enquired why she did not do them, she invariably replied:

“I find that it would take sixteen hundred dollars more than I can raise.”

Aunt Ann did not notice the coincidence that the sum required was always sixteen hundred dollars. She was an aggravatingly simple soul.

Family celebrations were the centre of Aunt Ann’s life. She was always preparing for one or another of them and the most important of them all was her own birthday. On that day, Aunt Ann became, for twenty-four hours, the centre of the universe. She felt that she was sitting high on a throne, surrounded by gifts and timely jests. For nearly half a century she had been saying:

“This may be my lucky year. Perhaps this year I’ll exchange my ‘miss’ for a ‘mistress’.”

After the death of her brother, Aunt Ann’s birthday became a difficult occasion. Somehow, the arrangements always appeared to clash. If Mrs. Potter planned a luncheon for her old friend, Georgina was certain to desire a midday celebration at her house. Aunt Ann did not like to accept Mrs. Potter’s invitations before hearing from her sister-in-law—she feared Georgina would feel hurt—and every year it ended in a jangle at the last moment. Once, Mrs. Potter tried to avoid all the meal hours and suggested two tables of duplicate whist for the evening, only to have Georgina break in upon the party shortly before eight o’clock. The latter had tickets to take Aunt Ann to hear Pauline Johnson recite her own poetry.

Aunt Ann regarded Pauline Johnson as a very great Canadian. It was easy enough to be a poetess, and it was not particularly difficult to be an Indian, but to be a poetess and an Indian at the same time impressed Aunt Ann as a notable achievement.

The choice was the most difficult that had ever been placed before Aunt Ann, but she stayed with Mrs. Potter, and then cried herself to sleep over the thought that she had missed Pauline Johnson and seemed ungrateful to Georgina.

Shortly before the opening of “The Only Teashop”, Mrs. Potter had left for England to spend Christmas with her married daughter. When saying “good-bye” to Aunt Ann, she added:

“I hope Georgina will look after your birthday!”

“Oh, you may be sure!” replied Miss Macready. “Dear Georgina is always so anxious to have me on that day because poor Thomas would have wished it.”

Mrs. Potter snorted and echoed “Poor Thomas”, with a different inflection from Aunt Ann’s.

For nearly a week before her birthday, Aunt Ann waited for a message from her sister-in-law. She liked mysteries and she wondered what surprise they were arranging in order that she might not miss either Thomas or Mrs. Potter. She got PeeVee’s letter to say that he would be home late on Saturday evening; she was more convinced than ever that there was a delightful plot hatching for her benefit.

By Friday night, she was too excited to sleep. Every tinkle of the bell brought her galloping to the telephone, but it was never Georgina. She could not remember a birthday that had crept upon her in this ambushed manner.

The excitement kept her awake all night and she got up by lamplight, fully an hour earlier than usual, so as to be waiting when the ’phone rang. She did not eat any breakfast, but sat at the window where the road could be seen winding up the hill.

She durst not mention to Moggy that she felt anxious, and when the latter looked in from the kitchen to enquire: “Any word?” she replied, quite lightly: “Oh, there is plenty of time!” She had to be that way with Moggy, who seized upon the slightest provocation to say extremely rude things about Georgina. She would not be silenced, though Aunt Ann had reproved her sharply a great number of times.

At last, it was impossible to keep up the pretence any longer, and when the clock in the hall struck eleven, Ann Macready put a shawl over her head and strolled down to the gate. Then she did not dare to go back, for she knew that Moggy would be waiting for her with acid criticism to pour upon Georgina.

Relief came upon her unexpectedly. It drove right up to her from the direction of the main street and she did not notice it because she was gazing so fixedly in the other direction.

A voice hailed her:

“Many happy returns, Aunt Ann!”

The sensation of being happy again came so suddenly that she exclaimed:—

“The same to you and many of them.”

Then she realized that it was Gertrude, and tittered at her own blunder.

Gertrude sat in the shabby buggy from Murray’s livery, with a hamper beside her on the seat, and she pulled in the old black horse that was much more ready to stop than go.

“What do you say to a ride?” she asked.

The query was unnecessary. Aunt Ann clasped her hands. She loved a drive behind a spanking turnout, and everything passed for a spanking turnout with her that was able to pull up a hill.

“I suppose I can leave it here quite safely while you muffle up?” suggested Gertrude.

The horse drooped its head limply, as if to intimate that nothing would move it to betray such faith.

“What about the others?” enquired Aunt Ann, as she dressed herself with Moggy’s aid. “Aren’t they coming too?”

“Mother had to go to the city,” Gertrude told her.

Moggy’s grunt was so eloquent that Aunt Ann wanted to slap her.

Gertrude explained:

“There was an invitation that mother could not refuse.”

“And you stayed at home because of me?”

Aunt Ann pulled away from Moggy to kiss her niece. She wiped her brimming eyes with the corner of her shawl: nothing upset her so much as being loved.

The arrangements for the day delighted Aunt Ann. They drove to the next village along the gravel road in which the November rains had as yet made no ruts, and spent several hours with the Misses Crowe. The hamper provided by Gertrude turned their luncheon into a surprise party, made perfect by many delicacies that were bound to disagree with the digestions of Aunt Ann and both the Misses Crowe. On their way home, late in the afternoon, they spent an hour in the cemetery. Aunt Ann never tired of visiting the cemetery. It appealed to her as did an old-fashioned melodrama, a satisfying combination of sentiment and comic relief. She cried a little beside the graves of friends and relatives, but tittered delightedly over the epitaphs on the stones of strangers. Names like Wrenn, Bosomworth and Honk struck her as very humorous when carved upon a monument.

It was characteristic of Aunt Ann that she forgot immediately her fears of the early morning and the night before. She took it for granted that her other nieces, like Gertrude, had been loth to be absent from town on her birthday.

II.

Gertrude reached home in time to prepare tea for the other members of the family. It had been an unsatisfactory day for her. She was angry with her mother, but still more angry with herself.

After dark, she sat on the verandah that reached across the front of the house, and watched the lights appear and disappear in the windows beyond the lilac hedge, now completely bare of leaves. As she went over the events of the week, she felt at times that she had been entirely in the right; then upsetting doubts would creep into her mind. Suppose she did not understand her mother at all? Then her own conduct had been unpardonable.

For nearly a fortnight, Gertrude had wondered what her mother intended to do to celebrate Aunt Ann's birthday. On the previous Sunday, she had suggested to Diana that something ought to be said about it, but Diana had reminded her, rather fearfully, that their mother disliked interference with her plans.

"Aunt Ann may be worrying," said Gertrude.

"I am quite certain mother hasn't forgotten," replied Diana.

On Saturday morning, at breakfast, Mrs. Macready remarked casually to her daughter:

"We have no time to waste if we intend to catch the noon train."

"Are we going to Miss Hortop's reception?" enquired Gertrude.

"Certainly," Medora replied, as if she had known it all along.

"But it is Aunt Ann's birthday," Gertrude objected.

"Your Aunt Ann will not be forgotten," said her mother. "I intend to bring her up here tomorrow for tea."

"We should have told her before now," Gertrude objected. "You know how much attention she expects today."

"I hope you are not going to make yourself disagreeable," put in Medora. "We all give a great deal of thought to Aunt Ann."

Gertrude put down her coffee cup and spoke deliberately:

"If Mrs. Potter had been at home, we'd have been doing all sorts of things to conflict with her plans and spoil poor Aunt Ann's day, but because Mrs. Potter is away we are going calmly off to leave her in the lurch, without even a word."

Georgina rose to her feet.

"Gertrude," she said, "you forget yourself."

Simultaneously, Medora and Diana followed their mother's lead. Medora contributed:

“If you do not want to come with us you can stay at home. But you need not be rude to mother!”

“I have no intention of going with you,” retorted Gertrude.

The others pushed back their chairs, dropped their napkins, and left the room. A few minutes later, Diana ran back and slipped a two-dollar bill into her sister’s hand, whispering:

“If you want to take Aunt Ann for a ride, that will help you.”

Then she departed hurriedly. Diana’s one purpose in life was to avoid running foul of any member of her family.

That type of scene was known in the Macready household as one of Gertrude’s tantrums.

At such times, Gertrude believed for the moment that she was seeing clearly the motive behind her mother’s actions, but she always realized afterwards that Medora and Diana did not agree with her. It was possible that the pettiness and malice were all in her own imagination, and that the things she said in the heat of resentment were unjust. She would try to tell herself she had some of her mother’s meanness in her own make-up, so that she recognized it readily. But what if the meanness were in her mind only?

At eight o’clock, the station cab drew up at the gate. At once Gertrude noticed a feeling of restraint. Diana was doing most of the talking and trying to pretend that nothing was wrong, but Diana was very transparent. During the meal, she prattled about Stan Spencer’s beautiful manners and Bess Hortop’s delicious refreshments and the prominent people who were present and, finally, had a word of praise for Laura Bateman’s singing.

Mrs. Macready interrupted to rebuke her daughter’s enthusiasm. Apart from that young woman and her songs, the whole affair had been more refined than she had expected but, in her youth, no girl like Laura Bateman would have been tolerated in a gathering of nice people.

“Laura has as much brains as all the nice people down there put together,” snapped PeeVee.

“She doesn’t know how to sing,” put in Medora, who always followed her mother’s lead in a conversation. Medora had spent two years studying music in Europe and always spoke with authority on the efforts of other singers.

PeeVee paid no attention. His evident ill-humour surprised Gertrude; as a rule he avoided anything so disconcerting as an altercation. She remembered that it had been her father's way to say nothing except when everything was sunny, and PeeVee had the same dislike of scenes.

"What is wrong?" she asked suddenly. "Wasn't the party a success after all?"

Diana dropped the spoon with a splash into the preserves that she had been serving. The crisis she had been attempting to avoid was upon them.

Medora, annoyed with PeeVee for ignoring her remark, supplied the information.

"Pierre has seen fit to be a wet blanket all the way home because he disapproved of something that mother said to Miss Hortop."

"It really wasn't anything," from Diana, in desperation.

"A perfectly harmless jest," explained Medora. "Mother merely warned Miss Hortop that cabbages and onions make a cook smell like her profession."

Mrs. Macready bit her lip and wondered why her eldest daughter should be such a fool.

Diana glanced apprehensively at Gertrude. At such moments, Gertrude's likeness to Georgina became strangely marked.

"I do not know why it is, mother," she said, "that you should have made up your mind to dislike Miss Hortop. I believe you went to Toronto today especially to give her a snubbing."

Led by their mother, the other girls went through the formality of leaving the room, although Diana lingered ruefully—she was hungry, and the citron jam looked particularly toothsome with its amber transparency.

Medora permitted them to pass out, and then turned back for a moment.

"I hope you realize," she said, "that your disrespect to mother has spoiled two meals today."

Gertrude and PeeVee gazed at one another across the disordered table.

"Let's get out of this!" he suggested. "Aunt Ann will be expecting us."

They found Miss Macready waiting for them in the front room of her cottage, fluttering the pages of a church paper without paying much attention to its contents. Aunt Ann was devotional by habit rather than by instinct. To go to church on Sunday, with a carefully-arranged toilet, broke the monotony of an unduly lengthy day. For week days, she had in her room a little pile of books on religious subjects, with purple, white, and green markers and sacred symbols, delicately executed in silver, hanging from them. Almost any afternoon, when there was absolutely nothing else to do, you could find her in a comfortable rocker with a book of meditations open upon her lap. It gave her a feeling of spiritual satisfaction, when she settled herself for a snooze, to have Thomas à Kempis for her companion. *The Imitation of Christ*, alone, promised to last her a lifetime. She had read, with partial understanding, twenty pages of it, and her one definite impression of Thomas à Kempis was that he had not known how to express himself clearly, though he had been in all probability a great and good man.

She dropped her church paper gladly when PeeVee and Gertrude opened the front door. Whenever Aunt Ann talked to men, she grimaced and made coy faces. Only to members of her own sex and to very little boys was her manner natural. Her nephew produced a lace shawl, which she had pointed out to Gertrude in a catalogue as the desire of her heart, but she pretended to be greatly surprised.

"For me?" she cried. "Not really for me?"

"It will make you look like a pin-cushion with a crocheted tidy," PeeVee told her.

Aunt Ann laughed immoderately. When a man provided a jest for her, she never made the mistake of under-appreciating it.

They crowded together on the sofa, so that she might sit with her arm around PeeVee, and no matter what they talked about, she interrupted at intervals to exclaim:

"Oughtn't I to be the proud auntie with such a clever and handsome young man for a nephew?"

Shortly before midnight, they drank a cup of thick cocoa that had a flavour like licorice, and then were ready to go home. Aunt Ann accompanied them as far as the gate, a hand on each young waist, and when they said "goodnight" she gurgled, half-tearfully:

"What a perfect, perfect ending to a lovely, lovely birthday!"

Georgina Macready heard Pierre and Gertrude go out together as if nothing had happened, and more than three hours later, lying sleepless in bed, she heard them come in again; they were laughing as they came up the gravel walk.

The experiences in the city had left her strangely agitated. More than anything else in the world, Georgina wanted her son to be a recognized figure in this Canadian renaissance about which Mrs. Pentley Dickenson talked blithely; he had to be so conspicuously successful that certain women—she had had them mentally listed for years—would be forced to bow to her superiority. That day, she had met men and women who apparently shared her faith in his ability, and yet their attitudes had been disquieting. She almost hated Professor St. Quinton for his flippancy. "You will see something that does look to me like decided talent," he had said of Laura Bateman. Had he meant that Pierre possessed no decided talent? Then, he had made a remark about character; she could not remember exactly what, but it, too, sounded like an insinuation. Georgina thought bitterly of her late husband. He had been determined about only one thing; to waste his entire life, to waste it in a way that he enjoyed, being a play-boy in the company of mediocre cronies. But for that, Pierre would not now be hampered by such a crowd of middle-class friends, who could not be avoided in Canada except by a great act of will.

One thing had to be done: Pierre must be separated from the young people who were holding him back, young people who would be content to live and die in drab obscurity. They were typical of their country; Pierre was not. But too many of them might quench him by their clammy weight. The clock in the hall struck three before Georgina reached a decision. Then, with her mind more at ease, she fell asleep.

On Sunday afternoon, Georgina found her son reading alone in front of a grate fire. She drew up a rocker and, sitting beside him, made her proposal without any introduction.

"Pierre," she said, "I want you to resign from your office, and come back home to live."

He expressed surprise, and she went on to explain:

"You could look after the estate for me, and you could devote more attention to your career."

"But what if it should turn out that I have no career?" he asked. He did not speak impatiently, although the constant urgings irritated him.

Mrs. Macready insisted that he could be as famous as he chose to be; at last, his own country had something to offer to men whose talents were artistic. Everybody expected him to excel.

"Because of that silly prize-winning poem?" he interrupted.

No, that was not the reason, and he knew it. Even when he was very young, his friends and teachers had frequently told her that he was not like other boys. She reminded him that she had sacrificed an unusual gift—the paintings on the walls of the room were her evidence—to do her duty as a wife and mother. Now, her hopes were alive again and centred in him.

"It would be absurd for me to come home here to live like a 'bum'," he objected. "I'd be ashamed to face my friends who are earning honest livings."

"Then if I furnish you with the necessary income, will you go away and live in Paris or London for five years?"

PeeVee had never seen his mother more in earnest. The offer seemed overwhelmingly generous, especially as he had heard Georgina say many times that the lack of another sixteen hundred dollars a year made it impossible for Medora to go abroad to finish her musical education. Medora was just commencing the third year of her studies in Italy when the cable telling of Thomas Macready's fatal illness called her home. She had remained in Petersville, and had made a great deal of talk about her sacrifices for the family until Mrs. Potter had said, testily:

"What would be the use of wasting the cash on Medora? Her voice is loud, and that's all."

PeeVee suggested that he would not like to take the money when there was none forthcoming for Medora.

"Medora is as ambitious for you as I am," Georgina assured him. "We both feel that you will never accomplish anything while you remain in Toronto. Why don't you cultivate people who can help you, like Mrs. Pentley Dickenson, instead of running about everywhere with a couple of haberdashers?"

Unintentionally, she had reminded him of one reason why he would not go abroad; his friends could not be with him. But he knew it would not do to tell that to his mother. Instead, he said:

"But I am not so idle as you appear to think. I may have a little play staged in January."

She was delighted. Why had he kept it a secret?

"I didn't want to blow before I was absolutely certain," he told her. "The Garrison Dramatic Club may do it as the curtain-raiser for their annual performance."

Georgina’s enthusiasm received a decided let-down. Only amateurs! Still, it would make a noise in Toronto, and that was better than silence.

CHAPTER VI

THREE MORE MUSKETEERS

I.

PeeVee Macready had never attempted to analyze the value that he placed upon the companionship of a couple of haberdashers; it was not at all surprising that his mother, an outsider, should think they could not have much in common, but he realized that friendship was not entirely a matter of standardized groupings. He did not pay a great deal of attention to David McLean's sentimental view of it—"All for one and one for all", the magic which had bound together for life so many trios of musketeers. That was like David. He even refused to see that Mildred could make an iota of difference. PeeVee hoped he was right, but felt less certain about it.

The friendship began one September day in the early eighties, when three little boys entered the Petersville Public School. They sat together in the lowest tablet class, and at recess shyly learned each other's names. They ignored the other beginners and, after school, David McLean took Pierre Macready and Ted MacHenry hooking apples; they got no fruit and narrowly escaped being overhauled by a surly collie.

That evening, Mrs. Macready began to discourage her son's choice of chums. Ted MacHenry's father was the village tailor and Mrs. Macready did not know whether he possessed a family or not. As for Mrs. McLean, she could hardly expect the recognition that a professional man's wife might have received, Dr. McLean being the sort of man he was; Georgina described him as a rowdy.

Mrs. McLean was a brown woman—red-brown hair and round, gentle, brown eyes. She asked no pity in life, and when her husband said, "I am a shiftless clown, Mary", she contradicted him. She had seven sons to look after, one of them a hopeless cripple fore-doomed never to reach manhood, and money was not plentiful, but it was always jolly in the home, everybody laughing, her husband loudest of all. Dr. McLean loved to fish and hunt and be out among men, and that was why prospective patients so frequently found him absent from his office. Most of them drifted down the street to the busy Dr. McPherson. Only those remained who did not wish to pay a fee; they knew that Dr. McLean would not press them.

Georgina Macready disapproved of such shiftlessness and would not listen when her husband described McLean as the whitest man in town.

“He is lewd too,” she declared. “I have heard you repeat some of his vulgar speeches.”

Macready said no more. He knew that he could not make his wife realize the health and cleanness of Dr. McLean’s hearty vulgarity.

It was Dr. McLean who suggested to David that “PeeVee” was a nickname that described Pierre, and Georgina never forgave the McLeans for what she regarded as an impertinence.

David made PeeVee learn to swim. PeeVee preferred to take his duck and then remain in the cool shallows watching the other boys perform. David insisted upon taking him into the depths. PeeVee found a strength in David’s naked body touching his that gave him a confidence he had not possessed before. For a while, they went in like Siamese twins, until David declared, “You don’t need me any more.” In the second summer, PeeVee was doing fancy dives that were not in David’s repertoire. The boys spread abroad the story of his prowess and he was forced, at last, to invest in a pair of bathing trunks, so that he might give a performance off the bridge into the deep water above the dam.

The hours spent at the McLeans’ home were the happiest of PeeVee’s boyhood. Everybody joined in the never-flagging jollity, and Mrs. McLean described her husband as the most incorrigible boy of them all. Sometimes she was a little weary—such an army of males made a great deal for her to do, and they could not afford a servant except at intervals—but she never seemed to grow cranky. Even Donald, the little sufferer, was not left out, and his brothers took him, with surprising gentleness for such a heedless crowd, to any place where it was possible for him to go.

Mrs. Macready feared that the lack of discipline in the McLean household might have a bad effect upon her son. Once, in her hearing, Dr. McLean had said: “I have made just one attempt to spank one of my kids, but when I saw his little white hinder compared to my big ham of a hand, I knew that only a brute could get satisfaction out of such a performance.” She remembered the speech as a perfect blending of coarseness and paternal folly.

Mrs. McLean had no such slim record of chastisement. How could she, with so much vitality to keep under control?

Sometimes, Dr. McLean had a sudden feeling that his sons deserved punishment. Then he adopted a rough and ready method. He took a flying kick at his offending progeny and if by any chance he landed, which he rarely did, as they were watchful and nimble, it was considered a great joke by everybody concerned. There was the memorable occasion when he pursued Alec across the backyard and, inadvertently, on to a slide covered by lightly-falling snow. The kick ended in disaster. After a spread-eagle interval in the air, the father landed on his back and the son sprawled on his face, the latter gazing wryly over his shoulder until he made sure that it was going to be all right to laugh about it. . . . Such diverting incidents never happened in PeeVee's home.

Occasionally, the McLean boys had solemn moments with their father, when he gave them his rules of conduct, embodied in simple sentences: "Never hit a man when he's down", and "Never hurt a woman", and "Only the meanest sort of shyster lies himself out of a mess."

Ted MacHenry's father died the year that the other boys entered High School, and Ted had to help his mother look after the shop, but no break occurred in the three village musketeers. By nature, Ted was a secretary. He was slim and a trifle dry in appearance, and he had never tried to engage in athletic pursuits. He preferred to keep records and make reports, and he performed that function for every young peoples' executive in the town. At intervals, he went to a convention as the delegate from Petersville and never missed an opportunity to make a speech. Once or twice, his remarks were reported in the city dailies and duly copied in the local weekly.

"It is good practice," he told his friends, and, though his face wore no expression, he was evidently pleased with himself.

"Practice, for what?" asked David. "Do you want to be a preacher?"

And Ted said nothing; he thought explanations were useless.

At such times, PeeVee looked at Ted and wondered how far-reaching were his designs for the future, but he never suggested to David that their friend made him a little tired. David was too staunch to the idea of all for one.

II.

The three youths went to Toronto at the same time, David and PeeVee to attend 'Varsity, and Ted to work in the warehouse of the firm which had handled his father's business for many years. To David had been awarded the Horace Potter Scholarship, open to high school students in Marlborough County, and the money enabled him to accompany PeeVee to the University, although he would have to augment it with earnings in his leisure months.

Under the strain of responsibility, Ted had lost his boyishness and looked sallow and precise; he could out-talk the others and correct them in practically every subject that they ever mentioned. Ted MacHenry was inclined to be supercilious about the higher education; he found himself doing so well without it.

When Mrs. MacHenry joined her son in the city and opened a boarding-house, PeeVee became their first roomer. His mother objected, but he insisted that it was only decent for one citizen of Petersville to help another. Mrs. MacHenry found him easy to please and, consequently, he did not always fare so well as the more exacting boarders. In course of time her establishment prospered and she suggested that if PeeVee did not mind occupying a cot in Ted's room, that arrangement would give her a little more income. PeeVee was quite willing, but he never told his mother what he had done. Occasionally, PeeVee's litter of books caused friction. Ted did not like litters, and got on very well, himself, with a limited library, consisting of *Self Help, In Tune with the Infinite*, *What a Young Man Ought to Know*, and a few books on success and public speaking.

Mrs. MacHenry gave her son to understand that she would not have David McLean in the house. He was not what she considered a refined young man, and when she heard that he was playing rugby, hockey, and lacrosse with the 'Varsity teams, she was certain that, instead of acquiring an education, he was wasting his time among wild companions. Greatly to Ted's relief, David did not propose to take a room at Mrs. MacHenry's; the prices were higher than he could afford to pay. He located himself on one of the dingy streets tucked away among the factories of suburban Yorkville. Most of the houses in the smoky, red-brick row were occupied by policemen and scavengers. The Misses Menzies did not associate with any of their neighbours, but they stayed in Civil Service Terrace—so dubbed by PeeVee—because they had been able to purchase cheaply. They were thrifty old ladies and regarded a university student as a most desirable tenant for their spare room.

The Misses Menzies, especially the talkative Miss Imogen, virtually adopted David. They tried to make him take the best of everything, and boasted about him as if he had been their own son. They told their friends, proudly, how he got up at six o'clock every morning to deliver newspapers; his earnings were sufficient to pay his room rent. In the bleak winter dawning, he would start out about the time that the milk-carts and scavenger waggons were rattling along the row, over the broken cedar cobbles, but one of the Misses Menzies was always ahead of him, waiting at the foot of the stairs in a flannelette wrapper, to make him drink a glass of hot milk, salted and peppered. No lazybones could live in Civil Service Terrace; the screaming and tooting of the early factory whistles saw to that.

It became one of the great joys in the lives of the Misses Menzies to have David's two friends to supper once a week.

There was one feature of Civil Service Terrace in which PeeVee and David delighted, although Ted could not agree with them that it was entertaining. The row itself was frigidly respectable, but the window of David's room overlooked a blind street known as the Dump, which consisted of ramshackle, rough-cast houses, mostly unfit for habitation. Directly behind the Misses Menzies lived a knife-grinder. Apparently, he had put an edge on the voices of all the womenfolk who belonged, more or less, to his establishment. They were equally shrill in joy and anger.

The household consisted entirely of adults, several children having been impounded by charitable organizations. Saturday nights were always festive. Three times the knife-grinder's house had been on fire, due to overturned lamps; it was no unusual experience to hear an hysterical voice moving towards the nearest thoroughfare in search of a policeman. On one occasion, there was a stabbing. It occurred in the knife-grinder's waggon. Two women were removed in an ambulance, one a young girl who had never been seen there before, and the other the virago who was generally regarded as the proprietor's wife. The girl had been cut, and the woman knocked senseless by a heavy implement. The knife-grinder, when arrested, claimed that his wife had run her head against an iron bolt he had happened to be holding out between her and the girl. The woman contradicted him and blamed the girl for the blow. Neither of them could imagine how the young woman had come to be stabbed. In her turn, she was inclined to be silent or to call the others filthy names. As nobody seemed much the worse for the mix-up, the magistrate was lenient, and in less than a month, the knife-grinder's friends held a reunion party, at which one of the fires occurred.

The Misses Menzies said it was disgusting and threatened to sell their house. Such things never happened in the country, and they felt Toronto to be a minor Sodom. But they attended church the following Sunday and felt purified by the sight of so many respectably-dressed people piling the plates with bills and silver.

David enjoyed his life at 'Varsity and did not give much thought to the years that lay beyond. But it was not Ted MacHenry's way to let anybody associated with him forget the future. One day, he informed David that he had been “figuring out a big proposition” that affected both of them. They ought to form a partnership and open a store. Haberdashery. That had been Ted’s department in the warehouse and he knew all that there was to be known about the business. He would count on McLean’s popularity in sporting circles to draw the men, and he was competent to do the rest. All they required was capital. Ted mentioned that fact to PeeVee, who remarked airily that there need be no trouble about money, and Ted quietly but perseveringly kept him to that. By the time David had received his degree, Ted had everything in readiness for the opening of “The Two Macs”.

As soon as “The Two Macs” showed signs of prosperity, Ted began to move toward matrimony. He selected a nice girl, a member of the choir in which he sang on Sundays, and walked home with her after the evening service. She asked him to remain to supper and, after a few weeks, he was invited to tea before church. By that time he had decided that she would do, and proceeded to fall in love.

They went together to concerts, mostly choral ones. Mildred disapproved of plays, except a select few like *Ben Hur* and *The Sign of the Cross*, but she was enthusiastic about choruses, the larger the better. Ted had never kept company with a girl, and arguing from that fact, his mother had predicted for years that some flippety-gibbet would capture him. Accordingly, she was delighted with Mildred. The wedding took place in less than a year after the first Sunday evening supper.

Mildred waited until they had been married for six months before she gave Ted the slightest intimation of her suspicions regarding his two friends. Then, without mentioning names, she hinted that popular athletes and rich young men usually found it difficult to keep straight in a city such as Toronto was getting to be. (Mildred was one of those persons who are always assuming that everything in the world is getting to be more undesirable than it used to be.) It troubled Ted to have her look knowingly at him whenever they saw either PeeVee or David with a woman to whom he was not engaged.

There was no doubt in Mildred’s mind that, in the end, Ted would amount to more than his two friends. She agreed with him that he would have found a college education an encumbrance.

On one occasion, David said to her:

“Has Ted ever told you, Mildred, that we were the three musketeers of Petersville?”

To which she replied:

“I don’t like Dumas’ novels. They are too immoral to suit me.”

III.

When PeeVee left Mrs. MacHenry’s boarding-house, his mother insisted that he must take the sort of room that she had always wanted for him. She found an apartment on the Crescent. It was a suitable place for a well-to-do young bachelor’s diggings. He had his own private bath and a large fireplace. He had never thought of so much luxury in connection with himself. In less than a month, he wondered how he had failed to notice, for so long, that Ted’s quarters were very cramped.

He saw less of Ted, but a great deal more of David McLean. If they were out late together, or on stormy nights when the trip to Civil Service Terrace seemed long and dirty, he could put up David. Their long talks began to acquire a new intimacy which they had never possessed before. PeeVee was the only person to whom David mentioned the tantalizing perfections of Ruby, and he listened in turn while Macready described what he intended to accomplish with his pen.

Occasionally, David threw out the suggestion:

“If you are going to be a great man, isn’t it time you started to do something definite about it?”

He never said more than that, for he had learned from experience how PeeVee balked at the touch of the spur.

David hoped that PeeVee would not write enough verse to be accepted as a poet by Mrs. Pentley Dickenson and her friends, but not for worlds would he have put the thought into words. In his room he had a framed copy of the prize poem; that was for friendship’s sake. He liked the decorations, made by PeeVee in imitation of Aubrey Beardsley, but whenever he read the lines he seemed to see Macready writing them with his tongue in his cheek.

The first two stanzas ran:

She sees the morning’s baleful gleam;
She sees the noon-day’s fiery rays;
She sees the sun’s descending beam
Cut like a sword athwart the haze;
At night, low in the leaden sky,
The moon a molten scar appears;
Splashes of lightning gleam and die;
Her eyes are blurred with unshed tears.

The fetid breezes fan her brow;
The purple curtains slowly wave;
The pungent flowers in shadow bow,
Like brooding mourners at a grave.
At times, the night-bat sweeping by
Brushes against her marble cheek;
No tremor wakes her staring eye;
Her bloodless lips ne’er move to speak.

In that tosh there was no suggestion of PeeVee that he could detect. On the whole, David was inclined to share the opinion of poets as expressed by Miss Imogen Menzies. She had said:

“I always think that a man who writes poetry is no better than a Miss Nancy, and that a woman who writes poetry is no better than nothing at all.”

The night following PeeVee’s talk with his mother, he sent for David, and they sat in front of a blazing fire while the rain spilled with a steady splatter on the verandah roof outside the window. PeeVee did not mention that he had been offered a bribe to leave Toronto. He saw it in that light now. He merely told his friend that he was to have a one-act play staged by the Garrison Dramatic Club.

“Colonel Denman called me up today to say that they had definitely decided to do it,” he said. “It will be used as a curtain-raiser for *Ours*. I intended that you should be the first to hear the news, but I told mother last night.”

David wanted particulars, to see a copy, if available.

“I really wrote the thing as a hoax,” admitted PeeVee, “a sort of travesty, with a flavouring of Maeterlinck and that fellow, Yeats. I have named it *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee*”.

“Sounds as though it might be pretty good fun.”

“Well, it has to be that, or it’s nothing.”

“Anyway, it’s a start along a new line,” said David.

“Wouldn’t it be awful,” suggested PeeVee, “if they seized upon it as a sign of genius, like that prize poem?”

He pointed to some half-charred scraps of paper that had fallen from the grate to the fender. “I am through with verses,” he said. “See! While I was waiting for you I did that with every rhyme I had ever written.”

David made no comment, but picked up the pieces that had escaped, and tossed them back into the flames.

CHAPTER VII

SIMPSON TO THE RESCUE

At first, customers came slowly to “The Only Teashop”. Bess found that Ruby and Laura Bateman were all the staff that she required to look after the few young men, mostly friends of the boys, who dropped in to lunch, and the sprinkling of women who took afternoon tea in the big room. Her chief problem was arranging her menu so that there might not be too much waste.

At the end of the second week, Laura refused to accept her envelope.

“The cashier round this joint doesn’t earn any wages as yet,” she said. “When you get prosperous, I’ll collect.”

Ted MacHenry undertook to elaborate the reasons for impending failure. People would not walk up a flight of stairs in order to be fed; they were accustomed to eating on the street-level, and Bess could not hope to alter a habit that was as old as restaurants. Besides, Canadians were a democratic people, for which he thanked God, and resented the superior airs of “The Only Teashop”. Some of Mildred’s friends had visited the place and found the food too fussy and the prices too high.

At this point, Laura Bateman left the room and slammed the door; she came back by another door and slammed it more loudly; and she departed again by the first door with a third resounding slam.

“That is Laura’s way of saying that we are not dead yet,” Bess explained to Ted. “I counted on a struggle at the start. Strangers are returning a second and third time, and that’s the first good sign.”

In the spare moments that were still too plentiful, Bess made caramels and maple cream. For years, she had possessed a reputation among her friends as a maker of candy. She was, perhaps, the only amateur in the city whose fudge did not turn out soggy lumps of brown sugar and vanilla with no quality except the suggestion of too much sweetness. When asked how it was done, she always replied,

“When you cook lovingly, that’s the result.” Christmas shoppers, who had dropped into the tea-room for a rest, tasted the candy and then placed orders for substantial amounts. Bess found that she would be working night and day during the week before the holiday, and called upon Ruby to help her in the kitchen.

To Ruby, there seemed to be no reason for so much extra labour. Bess went to the bank every day and Ruby regarded that as a sign that her sister still had money. She drew her weekly wage light-heartedly and, so long as the customers were not numerous, found the teashop good fun. Stan Spencer called daily for tea and toast.

Ruby hoped that Stan's visits were being noted by David. In spite of her pleading, David had signed up to play hockey for another season with the General Wolfe's, and was in the midst of that severe self-denial and hard work which he described as training. Ruby was glad of the proximity of "The Only Teashop" to "The Two Macs"; David could see that she was not fretting. She made a point of telling him that she had never enjoyed the theatre so much as when Stan took her to see that awfully comical fellow, Lawrence D'Orsay, in his new play, *The Earl of Pawtucket*.

Every evening, PeeVee dropped in for dinner and to hear a report of the day's business. He always found Bess sanguine and she only laughed at him when he suggested that it would be better to close up before all her money was exhausted.

Walking home that night, Laura pitched into him.

"What are you trying to do?" she demanded. "Shake Bess's nerve?"

"I thought it would be wiser for her to play safe."

Laura was scornful. "You are like all the people in this city!" she cried. "You worship safety and respectability."

They were passing a large and solemn-looking house.

"That is my shrine," she said.

The house had once been the home of an adventurous girl who had married a prince—an old man and rather the worse for wear, according to Toronto's marriage standards, but still a prince. Gossip said that she had lured and accepted him in order to win a bet from her mother. The princess was not content to disappear into oblivion after causing one brief flutter in her native city. Later she made the whole world talk when she left her experiment in royalty to follow the fortunes of a romantic gypsy fiddler.

In the gloom of the December evening, they gazed up at the frowning face of the house.

"It reminds me," said Laura, "that if one girl brought up in this humdrum city can do anything so exciting as marrying a prince, I need not despair. If another prince ever lands at the Union Station, I'll be there, and I'll chase him until he falls over."

"Go to it, old girl!" he encouraged her.

"As soon as I see Bess well started, it will be my turn," she asserted. "You can hang round and rust if you like!"

Her attitude nettled him, and he called her attention to the white cards tacked to the telegraph poles; they announced that, for three nights in January, the Garrison Dramatic Club would present Tom Robertson's classic military comedy *Ours*, preceded by a curtain-raiser, *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee*, by Pierre Vincent Macready.

II.

On the day after Christmas, Simpson Hortop paid his first visit to his daughter's tea-room. Few civil servants had taken the trouble to turn up at their offices that day, and Simpson, feeling very virtuous, left early. As he had nothing better to do, he dropped in at Bess's place of business and, to his surprise, found it quite refined. He partook of afternoon tea, for which he paid Ruby with a kiss.

"I am the cashier," Laura informed him, and he thought her a pert but attractive girl.

"The Only Teashop" appealed to Simpson Hortop as a place where he could entertain his cronies much more cheaply than in the expensive bar-rooms that gentlemen would frequent. He began to turn up every afternoon with one or two friends for tea, toast, a pipe, and delectable chit-chat. Their conversations gave tone to the smoking-room.

With Colonel Ryder he discussed history and politicians. They bewailed the deterioration of the national leaders and spoke appreciatively of the great dead—according to them, all the great were dead. So far as the living were concerned, they always came to the same conclusion.

"In the days after Confederation, we used to have statesmen in public life—yes, sir, statesmen in both parties. But what have we now? Nothing but politicians."

"Yes, sir! You are right, sir! That is what we have come to."

No matter what went wrong in Canada or the British Empire, they traced it to the same cause; the statesmen were dead and the politicians were alive.

If shivery Mr. Freeman came as his guest, they talked literature, preferably poetry. At seventy, Mr. Freeman still took a deep technical interest in a maiden's glance, but only for poetic purposes; he would devote an hour to defining the subtle difference between "a tender wistfulness" and "a wistful tenderness".

When Simpson Hortop did not invite his friends, they invited their own parties, and the afternoon gatherings in the smoking-room grew steadily in size. In appearance, it was more exclusive than the groups of men to be found in the down-town clubs.

Laura always maintained that the old fogies had started things moving; Bess believed her to be right, but never dared to thank her father for what he had done. In less than no time he would have been claiming credit for a far-sighted campaign, carried through with consummate generalship. Simpson Hortop was the sort of man who needed only one flicker of success to justify all his disastrous undertakings. Very little encouragement was required to make him give voice to his secret conviction that he had never been wrong in his life, but had always been the victim of a malicious and inscrutable fate.

CHAPTER VIII
“A SMART YOUNG MAN ON HIS WAY”

I.

When Mrs. Pentley Dickenson saw the city studded with the announcements of the Garrison Dramatic Club she wrote at once to Georgina, reiterating her faith in Pierre. She longed to have him make her house his home; he would find interesting people there, and inspiration. Mrs. Macready’s next letter to her son urged him not to neglect the people who could be a help to him. The same mail brought a note from Mrs. Dickenson, inviting him to visit her the following Sunday evening; she was expecting a notable guest from out-of-town.

When PeeVee arrived shortly after nine o’clock, she swept him into the drawing-room to meet her special lion, a heavy-eyed painter from Montreal. He noticed at once that she was calling him “Pierre”, no longer “Mr. Macready”.

“You remember his prize poem,” she said to the painter, as he shook hands with PeeVee, “so rare, so exotic, so full of the unknowable things of the soul! It was an achievement for one so young and we are all wild about it. I hope that you have come prepared to read it for us, Pierre.”

The painter looked him over with a smileless gaze that said more plainly than words: “You young puppy!”

PeeVee felt how childish and contemptible his verses must appear to a man of mature judgment. Evidently, the artist disapproved of so much flattery being bestowed upon the author of such a poem. He excused himself hastily; he had not brought his manuscript with him.

“You might have guessed that we should want to hear it,” purred Mrs. Pentley Dickenson.

The lion had not said a word. He turned away and began talking to a lady so languid that she looked chilled to the bone. PeeVee knew that he had been put in his place.

A few yards away, the painter was asking the languid lady to tell him about the young man. He had never heard of Pierre Macready and did not know if his poetry were good or bad. But when a poet came floating down the room on the high tide of Mrs. Pentley Dickenson’s gush, he had scented a contest for the middle of the floor. There was more of apprehension than of contempt in his attitude.

PeeVee would have preferred to spend the evening in a secluded corner, with a youth who had come there as his mother's escort, but Mrs. Dickenson continued at intervals to yank him forward. He felt a little like a nervous monkey at the end of an organ-grinder's rope.

"I suppose you have heard that Pierre has written a play?" trilled the hostess.

And again:

"What are the dates of the performance, Pierre? We must all make a note of them so that we may not miss it."

During these interludes, the painter glowered. He had brought with him a collection of sketches, but when Mrs. Pentley Dickenson had first mentioned them, he had deprecated the idea of placing on view such unimportant efforts. Having seen the portfolio in the hall, the other guests knew that the sketches would eventually be shown. Accordingly, they did their part and chimed their eagerness.

The mantel was cleared, and the artist placed his pictures in a careful row. For about ten minutes everybody stood silent, in attitudes that suggested intense interest. PeeVee wondered if they were all at a loss for something to say. Then Mrs. Pentley Dickenson told them which sketch she liked, and the bolder spirits responded by pointing out to her the ones they preferred. The room was filled with cries of "That sky moves me deeply" and "I can just smell the woods".

An elderly gentleman who was known to buy pictures, which gave him the right to assert his preferences, pushed himself forward and blocked everybody else's view while he pointed out his favourite with two fingers.

"This one is quite remarkable for its luminosity." He waved his hand backwards and forwards. Several of the guests drew gasping breaths, as if they had been noticing the display of luminosity and had found it too much for them.

The elderly gentleman went on to speak of grouping, and rhythm, and tone. He casually dropped into his talk the names of several European painters, and if one of them happened to be a Spanish dramatist it did not greatly matter. He finished by saying:

“I must congratulate the man who gave this picture to the world. I voice Toronto’s envy of his home city, Montreal.”

He bowed in the direction of the painter, who bowed back again. The artist had never received so much praise to his face, from a stranger possessing such a command of the patter of criticism, but he tried to behave as if it had been a common experience.

Mrs. Pentley Dickenson reminded everybody that they had been listening to most illuminating words, and that those words had been spoken of a Canadian; she did not forget to mention the renaissance.

“And, in the name of Canada, I want to salute the man who has given us the right to feel that our art is the equal of any art in the world.”

She kissed the artist’s hand, the hand that had held the brush.

This patriotic ceremony brought a round of subdued clapping. At Mrs. Pentley Dickenson’s gatherings such cues were never missed.

II.

Next morning, PeeVee received a telephone call from the editor of *Once a Week*, the periodical in which his prize poem had been published. Could he call at five o’clock on a matter of business that might be of advantage to both of them?

Carr Morris was a successful editor, strong in his views and dynamic in the expression of them, and his admirers regarded him as honest and forthright. He liked to be surrounded by writers who gave the impression of brilliance and was proud of the young men of promise discovered by him, but he was cautious not to accept paste for diamonds. After the appearance of the prize poem, he had kept an eye on PeeVee. Perhaps it was just a flash in the pan, and at best he regarded poetry as a poor test of a writer’s ability. Little things counted with Carr Morris. It was after chuckling over the title of the play that he sent for PeeVee.

“I am glad to see that you are more than a poet,” he said, and went on to ask if Macready could contribute a weekly article to his paper.

“It must be smart and topical,” he continued, “the sort of stuff that Top Lofty is doing. I suppose you know Terry Lucas?”

PeeVee only knew of Lucas as the author of the Top Lofty articles.

“Of course, I do not expect you to start right off being another Terry,” went on Morris. “Terry has a big future. He intends to go to New York next month. He will find more scope down there."

PeeVee had always thought it would be fun to write as cheerfully and flippantly as Top Lofty. He said so.

"But you must not attempt to imitate him," warned Morris. "He does literary stunts and our papers are too old-fashioned for that sort of thing. He will find a bigger field in the States."

Speedily they reached an agreement,—Carr Morris never took long about such things. PeeVee was not to join the staff of *Once a Week*, at least not immediately. He would write his articles in his spare moments, and would only be required to turn out one a week. What a lark! Suitable subjects began to crowd into his mind.

"I would like you to submit a couple, just to see what you can do," Morris instructed him.

A few days later, bulletins appeared in the windows of the local bookstores, announcing that Pierre V. Macready would contribute articles regularly to *Once a Week*, the first to appear on January the fifteenth; it would be entitled, "A City in Search of a Legend".

The town became spotted with his name. How pleased his mother would be!

III.

PeeVee longed to hear what Professor St. Quinton had to say about his sudden activity; he had been hurt more than he would have admitted by the remarks made to Georgina. Mrs. Macready described them as malicious, cynical, and envious, but her son knew that they voiced St. Quinton's disappointment in him. While at 'Varsity, the professor had given him a great deal of encouragement. Now, he was ashamed to recall how seldom he had visited the dingy library since settling into his comfortable quarters in the Crescent.

One evening, just after the New Year, PeeVee went round to the funny old house near the university, and Miss St. Quinton sent him upstairs to her brother's attic. The sign was a reassuring one. It meant that he had a place among those persons who could be admitted without delay. Professor St. Quinton allowed only a favoured few into his library. To others he came down, or they could hear him telling his sister in a peevish, forbidding voice that he was not at home.

Over a cluttered table in the centre of the room hung a green-shaded electric lamp; for extra light the professor depended upon candles. They guttered in gloomy corners, and numerous clots of wax showed where they had been carelessly left to spill their lives away since the last annual house-cleaning. The maze of book-shelves was the accumulation of years, and Professor St. Quinton, in a dressing-gown that might have been given him when he started the library, came blinking from among them to greet his visitor.

"Well, Macready, have you come to learn the date of your last visit?" he enquired.

He picked up a diary from among his papers and turned over the pages in diligent search.

The young man sat down and waited.

At last the professor looked up with his usual combination of a twinkle in his eye and a rasp in his voice.

"Evidently, you have not been here since the last volume. Now you have come back because you have been receiving a lot of senseless flattery."

St. Quinton ordered PeeVee out of his personal chair, and deposited him in another from which a pile of papers had to be lifted. Then he brought out his favourite beverage, ginger ale with a shot of brandy. PeeVee knew that he was expected to stay a while. They talked about 'Varsity days, and the professor gave recent news of graduates who were making their mark. Occasionally, he paused to rail at them for being mostly money-grubbers. Darting from his chair at intervals, the professor brought back books that he either hated or admired excessively. He pressed three of them upon his visitor and exacted a promise that they would be read within six weeks.

At ten-thirty, an alarm clock on the corner of the table buzzed violently.

St. Quinton pointed to it.

"Of course, you remember that's my sister's reminder that she expects a game of bezique before going to bed. The hot milk and the crackers will be ready."

PeeVee picked up the books.

The black beads of St. Quinton's eyes gleamed with humour.

"Well, Macready," he said, "and am I to understand that you are developing into a smart young man on his way to New York?"

The phrase was not new to PeeVee; he had frequently heard it applied to precocious students.

He replied:

“I think I am the kind who stays in his own country.”

“We cannot blame those who seek cities where they pay handsomely for cleverness,” remarked the professor.

“I have heard you say that we are a terribly self-conscious crowd in this city,” suggested PeeVee.

St. Quinton smiled.

“Not only in this city. People cannot do anything in our country without being self-conscious. We are self-conscious in our art; we are self-conscious in our virtue; and,—God help us!—we are most of all self-conscious in our sinning . . . I really must say that in a lecture.”

They had reached the lower hall and had paused at the door.

“And I come from Nova Scotia,” he added, “where we were mainly self-conscious about our superior birth and breeding.”

Professor St. Quinton squeezed PeeVee’s hand affectionately as they parted.

“You are having a good time,” he said. “I can see that. But I shall be watching you with interest. I am not yet sure that you are not merely a smart young man on his way to New York.”

CHAPTER IX

THE DRAMA

I.

The annual dramatic production of the Garrison Club was a social event of the first importance, and nobody expected it to be anything more. The local dramatic critics, kindly gentlemen all, were usually in attendance, and they could be counted upon to say next morning that a new standard of amateur acting had been established, which pleased the players. But it was much more important that the society editors should be there.

For the presentation of *Ours* and *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee*, the club executive had rented a theatre for an entire week. Three nights were devoted to getting the actors placed upon the large stage. They argued with the director about where they ought to stand and how this and that should be done. On Tuesday, one actress and the director threatened to resign because each lacked a proper appreciation of the other's importance; after much negotiation, they compromised by deciding to stay, but not to speak to each other again.

Experiments were made to make sure that the actors could be heard in all parts of the house, and as a result every player took to shouting. The dress rehearsal made it apparent that not a single performer could be trusted to be line perfect for an entire evening. They all went around saying that a bad dress rehearsal was invariably followed by a good *première*. That being the case, they were bound to set a still higher standard of amateur acting than ever before.

Thursday was a desolate night, with sheets of black ice on the pavements, across which puffs of snow went scudding before a bitter wind. Men and women, who alighted from street-cars and walked the half-block to the theatre, crouched into their collars, facing the nor'wester. The street was dark and forbidding, and the blaze of light from the great doorway of the playhouse invited passers-by to a place of refuge.

Cabs and smart turn-outs were drawing up in quick succession before the door, and ladies, gathering their cloaks about them, scampered across the sidewalk into the shelter of the long lobby, to be swallowed up in the clatter of fashion and gaiety, and to contribute something to the perfumed atmosphere of success.

In the crowd that glittered and chattered its way past the doorman and into the stiff and shabby auditorium, nobody of importance was missing. Mrs. Pentley Dickenson and her party occupied two of the uncomfortable boxes, from which they could see the people in the orchestra seats very plainly but the stage hardly at all. Mrs. Dickenson had hoped that PeeVee would be one of them, but he preferred to remain out of sight behind the scenes. He knew that he was going to be ridiculously nervous.

Directly opposite to her, Mrs. Pentley Dickenson noticed with disapproval, was Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter, a woman who menaced the high tone of the sprouting Canadian culture—at least Mrs. Dickenson thought so. Mrs. Decasser-Hunter's golden hair gleamed like a newly-gilded knob and, seated well forward in the box, she suggested an over-blown peony in too small a vase.

At the home of Mrs. Decasser-Hunter, actors and actresses were entertained when playing in the city. She had devoted a wealthy widowhood to giving rich foods and costly wines to minor players, who were only too glad to get away from the cheap restaurant meals, and to talk about themselves and their profession to such eager listeners. She did not pretend to possess any form of talent but went everywhere, except to the choral concerts. Music was the one form of art that Mrs. Decasser-Hunter could not tolerate. She confessed herself to be tone-deaf, and if she did go to hear a chorus perform it was only in order to burlesque the homely women in white who screamed and strained in the front rows.

With Mrs. Decasser-Hunter was her closest friend, Gypsy Hagar Bright, who had been the first woman in Toronto to make free use of the word "sex" in her general conversation. Gypsy Hagar was the relentless enemy of all the taboos. She missed no opportunity to discuss the subjects which her mother's friends would never have mentioned. After two cocktails she could be counted upon to explain that she had married John Bright to escape the importunities of lovers. "Imagine my giving up a name like Gypsy Hagar to become Mrs. John Bright, with its mid-nineteenth-century associations!"

Behind her friend's back, Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter told people that Gypsy had settled grimly into marriage after spending fifteen years diligently trying to get herself seduced by some man with whom it would have been a satisfaction to be associated in a scandal. Being harsh of outline and raggedly fleshed, she might have been a George Eliot or a Georges Sand, but she could find no Lewes or Chopin in the provincial city where fate and a stingy parent had decreed that she should live. John Bright admired his wife but could not understand why a person whose palate always, and whose stomach frequently, rebelled against alcoholic beverages, should continue resolutely to seek them. Even the debaucheries of Gypsy Hagar had about them an air of frigidity.

Mrs. Pentley Dickenson concluded at once that Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter and Gypsy Hagar Bright had their united eyes on the wealthy and comely young man of promise. She set her lips firmly. Had she not seen him first?

Half an hour late, the curtain went up; even then the amateur stage-manager was not quite certain that all the properties were in place. Twice, the orchestra had played all the selections announced on the programme, and the head usher had sent word back repeatedly that the audience was seated and growing restless. To the last "Just wait one moment!" Major Webster turned a deaf ear and gave the signal that the curtain was to rise on *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee*.

In a corner behind the scenes, where he could hear everything, PeeVee nursed his feeling of panic. For the first five hours—it was exactly four minutes by his watch—he heard only the scared voices of the performers. They seemed to be out there all alone, acting in front of an empty theatre. How foolish the speeches sounded! Why didn't someone drop the curtain instead of permitting the poor little play to die by inches? Suddenly a man laughed. Yes, that line had been intended to amuse. The sound heartened the actors. They grew more lively and the dialogue gained in spirit; they no longer appeared to be striving to remember it.

They were nearing the first big moment. Would it come off? PeeVee listened. Before it was reached, the audience responded. A gale of mirth came sweeping from every part of the house. The actors were going right on. Why didn't they wait? The laughter was drowning the good things they had to say. PeeVee found himself wishing he could stick out his head to bid them "hush" and listen.

One of the actors, whose brief scene was over, crept up behind him to whisper:

"They love it. They're eating it up."

The laughter came again and again. A fashionable audience had forgotten to be politely cordial towards *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee* and was hugely enjoying itself.

Now, it was all over and the curtain down. PeeVee's pulses were pounding so that he could both hear and feel them. There were shouts for the author, but he durst not walk upon the stage; he believed that the wobbling of his knees would be visible.

As soon as the orchestra began to play its selections for the third time, people came flocking behind to assure the author that his play was comic; they said it as if he could not have had any idea what the piece would turn out to be. He was happy but wished they would go away; his heart was thumping so.

The excitement had a disastrous effect upon the performance of *Ours*. Before the actors went on at all, they were flustered and felt as superfluous as anticlimaxes. When things began to go wrong, all but a few of them lost their heads entirely. They forgot their cues, stumbled over objects that should not have tripped them, and failed to hear the prompter until everybody in the house was aware of the next speech. After each mishap, they tried to comfort each other with the assurance that perhaps the audience had not noticed it.

Shortly after midnight the final curtain went down.

But long before that, PeeVee, accompanied by David McLean, had made his way home through the bleak whiteness of the night; it was now snowing heavily. With David, a victory always acted as a stimulant, and he could not understand why his friend seemed completely flattened out by his triumph. They ended up by slipping into a quiet bar for a drink together.

As they were parting, David asked anxiously:

“Aren’t you overdoing things, old man? You seem to be a little nervy?”

PeeVee laughed.

“I’ll enjoy it more tomorrow night,” he said. “It won’t be such a strain.”

II.

After the final performance on Saturday night, Bess Hortop gave a supper in “The Only Teashop”. The celebration served a double purpose; it honoured PeeVee and also proclaimed that Bess felt her venture to be safely established. She had added three girls to her staff and Ruby’s complaints of tired feet made her think that a fourth would soon be necessary.

Gertrude and Aunt Ann were among the guests; they had been invited over the long-distance telephone in the morning as soon as PeeVee had made sure that the weather was not going to be too severe for an old lady. The prospect of a supper-party after the show, in the manner of characters in a society novel, filled Aunt Ann with shudders of joy.

Stan Spencer and Ted MacHenry were not at the party. Bess had her own reasons for omitting Stan and Ted had been persuaded by Mildred to stay at home. Mildred had calculated that a supper starting at eleven-thirty was certain to last into the early hours of Sunday morning and she did not altogether like the idea of such goings-on over her husband's shop. Somebody who knew them might see the lights. Ted was inclined to agree with her; if you want to succeed you must not do things to offend people. It comforted him to think that very few of the best citizens would be passing that way after midnight.

When Bess saw that Ruby had made up her mind to sulk, she gave David the task of looking after Aunt Ann. Old ladies always liked David; he petted them and they tried in turn to pet him.

PeeVee was toasted by his friends. They sang about his being a jolly good fellow and about seeing him smiling. They told him that he had been born lucky; where but in Toronto could a man attempt to write like Maeterlinck and be mistaken for a humorist?

Aunt Ann was delighted to find that her boy was able to get on his feet and make a speech, just like a man; to her, he was always a bright child. Yes, and he was quite the best of all the speakers. She felt the others to be decidedly rude, girls and all, when they interrupted and hooted his claim that he had hoped all along *Dierdre* would turn out to be funny. They declared he had never suspected it; it was just PeeVee's luck.

"They don't mean it," whispered David, noticing her distress.

Cheeriness spread again over Aunt Ann's face. She had been making many confidences to David and now she told him that never before in all her life had she attended a party after the theatre.

PeeVee sat down at the piano and the rhythm of the two-step invited the dancers to the floor.

Then Aunt Ann made another discovery. It was long after midnight; in other words, it was Sunday morning. She ran about giving the information in a very low voice to everybody she knew, but with the next breath impressed upon them that she wanted the dancing to continue.

To David she elaborated, as he was the best listener.

“I was brought up never to do anything wicked on Sunday,—I mean mildly wicked, like dancing. So it’s awfully exciting to be among all these nice young people when they are committing sins.”

“Don’t let them know I told you,” David said, looking round mysteriously, “but the majority of them will probably go to church at least once tomorrow, as if nothing had happened.”

“Will they?” Aunt Ann was more impressed than ever.

“Would you like to be depraved yourself, Miss Macready?” he asked her.

“How could I?” eagerly.

“You can have a dance with me.”

A waltz was being played, and in the early seventies Miss Ann Macready had been described as a chic waltzer. And so, for the first time, Aunt Ann broke the Lord’s Day by dancing in a public place at one o’clock on a Sunday morning. She had to simper when she thought of it, but when she failed to keep her mind on the steps she found herself hopelessly mixed up. Her broad-shouldered partner did not bother; he just picked her up and went on with the dance.

They were passing close by the pianist when PeeVee struck a chord and stopped unexpectedly.

Without a word, David whisked the tiny woman into the air and seated her on the piano.

The young people applauded. They seemed to her to applaud everything. Aunt Ann clapped her hands too; she was hoping that she did not look intoxicated. What a devilish climax to a devilish evening, away up there, kicking her feet, like the sinful young women in the Sunday papers! How shocked Moggy would look, and how she would drink in every word when Miss Macready recounted her adventures over a mild dish of green tea!

When David lifted her down and escorted her to a chair, she grew confidential again:

“I had no idea how much fun all this wickedness could be, and really it is hardly a bit naughty after all.”

“I hope, Miss Macready,” he replied, “that we have not started your downward journey on the primrose path. You take to it so naturally that I am quite shocked.”

And that was, in all probability, the greatest compliment that Aunt Ann had ever received—at least, she thought so.

As they talked, Ruby moved across the room to their side. She had suddenly become radiant, after two hours of the pouts, and scolded Miss Macready playfully for monopolizing the nicest boy in the room. Laura Bateman had taken the piano stool from PeeVee and, a few minutes later, to the crash of her music, David and Ruby were dancing together.

“Did you see that?” remarked Laura. “The little cat! I’d like to cuff her ears!”

Bess had taken the vacant chair beside Aunt Ann.

“I hope Ruby gets wise to herself before she spoils things for herself and David,” said PeeVee.

“Her kind only spoils things for other people,” replied Laura, scornfully.

Laura gave her attention to the piano until there was no dancing couple near them. Then she spoke again:

“Listen, PeeVee! Do you know that I am leaving the city?”

“When? For a holiday?” he asked, all at sea.

“It’s my turn now,” she said, “and I am going on the stage, if I can find a stage to get on.”

“But where?”

“Chicago. The runt has friends there.”

“The runt!”

“Shut up about the runt! He knows the ropes. But you mustn’t whisper a word of it. I am telling only you and Bess.”

It was like Laura to have told the news so casually. PeeVee stood silent, watching her play. He liked her, he decided, a lot more than he had suspected. Why was she going to break a hole in the circle when they were all beginning to have such a good time together? She had taken the gilt off the evening for him.

At two o’clock in the morning, a cab came for Gertrude and Aunt Ann, but they were loth to depart. To both, it had been a new experience; they found it a wrench to say goodnight and end it all.

Aunt Ann insisted upon having Gertrude’s company in her room at the “Queen’s”. She was always terrified of something, she had no idea of what, when staying at a hotel.

Side by side, they sat on the edge of the bed and compared impressions. Aunt Ann was a little bit afraid to say her prayers after her behaviour on a Sunday morning, but she did not repent for a single second. She pressed her niece to name the nicest person at the gathering.

“I like Bess Hortop,” Gertrude replied.

“Oh, I don’t count women!” Aunt Ann spoke impatiently, for she never counted women when there were men about.

“All the men who danced with me were just the sort I expected PeeVee to know.”

Nor was this answer the one Aunt Ann had wanted. She grabbed Gertrude and gave her a convulsive hug.

“If I were a girl like you,” she exclaimed, ecstatically, “I would marry that boy, David McLean!”

CHAPTER X

PUMPING UP A RENAISSANCE

I.

Sunday afternoon was spent by PeeVee and David ice-boating on the bay. A keen wind blew from the north, and on the shelterless ice plain it bit into their cheeks like cold teeth. Their faces tingled but their bodies in heavy sweaters glowed with warmth. The scudding speed of the boat thrilled David. He liked to feel that the velocity was not bearing him away into space but was under his control. And PeeVee felt his vitality, which had played him such a foolish trick on Thursday night, surging through his veins again.

“I told you that you only needed a little more air,” said David when they were returning.

“Also I managed to dodge Mrs. Dickenson’s Sunday afternoon,” replied PeeVee.

Mrs. Pentley Dickenson had acted with her usual speed in arranging to do honour to the young dramatist. Urged by the thought that Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter intended to be ahead of her, she had spent Friday morning at the telephone rounding up her clique for Sunday afternoon. Everybody had accepted the invitation with eagerness. Most of them had seen the play and all of them had read the comments of the local critics, who gave their choicest adjectives to Pierre V. Macready and treated Tom Robertson as a man of no renown. When she had finally got PeeVee, he had told her he was sorry but that he had promised to spend Sunday with a friend.

Undaunted, Mrs. Dickenson sounded him on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but he had engagements for all of them. At last, she nailed him down for Thursday evening and had the satisfaction of knowing that Mrs. Decasser-Hunter could not possibly get ahead of her.

Nobody was invited to the reception who could not contribute something to the importance of the occasion. It turned out even better than the hostess had hoped. On Thursday morning, a well-known woman-novelist arrived in the city and immediately called up Mrs. Dickenson, who had been the one person to speak of her as a literary genius after the publication of her first book. From that time, she had regarded Mrs. Dickenson’s house as her Toronto home.

Her stories, which ran into many editions, were variations of a single theme. She wrote about the maidenhood of girls, who, having been reared in a frozen environment, melted it completely by an unbroken cheerfulness. When they had transformed a group of cross-grained relatives into radiant saints, they achieved marriage as a reward and as a sign that the novel need not be continued any longer.

Mrs. Pentley Dickenson introduced her guests.

"It is a rare privilege to bring about the meeting of a dramatist with a future and a novelist with a . . . . a novelist with achievements for which thousands of people are grateful."

She had narrowly escaped making an unpardonable slip. Some women might have passed it off as a joke but Mrs. Dickenson never indulged in that type of humour.

Almost immediately, the novelist began to talk of her ideals as a writer.

"Some cynical critics have been unfair to me," she said, "but I pride myself on never having put into one of my little things a single line that could offend a person of refined sensibilities."

She joined Mrs. Pentley Dickenson in sympathizing with PeeVee over the newspaper notices of *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee*. He had been well pleased with them, but Mrs. Dickenson thought the reviewers had indicated the quality of their minds by treating the play as a sort of farce, entirely overlooking its mysticism and beautiful symbols.

"The poetry has the real ring of Maeterlinck," she said. "I wonder if you would read it to us?"

PeeVee was sorry he could not oblige her.

The novelist seized the opportunity to say:

"There is much blindness in high places."

Mrs. Dickenson gave her impression of the inner satisfaction that a poet must feel after voicing a thought that would come like manna to some thirsty soul. She asked PeeVee if he did not agree with her, from his own experience, that it was the soul of a writer that spoke when the soul of a reader was touched.

PeeVee was glad the novelist took upon herself to give an affirmative answer to the query. To mention his soul in a mixed company of strangers would have seemed as indecent as to mention his belly.

The arrival of other guests called Mrs. Dickenson away and left PeeVee alone with the novelist.

He found it easy to converse with her. She was willing to do all the talking, about herself and her work. She never listened. If he had an observation to offer, her mind was busy shaping what she intended to say next. Words skimmed across her comprehension as a skilfully thrown stone across the surface of a pond, seeming to touch at several points, only to land on the other side without creating a ripple, certainly without sounding any depths.

He was relieved when Mrs. Dickenson returned to insist that the guests of the evening must circulate: everybody was anxiously waiting to meet them. PeeVee trotted here and there, acknowledging compliments, many of which seemed to him absurd. He was glad when Mrs. Dickenson took a position by the piano to announce that dear Mme. Henderson had consented to sing.

Mme. Teresa Henderson's advertisements, as a teacher of singing, described her as:

"Former Prima Donna
Metropolitan Opera House
New York."

In Mrs. Pentley Dickenson's set, any singer, whose voice had long passed its bloom and become intensely disagreeable to the ear, was a great artist. Mme. Teresa Henderson sang only unfamiliar songs, another sign of superiority. She made unearthly sounds and hung on to any available high note until it became a hoot, which was her conception of being intense and dramatic. She gave two encores, alternately arch and grotesque, and after each number the art of her interpretations was greatly admired.

The time had now arrived to toss a literary topic into the general conversation. Mrs. Pentley Dickenson observed that art had nothing to do with morality. They might meet without clashing but there was no relationship between them. The novelist showed an inclination to demur, morality having done more than art towards selling her books. She found herself in the minority.

Of course, she did not know that a popular English lecturer had recently been preaching the doctrine in the city. The women's clubs had imported him at considerable expense and Mrs. Dickenson and her friends were attending all his meetings. He was most emphatic regarding the complete divorce of art from morality. To think otherwise would be mid-Victorian. So few years had passed since the death of the queen that it was still tolerable to be Victorian, but the prefix made it deadly.

The novelist found herself bombarded with quotations, borrowed, without acknowledgment, from the lecturer, and at last she fell silent. By that time it was sufficiently late to bring in the refreshments.

Mrs. Pentley Dickenson's evening had been a complete success.

II.

A week later, a note arrived from Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter. It was an informal, "won't-you-come-over" sort of letter, which assumed that Pierre V. Macready needed no introduction to Mrs. Decasser-Hunter. He knew instinctively that after the second meeting she would be calling him PeeVee. She wrote:

"Tom Jack Mellin is making one of his infrequent visits to the unappreciative city that gave him birth, and I thought you would like to meet him."

Tom Jack Mellin was an ex-Canadian author who lived in New York. He aimed to write of the realities of life, and years of laborious effort to free himself from all sentimentality had left him with the vocabulary of a wharf rat. He claimed that in style he was ahead of his time, even in a metropolitan city. PeeVee could not remember having seen one of his books, though he had frequently read accounts of his activities in the literary pages of the local newspapers. These notes about his doings were the only output that Tom Jack Mellin got published with anything like regularity.

PeeVee found Tom Jack Mellin a prim little man with the self-consciousness of a Y.M.C.A. secretary. He boasted constantly about his affairs with women, and about his purpose in life, which was to tear away all that had been prettified in human nature and show the scabs beneath.

No guest at Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter's party was lionized. She told PeeVee casually that his play had handed her a good laugh and mentioned, in the course of the evening, that Tom Jack Mellin had been driven from his country by the Mrs. Pentley Dickensons.

One of Mrs. Decasser-Hunter's most popular performances was her imitation of Mrs. Pentley Dickenson at home. Her clowning greatly amused her friends and PeeVee recognized signs that she had been a guest at Mrs. Dickenson's affairs before their feud began.

The gathering danced a little and drank a great deal of very strong punch.

After her fourth visit to the punch bowl, Gypsy Hagar Bright began, as usual, to revile her husband.

“Why is it, John Bright,” she enquired, “that you possess so few of the qualities that an intellectual woman wants in a man?”

Mrs. Decasser-Hunter did not like Gypsy in that mood. She interfered at once.

“John’s a good provider, isn’t he?” she asked, and without waiting for a reply she continued: “And if you think genius is a quality that a woman wants in a man, you’re dead mistaken. At least, not if she is married to him.”

At that moment, Dr. Newlin Jenkins entered the room and relieved the tension.

Dr. Newlin Jenkins was not a medical man; he had brought a degree back from Harvard. At social gatherings, he was spokesman for those persons who wanted it to be understood that they were in Toronto but not of it. Although born and partly educated in the city, he entertained no illusions regarding the community. After five years in Boston and Europe, he had launched himself into an untiring campaign against the complacency, the ugliness, the insularity, the intolerance, and the narrowness that he found everywhere, so he said, among his fellow-citizens.

At Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter’s affairs, he always rose to heights of what her friends regarded as scathing satire. All the houses of the wealthy were described by him as vulgar and unsightly and all the owners as upstarts, still reeking with the odour of the shops they had outgrown.

His favourite anecdote concerned a prominent millionaire who had put the sign “Tradesmen’s Entrance” over a side door, with the result that all his best friends walked up to it instinctively and rang.

When a prominent family entertained Dr. Newlin Jenkins, he told later of the extravagant display of diamonds, clothes, and rare wines that had formed an accompaniment to a tasteless dinner. He had never admitted getting an eatable meal in a Toronto home. Dr. Jenkins claimed that no intellectual conversation might be heard in the leading drawing-rooms. He imitated the strut of the men and the affected hauteur of the women, when uttering insane comments on worthless “best-sellers”, that being their notion of a literary chat. At concerts, Dr. Newlin Jenkins believed that no one but his friends appreciated what was happening on the platform. He regarded the other members of the audience as ignoramuses in evening dress, who were there only because it was the proper social stunt of the evening.

If Mrs. Decasser-Hunter happened to be entertaining strangers from other cities, Dr. Jenkins made a point of telling them to go home and report that Toronto contained a few broad-minded citizens. “Some of us are civilized in spite of our surroundings. Will you let it be known in Montreal that we are not all pious hypocrites?”

Late in the evening, he addressed PeeVee:

“You must not be shocked at finding a little liberty of speech in this city, Macready. Our best citizens discourage it, I know, but it manages to survive.”

PeeVee was sorry when Professor St. Quinton dropped in before supper. He suspected that the two men had little in common. Whenever the name of Newlin Jenkins was mentioned, St. Quinton would mumble:

“Yes, huh, huh, Newlin Jenkins! Of course. Huh! huh!”

III.

Professor St. Quinton, after asking PeeVee to accompany him, left early.

The presence of his old master at Mrs. Decasser-Hunter’s house had not surprised PeeVee, who was aware that St. Quinton went everywhere and knew every phase of the city’s life.

It was a glittering night, with a star-filled sky, and the professor suggested walking home.

“I knew you were to be there,” he said, as they moved briskly along. “You will find Mrs. Decasser-Hunter an amusing hostess, but their incessant scoffing grows monotonous.”

St. Quinton threw out a hint that the cliques did not contain all the people of talent.

“You have not entered the Holy of Holies, young man,” he said. “There are plenty of earnest and promising workers in the arts who have not time to run about with these pleasant ladies. They have a living to earn. Dr. Newlin Jenkins would caricature them as feeble performers. Perhaps, in a sense, they are, but they are happy and undiscouraged.”

He switched the subject abruptly to ask if Macready had seen the appreciation of *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee* in the latest issue of *Once a*

Week?

“I hope you do not think, sir, that I inspired it myself,” said PeeVee.

The professor laughed.

“It is not quite your style.”

The panegyric on the play had been contributed by the successful novelist and embodied the views of Mrs. Pentley Dickenson’s set. She admitted that she had missed seeing the play and had based her opinion on a reading of the manuscript. She reproved the local dramatic writers for permitting themselves to be “blinded to spiritual subtleties by the tinkling bells of laughter”. She quoted lines that contained depths of poignant meaning and interpreted a number of symbols, all of which were new to the author. She would always remember her visit to Toronto because it had stored in her mind “a little bit of the infinite beauty”.

“I know it is rot,” said PeeVee.

“Your play was rather amusing, and the acting in the really good comedy was so bad that yours benefited by contrast. But you must not take what the ladies say too seriously. Superficial parody is an easy thing to write. Nobody has told you that. You made them laugh and they were satisfied.”

“I don’t think I have any illusions, sir, but I like writing drama.”

They had paused at Professor St. Quinton’s door.

“I’m glad of this little talk,” said the old man. “I came away from the theatre feeling more than ever that you were a smart young man on his way to New York.”

CHAPTER XI

PULLING UP STAKES

Laura Bateman left quietly for Chicago. At least her departure was fairly calm after her father had washed his hands of it. When she had first told him that she intended to take a holiday, he had been more violent than usual. Chicago, in midwinter, was no place to visit; for that matter, it was no place for a decent girl at any time. He had suggested Bermuda, but she had refused to consider it; and immediately he had insisted loudly that he would not provide a cent for any other outing. There was only one friend with whom she could stay in Chicago, and Dr. Bateman hated the woman; she went in for being a saint. No, he would never consent to Chicago.

Dr. Bateman's opposition had collapsed when she had informed him that she needed no assistance in financing the trip.

"It is just as well that he won't have anything to do with Miss Burt," said Laura to Bess. "I have no intention of going near her."

Only Bess and PeeVee were aware that the runt figured in Laura's plans. Both of them tried to dissuade her, but she only answered:

"If I don't get started soon, it'll be too late, and I know how to take care of myself."

They were familiar with that expression of confidence on Laura's lips.

"The Princess de Chimay aimed higher than that," suggested PeeVee.

"If the Princess de Chimay had sat in Toronto and waited for something to happen, she'd be sitting here still," retorted Laura.

To PeeVee, as they were walking home from the teashop for the last time, she said:

"I did not want to say so in front of Bess, but if I stayed here much longer I couldn't keep my hands off Ruby."

She had something of her father's stridency when she continued:

"There are two sorts of man-crazy women. I am one kind and Ruby is the other. Ruby's sort never plays the game. They like to think they can corner the market. She is a despicable little sneak."

"Not so loud, Laura, please!" he protested. "People are looking after us."

"I don't care. They will only think you are my husband."

After expressing a few more opinions of Ruby, she said at last:

“But does it really matter? It’s always men like David who get bedevilled by some nasty little scrub. Why spoil our walk by worrying over something that we can’t mend?”

Laura would not permit anybody to see her off. Partly because she had an almost superstitious dread of “good-byes” and last times; she liked to act as if she could fool fate into thinking that she was not taking a momentous step. Partly, she feared that the runt might turn up inopportunely where her friends would see him. She had arranged with him to join her on the train.

That night, PeeVee and David dined together and then walked over to the room on the Crescent, where the grate stood ready, awaiting a match. Both of them were depressed. A change from any accepted and comfortable routine always affected PeeVee that way, and David had taken this opportunity to talk over a little matter that he hardly liked to put into words.

“I know you hate the pulling up of stakes,” he said, as he removed his overcoat and folded his neckcloth. “Have you noticed anything odd about Ted lately?”

PeeVee knew perfectly well what he meant, but he asked:

“What?”

“Staying away from the crowd.”

It was unlike David to gossip about a friend and PeeVee knew how much the musketeers had meant to him. He replied lightly:

“Ted’s married now.”

“And do men always alter towards their friends when they get married?”

“Naturally, confidences of a certain sort are bound to disappear.”

There was an unusual seriousness about David as he brushed aside the flippancy of this reply and stated his case.

“Ted has been changing gradually during the past six years. At first, I blamed Mildred. I know she is the type of woman who resents all her husband’s pals when they happen to differ from her own crowd. But Ted himself has grown to be different. He is getting such a queer, nagging way. It isn’t easy to explain. We haven’t quarrelled, mind you. But he wants to alter the whole character of the shop. He talks about needing a better tone than the sporting crowd can give us. He thinks the name ‘The Two Macs’ is *infra dig*.”

If they had not quarrelled, it was due to David's forbearance, thought PeeVee, but he only said:

"Well, I'm damned! And he used to spout so eloquently about the advertising value of the name!"

"I can't make out exactly what he wants, but I am inclined to think that our prosperity has turned his head. He doesn't seem to realize how much of it is due to my friends."

"Do you think he wants to freeze you out and have the whole thing for himself?"

David was startled. He almost condemned PeeVee for imagining such treachery.

"Why don't you put it right up to him?" PeeVee demanded.

"Just now I am making allowances. I imagine he is having a trying time at home."

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, don't you know? Mildred is always exacting and fault-finding when she is not-smart."

They sat silent. That last word took them both back into the McLean household. Dr. McLean had used it, in the presence of his children, to tell his wife what ailed the patients in the cottages down by the mills. Most of the women there were not-smart the greater part of the time. Mrs. McLean had retained the word as a veil for the innocence of his sons long after it had become a joke among them.

At last, David spoke again:

"I'd feel better about things if I knew what Ted's new ambitions are."

"Just to be one of the people who are getting on. That has always been his determination. Perhaps Mildred is showing him a new way to do it."

"He deserves credit for that," said David. "He didn't have much chance."

PeeVee sniffed. He had never had much sympathy for Ted's activity in all sorts of organizations. Now, he was joining lodges, too, and sporting his first outfit of evening clothes at their meetings.

"Do you think he is considering civic politics?" he asked.

"I shouldn't be surprised. He told me once that he felt he could do a useful work for the city on the Board of Education."

Macready's ringing laughter made the occupants of the adjacent rooms wonder about the nature of the joke.

"It would be very funny," he gasped, "if Ted had to drop you and me as a couple of social handicaps."

The humorous side of it did not appeal to David. He looked back over a lifetime, during which it had been as much one for all as all for one.

"I'm rather unhappy about it," he said.

"Of course you are, you old sentimentalist!" exclaimed PeeVee, "but you must remember that modern marriage did not enter into the affairs of the three musketeers."

CHAPTER XII
SPORT

I.

Every year when championship matches were being played, Mrs. Pentley Dickenson suffered acutely. The one blot on the fair name of her beloved city was its devotion to sport. She believed that sport would ultimately ruin Toronto just as inevitably as luxury had brought the downfall of Rome. She saw the symptoms everywhere. The newspapers devoted pages to games, and only a few paragraphs to works of art. As for the citizens, the many went to rugby and hockey and lacrosse while the few found their way to the picture galleries and the literary lectures. Dr. Newlin Jenkins had once said to her: “People will only go to what their minds can grasp. That is the result of our educational system.” The thought had amused Dr. Jenkins, but it had pained Mrs. Dickenson. She could see, as in a nightmare, the figure of Toronto, with muscular hands and enormous feet, and the word “sport” branded on her simpleton’s forehead.

Almost hysterically, she read aloud to her husband what the sporting writers were saying about the hockey finals between the General Wolfes and Milltown. From the accounts, she gathered that the Toronto players had received a terrible gruelling in Milltown. The sporting editors lectured both teams and accused them of injuring, by their roughness, the popularity of the game. Of that much she approved. But the paragraphs that followed, if she had interpreted them aright, were inciting the General Wolfes to retaliate. She cried out against such hypocrisy; it ruined beauty in the lives of young men.

Mr. Dickenson went on with his breakfast, dipping his spoon deeply and deliberately into his boiled egg.

“My dear,” he said, “in the circumstances, the game will draw a record crowd. People are like that.”

He was right. Men stood all night at the rink to be sure of their tickets. They passed the long hours discussing the warning issued by the President of the Association against deliberately dirty play. They endorsed his stand; he had done the right thing; but they added hopefully:

“The Milltowns got away with murder and you can’t expect the Wolfes to act like sheep on their own ice.”

II.

On the night of the game, the narrow street leading to the rink surged and eddied with conflicting currents of humanity. By vigilance and a little roughness, the policemen kept the two streams running from north and south into the glare of light around the doorway, from being blocked; the onlookers who were not going inside appeared sufficiently numerous to have filled the building a second time. They started noisy arguments. Milltown had gained a lead of one goal on their own ice. Could they hold it? Some said “no”, and others “yes”. Assertions were shouted and fists waved; the policemen interfered, and the spectators laughed.

In the centre of the flood of humans, PeeVee was swept into the building with as much sense of direction as a piece of driftwood. In the confusion, he could discover no ushers, so he pushed his way along until he reached the row where he was to sit; he found it completely occupied. A perspiring official came to his assistance and consulted the checks. Then he counted heads and discovered that the long seat, marked for thirty occupants, was comfortably filled by twenty-nine. Evidently, some of them were much broader of beam than hockey fans were supposed to be.

With seat-check Number Eleven to establish his right to make himself objectionable, PeeVee jammed in between numbers ten and twelve, both of whom showed an inclination to resent the intrusion. A nearby joker offered an ancient wheeze about sardines and street-car crushes, and everybody became friendly in order to criticize the incapacity of the rink management. They sat wedged in and looking as uncomfortable as the standers opposite, who leaned in masses against the bars and upon fellow-standers’ shoulders.

The players were already on the ice, warming up. Some of them skated lazily with long, slow glides, conscious that the ladies enjoyed watching them. The younger players went at it more vigorously, unable to hold their surplus energy in check. Slim Miller, the star defence man of the Milltown team, made his entry alone with a spectacular rush and was greeted with the first howl of the evening. Like all the cheers heard during the contest, it was a long-drawn yell, an unharmonized mixture of treble screams and baritone hoots.

Crimson and green streamers appeared and waved in every direction, and Slim Miller acknowledged the ovation by skating the length of the rink with his hockey-stick raised in salute.

David McLean was standing alone near the penalty box. The feud between himself and Slim Miller dated back through a series of notable clashes; his admirers started a yowl to offset the Miller yowls and, for a moment, pandemonium reigned. To the dismay of the fans who looked for battle with no quarter given, McLean skated over to his rival and they shook hands. After exchanging a few words, they laughed together and parted.

“The pipe of peace,” said Number Twelve to his companion.

She was obviously unacquainted with the gossip of hockey and enquired:

“Doesn’t he like our man?”

“I should say not!” replied Number Twelve. “He knows that Reddy McLean can walk away from him any old time.”

That explanation caused Number Ten to lean across in front of PeeVee and demand blatantly:

“Who walk away from whom? Where did you get that stuff?”

But Number Twelve had a lady with him and refused to be drawn into a brawl so early in the game.

He contented himself with shouting:

“You’re all right, Reddy!”

And the lady, to show Number Ten that she had resented his intrusion, chirruped nervously:

“You’re all right, Reddy!”

If you care to go over the back files of newspapers, you will find that, when the General Wolfes played Milltown for the championship of Ontario, hockey was a different game from what it is today. Seven men made a team and all of them had to be in condition to go the full distance; no substitutes were permitted. The play of shooting the puck aimlessly as far as possible down the ice had not yet disappeared, and the defence players who excelled at “lifting” were much admired by sporting experts.

In the first ten minutes of play, the unexpected happened. Milltown ran in two goals and increased their lead in the round to three.

Number Ten and his friend grew delirious. They were on their feet most of the time and only stopped yelling to enquire of Number Twelve: “Who can play hockey now?” or “What has become of Reddy McLean?” Number Twelve maintained his dignity, and tried to act as if he had come there for no purpose except to conduct a quiet conversation with his friend. But she had more spirit. She grew bitter and expressed her surprise, distinctly and with her head slightly turned, that the rink management should have sold tickets to hoodlums.

After the second score, the two men laughed mockingly and flaunted their scarves at her. They knocked PeeVee's hat from his head and it fell into the seat in front of them, vacated for a moment by the occupant, who promptly sat on it. Apologies followed on one side and assurance on the other that it was an old hat anyway. Everybody in the vicinity enjoyed the incident; the mirth was quite out of proportion to the amount of comedy, thought PeeVee.

Number Ten would not be diverted from his prey. He returned to the attack with a bombardment of questions and found much to tickle him in his own wit, but Number Twelve remained steadfastly silent. His companion was paying little attention to his polite conversation now; she never ceased to glare at the other couple.

Number Ten leaned in front of PeeVee to ask her a question.

"Do I see Reddy McLean performing any great wonders?"

Then the lady entered the lists.

"You don't know what you see," she said. "You are looking all over the rink."

An extremely personal retort! Number Ten was disfiguringly cross-eyed.

Number Twelve turned his face to his tormentor, smilelessly, and, dropping his jaw, ejaculated: "Ha, Ha!"

Those who heard this sally indicated, with horse laughs, that they had found it more humorous than the wrecking of PeeVee's hat. Number Ten must have realized that he was not sitting among friends.

At that moment, the play became more important than the repartee. McLean was in pursuit of the rushing Miller, who kept the puck well protected on the side next the boards. "Give him the body, Red!" yelled the fans; they were anxious to see a few bumps in the struggle, which so far had been tame enough. To their joy, it happened. When Slim Miller crashed on the ice, he went as completely as a man who could not skate at all, missing the boards by inches.

Instantly, the Milltown chorus roared: "Dirty McLean!" The crowd held its breath. Would the referee call it a foul? He hesitated, but his whistle remained unblown. He did not challenge the check, or obey the frantic instructions of Number Ten to “put him off”.

Slim Miller was shaken. He climbed to his feet as the play returned down the ice and the nearest spectators heard him say:

“I’ll get you, you son of a bitch!”

It was useless for the ladies to pretend they had not heard. When Slim Miller spoke in anger, he used words of one syllable and said them clearly.

The struggle was now aflame. The referee did his best to regain control, but he seemed to be the one man on the ice who had no friends in the rink. A procession of players marched to and from the penalty box and the fans wailed their protests. All his decisions were wrong. The penalties handed to one side were always undeserved and those to the opposing players much too short.

“The referee is the only player on the Wolfe’s team,” shrieked Number Ten, almost in despair when Milltown was playing four men to six. And Number Twelve’s companion screamed exactly the opposite.

The cracking of the sticks, the scratching of the skates, and the thud of the puck grew steadily more furious. There were moments of gasping silence when people were too excited to yell. The battle was all that the crowd had hoped for in their hearts and condemned in their conversation.

Just before half-time, a commotion was created behind PeeVee by two persons who wanted to get out. By his remarks, the man made it apparent that the whole exhibition had disgusted him, and he forced a path for his companion from the centre of a long row.

PeeVee turned his head and caught a clear view of them as they reached the aisle. It was Stan Spencer and Ruby Hortop. In a flash, he remembered that Ruby had refused to accept tickets from David.

III.

When the players came on the ice for the final period, there was a note of desperation in the shouts of “Eat ’em up, Wolfes!” Milltown had held their rivals for a game and a half. Now they possessed a commanding lead, and had merely to defend it. They played with caution.

And then, for no apparent reason, the Milltown defence cracked. For less than five minutes the crack yawned wide open, and through it, zip, zip, zip, zip, shot one, two, three, four goals. Every player on the General Wolfe’s was able to do with ease what none had been able to do before at all. It looked like the commencement of an avalanche but, as suddenly as it had opened, the crack closed and the Milltown defence was as invincible as before.

Number Twelve and his companion were more vociferous than Number Ten had ever been; they counted one, two, three, four, over and over again.

“It’s luck!” yelled Number Ten. “It’s luck! It’s luck! It’s luck! Such a thing will never happen again.”

“But once is quite enough,” agreed Number Twelve happily.

“It’s luck! It’s luck!” the other kept on, as a fusilade of shots missed by inches beating the Toronto goalie.

To the Wolfes and their friends, the last fifteen minutes of play lasted for hours; to the Milltowns, they seemed to telescope.

The men with the stop-watches were standing, with whistles raised and counting the final seconds, in readiness to announce the end, when Slim Miller found himself in control of the sort of opportunity that he may have had in his dreams but never before in reality. A long lifted shot dropped at the feet of the General Wolfes goalie. A slip in clearing, and the puck was lying stationary, out on no-man’s ice. The goalkeeper started after it, lost his nerve, and backed into his position again. Slim Miller was the nearest man. A clear unchecked shot on a shaken goalie. Number Twelve’s companion had buried her face in her hands, so that she might not see the result.

Reddy McLean was the only hope; the nearest and the fastest man. He came across the ice, putting every available inch into his reach. Miller had seen him. He had paused. Veterans do not permit themselves to be flurried when making critical shots.

What was Slim waiting for? Such deliberation seemed uncanny. . . . With a flash like a blade, the white stick lifted and fell. McLean was face downward on the ice, and the scream of the released tension went up from the crowd. To add to the din, the final whistle shrilled. The puck was still lying where Slim Miller had found it.

A more livid red than David’s hair dripped down his forehead, and Miller stood on guard as avenging sticks were flourished towards him. The referee, a small man but plucky, rushed with outspread arms to prevent retaliation, but McLean’s friends had turned aside to see what help he needed.

Number Twelve's companion acted as if Number Ten had been responsible. She was asking everybody within hearing if they had seen that. As a matter of fact, she had missed it, having been too unstrung to watch the final moments of the contest, but that did not prevent her shouting: "The brute! The brute!" as loudly as anyone. From the cheaper seats, they were hurling no milder word than murderer.

A few spectators leapt onto the ice with the intention of hitting somebody and were promptly hustled back into the stands by the policemen, who had appeared suddenly from various entries under the leadership of a giant inspector. No women fainted; whatever they might intend to do later, when the excitement had subsided, they were as eager as the urchins to see everything that might happen.

To PeeVee's relief, David had staggered to his feet again and was leaning forward to let the blood drip on the ice. Two of his team-mates assisted him to the dressing-room.

In all the hubbub, the only man who stood alone and without a friend was Slim Miller. He had committed the unpardonable sin; in order to get even with McLean, he had let down his team and thrown away a golden chance to tie up the round. As he skated towards the Milltown rooms, nobody spoke to him except the trainer, who paused long enough to say: "Slim, you're a damn fool!" All his past services in Milltown's many victories were forgotten.

"Such is sport," said PeeVee aloud, suddenly feeling a little sorry for Miller.

Number Ten, who thought that the remark was addressed to him, replied, "Yes," and wondered what the fellow with the wrecked hat was talking about.

A serious-looking gentleman, so recently arrived from Great Britain, as his accent and clothes proclaimed, that he was still unaccustomed to sporting events in North America, shook his head sadly at PeeVee, and murmured:

"Most lamentable and unjustifiable!"

Without catching the words, PeeVee nodded, and the old gentleman felt happier to find that one man shared his attitude of disapproval.

Doubtless it was lamentable and unjustifiable; everybody said so. But those who had seen the game told everybody they knew, especially friends who had not been there, that it was "the best ever".

IV.

At midnight, PeeVee sat in front of his grate in pajamas and dressing-gown, stretching his bare feet to the blaze and gingerly drawing them away again. In the shower bath, David, with a borrowed bathing-cap to protect the patches on his head, splashed and whistled. After the game, the Wolfes and their friends had gone off in groups to celebrate and break training, according to their various ideas of a good time, but McLean, a little shaken, had preferred to accompany PeeVee to his room, which was just round the corner from the rink.

David came dripping out of the bath. The towelling had to be done carefully, for he was spotted with vari-coloured bruises. One of his knees looked as if it had been gnawed by ravenous rats, and from his scalp the doctor had removed chunks of hair when treating the gash made by Slim Miller's blow.

Three round red bruises on his body, which David pointed out, suggested an attempt to pierce him with a blunt spear.

"That's what I hate about Miller," he said. "He is deadly with the butt-end. He is going to injure someone before he is through."

PeeVee looked him over and laughed.

"Between them all, they have made a thing of beauty out of you."

David was standing close to the heat with a large towel draped about him. He beamed, with that wholehearted glee that young boys find in their pleasures.

"It was the greatest hockey game I have ever been in, and it's a wonderful feeling, after you have won."

PeeVee leaned back in his chair.

"Do you know, David, it seems to have taken more out of me than out of you. I feel as if I'd like to close my eyes and become unconscious."

He didn't move and his face was bloodless.

"You'd better take a swig of brandy, old man!"

David dropped his towel, and forgetting his sore knee, kneeled at the side cupboard of Macready's desk. He threw out a pile of manuscript, obviously portions of a play, and took from behind it a small flask. Stooping over his friend, he poured the liquor between his lips, and watched anxiously until the colour glowed in his cheeks again.

PeeVee smiled up at him then, sheepishly, as if ashamed of having made an exhibition of himself.

“For heaven’s sake,” he said, “get some garments and cover up your lacerations!”

Ten minutes later, McLean was occupying another easy chair and nursing his aching knee.

“I bet Slim Miller is feeling pretty sick over the whole affair about this time,” suggested PeeVee.

“You know, Slim is not a bad head off the ice, but he has a vindictive devil in him when he gets roused?”

“He overdid it this time.”

“Yes, even his pals were down on him. Not because he beaned me, but because he tossed away a championship.”

“Was he badly scared?” PeeVee asked.

“Rather! The police inspector threatened police court proceedings. Slim came to our dressing-room afterwards to see me, when they had me on the table patching me up. Paddy Moore shouldered him a bit and tried to start something, so the cop ran him out to prevent trouble.”

“If there is an assault charge, you’ll be called.”

“But I don’t want to give evidence against the poor devil. Anyway, I can honestly swear that I didn’t see him hit me.”

The evasion amused PeeVee.

“If the magistrate takes it into his head to undress you and look you over, he’ll think everybody in the rink took a poke at you.”

“I’m afraid the magistrate won’t be sympathetic. Probably, the old boy has never seen a real game of hockey.”

V.

They overslept the next morning. Neither had closed an eye until after three o’clock, and it was ten o’clock when the housemaid banged the carpet-sweeper against their door to indicate that she wanted to do the room.

They dressed leisurely. For a fortnight, the approaching contest had given a zest to every moment of their waking hours, and now that it was all over the reaction made them feel dejected. David limped as he moved about the room, and he looked wryly in the glass at his disfigured head, when trying to brush his patchy hair.

They were descending the steps from the house, when Miss Imogen Menzies came hastening round the Crescent. She almost ran towards them.

"O, Mr. David!" she exclaimed. "Are you able to be out?"

She had read the accounts of the game in the morning papers; the writers had done such complete justice to the climax that she pictured David with his head dented like the ace of hearts.

"I'm as right as a trivet," he reassured her.

"You look it," she said, and sounded a trifle disappointed. She had intended to make a fuss over him.

As words of solicitude were evidently out of place, Miss Imogen turned to her business.

"A special messenger brought a letter and a package this morning." She produced them from her muff. "I thought they might be important, so I took them to your shop, but you weren't there."

The writing was Ruby's; David recognized it at once. Apparently she was worrying about his injuries. How careless of him not to have telephoned first thing in the morning to let her know he was perfectly sound! Eagerly, he tore open the envelope.

It was not necessary to read Ruby's note. One glance took in the contents of the first page:

> Dear Mr. McLean:
>
> After the humiliation to which you subjected me last night, and after the scandal in all the morning papers, with which your name is connected, you can hardly expect me——

He glanced at his companions, then crammed the letter and package into his overcoat pocket.

PeeVee knew at once that something unpleasant had happened. He took Miss Menzies by the arm, and said:

"You must come with us and have a cup of hot tea."

As they walked briskly towards the restaurant, David was silent, and Miss Imogen seized the opportunity to lecture him:

“I never let you oversleep this way, Mr. David. It is not right to allow fun to interfere with your business. If you do that while you are young, you will never get along.”

Although she was aggressively Canadian and admitted no virtues in any other nationality, Miss Imogen Menzies had one inheritance from her Scotch ancestry; she still believed that the thing of first importance in a young man’s life was to get along.

CHAPTER XIII

RUBY MAKES A DECISION

I.

A young woman who spends her time getting engaged and disengaged enjoys considerable excitement which her more constant sisters miss. Suddenly, Ruby felt that she had assumed a new importance and began to suspect that she had been overlooking, for a good many years, a legitimate form of diversion.

After writing the letter to David, she told Bess what she had done and was informed with sisterly frankness that her behaviour was idiotic and that she would probably live to regret it. Ruby retaliated by resigning from “The Only Teashop”.

With the exception of Nesta, all her other sisters approved of her decision. Nesta held the belief that there was only one “true love” in every nice woman’s life. No one durst hint to her that she had been betrothed to other men before meeting T. Hannisford Holmes; she always spoke as if she and “the little man” had become conscious of their common destiny in the cradle, and had remained loyal to it. More than once, she had described the breaking of an engagement among her friends as an infidelity; which had caused “the little man” to inform her anxiously that she must be more careful how she used words, libel laws being squeamish things.

Nesta refused to see Ruby at all until she could think the matter over, but Clarine gave a dinner-party for her sister, to which Stan Spencer was invited. It was the first time that a married member of the Hortop family had paid so much attention to Ruby’s affairs, but Stella and Jessica agreed that a concerted effort to encourage Stan was advisable. Their husbands believed him to be wealthy and influential; he always talked like it.

Gossip took the colour of the surfaces over which it flowed. Mildred MacHenry asked her husband what Ruby had found out about McLean, and if Ted had known it all the time. Being patient with Mildred was Ted’s husbandly duty these days, so he contented himself with a mild reproof—did she think such suspicions quite Christian? What Mildred did think was that men could always be counted upon to defend each other in such matters, even when they were as different as her Ted and David McLean.

Naturally, Ruby found it embarrassing not to be able to give any reason for her action. She desired to be in the better light and realized that it would not do to say that she disapproved of David's activity in sport. That hint had come to her from a friend of her mother's. To her surprise, the old lady, from whom she had expected sympathy, had said, with something like severity: "When I was a girl, I'd have forgiven a man anything who could play a game as David McLean plays hockey." One never knows what notions lurk in old ladies' minds. After that, Ruby decided to be mysterious about the cause of the quarrel; people thought better of her for refusing to say anything against David.

Macready tried to be sorry for his friend's sake; he could not tell how deeply David was feeling it. But in his room, he found himself smiling with satisfaction at the thought that the trio was rid of Ruby. Wasn't Mildred enough? He wondered if David realized what it would mean to have his blessed Three Musketeers, each with a wife pulling in a different direction. Probably, it would come about in the end, anyway. Deliberately, he made himself think of something else; he did not like to be mentally uncomfortable.

On the street, one evening, PeeVee met Professor St. Quinton, who began at once, apparently without any reason, to talk about the Hortops:

"In a city like ours," he said, "you will always find old families that have gone to seed, families that had positions but little character to start with. They invariably end in disintegration. Hortop is a conceited and pitiful figure, and his offspring are parasites. I cannot understand how Simpson Hortop came to be the father of a sensible girl like Bess."

Although St. Quinton did not link up the train of his thought, he remarked quite positively a little later:

"I have never overlooked the sturdy decency of David McLean."

The description delighted PeeVee; it seemed to him so apt. There were many surprising sides to St. Quinton; at 'Varsity, he was regarded as one of the professors who took absolutely no interest in athletics or the gods of the playing-field. Now he was saying:

"An old teacher knows that you can meet a great many more healthy and hearty young men like McLean than sophisticated people are willing to allow. I am not certain that it isn't wiser to bank on them than on the adolescent geniuses, or the niggling young fellows who mistake selfishness for ambition."

When they were parting, St. Quinton observed with a chuckle:

"McLean showed up as I expected in the police court proceedings."

Then he made the only connection between his two topics:

"I imagine that Miss Hortop would be wishing otherwise."

It was a shrewd guess. Ruby had hoped that when Slim Miller came before the court on the assault charge, his victim would be made to appear in an equally unfavourable light. Rather wilfully, it seemed to her, David managed to get himself praised, even by the magistrate, an old military man, with strongly-British views regarding conduct and honour. His patriotism took the form of mistrusting foreigners. Invariably, he blamed the faults,—especially in manners,—of Canadian offenders who passed before him, on the pernicious influence of the other nations in the Western Hemisphere.

Slim Miller felt keenly the ignominy of being charged with aggravated assault. From his place in the dock, where he had been forced to stand, he shot grateful glances at David when he realized that the latter was giving as little damaging evidence against him as possible. To the intense annoyance of the Crown Attorney, the magistrate maintained that the stand of the chief witness was the only manly and proper one.

"Are you any relation to the Dr. McLean who went with the troops to the North-West Rebellion?" he asked.

"He was my father," replied David, who knew that his tawny head emphasized the likeness.

"A splendid fellow," said the magistrate, and shook hands.

When all the evidence had been taken, the magistrate paid no further attention to it. Instead, he delivered a caustic address on the modern conception of sport; it was one of his favourite topics, and he had his ideas well arranged. Of course, he fixed the blame on the aliens, as he called all who did not live under the Union Jack, and he warned young Canadians, particularly Slim Miller, that they would be responsible if anything dire happened to their country's sense of sportsmanship. Unless they would be warned in time, he might find it necessary to send a few of them to jail one of these days. Then he permitted the defendant to go, and, with the consciousness that he had done something to delay the decay of his country, turned to the next case.

His remarks were fully reported in the newspapers, and two pompous writers took them as a text for editorials entitled "Clean Sport", in which the things he had said were repeated in more pontifical language. After that, justice was fully satisfied, and the athletes began training for any fracas that might occur in the summer games.

There was nothing left for Ruby Hortop to do but assume an attitude of grieved mystery whenever the name of David McLean was mentioned.

Three weeks later, she told her family that she was engaged to be married to Stan Spencer.

II.

Ruby's wedding was to take place at once. Stan Spencer had closed the office, in which for about eight months he had failed to do business as a manufacturers' agent. He intended to settle in Ottawa, where he expected to fill the first important vacancy that occurred in the Civil Service. He professed great confidence in certain politicians.

Of course, it would be a church affair, with a reception at Nesta's house; Nesta took it for granted that the re-engagement had cancelled the infidelity. Mrs. Hortop invited her married daughters to afternoon tea, to discuss details. It would probably be the last "show" wedding in the family. If Bess ever displayed sufficient womanliness to give up her independence, she was the sort of queer one to slip out and go through the ceremony in her noon hour.

Bess failed to turn up at the consultation and that was unfortunate, as she had promised months ago to foot the bills when Ruby married.

All impatience, Ruby went to the telephone, and returned in tears.

"Bess says we need not bother making plans," she sobbed. "She knows what she intends to do."

"Why cry about it?" enquired Jessica. "When Bess does a thing, she usually does it right."

"She says there will be no fuss and that I am to be married in my travelling-dress."

"Bess is hard," exclaimed Nesta. "She has no idea what a wedding means to a girl."

"It is just spite, because she likes David," declared Stella.

"If she wants that sort of man in the family, why doesn't she marry him herself?" said Clarine. Her conclusion regarding the broken engagement had been most damaging to McLean, especially when Ruby refused to say "yes" or "no" to her questionings.

Clarine, Stella, and Jessica fell to praising Stan Spencer. The previous evening, he had given a little dinner at the Queen's to their husbands, who had returned to their homes and pronounced him a splendid fellow, a man of parts and social charm. Only T. Hannisford Holmes had sent his regrets; he had disapproved of the entire affair.

"The little man" condemned the idea of so much splurge when everybody knew how recently Ruby had transferred her affections from McLean to Spencer. They might use his house if Nesta wished it, but he would not give a cent towards paying for indecent display. For the first time since their marriage, Nesta had believed "the little man" to be prejudiced, but now that Bess agreed with him, she was inclined to go over to them.

If Bess refused to contribute the necessary money, where would they get it? Nesta did not want to tell them of the stand taken by T. Hannisford Holmes.

Ruby pronounced herself broken-hearted at the prospect of no white satin dress and no reception. Accordingly, they decided that Jessica and Stella should call on Bess and attempt to talk her over. Clarine had said so many cutting things about Bess's "beanery" that it did not seem diplomatic for her to accompany them. To their surprise, Nesta refused. She explained that she saw Bess every few days and would bring up the matter quite casually.

Jessica and Stella did not make a success of their visit to the teashop—it was their first. Stella's curiosity was largely to blame. She thought it a good opportunity to learn what had become of that Bateman woman, and why she had left the city.

"I always knew," said Stella with complacency, "that Laura Bateman would turn out badly."

Bess turned to her with that sharp business precision which her sisters disliked and feared.

"If only Ruby possessed some of the qualities of Laura Bateman," she said, "the whole Hortop family would not look as contemptible as it does just now. Laura has a lot of traits that any one of us might be glad to possess. Have you ever shown a piece of decent courage in your life, Stella?"

Tactfully, Jessica engineered a retreat. Outside, they remembered that they had not even mentioned Ruby's wedding. Stella blamed Jessica for rushing her away so soon.

"I never pay any attention to what Bess says," she protested. "She is just an old maid."

"Then you can go back alone," said Jessica, "or I shall go alone, but I won't go with you."

They postponed the interview to another day and paid a visit to Clarine, to whom Stella gave the impression that Bess had been very ugly.

Clarine, Stella, and Jessica needed every cent that their husbands could earn. They were making many nice friends and it cost more and more to do the things that their nice friends did. They were very sorry for Ruby and very angry with Bess, but it was out of the question for them to think of paying for an elaborate wedding.

"Won't Hannisford do it?" suggested Ruby. "He did it for the rest of you."

They turned back to Nesta, but found that she had gone over completely to the enemy.

For a number of years, Nesta had nursed a suspicion, a faint one, barely admitted to herself, that Bess was inclined to laugh at T. Hannisford Holmes, and whenever "the little man" had an opinion that coincided with that held by Bess, she hastened to tell her sister about it.

Accompanied by one of her little sons, Nesta visited "The Only Teashop". Conversation was not easy, as she had to spend considerable time coaxing little Simmy to drink a glass of milk and eat a slice of toast, when he much preferred the appearance of the scummy mug of iced coffee and the almost black fruit cake on his mother's plate. The clash of wills ended in a battle which Nesta won by sheer weight. She carried out her threat to take away the milk and toast altogether, and sent Simmy off to play.

Perspiring but smiling, Nesta sat down again to her iced coffee.

" 'The little man' agrees with you that Ruby's wedding should be as quiet as possible," she said, breathing heavily. "He thinks that Ruby's infidelity has made us all ridiculous enough already."

Before she could say more, Simmy arrived back to ask for candy.

"No, dear, Mummy has no candy."

"But you said Aunt Bess might have some."

"You mustn't worry poor Aunt Bess. Now don't go to any bother, Bess!"

Bess returned with a piece of candy, and Simmy was placed upon a chair with instructions to remain there until he had finished the sweetie, so that he might not sticky-up Aunt Bess's pretty house. Two minutes later, he was gone, sweetie and all.

"I am buying Ruby a good outfit," said Bess, "and I intend to give her a cheque for a hundred dollars."

"Marrying a man like Stan, she will hardly need that," objected Nesta.

"I am not so sure. Only ten days ago, Stan tried to borrow two hundred dollars from me on his note. It seems that some business deal caught him in need of a little ready cash."

"And you refused?"

"Of course."

"Didn't you tell Ruby that?"

"She only got angry. She thought it was my hatefulness."

Nesta missed the reply. She had darted across the room to stop Simmy jerking the leaves of an amaryllis, in full bloom. Simmy was told that only a naughty boy would spoil the pretty flower. His mother licked the corner of her handkerchief to rub his grubby hands, and dropped the mucky remains of the candy into the flowerpot.

She returned to where Bess was standing, and continued their conversation:

"That doesn't sound to me as if he were as wealthy as Clarine says."

"I felt that way about it too," replied Bess, as she moved across the room to pick up her nephew, who had continued tugging at the amaryllis, quite undisturbed by his mother's rebuke.

Nesta beamed upon her son.

"O Simmy! Aunt Bess won't think you a nice little boy, pulling so many leaves off her pretty lily!"

At the end of the scrambled conference, which lasted for half an hour longer, Bess understood that T. Hannisford Holmes intended to support her view of the matter. And when Stella, Clarine, and Jessica heard of the new alliance, they hastened to urge upon Ruby that, everything considered, she ought to be satisfied with a quiet wedding.

Stan and Ruby were married at high noon, in the presence of a few friends. They went directly from the church to the station, bound for Niagara Falls. Ruby confided to Clarine that she did not think she could ever bring herself to forgive the meanness of Bess.

CHAPTER XIV

TOWARDS BROADWAY

I.

Laura Bateman had been in Chicago for a month before her father suspected that she was not paying an ordinary visit. He set afoot enquiries regarding the runt, and when he was sure that no one had seen that objectionable young man for several weeks, he leapt to the conclusion that he now possessed a son-in-law whom he cordially detested. He wrote to Laura that she was no longer a daughter of his and threatened to tear up all future communications from her without reading them. Three weeks later, he wrote her again, but the letter came back with the information that Miss Bateman had changed her address. Nothing remained for Dr. Bateman but to fume; he made Mrs. Bateman's existence more miserable than it had ever been in their nerve-racking married life.

Early in May, Laura returned to Toronto. She walked into the house just as her father and mother were rising from the breakfast-table.

Dr. Bateman obeyed his first impulse to embrace her roughly, and then handed her on to his weeping wife.

Believing that he was about to be asked to receive his son-in-law, he became himself again and launched into a catalogue of epithets descriptive of vile males. Mrs. Bateman was muffling her sobs in a table napkin; her handkerchief was quite inadequate.

When Laura could make herself heard, she said:

"Hold on dad! You had better keep some of those pleasant names until you hear what I am going to tell you. The runt is not here."

Dr. Bateman had exhausted himself. He could not rise to the greatest occasion of his life. He asked lamely: "What do you mean, not here?" and stood there, gaping.

"Then you didn't go away with him after all?" cried Mrs. Bateman.

It had never been Laura's way to dodge facts; she summed up the whole story briefly.

"Now keep your vests down," she said. "I did go away with him, but I ditched him in short order."

Mrs. Bateman grew almost hysterical, until the doctor bawled at her to get out until he could get to the bottom of what Laura meant. Then she fled, moaning, to her room.

"Weren't you married?" demanded the doctor, when alone with his daughter.

"Thank God, no!"

"Don't you realize what that means to you?"

"It means I got my eyes opened in time. That's the difference between me and a lot of married women we know."

"Where has he gone?"

"I don't know. To hell for all I care!"

And when he paused in his railing for breath, she added:

"The boys were right and I was wrong. He was just plain skunk. They don't make them any more abominable."

The doctor had boiled into a rage again. He ordered Laura out of the house and she thought it diplomatic to obey. Before leaving, she carried her valise up to her room and ran in to speak to her mother.

Mrs. Bateman could only wring her hands and ask, over and over again:

"How did I ever come to have such a daughter?"

Laura had heard that query many times and thought she knew the answer, but had never offered it to her mother, who was such a sad old thing. Once she had confided to Bess:

"Mother used to boast to me that she was engaged seven times before she met father. That's what a girl called having a good time in 1875. Mother went as far as she dared, and if she'd had a little of dad's spirit, she'd have gone farther."

While her parents were coming to reason, Laura went round to the tea-room to see Bess Hortop and found her eager to hear about the adventures in Chicago. Laura told little of the break with the runt, but described her subsequent experiences with gusto.

She had soon learned that the chances of finding a theatrical opening in Chicago were slim, but her money was running low and she could not get as far as New York. For purposes of economy, she had moved into a cheap boarding-house, and there she had come across a clever young pianist who was too shy to show people what he could do. "I was desperate," she said, "so I kidnapped him. I got a try-out with a manager who needed someone to fill a bad hole in a worse show. He took us on, and we never flopped once. We toured a lot of little cities to fill out the season, and then the manager offered us a contract. My partner wanted to grab it. I think it was the first time he had been sure of having three meals a day since leaving his mamma."

"And didn't you accept?"

"We were in burlesque. It was tough stuff, I can tell you. But I'm good enough for vaudeville. I want Dad to lend me a few hundred dollars, just a loan, mind you. I know we can break into Broadway."

"Did you bring your partner with you?" Bess asked.

Laura flapped her two hands in the air. "You talk exactly like Toronto, but you needn't look so haggard at me. I have told you he is not a man; he is a pianist. You'll like him, Bess. He is such an appealing little creature. I am going to lead him round here some day and let you feed him. He is always so grateful to anybody who gives him a good meal."

Bess offered to lend her the money, but Laura wouldn't hear of it. "I could get it from PeeVee if I was really stuck," she said. "But the old boy will be all cut up when he hears that I am leaving for good. He'll insist upon being my backer."

II.

When Dr. Bateman realized that his daughter had no intention of remaining at home, his bark, which had opposed every move made by her since she was five years old, dwindled pathetically. He did an unprecedented thing; he pleaded with her.

"How do you think I can live in this house alone with your mother, blubbering on my neck night and day?" he demanded. "Every time she thinks of you, she'll have another cry."

"You're too old to keep a pet like me, dad," Laura replied. "I'd give you apoplexy one of these days, and then things would be worse than ever."

"You've been a damned pest, girl!" he admitted, sadly.

"And you're not so easy to get along with, yourself," she interrupted.

"But we are the same sort of cattle." He said it as if he feared she might overlook their essential kinship.

Laura permitted herself a rare demonstration; she kissed him on the forehead.

"You stay at home with us." He spoke eagerly and hopefully. "What do we care if fools scandalize the name of Bateman!"

She pulled the lobe of his ear.

"You don't seem to understand," she said. "I do not care in the least what folks say. I never have, any more than you. But I want to see what I can do on the stage. Now is the time, when I have so much confidence in myself."

He saw that she was determined and that it would be useless for him to say any more, but he suddenly began to want more of her company, so long as she remained at home. They made plans for the future; he was to visit her in New York. "It will be an education for you, dad, even at your time of life," she promised.

Laura found that her father's new gentleness was making her sentimental. She wanted to get back to the United States as soon as possible, as she hoped to secure engagements in Atlantic City or some of the other resorts on the sea-coast, but it was not easy, after all, to say "good-bye".

She surprised PeeVee by declaring:

"I hate to see the old gang dissolving. We have had some good times together."

Then to cover up any hint of emotion, she opened fire on Ruby, who was now safely established in Ottawa.

"She did her best to spoil things for everybody two summers ago. She chased David until she made me sick. Do you remember how she tennised? She made a fool of herself on the courts until she was all of a sweat. To think that men fall for such things!"

While on the subject, she completed the list:

"There is another of our friends that I never liked, and his name is Ted MacHenry."

PeeVee was still willing to champion his friend. "Ted's all right," he said.

Laura snapped her fingers at him.

"I know why you three go together," she asserted. "You make one complete man—body, mind and spirit. David is the body,—a lovely attractive body; Ted is the mind,—a nasty, scheming mind; and you, PeeVee, are the spirit,—whatever that may be. Something indefinable that never gets anywhere."

Three hours later, PeeVee and Bess saw Laura Bateman aboard the New York train. She bundled her pianist limply in front of her, as if he were some sort of sickly pet.

CHAPTER XV
CHANGE

I.

Summer came early with a burst of heat, and for ten weeks there were few wet or cool days. The boat-houses along the water-front were as busy as ant-hills, and in the evenings the small craft on the bay flitted in and out as thick as moths about a candle. Mostly they were dinghies, uncertain of balance with their white spread of sail, though an occasional canoe would dart out of the darkness, playing in the swells from the ponderous ferries.

PeeVee and David did not like the crowded waters of the bay. They looked forward to the weekends, when they could sail far out of sight of land, where it was possible to drop overboard into the cool depths of Lake Ontario, which always, even on the sizzling July afternoons, felt like a body of ice that had, for some unscientific reason, remained liquid.

For the first time, Ted refused to accompany them on these expeditions. He said that Mildred considered them dangerous. In reality, Mildred feared that when men were gathered together, without the restraining influence of women, the tendency was degrading.

The heat made the new baby ill, and Mildred decided to take the children to a farm in the country until the weather moderated. For six Sunday afternoons, Ted sat alone in his living-room, with all the blinds drawn in a vain endeavour to reduce the temperature. With the perspiration pouring down his face, he made speeches to his image in the mirror. He imagined conversations between himself and prominent citizens whom he admired. Sometimes they addressed him intimately as “Ted”, and again respectfully as “Mr. MacHenry”. In the evening, he went to church and felt himself a paragon of dignity as he showed people to their seats; the sort of man that strangers look at a second time. In the end, he saw how right Mildred was in these matters; the same time spent with David and PeeVee would have been wasted.

With the return of the cool weather, Mrs. Pentley Dickenson hastened back from Muskoka. She had discovered a new genius, a recent arrival in the city, and wanted to be the first to entertain him. He was a fat young man, whose poetry appeared at intervals in the leading American magazines: *Harper’s*, *The Century*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. His manners were exceedingly rude, but in Mrs. Dickenson’s set, that was regarded as an additional indication of some divine spark, in spite of the fact that they were all most punctilious in their own behaviour. He read his verses aloud when invited and frequently insisted upon reading them when not invited. He said bitter things about Canadian editors, who were willing to print his poems provided that he did not expect payment.

PeeVee was present at a number of the readings. He wondered how such an absurd young man could write such good verse. But the gatherings were uncomfortable. He wished that Mrs. Dickenson would not, so frequently, refer to him as "our young Canadian dramatist".

The poet hated Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter and all her friends with a perspiring hatred. He had been taken to her home, where he had promptly volunteered a reading.

After twenty minutes, Gypsy Hagar Bright had staggered to her feet and said:

"See here, Georgy Porgy! Who do you think wants to listen to your silly jingles? I can do better than that myself."

He had expected the other members of the party to stamp on her for such effrontery, but they had only laughed, and laughed so loudly that Gypsy was encouraged to repeat a limerick. It was a limerick about the king, written in the gay days when he was the Prince of Wales. Although never printed, it had travelled through the Empire with as much vitality as one of Rudyard Kipling's bursts of imperialism. It is probable that Gypsy Hagar Bright would not have repeated it in mixed company if Mrs. Decasser-Hunter's cocktails had been less potent.

The poet had read no more that day. Thereafter, he spoke of Mrs. Decasser-Hunter only with sarcasm.

The evenings spent at the homes of his new friends were growing monotonous to PeeVee. At Mrs. Pentley Dickenson's, the unabated enthusiasm; at Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter's, the never-ending scoffing. So few of their emotions sounded real. Turning out regular articles for *Once a Week* was a drag also; now that people took them for granted, they seemed almost superfluous. Only his mother ever mentioned them now.

Whenever he had a free evening, he locked himself in his room and laboured at his plays—he was writing two,—but he never mentioned their existence to outsiders. In the cliques that surrounded Mrs. Dickenson and Mrs. Decasser-Hunter, writers reaped so much credit for things they intended to do that many of them saw no reason for going beyond the stage of announcing their plans. The chatter about “my play” and “my novel” irritated PeeVee when he knew that they existed merely as vague possibilities. He thought it would be an innovation to have his drama in the hands of a producer before discussing it with every curious questioner.

Occasionally, he dropped round to see Bess Hortop, but her days were crowded with activities. In November, she opened a shop for the sale of her candy—a prim little black and white front, pinched in between two opulent windows. “The Spinster Bess Candies” were becoming the fad of the moment in the city. PeeVee made a design for the candy box and, according to Mrs. Pentley Dickenson, it was a greater factor in the sale than the flavour of the chocolates.

At New Year’s, Ted MacHenry provided a brief diversion; he got himself elected to the Board of Education. It had not been his intention to step into public life so soon, but a small field, including a trustee who had been besmirched in a recent civic investigation, looked like an opportunity that might not occur again. Ted entered as a last moment candidate, and scraped in a few votes ahead of the man who was seeking vindication. Trustee MacHenry got a good deal of newspaper publicity; he represented the cause of righteousness. Dr. Newlin Jenkins developed a scathing monologue about him, as the perfect puritan, to entertain his friends.

On the whole, PeeVee found the winter months dull and unsatisfactory.

By February, the two comedies were ready, and he sent them to a play agent in New York. One of them came back promptly; the agent did not think it had a chance. She was more encouraging about the other. The plot was unconventional and amusing, but she suggested that it would have to be re-written by someone with a better understanding of the requirements of Broadway. A Canadian background without “mounties”, or French *patois* was quite impossible.

PeeVee asked her to send it back to him. Then he tore up both manuscripts and tossed the fragments into the grate where his poetry had perished a year earlier. Exultantly, he told David what he had done. What a fool he had been to permit his head to be turned by all the gush over *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee*!

Circumstances were slowly shaping themselves to suit the purposes of one Humphrey Cronk, of whose existence PeeVee Macready had never heard, up to that time.

II.

The small inland city of Milltown contained one prosperous daily paper, and the owner of it, Humphrey Cronk, was a native of Petersville. He had left the town at the tender age of ten years, but after he had reached middle life, his interest in the community had commenced to grow. The growth was due to his conviction that it was a great thing for any town to have been the birthplace of a successful man like Humphrey Cronk.

When the profits of his business began to outstrip his private needs, Humphrey Cronk conceived a desire to be the owner of a paper that was being talked about. He wanted it to have what he called "class", and to be less like the papers published in other cities of Milltown's size. He consulted the trustworthy Mrs. Chapman, who had, for years, conducted a woman's page and furnished comment on any of the arts that happened to intrude upon the respectability of Milltown. Cronk gave two pages daily to sport and less than a column weekly to art and literature. Mrs. Chapman suggested a little more attention to the intellectual and aesthetic. She combated the proprietor's contention that there was no demand for anything of the sort in Milltown. What else could give the paper class? They needed an extra editor to write a classy article every day; Mrs. Chapman said an essay, but Mr. Cronk mistrusted essays.

In the end, they adopted Mrs. Chapman's suggestion. Mr. Cronk and his overworked managing editor would retain the right to express opinions on all the really important subjects, party politics, the lessons to be learned from a recent brutal murder, and the local need of more sewers.

"Where is such a special writer to be found?" asked Cronk.

Mrs. Chapman gave the name of Pierre Vincent Macready, who had recently been contributing clever articles to *Once a Week*. She mentioned incidentally that the young writer's family lived in Petersville, and Cronk knew without more ado that he had found his man. He did not even wait to look up one of PeeVee's contributions to *Once a Week*; anyway, he considered himself too practical a citizen to read that sort of publication.

So it came to pass that PeeVee received a letter, making him a surprisingly generous offer of a position on the *Milltown Gazette*.

Here was a way out. The burnt scraps of his plays were still lying on the hearth. He now realized that he had felt all along, even when sending them to the agent, that they were not good enough. What folly it would be to start doing the same thing over again! Worse still, he might continue to drift round Mrs. Pentley Dickenson's home, where they seemed willing to treat him as if *Dierdre, The Keeper of a Bee* were sufficient for any man's life work.

He sat down that evening and accepted the offer with a note of eagerness that caused Mr. Cronk to remark:

"I never make a mistake when I follow my intuition."

When Mrs. Macready heard what had happened, she hastened to the city by the next train and spent two hours with her son.

"Why didn't you consult me before doing anything definite?" she wanted to know.

"I'm anxious to do it," he told her, "so I know that I'll do it well."

"Is it worth doing?" she demanded.

He tried to explain his point of view, but Georgina would not listen.

"Just when you are commencing to be known!" she continued to protest. "The right people have taken you up, and I have been so happy."

She reminded him that if it had not been for his father's will, Medora might have been winning fame in Europe, and that his sister had given up the ambition of her life without a murmur. They looked to him to compensate them for all their sacrifices, and now it was all to end in Milltown. Georgina insisted upon regarding Milltown as a graveyard in which to bury failures.

"Can you tell me a single celebrity in Milltown?" she put to him.

"Can you tell me a single celebrity in Toronto?" he asked in reply.

"Then why don't you go to New York? If you cannot find any more inspiration here, you might find it there. In Milltown, there can be nothing."

"And what if New York turned out to be the Pentley Dickensons and the Decasser-Hunters on a grander scale?"

Mrs. Macready could not understand what he meant. To her, it sounded like ingratitude after all that had been done for him. She left Pierre and went directly to Mrs. Pentley Dickenson in search of comfort. They talked sadly together, like two mourners after a recent death.

"I love him as my own son," Mrs. Dickenson carolled. "I am happy that I have been able to do so much to draw him out. He was so shy and retiring at first, but I could see his talents unfolding like a beautiful flower in the environment of gifted people. What a pity, what a pity to have him forego the cultured surroundings! They were the one thing he needed."

Georgina was effusive in her thanks, but at the same time she experienced a pang of resentment. As her own son! What right had Mrs. Dickenson to assume that Pierre needed an improved maternity? Georgina began to tell of her own youth in Toronto, when her friends, members of the most exclusive families, had hoped much for her future as an artist.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Dickenson.

There was an almost imperceptible chill between them when they parted.

Mrs. Macready went back to Petersville with the half-formed intention of taking Medora to Europe if her son insisted upon disappointing her.

The last fortnight spent in Toronto by PeeVee was filled with excitement. Even those, like David, who were genuinely sorry to see him go, wished him luck, and predicted that his new experience would stir him up.

Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter ran round in her recently-purchased and uncertain automobile to say "good-bye".

"If ever you get bored," she said, "send for me, and I'll bring the gang over in my car. We'll show the yokels that they are entertaining a real live boy."

Gypsy Hagar Bright took both his hands in hers and said:

"Do you know, Pierre, that you have more attraction for the opposite sex than any man I have ever met?"

"Come on, Gypsy!" interrupted Dorothea. "PeeVee doesn't want to hear what you'd have done with him if you had not first come across John Bright."

The motor gave a snort and a jerk; the frowsy yellow head bobbed forward and back; and the car went careering down the street with a recklessness that made Gypsy Hagar Bright suggest nervously:

"You really ought to get someone to show you more about the car, Dorothea."

Quite unintentionally, Bess Hortop gave the only cold douche to PeeVee's delight in his future. She said:

"By the way, Stan and Ruby have just moved to Milltown. The high-salaried post in Ottawa did not materialize, and Stan has opened some sort of an agency. He appears to have found generous financial backing, and Ruby is very happy about the change.”

END OF BOOK ONE

BOOK TWO
Milltown

CHAPTER XVI
THE GIFT OF THE GAB

I.

Humphrey Cronk would have liked to launch his new editor on Dominion Day, for luck, but as that was one of the seven public holidays on which the *Milltown Gazette* did not appear, PeeVee's first article came out on June 30th. He did not flatter himself that it had created a stir. The first hot spell of the summer had just settled down on baked and dusty Milltown, and the citizens felt too exhausted to read anything more than yesterday's temperature and tomorrow's probabilities.

Compared with the offices of the trust company, the room in which PeeVee was to spend his days appeared unbearably grubby and hot. It looked out upon a tar-and-gravel roof that bubbled in the midday sun, and he wondered if a breath of air ever stirred in it during the torrid months. Perhaps that was just as well; the slightest breeze would have raised such a cloud of dust from the neglected piles of books and parliamentary reports, heaped in the corners and upon the shelves of the one dilapidated bookcase.

With considerable pride, Cronk displayed the premises.

"You will not be disturbed here," he said. "And remember, you are to have an absolutely free hand. Select your own subjects and say what you like. Not a man in the city of Milltown would dare to interfere with the editorial policy of the *Gazette*."

Humphrey Cronk wandered in frequently to stand across the doorway, blocking what little draught there might have been. On the second day, he offered his opinion of PeeVee's method of writing. PeeVee sometimes spent an hour casting and recasting a paragraph.

"You are wasting your time," Cronk told him. "Write your stuff once and revise it with a lead pencil. What a man says spontaneously is the cream of his day's thinking."

He hated stylists, from Henry James down.

Also, he hated innovations. Typewriters were only tolerated because the staff, writers and printers, demanded them. He barked at PeeVee:

"It is because of that machine that you young men do not write with the vigour we had when I was your age. It has increased the velocity of the hands without increasing the velocity of the brain.”

He suggested that the special editorials should be rich in information, humour, and satire. He was the sort of man who laughed uproariously at lampoons of anything of which he disapproved, but he flew into a violent rage and dictated thunderous replies if he found a single line in a rival paper that expressed a doubt about one of his pet fads.

There were too many spineless citizens in the country, Humphrey Cronk said; by spineless citizens, he meant those who did not hold their convictions savagely. Once he had made up his mind to think a thing, nothing could shake him. He believed that all French people were immoral; he said that impressionistic painting was a sign of a diseased mind, and he called all pictures impressionistic that did not look like the thing as he saw it; he declared that every right-thinking man was in favour of locking up Bernard Shaw and that fellow, Lloyd George; and he could not see why any Canadian should write a novel—except on the off-chance of making a little money—when the lists of literature were completely filled with the work of competent dead men. In his own special field of politics and social questions, he silenced an opposing argument in short order. He did so by shouting:

“I want you to understand this is a subject I have studied very carefully, and I KNOW.”

When Humphrey Cronk wrote an editorial, it was not because tradition had decreed that newspapers must contain editorials. He delighted in telling people what they should think and do. He was filled with an overwhelming desire to teach, and it never deterred him that the desire was so frequently unsupported by an adequate stock of accurate information. On the whole, his influence was not less, but perhaps greater, for that.

“I like the members of my staff to be recognized figures in the city,” said Cronk to PeeVee, who found himself, as soon as the excessive heat moderated, being taken regularly to Cronk’s bowling-club.

Macready had always regarded lawn-bowling as one of the melancholy forms of sport, but he found Cronk’s friends, when on the green, the most persistently jocular of men. Their youthful spirits belied their bald heads and stiffening knees. None of them ever spoke without a determination to make somebody laugh, if only himself. “A great bunch of kidders,” Cronk called them. A joke lasted them a long time, and the gags and retorts that happened to be considered witty that summer were bandied about night after night without seeming any the worse for wear.

In less than a fortnight, PeeVee found that he was being taken under the wing of the Rev. Roderick Cochrane. He was the pastor of the Parkes Street Church, which had become, under his leadership, the largest and wealthiest congregation in the city, and he was much admired as a man's man. Among the bowlers he had few peers. Indeed, he put his hand to nothing that was not done conspicuously well. No other institution in Milltown fed as many poor families on Christmas Day as Parkes Street Church; his periodic sermons for young men only, or young women only, drew congregations that were the envy of all other preachers; when he took the lead in the Ministerial Association, the police found themselves goaded into action in every direction; and when he threw his weight into any campaign, it leapt, at once, halfway to victory. He was proud of his outspoken courage. He despised, and did not hesitate to say so, a clerical moral reformer in a neighbouring city who wore a wig and a false moustache when visiting a burlesque theatre to see if the shows were as obscene as he had hoped. If the Rev. Roddy Cochrane conceived the notion that a certain form of entertainment would injure the community, he denounced it without more ado.

According to Humphrey Cronk, the Rev. Roddy was, next to the *Gazette*, the greatest social force in Milltown. Naturally, the Cronks were members of the Parkes Street Church, and it was suggested that his new assistant might find it helpful to associate himself there, too.

With tremendous expansiveness and vitality, the Rev. Roddy seemed to be able to attend dozens of meetings in the course of a day, and yet to make time for heart-to-heart conversations with any young person in whom he might be interested. He invariably got down to essentials when speaking alone to a young man. To PeeVee, it seemed that the Rev. Roddy was creeping up close to the edge of his privacy, and reaching for some sort of a confession, or at least a confidence. All their conversations led, inevitably, to the temptations of youth.

The Rev. Roddy approached such matters practically—it was his favourite word. Practical Christianity. He meant by that a never-ending fight against drunkenness and similar vices that might undermine a man's health and destroy his efficiency as a citizen.

"It is a practical age, and there is too much work to be done to sit round, splitting theoretical hairs."

Thus the Rev. Roddy Cochrane, with kindliness and authority, had dismissed the futile questionings of many a young man. He believed the best way to treat "isms" and heresies was to ride rough-shod over them.

After a couple of conversations with PeeVee, he summed him up for Cronk's benefit:

"That is a clever young fellow, but he needs to have his feet on the ground. I can see the effect upon his mind of the free-thinking younger set which, so I understand, has become numerous in Toronto of late years. He shows an inclination to sneer at rich and respectable people, as does that cynic, Bernard Shaw."

"He will soon grow out of that," declared Cronk with confidence. "There is a thoroughly good tone among the best people of Milltown."

If PeeVee had not felt a deliberate suction drawing him into Parkes Street Church, he would have settled down quite naturally under the Rev. Roddy's paternal shadow. But here in Milltown was the very thing that he had hoped to escape: pressure; the united will of other people to drive him in a certain direction; a situation to be met, not by direct opposition, but by apparently accidental evasion.

One Sunday morning, he dropped into St. Faith's, a shabby little church near his boarding-house. He liked the appearance of the parson, a frail little man with an intense, ascetic face, and he noticed how thin the collection plate looked, compared to the opulent brasses at Parkes Street. On his way out, he informed a seedy-looking individual, who gave him rather a bleak smile, that he intended to become a member, and received a small card, printed in purple, on which to send in his name.

He felt rather ashamed of his satisfaction in telling the pastor of Parkes Street Church what he had done.

The Rev. Roddy spoke very nicely of the incumbent of St. Faith's, who looked, so he said, undernourished and overworked. Why did he hold so many services in his desolate church, with almost no congregation? And why did he and his wife waste their obviously limited strength doing things that the public nurses were paid to look after? Cochrane called him a mystic, which was a kindly way of saying that he had not sufficient practical sense to make a success of his profession.

"Anyway, I am glad we have persuaded Macready into a church connection," said Cronk to his pastor. "It makes you feel that a young man will be more steady and reliable."

II.

In September, Mrs. Chapman arrived back from a four months' vacation, devoted to a trip across Canada.

Mrs. Chapman was the best-known woman in Milltown. Many admired her and almost as many feared her. Some liked her and a few hated her, but no one denied that she was a dangerous woman to have as an enemy, if you desired to go your way quietly in the city.

The Saturday page that Mrs. Chapman conducted in the *Gazette* was the usual medley supposed to be of interest to women—recipes and hints for housekeeping that had never been tested; talks about the shortcomings of bachelors, and suggestions concerning love affairs; gush, sentimentality, and the latest wrinkle in fashions. But that was the least of her activities. Cronk called her a wonder; she was the only member of the staff who dared to stand up to him.

Mrs. Chapman was doing her part to drag Milltown into the sacred circle of the Canadian renaissance. Cronk had believed that all articles on the arts were pedantic until Mrs. Chapman proved him wrong. For the benefit of the most lowly reader of the *Gazette*, she wrote with a mixture of comic effects. She made references to "the late Julius Caesar, Esq." and "that famous slinger of whitewash, Mike Angelo". Her masterpiece, according to Cronk, was the chiding of the citizens of Milltown for not turning out to see the only ballet that had ever visited their opera-house. She asked:

"If the original Miriam and her maidenly hoppers came prancing through our town, would the good folk turn out to encourage Terpsichore's Hebrew sister? I trow not. So why should I be annoyed about the vacant seats last night? That seems to be the way with this little city. It was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, as the dago poet, Mr. Odyssey Homer once remarked."

All Mrs. Chapman's friends agreed that she was a whimsical writer. And she thought so, too.

Mrs. Chapman returned with a rush and took possession of the new editor. She concluded that they were kindred spirits, and for weeks galloped him about, exhibiting places of interest in Milltown that he had not even heard of; the spot where the founder had built the first log house; the tree that was planted by King Edward, when, as a dashing youth, he had visited Canada in 1867. Mrs. Chapman also knew where the best autumn colouring was to be found and displayed vistas of beauty as if she had created them. Occasionally, they were accompanied by Mr. Chapman, a peace-loving person, who disappeared into nothingness between the times when his wife brought him to the surface.

One day, Mrs. Chapman said to PeeVee:

"How you must miss Mrs. Pentley Dickenson and her brilliant friends!"

She told him how much she treasured the memory of two visits to Mrs. Dickenson's house. Milltown was not sufficiently large to support a similar group of rarified minds, but Mrs. Chapman promised him that he would meet, at her flat, a few women who were interested in ideas.

He accepted her invitation to have that experience, and a little supper. The idea that had been selected to stimulate their interest concerned women who wrote verses. Hadn't they a right to be called poets, and wasn't there a degrading suggestion of inferiority in segregating them as poetesses? There was much earnestness and more indignation in the discussion of the matter. They agreed that dictionaries had wasted space for generations on a word that was no more necessary than "cookess" or "butcheress".

Mr. Chapman motioned PeeVee to join him in the dining-room, and when they got outside, he said:

"I thought perhaps you might like to escape. Nellie's friends are too deep for me."

He produced a box of expensive cigars. With two incomes and no family, the Chapmans could afford to do themselves very well.

As they were leaving, one of the guests shook PeeVee energetically by the hand, and said:

"Oh, Mr. Macready, we are all looking forward so much to hearing you speak!"

He looked towards Mrs. Chapman for enlightenment. She informed him:

"Mr. Cronk thinks you ought to make a good speaker. You talk so easily. Oh, you will hear more about it one of these days!"

III.

Humphrey Cronk was quick to recognize that an editor who could deliver popular addresses would be a great advertising asset for the *Gazette*. Macready had appearance and manner, he dressed well without being a fop, and whenever he exerted himself to be pleasant, people liked him. Apparently, he had what Cronk called the "gift of the gab".

A hint was dropped that Macready would be a good man to address the Canadian Club on "The Drama", and as Cronk's hints were never overlooked in Milltown, the Secretary invited PeeVee to be the first speaker of the autumn season.

For many days, PeeVee toiled over his address. He gathered sufficient material for a course of lectures, and then discarded it in large quantities. He selected what he believed to be the most important points and fitted them together into a speech, which, he hoped, would seem witty without being slap-stick, and informative without being preachy. After so much study, he could not have known the final product better if it had been a recitation. He felt he had prepared himself for one of his accustomed successes.

The Canadian Club met at noon. The members ate a lunch of stringy veal buried in a heap of damp dressing, green peas, and mashed potatoes, followed by apple pie and cheese, with forbidding coffee. Over the wreck of the bodily meal, the speaker gave out his mental fare. PeeVee found it easy to talk and his speech flowed on, unhesitatingly. But somehow, the listeners seemed to be tolerantly friendly rather than cordial; he was conscious that he stood in the midst of boredom. Towards the end he hastened, and sat down with a feeling of relief. Everybody clapped, but he did not mistake it for applause.

The Rev. Roddy Cochrane walked back to the office with him. He offered one comment:

"Pretty immoral chap, that fellow Ibsen!"

PeeVee was feeling chagrined, or he would not have asked, abruptly:

"What has he been up to, now?"

Immediately he regretted his words, but the Rev. Roddy did not regard them as rudeness.

"Oh, he may be a very decent fellow for all I know!" he explained. "But his plays are too disturbing for Canadians. In fact, I am opposed to all translated dramas."

To Cronk, the Rev. Roddy said:

"Pierre's address was scholarly, but he needs to get more into touch with normal minds and enthusiasms."

It was not Cronk's way to be discouraged by a single failure. He said no word of disappointment or praise to PeeVee; either would have been rubbing it in. But, one day, he mentioned that Gay Adams of Cleveland was going to give an address under the auspices of the Men's Club of the Parkes Street Church. Gay Adams made an annual visit to Milltown and always drew a large crowd. He had recently returned from a flying trip to Japan and China, and his new lecture was entitled "Western Civilization in the Orient".

Cronk believed that Macready could learn a great deal from Gay Adams and gave him a day off to entertain the lecturer.

In all his life, PeeVee had never met anybody who became intimate so quickly. They spent five hours together, at lunch and driving, and at the end of that time, PeeVee could have pieced together a short biography of the lecturer.

Gay Adams took pride in his rise from humble beginnings, although his mother, as he did not neglect to mention, had been a distant relative of one of the Presidents. As a boy, he had caught the eye of a wealthy man with no sons of his own. PeeVee was humiliated to have to admit that he had never heard the name of Gay Adams' benefactor; why, he owned the greatest collection of precious stones in the world! Eventually, Adams had become wealthy too, and married a Buffalo woman, a woman-drummer, but also a member of a prominent family. Before giving up her profession in order to become a wife, Mrs. Adams had been recognized as the best woman-drummer in her territory—probably in any territory, anywhere. They had spent their honeymoon in East Aurora, basking in the inspirational presence of Elbert Hubbard. Together they had visited many lands, and Adams had developed a latent talent for lecturing. His trips supplied him with material.

At the meeting in the evening, Gay Adams came forward looking tremendously keen, and began his speech with a burst of enthusiasm. He wanted to tell them right there how proud he was of the friendship of Milltown. Since his last visit he had travelled in many lands, but what he had seen had only served to make him more convinced that Canadians were a great people, living in a great country, with a great future. He talked of hands-across-the-lakes, and described, as an object lesson to the world, the thousands of miles of boundary-line without gun or fort. After that, he told a number of jokes, and told them well. In every one of his anecdotes, an Irishman proved too quick-witted for the characters that hailed from other countries. By that time, Gay Adams was inhaling as much cordiality as he had been exhaling. Then he leapt to the Orient, and described all that was wrong with it. Somehow, he made everybody feel how many blessings they possessed in Milltown that were lacking in China and Japan. Gay Adams spoke eloquently of "blessings", which were the things that Western Civilization must take to the Far East. He was quite willing to risk his reputation on the statement that the whole future of the world depended upon the co-operation of the English-speaking nations, who stood for liberty and equality, and under whose flags the oppressed could find freedom. Then he returned abruptly to his hero, Pat, and told some more jokes about him, leading up to his final message to Milltown, a message that left Tokio and Pekin looking thoroughly rebuked and abashed.

PeeVee went back to his room and destroyed the material he had been collecting for an address on "Canadian Literature", to be delivered at the same club a month later. He might not sound as convincing in his optimism as Gay Adams, but Gay Adams was to be his model.

When PeeVee spoke on "Canadian Literature", he discovered, to his surprise, that he possessed a talent as urbane as that of the speaker from Cleveland. He built his talk round a few snappy items, and gave free rein to a prophetic gift; compared to his forecasts the predictions of Gay Adams looked like slurs. The future of Milltown got more and more into the foreground of his address. In recent years, Toronto and Montreal had grown complacent and unless they mended their ways would cease to be the intellectual centres of the Dominion. But Milltown was forward-looking; he rolled the flatulent word at them as a ball goes down a ten-pin alley. Who would say what a forward-looking community might not accomplish in the next generation?

Humphrey Cronk and the Rev. Roddy Cochrane were delighted. They patted his back and shook his hand and carried him home to a late supper.

"Why be cold and academic, when you possess so much inspirational power?" asked the Rev. Roddy.

Cronk predicted that every club in the city would want to hear him when people began talking about his lecture.

"Next season," he said, "you will be going back to Toronto as a popular speaker. It takes Milltown to draw out a man."

An hour later, walking home through the gently-falling snow, PeeVee recalled how Professor St. Quinton had once said to him: "Ignorance need never be a handicap to a public speaker who possesses sufficient fluency."

CHAPTER XVII
GERTRUDE COMES TO TOWN

I.

"The renaissance has hit Milltown, and I may be appointed the chief bally-hoo," Pierre wrote to his mother.

Mrs. Macready was conscious of a fretting resentment as she read the letter. It was so light-hearted. Pierre seemed perfectly satisfied with the move he had made. Hopelessly provincial Milltown! Nothing could possibly happen there that would matter to her.

It was little comfort to Georgina to know that her son did not realize the keenness of her disappointment and she could not possibly explain her position to him. Again and again, she enumerated to herself the families that had tormented her soul when she was young. Even those who continued to acknowledge her existence did so as if she were an inferior; she wanted them to do more than bow to her. Pierre might have altered everything by becoming one of the men to be known, and he had thrown the opportunity away without a regret. Another triumph, and she could have slighted those who had slighted her in bygone years. She never mentioned her thoughts even to Medora, but the memories were rankling and embittering.

In Petersville, she suspected that the people who passed her daily were laughing behind their hands. Pierre Macready, the precocious youth, had squibbed; she could hear them saying it. Georgina knew that her neighbours did not like her; it amused her to think that they feared her. But were they gloating in secret? She held her head high, and was glad, when dressing herself to appear in public, that her good looks could not be denied. Her tongue grew more pungent than ever.

It would have surprised Georgina to know how little the women of Petersville gossiped about PeeVee's move to Milltown. They concluded that he was getting on, and let it go at that. When they asked Gertrude and Diana, who were always approachable, about his new position, their motive was not malicious. They felt he must be a very bright young man indeed to have signed articles published in a city paper.

Mrs. Potter was the one woman in the community who spoke her mind to Georgina; her long-standing friendship with the Macready family gave her that privilege. She and Georgina were mutually rude, but never ceased to speak.

“Have some sense!” said Mrs. Potter. “If Pierre is going to be a great man, he will get there without so much prodding in the back.”

“I have not been fair to Medora,” Georgina replied. “With all her talent, she has a right to a chance.”

Mrs. Potter shook her be-ratted pompadour impatiently, and said no more.

During that winter, Mrs. Macready surprised her daughters by turning for consolation to the young rector. As a rule, Georgina had done her best to make the lives of the clergy miserable; her husband, in his day, had been inclined to be friendly with them. After attending a church service, Georgina invariably devoted an hour to ridiculing the clergyman and her fellow-worshippers. Not a grammatical slip in the sermon escaped her ear, and not an unbecoming hat in the congregation escaped her eye; a sidesman who stumbled in the performance of his duties was a clown—perhaps an intoxicated clown aping his betters.

But the Rev. Harper Loftus was immune from the usual treatment. He had only recently been ordained and was still young enough to laugh at the carping, meddling end of parish life. He talked extravagantly—so said old ladies with precise minds—but he seemed chiefly intent on being entertaining.

To the Macreadys, he told a story of an eccentric great-aunt of his who had remained in a dungeon of a bedroom for a quarter of a century, until the autumn when he had decided to enter the ministry, when she had emerged, enveloped in ancient black silk, to present him with a handsome cheque. It did not sound credible; people did not do such things.

Mrs. Potter knew all about the parents and grandparents of the Rev. Harper Loftus—they were one of the oldest and most respected families in Marlborough County—but Georgina found another reason for being interested in the young clergyman. He had a crippled brother who was studying art in Paris; his paintings had been hung more than once in the Salon.

To the Rev. Harper Loftus, Georgina talked of her own thwarted ambitions in art. In her girlhood, Georgina had studied with several distracted teachers, but had always refused to listen to them when they attempted to interfere with her chosen line of development. Other girls in the art classes had been content to do pale landscapes and stiff bunches of flowers, but she had preferred to paint a series of portraits—not portraits of her insipid friends but of notable women long since dead: Jezebel, Mary

Queen of Scots, Nell Gwynne, Lucretia Borgia, Helen of Troy, and La Pompadour. She looked back now and appreciated her youthful originality more and more.

From the walls of the Macready parlour, a row of flat-faced females, dressed gorgeously in the apparel of different nations and centuries, looked down. “All present, except Aholibah!” Thomas Macready used to say, much to the indignation of his wife.

The rector was called upon to express his opinion of the portraits. He stood in front of them one by one, and Georgina heard him murmur: “Remarkable!” At last, he gave his opinion:

“I have never seen such a demonstration of the effect of character upon physiognomy.”

Mrs. Macready beamed; here was a man who did not deal in conventional praise.

He pointed out that the wicked ladies looked sufficiently alike to have been sisters; yet, their only common bond was their favourite form of sin.

Gertrude glanced at her mother. She felt that the Rev. Loftus was being facetious but, apparently, the comments had been accepted as flattering.

Several days later, Mrs. Macready said to her daughters:

“Mr. Loftus agrees with me that gifted people must go to Europe to mature. I know now that we should have left this wretched country years ago.”

“We can’t afford it,” said Medora, who knew the usual trend of these remarks.

“We must afford it,” replied her mother. “I have made enough sacrifices already.”

In the presence of this threat, Diana sat silent. She did not wish to live in any land where she could not talk with everyone, and Diana’s memory refused to absorb foreign languages.

Gertrude spoke with the metallic decision that suggested her mother:

“I have no desire to leave this wretched country. If you go to Europe, I’ll stay in Canada and keep house for PeeVee.”

Diana turned to her appealingly, and Mrs. Macready said with anger in her voice:

“Is that horrible Milltown to rob me of all my children?”

II.

The idea born that evening grew rapidly. A week later, Gertrude wrote to PeeVee:

“If I stay here much longer, I’ll be a cat. I can’t help being perverse with mother and Medora, but you and I always get on. Perhaps, you deserve the credit. Do get a house and let me come and look after it for you!”

PeeVee had never pictured himself as head of a household. A bothersome undertaking! But Gertrude’s letter came at an opportune moment. In Milltown, everybody had a home and took pride in it. Men who boarded found themselves subjected to the process of being made one of the family, and PeeVee’s landlady showed embarrassing persistence in keeping him from being lonely. “We’d be glad to have you come down and sit with us at any time”, or, “Don’t hesitate to tell me if you have no place to go for your Sunday dinner; there’s always enough for one more.” And there was her daughter, Rosie. PeeVee could read the word housekeeping in the old woman’s eye. It seemed to him that Gertrude had opened a door of escape.

He consulted Mrs. Chapman, and she, with all the sentimental enthusiasm of a woman who never stayed in her home when she could get away from it, told him how happy a little place of his own would make him. She longed to find a suitable house and see him settled in it.

The Rev. Roddy Cochrane also approved. He gave PeeVee a sudden slap on the back, which upset his temper more than he would have cared to show.

“There is nothing like it, my boy,” he said. “No man ever appreciates the full meaning of citizenship until he has done the odd jobs round his own home.”

The Rev. Roddy shovelled snow and carried out ashes with gusto. He frequently finished up by swelling his chest and exclaiming:

“If friend Jones would do more of this sort of thing, it would clean up his imagination and his way of living!”

PeeVee found it much less difficult to make up his mind than to find a suitable house. Several times, agents talked him into leasing places that he did not like, and he began to wonder how all the people who lived in pleasant homes had managed to secure them.

Then, one morning, Mrs. Chapman rushed into his office and exclaimed breathlessly:

"I have found the very place! You'll love it!"

The previous evening, she had been visiting friends. They lived in a cottage on the edge of the country and yet close to Milltown's main car-line. It was idyllic, and also, strange to say, both comfortable and convenient. The owners had spent years perfecting the garden, until it consisted entirely of flowers, with never a weed; at least, Mrs. Chapman gave that impression. In May, they intended to go abroad for at least a year, possibly five years. They wanted a desirable tenant who would not turn children or dogs loose among the flower-beds, and Mrs. Chapman had promised them one.

Fortunately for PeeVee, he liked the cottage. Even if it had been otherwise, he could hardly have refused to take it; Mrs. Chapman had attended to everything except the signing of the lease. She suggested what furniture should be kept out, and what would be better in storage; she made the owners complete certain repairs which they had intended to neglect; she wrote directly to Gertrude to learn when she could come to Milltown, and found a woman to assist her in the fairly light task of getting settled.

The garden was full of spring bloom—tulips and daffodils—when Gertrude arrived. In a sunlit patch near the gate, some early irises held up their stiff purple heads and, in a remote corner, she discovered the dainty blue bells of the chionodoxa. Gertrude fell in love with the cottage. She liked the glimpse of woodland that could be seen on a slope just outside the city limits, and there was something homelike about the small church that stood out alone in the fields behind the house. On Sunday mornings, the jangling of its cracked bell suggested Petersville.

In the *Milltown Gazette*, Mrs. Chapman devoted a long paragraph on the women's page to the coming of Gertrude. It annoyed PeeVee, who did not want his sister to be pestered by strangers, but he knew that when Mrs. Chapman made any cause her own, her acts of thoughtfulness were apt to become a burden.

The first person to be attracted by the paragraph was Stan Spencer. Once or twice, during the winter, PeeVee had seen him in the distance, wearing a fur-lined overcoat and eye-glasses with a flowing black ribbon that gave him an air of expanded prosperity, but they had only hailed one another in passing. Now, Spencer dropped into the office and insisted that they might stroll along together on the way home.

Stan had acquired a swagger that made PeeVee feel many years his junior, and he spoke with a suggestion of patronage:

"We noticed that your sister had come to the city," he said. "Ruby will look her up. My wife can give her some valuable introductions."

PeeVee thanked him, but added:

"My sister is rather a retiring girl."

Stan ignored the remark, and continued:

"I did suggest that she run over this afternoon, but we are having a little dinner tonight for a few of our neighbours on the boulevarde."

He mentioned casually the names of several of the Elgin Boulevarde notables and, when his companion made no comment, went on to say that he and Ruby had recently moved into one of the more modest houses on that street.

"I have learned that it's a mistake to be too retiring," he said. "Display a little money, and it will get you more. That's the way to impress the big men. Right now, my prospects are marvellous."

"You've done pretty well for one year," PeeVee remarked.

"That's putting it mildly," said Stan.

With his elaborate flourish of a "good-afternoon", Stan turned into Elgin Boulevarde, and PeeVee boarded a street-car. Spencer's affluence had startled him; he wanted time to think it over. The get-rich-by-bluff philosophy to which he had just listened was not new; all the popular magazines reeked with it; but he had had no idea that it really worked so well. PeeVee could not be certain that he was pleased about it; Ruby was being too richly rewarded for her shabby treatment of David. Showy men, rather than the quiet, sound fellows, seemed to get the best of everything.

At the gate, Gertrude was waiting for him. He threw off his mood of exasperation and exclaimed, as he came up:

"You have arrived in town with a vengeance, Gertrude. I fear you are going to be taken up."

CHAPTER XVIII

BROTHER AND SISTER

I.

The freedom in the matter of editorial expression, promised by Humphrey Cronk, did not turn out to be all that PeeVee had expected. At his club, Cronk frequently told his cronies that he never interfered; his policy was to permit a fresh young mind to function naturally. “Of course, I keep an eye on him. Nothing more,” he said. And he believed it.

At first, Macready felt it was only natural that Cronk should come into his office and read the articles before they went up to the composing-room.

“Yes,” he would say, “that is an interesting and timely subject, but I’ll tell you what I think you might have said. My views are perhaps a little more mature than yours could be.”

And he would outline ideas that utterly confounded PeeVee’s original motive for taking up that particular theme at all.

One day, PeeVee compiled a list of historic examples of intolerance that looked ludicrous to the modern mind, and ended it with references to certain conditions that existed in Milltown. Manuscript in hand, Cronk entered his office, wagging his head sadly.

“Your satire is very amusing,” he said, “but what is to be gained by going out of our way to annoy three of the largest advertisers in the city? Of course, they know perfectly well that they cannot interfere with our editorial policy. The man who buys our space does not buy the right to dictate our opinions. But there is something to be said for the motto, ‘live and let live’. Think it over, my boy.”

The manuscript was never seen again.

On another occasion, Cronk handed him a novel, written by the spoiled daughter of one of Milltown’s leading citizens.

“If we were to use a special criticism on the editorial page,” he said, “I am sure it would be much appreciated. Of course, you must tell the truth. I do not want you to call it a masterpiece if you think it isn’t.”

There were points in the book, not numerous, that could be commended; PeeVee spoke of them first and enlarged upon them. The glaring defects, that simply could not be ignored, he mentioned in the briefest of paragraphs.

Then, to fill out the article, he indulged in a few generalities about the fiction written in his own country. What folly it was to boost mediocre novels simply because the author happened to live in the Dominion! Of all existing forms of patriotic exercise, that was the most mistaken.

Wearing a pained expression, Cronk stopped him in the hallway.

“Very nice, very nice,” he said, “but rather pernickety. When I do a thing for a friend, I like to go the whole distance.”

PeeVee was reading the review with grave misgivings, when Mrs. Chapman rushed into his office.

“I am glad you roasted that stuck-up little brat!” she exclaimed, delightedly. “It will do her the world of good.”

He tried to explain that it had not been intended as a roast, but as a fair and well-balanced criticism. He did not think the spirit or the manner unkindly. Mrs. Chapman refused to see it that way. She warned him that the author would share her view.

Early in the year, a syndicate was organized in Milltown to introduce professional baseball into the city. The hullabaloo of the propaganda suggested to PeeVee a skit which he wrote, smiling.

Here was Milltown that prided itself on being the most Canadian of cities. Being the centre of many industries, with manufacturers as its leading citizens, the city’s favourite motto was “Canada for the Canadians”. Loyalty was tested by a man’s anxiety to purchase only goods made in the Dominion, preferably in Milltown. And yet, Milltown, in the name of sport, was proposing to import a bunch of aliens to be adopted as the athletic representatives of the city. They were to be known as the Milltown Union Jacks—shortened to Jacks for the convenience of the sporting writers—and were to be advertised and regarded as local heroes.

Cronk was not a baseball fan. He would not attend more than one game a season—the gala opening—and he did not expect to enjoy that. When he read the article at the dinner-table, he gave a short laugh, which broke off in the middle. Suddenly, he crumpled up the paper and threw it violently from him.

“There is such a thing as being too damn clever!” was his reply to Mrs. Cronk’s anxious query.

Next day, he had an interview with his young editor.

“How many friends do you expect to make by that?” he asked.

He was willing to admit the irony of the situation. He regarded professional baseball as a poor apology for sport, but a great many readers of the *Milltown Gazette* thought otherwise.

“They may not belong to the best class of citizens,” he said, “but their subscriptions are just as valuable as Judge McLaren’s and much more numerous. Aren’t there plenty of good subjects to write about that would not annoy anybody?”

For the better part of a day, PeeVee felt that he owed it to his self-respect to resign. But it would be a nuisance. Just when he was so comfortably settled, too. He possessed no heroic prejudice against compromise, and after all, Cronk had a perfect right to say what he did not want in his own paper. PeeVee recalled a warning that Carr Morris had given him at parting:

“If you want to be a popular writer, remember one thing; say what you like about the Czar of Russia, but go easy on the boys at home.”

The motto was a reasonable guide, if it meant the choice between continual jarring and peace of mind. In foreign periodicals, he could find all the material that he needed. A caustic reference might be made occasionally to the neighbouring cities that were larger or more prosperous than Milltown, but if he desired to be hilariously satirical, it was better to take as his subject the social peculiarities of the United States or the political blunders of the British Government. When he ridiculed a famous Frenchman or Italian, Cronk congratulated him on a brilliant article.

“I like to see the hide ripped off those fellows,” he said.

II.

Keeping house was a new experience for PeeVee. He found in it a freedom that he had never known before. In Petersville, there had always been restraints and frictions and he had grown to regard them as a necessary part of home-life, but in their cottage domesticity seemed to run along without hitches. He did not realize that Gertrude ordered everything to suit his convenience.

For a few weeks, Mrs. Chapman rushed Gertrude everywhere, introducing her to Milltown. They inspected the oak planted by King Edward and the log cabin built by the founder; they went for country walks and city strolls and, one evening, Mrs. Chapman’s friends played football with a literary idea for Gertrude’s benefit; Mr. Chapman could not save her with an invitation to smoke. Then, the National Council of Women held a convention in the city, and Mrs. Chapman forgot all about her, greatly to Gertrude's relief.

Mrs. Pentley Dickenson paid them a visit for a few days, and acted as if she had been engaged as a governess; she gave her hostess instruction in many things. But she also talked about Pierre's genius and the fame he was sure to win for himself, and that made Gertrude like her.

One Saturday, Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter brought as many members of the gang as she could get into her car, and they bunked in all the odd corners of the cottage for two nights. To Gertrude, they seemed decidedly alarming. They laughed at beliefs which she considered important. They said: "If anybody is left alive who reads Dickens", and Gertrude thought Dickens the greatest novelist who had ever lived. They exclaimed: "Of course, the Boer War will always remain a blot on our history", and Gertrude considered it rather worse to be a pro-Boer than to be a matricide. They scoffed: "Let's get the church-goers to pray for a dry day, if any of the church-goers really believe in prayer!" and Gertrude could not conceive of anyone's going to church who did not believe things. Most of all she resented being asked if they were shocking her.

Of all their guests, she found Bess Hortop and David McLean the least alarming. They were not so different from Petersville; at least, they did not emphasize it.

The change that had suddenly taken place in Gertrude amazed her brother. At home, she had been regarded as the possessor of an acid tongue, and there had always been an acerbity and self-confidence in her attitude when combating Medora. In her new surroundings, she was strangely nervous and retiring. Strangers over-awed her; if they stopped to listen to what she had to say, she became flurried.

Looking back over his life, PeeVee wondered if his mother's attitude had made it impossible for his sisters to move naturally among normal men and women. They had been taught from infancy that the Macreadys were a family apart, made superior, even to their father's relations, by some divine right. Intimate friends had been denied them, and they had bowed across a chasm to their acquaintances. He feared that Gertrude had been so drilled in her own little world that she would never learn to trust or understand people who were different; certainly she was not at ease elsewhere. He began to ask himself if he might not be a little queer too, and then, as the idea disturbed him, stopped thinking about it altogether.

June was nearly over before Ruby Spencer paid the visit promised by Stan. As soon as the door opened, she began to gush apologies for the delay. She had been the victim of endless engagements. All the important names tripped off her tongue, from Sir Gilbert Farmer, a retired politician who had garnered a knighthood and a fortune while serving his country at Ottawa, to Hiram Black, reputed a multi-millionaire.

Ruby was modish in her dress, smarter than any other woman that Gertrude had met in Milltown, and she spoke in a high-pitched voice, modelled on that of the society women in plays.

“My husband is so sorry that he has not been able to look up your brother,” Ruby chanted.

She did not wait for a reply but started to speak again before Gertrude could finish a sentence; she had ignored in the same manner every other remark made by her hostess.

“My husband says he has heard PeeVee’s writing highly commended by some of the most influential men in the city.”

Gertrude tried to say PeeVee would be pleased to hear it.

“Of course, we sometimes see him in the distance at dinners and meetings we attend,” Ruby rattled on. “I suppose he is reporting them.”

Gertrude flushed. She knew it was foolish to be annoyed by that remark. What difference would it make if PeeVee did report meetings at which this dashing lady was an honoured guest. But if they had been little girls, Gertrude Macready would have slapped Ruby Spencer then and there. She managed to say, most decidedly:

“My brother does not report meetings.”

To which Ruby chirruped:

“How disappointing! I have always read reports with such interest because I thought they were written by PeeVee. Some of them were quite good, and I said to my husband how well he seemed to be getting along.”

Then she was through with PeeVee. She turned her attention to the “cuteness” of the cottage, and moved to the window to get a better view of the garden; she pronounced it very pretty, very pretty indeed. She spoke as the lady of the manor commending a thrifty tenant.

That night, as Gertrude was pouring PeeVee’s tea, she exclaimed:

“What a hateful little woman Mrs. Spencer is!”

“She’s only a prize ass,” he replied.

Gertrude’s feelings were not so easily soothed; during the hours that followed Ruby’s departure, she had thought of endless cutting things she might have said.

“How did she ever come to be Bess Hortop’s sister?” she demanded of him.

“I’m sure I can’t tell you that,” he said, “but the difference is fundamental. Bess wants to do. All her sisters want to have.”

Gertrude went on to describe how angry she had been when Ruby had referred to him as a reporter, but PeeVee only laughed, laughed until she told him to stop.

“Why should you resent the idea of my being a reporter?” he gasped at last. “Reporters have all the best of it. Men buy them drinks.”

CHAPTER XIX
CALLOUS MILLTOWN

I.

In October, Gertrude made up her mind to call upon Ruby Spencer, and get it over. She would pay a formal visit and then their acquaintance could come to an end, to the probable satisfaction of both.

Elgin Boulevarde made her feel that she was obtruding herself into a social sphere to which she did not belong. Gertrude knew that her mother would have despised her for thinking so; at such moments, she was always conscious of what Georgina would say. But the pompous red-brick fronts did not impress her; the houses looked as if only women like Ruby Spencer would live in them, and instinctively she wanted to keep away from all the Rubies in the world. Once, Gertrude turned back, and then, with determination, marched up to the door and rang the bell.

Mrs. Spencer's reception-room had the appearance of fall house-cleaning. The pictures were down and stood in corners, behind the chairs; the general atmosphere was one of dishevelment.

A subdued Ruby came from upstairs to welcome her. She had red-rimmed eyes, the result of recent weeping, Gertrude surmised, and she spoke in an undertone that suggested a death in the house. They talked at random for a few moments; Ruby's thoughts were apparently elsewhere. At last she mumbled:

"I want you to meet my sister," and left the room.

Gertrude felt that she had intruded, and wished she had excused herself at once. Something more upsetting than house-cleaning was afoot.

After a brief delay, Nesta Holmes bustled in, filling the room with her bulk and importance. She acted towards Ruby as a motherly nurse treats a patient, and seemed twice her natural size, which was a peculiarity of Nesta's when shouldering any trouble for the Hortop family. To Gertrude she seemed a fat and good-natured soul, who told a number of exceedingly stupid stories about her children, and quoted the opinions of a person whom she alternately called "Mr. Holmes" and "the little man". Invariably, Nesta added what she hoped were improvements to the anecdotes about her family, but as she lacked a restrained imagination, she only succeeded in making them sound distorted and untrue.

Ruby sat in a deep armchair and plucked at the edge of her handkerchief; she gave the impression of whimpering inwardly, while Nesta beamed and twaddled. What a gorgeous October they were having! No one could be interested in social activities while such weather lasted. Gertrude mentioned that the officers of the Highlanders' Regiment were opening the season early in November with a ball.

That remark turned out to be an unfortunate one. At the mention of the ball, Mrs. Holmes turned anxiously toward her sister, who fought violently to control the puckers in her face, with half a handkerchief, it seemed to Gertrude, stuffed into her mouth. Finally, Ruby leapt to her feet, muttered a few half-articulate words about being unwell, and bolted from the room.

Nesta followed her to the door, and then turned back.

"You will have to excuse my sister," she said. "She is terribly highly-strung. Her husband has had some serious business reverses, and they came as a great blow to her when everything seemed so prosperous."

"Shouldn't I have mentioned the Highlanders' Ball?" Gertrude ventured.

"That did upset her," Nesta explained. "She was looking forward to it so eagerly. Even her gown was planned, and she feels the disappointment keenly. She has been crying about it nearly all day."

Gertrude got up to go, but Nesta insisted that she remain a little longer.

"I want you to tell your brother what has happened," she said.

Nesta recounted Ruby's version of Stan Spencer's misfortune. It showed up the prominent men of Milltown as a poor lot; they had behaved very badly towards Stan. After permitting him to believe that he had established a place for himself, not one of them had backed him up with a substantial amount of interest or support. What made it worse was the way in which they had accepted his hospitality; naturally, he had believed himself to be their friend. It was as cruel an exhibition of treachery as the business world had ever known. Nesta denounced Milltown as utterly callous. Now poor Stan had closed his office; they would have to give up this beautiful home in which they had been so happy; yet nobody appeared to care. Nesta and Ruby had written a joint letter to Bess, who was in New York for a short holiday. They expected her back tomorrow. She was the only member of the family in a position to help.

"I think my brother-in-law intends to go back into the bank for the present," Nesta concluded. "He is making an application through an influential friend."

"I'll let PeeVee know all about it tonight," Gertrude promised.

"I'm sure he will feel badly," said Nesta. "Like all the men, he was always so fond of Ruby." She looked coy. "In fact, I think he was smitten with her."

That night, PeeVee did not get home until very late. He had been delivering an address to the Collegiate Association of a neighbouring village, and it was after midnight when Humphrey Cronk's car deposited him at the cottage-gate. He was surprised to find Gertrude awaiting him with a pot of coffee and a plate of hot ginger-bread.

"You mustn't sit round till all hours waiting for me when I am late," he remonstrated.

She explained that she had something special to tell him, and had prepared the supper to put in time.

They sat down together on the chesterfield, and Gertrude described her visit to Ruby Spencer. She repeated Nesta's story with as much of the detail as she could remember, but left out the suggestion that PeeVee had been one of Ruby's old flames.

When she had finished, her brother yawned and then smiled.

"I am not surprised," he said. "It means that Stan butted in where he was not wanted, and he has now been landed out again."

There were times when Gertrude thought PeeVee appeared unsympathetic. She pointed out that the action of the business men had been exceedingly mean. ("According to Ruby," he interrupted her.) Also that Mrs. Holmes was greatly concerned.

He was still smiling.

"I fear I cannot force myself to take the matter very seriously," he remarked. "Didn't you say the climax of the tragedy was Ruby's disappointment over a new dress and her inability to go to the Highlanders' ball?"

He added that he had suspected things were not running smoothly for the Spencers. He had noticed an item in the *Gazette* to the effect that Stan was being sued for sixty-two dollars by a local tradesman; it had caused him to wonder.

"They have sent for Bess," said Gertrude, suddenly.

"But she is in New York, visiting Laura Bateman."

“Yes, but they expect her to come back at once.”

To PeeVee, that gave a different complexion to the entire affair. Was it possible that Bess had placed any of her money in Spencer’s hands? She had too much common sense, he felt sure. Then he reminded himself that a Hortop, in distress, would naturally send for Bess. There was the assumption, firmly held by the Hortops, that the unmarried members of a family had a moral obligation to put themselves out to any degree for the benefit of the married members.

He got up and made a move to pour himself another cup of coffee. He paused uncertainly, looked into the pot, then closed the cover with a sharp click.

“Do you want some more?” Gertrude asked.

“I think I have had enough now to keep me awake,” he replied.

The clock in the next room struck a half-hour. PeeVee leaned over and took his sister by the arm.

“And so to bed!” he said.

II.

Next day, Bess Hortop visited Milltown. She spent the afternoon with the Spencers, and arrived at PeeVee’s office just as he was leaving.

“You must come with me to dinner,” she said, “I want to be sure that the whole world has not gone mad.”

“Do you think I’ll prove reassuring?” PeeVee asked.

“Yes, even you, PeeVee,” she replied, “after the insanity of Ruby and Stan.”

“What has really happened?”

“The only thing I can tell you,” Bess answered, “is that neither of them has any sense of proportion where the spending of money is concerned.”

They went into a neighbouring quick lunch place, and took a table in a quiet corner where, talking in a low tone, they could not be overheard.

“They wanted me to help,” Bess told him, “and yet they resented any suggestion that I should be told exactly what had happened.”

When Bess’s face wore that funny childlike mixture of seriousness and wonderment, PeeVee was always amused; it masked so much calm capability.

“I know it all sounds like a farce,” she said, “but it’s no joke.”

It appeared that the costly home in Elgin Boulevarde had been rented furnished, though Ruby had added several choice pieces of furniture, which the dealers were now removing. The Spencers had first admitted the pressure of creditors in August, when they had appealed to Nesta for money. The story told by Bess started there. Nesta could not consult with Hannisford, who no longer trusted Stan, so she had sent them a hundred dollars from her own bank account. A hundred dollars not being sufficient to settle any of the more pressing debts, Ruby had frittered it away on various gew-gaws she had wanted at the moment. When Nesta, feeling anxious, had run over to see them, they had avoided telling how her money had been spent, but in the excitement caused by the arrival of a bailiff, that little fact had slipped out. At first, Nesta had been annoyed, but Ruby’s tears had soon quenched her scolding. Then Stan had thrown up his hands and pleaded with Nesta for such a large sum that she could think of nothing to do except write for Bess.

“But that explains nothing,” said PeeVee. “How did they get in such a hole?”

Bess shook her head.

“They seemed to have plenty of money,” he added.

“That is where I came to a dead end,” Bess told him. “Nesta does not know. When I asked questions, Ruby cried and Stan retired behind his dignity. But they did pay cash at the start.”

Neither of them knew of anybody who would be likely to back Stan Spencer so generously. Where had that person disappeared to now, when a little more money was needed to save the investment in the agency? Bess dismissed the mystery. The recklessness of strangers was the least of her worries.

She described the plans that had been made for the future. Naturally, Stan’s application for a position in a bank which he had deserted without notice twelve years before, had received no consideration. Now, he wanted to go West, and Bess thought the idea a good one. David had a brother in Winnipeg who would help him to get started.

“We’ll settle up things here as best we can,” she said, “and I’ll let Stan have his fare to Winnipeg. Ruby will have to come home to us until he is on his feet.”

Bess admitted frankly that the arrangement would not add to the happiness of the Hortop home. Ruby had violently opposed the idea of leaving Milltown at all, just when she was commencing to be invited everywhere. After Stan had informed her that there was nothing else to be done, she had accused him of being run by Bess, and now refused to do anything but sulk.

Bess looked at her watch and found that she had just ten minutes to catch her train.

“I’m glad I found you,” she said, getting up. “You may never be very helpful, but you are always comforting.”

CHAPTER XX
DAVID PAYS SOME CALLS

I.

A few miles from Milltown lay the little village of Hawk, destined in due time to be gathered within the boundaries of the steadily-spreading city. The citizens of Hawk were mostly old men and women who had made sufficient money on the neighbouring farms to retire and spend their last years in idleness. Age was the chief characteristic of the village; jokesmiths maintained that newcomers had to prove they were over forty years of age before they were permitted to settle within its senile borders.

On one of the best farms in the vicinity of Hawk, there had lived for nearly a century a family named Smiddy. The grandfather of Stan Spencer and David McLean was Thomas Smiddy, eldest son of the original Smiddy. Thomas Smiddy had married young, had had two daughters, and had worked himself to death trying to raise fruit on a farm that was fifty miles north of the district where peaches and grapes would ripen properly.

Three Smiddys had survived to see the twentieth century. Oliver, Janie, and Prue Smiddy had never married, but had remained together on the portions of the original farm that had come to them when the divisions were made. The married brothers and sisters had drunk more deeply of life than the trio on the homestead and had passed away, one by one, Thomas Smiddy being the only member of the family to leave any descendants.

Oliver looked after Janie and Prue, and they loved him with sore hearts; they had been forced to admit to each other that he was dissipated. True, he drove them to church with the utmost regularity, but that had not cured the wild streak in him. On four occasions that they could remember, he had returned from Hawk quite jubilant with excessive liquor; they had crept up and sniffed at his breath. Once, when Janie, who could be bold when occasion demanded, had reproached him, he had hinted at unmentionable adventures in Milltown, many years before when he had been still on the high-stepping side of forty. They could only hope that the neighbours did not know.

Even after he had reached the allotted span, Oliver had smoked to excess, and had at last refused to continue his practice of going out of doors for his daily pipe. “I feel the cold too much to enjoy my smoke if I have to stay in the yard to do it,” he had contended, and because they had really adored him, they had risked the smell of tobacco on their curtains. When he finally died at the age of seventy-four, Janie and Prue felt a little sadly that his masculine vices had shortened his days. It seemed hypocritical to be pleased when fellow-members of Knox Church talked of their brother's exemplary life.

Two maiden ladies of nigh to eighty summers could not run a farm, so they had sold the land for ten thousand dollars and moved into Hawk.

Of all their grand-nephews, Janie and Prue Smiddy preferred Stan Spencer, and never had been able to understand why Oliver could not abide him. He was their conception of a grand gentleman and they could hardly credit that he was a grandson of brother Tom, who had been a hayseed if ever there was one. When Stan came to see them, and bowed with such dignity over their hands while he enquired: "How is the little auntie?" they shivered with delight.

Several weeks before Stan had moved to Milltown, he had partaken of the midday meal with them, when he had painted a graphic picture of his silk-hatted and plush-lined future. All he needed was a few thousand dollars to place him on a solid financial basis. Stan could always say, to his own credit, that he did not ask them how much they had received for the farm or how they intended to invest the money.

Janie and Prue had whispered together in the kitchen concerning a sum of eight thousand dollars, lying idle in the savings bank. Their Scotchness had suggested a slight reserve, so they had returned and told him they had seven thousand dollars to invest in his business. He had consented to accept the full amount, if they would permit him to pay interest at the rate of ten per cent.; the savings bank gave them less than three per cent.

Stan Spencer had left Hawk with a cheque in Aunt Prue's quaint hand, and Prue and Janie Smiddy had locked away, with great satisfaction, a note promising to pay them seven thousand dollars on demand. It had been a simple transaction, and anybody could trust a fine gentleman like Stan.

II.

When Bess Hortop got back to Toronto, she dropped into "The Two Macs" to tell David why she had returned via Milltown. She knew that he would be interested in the mischances of the Spencers. As she talked, David's mind was on a letter which he had received that morning from his mother. On the top of the first page, Mrs. McLean had added an afterthought, a misplaced postscript:

"I hear that Aunt Prue and Aunt Janie have invested some money in Stan's business. I hope, for their sakes, he will be successful this time."

He said nothing to Bess about it, but he went home early and asked Miss Imogen Menzies to call him in time to catch the morning train to Hawk.

His unexpected visit filled the two Miss Smiddys with alarm. He questioned them as gently as he could about their money, for he did not like to see the quavering old ladies grow so round-eyed. They brought out Stan's note and showed it timidly.

"That protects our money, doesn't it?" asked Miss Prue, and Miss Janie added, as proof of the note's validity:

"He gave us three hundred and seventy-five dollars interest after he had had the money for six months."

"Have you had any more?" he enquired.

"We are expecting it any day," Miss Prue informed him.

"It will be quite safe, with the note and all," Miss Janie ventured.

"Of course, it will be perfectly all right," David lied blithely; he did not know what else he could say.

They rewarded him with relieved sighs.

David had to remain for a meal of scones and marmalade, with plenty of scalding tea. Quite easy in their minds again, they praised Stan for his goodness to them, and almost forced David to say he thought his cousin handsome and refined. Janie started to talk about Spencer's being a good young man, but Prue remembered having seen David's name in connection with a police court case. She silenced her sister sharply, but tears were filming her eyes, for she was recalling that Oliver had always preferred his red-headed grand-nephew, which was ominous for David. Still, both old ladies liked his jolly, teasing ways—that was like poor, poor Oliver, too—and wished they might say something to keep him from wicked habits.

That night, Stan Spencer saw David McLean in a white rage; it was a sight most people avoided. His lips were a straight line, and the good-tempered curves had gone from his chin; there was a hard glint in his eyes. Nesta, who had let him in, had thought David looked commanding, a quality she sometimes missed in "the little man", who was merely bossy. After leaving him at the door of Stan's den, she had gone upstairs and told Ruby he had made her feel frightened.

David waited for no greeting.

"I always knew you were a swine, Stan," he said, "but I thought even you would stop short of fleecing feeble old women."

Stan endeavoured to be suave:

"I have no notion what you mean," he said.

David told him:

"I have been to Hawk."

It was Stan's first impulse to demand what his cousin meant by prying into his business, but he looked at David and changed his mind. With a calmness he did not feel, he motioned him towards a chair.

"Don't you think you had better know all the facts before you jump to conclusions?" he asked, with as much dignity as he could muster.

David ignored the chair.

"Is there more than one possible conclusion?" he demanded. "Haven't you taken money from Aunt Prue that you will never pay back?"

"I did intend to pay it back," Stan declared. "Do you think that I knew, when I borrowed the money, that my business was going to fail?"

Ruby had entered the room, and still standing by the door, made her contribution.

"Stan did it to help them," she cried. "They were only getting a miserable three per cent. for their money. They offered it to him, and he gave them splendid interest."

David noticed her presence for the first time.

"Oh, go away!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "You don't know what you are talking about!"

His brusqueness amazed her. She crossed over to Stan, so as to have someone to lean upon if she decided to weep, but he whispered:

"You had better run up to Nesta."

He did not want to be humbled by David in the presence of his wife.

The door had hardly closed when David said:

"I believe you are such a rotter that you cannot understand what a crook you have been."

"Look here—" Stan blustered, and then paused.

"I'm looking."

Stan sank abjectly into his chair. Tears made their way slowly down the fat wrinkles of his cheeks.

"Don't you realize that I am worried pretty nearly out of my mind?" His voice was piteous. "Why do you come here rubbing it in? I want to pay my debts, but I never have any luck."

David stood looking down at him, a feeling of contempt gradually neutralizing his desire to rattle his cousin's big blonde head on the hardwood flooring. He waited until Spencer controlled a shuddering movement in his throat, like suppressed sobbing.

"Is there anything you can do?" he asked.

"Not now. I don't know where the next cent is coming from," Stan replied, "but give me time and my fair share of luck."

"Aunt Prue and Aunt Janie are old, and they must have money to live on," said David.

Stan's emotions overcame him again.

"Do you think I am blind to all that? And there is Ruby, too. I love her, David, and all her cute little ways. I simply cannot bear seeing her unhappy as she is now."

"It is the aunt Smiddys we must consider first," said David testily. "What do you intend to do for them?"

"You know perfectly well I did not intend to lose their money, and I cannot get it back now," Stan cried. "What is the use of torturing me about it?"

"If you are going to be hysterical, I am wasting my time here," said David.

He walked out so abruptly that Stan was surprised to find himself alone, but was relieved as well. He sat a while to regain his composure, and then went upstairs to sympathize with Ruby over McLean's rudeness to her. It was by no means the first time that they had made themselves feel better by discussing David's shortcomings.

III.

The visit to Stan Spencer had been a forlorn hope, and David was not surprised to have found him with his weak hands in the air, crying out against his luck. After leaving his aunt Smiddys, David had made his plans, and it was now only necessary to consolidate them.

From a neighbouring drug-store, he telephoned PeeVee:

"Stay in the office until I get there," he said. "I want to borrow your pen and ink."

They sat together in the twilight, among the litter of papers and files, while Macready heard the details that Bess Hortop had been unable to supply.

His first thought was that Stan Spencer should be made to pay. Jail was the place for him. David contradicted him curtly. How would that help the aunt Smiddys?

"Anyway, it wouldn't convince Stan that he's a crook," he said. "He'd only feel abused. He sees himself as the victim of a cruel fate."

"No man can be such a fool about the meaning of common honesty," PeeVee argued.

David replied, as if admitting something that he had long feared to be true:

"I have a notion that this country is filled with men who see things just that way."

He walked across the room and sat down at PeeVee's desk, where he scribbled for several minutes on a pad of paper. Macready said nothing, but waited. David always knew what he was about. Perhaps, it was in sport that he had learned to make up his mind and to act promptly.

At last, David was satisfied, and handed a draft of a letter to his friend, who read:

> "Dear Stan:—
>
> After our recent conversation you will not think that any regard for you prompts the offer I am going to make. Somebody must look after Aunt Janie and Aunt Prue while you are getting on your feet. In the first place, they must be told everything. I'll pay them $350 at once and, from now on, $100 quarterly. As soon as you have an income, you will start to pay off the remaining

> interest and principle. What I pay to them, you will owe to me. We can put that into legal form. Now, it is up to you to get wise to yourself.”

“Why should you shoulder the whole thing?” asked PeeVee, looking up. “What about your brothers?”

“The married ones have about as much as they can take care of. We McLeans are such terrible breeders.”

“But not Bruce.”

“He’s to be married next month. It wouldn’t be sporting to spoil things for him just now.”

There was nothing else to be done, David asserted, and his aunts were too old to be worried and kept waiting. If PeeVee could make a better suggestion, he would be glad to hear it. He turned round to the desk again, and began to make a copy of the letter.

With his feet on a pile of parliamentary reports, PeeVee sat and watched the muscular shoulders of his friend, as he bent over his work. They were clannish people, these McLeans, he thought, and under that thatch of red hair existed a lot of sentimental impulses that casual acquaintances did not suspect. PeeVee was glad his own relatives made no such demands upon him. They could have his ready cash, if they would go away and leave him alone. But to tie himself up indefinitely!

He felt a sudden affectionate impulse towards his friend, and crossing the room gave him a slap on the back, that blotted his signature and caused him to throw down his pen with a “damn!”

“Now,” said PeeVee, when the letter had been despatched in the hands of a messenger boy, “you must spend the week-end with us at the cottage. We can take a walk in the country tomorrow, and forget the Spencers and everybody.”

“Except ourselves,” said David. “I have something to tell you. St. Quinton has been looking me up. He wants me to go into the office of a publisher friend of his. The old boy’s tremendously keen. Odd, isn’t it?”

The telephone in the empty outer office rang forlornly.

It was Gertrude, wondering if PeeVee had forgotten to come home to dinner.

CHAPTER XXI
TWO WOMEN

I.

Sunday was cloudless, with a soft October heat-haze, that looked like dust in the air, under the trees where the sun sent shafts of light through the thinning foliage. PeeVee dragged himself down to breakfast with a headache that forced him to grope his way to the sofa, where he lay with closed eyes, refusing even orange juice.

Incredibly, Gertrude found herself palpitating with anxiety. Not about PeeVee's health; these nervous headaches that crept upon him in the night departed as suddenly in the course of the day. But she knew that, if he felt unable to take the walk in the country, he would pack her off with David as soon as they had finished their dinner. Gertrude wondered if she knew enough things to entertain a man for an entire afternoon. She liked to be along with David and PeeVee and to dip occasionally into their conversation, but the idea of holding up one end all by herself frightened her. Besides, Mrs. Macready had dinned into her daughters' minds the danger of being alone with men in lonely places until Gertrude was instinctively timid about an experience that had never been hers.

When PeeVee opened his eyes long enough to tell them to get started early, Gertrude ran for her camera. She could take a picture whenever the silence became oppressive; that would fill up time.

David selected an unfrequented road, and they had been walking for nearly an hour before Gertrude made the discovery that it was no task to keep the conversation flowing. David liked to tell about his experiences in sport. He described adventures that sounded anything but pleasurable to Gertrude, but he appeared to have enjoyed them; he laughed so heartily at the recollection. Gertrude made up her mind to have PeeVee take her to a game of rugby; she had never seen one. They talked about PeeVee's conquest of Milltown and his growing reputation as a speaker.

"Anything he undertakes, he does easily and superlatively," said David. "I discovered that when we were kids. I taught him to swim, and in a year he was better at it than I was. I believe he can be anything in the world he wants to be."

Gertrude liked to hear that said by a man like David. At home, they had harped on PeeVee's genius until, at times, she had felt sceptical.

The grass on either side of the road was bronzed by a prolonged drought, and whenever a buggy or a motor passed the walkers, they had to close their eyes against a white cloud of dust. At David's suggestion, they turned into one of the patches of woodland; after white teeth as they gleamed in contrast to his brown skin when he smiled, but she hesitated to say so; it would sound too personal. He draped himself against a fungus-covered log and she had to be content with that, although she knew it would not be satisfactory. The picture was certain to resemble dozens of others, to be found in her album at home, with groups of bank-boys and choir-members and other insipid males of Petersville as their subjects.

"Snaps are fool things," she said, giving the camera a shake. "They seem only to tell the truth about people you do not like."

"Then let's go hooking apples!" suggested David.

They had come out from among the trees against a fence that surrounded a stretch of orchard.

Gertrude picked an apple that was hanging within her reach, but before she could taste it, her companion flicked it out of her hand.

"It is not much more than a crab," he said. "This old boy must be a crab himself. He has planted his good trees far away from the fence."

"You are not going to climb over?" in surprise.

"Why not? It's an easy rail-fence. If you stick, I'll give you a boost."

For a moment, Gertrude thought of her mother. Mrs. Macready would have fastened on that proposal as evidence of a coarse mind thinking nasty thoughts. Gertrude looked at her companion and did not believe it.

The fence had no terrors for her. She and Diana frequently took cross-country walks and only shunned barbed wire. She went over unassisted. David followed, and pointed to a gate opposite.

"That will take us out on the main road," he said.

She wondered how he kept track of directions; she and Diana usually wandered about until they found a familiar scene.

He added:

"Aren't we lucky to be passing a couple of jolly-looking pear-trees on the way?"

They paused beneath one, on which the bell-like fruit hung yellow and luscious. David gave it a shake, but only a half-rotten one fell. He tried again a little harder, and as he did so Gertrude gave an exclamation of dismay.

“Here comes the owner!”

They stood their ground; there was nothing else to be done. The farmer was a young man, big of shoulder and grim of mouth. At his heels ran two collie dogs that grinned with menace. The man carried a heavy stick.

“What are you doing?” he shouted.

Gertrude thought she saw the flicker of a change brighten the man’s eye.

“You’ve got your pears stuck on awfully tight,” said David.

By that time, the farmer had broken into a smile that made him look like no one’s enemy, and ten years younger.

“You’re Red McLean, ain’t you?” he enquired.

“Why, yes.”

“Of the Wolfes?”

“You’re a hockey fan?” David asked in return.

“I sure am!”

The farmer grasped David’s hand, and his dogs relaxed as if they had been hockey fans too. They reflected their master’s spirits, and he was feeling like a social lion-hunter who lands as his guest, quite by accident, the greatest living celebrity. He insisted that Red McLean and his friend should accompany him to the house to meet the wife and get a few really choice pears.

As they walked through the orchard, their host chuckled:

“I was there the night Slim Miller beaned you. Don’t you remember?”

“Yes, I think I remember,” David answered. “I was there, too.”

The power of the young farmer’s guffaw startled them. Evidently, in his company, David would not have to exert his wits in order to be considered a comic. At the kitchen door, they met the wife, who obviously had not been able to attend as many hockey games as her husband during the nine years of their married life; she held one baby in her arms while six more crowded round her ample legs. She had to hear the come-back about Red McLean’s being present the night he was beaned. She laughed louder than her husband because her mirth was shriller.

They insisted that their guests remain for a cup of tea and a piece of dried apple cake, which was no treat. Gertrude was tolerated as McLean's friend, but they hung on every word that David uttered. His simplest jest convulsed them, and for their benefit, he wallowed in recent wheezes. The children made friends as quickly as the dogs, and those who could not climb to his knees made sticky hand-marks on his pant legs and coat-sleeves. Like their father, they called him "Red", and only the wife kept to a formal "Mr. McLean".

When David succeeded, at last, in convincing their host that they could stay no longer and that they could not possibly carry several baskets of pears and apples, it was getting late, and the pair strode along briskly in the direction of the city. They set too exacting a pace to talk much.

Once Gertrude remarked:

"They think you are wonderful."

"I have a little rough-neck fame of my own," he replied.

"And we don't even know their names."

"Good heavens," he exclaimed, "I never thought of that! All of them knew mine so well."

II.

At home, PeeVee was awaiting them, his headache quite gone, though he still looked a little pale. He greeted them with a message: Ruby Spencer had been calling at intervals all afternoon, and wanted David to be at Elgin Boulevarde by seven o'clock.

Gertrude was annoyed.

"We'll have our tea first," she said.

"What does anybody filled up with pears and dried-apple cake want with food?" asked David. "I'll get through with the Spencers first, and come back for supper."

"By that time, I'll be ready for a cup of tea myself," added PeeVee.

At the door of the partly-dismantled house in Elgin Boulevarde, Ruby was waiting; she opened it before David had time to ring. They went together into the small sitting-room that Stan had called his den. They were alone in the house, Ruby informed him. Stan had gone to tea with the Rev. Roddy Cochrane and would not be home until after church. Nesta was at the cathedral; Nesta always preferred to worship in imposing places like cathedrals or romantic places like college chapels.

"But I could not rest until I had had a talk with you," said Ruby, with more intensity than the remark seemed to warrant.

The room was dimly lighted by a single electric fixture, with a rose-coloured shade. Ruby's devices were recognizable, and David remembered that she always arranged to have soft lights when she wished to make an emotional appeal. For months, he had longed for the old days when she had been almost a physical torment to him, but had feared to meet her. Now, he was surprised to find himself thinking only of the trickery of the lights.

She sat down close beside him, and said in a low voice:

"I understand why you have saved Stan."

The voice in which he replied was just as low; he said that it had been entirely a business transaction.

Still tense, she went on:

"It will mean so much to Stan to be able to start without the weight of debts to discourage him."

It struck David that she spoke as if all their obligations had been wiped out, but he only asked:

"Why are we whispering to one another like this? We're not likely to wake any babies, are we?"

Ruby thought it was like David to make a crude remark when she had given him a perfect opening to say the thing she expected him to say. In his letter to Stan, she had recognized, so she thought, the significance of that sentence: "You will not think that any regard for you prompts the offer I am going to make." No, it was not regard for Stan, but an undying love for Stan's wife. It would be thrilling to hear David's own lips say so.

There was a slight tremble in her voice when she spoke again:

"Perhaps, you think I can't appreciate a devotion like yours. I know I was beastly to you two years ago."

"That is all past," he replied. "Let's not speak of it!"

"But I realize now what it meant to you," she urged.

Not a tear had been shed by Ruby all day; she was too stirred by the discovery that she had broken David's heart. Now, she wanted to have his own assurance that he was a mere shell of a man, living only to cherish memories of her. To that end, she was willing to accuse herself of beastliness. Ruby did not really think she had ever been beastly, but a confession on her side, made with a sob in her voice, was likely to beget tenderness and intimacy on his. But David only said:

"I hope Stan will make good in the West."

He rose to go, and reached for his hat, which had dropped to the floor. Ruby recollected that it had always been difficult to guide David into saying the thing she wanted to hear.

"I'll always remember your generosity," she exclaimed. "Don't think that I don't understand. You know, David, that I can read you like a book."

In the empty hall, Ruby stood close beside him. She spanned the muscle of his arm with both her hands, an old trick of hers, and looked up at him with luminous eyes.

"O, David!" she whispered, "How could you be so noble?"

She believed that David's nobility was a measure of his devotion to her, and she wanted him to intimate as much.

He realized the touch of her hands and the nearness of her body to his. He had dreaded such a moment. He was not unaware of her power. To his surprise, he found himself wondering where he had heard her farewell phrase before. He remembered that something like it occurred in *Tom Sawyer*, and the scene was suddenly comic.

Striding homeward, he could not explain what had happened. He had been alone with Ruby, the old Ruby, all cooing and winsome, and his only thought had been to get away. He found his mind travelling back over numberless conversations, in which he had heard about the colours that were becoming to Ruby; about the nasty things that other people did to her; about the good times she wanted to have; about the selfishness of her sisters; about her disappointments in life, all of them undeserved; about her likes and dislikes; and about what men thought of her. Again, he was thinking of the walk that afternoon; then, he realized for the first time that Gertrude Macready had told him nothing whatever about herself.

CHAPTER XXII
THE HORTOPS AGAIN

I.

The splash made by the Spencers in Milltown subsided so quickly that in less than a month only the outer ripples of gossip remained on the surface. The Rev. Roddy Cochrane voiced the verdict of the most talkative section of the population when he said that Spencer was a worthy, upstanding citizen, opposed to the things that the Rev. Roddy opposed, but unfortunate in business. He refrained, except in private to his wife, from placing a share of the blame on pretty Mrs. Spencer. She had not attempted to disguise that she was bored by the undertakings in which the Cochranes were interested, and that, of course, was ample proof of her frivolity. They were sorry for Stan Spencer, a fine man dragged down by his wife.

From Winnipeg, Stan wrote to Ruby, now reestablished in her old room in the Hortop home, that he should have moved West years before. It was a man’s country, while Ontario was only fit for slaves; he already felt ashamed of having been content to potter round for so long in the effete East. He felt amused with himself for having carried two coppers in his pocket all the way from Milltown to Winnipeg, only to find that west of Lake Superior, nobody ever thought in a smaller figure than a five-cent piece. “That is typical,” he said. “Coppers are for children, not for grown men.” He did not intend to remain long in Manitoba, working on a salary in order to make his boss rich. As soon as he could look about, he would move to one of the smaller cities in the new provinces, and there he expected to get into something big. He ended up by saying:

“I hope you will not find Toronto dull until I send for you. I’m sure some of the boys will be only too glad of a chance to take you round again.”

Ruby telephoned to David, and said that the message had been sent to him. He was to keep her from fretting. She called him up again and again, and kept him at the ’phone with long, indefinite conversations; she had something to tell him that he’d like to know; she just wouldn’t talk to him, if he was going to be curt; he’d have to guess; well, anyway, he could guess who told her. It did not discourage her to have him ask to be excused because there were customers in the shop. Some days, she made him listen to a long description of how blue she was; she didn’t know whether she could stand it.

At last, he suggested that a night at the theatre might help. Immediately, he chilled her elation by adding:

“I’ll just run up to the teashop and see if Bess can come, too.”

Although Ruby hinted that it seemed an imposition to expect David to take the entire family, Bess accepted, and bought a new gown for the occasion.

“I must be able to hold my own beside your grand clothes,” she said to Ruby.

At the theatre, Bess continued to be tactless. She talked about her trip to New York and Laura Bateman’s swift success in vaudeville. Ruby tried several times to change the subject, but David insisted upon being interested in what Bess had to tell. There was nothing for Ruby to do but sulk. David asked:

“Has Laura changed much?”

“I’m afraid if she promenaded along King Street after a Saturday matinée, with her little dog, a lot of people would turn to look at her,” Bess replied, “and some old friends might not see her at all.”

Then Ruby commented:

“I think it is disgusting. No respectable woman paints and dresses to attract attention.”

At supper, they discussed the Macready’s pretty little cottage. Bess thought PeeVee was lucky in his sister, and David agreed with almost startling heartiness. It seemed to Ruby that any mention of Milltown was in bad taste: they might have considered her feelings!

As soon as the sisters were inside the hall of the Hortop home, with the door closed, Ruby burst out, in undisguised rage.

“You have spoiled the whole evening,” she shrilled, “with your silly talk about that horrid Laura Bateman! You might have known that David and I had a lot to say to one another, and we didn’t want a gooseberry along!”

“Then he should not have invited me,” Bess replied.

“He only did it because he’s old-fashioned,” retorted Ruby. “He thought I should have a chaperone.”

Bess ran light-heartedly upstairs, pausing on the landing to call back.

“It’s too late now to refuse, and I’ve had an awfully pleasant evening.”

The door of her bedroom slammed, and Ruby was left to fume alone.

The following Saturday, Ruby called up David and invited him to take her to church on Sunday evening. As a rule, Ruby did not make engagements to go to church with men. She had always thought church a dull institution, except for one brief interval, when she used to stand well out of the pew, in the middle aisle, so that, during the processional and recessional hymns, her arm might be brushed by that of a chorister whose image was engraved, or so she thought, on her tender young heart. That was when she was only seventeen. But in Ruby's code of propriety, nice married women, whose husbands were away from home, might not invite bachelors to accompany them to any place other than church.

David called for her shortly after six o'clock, but she was not ready. She loitered over her dressing, and arrived downstairs protesting that her bedroom clock must be terribly slow. The church where Mrs. Hortop found so much comfort and surcease from Simpson was less than a block away, but when they arrived at the door, Ruby hesitated; it was always crowded, and everybody knew her, and she hated to be late. It would be better to go elsewhere. Unfortunately, there were churches to be encountered in every direction. She had to rattle along effervescently, in order to distract his attention while they were passing a large red-brick one at the corner. Then, she took his arm and suggested that they walk straight east. Suddenly, David stopped opposite a squat little church that faced the park.

"We can go in here," he said. "Nobody knows us."

He took her elbow and ran her up the steps. It was an unexpected thing for David to do; in the old days, he had been the one to suggest a walk. An old gentleman with woolly, mutton-chop whiskers and a long white gown was reading from the Bible as they entered, so they slipped into one of the back seats.

Ruby felt that David was acting very queerly. She had never known a man so independent about finding his places in the Prayer Book. Also, he asked for a second hymn book and sang heartily from his own. When Ruby carefully ripped a page out of hers and told him that the hymn was missing, he secured a third one. During the sermon, she tried to snuggle against his sleeve, but he seemed to slide away. On the whole, Ruby had seldom spent a less satisfactory evening in church, but as they drifted out, David observed:

"It was quite a pleasant service, wasn't it?"

They crossed the road, through the stone gates into Queen's Park. The night was balmy for so late in the year and, in the light of the full moon, the clusters of dead leaves on the oak trees looked to be still alive. Ruby waxed sentimental and asked if he remembered how fond they used to be of walking through the park. He remembered so well that he guided her towards a short cut home.

The pace he set made it difficult for Ruby to talk, and also hurried her decision. All day, she had been trying to make up her mind how much she ought to say about Gertrude Macready; now, she found that she had leapt into the subject haphazard.

“Poor Miss Macready is such a dull little thing,” she was saying. “The people of Milltown couldn’t understand how an interesting man like PeeVee came to have such an unattractive sister. I told them that if they would take the trouble to get to know her, they’d not find her so colourless.”

“You were right, and the others were fools,” replied David.

“I expected her to be a girl with plenty of decision of character.”

“Indeed?”

“Don’t you know how they regard her in Petersville?”

This was what she particularly wanted to say.

“Stan tells me that she is so quarrelsome in her own home that she upsets the whole family life. Everybody in the village knows what a problem she has been to dear Mrs. Macready.”

“Aren’t those moon-shadows distinct?” remarked David, pointing to a few scattered elms on an otherwise bare field.

He was quickening his stride and Ruby found herself without much breath for further conversation. In less than ten minutes, they entered the Hortop living-room.

Mrs. Hortop greeted them sharply:

“I thought you were going to church! You were not at St. Thomas’s.”

“We were so late I did not like to go in,” Ruby told her.

“It’s all right, Mrs. Hortop,” David explained. “We set out to go to church, and we went to church.”

Bess, sitting by the grate, looked up from her book; then she looked down again and smiled.

Shortly after midnight, Ruby heard Bess coming down the stairs from her attic-bedroom. She wanted no sisterly call, so she put away her book, switched off the gas and snuggled back into the pillows; but she knew Bess must have seen the crack of light under the door disappear. The knob turned, with the usual creak of all the knobs in the old house, and a moment later Bess had seated herself on the bed.

She spoke in her crisp business-like voice:

“I have been watching you since you came home,” she said, “and I see perfectly well what you are up to.”

“I don’t understand what you mean,” Ruby replied, defensively.

“Oh yes, you do! You cannot bear to think that David is no longer at your beck and call. You want to feel that you have a hold on him again.”

Ruby sat up in bed.

“How dare you insinuate such a thing!” she cried angrily. “You know I adore Stan. You can get out of my room, if you are here to suggest that I would be disloyal to him.”

“You needn’t try melodrama,” said Bess. “I know where you draw the line. You have always thought yourself a charmer of men. I don’t believe you would stop at any lie to injure the chances of other girls.”

On the verge of tears of mortification, Ruby could only exclaim:

“How dare you?”

“Do you think I have been blind all these years?” Bess continued relentlessly. “Now that David McLean is willing to forget, can’t you leave him alone?”

“It’s not for your sake he’s willing to forget,” Ruby jeered.

“Unless you can behave, I’ll give you the money and pack you off after Stan.”

The voice went on mockingly in the darkness:

“It is just spite, because men take no interest in spinster Bess.”

The lithe figure moved towards the door.

“I should have done it in the first place,” she said.

Ruby called after her:

“And you’re wrong about David. He told me tonight that no other woman could ever take my place with him.”

And it was characteristic of Ruby that she believed what she said.

II.

Ruby went to Jessica with her grievances. She felt it would be a comfort to hear Bess dissected and criticised with all the skill that Stella, Clarine, and Jessica used to bring to that operation. Jessica startled her with the advice to go back home and do what Bess told her, adding:

"It will probably be for your own good."

Now that Bess Hortop was conspicuously successful, her sisters took a pride in "The Only Teashop", and in the neat little stores, steadily increasing in number, where the Spinster Bess Candies were on sale. Clarine Clark and her husband had reached the point of bragging about the relationship. Quite casually, Mr. Clark would speak to customers at the bank about the business acumen of his sister-in-law, and Clarine took her cue from him. Stella showed her approval of prosperity by attempting to borrow sufficient money to buy a fur coat; her argument was that both Clarine and Jessica had them and did not let her forget it. Bess turned a deaf ear to her sister's demands; she needed every available cent for expansion.

It could not be denied that the Hortop name was rising again from oblivion.

Only Nesta detected a note of tragedy in her sister's career. To her, it appeared that Bess was cloaking a broken heart. She hinted as much to her friends. All that capacity for romance, meaning a husband and children, the birthright of Hortop women, had distilled in the case of Bess into business energy, and underneath were the ashes of disappointed love. Nesta mentioned no names. Every bachelor was a possibility, but more often she preferred to imagine a man capable of crushing the heart of a Spartan like Bess; the twin of "the little man", as Nesta saw him when not looking at him.

Nesta began to acquire the habit of kissing her sister tenderly whenever they parted. She swept down like an avalanche of affection, an avalanche that breathed heavily and perspired from exertion. Bess knew she was considered an object for pity.

In order that she might enjoy glimpses of the domestic bliss she had been missing, Bess was frequently invited to Nesta's house. In September, "the little man" had invested in an outfit of carpet balls. Hannisford did not join clubs to compete with other men; both he and Nesta regarded that sort of husband as thoroughly selfish. He preferred to exhibit his prowess for the benefit of his wife and offspring.

"'The little man' is perfectly marvellous at it!" cried Nesta. "He can shoot a ball to hit the little white one the whole length of the double parlours."

"The little man" listened with a deprecating smile, as if Nesta were breaking the news that he had recently become carpet-ball champion of the world.

At least once a week, Bess was pressed to drop in for a game. Hannisford did not show up so well against a more redoubtable opponent; the members of his own family were either too wild or too weak. It was with difficulty that he covered up his annoyance at being beaten; he smiled wanly and felt himself a good sport. But Nesta gave both contestants much fond encouragement, although she was completely at sea about the scoring and became greatly excited whenever one ball crashed into another. She had a feeling that an occasional victory consoled Bess for many dark, husbandless hours.

Nesta did not spare herself in helping Bess to forget she had been nothing but a successful business woman.

Simpson Hortop was the most triumphant of all. As things were turning out so well, he was glad he had never permitted himself to appear ashamed of the teashop. He began to garner a little indirect credit to himself. One day, in the presence of a few old friends, he ventured to put his thoughts into words.

"You remember, my dear," he said, "before Bess came, how much you and I wanted a son, a son like me?"

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted Mrs. Hortop, to whom all these theories of pre-natal influence were so much bosh. Besides, a second Simpson in the household was about the last thing she had ever desired.

CHAPTER XXIII

LAURA BATEMAN

I.

Laura Bateman took to New York a self-confidence which carried her along with a velocity that less fortunate stage-struck girls would have attributed to luck. She knew several young women who had made this journey before her and returned discouraged; not one of them had obtained a foothold. But they were different. Their one qualification had been a desire to be actresses; they wanted to be taken into the profession and made part of it, in due time. Laura felt that she had something definite to offer. Her experience in Chicago had convinced her that she only needed to obtain a hearing; given an audience to amuse, all would be plain sailing.

Her supply of courage also sustained the timid little accompanist. Together, they visited the theatres, and she watched with critical eye the performances of the current favourites.

“If these people are good, I’m good,” declared Laura, whenever her companion grew plaintive over the outlook.

Their first engagement was in a restaurant—The College Inn, close by Times Square. It turned out to be anything but a resort suitable for college boys. On Saturday nights, the rowdiness of the fun frightened the pianist, and he suggested that the place might stamp them as not respectable. But Laura paid no attention to his misgivings; she was elated to find that the crowds were increasing and calling for her.

At last, a summons to call upon the manager of a leading vaudeville theatre did not surprise her. She found him a stubby, Mephistophelean man, dressed rakishly in what appeared to her a strange assortment of clothes, although in the detail of linen he was spotless. Laura did not like him. He smoked a fat cigar during their interview, and that was something men did not do at home. His attitude was arrogant and his vanity stuck out of everything he said. He took no interest in the fact that she was a Canadian; to him, that only made her a sort of remote home talent, lacking the glamour that envelops a foreigner. But Laura knew that this eccentric Jew could make her, and did not shrink from declaring her belief in herself.

For her first appearance at the old Victoria, she occupied a lowly place on the bill, but before starting on the road she had been given more prominence. She felt confident she would return to New York a headliner.

As soon as they were certain of a steady income, the pianist got married to a sweetheart from his home city and wanted to add her to the act.

Writing to Bess about it, Laura said:

"I believe the little sprat thought he needed a wife to protect him from being gobbled up by me. You can see he has been so beautifully brought up that I am surprised that he ever thought of going on the stage. Friend wife is a pretty girl, but she hasn't had a new idea since she got into words of two syllables. She does to carry out the titles and place them on the easel, and she thinks she is the whole show. But if he ever forgot to arrange them for her, she'd be sunk."

Shortly after Bess Hortop's visit was curtailed by Ruby's call for help, Laura invited her parents to New York, but Mrs. Bateman refused to cross the line into the abandoned country that had swallowed up her innocent daughter.

"It seems to me that women nowadays are ceasing to recognize the duty they owe to the children they bring into the world!" she exclaimed. "What mother worthy of the name could bear to see her child among the daughters of Babylon?"

"To hell with Babylon!" responded the doctor. "Laura is in New York."

He pounded out of the room.

Dr. Bateman had no patience with his wife's determination to regard Laura as a fallen woman. Their daughter was an actress now, and her conduct could no longer be measured by the standards of Mrs. Bateman's whist club. The appearance of Laura's picture in the theatrical section of *Munsey's Magazine* had reconciled her father completely to her choice of a career. She was described as "A live wire from Canada"; her father chortled while his wife shed tears. Friends called up to congratulate them, and pointed out that on the next page was the beautiful Maxine Elliott; Laura had lifted herself into illustrious company. Everybody pretended that she had never been classed among the prodigal daughters.

A dozen times during the week that followed, Mrs. Bateman reiterated that nothing could persuade her to visit New York and, rather to her distress, the doctor urged her to adhere to that determination. On the day set for his departure, she showed signs of weakening.

At breakfast, she said pensively:

“If a daughter desires a reconciliation, it is a mother’s place to be there to receive her.”

Dr. Bateman hastily supplied discouragement:

“Don’t imagine for a moment that Laura is sorry for what she has done. We are the ones who must eat humble pie.”

So Mrs. Bateman remained at home, feeling alternately sorry for herself and proud that she had been true to her principles. She never mentioned to a soul that she had made preparations, in secret, to accompany her husband.

The first sight of Laura staggered her father. The young women whom he met in the homes of his friends did not smear their faces with so many substances and colours. He realized that Mrs. Bateman would not have overlooked such an occasion to make a scene; to her, there was only one precedent for a woman who “painted her face and tired her hair”. It was fortunate that he had come alone.

But Dr. Bateman was no spoil-sport; he never even hinted to her that he found it difficult to grow accustomed to her vivid new face. He learned later that she was quite restrained, compared to most of her friends. A few of them gave him an uncanny sensation; he felt that he had never really seen more than their eyes, gazing at him through their variegated masks.

Laura understood his silence and felt sorry for him. She said to her accompanist:

“My dad is as much a Puritan at heart as you are, in spite of his blasphemies. He is enjoying himself, with reservations.”

She gave a party, to which she invited some of the noisiest girls she knew. They were not celebrities of the theatre; one or two of them might be seen nightly in the choruses of the minor musical shows and the others belonged to the varieties, but all of them could supply boisterous laughter when somebody else was providing a princely meal. Dr. Bateman found them a fresh and harmless lot, if not always ladylike—so he told his daughter. She responded with a knowing wink, and he wondered what she meant by that.

Dr. Bateman was a believer in respectability, and he did not wear it grudgingly as a cloak forced upon him by the standards of the community in which he made his living. Still, he was curious about other kinds of life, the customs and morals of people who were different from him. It did not worry him that he might be accused of hypocrisy and of slipping away to large cities to indulge in secret debaucheries. His was the spirit of an explorer. He despised the attempts to be Bohemian which he encountered in Toronto. He knew too much about the young men and women who went in for that sort of thing at home, and they were, in his opinion, a poor, silly lot. It would be a waste of time to spend an evening in a Queen Street chop suey joint; nobody was likely to come in who would introduce an element of romance. But in New York, among strangers, he was free to suspect the existence of colour and mystery.

He returned home feeling slightly disappointed that he had not met a few women like Margaret Anglin, Julia Arthur, or May Irwin. He was accustomed to refer to them as Canadian actresses and he had imagined that all the famous daughters of the Dominion would congregate in one group. When he hinted as much to Laura, she laughed at him.

“You have got my position down here wrong, dad,” she said. “Those women are aristocrats of the theatre and probably have never even heard of me. But if I get into a Frohman show next fall, perhaps they’ll know me when next you come to the big town.”

Back among his friends in Toronto, he found it unnecessary to modify the facts regarding Laura’s importance in the theatrical world. Their unfeigned interest made him feel that he had fathered a superwoman.

II.

Dark yellow posters, printed in heavy black type, announced that Laura Bateman, “The Girl from Toronto”, was returning to her native city as a vaudeville headliner. Gossip got busy to stimulate interest. In many a drawing-room and at still more tea-tables, Laura the child, Laura the girl, and Laura the young woman were discussed, and people who had no firsthand knowledge of her escapades invented a few. Thousands of men and women had recognized her talent as an entertainer even when she was a prattling infant. In the line-up at the box office could be found ticket-purchasers who never attended the theatre except to see stars of recognized social standing, and they were rubbing shoulders with common young persons who mirthfully remembered Laura Bateman’s performances on skates at the Moss Park Rink.

With the evening papers publishing columns of inaccurate human interest stories, Laura’s triumphant return was assured in advance. Mrs. Bateman showed an inclination to regard it as a tribute to the doctor’s position in the community, but he refused to accept that flattering explanation. He realized that Laura had always been a girl who could not be overlooked, whether people approved or disapproved of her.

Before the end of the week, the manager of the theatre wrote to New York requesting a return engagement as soon as possible. Even those persons who whispered that Laura, off the stage, must be hard for her mother to bear, were obliged to admit that her success was no accident; they had attended the theatre to glower, and remained to laugh.

Invitations poured in upon her. Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter wanted to have her "for as many nights as possible", and Gypsy Hagar Bright was constantly on hand to impede her comings and goings. Even Mrs. Pentley Dickenson called, and missed her because she had left by the back door. But Laura was careful not to respond too ubiquitously to the efforts to exploit her; she knew something already of the subtle tricks of publicity.

On Wednesday, at noon, she took lunch in the private office of "The Only Teashop", and David and PeeVee were there also. "Just a shattered remnant of the old crowd," PeeVee suggested, but Laura shrilly forbade any more maudlin sentiment. She had many things to tell them about the fun of being somebody.

PeeVee pointed at her accusingly with the stem of his pipe.

"I wonder if you realize, my lady," he said, "that I was the member of this present quartet selected by our friends to become a great person. Anybody will tell you that. And you have stolen a march on me."

She flashed back at him:

"You were like all the rest of them, my family included. Now confess it. You thought I was destined to be a harlot."

"No, no," he corrected her. "A courtesan. The word is much more classic."

"I used the right word," Laura contended. "This city is Biblical rather than classic."

Bess was pouring a box of Spinster Bess Candies into a dish. She looked up seriously and asked:

"Would anything persuade you to turn back now?"

Laura passed her hand over her forehead in mock thought.

"I might marry, if I got the right man," she announced slowly. "David, if you'll have me, I'll wash my face and come back to Toronto and be just too sweet to live."

She did not give him time to find a stammering repartee, but leapt to her feet with a melodramatic cry:

"I call you all to witness that my last chance of becoming an honest woman has been torn from me."

"You talk like Gypsy Hagar," PeeVee told her.

Laura sat down on the arm of David's chair.

"Say, Redhead," she asked, "do you remember how I used to attend all the lacrosse games when you were playing?"

"You were quite a sport, Laura," he assented.

She bent over him and confided:

"I didn't care for the game; I never cared for games. It was your legs I went to see. You always had a wonderful pair of shanks, Reddy."

When David doubled his feet under the chair, she laughed and got up.

"Come on!" she said. "Bess, your food is better than ever, but I must return to my dear public."

As they emerged from the building, Mildred MacHenry was standing in the doorway of her husband's store. Like everybody in the vicinity, she stared after the lanky woman in clinging bright green and furs but, unlike the others, she did not watch the trio out of sight down the street. Instead, she turned back again to speak to her husband.

III.

Mildred MacHenry had been awaiting this moment for years. Even before her marriage, she had made up her mind that it would be better for Ted to get away from his old associations and be adopted by her own acquaintances, all of whom were on the way to become well-to-do citizens. But, except for carping criticisms, she had bided her time; she realized that diverging courses had been set, and that gentle breezes would serve to drift them gradually apart.

Now, she called her husband to the window to see Laura Bateman flaunting herself down the city's main thoroughfare with the two men.

"You ought not to stand it," she said.

"They are very old friends," he objected lamely.

“A man on the Board of Education can hardly afford to have his partner appearing in public with a woman who looks like that,” declared Mildred.

“I know some school trustees who would gladly resign in order to get a chance to walk out with Laura Bateman,” he said.

Immediately, he regretted the flippancy. She looked at him as might a mother who had caught her boy for the first time using a foul word.

“You are supported by a very different type of citizen,” was all she said.

Mildred left him without even suggesting that he should think it over. She knew she had said enough for the time being.

That night, she returned to the subject when they were alone in their living-room, after the children had ceased their bedtime squalling and calling downstairs for drinks.

“Why don’t you buy out David McLean’s share of the business?” she asked him directly. “You told me once that you would have no trouble raising the necessary money now, with the connections you have made round the City Hall.”

“But, dearest,” Ted objected, “when PeeVee arranged to finance the shop, he meant it for David, too.”

“He was more your friend than McLean’s then,” she pointed out. “Besides, all that money has been paid off.”

“I cannot see why you are so set on getting rid of him,” he said, a little peevishly.

She placed before him her conviction that Macready and McLean could no longer be considered useful; one went with queer people and the other wasted his time in sport.

Ted attempted to fall back on one of his orations. He asked her what Toronto man had won the widest international fame. Ned Hanlan, the greatest oarsman the world had ever seen. He harked back to the eighties, which she barely remembered, when Hanlan was winning his three hundred races on all the waterways of the world. Toronto had never been so advertised before or since. He tossed in several phrases from his speech delivered when proposing the toast to athletics at a Y.M.C.A. banquet. He concluded: “Let us not forget that the most famous man of our beloved city was a sporting man!”

“And the only world-famous woman Toronto has produced was the Princess de Chimay,” Mildred retorted.

“Both David and PeeVee have considerable reputation in their own spheres,” he reminded her. He hoped he might convince Mildred that his friends were still valuable.

“I think you would be wiser to pin your faith to men who are prosperous and respectable,” she remarked, crisply, and again left the yeast of her ideas to work.

Ted MacHenry passed through many days and nights of struggle. He found himself unable to deny that Mildred was right; he could do better if he had the business to himself, and doing better was about the most important thing in the world. But, lying awake, and gazing up into the darkness, while his wife slept quietly beside him, he thought of many things about which she knew nothing; of three boys at school at Petersville; of Saturdays, whey they skated on the river, and of the swimming pool during the hot summer holidays; he thought of the first anxious years in the city, when PeeVee’s loyalty to an old friendship had cheered Mrs. MacHenry and given her material support. But when daylight came, these pangs of nostalgia for bygone days withered into sentimentality, and Ted found himself thinking that the words, “Theodore MacHenry, Gents’ Furnishings” would add dignity to the store-window; he agreed with Mildred that “The Two Macs” sounded bar-roomy.

When Ted finally made his offer to buy out David, he was hard and business-like. He dealt only with the essentials and mentioned none of his doubts or hesitations. Greatly to his relief, McLean expressed no surprise and uttered no reproaches. In after years, Ted got into the habit of saying that he had suspected his partner of getting from under and leaving him flat, and had forced him out to prevent treachery.

For many months, David had feared that something of the sort might happen, and he was glad to get it over. Also, the time was opportune. Professor St. Quinton had continued to urge that he was wasting his talents making prosperity for “The Two Macs”, and the publisher was still in the background, willing to give him a trial; the idea of making his living among books appealed to him.

The dissolution of the partnership enraged PeeVee. He did not even wait to hear what bargain had been struck, but demanded:

“What are you going to do? Start another store and give the little shyster the ride of his life?”

“I’m through with dickies and shirt-tails,” David replied cheerfully.

But PeeVee refused to take it calmly.

“I am beginning to think that Ted is a cold-blooded little beast, with no eye for anything but the main chance.”

“Marriage has changed Ted a whole lot,” said McLean.

Both recalled the ghastly wedding in Mildred’s ma’s front parlour with all the guests crowded into the back room with the golden oak side-board and dining-table. Even then, it had seemed to them like a new beginning for Ted.

“I used to think I was pretty close to him,” said Macready, “and that I understood him, but as he married, every blind went down.”

“The thing that ragged me a bit was the hard, practical way he went about it,” David confided to him. “I thought old times would count for something between us.”

“So much for any three musketeers in the twentieth century,” suggested PeeVee.

David would not have it that way.

“How about ourselves?” he asked.

“We are still bachelors, so the blinds between us have not gone down,” PeeVee replied. “Besides, our interests have never come into conflict.”

CHAPTER XXIV

CHRISTOPHER; CHRIS; KIT; K.

I.

A rumour spread through Toronto, and thence to Milltown and Petersville, that Pierre Macready was engaged upon a novel. Mrs. Pentley Dickenson was responsible for the story. When friends asked why her charming young *protégé* had buried himself in a small city, she was so flattered to have him considered her *protégé*, and so loth to admit that he might prove a sterile genius, that she took to pointing out the advantages of a peaceful environment for a novelist.

“We imposed upon his time when he was here,” she explained, “and he simply could not make sufficient leisure for creative work.”

In due time, Mrs. Dickenson convinced herself that she knew a great deal about the novel, and could state with authority that it was a piece of real Canadian literature, at last. Some of her other friends, who had published long and short stories, were a trifle nettled; she had described their work as literature in its day. They had been hailed as contributors to the renaissance. Now, they reminded one another that Pierre V. Macready was the first novelist known to Mrs. Dickenson during the months preceding the birth of his literary child. Naturally, she felt herself to be privileged; it was a little like being a bride’s confidential friend.

When Humphrey Cronk heard of it, he straightway offered his young editor some advice on the subject.

“Don’t take any chances,” he said. “There must be a trick in the writing of a novel. If I were you, I’d read all the New York ‘best-sellers’, and find out what people want. Cater to the Yankee taste. That’s where you’ll get the big sales.”

He swelled to the Rev. Roddy Cochrane:

“That young man of mine has written a novel, no less.”

To which the Rev. Roddy replied that he hoped the tone would be uplifting. He mentioned several works of fiction which were, according to his standards, morally beyond reproach; even boys in their ’teens could read them without finding a morbid suggestion. He added: “And yet note how financially successful they have been! They pay just as well as if the effects were entirely unhealthy.”

Even comparative strangers began to ask PeeVee the nature of his novel, and when he intended to publish it. It flattered him to find that they entertained no doubt of his ability to do it, and also to find a publisher.

“I’d better get started,” he said to Gertrude. “It’s too late now to tell them I have never dreamed of such a thing.”

In his odd moments, he commenced a meandering narrative which he called his novel, but whenever he re-read a passage, he found that it would have to be destroyed. Those that he had enjoyed writing were the most impossible. Humphrey Cronk kept getting into them, thundering ludicrously-wrong opinions with the utmost confidence; and Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter, a flamboyant disciple of clothes, dollars, and smartness; and Mrs. Pentley Dickenson, herself a symbol, earnest and rhapsodical; and Professor St. Quinton, an academic bird with a long bill, pecking at the world outside his cage; all his best friends, the men and women who had tried to do the most for him. No matter how carefully he designed his story so as to leave them out, they sauntered in quite casually and he found them occupying the most conspicuous seats.

It seemed a waste of time to labour over a manuscript when reputation could be garnered so easily. While living in Toronto, he had been surprised at the number of men and women who preferred to talk about themselves and their plans, though he could not discover anything that they had actually done. Now, he understood them better; with very little effort they enjoyed enough fame to satisfy their hunger.

At first, PeeVee intended to tell his mother that his novel was largely the creation of gossip; he did not want to raise and dash her hopes again. But Georgina Macready refused to be interested. For her, a triumph scored in Milltown would always take on the second-rate complexion of the town; it would not establish her as “a person” in Toronto, and she would find satisfaction in nothing less than that.

Georgina had made up her mind to take her eldest daughter back to Europe.

“We are going over next autumn,” she informed PeeVee. “I have always been an ambitious woman, but I have sacrificed myself for others, first your father, then you children, and then Aunt Ann. Now, I am determined that Medora shall have her chance.”

For a moment, PeeVee felt guilty. He would have to get busy one of these days and give his mother a pleasant surprise. He only said:

“You will not have to worry about Gertrude. She likes it with me in Milltown.”

Mrs. Macready agreed:

“Gertrude seems much better satisfied and less difficult when living with you.”

That such should be the case annoyed her more than she cared to admit.

II.

Diana was the only one to protest against the arrangements for the European trip. She saw herself was her intention. But, one night, she found herself wondering what Gertrude would have done if she had wished to marry a forbidden bank-boy, and another night, she tried to imagine how great an effort it would take to say “I won’t” to her mother’s “You shall”, or “I will” to her mother’s “You shall not”.

Just before the close of navigation, Georgina Macready and her two daughters sailed from Montreal. With customary docility, Diana did what she was told and raised no objections. She looked lovelier than ever, her mother thought; what a pity some of Medora’s talent did not accompany so much beauty. Anyway, Georgina had frightened off the bank-boy. In September, he was moved from Petersville, and left without daring to do more than say a formal “good-bye” to Diana.

The first letter from Diana had been written during the trip down the river. It was mostly about a nice young Englishman who had been introduced to her in Montreal. Mother and Medora did not seem to care for him; mother called him a lout. But he had hastened his Canadian business in order to sail on the same boat with them. His name was Christopher Brown.

In her first letter from London, Diana described a harrowing scene between Chris and her mother. Mother had been unusually rude to Chris, and Chris had been rude to her, right back again. Diana was sorry such a thing had happened, and she blamed Chris for being hasty.

“I think I can detect a faint note of applause,” remarked Gertrude.

On the back of the paper she found a postscript. Arrangements for going to Italy had been disorganized. Mrs. Macready would not move out of England until Diana had made her an apology and a promise,—their exact nature was not indicated. Diana had flatly refused to do either. The final line read: “Anyway, I’d sooner stay in England.”

Ten days later, two letters came together, a bulky one from Mrs. Macready and a slim one from Diana. The latter was short, but it told everything. Diana and Kit had walked off quietly, without asking the permission of mother and Medora, and Kit's uncle, such an old dear, had married them. Now they were spending their honeymoon in Scotland. Kit was wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, and Scotland was wonderful.

Mrs. Macready wrote a bitter and business-like letter. This Christopher Brown person was a fortune-hunter, a burly, blue-eyed, yellow-headed sort of man who looked like somebody's gardener, but Diana had refused to be warned. Evidently, he believed them to be colonial millionaires. On hearing of the runaway match, Georgina had made it clear to both of them that Diana could no longer count on receiving money from her. They would have to make their own way on Brown's wages. After the interview, the man had departed crestfallen, without saying a word. Diana would probably repent her wilfulness.

Diana made no mention of her mother's wrath and edict. Letters came regularly, but did not contain any suggestion of financial worries. Of course, Diana had always taken money for granted, but Christopher seemed to spend it lavishly. Diana's letters were devoted to ringing the changes on the assertion that K. was wonderful. On the day before they left Edinburgh, she managed to crowd nineteen "wonderfuls" into three pages. She closed with the words:

"Oh, Gertrude, when you see my K., you'll love him just as much as I do. Such a magnificent, kindly, romantic bully!"

"Poor Di!" observed PeeVee. "Life would not seem complete to her without a bully, but a magnificent, romantic, kindly bully must be an improvement upon one's own family."

Diana and her magnificent, romantic, kindly bully wandered into his novel. It amused him to clothe the bones of her letters with a variety of incidents. Naturally, he presented the wonderful K. as the brightest and most dynamic son of a family that would have regarded the Macready's income as an unimportant dribble.

Later, they learned from Medora that Diana's marriage was not unlike PeeVee's fiction. In addition to possessing great wealth, Christopher Brown's family contained a knight, an archdeacon, an admiral, and a Member of Parliament. "How could we have guessed," wrote Medora, "with a name like Brown? And Christopher goes about most of the time in rough Norfolk suits and doesn't behave like anybody in particular."

Georgina said nothing more about the marriage. She could now afford a better teacher for Medora than she had hoped; he assured her that Medora would be singing in Covent Garden inside of four years.

CHAPTER XXV
IN POLITICS

I.

Years passed quietly in Milltown, but PeeVee would not have had it otherwise. The cottage, with Gertrude in charge, was the first home he had ever known undisturbed by constant upheavals, disagreements, and readjustments; in the Macready household, the days had been rare when no electricity could be felt in the air. At the office of the *Gazette*, things flowed along so easily that he sometimes went back a fortnight to look for an article, only to find that two months had elapsed since its publication. His work called for little effort, and the more his articles became a matter of routine, filled with jibes at foreigners, the better his employer liked them. Cronk contended that he was the wittiest writer in the Dominion, and wondered how it had happened that he had not been enticed to one of the larger cities.

The legend of his novel still persisted. When he visited Toronto, Mrs. Pentley Dickenson lionized him and Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter fêted him; Mrs. Dickenson spoke with reverence of the coming masterpiece, and Mrs. Decasser-Hunter asked when the "best seller" was going to crash into the market. Sometimes he took out the manuscript and worked at it, but these bursts of energy were always short-lived. He preferred delivering addresses; it was so much easier.

As time went on, PeeVee took pleasure in watching how his old friends were setting up flags in the world, in one way or another, while he sat at ease among his air-castles. Laura Bateman had gone to England, as star in an American musical comedy that was invading London; Bess Hortop was admired as the smartest business woman in Toronto and the Spinster Bess Candy Stores were springing up in many cities; David McLean was figuring in the sporting-pages as a golfer destined to be a champion; and Ted MacHenry had become a talkative alderman and was gingerly but persistently picking his way towards the mayor's chair.

Even Medora was enjoying a meed of provincial fame. Long accounts of her triumphs had appeared in the Toronto papers, written and mailed from Europe by Georgina. From them, people gathered that Medora's single appearance in a small opera-house had caused almost as much excitement among the Italians as a declaration of war. There was scarcely any important musical centre where she could not now appear, if she so desired.

Only in Petersville did scepticism exist. The weekly paper had published a translated account of Medora's performance, taken from an Italian periodical. It described how the singer was hissed, only managing to overcome the opposition by the excessive loudness of her voice. The critic was as unkind as the audience; his comments sounded like a prolonged hiss, the only difference being that Medora could not sing them down.

The editor refused to reveal the identity of the person who had supplied the translation, and Mrs. Macready blamed Mrs. Potter. Her old friend indignantly denied that she would adopt such an underhand method of expressing the conviction that the money spent on Medora's voice was being wasted. PeeVee received an angry letter from his mother. She would never consent to live again in a malicious community like Petersville. Anyway, Medora would return to Canada in the course of time with a European reputation; as "Mme. Medora Macready", she was bound to be accepted in Toronto as a very great artist indeed.

Only David McLean found time to pay regular visits to Milltown, and PeeVee noted that they became steadily more frequent. With mixed feelings, for he feared being robbed of his home, he watched his friend discover that Gertrude was companionable. It was not a courtship, as David had courted the elusive Ruby. They were frankly pleased to be together, but did not act as if they regarded PeeVee, or anybody else, as an intruder. There were no whisperings in corners, or lovers' slaps in the face for all the rest of the world.

David and Gertrude never knew the exact day when they had realized clearly that they would ultimately be married. Their engagement came as the ripening of a friendship, without the formalities necessary when a man "proposes" to a woman who is a mere acquaintance. Gertrude understood David's position, his unshirkable responsibilities and his inherited canniness, which prevented him from planning beyond the certainties of the immediate future. So they moved along in a pleasant and inclusive companionship until the day when PeeVee realized that, in some subtle way, he had been left outside; the other two were engaged.

That casual method of floating towards matrimony would not have satisfied Aunt Ann. To her, a love affair should be a series of unforgettable ceremonies,—the ceremony of the introduction, with its mutual thrill; the ceremony of the first evening out together; the ceremony of the proposal, a most elaborate affair; the ceremony of breaking the news to one's relatives; the ceremony of the marriage; and beyond that her imagination carried her uncertainly among the other ceremonies.

After the first Christmas that David spent with the Macreadys, Gertrude began to wear a plain diamond ring. There was little excitement; it had been expected by her friends, and they were pleased.

During the following week, Bess was surprised to have Nesta stalk into her office with a funereal face, and ravish her with pitying kisses.

II.

In the month of January, in the fifth winter spent by PeeVee in Milltown, William Marsh, M.P.P., died in the village of Petersville, after representing South Marlborough in the Provincial Legislature for more than a quarter of a century. PeeVee barely knew the late member, but remembered that his father had voted for the other party. The Government leaders regarded Marsh as a distinct loss, for he had been an ideal candidate. He had known most of the voters by their Christian names and, on the quiet, had proved himself sufficiently human to stand well with "the boys". On the platform, he had talked a great deal about economy and ideals, and could speak with actual suffering in his voice if an opponent was detected in wrongdoing. Politics had always been solemn in South Marlborough and, by maintaining a solemn attitude, William Marsh had remained much admired and firmly entrenched in the constituency and in the course of time, had grown wealthy.

The Government had no fear of losing Marsh's seat, but, at any time, a by-election was an inconvenience.

The papers announced that John Marsh, a brother of the late member, was to receive the Government nomination, and that he would be elected by acclamation. The Opposition press grew indignant over that statement and accused their opponents of adopting unscrupulous tactics to weaken the chance of any candidate who might enter the field against John Marsh. Government editors started the rumour that the nomination was going begging because sensible men knew the Marsh reputation was impregnable. Why waste the money and the time!

At that juncture, Humphrey Cronk wrote a volcanic editorial charging the other party with vicious abuse of power. He hurled at the Government the accusation that it was completely discredited, and knew that the voters were only awaiting an opportunity to express their disapproval. He sounded so positive that the Opposition leaders took heart again. In vain they had suggested to a number of prominent citizens that they undertake the task of defeating John Marsh; now they offered the nomination, with considerable confidence, to Humphrey Cronk.

By never undertaking anything, unless he saw his way clear to carry it to a successful conclusion, Humphrey Cronk had established his reputation as a strong man. He recognized that desperate chances and forlorn hopes occasionally brought fame to their champions but that, on the whole, the world was controlled by the circumspect individuals. Now, if it had been the Dominion Parliament, he might have been tempted, but Cronk could not afford the humiliation of defeat with nothing greater at stake than a seat in the Ontario Legislature.

Still, Humphrey Cronk was not the man to leave his party in the lurch. He had another candidate in mind, even better equipped than himself to capture the seat; he gave them to understand that that was his only reason for refusing the nomination. He offered for their consideration Pierre Vincent Macready.

Everybody looked blank when the name was mentioned, and Cronk had to elaborate.

Macready possessed no political experience and showed little interest in party affairs, but his merits as a candidate would outweigh his defects. He had plenty of money to meet the expenses of the campaign. He was an entertaining speaker; more eloquent than John Marsh. He had a way with him, and people invariably took to him; in that respect, he was like his father—Thomas Macready had made friends everywhere, whatever might be said of his wife. Fortunately, she was in Europe. True, the young man was interested in intellectual pursuits, but the prejudice against such things in public life need not be fatal; Macready had none of the ear-marks of a highbrow.

At the end of the interview, Humphrey Cronk promised to approach his editor, to ascertain if he would accept a nomination which meant six weeks of hard campaigning with certain defeat at the end of it.

PeeVee's first impulse was to refuse to give the proposal a second thought. He did not relish the prospect of a cold weather campaign in the townships around Petersville. He had visions of the rural hotels, with their outdoor plumbing, the excessive heat of the bar and the bleakness of the bedrooms. He shuddered at the thought of retiring by smoky lamplight to sleep between cold, damp sheets, and rising in the morning to a breakfast of lumpy porridge, chunky toast, briney bacon, and undrinkable coffee. He did not know whether he could stand the strain of making himself pleasant to offensive people day after day, and he believed that in politics more offensive people were to be met than in any other field of activity.

“You had better think it over,” Cronk advised. “Talk with that sensible sister of yours and see what she has to say.”

To PeeVee’s surprise, Gertrude urged him to accept.

“The nomination would not have been offered to me if there had been any possibility of winning,” he told her.

“I guessed as much,” she replied. “I did not suppose for one moment that politicians would be giving anything away.”

“Then why are you so keen for me to get mixed up in the mess?” She could not tell him, for she did not know herself.

“It isn’t much of a reason,” she answered. “Because I’d like to see you do it.”

Later in the evening, Gertrude asked him:

“Have you thought how it will delight everybody who knows you?”

“For a while, until the novelty wears off,” he replied. “It seems to me that we are like dice in a box. Fate rattles us round and turns us out, and people rush to see the totals. If the score happens to be high, they clack about it for a few days, before they scuttle away to clack about someone else.”

In that spirit, Pierre Macready accepted the nomination for South Marlborough, and Humphrey Cronk carried the news in triumph to the committee of his party.

III.

March turned out to be quite as unpleasant a month for campaigning as PeeVee had feared. It ranged from midwinter severity to the spring break-up, and every sample offered was the most intense of its kind.

During the first week that he and Gertrude spent back in Petersville, the mercury hovered around zero and the whiteness of the snow was dazzling under the cloudless sky. Drifts overtopped many of the fences, but the honey-combed surface indicated the growing strength of the midday sun, and the jingle-jangle of the sleighbells provided a liveliness that the streets did not possess at other times of the year.

While the Macready house was being dusted and heated and set to rights, they spent several days with Aunt Ann, sleeping in discomfort on inadequate sofas. When they moved, thankfully, into more roomy quarters, Aunt Ann accompanied them, with Moggy, who immediately assumed complete charge of the kitchen.

On Sunday, they took a walk up the river, where they had often skated in their childhood. Piles of snow, through which they ploughed up to their knees, made the travelling slow, so they turned into an old path through the swamp towards the main county-road. The cedars hung heavy with festooned white crowns under a sky of brittle blue; the air was so clear, they seemed to stand in a vacuum.

“Why doesn’t someone paint these things?” cried Gertrude, with enthusiasm.

She was applying a lump of snow to the whitened tip of her nose, and her breath made faint puffs of steam.

“Because they would freeze stiff while they were thinking about it,” suggested PeeVee.

The cold caught his breath slightly, but he was enjoying the vigour of the keen air.

“If it only holds,” he said, “we are going to have some splendid sleigh-rides.”

“You are not here to go sleigh-riding,” Gertrude reminded him.

“Oh, I’ll be carrying the glad tiding of my presence to all parts of the riding!” he retorted.

“This weather is unseasonable for the first of March,” she suggested. “We are almost certain to have a thaw directly, and then the break-up.”

“That’ll make things jolly for the Opposition candidate,” said PeeVee. “With all this snow, the roads will be like bogs.”

Monday was milder, and the slush grew heavy on the sidewalks of the town.

That night, the two candidates came face to face for the first time. Once a fortnight, the local talent of Petersville gave a dime concert to raise money for the book-buying fund of the public library, and though it was washday, which left a large proportion of the women in a state of collapse, the town hall was always crowded. Naturally, politics were never discussed at these gatherings; the library needed the united support of Grits and Tories; but the chairman thought it would be a good idea to have a few non-partisan words from John Marsh and Pierre Macready. They could shake hands, as boxers do in the ring before they commence to cuff one another. If the cheers were unevenly divided—Petersville was notoriously a Marsh stronghold—that could not be avoided.

The chairman called upon John Marsh to speak first. Marsh was a dumpy man, almost a dwarf, with a long burly trunk and short fat legs. He did more than shout his remarks; he "hollered" them. His manner was heavily facetious, and he confined his attention entirely to Macready. He had the honour, he said, to be the first to give a public welcome to the returning son; he would not say a prodigal son, but, at least, one who had apparently preferred to be absent for a long, long time. Why had he come home now? Were there loaves and fishes, or a fatted calf, or something even more desirable to tempt him? The chairman grew uneasy and shuffled in his seat. It was always pleasant, said John Marsh, when a man had seen fit to desert his home-town to find him repenting later and returning to the old scenes. He felt certain that Mr. Macready's motives for doing so were entirely unselfish.

When Marsh climbed back on his chair, and sat with swinging feet, PeeVee advanced to the front of the platform. He felt absurdly young among so many graybeards; he remembered that, when he was a boy, most of them had appeared to him to be graybeards, and so far as he could see, they looked no older now. He was conscious of the friendly eyes of the women in front of him; he wished these motherly persons had votes.

Instinctively, he resorted to his best Gay Adams manner. He was right there to tell them it was a great thing to be a native son of Petersville, no matter where you happened to live. In fact, he found eminent men everywhere, given to the world by the town of Petersville. He recalled a few names, not forgetting Humphrey Cronk. The audience liked the idea that Petersville was a sort of hotbed of high citizenship, and each new name won fresh applause. John Marsh seemed unhappy; his sarcasms had aroused no outbursts of clapping. He felt himself to be at a disadvantage, as he could not be so fulsome in praise of the town in which he lived. PeeVee realized that the audience was with him; the matronly eyes were plainly saying: "And this is little Pierre Macready!"

He risked one shot at his opponent in closing.

"I am grateful for this opportunity to say a few words," he said. "If you had left me in the audience, sitting among the boys and girls, I'm afraid I should not even have seen William Marsh's little brother."

The laughter, all out of proportion to the poor jest, was the first intimation to PeeVee that South Marlborough found him to be a comical fellow. Something about the phrase "William Marsh's little brother" caught their fancy—it described so exactly what most of them felt about John Marsh.

"I think they are going to prefer the same line of oratory that goes over big with the Business Men's Club of Milltown," PeeVee told Gertrude that night.

He had spent considerable time preparing a series of campaign addresses, but now he felt that his thought and research had been wasted. He would stick to the Gay Adams inspirations and trust to his luck.

In the hustings, John Marsh gave the Government credit for everything that had brought joy into the lives of the voters of South Marlborough, even the recent spell of weather that had made the final open air bonspiel of the season a tingling, zero success. He accused the Opposition of existing for the deliberate purpose of ruining the Province. Also he ridiculed "this cheeky boy", put up as a candidate in sheer desperation by a hopeless party.

PeeVee reversed the process of argument. He was amazed at the number of things he could find to blame upon the Government. Why were the schoolchildren given so much homework, when they might, otherwise, have been employed assisting their parents on the farms? Why had not the Department of Agriculture built in the county an experimental station? Surely, Marlborough was entitled to one in preference to other counties that possessed them. But he soon discovered that the audiences expected him to make them laugh. They even detected jokes where he had not intended them. He found himself falling back on stories that he had despised when he had heard them related by Gay Adams and other speakers. His humour was broadly-pointed, so that everybody, including the immigrant farm-boys, with woolly, unbrushed hair just above the level of their eyebrows, might open their mouths widely and "haw-haw" at it. He did not reply to all of John Marsh's personalities, but whenever he found a gathering in a particularly receptive humour, he seized the opportunity to ring the changes on the phrase "William Marsh's little brother"; it had been the seed of his reputation as a wit, and it had already travelled beyond the borders of the county.

The thaw heralded the arrival of spring. The snow in the back-yards disappeared into black mush and pools of dirty water, and a faint suggestion of buds began to show on the bare branches of the trees. One night, the

South wind started to blow, and next morning the sun bethought himself that it was nearly time for maple sugar. The days were balmy, and the earth was a-trickle with swiftly-departing winter, but the nights had a snap of frost and the pools in the hollow places were skimmed with ice; in the early morning light the world looked glazed and drier.

When the hours of darkness grew warmer too, the old residents complained:

"There will be a terrible freshet one of these days with the snow going so fast."

The travelling became a horror. Weary horses dragged buggies filled with politicians over the rutted and broken roads. Both parties longed to call a truce, so far as meetings were concerned, but neither dared propose such a thing.

Speaking to a small gathering in a country schoolhouse, John Marsh had said: "I understand that our fastidious young friend from the city would like to confine his attention to the towns and the more luxurious centres." Then, with a great burst of indignation and much thumping of the table: "Who is he, to deprive the men who have made our farming community the envy of the world, of the right to hear an intelligent discussion of the issues at stake in the life of our young nation? I protest; in the name of every rural voter, I protest."

After that, no cancellations were possible. The Government organizer looked at his mud-bespattered trousers, and called John Marsh "a blabbing fool".

Macready and Marsh held one joint meeting, in the little village of Potter, where the only available building was the rink. Their agents made arrangements with the manager to remove the cracked and greasy ice, but he was a man who left his tasks until the last moment and then devised hurry-up schemes to carry them out. He erected a temporary platform at the end of the building and secured the necessary chairs and benches. Three hours before the meeting, he concluded that he had not given himself sufficient time to scrape the floor, so he hurriedly scattered large quantities of dirty straw to provide a foothold for anybody who might be nervous about slippery surfaces.

When the speakers arrived, they found the rink crowded, in spite of the bad roads. Potter was situated in a remote part of the county, and Potterites got little outside entertainment in the course of a year. News had reached them that Pierre Macready would "make a horse laugh"; he was, most decidedly, a person not to be missed. From miles around, the voters had gathered, accompanied by their wives and children to share in the fun. In the heavily-boarded building, the moist atmosphere was a strange mixture of stifling closeness and chill; it reeked with the smell of damp wool and sweating fur, with a pervading suggestion of horses and cow-stables.

On the platform, which wobbled unduly, the local celebrities and the visiting speakers sat. The reeve announced that he would occupy very little time with his words of introduction, and then became so involved in his tributes and his desire to be non-partisan that he could not stop.

John Marsh spoke first. He boomed his eloquence so that it rumbled in the high arch of the roof. For nearly ten minutes, he pretended to ignore the presence of Macready; then, very deliberately, he turned about and uttered the phrase, "this bright but inexperienced young man". After that, he addressed all his remarks directly to his opponent; pointed at him, shouted at him, and shook an accusing finger in his face. PeeVee remembered how the boys at school used to bite at pointing fingers, and could hardly restrain himself when Marsh's stubby nail almost touched the end of his nose. He felt that he must look like a naughty, caught-in-the-act child.

When Marsh sat down, the applause, although not general, was prolonged. His friends acted as if they did not intend to permit another speech, and the chairman had to resort to a clanging hand-bell before he could call upon the Opposition candidate.

Macready leapt to his feet and walked eagerly to the front of the platform; he had discovered from experience that he did not feel so nervous when he took a running jump into his speeches. As he uttered his first words, the crowd started to laugh, and he realized they were welcoming him as an entertainer, rather than a public speaker. Even when he complimented them upon living in a town that was called after Marlborough's most eminent son, there was mirth mixed with the applause. He talked about the roads over which they had journeyed, and a subject that they had usually regarded as tragedy turned into comedy. He described how the leader of his party yearned to provide good highways to connect Potter with the outside world; at which they cheered a little and laughed a great deal. He began to fear that his reputation as a comedian might overwhelm him.

At that point, John Marsh left the platform. He stamped ostentatiously down the steps, and crossed the rink between the speaker and the audience. By that simple manoeuvre, Marsh had disconcerted more experienced speakers than his present opponent, and PeeVee paused in the middle of a sentence to let him reach his destination.

But straw scattered thinly upon melting ice makes a treacherous footing. In his desire to appear nonchalant, Marsh failed to exercise sufficient care. Suddenly, he found himself doing an impromptu piece of clowning. Under his right foot, a wad of straw started to slide. He moved his left foot quickly, but instead of balancing, he only managed to trip himself. Waving his arm, he knocked off his hat, and a second later was lying prone among the chairs.

The citizens of Potter were there to enjoy a comedy, and good-naturedly they roared their appreciation. Marsh was conscious of wishing he had injured his spine so that their mirth might have been turned into consternation.

Two or three men jumped to assist him, and as the laughter subsided, the voice of the speaker made itself heard:

“Be careful where you step, gentlemen!” he besought them. “There is a little man somewhere in the straw.”

The guffaws were loosed again.

Marsh limped to his chair, and found that even his friends had not been guiltless of a snicker or two. He felt he had never hated anybody so much as he hated this smart Alec from the city, into whose hands even mischances seemed to play. His one consolation was the certainty that election day would avenge him.

During the remainder of the meeting, everything was accepted as humour. A sudden death in their midst would have been greeted as an occasion for laughter. An hour later, the crowd, unwillingly, left the rink, and the opinion was unanimous that they had never heard the issues at stake in the life of the young country discussed in so eminently satisfactory a manner.

At parting, the candidates shook hands, and Marsh said, as well as his dry throat would permit:

“After the exhibition of bad manners that we have had tonight, I do not think it would be advisable to arrange any more joint meetings.”

IV.

The following Sunday, David McLean arrived upon the scene, after spending a day on his brother Bruce’s farm, where conditions were neither restful nor comfortable; Bruce already had a family of three babies, and the twins were only two months old. In the rare moments of calm, David had heard the story of the campaign.

Later, he said to PeeVee:

“I hear that, between the two of you, the entire election is being turned into a farce.”

“But it is a funny farce, at least,” PeeVee replied. “My experience in Cronk’s office has taught me that politics in our country are usually a farce, but most of the farces are grim and not funny.”

“I understand that John Marsh is not proving as strong a candidate as his brother,” David added encouragingly.

“In the new sort of campaign he has been caught at a disadvantage,” PeeVee laughed. “There is a demand in South Marlborough this year for funny candidates, and poor John is never funny, except unintentionally.”

CHAPTER XXVI

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

I.

For several days, the sun did its part in clearing away the deposits of January. Then the wind veered to the east and the weather thickened steadily. After an afternoon of heavy clouds that spattered threateningly at intervals, the rain began to fall. All night it poured; the eaves dripped and the water-pipes gurgled noisily. By morning, the streets were sheets of water on icy bottoms that caused the most cautious of walkers to come splashing down in the puddles. To venture out was to return drenched, with heavy footwear, clinging mackintosh, and soaked umbrella; the citizens of Petersville stayed comfortably in their homes, unless imperative business called them forth. Everybody grumbled and said that the most disagreeable feature of Ontario's climate was an easterly downpour in the month of March.

In the whole town, Aunt Ann, alone, made no complaint. David McLean was remaining in Petersville for PeeVee's last big rally, and she had the young people to herself. All day long, she danced round after them, blissfully rattled. In spite of her own spinsterhood, Aunt Ann regarded her niece's engagement as an escape from a shameful predicament, and she was so anxious to see that they had those hours together which lovers are supposed to seek, that she never left them alone. Somehow, it did not occur to her that her own presence could be breaking the charm of the *tête-à-tête*. If anybody had suggested such a thing, Aunt Ann would have been deeply hurt. Wherever David went, she was at his heels.

"I am sure he would prefer you," she said to Gertrude, "but you neglect him shamefully. I have to keep him from being lonely."

Aunt Ann was convinced that men, long-suffering and fascinating men, suffered many things at the hands of women whose chief purpose in life should be to look after them.

At last, the clouds appeared to grow weary, and late one afternoon the rain dwindled to a thin drizzle. The whole countryside was water-soaked, and of the winter, only small unsightly bits of ice remained in sheltered places where there had recently been deep drifts.

From the verandah of the Macready home, they could see, after sundown, the fog in the river valley, lying dark and closely-packed. Lights were obliterated; even the swinging arc lamp across the road showed but wanly through the vapours.

“The rain is over,” David announced cheerfully. “A fog always ends it, and the air is so warm that the river ice ought to break up tonight.”

They could hear, in the distance, the muffled roar of falling water.

“Listen to the dam,” said Gertrude. “I believe the freshet is coming down now.”

“The river is clear from about fifteen miles below the town right down to the lake,” PeeVee informed them. He had been telephoning to the telegraph office, which was the town’s clearing house for news.

“Let’s walk down to the bridge and see what’s doing!” suggested David.

Aunt Ann refused to accompany them. She dreaded night air at the best of times, and to her it seemed suicidal for anybody to breathe night air laden with fog.

They made their way to the bridge on Main Street. It was already crowded with men and women, eager to see the break-up, but the mist curtained everything. Beneath them, great cakes of ice were creeping by and crunching against the stone piers. As they gazed down, the movement of the waters made the river visible, swollen, black, and ominous. Occasionally, a log twisted into view, like an arm reaching up for succour from the flood. Three hundred yards below, the dam thundered. In the presence of the river’s angry awakening after a long sleep, everybody seemed awed.

One man volunteered information:

“There has been no jam in the narrows,” he told them. “There won’t be much damage this year.”

“It is a miracle after all the rain,” commented a bystander.

A breath of north wind, blowing in their faces, suggested the end of the fog, with frost before sunrise.

As they turned homeward, David remarked:

“I believe it is going to turn colder, and dry things up a bit.”

II.

In the morning, not a cloud remained above the horizon. The mist was gone and the air had a touch of crispness.

“PeeVee’s luck!” they exclaimed. He was going to have a perfect day for his meeting, after all.

“There ought to be plenty of men piking at the river,” suggested Aunt Ann at breakfast. “Are you going down to watch them?”

She had assumed the manner of a hostess showing the sights of the town to strangers.

“I haven’t seen the freshet for about a dozen years,” said PeeVee.

He informed them that he had to call at the cobbler’s shop. The rubber heels of his boots needed replacing.

“There is a balcony behind old Snyder’s workroom,” Aunt Ann told him, “where you can get a splendid view of the river and the bridge.”

“Did you think he had forgotten?” asked Gertrude. “That’s why he is going to the cobbler’s.”

They recalled how PeeVee had always wanted to try his hand with a pike when he was a boy. Invariably, at freshet time, there had been a row about it in the Macready household.

“You did attempt it once,” David reminded him, “but you soon tired when a few pieces of wood got away.”

PeeVee remembered, and Aunt Ann was delighted to hear of the act of disobedience.

“I am certain your mother did not know about that,” she cried.

“But dad did,” he replied, and winked at her.

Every year, the freshet brought a gift of driftwood to Petersville. The swollen, undisciplined river picked up logs at the edge of swamps, old sheds and fences; sometimes, it even reached out across the flats and helped itself to a carelessly-arranged woodpile. Scores of men and boys lined the banks and leaned over the railings of the bridge to fish for the boards and dead trees. They used short heavy pikes, attached to long ropes, and in the performance, there was an element of sport which made it popular with the youths of the town. They made bets on the size of the piles they would land.

On both sides of the stream, approaching the bridge, buildings backed upon the river. Heavy stone foundations walled the water into a broad canal, through which it flowed sullenly toward the plunge over the dam, seemingly resentful of the man-made canyon, with its balconies and rickety frame look-outs, hanging safely beyond the reach of the highest flood.

Old Snyder, the cobbler, permitted no piking from behind his shop, although his balcony was substantial and stood out well over the water. While the old man worked away at his boots, PeeVee sat by the window, waggling the woollen toes of his stockings in front of the charcoal-heater. He had an unobstructed view of the men on the bridge, driving sharply with their pikes at the floating wood as it swept beneath them. The cakes of ice were not so large as those that had moved out the previous evening. Having travelled a long way, they were crumbled and broken, and the black surface of the water appeared to be almost entirely covered by floating masses of slush. To him, the river suggested a caged animal, filled with evil anger because puny men were teasing it with their pikes, knowing well it was powerless to retaliate.

"I don't believe there are so many pikers on the bridge as there used to be," observed PeeVee.

"Perhaps they are getting more sense," grunted the cobbler. "Anyway, there is not much wood any more."

He went on, tap, tap, tap, with his hammer. Old Snyder was a friend of the Marsh family and did not intend to be cordial.

The young man whistled to himself and languidly watched the sport that had once seemed so hair-raising.

The cobbler completed one boot and tossed it to the owner. It fell short, and PeeVee rose from his chair to reach it. As he did so, a swirl of commotion on the bridge caught his eye.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "What's coming downstream now?"

Snyder refused to be interested and kept on, tap, tap, tap, as if no one had spoken.

Now, the pikers were rushing about and pointing. PeeVee went to the door and opened it to get a view of what was exciting them.

"Don't let in so much air!" Snyder commanded acidly, but PeeVee did not heed him.

In the water was a boy, his head clearly visible among the shifting smears of slush. He was striking out desperately, to keep himself afloat. Out of the corner of his eye, PeeVee noted the frantic group on the balcony from which the young swimmer had fallen. As he watched, a cake of ice appeared to sweep ahead of its place in the tide, and overwhelmed the small blonde head. PeeVee glanced at his feet, and with the same movement shed his coat, vest, and overcoat. One spring landed him on the railing of the balcony. He heard Snyder's voice shouting: "Whatever are you about, young man?" as he plunged into the river.

Before the cold clutched at PeeVee's heart, he had reached the boy. He felt the little fellow relax, with confidence in the stronger hand supporting him, and he murmured reassuringly: "All right, old son!" His mind had never grasped a situation more swiftly and clearly. He realized that between him and the dam, there were only two places where he could hope to make a landing,—the bridge and the stonework of the flume above the mills. Also, there were two enemies to be feared,—blocks of ice and logs that might strike them from behind.

The current was too strong for him to work across it, and the chill of the water made his head reel. The bridge would be his best chance of rescue. He clamped his will down upon his nerves, and looked ahead.

In front of the arch through which he would pass, the men had dropped their pikes, giving him a choice of ropes. He grabbed the nearest, and as the others fell about him, he knew the owners had taken hold of the one on which he was supported. The water tore at his body to drag him beneath the bridge, and he felt the boy had become limp. His hand slipped down along the rope, with a burning sensation, until it rested, against the head of the pike, and there, like a vice, he closed his grip.

The men on the bridge were slowly drawing up the rope; they feared a jerk might shake him loose. He could see expectant faces and hands reaching over the railing. Suddenly, PeeVee felt that his hold on the boy was no longer firm. He clutched at the cloth of the coat, but he had not sufficient in his hand for his finger-nails to fasten upon. In a fraction of a second, his choice was made; he could not drop his burden.

The men on the bridge started back, and found the pike was free again.

As PeeVee turned in the water, the end of a log struck his side. It came with what seemed to him the force of a battering-ram, and for a moment he went under. He was scraping the buttresses of the bridge, and then he floated free. Pike-ropes had been dropped to aid him as he came out, but he failed to reach them. For the first time, he was conscious of the thunder of the dam.

Clearly ahead of him, on the right, PeeVee realized the presence of men on the flume. Aided by a cross drive in the current, he tried to guide himself towards them, but with a pang of something like fear, he found his stroke was weaker and his purpose less determined. If another rope were thrown to him, could he cling to it and resist the suction of the dam?

As he dragged himself heavily towards the side of the river, a large cake of ice moved up beside him. He had not seen it coming, and only knew of its presence when he found it blocking his path like an army that had turned his flank. It was bearing him past, and when free of it he would be beyond the rescue party and nearer the dam's foaming cataract. The fight was over. He could not hope to swim upstream. Why try?

Close beside him, a voice spoke, so loudly that he thought he must be losing consciousness.

"Hold on!" it said.

Immediately, two strong arms gripped him, and held him fast.

The men on the flume had realized that the floating ice was carrying the swimmers beyond their reach and over the dam, and a powerful Scotch mill-hand with a rope firmly fastened round his body, had leapt from the stonework, as soon as the floe left an opening for him, to overtake PeeVee and his burden. A dozen pairs of hands were waiting to pull them to safety.

The boy lay half-conscious on the floor of the mill; he had struck his head on the stonework of the bridge.

"A doctor is coming," someone said.

PeeVee heard the voice and it brought him back to reality. He had taken a long draught of whiskey from the first flask offered and was stretched in collapsed exhaustion, with his head on a pile of overcoats, when he suddenly felt himself to be the centre of a circle of staring eyes. He sat up, and addressed the man nearest him:

"I think I had better get to my home," he said.

They wrapped him in an ulster and carried him to the mill-owner's motor car. At his house, he insisted upon walking without assistance.

"I don't want to cause a panic," he explained.

While soaking in a hot bath, under the supervision of David, the political rally came back to his memory.

"You can't make it," declared McLean.

"Good Lord, I must!" he replied.

They rolled him in hot blankets and almost scalded his throat with steaming toddy. Once he began to shiver, but it passed and he fell into a sound sleep.

When he awoke at five o’clock, he announced:

“I’m often more all in than I feel now. After all, David, what is a little cold water to a person accustomed to swimming in Lake Ontario?”

McLean looked at him fearfully.

“You’re pretty sick,” he ventured.

“I’ll be right as a trivet when I get going,” PeeVee replied.

He dressed and ate a light meal, but his head was in a maze and his ideas refused to be co-related.

“I slept so long I’ve made myself stupid,” he confided to David. “I’m going to make a terrible mess of my meeting tonight, and it should have been my best effort.”

At the town hall, a large crowd was waiting. The town of Petersville had been stirred to the depths. The boy, the toughest youngster in the town, promised to be none the worse for his adventure, and his mother had spent the day singing Macready’s praises in every shop on Main Street. Early in the afternoon, a rumour got into circulation that the meeting would have to be called off as the candidate was too ill to speak, but, quite without authority, his supporters placed bulletins at several points of vantage, stating positively that there was to be no cancellation.

Shortly after eight o’clock, PeeVee appeared on the platform. As he entered the hall, he whispered to David:

“For God’s sake, don’t hold my arm! I am not going to totter or do anything melodramatic.”

The reeve rushed forward to greet him. He was a Marsh supporter, but the occasion had ceased to be a political one. He insisted upon saying a few words, and immediately committed himself to vote for Macready. He had not intended to do so, but it was the one action he could think of that seemed adequate. Only when thunderous cheers greeted the announcement did he realize what he had said.

To PeeVee, all the occurrences about him seemed to be miles distant. The opening passages of his speech kept getting away from him, and he pulled them back with an effort. He became conscious that there was a pause; they were waiting for him. He moved quickly forward with his familiar smile, a little less merry and much more forced than usual, but

David was the only person present who recognized the difference. The crowd had developed hysteria. When he faltered and tried to unravel his mixed ideas, they cheered him as he had never been cheered before. There were women present who sobbed, unashamed, and the sight of their tears stirred the men to fresh vigour. The chaos of the meeting buried the chaos of the address.

Afterwards, they took the horses from the dilapidated livery cab and hauled him through the streets to his home. Such a thing had never before happened in Petersville.

Sitting at his front window, John Marsh saw them go by, and said: "Damn!" loudly and earnestly.

"I told you that you should have attended the meeting," said Mrs. Marsh. "It would have looked much better for you to have congratulated him upon his heroism and his escape."

"Get out of here, damn you!" retorted John Marsh.

Being in politics, he did not habitually say things to his wife of which the neighbours might disapprove, but he had just passed through an exceptional day, in which the part he ought to play was not easily determined. Now that it was too late, he knew she had been right.

At midnight, while PeeVee lay shivering between blankets, David sat beside him.

"You should not have gone out," he said.

PeeVee laughed through his chattering teeth.

"I couldn't make a speech in a thousand years that would supply all the thrills we got tonight," he declared.

III.

Aunt Ann sent for her doctor, who looked serious and said: "Pneumonia." PeeVee called the diagnosis nonsense, and said he frequently got a chill and recovered from it in a day or two. Looking at him and listening to his breathing, the others knew the doctor was right.

The Opposition candidate for South Marlborough had made his last move in the campaign. While his friends went up and down the riding, telling the story of his heroism, he was fighting for every breath he drew. When the day for the voting came, he did not care how many would be marking ballots for him. He lay in a torpor, worn out by a struggle for life.

Two doctors whispered together in his room. They said to one another that his heart might not hold out, but they spoke only words of encouragement to the watchers.

Late that night, PeeVee grew easier. He opened his eyes and looked weakly about him.

Gertrude knelt beside his bed and spoke slowly and distinctly, as if sending a message across space.

"You have been elected by a majority of seventy-two," she said. "Petersville alone gave you a majority of over two hundred. Our side has never before received so many votes in this town."

He smiled and closed his eyes. Then she heard him say in a low voice:

"I'm a fool for luck. They elected me because I jumped into the river and caught pneumonia."

Aunt Ann left the room in order to cry. She said he had such a happy look on his face that she felt sure he must be entering eternity.

An hour passed before PeeVee gave another sign that his mind was clear. One hand beckoned David to his bedside, and McLean leaned over him to catch the words. What he said was:

"I have always thought that speaking of an honorable politician was like speaking of a chaste harlot. Now I am one of them."

To a group of politicians in a Toronto Club, Humphrey Cronk was taking full credit for his acumen.

"In spite of his illness, he has swept the county," he said. "That young man of mine will bear watching. I see no reason why he should not rise to be Prime Minister of Canada before he is through."

They listened while he gave his reasons.

"Young Macready has everything—fine appearance, good breeding, and education. I understand he will have plenty of money someday, and he can make a speech that the average voter enjoys. You have seen what sort of campaigner he is: we all thought a Marsh would be invincible. Of course, as I told you before, he used to dabble in literature, but he can soon live that down. So far as I know, he has only one serious handicap."

"What is that?" they enquired, eagerly.

“In the course of nature, it will be removed long before it can do him much harm,” Cronk informed them.

He did not attempt to enlighten them further. He was aware that none of them knew Georgina.

CHAPTER XXVII

AUNT ANN HANDLES THE PAWNS

I.

PeeVee's recovery was slow. The doctors shook their heads and asked him many questions about his heart. Had it ever given him any bother? Had he been subject to fainting spells or weak turns? His first reply was an indignant denial, but when they pressed him, he remembered how he had collapsed after the General Wolfe-Milltown hockey game. Then he resorted to the emphatic declaration:

"I have never had a serious illness in my life."

"Your heart is in bad shape now," they told him. "It will have to be pampered until it functions properly again."

He attempted to disobey orders, but when he got up and began to dress he found himself as limp as squash vines after the first September frost. He was glad to crawl back into bed and stay there.

At first the enforced idleness was not so bad. Letters of congratulation poured in by every mail. Mrs. Pentley Dickenson wrote ten pages on the beauty of serving one's country and the Rev. Roddy Cochrane wrote twelve on the various reforms that could be secured by Parliamentary enactment, placing emphasis chiefly on the prohibition of spirituous liquors and the censorship of reading matter. Nesta Holmes described him as the first ruler she had ever known in her life, and Ted MacHenry required most of the space on one type-written page to enumerate his own activities at the City Hall. He managed to work in the names of a few prominent men with whom he was now associated; every friend that MacHenry acknowledged was the manager of something, if only the shoe-lace counter in a departmental store.

Short but hearty messages were received from men known to PeeVee at school and college, but whose very existence he had almost forgotten. One letter came all the way from South Africa and another from the Yukon. He recalled the two Petersville boys; Mark Williams had gone to the Boer War and Elliott Fraser had caught the gold fever in 'ninety-eight. He found tears on his cheeks as he read them, and wondered if loss of strength had made him prematurely maudlin.

His weakness appeared to be playing tricks with his imagination. He began to feel that the world was a terribly lonely place as a man grew older.

It was not merely that old companions drifted so far asunder or followed so many different interests. He had never been fool enough to think that the intimate contacts of school-days could last. But PeeVee hated the discovery that in a whole world of human beings, every man must judge human nature from his own private experiences. Confidences were never made about the things that mattered. Youth might talk a little, but in the course of time friends seemed to acquire fresh caution and increased reticence. One by one, the blinds were pulled down, until everywhere he looked only drawn blinds could be found, behind which were hidden the realities of all the hopes, desires, joys, lusts, disappointments, conquests, failures, and beliefs except his own. How did authors and biographers and historians dare to write when they could be certain of so little? Sometimes he tried to shake himself free of such thoughts; he knew they were morbid. The majority of people did not want to know the whys and wherefores of other lives. They seemed quite content to enjoy superficial gaieties and excitements among partial strangers.

At intervals, Aunt Ann crept to the door to look at him, lying there with his eyes closed, but awake. She told Moggy that he was fretting; a statesman always chafed when he could not be up and doing—to Aunt Ann, everybody elected to Parliament immediately became a statesman.

Although it was not a thought that she could put into words, Aunt Ann did not want her nephew to make a swift and complete recovery; that would mean her return to the insipid existence in the cottage. Now that PeeVee had been safely elected, there was another matter that demanded their united attention. Aunt Ann felt that she had done as much as she could hope to accomplish alone. Two days after Bess Hortop's theatre party, she had commenced to pray that David McLean would notice that Gertrude Macready was a suitable wife for him, and though the answer had been long deferred, she regarded herself as the subtle force that had kindled the affair.

Sitting beside PeeVee's bed one afternoon, she remarked:

"Illness has upset your nerves. You need something to rouse you out of yourself."

"What would you suggest?" he asked, humouring her.

"Wouldn't it do you the world of good to see David and Gertrude actually married?" she enquired. That was Aunt Ann's way; the thing she desired was the very thing for somebody else's good.

"Marriage has been prescribed as a cure for heart trouble."

Aunt Ann was so much in earnest that she did not notice he had attempted a joke.

"I like couples to be married young," she said. "It always seems more romantic to think of their having children while they are still boys and girls themselves. Don't you feel just a little bit disgusted when older people become parents?"

"What funny things run about in your mind, Aunt Ann!" he exclaimed. "You are certainly no prude."

She did not mind his laughter. Aunt Ann was never so happy as when she had succeeded in amusing a man.

A few days later, she sat down on the edge of his bed and whispered to him, although they were quite alone, that she had made up her mind to buy a house in Toronto.

"Do you know that it requires money to buy a house in the city?" he responded, banteringly.

"I have the cash," she said, pleased with herself, and went on to explain that she had never lived up to her income. She added: "I wanted to give part of it back to your mother, but Mrs. Potter wouldn't let me. Now I've got ever so many thousands of dollars in the bank."

"And do you want to leave Petersville?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" she replied. "I want to give the house to Gertrude as a wedding-present. That ought to hurry them up."

Having made the plan, Aunt Ann talked of nothing else when Gertrude was not around. She intended to find a house at the Beaches. To her, a beach had always appeared a singularly attractive place; the very name Balmy Beach, suggested tranquil water lapping on sand. She dreamed of Mr. and Mrs. David McLean in a little house overlooking the lake, selected and presented to them by her.

At last, she could wait no longer. If PeeVee did not feel strong enough to accompany her, she would go to Toronto alone. She had plenty of money to get whatever she wanted and she really didn't need anybody to advise her. It was only after considerable argument that PeeVee persuaded her to consult Bess Hortop.

Aunt Ann spent two days in Toronto, and returned so well satisfied and so mysterious that Gertrude grew curious; and that was exactly what her aunt had desired. When the three of them were alone together, she indulged in endless innuendoes and knowing nods, and came near to spilling her secret a dozen times. It required a week to settle the details of the transfer, and then Aunt Ann visited the city again. She brought back the deed and a photograph, which she presented to Gertrude at the tea-table.

As David was present, it seemed a good opportunity to say:

"That is your wedding-gift, my dear!"

She had no intention of permitting the matter to drop with that gentle hint. Half an hour later, while washing the dishes with Gertrude, she returned to the attack:

"There is just one medicine that Pierre needs to strengthen him," she said.

"And what is that?"

The lack of interest in her niece's tone annoyed Aunt Ann. She turned about and put her hands on her hips, in order to say, impressively:

"He wants to see you and David married."

"Does he say so?"

The directness of the query would have disconcerted anyone except Miss Macready.

"He talks of nothing else when we are alone together," she replied.

When Aunt Ann had an end in view, she never believed in being hampered by such a trifling thing as the exact truth.

Gertrude went on drying the dishes. She was touched, and she also felt a pang of fear; it seemed so unlike PeeVee to want to hasten events.

"What about mother?" she asked at last.

Although Gertrude had written her mother a number of times regarding her engagement, Mrs. Macready continued to ignore the information completely.

"She will come round," said Aunt Ann, reassuringly. "Look how fond she has grown of dear Christopher!"

Gertrude knew her aunt was overstating Georgina's affection for her son-in-law. It was not the personal charm of Christopher Brown that had brought about the reconciliation between Diana and her mother. Mrs. Macready and Medora still felt that it had been inconsiderate of him, at the start, to say nothing about himself, his wealth and family position; there were so many

Browns in the world, how could Georgina be expected to know which was which? A little openness on Christopher's part would have prevented a great deal of misunderstanding.

Diana's childlike letters indicated clearly the change of front. She had been delighted when her mother began to ask affectionately after Christopher's health—Christopher, who never knew a day's sickness from year's end to year's end:—and then to send him playful messages, which Diana duly reported to Gertrude. Nine months after the honeymoon in Scotland, Diana had brought another Christopher Brown into the world. Georgina had written to suggest that a mother's place, at such a time, was with her daughter, but she had received no encouragement; Diana had informed Gertrude: "I am not going to have K. bothered." After their second son was born, Christopher had invited his mother-in-law to spend a fortnight with them. Mrs. Macready and Medora had hastened back to England, and to Diana's surprise, her mother had spent more time doting on K. than cuddling the babies.

But the experiences of Diana did not reassure her sister. She knew how deep-rooted was Mrs. Macready's dislike of the McLeans.

II.

Clergymen and weddings were closely associated in Aunt Ann's mind. Suddenly, she began to show a great interest in the Rev. Harper Loftus; he had taken on a new importance in her eyes. She saw him with David and Gertrude in the form of a triangle—a sanctified triangle, of course, with benefit of clergy and all that, the parson being the base.

The young rector had never received so much attention from any member of the Macready family. Whenever Aunt Ann happened to think of it, she telephoned that a call would benefit her nephew; then she talked to him so much about marriages that he began to wonder what the old lady had in her mind.

The Rev. Harper Loftus was so absurdly youthful in his appearance that he resembled a high school boy masquerading in clerical clothes. Alert and healthy and interested in life, his eagerness to be happy was contagious. Always in haste to keep another engagement, his days were made up of short visits. He liked the new member for South Marlborough better than he had expected to like the son of Georgina Macready.

After the efficient idealism of the pastor of Parkes Street Church, the light-hearted chatter of the Rev. Harper Loftus seemed strangely frank.

PeeVee wondered what the Rev. Roddy would have said if he had been present when the rector remarked:

"I always sympathize with a boy who objects to church-going. When I was a youngster, I hated it, for I couldn't sing and I couldn't sit still. But I had two brothers who liked singing and sitting still, so they marched off meekly every Sunday morning. Now, one of them is a painter and the other a doctor. And look at me! You never can tell."

It did not even irritate PeeVee to have him talk about the novel, which had been mentioned in the Toronto papers, following the election.

"I wish you could herd all my ancestors into a story!" the rector said. "They date right back to the pioneer days of Upper Canada and look to me like the spinal column of provincial history."

"The lives of the pioneers were pretty humdrum," suggested PeeVee.

"Not if they were as crazy as the Loftus tribe."

The legends of the Loftus family, as related by the Rev. Harper, left Aunt Ann round-eyed and PeeVee amused.

There was the story of his great-great-uncle Malcolm, who had got involved in a feud with some of the other early settlers in Marlborough County. Great-great-uncle Malcolm had fought better with words than with deeds. He had uttered gross libels against his enemies, and when they came to call upon him, carrying an ominous amount of tar in a bucket and feathers in a sack, he had preferred to hide rather than to speak with them at the gate. He had selected a tall clothes basket, standing on a dark landing, and after dumping the soiled contents, had pulled it over his head, like an enormous extinguisher on a small candle. Unfortunately, great-great-uncle Malcolm had located himself in the landing's most draughty corner, and being susceptible to colds, had endeavoured to alter his position by a few cautious hops. In the narrow space, he had misjudged the distance and, a moment later, the irate visitors had seen, to their surprise, a large basket coming bumpety-bump down the staircase. The basket had rolled liked a living thing across the stone floor and continued its journey down the cellar steps. In the basement, it had found a cistern, and had tumbled into the black water, from which the family had fished it out later in the day. No one ever knew what great-great-uncle Malcolm had been doing or thinking during the strange journey. The visitors were intensely annoyed at having had no use for the tar and feathers after carrying them so far.

As he finished the anecdote, the Rev. Harper Loftus consulted his watch, and found he was already late for his next appointment.

"You may have great-great-uncle Malcolm for your novel, if you can use him," he said, as he departed. "But you will not find it easy to make his adventure plausible."

PeeVee wondered if his novel were being chaffed by this parson who had dared, according to Gertrude, to ridicule Georgina's paintings.

Aunt Ann returned, greatly concerned.

"Don't you think a clergyman, of all men, ought to respect the memory of his ancestors?" she said.

"How can anyone respect the memory of an ancestor who got himself drowned in a dirty clothes basket?" PeeVee replied.

Aunt Ann continued to shake her head.

"It is a story I should never have believed," she said, "if our own rector had not told it."

III.

With the three principal pieces to arrange a marriage game—the bride, the groom, and the parson—in her hands, Aunt Ann could hardly sleep at night for wondering what to do next. It seemed to her that she had been making all the moves, and there was a point where too much aggressiveness would begin to look indelicate. She resorted again to prayer, which she felt to be quite within the proprieties, but somehow it appeared little better than inaction.

In her bedroom, Aunt Ann had hidden a letter that added to her anxiety. Mrs. Macready and Medora expected to arrive back in Canada during the month of May, but Georgina had instructed her sister-in-law to say nothing about her plans, as she wanted to give Pierre a surprise; she made no mention of Gertrude. Medora's first important engagement had been a disappointment. Her mother explained: "She sang once, in *Il Trovatore* and was a great artistic success, but the company did not have the sort of *clientèle* that could appreciate Medora's work, so her other performances were cancelled."

Medora's failure did not interest Aunt Ann; indeed, she thought it had been a triumph. What worried her was the fear that Georgina might endeavour to break off Gertrude's engagement. Although she had never suspected her brother's wife of being mean to her, she was convinced that Georgina cared less for Gertrude than for her other children. Gertrude had never been given a fair deal, and now it was in Aunt Ann's hands to see that she got one. So she kept the secret, and appealed to the Rev. Harper Loftus to speak to the young folks about the folly of long engagements. His shocked expression and raised hands surprised her.

"My dear Miss Macready," he said, "don't you know that it is quite unethical for doctors and parsons and undertakers to drum up business?"

At any other time, Aunt Ann would have been worried over her indiscretion, but the days were passing rapidly and the hour for action had arrived.

On the following Saturday afternoon, she met David in the vestibule and greeted him with a kiss.

"When are you going to give me the right to consider you really my nephew?" she asked.

"You can do it now," he replied.

"Not really. You must do *it* first," and she gave him an insinuating ogle that nobody could have misunderstood.

A little later, David remarked to PeeVee:

"I have never been in an atmosphere so surcharged with matrimony as this house."

By this time, PeeVee understood quite well what his aunt was up to; the old lady did not know what it meant to be subtle, and her undisguised eagerness to have a wedding as soon as possible amused him. But he did not suspect her motive; it was only Aunt Ann's way.

PeeVee understood that the situation between David and Stan Spencer had grown more complicated. Stan had moved from Winnipeg to Calgary, and from Calgary to Vancouver, and was more contemptuous than ever of men who were content to remain in the stagnant East when a small railroad fare would lift them into the Land of Opportunity. He and Ruby were almost as prominent in Vancouver as they had been in Milltown, but his contributions towards squaring the debt he owed the Misses Prue and Janet Smiddy remained small and intermittent. Ruby had spread the story wherever possible that David, out of spite, had attempted to ruin Stan's chances with his wealthy aunts, and be it said, in justice to Ruby, that she really saw the matter in that light. David now realized that he could not hound Ruby’s husband into the courts, and there the matter stood.

“The day of reckoning will surely come,” said the canny McLean. He kept the legal records of the case in spick-and-span order.

“Do you think you will ever be able to permit Aunt Ann the happiness of seeing the two of you married?” PeeVee asked him.

David smiled awkwardly.

“Aunt Ann’s present has made a lot of difference,” he said. “Gertrude thinks we might be spliced about the second week in May, if you can spare her.”

When Aunt Ann heard that a day had been set for the wedding, she ran upstairs and re-read Georgina’s letter. They would be safely away in plenty of time. Stealthily, she folded the pages and restored them to the envelope, which she placed in one of her devotional books. Somehow, the hiding-place made the whole affair feel more like a delicious conspiracy.

IV.

On May the tenth, Gertrude Macready crept from her bed at five o’clock in the morning to see what sort of a day the dawning promised. Everything was white with hoar frost. The roofs looked wintry, but the lawns were green, and in the flower-beds the tulips stood straight and tall, with their flowers tightly-closed, like rigid ladies pulling gaudy shawls over their heads for warmth. The sky was a pale green, and in the breathless air smoke from a few chimneys rose in straight gray columns. She leapt back, shivering, between the bedclothes.

Aunt Ann’s head, fearsome with curling rags—Aunt Ann intended to look her best on that great day—came round the door.

“You are not ill, I hope,” she whispered, loudly.

Gertrude rose from the depths with a wan smile.

“Everything is so bleak!” she exclaimed.

Aunt Ann sat on the edge of the bed.

“You must look your prettiest,” she said. “Did you sleep well?”

“In the darkness, the whole outlook seemed bleak too,” replied Gertrude, “with PeeVee not well. And you know how he hates being upset.”

To Aunt Ann's mingled dismay and delight, Gertrude began to cry, a thing she had not done, to her aunt's knowledge, since childhood, and seldom then. The two women held one another close and sat without a word for a long time, while the sun climbed higher and licked the white frost from the sidewalks and the fence-tops.

In the Tecumseh House, David McLean made himself stay beneath the bedclothes until the clerk pounded on the door at eight o'clock. Then he got up, slammed down the window, and peered at himself in the scratched and tarnished mirror. It told him he looked a wreck. He had hardly slept, although there had been intervals when he had managed to sink into a stupor; he remembered that when he was a small boy, his nerves used to play tricks with his rest before an important game.

A cold sponge would brighten him up, he thought. Well, if coldness would do it, there was plenty to be had—icy water and a heatless room, with a draught from the upper half of the window that did not close quite tight. With relief, he dived into the new garments that he had laid out in readiness the night before.

At nine o'clock, PeeVee joined him at breakfast, but David's throat did not swallow as readily as usual. He preferred to walk, and walk, and walk, but PeeVee soon cried a halt.

"Why all the fidgets?" he protested. "You are not shouldering such a hell of a lot of responsibility! Remember Brigham Young!"

"I'm beginning to admire Ted's nerve," said David, unexpectedly. "Do you remember how calm he was?"

The town clock was striking midday, as Gertrude, on Aunt Ann's arm, walked down the centre aisle of the crowded church. Only a small wedding-party occupied the front pews: Bess Hortop, the Misses Menzies, Mrs. Potter, and Mrs. McLean, with two of her sons and their wives.

PeeVee could not take his eyes off his sister. How calm and fresh she looked, as if she had risen from one of those bowers where, according to the older poets, the happy bride-to-be reclines. Now, the parson was talking. It seemed almost an impropriety for anybody so boyish and innocent-looking as the Rev. Harper Loftus to be reading to a man and a maid so obviously more mature the intimate definitions of the purposes of marriage, found in the Book of Common Prayer. He put questions to Gertrude, and she gave the answers steadily and clearly. It was strange, thought her brother, how women took to being married as a matter of course and were never in the least upset by the ceremony.

He glanced with pity at David. He knew that his friend was feeling as he had felt on the first night of *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee*. McLean stood very stiff and mumbled the responses, but PeeVee thought he could detect a tremble that would not be controlled.

In the vestry, Mrs. Potter rallied the bridegroom.

“You men are brutes!” she said. “You haven’t enough imagination to think what an ordeal marriage is for a girl. Poor Gertrude was as pale as a ghost. I thought she would faint, and you were just enjoying yourself. I don’t believe you lost a wink of sleep over it.”

PeeVee knew how wrong she was. He would have been surprised to learn that for every person present who agreed with him, there was one who agreed with Mrs. Potter.

That night, Aunt Ann went to bed with a feeling of peace resting upon her soul. All her life she had longed to bring about the ringing of wedding bells and now, in her old age, she had experienced the success that had proved so elusive in her youth. She thought of David and Gertrude away together for the first time alone, and while she smiled, she was feeling under the pillow for a small square of cambric with which to dry her eyes. Aunt Ann believed she had controlled destiny, even though it was not her own, and thus fulfilled her purpose in life.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. MACREADY COMES HOME

I.

The suggestion was made by Humphrey Cronk that Macready should take three or four months' leave of absence and devote all his time to getting strong again. Among his friends, Cronk boasted:

"Of course, you cannot imagine that young man of mine doing nothing. His mind is too active. He will be turning out something to surprise us all—a novel or a play."

When PeeVee received word that he would not be expected back in Milltown until the middle of August, his one thought was that he would be able to live in the interval free from the slavery to clocks. What a summer lay ahead of him, with nothing to do but lie in a bath of blossoms while the waves swept over him, the irises following the tulips, the peonies after the irises, and then the roses, the larkspurs, the gladioli, and the asters, until the full flood of July and early August had passed him by.

David and Gertrude returned from their short honeymoon in Quebec where the chill of a dead winter lying somewhere back among the mountains had made things none too pleasant, but they were to have another holiday in July. Aunt Ann spent one day in Toronto to see that they were settled in the right house, and found the Beaches all she had expected a beach to be. But PeeVee showed no inclination to move far away from his home in Petersville.

The warm weather arrived late, but magnificently. After hesitating for weeks with the buds half blown on their branches, the maples and elms suddenly put forth great masses of foliage. In the orchards, the apple—and plum—trees clothed themselves in white. Aunt Ann insisted that her nephew should take afternoon tea on the lawn at the side of the house, where he could drink deep of the sunlight and the beauty.

Georgina Macready and Medora did not arrive in Petersville until the last week of May. They had not written for more than a month, and Aunt Ann feared that they had heard of the wedding; she steeled herself to face bitter reproaches.

At the station, Mrs. Macready took the only available cab, a dilapidated vehicle, browned by exposure, and smelling as if it had been used as a sleeping-place for horses and dogs. It was not a pleasant conveyance on a warm day, and Medora complained emphatically. After their recent experiences of travel in Europe, it should not have affected her, but Medora was most fastidious when she encountered the shortcomings of her native village.

In the interviews that followed, Aunt Ann was the only person in the household who received no surprises. She had expected to be blamed for not delaying Gertrude's marriage, and she was. But her replies seemed perfectly logical to herself. How could she have told them to wait for Georgina and at the same time keep her coming a secret? She made that one reply to every criticism of her conduct, until Georgina exclaimed, in exasperation:

"Are you so stupid as you make out? Can't you use a little common sense once in a while?"

To which Aunt Ann said again:

"But I thought you were so anxious to give them a surprise?"

Mrs. Macready seized the opportunity to say something that she had never before suggested to her husband's sister:

"I regard your actions as deliberate treachery. All my married life, I have sacrificed my interests for you; I have allowed you more money than I could afford since Tom's death; and I feel your ingratitude more than I can say. If this marriage turns out badly, I shall consider it your fault."

There was a time when Aunt Ann would have been broken up for hours after such a rebuke, but to be acknowledged by Georgina as the promoter of Gertrude's wedding was a compliment that made her forget everything else.

When Pierre suggested inviting Gertrude to spend the week-end in Petersville, his mother forbade it. She would see her daughter in Toronto the following week, but could not bring herself to sleep under the same roof as David McLean.

Suddenly, she turned and accused him of lacking proper family pride. She spoke in the low, hard, acid voice that he recalled so well, though she had seldom used it before to address him. She had left him to look after his sister's interests, and he had betrayed his trust. She denounced the McLeans. Dr. McLean was a coarse, common loafer, a no-good who died without a cent. How could one of his sons make Gertrude happy?

"Have you forgotten," she asked, "what a family Mrs. McLean was forced to bear, with never enough to keep them?"

“I only remember,” he retorted, “that their home was happier than ours ever was.”

This plain statement astonished her, but after a pause, she ignored it, saying:

“You are like your father, pretending to shut your eyes to facts you cannot deny.”

“I think I know the McLeans better than you do, mother,” he said.

Georgina was not accustomed to being contradicted; she grew angry.

“Then you should have kept your sister from falling into the hands of a man like David McLean.”

PeeVee saw that she was losing control of herself. He tried to speak calmly:

“Now hold on!” he said. “You are working yourself up and talking wildly.”

The attempt to be tactful was unavailing; it only irritated Georgina.

“Everybody knows,” she declared, “that that Bateman creature was David McLean’s mistress before she went on the stage, and that Ruby Spencer broke her engagement when she found it out.”

PeeVee’s heart began to rattle against his ribs. He tried to speak but the words seemed to be evaporating into nothingness. Then, coming from nowhere, he heard his own voice saying thinly:

“The person who told you that was a damned liar!”

And he sank back weakly into his chair.

Mrs. Macready lifted his limp hand and dropped it. His whiteness terrified her, and she ran towards the house calling frantically for help.

Her cries brought Aunt Ann, who came with a little black bottle, a glass, and a spoon. She knew exactly what to do and made no fuss about it, but she paused long enough to say crisply to Georgina: “What have you done to him?” very much as a nurse might have addressed a small boy found alone with a crying baby.

While Mrs. Macready stood looking on helplessly, her son slowly revived, and when he muttered a curse at his own foolish weakness, Aunt Ann stood up with a triumphant cluck.

“You had better leave him quietly for a while,” she said, and sat down in charge of the situation.

Georgina moved obediently away. It was the first time her sister-in-law had been able to give her a feeling of inferiority, and she hated to feel inferior.

II.

Nothing more was said about Gertrude’s marriage, except when Mrs. Macready was alone with Medora, who listened and offered no comment. Georgina realized that she resented David chiefly because he came from Petersville; everybody knew his family and all about him. If only he had been a complete stranger! It was as if Gertrude had deliberately acknowledged in public that the Macreadys were no better than anybody else; merely common Petersville clay. Willy-nilly, the others had to share the humiliation.

During the following week, Georgina took rooms in Toronto. She accepted an invitation for herself and Medora to dine with Gertrude, but refused to stay overnight. The party was a flat affair. Mrs. Macready devoted herself to making David feel that his presence was an intrusion. When he spoke, she looked at him unsmilingly, as if aware of him for the first time, and if it were not possible to catch up or correct what he had to say, she ignored his remarks completely. At last, he dropped out of the conversation and was more thankful than ever for his own mother.

When alone with Gertrude, Mrs. Macready informed her that no money would be placed to her account at the end of June.

“Now that you and Diana have husbands to support you,” she said, “you will admit that Medora has the first right to anything she requires.”

And Gertrude replied:

“David would prefer to have it that way.”

But Georgina hoped her son-in-law would be much chagrined to learn that his wife had ceased to be a financial asset.

Before leaving for her summer home, Mrs. Pentley Dickenson arranged a party to enable the local musicians to meet Medora, and everybody made a great deal of her, especially after they learned that she would shortly return to Europe. The praise of Pierre was on everybody’s lips. People pressed forward to be introduced to his mother and talked of his exploits as if he had been a glamorous hero. Georgina was stirred with a new exaltation. No longer did men and women acknowledge her existence civilly and then pass her by. The best people were coming to the feet of the Macreadys.

The newspapers published long accounts of Medora's European career, and her mother also furnished particulars regarding the eminent Englishmen to whom Diana was now connected by marriage. Every week provided her with fresh proof that it had been a mistake to remain all those years in an Ontario village; she should have insisted upon going abroad when the children were in their impressionable 'teens. She knew now that she had been as right as her husband had been wrong.

Near Mrs. Dickenson's cottage in Muskoka, there was a large summer hotel. She threw out the suggestion that if Mrs. Macready were to spend the hot weather there, they could see a great deal of one another. Immediately, Georgina telegraphed and reserved rooms for herself, Medora, and Pierre; at last, she would be one with the Pentley Dickensons.

When she wrote and told PeeVee what she had done, his reply was a light-hearted refusal. He had already invited David and Gertrude to be his guests at a Georgian Bay resort, and Bess Hortop was to be there also. He did not seem to realize that he was throwing up an opportunity! Again, that horrible gang, just as Georgina was beginning to feel that they no longer mattered! She sat with his letter crumpled in her hand. So he had made his plans without even consulting her intentions? That Bess Hortop! Every time she ran across the black and white face of a Spinster Bess Candy Shop, her dislike for the girl was stirred anew. What if Pierre should make up his mind to marry her? That would be the end of everything.

III.

In the telephone book, Mrs. Macready found the address of the Simpson Hortops and, that afternoon, ordered a cab and set out to look it up.

The Hortops had recently moved into a new house, purchased by Bess in a smart suburb. For the first time since her marriage, Mrs. Hortop had found herself living in a street that was enjoying its social ascendancy. She had tingled with satisfaction when she learned that the large place opposite, not yet completed, belonged to a family that had dropped her from its calling list a dozen years ago. She frequently walked up and down the street for the sole purpose of feasting her eyes on the prosperous gentility of the neighbourhood. Mrs. Hortop had been an exile from her own people, and now she was home again.

Mrs. Macready surveyed the front of the neat stone house in some surprise; she had been under the impression that the Hortops lived in a shabby back street. A childish maid, ornamental rather than competent, showed her into a living-room in which the old-fashioned but recently-upholstered furniture looked much too large.

Like the Victorian chairs and sofa, Mrs. Hortop appeared a little out of place in her new home. After fifteen years of humiliation, during which she had found little comfort in reminding herself that she could lay claim to birth and tradition while the families who were forgetting her possessed only money, it required time to expand into her former self-assurance. Sitting primly, with wrinkled hands clasped on her black silk lap, she would have impressed the majority of callers as faded and pitiful. To Georgina, she was the sort of person to pelt with London and Paris, Monte Carlo and Milan. Mrs. Hortop murmured her replies in monosyllables but thought to herself that such ostentation was a sign of commonness.

“Your son and my daughter have been great friends for many years,” she said in her mild way. “I think they met at ’Varsity.”

“A platonic friendship,” suggested Georgina.

Mrs. Hortop grew confidential.

“Bess is not like her sisters. They had a woman’s natural desire for a home of her own. It was a long time before I began to understand Bess myself.”

“It is rather dangerous for a young man and woman to be seen too much together,” said Georgina. “Outsiders are apt to misunderstand.”

“Not with Bess,” declared Mrs. Hortop. “It is quite wonderful the way she commands the respect of business men. Her father says he could not ask for more consideration, himself.”

(To strangers, she kept up the pretence of a high regard for Simpson’s ability.)

Mrs. Macready remarked that her son differed from ordinary men. His unconventionality frequently made her anxious about him. “Toronto is so provincial,” she said, “and now that Pierre has entered politics, a breath of scandal might be fatal. Miss Hortop is a conspicuous woman too.”

“I never fuss over my daughter any more,” replied Mrs. Hortop. “What could I say to her about her friends?”

"You might suggest to her that people will talk if she goes holidaying with my son," answered Georgina.

Mrs. Hortop had long since ceased attempting to shape any plans for Bess. She explained that her daughter would only laugh at her fears, and went on to lament that the younger generation had less regard for appearances than their parents. They did not seem to realize that laxity in the conventions might drift into laxity in morals. She concluded:

"I sometimes wonder what the world is coming to in this new century, with unmarried young people running wild the way they are. You and I prefer the old ways, but we cannot alter the new ones."

This meek but exasperating old lady would have to be put in her place. Mrs. Macready spoke sharply:

"I am afraid I cannot be so complaisant about an entanglement that may wreck my son's future."

"I do not quite understand you," replied Mrs. Hortop, flushing, and then, very directly: "Did you come here purposely to insult me?"

"May I speak plainly?" exclaimed Georgina, although she fully intended to do so. "My son is a public figure and must avoid putting himself in a false position. It is the social disparity between them that will make the gossips suspicious."

Slowly, Mrs. Hortop rose to her feet. She was very white, and something clicked in her throat. Years of humility were forgotten.

"If there is any social disparity, the advantage is all on my daughter's side," she announced clearly. "There were Hortops among the exclusive families of this city when John Graves Simcoe lived at Castle Frank."

Mrs. Macready said, "Indeed?" She could not have been more dumbfounded if a smitten lamb had turned and attacked her.

"I know nothing at all about the Macreadys," went on the gentle voice, "but I have not forgotten that your father kept a bustle shop at the corner where my daughter's head office now stands. I can remember the hoop-skirts bobbing and bouncing on both sides of the doorway. It may be ill-bred to remind you of your lowly beginnings, but your presumption invited it."

Georgina was standing now. She could not speak for trembling. All the terrible days of her girlhood swept upon her again. An apparently spiritless creature had dared to remind her of facts that she had been forgetting with determination for many years. The two women stood staring at one another, and neither knew what to do next. At that moment, the front door opened, and footsteps crossed the hall.

As soon as Bess Hortop entered the room, she realized the feeling of tension. She bowed to Mrs. Macready; the offer of a handshake might have invited a snub, and she had not forgotten their one meeting.

“What is the matter, mother?” she asked. “You look like an army with banners.”

“Nothing, dear,” Mrs. Hortop’s voice was shaking a little. “Mrs. Macready is just leaving.”

There was nothing more to be said but farewells.

“Surely, you did not have the spunk to fight PeeVee’s mother!” Bess exclaimed afterwards. “I’m terrified of her.”

Her mother offered no explanation.

“She is a horrible woman,” was her only remark. “I am glad you were not at home when she came.”

Before returning to her boarding-house, Georgina took a long drive, to think over the events of the afternoon. The visit to Mrs. Hortop had been a mistake; she knew it now. What if Pierre were to hear the gist of their conversation? There was a possibility that it might bring about the very thing that she had wanted to prevent. She did not find it easy to deal with her son’s perversity.

“I hate this country!” she cried bitterly to Medora that night. “I wish we had never come back!”

“What’s wrong?” asked Medora.

“Everything is so insular and everybody so ordinary,” she declared. “It has ruined Pierre. I should have sent him to Oxford for his education. Then he would not have had so much in common with the people that he seems to prefer.”

For a while, Medora sat silent. She had a feeling that in a few years she would be settling in Toronto. Other women had done so; they called themselves “Madame” on the strength of a few years of study abroad, and talked intimately about foreign notables. With very little effort, they were personages in the community. To her, it looked a much more pleasant career than the struggles and hard work and disappointments of Europe.

“Mrs. Pentley Dickenson tells me that the native arts are blossoming everywhere,” she said at last.

Mrs. Dickenson had been assuring her that the twentieth century belonged to Canada; she clung tenaciously to the idea.

“Just trumpery amateurs!” exclaimed Georgina, derisively. “I loathe this city, and I’ll not be happy until I get out of it.”

Although Medora knew that her mother must, in the end, accept her view, she did not argue at a moment that was obviously inopportune.

“Don’t think any more about Gertrude’s disloyalty,” she said. “She’ll be happy enough with her red-headed yokel. After all, she has always been smalltown; not a bit like the rest of us.”

“She is exactly like your father’s family.”

And that assertion comforted Georgina.

CHAPTER XXIX
AT GEORGIAN BAY

I.

The island resort on Georgian Bay was a remote rocky paradise to which Bess Hortop frequently fled in the summer when she found the city oppressive. The Main House stood on the highest point of the scrub-covered rock, and on the broad verandahs PeeVee's party rested after their journey and drank deep of the wine of the northern air. Fresh from the dull atmosphere of Southern Ontario, the clarity of the blue gave them a feeling of giddiness. Across the water, they could see the crouching shoreline of other islands, with their wind-terrified trees, haunted still, in placid August, by the memories of December gales. Hardly a breath stirred, yet the faroff headlands looked to be torn by mad hurricanes.

"It is like some strange wild thing that will never be more than half-tamed, this Georgian Bay," said Bess. "You'll grow to love it."

"Let us swim in it and wash the train out of us!" suggested David, ready, after twenty minutes of sitting, for action again.

Other young people were making their way to the dock for a dip before the tea-hour; some of them ran across to shake Bess by the hand.

Being a privileged guest, Bess Hortop was accommodated in the Main House, while the others occupied three small rooms in a nearby cottage. In a very few minutes, Bess and David appeared in their bathing-suits. As the doctor had advised PeeVee not to spend too much time in the water, he remained on the sloping beach with Gertrude, who intended to learn to swim later, with her husband's assistance, when there were not too many people about to watch her early terrors and failures.

Bess pattered down the boarding behind David, and when he went off into the deep water, she dived after him. She did not swim with the easy delight of a mermaid, but with the steady sureness of a person who believes in mastering every undertaking. She followed David confidently to a nearby island and back again.

As she climbed the ladder to the dock, she called to him:

"You didn't think I could do it!"

"No, I didn't," he replied, honestly.

Gertrude applauded the swimmers. She had felt nervous when their heads bobbed above the depths of mid-channel. She had not feared for David—she believed him capable of any feat within the strength of man—but Bess Hortop was always surprising her with some new accomplishment.

Everybody appeared to know Bess. Men and women, boys and girls, crowded about her and were introduced to David. They were not given much time to get back into the water, and when the tea-bell tolled in the Main Building, there was an excited scattering across the rocks to the various cottages.

In the dining-room, more old friends turned up to greet Bess. Although her companions were ravenous, they spent as much time popping up and down as they did eating.

“Look here, Bess! We should have put you in a corner by yourself for this first meal,” complained PeeVee.

At the table to one side of them sat a lean, elderly man with a young, blonde wife. He appeared either happy or foolish, or both. The girl conversed with him in baby talk and he fed her across the table from the tip of his spoon. His playfulness never ceased for a moment. Even when he reached for the salt or sugar, he flapped his two hands towards it like an ungainly bird, causing his companion to simper with delight.

“He used to be a widower,” Bess explained, “and came here every summer with his daughters until the last of them married. Now he is back again with a new wife.” She did not intimate that she herself had refused the flattering offer of an opportunity to sit opposite him and be fed from the tip of his spoon!

Their other neighbour was the principal of a High School. He talked loudly and gave out a great deal of information. If he asked a question, it was merely to contradict his victim’s reply and supply the correct set of facts. His wife and her two sisters completed the party. They devoted their attention to eating, and whether the showers of wisdom that fell about them soaked in or ran off was something nobody could guess.

Bess whispered to PeeVee:

“When he learns who you are, you’ll have to climb the highest jackpine or bury yourself in a blueberry patch.”

Suddenly, PeeVee found himself noticing that Bess, on a holiday, did not relax the severity of her clothes; he wished that she were not so excessively tailor-made. Yet, she enjoyed herself with a youthful zest that he envied.

After dark, in the dancing-quadrangle, she knew all the best dancers. An orchestra of strangely-assorted instruments, led by a tinkling piano, made vile sounds from which the melodies of “The Merry Widow Waltz” and “Kiss Me Again” emerged at intervals, and Bess danced steadily all evening. She found time to provide partners for David and Gertrude; the young women were manoeuvring to be introduced to McLean. PeeVee preferred to watch, but he was not neglected; the news that he was Pierre V. Macready, M.P.P., of so much recent newspaper fame, had spread, and he found himself a magnet for all the tiresome old men and women on the island, led by the schoolmaster.

Before the end of the week, David was organizing daily fishing excursions to rescue his friend from the combined persecutions of those who admired him as a hero, or as a successful politician, or as a genius. They praised him to an embarrassing degree and then asked cheeky questions about his plans for the future.

“If they do not let me alone, I’ll send my resignation to the Clerk of the House by the next boat!” PeeVee declared.

“That would be just like you,” observed Bess, “to get fed up before you were nicely started.”

“I have stayed in long enough to discover the trick of it,” he replied. “Anybody who is able to swim in cold water can get elected in South Marlborough.”

They drifted through secluded channels, with tangled evergreens leaning over the crimson flowers at the water’s edge, and landed on the clean, white rock islands, where the Indian guides turned the day’s catch into a toothsome meal. None of them grew tired of the sizzling flesh of the black bass—nature’s most perfect invention in the way of a fresh water fish, combining a gallant fighting spirit in life with the most delicate of flavours in death.

In the crimson dusk, they returned to the hotel, where three of them made ready for the dance, while aggressive elderly gentlemen waved newspapers in PeeVee’s face and demanded his views on matters regarding which he knew absolutely nothing. They were not in the least discouraged when he told them so; they liked modesty in a brilliant young man.

II.

On Sunday, no fishing was done. In the morning, they wandered through the woods that covered the back of the island, and tested the blueberry patches. Gertrude still carried her kodak whenever she expected to come across a new background against which to photograph her friends. She made many snaps of David, now that she could tell him how she wanted him to look; he tried his best to provide the poses and smiles she desired, but the pictures usually came out stiff and comic. Still, Gertrude never left the beaten track of her life without her camera. She believed in it, in much the same way that Aunt Ann believed in her religion, convinced that someday it would justify her faith, if she lugged it about with her long enough.

They spent an hour sitting by a little bay, where the stillness of noon surrounded them. A wall of trees, beyond the reach of the winter's dashing waves, cast a shade over the boulders that formed natural seats. An occasional ripple, a message from some unseen boat, ran across the water and broke on the pebbles. Two gulls were engaged in a flirtation on the reefs nearby; they were still, though others passed in the distance with raucous screaming. Once, a black snake slithered down through the sedge and disappeared into the water.

PeeVee lay stretched on a patch of sand, one with the motionless stones, his eyes fixed on a belated iris that lingered in a tangle of green, as if he expected to catch a glimpse of the process of its dying. Bess sat still, too, in deep thought, and once she took out an envelope and did some figuring upon it. David was the first to grow tired of inaction, and lured Gertrude into a contest, skipping flat stones across the calm surface of the water.

So they idled, these four friends, on the first holiday they had ever spent together.

Late in the afternoon, they returned to the boathouse. David took a canoe to continue his wife's lessons in paddling; they had disappeared among the islands before PeeVee and Bess reached the main channel in their more leisurely skiff. The rowboat was broad of beam and slow moving. They made their way into a long lagoon, protected from the south-west breeze, and only dipped an occasional oar to guide the course of their drifting.

At last, Bess broke the silence:

"Have you been overdoing things this week?" she enquired. "You seem to be feeling exhausted today."

PeeVee gave two long pulls on the oars to demonstrate her mistake.

"I have been thinking about the nuisance of getting into harness next month," he told her.

"You will not find it easy," she agreed.

"I was not made for drudgery," he said.

Bess had never been able to understand that side of him. When she was on the water, she liked to be rowing; she rowed for rowing's sake. If she raced and won, she enjoyed the cheering, but she enjoyed still more the actual racing and the actual winning.

"In your heart of hearts, I believe you are purely domestic, after all," she suggested. "You are happier pottering behind four walls."

"David has found a strain of real happiness," he said.

She nodded.

"Bless him! He deserved it."

They drifted, and for a while spoke no more.

Bess turned her head over her shoulder and found PeeVee looking at her, oddly.

"If you and I had ever married," he suggested, "I suppose it would have been to one another."

She threw back her head and laughed, that rippling mirth of hers. Everybody liked to hear Bess Hortop laugh. She did it much less frequently now than when they were younger, PeeVee thought.

He felt a trifle nettled.

"What would there be so ludicrous about our being married?"

"Nothing," she replied. "It was the desperate way you said it. The two left-overs consoling themselves!"

"And yet it is not so very comic," he went on ruefully. "You and I have been wonderful friends. When I was getting well, I often lay awake at night and got to thinking things. I have let you down terribly."

She grew serious again.

"You must not get morbid," she said. "You and I have so much to do."

"It must look shabby to an outsider, to your family for instance," he persisted.

"Nesta is the only member of my family who still tries to shape my future," she told him, and added, a moment later: "What have you and I seen behind the scenes of married life to make us regard it as the only goal of existence?"

He asked her in return:

“What can you know of my sentimental illusions?”

She paused, wondering if by any chance his father had appeared to find with Georgina that beatitude of which every seeker is so certain at the beginning.

“Then I’ll speak for myself,” she assured him. “Take our home. Father is a dear in his way, and mother in hers, but they have never fitted together. They make the best of it and I suppose it has become a habit, but neither really counts for much with the other. Poor old darlings!”

“They have had so many misfortunes,” he suggested.

“It would have been a make-shift, anyway.”

PeeVee mentioned her sisters, all except Ruby successfully married.

Bess shook her head.

“You have no idea what our home was like when they were all scheming and planning to get the inside track with this or that boy.”

“They are all satisfied now they are married,” he reminded her.

“They are rivals still,” Bess said, “full of jealousies and petty plans to outshine one another.”

After pondering for a few minutes, she added:

“Anyway, their homes are not an inspiration. You know their husbands.”

That one brief comment disposed completely of Jessica, Clarine, and Stella.

“How about Nesta?” he enquired. “You have told me, yourself, that her home is a happy one.”

“Hannisford and the children seem to be all she wanted,” she assented, “but I am not quite like Nesta.”

She looked round at him, smiling, and he was smiling too.

“I admit that no woman would ever accept a husband if she looked into the marriages of the majority of her friends to find encouragement,” Bess said. “I haven’t the courage to risk getting settled permanently in futile and dispiriting surroundings.”

“The trouble with you is that you are incurably romantic,” he declared. “You keep on expecting to find an ideal that does not exist. Now a healthy sentimentalist glorifies even a disheartening reality."

Presently, they came from behind the island, and a freshening breeze spanked little waves against the side of the boat. They began to row again.

"You have all a bachelor's misgivings about marriage," said PeeVee. "I didn't know that a woman ever saw it that way."

"There are times," replied Bess, "when you feel that life is a long journey with no one along with whom you can expect to stand absolutely first."

"Sentimental after all?" he suggested.

"Until I look at the facts," she retorted. "If you and I were married, we'd be jangling in no time. Your frittering would get on my nerves in a couple of months."

"Do I fritter, Bess?"

"You must know it," she told him. "You do things too easily. You go halfway in so many directions. You'd soon turn your wife into a pessimistic virago."

The thought of PeeVee being goaded by a wife tickled both of them. They chuckled together, and pulled in unison at the oars.

III.

After dark, all the chairs on the verandahs were filled with lounging guests. In the dancing-quadrangle, a few old ladies sang hymns, with the untuned piano to accompany them, and the drone of their voices made the night weary. Parties of young people had gone for picnics among the islands, and for those who remained there was nothing to do. The schoolmaster seized the opportunity as peculiarly his own, and raised his voice to address his impromptu class:

"There is something about the crude and sinister beauty of the Canadian wilds that stirs the imagination," he said.

"It is tame enough here," suggested David, swinging his rocker.

The schoolmaster ignored him.

"My mind is stirred by the thought that yonder the Algonquins used to wander." He waved his hand vaguely in the direction of the open bay; he never could remember where the mainland was situated.

David looked at PeeVee, who was lying with his eyes closed.

“I recall being told at school that ‘Algonquin’ was a French contraction of ‘Algomequin’, meaning ‘the other side of the river’,” said the schoolmaster.

“I do not remember being told anything so interesting as that when I was at school,” observed a polite spinster, the sort of woman who encourages bores and gets snubbed for her pains.

The schoolmaster proceeded to snub her. “Just as well, because it was wrong. I have recently learned that the word came from the Micmac, ‘Algoomaking’, ‘at the place of the spearing of the fish’. The frozen north, you see.”

“How unfortunate!” said the polite spinster, abashed.

For a moment, the schoolmaster looked at her and seemed about to enquire what was unfortunate. He decided that she deserved no attention; instead he continued to be Sir Oracle:

“The Algonquins had the most picturesque myths and legends of all the Canadian Indians,” he said.

“I don’t know how you found that out,” objected a practical man, smoking a big cigar on the outskirts of the crowd. “I have had to do with hundreds of Indians, and I never met one in my life who could tell me a legend.”

The schoolmaster floored him with:

“I always secure my information from the most authentic sources.”

The practical man grunted; his manner cast an air of doubt upon all the erudition. A gushing young thing contributed another interruption:

“I adore Indian legends. I remember one about a fair Indian maiden” (“Squaw” murmured PeeVee. He was not asleep after all.) “who went over a cataract in a birch bark canoe, all for love. They called the place ‘The Lovers’ Leap’, or was it Niagara Falls?”

Some youngsters snickered; the class appeared to be getting out of hand. The schoolmaster’s voice took the note of a peremptory bell.

“The Algonquin legends are seldom unduly sentimental,” he said. “Their favourite hero is the comedian Wiske djak, the Canadian Jay. We prosaic Anglo-Saxons have corrupted the beautiful name to Whiskey Jack.”

The youngsters snickered again.

“If you would care to listen,” went on the schoolmaster, “I have put several of their myths into verse, nothing very pretentious, but they are suitable for a quiet evening, like the Sabbath.”

He fumbled in his breast pocket. Now, they all understood why he had seated himself where the light fell through the window, over his shoulder.

The schoolmaster had a faint fear that he might not be impressing the young Member of Parliament.

“Are you interested in the subject of Indian legends, Mr. Macready?” he enquired.

PeeVee opened his eyes.

“A little,” he said, “but do you recall their saying, ‘It is not well to tell stories in the summer, lest we die; but if stories are told, they must be told for ten successive evenings, to avert the evil’?”

The schoolmaster did not know that Mr. Macready was willing to compose an Indian motto at any moment, so he recognized the quotation at once.

“I have plenty for ten nights, if needs be,” he said.

True enough, he had, and he read most of them, with only short pauses for comment, until the hymn-singers came up from the quadrangle and created an interruption. Doubtless, he would have resumed, if his audience had not seized the chance to slip away. PeeVee, David, and Gertrude walked arm-in-arm towards their cottage.

“You are all in, old boy,” said David anxiously. “Perhaps, you had better not come fishing with us tomorrow.”

IV.

PeeVee felt tired, and anxious to be very still. Scraps of his conversation with Bess kept recurring to him, especially two of her remarks. So, even Bess, all self-reliance, occasionally dreaded walking alone; and she thought him to be, though she had said it jokingly, a fritterer. At least, no one could now accuse him of being nothing more than a smart young man on his way to New York; he was clearly anchored in his native land.

Clad in his pyjamas, he sat at the open casement-window and drew in long draughts of the refreshing night air. The moon, nearly at the full, made blotches of light on the water and the islands loomed black beyond. Two boats, filled with returning picnickers, glided into the path of yellow.

Youthful voices came up to him, singing a popular song in sour harmonies. They were young enough to feel there was nothing behind or beyond such a perfect hour. Would they be as well satisfied when they discovered that nature's plan was to divide them arbitrarily into domestic units? Would they consider it sufficient purpose in existence to support children, who would be dissolved, in their turn, into domestic units? Purpose? Could anything be more purposeless? And yet, it was not exactly purpose that he wanted. Friends and admirers made life a weariness to the flesh when they kept on demanding another step, and another step, and another step towards some vague goal.

Again he realized it was the drawn blinds that he resented. He wanted to know the impulses in the lives of other men, to see if they really tallied with his own, and to learn if human nature was entirely uniform in its fundamentals. But what availed the few furtive glimpses that he had been given into minds here and there? How many marriages were an instinctive effort to escape the loneliness of going forward entirely alone?

Through the partition, the murmur of voices and soft laughter came from Gertrude's room.

There was a marriage that differed from the arid, unlovely affairs considered by him and Bess. Perhaps, it was his affection for David and Gertrude that made him imagine a certain glamour, even a spiritual touch, in their coming together. He smiled that he should be thinking sentimentally of David, always masculine and whole-heartedly ribald in his mirth, and of Gertrude, condemned in her own family for her acid tongue.

A sudden gust of wind made a poplar near the window rattle like a shuttle, green and white in the moonlight. PeeVee shuddered as in a cold plunge.

That "gone" feeling sat heavily upon him. He poured out a glass of brandy, and then did not drink it. His doctor had advised no stimulants except in an emergency. He stood the glass on the bureau beside his bed.

His nerves had been playing him strange tricks all evening.

He climbed into bed and pulled the blanket to his chin. The wind was getting higher, and it whistled eerily through the screen. He liked the sound; it was a lullaby.

The day had been a peculiar one. Its events, its thoughts, its words were passing backwards and forwards, in time to the rattling shuttle of the poplar leaves.

To sleep, and to forget all the puzzles!

V.

In the fresh chill of the early morning, David McLean awoke. He sat up in bed, and felt as he always did with the return of day, that he must sing something. A man with such an urge to song should have a few notes in his voice worth pouring forth, if he could only discover them, but David remembered former experiences and considered the sleepers in the cottage. From his bed, he could see the water of the bay, still as paint, and the sky above, so blue that it looked as if all air and atmosphere had been removed, leaving only infinite distance.

David exercised violently for a few minutes before changing from his pyjamas to his bathing-suit. He did not expect company for his morning dip. He opened the door that separated the twin rooms, which were like the interiors of cedar boxes, and looked at Gertrude. She was sleeping soundly, almost as he had left her after saying “goodnight”. He felt a tenderness and protectiveness, and knew that he was being absurdly male. God bless her!

At PeeVee’s door, he paused and listened. All was quiet.

Fifteen minutes later, David returned, dripping and with his teeth slightly a-chatter. On his way back from the dock, he had met Bess, looking almost too neat for anything so informal as an early morning plunge. She had called to him:

“How one sleeps here! I die, and resurrect again in the morning.”

There was no sound from either of the neighbouring rooms. The Macreadys slept best when it was time to get up. David dressed himself. He would wake them at eight o’clock.

He picked up a weekly paper lying on his bureau, and ran his eye over the editorials. The editor was almost hysterical in his wrath about a recent proposal made by the Government. It seemed to David ridiculous that any man should grow so irate over a comparatively trifling matter. Whether the proposal became law or not, the country would probably run along just as smoothly or just as roughly as the individual might feel the motion of his economic life. It was obviously a game, and the editor’s play was to fly into a towering rage and use invectives. The writer of that editorial must have known he would be saying exactly the opposite if his own party had fostered the plan.

No wonder PeeVee wanted to turn back in disgust at the doorway of politics! What would he have to say about that article?

The door of PeeVee's room was unlocked. As David entered, he felt a stillness that gave him a sudden sensation of alarm. His quick eye caught one minor detail; a glass lay upset on the bureau, and a thin trickle of amber liquid gleamed on the surface of the wood.

PeeVee Macready was lying on his back. Many a time, McLean had seen him asleep, but never in a slumber so waxen, so motionless.

Leaning over the bed, David was shaken by a gust of affection. He lifted his friend in his arms and gazed down at him, as if by some miracle the surplus life that thrilled through him could stimulate that which lay so cold. PeeVee's head dropped back. And David realized the truth, an anguish that he had never before experienced tearing at his throat. His eyes took in the delicate line of the chin and the arch of the sensitive nostrils, which some persons had thought supercilious.

Very gently, he laid down that which seemed to him to be all that remained of his boyhood.

There were the others to be told, Gertrude and Bess.

Gertrude was awake when David entered her room. Like any housewife on a holiday, she liked to luxuriate in the thought that someone else was preparing the breakfast.

David sat down beside her, and smiling up at him, she saw the desolation in his eyes.

As she leapt up, he took both her hands.

"It's PeeVee!" she cried.

He nodded. It was difficult to speak.

Something told her there was nothing to be done.

"Why didn't you call me?" she asked. "Was he alone?"

David replied:

"It came quietly. Without a struggle, I think. In the night."

Her eyes were dry with the burning grief that absorbs all tears.

She felt the pressure of the strong hands that held hers.

"Poor Bess!" she whispered.

And he murmured:

“Good old PeeVee!”

CHAPTER XXX
AFTERWARDS

I.

September was spreading the golden glory of its departure over the gardens at the Beaches. In the flower-beds that surrounded David McLean's home, a few crimson zinnias and a bunch of marigolds stood up defiantly, lifting their faces above the yellow quilt of leaves. They fluttered down as steadily as flakes of snow.

Dozens of young couples stalked along the street pushing baby carriages; it was a youthful neighbourhood, filled with matrimony still in the experimental stages. The McLeans were not part of the regular Saturday afternoon procession; they had received a telephone message from Professor St. Quinton that he intended to call on them. Their son was propped up in his carriage, wearing his best dress, the christening robe donated by Aunt Bess; Gertrude did not realize that, at his age, even a wonderful dress would not make him interesting to strangers. David hovered in the offing, looking happy and rather foolish, as rugged men so often do when paternity impresses them as something fond and sacred.

When Professor St. Quinton arrived, he spent some minutes admiring the infant. Inwardly, he resented the babies born to former pupils; they reminded him unnecessarily that he was getting on.

He asked the boy's exact age; that was a safe query.

"Five months," replied Gertrude. "He came early in May."

The professor said he looked healthy.

Gertrude quoted her mother-in-law as corroboration. Mrs. McLean, who had been with them to meet her grandchild, had pronounced him the finest baby in her experience, and her experience was sufficiently extensive to make her an authority. She was now in Winnipeg, awaiting another descendant.

"What are you calling him?" the old man enquired.

"Gertrude has selected the initials, but not the names," David informed him.

Gertrude explained:

“We want him to have the initials P. V.”

Aunt Ann was partly responsible for their devotion to the two letters. She had made the suggestion that Pierre’s soul might not have departed, but might have passed into the newcomer, who would have been so close to his heart. Aunt Ann had been reading a book, in which the one idea that she had assimilated was something about souls hopping from body to body. David had not been in the least grateful to her. Before the baby came, Gertrude had been worried by the fear that the child might not be worthy.

“Why don’t you call him by PeeVee’s names?” asked St. Quinton.

“Oh, he hated them!” replied Gertrude. “He used to say they were flossy.”

“We have practically decided on Paul for ‘P’,” David added, “but the ‘V’ is a sticker. He couldn’t stand Vincent. I doubt if he’d like Victor or Vernon much better.”

“An odd difficulty,” observed the professor. “A little like writing music for an opera first and finding words to fit.”

They showed Professor St. Quinton over the house, and he promised them an etching from his collection. He suddenly remembered that he had omitted to give his old pupil a wedding-present; the pictures on the otherwise bare walls stirred his memory, which was usually torpid in such matters. Framed photographs made the house a history of David in sport,—photographs of David with the Petersville lacrosse team, photographs of David with all sorts of ’Varsity teams, photographs of David with the Argonaut rugby team, photographs of David with the General Wolfe hockey team, and photographs of David all twisted round himself after a drive in golf.

Back in the cramped sitting-room, their visitor placed upon the table a parcel that he had been carrying under his arm. Now he opened it, a large book with a handsome pale purple cover. David and Gertrude stood silent. They knew at once what it was, and neither could speak.

“I took the first copy off the press for you two,” he said, and held it up for them to see the bold inscription in gold letters:

Pierre Vincent Macready’s
Memorial Book

II.

To Mrs. Pentley Dickenson belonged the credit of having suggested the publication of the memorial book.

During the months that followed PeeVee's death, she prepared a lecture on his position in Canadian literature, commencing with the words:

"Shall we forget? If the fairest bud in the garden of our arts is torn ruthlessly from the stem by wanton fingers before it has reached the full glory of its blooming; if the sweetest voice among the singers falls silent before the morning passes into the heat of noonday; if Fate decrees that the hand, inscribing a name on the page of fame, must drop the pen with the flaming words not yet completed; shall we forget?"

In her address, she spoke with unqualified praise of the verse, the dramas, the essays, and the novels that had never seen the light of publication. She recounted intimate conversations between herself and the young genius, in which they had apparently used blank verse, a little in the style of her introductory paragraph.

When she reached the peroration, Mrs. Pentley Dickenson's voice invariably broke. It was not acting; her eloquence moved no one as much as it moved herself. There was always an undisguised sob in her final challenge: "Shall we forget?"

She repeated the lecture a number of times in Toronto, and later in Milltown and Petersville, and when popular interest was sufficiently stimulated, she proposed the memorial book. Her suggestion was that admirers should subscribe the money to pay for publication; then the fund, raised from the sales, could be used to erect a suitable memorial statue near the Petersville bridge.

Mrs. Pentley Dickenson experienced no difficulty in gathering together a strong and wealthy committee. In Milltown, Humphrey Cronk and the Rev. Roddy Cochrane joined hands to collect cash and exhort interest, with Mrs. Chapman as Secretary-Treasurer. In Petersville, John Marsh asked permission to be a committee of one. In a long letter to the local paper, he expressed his high regard for his late opponent:

"At first, I did not quite understand his boyish charm," he said, "but when the heat of the campaign was over, I grew to appreciate and love him more and more."

Everybody said it was tremendously sporting of John Marsh. He recaptured the constituency in the next by-election with comparative ease.

The situation in Toronto was not so simple. Professor St. Quinton consented to act as editor, and Mrs. Pentley Dickenson intended to be convenor. Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter created a serious complication by asking for a place on the committee. Because she was known to be a generous giver, when she gave at all, her offer could not very well be refused. It was not a pleasant situation for Mrs. Dickenson, who always had to cleanse her soul after an hour spent in the company of Mrs. Decasser-Hunter.

Pentley Dickenson reassured his wife:

"Probably she will not bother to attend the meetings."

He was mistaken. Mrs. Dorothea Decasser-Hunter never missed one. The gatherings supplied her with material with which to amuse the gang. She worked up a long scene, which she described as "The elderly sheep bleating her elegy over the grave of her literary ewe lamb". Everybody said it was a scream.

One night, Gypsy Hagar Bright tried to reprove her friends for their laughter. She began to tell them that their levity was a sacrilege, but the words were elusive after a gin supper.

Gypsy Hagar Bright burst into tears. She informed them that she had loved Pierre Macready. It was the irony of Fate that the one man she had loved with every atom of her being should have been so considerate of the honour of her damned husband!

Dorothea Decasser-Hunter said:

"Shut your mouth, Gypsy! You're drunk!"

All the way home, Gypsy sobbed in spasms on John Bright's shoulder. She would show that Hunter woman; she intended to write a poem about her passion for Pierre Macready to put in the memorial volume.

For days she laboured over a sonnet, with a copy of Swinburne and *An Englishwoman's Love Letters* beside her. When completed, the sonnet had nineteen lines, with one in the middle that did not rhyme with any of the others, but she could not compress into less space the array of amorous words gleaned by her.

As a reason for excluding "A Sonnet of Thwarted Desire", Professor St. Quinton laid down a rule that the volume should contain no poems but Macready's. Dr. Newlin Jenkins comforted Gypsy Hagar Bright with the assurance that it was another example of Toronto's prudery.

The Rev. Roddy Cochrane wrote “A Testimony”, in which he lamented the loss of the latent power, “which would have been harnessed in course of time for the uplifting of mankind, and the ennoblement of the moral vision of this fair Canada of ours”.

After a consultation with David and Gertrude, St. Quinton decided that “A Testimony” would hardly fit into the plan of the memorial.

When complete, the volume contained *Dierdre, the Keeper of a Bee*, the prize poem with its original decorations, two short stories, a number of newspaper articles, one fragmentary chapter intended for a novel, and several scraps of verse. The editor supplied the biographical note and Mrs. Pentley Dickenson contributed an appreciation. Hers was a most poetic effort, filled with elaborate imagery, but when analyzed carefully, it seemed to say that a versatile genius had died the death of a hero, without being given an opportunity to display any signs of versatility or genius; and that such a condition of affairs was altogether too bad. Of course, that was not the writer’s intention; Mrs. Pentley Dickenson’s style was beautiful, but her meanings were inexact.

III.

“If Pierre Vincent Macready does not become a tradition in this city, perhaps even in the literature of our country, it is not the fault of his well-meaning friends,” remarked Professor St. Quinton.

The McLeans were bending over the book.

David looked up.

“I am so glad you left out the testimony,” he said. “That was not PeeVee.”

The old man made a hasty excuse and hurried away. He feared a display of emotion; such things made him miserable for hours.

When David returned from the gate, Gertrude was gazing in a reverie at the purple dignity of the cover. Her face looked drawn.

David placed one hand upon her shoulder and with the other smoothed her hair.

“I don’t think PeeVee would have wanted such a thing,” he said, “but they did it out of love for him.”

He heard her whisper:

"Poor Bess!"

He did not remember when she had used that phrase before; nor did he recall his reply.

Now, he murmured again;

"Good old PeeVee!"

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 *PeeVee* by Fred Jacob]