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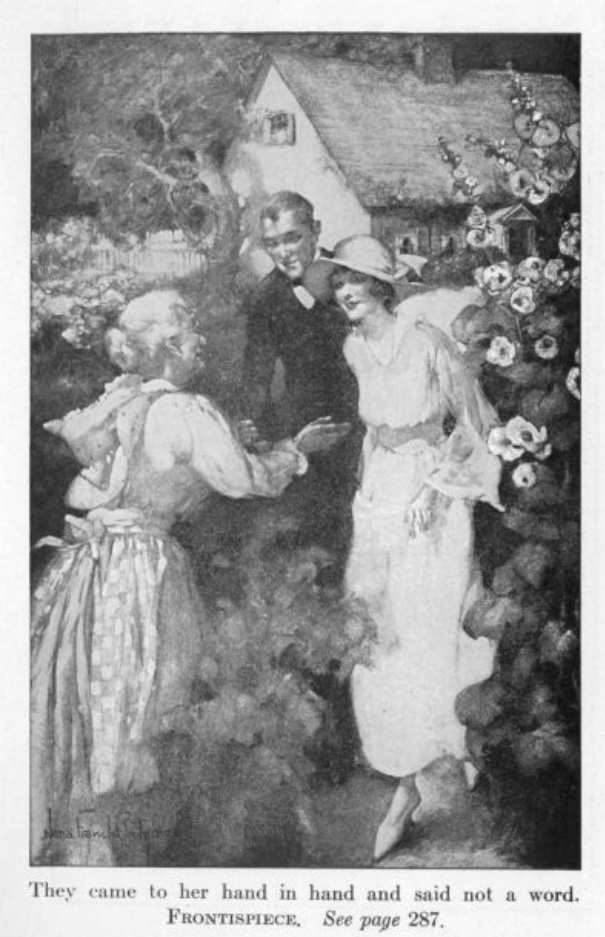

They came to her hand in hand and said not a word.
FRONTISPIECE. *See page* 287.

[Frontispiece: They came to her hand in hand and said not a word.]

GREEN VALLEY

BY

KATHARINE REYNOLDS

FRONTISPIECE BY
NANA FRENCH BICKFORD

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Dedication

TO ALL THE LITTLE ONE-HORSE TOWNS WHERE
LIFE IS SWEET AND ROOMY AND OLD-FASHIONED;
WHERE THE DAYS ARE FULL OF SUNSHINE AND
RAIN AND WORK; WHERE NEIGHBORS REALLY
NEIGHBOR AND MEN AND WOMEN ARE LIFE-SIZE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book was written to cure a heartache, to ease a very real and bad case of homesickness. I wrote it just for myself when I was very nearly ten thousand miles away from home and knew that I couldn't go back to the U. S. A. for two long years. It is a picture of a little Yankee town, the town I tried so hard to see over ten thousand miles of gray-green ocean.

When I was sailing from New York for South America that sunny June morning in 1913, about the last thing the last friend hurrying down the gangplank said was this:

"Of course you are going to be homesick. But it's worth it."

And I laughed.

But before that long stretch of gray-green ocean was plowed under I knew—oh, I knew—that

I was going to be most woefully homesick for the U. S. A.

A certain tall Swede from New Jersey and I discovered that fact about the same minute Fourth of July morning. We were standing on the deck, staring miserably back over the awful miles to where somewhere in that lost north our town lay with flags fluttering, picnic baskets getting into trains and everybody out on their lawns and porches.

We didn't look at each other after that first glance—that Swede and I. And we said the sunlight hurt our eyes.

Three months later I was sitting under the velvet-soft, star-sown night sky of the Argentine cattle country. I had seen volcano-scarred Martinique and had watched the beautiful island of Barbados rising like a fairy dream out of a foamy sea.

I had marveled at the endless beauties of Rio lying so picturesquely in its immense harbor and at the foot of its great, shaggy, sun-splashed, smoke-wreathed mountains. I had tramped through unsanitary Santos and loved it because it looked like Chicago in spite of its mountains and banana trees. I had witnessed a wonderful fiesta in Buenos Aires and had churned two hundred miles up the La Plata when it was bubbling with rain. And I had had a tooth pulled in Paysandu, the second largest city in Uruguay.

All that in three months! And there were still a million wonders to see. I loved and shall always love these radiant, sun-drenched uncrowded lands. But my heart was heavy as lead. For I was homesick. My eyes were tired of alien starshine, of alien, unfamiliar things, and my heart cried out for the little home towns of my own country.

But I could not go back for many, many months. So I learned Spanish and hobnobbed with wonderfully wise and delightful Spanish grandmothers. I grew to love some darling Indian babies. I interviewed interesting South American cowboys and discussed war and socialism with an Argentine navy officer. I exchanged calls and true blue friendships with soft-voiced Englishwomen. And I took tea and dinner aboard the ships of Welsh sea captains from Cardiff.

I had a wonderful time. I filled my notebook, took pictures and collected souvenirs. I laughed and told stories. Folks down there said I was good company.

But oh! In the hush of a rain-splashed night, when the fire in the grate dozed and dreamed and a boat siren somewhere out on the inky La Plata wailed and moaned through the black night, my heart flew back over those gray-green waves to a little town that I knew in the U. S. A. And to ease my longing I wrote Green Valley.

KATHARINE REYNOLDS.

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GREEN VALLEY

CHAPTER I

EAST AND WEST

"Joshua Churchill's dying in California and Nanny Ainslee's leaving to-night for Japan! And there's been a wreck between here and Spring Road!"

Fanny fairly gasped out the astounding news. Then she sank down into Grandma Wentworth's comfortable kitchen rocker and went into details.

"The two telegrams just came through. Uncle Tony's gone down to the wreck. I happened to be standing talking to him when Denny came running out of the station. Isn't it too bad Denny's so bow-legged? Though I don't know as it hinders him from running to any noticeable extent. I had an awful time trying to keep up so's to find out what had happened. I bet you Nan's packing right this minute and just loving it. My—ain't some people born lucky? Think of having the whole world to run around in!"

The telephone tinkled.

"Yes, Nan," Grandma smiled as she answered, "I know. Fanny's just this minute telling me. Yes, of course I can. I'll be over as soon as my bread's done baking. Yes—I'll bring along some of my lavender to pack in with your things."

"Land sakes, Grandma," exclaimed Fanny, "don't stop for the bread. I'll see to that. Just you git that lavender and go. And tell Nanny I'll be at the station to see her off."

Up-stairs in a big sunny room of the Ainslee house Grandma Wentworth looked reproachfully at a flushed, busy girl who was laughing and singing snatches of droll ditties the while she emptied closets and dresser drawers and tucked things into four trunks, two suitcases and a handbag.

"Nanny, are you never going to settle down and stay at home?" sighed Grandma.

"Yes, ma'am," Nanny's eyes danced, "some day when a man makes me fall in love with him and there are no more new places to go to. But so long as I am heartfree and footfree, and there's one alien shore calling, I'll have the wanderlust. I declare, Grandma, if that man doesn't turn up soon there will be no new places left for a honeymoon!"

Grandma smiled in spite of herself. There were things she wanted very much to say and other things she wanted very much to ask; but the trunks had to get down to the station and already the afternoon sun was low.

The two women worked feverishly and almost in silence so that when the packing was done they might get in the little visit both craved before the months of separation.

Nanny finally jumped on the trunks, snapped them shut, locked them and watched the expressman carry them down and out into his waiting dray. Then she sat down with a trembling little laugh.

"There—it's over and I'm really going! I have been to just about every country but Japan. I believe father would rather have skipped off alone this time. It seems to be some suddenly important international crisis that we are going over to settle. That's why we are going East the roundabout way. We must stop at Washington for instructions, then again at London and Paris."

"Nanny," mused Grandma, "there's a good many years difference in our ages but there's only one woman I ever loved as I love you. I think I might have loved your mother but she died the very first year your father brought her here. And she was ailing when she came. The other

woman that meant so much to me used to go traveling too. I always helped her with her packing. Then one day she packed and went away, never to come back."

"Was that Cynthia Churchill?" Nan asked gently.

"Yes—Cynthia. She was dearer than a sister to me, and neither of us dreamed that a whole wide world would divide us."

"Why did she go, Grandma?"

"Because a Green Valley man well-nigh broke her heart."

"A Green Valley man did—*that*? Oh, dear! And here I have been hoping that some day I might marry a Green Valley man myself."

"Nanny, I expect I'm old and foolish but I've been hoping and hoping that you'd marry a home boy and fearing you'd meet up with some one on your travels who would take you away from us forever. It would be hard to see you go."

The last sunbeam had faded away and golden twilight filled the room. Outside little day noises were dying out.

"Grandma dear, don't you worry about me. I intend to marry a Green Valley man if possible. But even if I didn't I'd always come back to Green Valley."

"No, you wouldn't. You couldn't, any more than Cynthia could. Cynthia loved this town better even than you love it. Yet she is lying under strange stars in a foreign land, far from her old home. Her father, they say, is dying in California. I suppose the old Churchill place will go now unless Cynthia's son comes back to take it over. But that isn't likely."

"Why—did Cynthia Churchill leave a son?" wondered Nanny.

"Yes. He must be a few years older than you. He was born and raised in India. 'Tisn't likely he'd come to Green Valley now that he's a man grown. Still, if Joshua Churchill dies out there in California, that boy will come into all his grandfather's property."

"Well," Nanny stood up and walked to the window from which she could see the fine old home of the Churchills, "if any one willed me a lovely old place like that Churchill homestead I'd come from the moon to claim it, let alone India."

"Nanny, are you sure there's no boy now in Green Valley who could keep you from roaming? I thought maybe Max Longman or Ronny Deering—"

"No—no one yet, Grandma. I like them all—but love—no. Love, it seems to me, must be something very different."

"Yes, I know," sighed Grandma.

When Uncle Tony returned from viewing the wreck he assured his townsmen that it was a wreck of such beautiful magnitude that traffic on the Northwestern would be tied up for twenty-four hours. It was feared that Mr. Ainslee would not be able to get his train and would have to drive five miles to the other railroad.

However Uncle Tony was reckoning things from a Green Valley point of view. As a matter of fact the wreckage was sufficiently cleared away so that the eastbound trains were running on time. It was the westbound ones that were stalled. The Los Angeles Limited Pullmans stood right in the Green Valley station. They were still standing there when Nanny and her father came to take the 10:27 east.

Perhaps nothing could explain so well Nanny Ainslee's popularity as the gathering of folks who came to see her off.

Fanny had stopped at the drug store and bought some headache pills.

"This excitement and hurry and you not scarcely eating any supper is apt to give you a bad headache. They'll come handy. And here's some seasick tablets. Martin says they're the newest thing out. And oh, Nanny, when you're seeing all those new places and people just take an extra look for me, seeing as I'll never know the color of the ocean."

Uncle Tony was tending to Nanny's hand luggage and in his heart wishing he could go along, even though he knew that one week spent away from his beloved hardware store would be the death of him.

It was a neighborly crowd that waited for the 10:27. And as it waited Jim Tumley started singing "Auld Lang Syne." He began very softly but soon the melody swelled to a clear sweetness that hushed the laughing chatter and stilled the shuffling feet of the Pullman passengers who crowded the train vestibules or strolled in weary patience along the station platform.

Then the 10:27 swung around the curve and the good-bys began.

"So long, dear folks! I shall write. Don't you dare cry, Grandma. I'll be back next lilac time. Remember, oh, just remember, all you Green Valley folks, that I'll be back when the lilacs bloom again!"

Nanny's voice, husky with laughter and tears, rippled back to the cluster of old neighbors waving hats and handkerchiefs. They watched her standing in the golden light of the car doorway until the train vanished from their sight. Then they drifted away in twos and threes.

From the dimmest corner of the observation platform a man had witnessed the departure of Nanny Ainslee. He had heard Jim's song, had caught the girl's farewells. And now he was delightedly repeating to himself her promise—"I'll be back when the lilacs bloom again."

Then quite suddenly he stepped from the train and made his way to where the magenta-pink and violet lights of Martin's drugstore glowed in the night. He bought a soda and some magazines and asked the druggist an odd question.

"When," asked the stranger, smiling, "will the lilacs bloom again in this town?"

Martin, who for hours had been rushing madly about, waiting on the thirsty crowd of stalled visitors, stopped to stare. But he answered. Something in the mysteriously rich face of the big, brown boy made him eager to answer.

"From the middle of next May on into early June."

The stranger smiled his thanks in a way that made Martin look at his clerk with a mournful eye.

"Jee-rusalem! Now, Eddie, why can't you smile like that? Say, if I had *that* fellow behind this soda counter I'd be doing a rushing business every night."

When the Limited was again winging its way toward the Golden West and train life had settled down to its regular routine, one dining-car waiter was saying to another:

"Yes, sah—the gentleman in Number 7 is sure the mighty-nicest white man I eber did see. And he sure does like rice. Says he comes from India where everybody eats it all the time. I ain' sure but what that man ain' a sure-enough prince."

CHAPTER II

SPRING IN GREEN VALLEY

Traveling men have a poor opinion of it. Ministers of the gospel have been known to despair of it. Socially ambitious matrons move out of it, or, if that is not possible, despise it. Real estate men can not get rich in it. And humorless folk sometimes have a hard, sad time of it in Green Valley.

But Uncle Tony, the slowest man in town but the very first at every fire and accident, says that once, when the Limited was stalled at the Old Roads Corner, a crowd of swells gathered on the observation platform and sized up the town.

One official, who—Uncle Tony says—couldn't have been anything less than a Chicago alderman, said right out loud:

"Great Stars! What peace—and cabbages!"

And another said solemnly, said he, "This is the place to come to when you have lost your last friend." And there was no malice, only a hungry longing in his voice.

The stylish, white-haired woman who, Uncle Tony guessed, must have been the alderman's wife, said, "Oh—John! What healing, lovely gardens!"

There's always a silly little wind fooling around the Old Roads Corners and so you get all the sweet smells from Grandma Wentworth's herb garden and all the heavenly fragrance that the flower gardens of this end of town send out.

Standing there you can look into any number of pretty yards but especially Ella Higgins'. Of course Ella's yard and garden is a wonder. It's been handed down from one old maid relative to another till in Ella's time it does seem as if every wild and home flower that ever bloomed was fairly rooted and represented there. It's in Ella's garden that the first wild violets bloom; where

the first spring beauty nods under the bushes of bridal wreath; where the last chrysanthemum glows.

Everybody in town got their lilies-of-the-valley roots and their yellow roses from Ella. Her peonies and roses, pansies and forget-me-nots are known clear over in Bloomingdale and bespoken by flower lovers in Spring Road. And as for her tulips, well—there are little flocks of them everywhere about, looking for all the world like crowds of gayly dressed babies toddling off to play.

The only time that poor Fanny Foster came near making trouble was when she said that of course Ella's place was all right but that it had no style or system, and that you couldn't have a proper garden without a gardener. Ella had scolded Fanny's children for carelessly stripping the lilacs.

Fanny Foster is as wonderful in her way as Ella's garden, though not so beautiful at first sight. Of course Green Valley loves Fanny Foster. Green Valley has reason to. Fanny did Green Valley folks a great service one still spring morning. But strangers just naturally misunderstand Fanny. They see only a tall, sharp-edged wisp of a woman with a mass of faded gold hair carelessly pinned up and two wide-open brown eyes fairly aching with curiosity. You have to know Fanny a long time before the poignant wistfulness of her clutches at your heart, before you can know the singular sweetness of her nature. And even when you come to love her you keep wishing that her collars were pinned on straight and that her skirts were hung evenly at the bottom. There are those who remember the time when Fanny was a beautiful girl, happy-go-lucky but always kind-hearted. Now she is famous for her marvelous instinct for news gathering and her great talent in weaving the odds and ends of commonplace daily living into an interesting, gossipy yarn. Green Valley without Fanny Foster would not be Green Valley, for she is a town institution.

However, before going any further into Green Valley's special characters and institutions it would be well to get a general feel of the town into one's mind. For it is only when you know how cozily Green Valley sets in its hollows, how quaintly its old tree-shaded roads dip and wander about over little sunny hills and through still, deep woods that you can guess the charm of it, can believe in the joyousness of it. For Green Valley is a joyous, sweetly human old town to those who love and understand it.

Take an early spring day when the winter's wreck and rust and deadness seem to be everywhere. Yet here in the Green Valley roads and streets little warm winds are straying, looking for tulip beds and spring borders. The sunshine that elsewhere looks thin and pale drops warmly here into back yards and ripples ever so brightly up and down Rabbit's Hill, where the hedges are turning green and David Allan is plowing.

The willows back of Dell Parsons' house are budding and all aquiver with the wildly glad, full-throated warblings of robins, bluebirds, red-winged blackbirds and bobolinks. While somewhere from the swaying tops of last year's reeds, up from the grassy slopes of Churchill's meadow, comes the sweet, clear call of meadow larks.

In the ditches the cushioning moss is green and through the brown tangled weeds along Silver Creek the new grass is peeping. The sunny clearing back of Petersen's woods will be full of mushrooms as the days deepen. And already there are big golden dandelions in Widow Green's orchard.

In these still, warm noons you can hear through the waiting, echoing air the laughing shouts of playing children and the low-dropping honk of the wild geese that in a scarcely quivering line are sailing northward across the reedy lowlands which the gentle spring rains will turn into soft, violet, misty marshes.

The last bit of frost has thawed out of the old Glen Road and in the young sunshine it seems to laugh goldenly as it climbs up, up to Jim Gray's squatty, weathered little farmhouse. The eastern windows of this little silver-gray house are gay with blossoming house plants and across the back dooryard, flapping gently in the spring breeze, is a line of gayly colored bed quilts. For Martha Gray has begun her house-cleaning.

The woodsy part of Grove Street, the part that was opened up only five years ago and is called Lovers' Lane because it curves and winds mysteriously through a lovely bit of woodland, is already shimmering with the life and beauty of spring.

Down on Fern Avenue, which is a wide, grassy road and no avenue at all, Uncle Roger Allan is carefully painting his chicken coops. Roger Allan is a tall, twinkling, smooth-shaven old man, and he lives in a house as twinkling and as tidy as himself. He is a bachelor, but years ago he took little David from the dead arms of an unhappy, wild young stepsister and has brought him up as his own. People used to know the reasons why Roger Allan had never married but few remember now. Here he is at any rate, painting his chicken coops and standing still every now and then to stare off at Rabbit's Hill where his boy, tall, sturdy David Allan, is plowing the warm, black fields.

Up in a narrow lane, at the side window of a blind-looking little house, sits Mrs. Rosenwinkle.

She is German and badly paralyzed and she believes that the earth is flat and that if you walked far enough out beyond Petersen's pasture you would most certainly fall off. She also believes that only Lutherans like herself can go to heaven. But to-day, beside the open window, with a soft, wooing, eiderdown little breeze caressing her face, she is happy and unworried, her eyes busy with the tender world and the two chubby grandchildren tumbling gleefully about in the still lane.

In his little square shoe shop built out from his house Joe Baldwin is arranging his spring stock in his two modest show windows. Joe is a widower with two boys, a gentle voice, a gentle, wondering mind, and a remarkable wart in the very center of his left palm. His shop is a sunny, cheerful room with plenty of benches and chairs. The little shop has a soft gray awning for the hot days and a wide-eyed competent stove for cold ones. Nobody but Grandma Wentworth and such other folks like Roger Allan ever suspect the real reason for all those comfortable sitting-down places in Joe's shop. And Joe never tells a soul that it is just an idea of his for keeping his own two boys and the boys of other men under his eye. In Joe's gentle opinion the hotel and livery barn and blacksmith shop are not exactly the best places for young boys to frequent. But of course Joe never mentions such opinions out loud even to the boys. He just makes his shop as inviting and homelike as possible, keeps the daily papers handy on the counter and a basket of nuts or apples maybe under his workbench. He is never lonely nor does he miss a bit of news though he seldom goes anywhere but to the barber shop on Saturdays and to church on Sundays.

Out on her sunny cellar steps sits Mrs. Jerry Dustin, sorting onion sets and seed potatoes. She is a little, rounded old lady with silvery hair, the softest, smoothest, fairest of complexions, forget-me-not eyes and a smile that is as gladdening as a golden daffodil. Few people know that she has in her heart a longing to see the world, a longing so intense, a life-long wanderlust so great that had she been a man it would have swept her round the globe. But she has never crossed the State line. She has big sons and daughters who all somehow have inherited their father's stay-at-home nature. Her youngest boy, Peter, however, is only seventeen and on him she has built her last hopes. He, like herself, has a gipsy song in his heart and she often dreams of the places they will visit together.

And while she is waiting for Peter to grow up she travels about and around Green Valley. She wanders far up the Glen Road into the deep fairy woods between Green Valley and Spring Road. Here she strays alone for hours, searching for ferns and adventure.

Once a week she rides away to the city where she spends the morning in the gay and crowded stores and the afternoon in the Art Institute. She never wearies of seeing pictures. She never, if she can help it, misses an exhibition, and whenever the day's doings have not tired her too much this little old lady will steal off to the edge of the great lake and dream of what lies in the world beyond its rim. She often wishes she could paint the restless stretch of water but though she knows its every mood and though she is a wonderful judge of pictures she can not reproduce except in words the lovely nooks and beauty spots of her little world.

Perhaps it is this knowledge of her limitations that causes that little strain of wistful sadness to creep into her voice sometimes and that sends her very often out beyond the town, south along Park Lane to the little Green Valley cemetery.

She loves to read on the mossy stones the unchanging little histories, so brief but so eloquent, some of them. The stone that interests her most and that each time seems like a freshly new adventure is the simple shaft that bears no name, no date, just the tenderly sweet and pathetic little message:

"I miss Thee so."

Mrs. Jerry Dustin knows very well for whom that low green bed was made and who has had that little message of lonely love cut into stone. But she longs to know the rest of the story.

Sometimes she has a real adventure. It was here at the cemetery one day that she met Bernard Rollins, the artist. He was out sketching the fields that lie everywhere about, rounding and rolling off toward the horizon with the roofs of homesteads and barns just showing above the swells, with crows circling about the solitary clusters of trees, and men and horses plodding along the furrows.

No artist could have passed Mrs. Jerry Dustin by, for in her face and about her was the beauty that she had for years fed her soul. So Rollins spoke to her that summer day and they are friends now, great friends. She visits his studio frequently and he tells her all about France or Venice or wherever he has spent his busy summer. And she sits and listens happily.

Rollins bought out what used to be in Chicago's young days an old tavern and half-way house. It was a dilapidated old ruin, crumbling away in a shaggy old orchard full of gnarled and ancient apple trees, satin-skinned cherry trunks, some plums and peaches, and tangled shrubs of all kinds.

With the aid of his wife Elizabeth, some dollars and much work, Rollins transformed the old ruin into the sort of a country place that one reads about and imagines only millionaires may have. They say that when Old Skinflint Holden saw the transformation he stood stock-still, then tied his team to the artistic hitching post under the old elms and went in search of Rollins. He

found him in the orchard in the laziest of hammocks literally worshipping the flowering trees all about him. Old Skinflint Holden was awed.

"Jehohasaphat! Bern, how did you do it?"

"Oh," smiled the artist, "we cleaned and patched it, put on a new bit here and there and sort of nursed it into shape. Doc Philipps gave us bulbs and seeds and loads of advice and then Elizabeth, I guess, sort of loved it into a home."

"Well—I guess," mused Skinflint Holden. "Must have cost you a pretty penny?"

"Why, no, it didn't. I'm telling you it wasn't a matter of dollars so much as love. If you use plenty of that you can economize on the money somewhat. Of course, it means work but love always means service, you know."

Old Skinflint Holden couldn't understand that sort of talk. It was said that love was one of the things he knew nothing about. His great star was money. He had had a chance to buy the old tavern but had seen no possibilities in it of any kind. So he had passed it up and now a man whose star was love and home had made a paradise of the hopeless ruin.

"And I'll be danged if he didn't have a whole small field of them there blue lilies that the children calls flags, over to one corner looking so darn pretty, like a chunk of sky had dropped there. I'd a never believed it if I hadn't saw it. I guess Doc Philipps didn't give him them."

Rollins is a great crony of Doc Philipps who almost any day of the year may be caught burrowing in the ground. For Doc Philipps is a tree maniac and father to every little green growing thing. He knows trees as a mother knows her children and he never sets foot outside his front gate without having tucked somewhere into the many pockets about his big person a stout trowel, some choice apple seeds, peach and cherry stones or seedlings of trees and shrubs. In every ramble, and he is a great walker, he searches for a spot where a tree seedling might grow to maturity and the minute he finds such a place off comes his coat, back goes his broad-rimmed hat and out comes the trowel and seed. Travelers driving along the road and catching sight of the big man on his knees say to each other, "There's Doc Philipps, planting another tree."

Up in the big, prim old Howe house sits Madam Howe. She is called Madam to distinguish her from her daughter-in-law, Mrs. George Howe. She is a regal old lady of eighty-three and spends most of her time in her room up-stairs where are gathered the wonderful heirlooms,—older, far older than she.

There is the mellow brown spinning wheel, and armchairs nearly two hundred years old and a walnut table that was mixed up in countless weddings and a beautifully carved old chest and a brocade-covered settee. There are old, old books and family portraits and there is the wonderful Madam herself, regal and silver-haired. If she likes you she will take you to her great room and tell you about the Revolutionary War as it happened in and to her family; and about her great ride westward in the prairie schooner; about the Indians and the babyhood of great cities, and the lovely wild flowers of the virgin prairie; about the wild animals, the snakes, the pioneer men and women of what is now only the Middle West.

She will take from out that age-darkened, beautiful chest dresses and bits of lace and samplers like the one that hangs framed above her writing desk and tells how it was stitched by one,

ABIGAIL WINSLOW PAGE,
Age 13.

There is one thing you must always remember if you wish to stand in Madam's good graces. You must never sit down on the brocade-covered settee with the beautiful rose wreath hand-carved on its gracefully curving walnut back. Some day when she gets to know you very well she will tell you of the wonderful love stories that were enacted on that settee. She will begin away, away back with some great-great-grandmother or some great-grand-aunt and come gradually down to her own time and history; and as she tells of the young years of her life, her eyes will go dreaming off into the past and she will forget you entirely. And you will slip away from that great room and leave her sitting there, regal and silver haired, her face mellow and sweet with the golden memories of far, by-gone days.

You can wander in this happy, aimless fashion all about Green Valley, go in and out its deep-rooted old homes, stroll through its tree-guarded old streets, and at every turn taste romance and adventure, revel in beauty of some sort. Even the old, red-brick creamery, ugly in itself, is a thing of beauty when seen against a sunset sky.

The people who pass you on the streets all smile and nod, stranger though you are. And if you happen to be at the little undistinguished depot just as the 6:10 pulls in, you will see pouring joyously out of it the Green Valley men, those who every day go to the great city to work and every night come thankfully back to their little home town to live.

They hurry along in twos and threes, waving newspaper and hand greetings to the home folks and the store proprietors who stand in their doorways to watch them go by.

There is a fragrant smell of supper in the air and a slight feel of coming rain. Here and there a mother calls a belated child. Doors slam, dogs bark and a baby frets loudly somewhere. In somebody's chicken coop a frightened, dozing hen gargles its throat and then goes to sleep again. The frogs along Silver Creek and in Wimple's pond are going full blast, and in her fragrant herb garden stands Grandma Wentworth. She is looking at the gold-smudged western sky and watching the sweet, spring night sift softly down on Green Valley.

She stands there a long time sensing the great tide of new life that is flushing the world into a new, tingling beauty. She sees the lacy loveliness of the birches, the budding green glory of her garden. Then she smiles as she tells herself:

"It won't be long now till the lilacs bloom again. Nanny will be here soon now. And who knows! Cynthia's boy may come back to live in his mother's old home."

CHAPTER III

THE LAST OF THE CHURCHILLS

Even in beautiful Los Angeles days can be rainy and full of gnawing cold and gloom.

On such a day Joshua Churchill lay dying. He could have died days before had he cared to let himself do so. But he was holding on grimly to the life he no longer valued and held off as grimly the death he really craved. He was waiting for the coming of the boy who was so soon to be the last of the Churchills.

He meant, this grim old man, to live long enough to greet the boy whom he remembered first as a baby, then as a little chap of ten, and later as a shy boy of seventeen.

Joshua Churchill had been to India several times. But he had never stayed long. He said that no man who had spent the greater part of his life in Green Valley could ever be happy or feel at home anywhere else.

Joshua Churchill went to India to see his daughter and grandson; but mostly to coax that daughter's wonderful husband to give up his fanatically zealous work among the heathen of the Orient and come and live in peace and plenty in a little Yankee town where there was a drug store and a post office and a mossy gray old stone church with a mellow bell in its steeple.

The wonderful and big son-in-law always listened respectfully to his big Yankee father-in-law. Then he would smile and point to the little brown babies lying sick in their mothers' arms.

"Somebody," he would say gently, "must help and heal and neighbor with these people."

As there was no answer that could be made to this the Yankee father-in-law said nothing. But the very last time he was in India he looked sharply at his daughter and then said wearily and bitterly:

"Sinner and saint—we men are all alike. We each in our own way kill the women we love. Cynthia is dying for a sight of Green Valley and Green Valley folks."

At that Cynthia's husband cried out. But Joshua Churchill did not stay to argue. He went away and never came back. He wanted of course to go back to Green Valley. But he could not bear to live alone in the big house where he had once been so happy. So he went instead into exile. And now he was dying in California.

As for Cynthia's husband, he discovered when it was too late to do any good that while he had been saving the souls and the children of alien women and men he had let the woman who was dearer to him than life die slowly and unnoticed. Saints have always done that and they always will.

Joshua Churchill meant to stay alive long enough to explain the shortcomings of both saints and sinners to the boy who was the last of the Churchills. He had half a mind to exact a promise from the boy. He meant too to tell him a long and a rather strange story and implore him to beware of a number of things.

But when Cynthia's son,—tall, bronzed and serene, smiled down on the old man who even in death had the look of a master, the warnings, the bitterness melted away and Joshua Churchill smiled back and sighed gratefully.

"Well, son,—I don't know as that saint father of yours and your sinning granddad made such a mess of things after all. It's something to give the world a man. Go back home to Green Valley and marry a Green Valley girl."

And without bothering to say another word Joshua Churchill died.

Nanny came back to her valley town when the budded lilacs dripped with rain and the wooded hillsides were blurred with spring mists.

But Green Valley rain never bothered Nanny Ainslee. Those who were not out to greet her telephoned as soon as they heard she was back home again.

And just as she had gone to help pack, Grandma Wentworth came to help unpack. There were three trunks besides those Nanny had taken, from Green Valley. Nanny laughed and chuckled as she explained.

"The joke's on father. We met up with a nice American chap on our travels. He was so likable that father, who was pretty homesick by that time and would have loved anything American, fell in love with him. I can't quite understand why I didn't lose my head too. I came mighty near it once or twice. But the minute I'd think of that boy here in Green Valley I'd grow cool and calm. That's all that saved me, I believe. But father was quite taken with him and being a man he felt sure that I must be. He was so sure that my maiden days were over that he dared to be funny. One day he sent up these three brand new trunks to the hotel. Said I might as well get my trousseau while I was gadding about this time. Well—I was pretty mad for a minute. But I concluded that father wasn't the only one in our family who is fond of a joke. So I just blushed properly and went off shopping. And I tell you, Grandma, Green Valley will just grow cross-eyed looking at the pretties that I have in these treasure chests. I showed Dad every mortal thing I bought and asked his advice and was oh, so shy—and wondered if he just *could* let me spend so much; and Dad just laughed and said he guessed an only daughter could be a bit extravagant, and to just go ahead. So I smiled again shyly and demurely and went ahead. And when not so much as a bit of ribbon or a chiffon veil could be squeezed in anywhere I shut those trunks and sat on them and swung my feet and bet Dad that I wouldn't marry that boy after all. And he was so sure that he was rid of me at last and that he could start out on his next trip blissfully free and alone that he bet me Jim Gray's Gunshot that I'd be married in six months to the gentleman in question. Of course it was a disgraceful business, the two of us betting on a thing like that, but somehow we never thought of that, we were so busy teasing each other. Well, of course Dad lost. I refused that nice chap three times in one week. And here I am, heart-free still, with three trunks of booty and the finest, blackest, and swiftest little horse in the county—mine. This has certainly been a profitable trip! Poor Dad, he's so delightfully old-fashioned. He does so believe in early marriages and husbands and wedding veils. And he thinks that twenty-three is absolutely a grewsome age. Poor Dad! And he says too that for what I have done to him in this trunk deal I shall be duly punished. That the good Lord who looks after the fathers of willful, old-maidish daughters will see to that. Why, he has gone so far as to say that he wouldn't be surprised if I wound up by marrying some weird country minister. Fancy that! Why, that from father is almost a curse. And he's worried sick about my riding Gunshot. But I shall manage. So expect to see me dash up to your gate in great style any day now."

"Nanny," warned Grandma, "I don't trust that horse either. You'd better be mighty careful. That horse isn't mean but it's young and scary."

Nan however laughed at fear and rode all about and around Green Valley town. And then one evening when she was least watchful and tired from the long day's sport, a glaring red motor came honking unexpectedly around the corner. So sudden was its appearance, so startling its body in the sunset light, so shrill its screeching siren, that the young horse reared. And Nan, caught unprepared, was helpless.

From the various groups of people standing about figures detached themselves and shot across the square. But before any one could reach her or even see how it happened, a tall stranger was holding the daring girl close against his breast with one arm, and the quivering young horse with the other.

He was reassuring the frightened animal and looking quietly down at the girl's face against his breast. Under that quiet look Nan's blue-white lips flushed with life and she tried to smile gratefully. When he smiled back and said, "So you *did* get back by lilac time," Nan was well enough to wonder what he meant. And the little crowd of rescuers arrived only just in time to hear Nanny thanking him.

But when he asked her where in Green Valley town Mary Wentworth lived everybody stared and listened. Even Nan came near staring. But after the puzzled look her face broke into a smile.

"Oh—you mean Grandma Wentworth?"

He smiled too and said, "Perhaps. I am a stranger in Green Valley. But my mother was a Green Valley girl. She was Cynthia Churchill and Mary Wentworth was her dearest friend."

"Then you are—why, you must be—" stammered Nanny.

"I am Cynthia Churchill's son."

"From India?" questioned Nan.

"From India," he said quietly.

From out the group of Green Valley folks, now dim in the May twilight, a voice spoke.

"You may come from India but if you are Cynthia Churchill's son you are a Green Valley man and this is home. So I say—welcome home."

Roger Allan, straight and tall and speaking with a sweetness in his voice those listening had never heard before, stepped up to the young man with outstretched hand.

The young stranger looked for a moment at the dimming streets, into the kindly faces about him, and then shook hands gladly.

"It is good to be home," he said, "but I wish I had mother here with me."

CHAPTER IV

A RAINY DAY

On a rainy day Green Valley is just as interesting as it is in the sunshine. Somehow though the big trees sag and drip and the wind sighs about the corners there is nothing mournful about the streets.

The children go to school just as joyously in raincoats and rubber boots. Their round glad faces, minus a tooth here and there, smile up at you from under big umbrellas. After the school bell rings the streets do get quiet but there is nothing depressing about that; for as you pass along you see at doors and windows the contented faces of busy women.

Old Mrs. Walley sits at her up-stairs front window sewing carpet rags. Grandma Dudley at her sitting room window is darning her grandchildren's stockings and carefully watching the street. Whenever anybody passes to whom she wants to talk she taps on the window with her thimble. She is a dear entertaining old soul but hard to get away from. Women with bread at home waiting to be put into pans and men hungry for their supper try not to let Grandma Dudley catch sight of them.

Bessie Williams always makes cinnamon buns or doughnuts on rainy days. She always leaves her kitchen door open while she is doing this because she says she likes to hear the rain while she is working—that it soothes her nerves.

So as you come up from around Bailey's strawberry patch and Tumley's hedge you get a whiff of such deliciousness as makes your mouth water. And more than likely Bessie sees you and comes running out with a few samples of her heavenly work. As you dispose of those cinnamon buns you forget that Bessie's voice is a trifle too high and too sweet, and that she is inclined to be at times a bit overly religious and too watchful of what she calls "vice" in people.

Over in front of the hotel Seth Curtis is standing up in his wagon and sawing his horses' mouths cruelly. Seth has been so viciously mistreated in his youth that he now abuses at times the very things that he loves. He has paid two hundred and fifty dollars apiece for those horses and is mighty proud of them. But Seth's temper is never good on a rainy day. Rain means no teaming and a money loss. Seth is a mite too conscious of money. At any rate, the loss of even a dollar makes him a sullen and at the least provocation an angry man. He isn't liked much except by his wife and children.

In his home Seth is gentle and kind. Maybe because here he finds the love and trust that all his life he has craved and been denied. Few of his neighbors know how he laughs and romps and sings with his children and what wonderful yarns he tells them, all made up out of his own head.

He is known to come from York State and has a Yankee shrewdness that some people say can at times be called something else. He is wide and square-shouldered though short, has a round stubborn head of reddish hair with a promising bald spot, close-set blue eyes and an annoying, almost an insulting habit of paying all his bills promptly and asking odds and favors of nobody.

To-day he was to have taken a load of stones, granite niggerheads of all sizes, up to Colonel Stratton's place. The Colonel is going to make a fern bed around his summer house.

Colonel Stratton is a real military colonel. He wears burnsides and they are very becoming. He has the most beautifully located residence in Green Valley and like Doc Philipps has some of

the most beautiful trees in town. The great silver-leaf poplar guarding the wide front lawns and the magnificent hardwood maples are the pride of the colonel's heart.

The colonel has a cultivated garden that keeps his gardener pretty busy. But the wild-flower garden along the rambling old north fence the colonel tends himself. In June it is a hedge of lovely wild roses followed a little later by masses of purple phlox. Then come the meadow lilies and the painted cup and so on, until in late October you can not see the old fence for the goldenrod, asters and gentians.

Today the colonel hoped to work on his fern bed but the weather being what it is he takes instead from his well-filled book shelves "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" and settles down to a day of solid joy.

In the big, softly stained house that stands in the solemn shade of immense pines, just diagonally across from the colonel's house, lives and labors Joshua Stillman, a man with the most wonderful memory, the readiest tongue when there is real need of it, a little man brimful of the most varied information and the sharpest humor.

For forty years and more he has been Green Valley's self-appointed librarian. He draws no salary except the joy of doing what he loves to do and he squanders, as his friends truly suspect, much secret money of his own on it. The library is housed in the old church in a room so small and dark that it hides the big work of this little man.

Joshua Stillman must be old but nobody ever thinks of what his age might be, he is so very much alive. He goes to the city every day and comes back early every afternoon. As he so seldom talks about himself nobody knows exactly what he does except that it has to do with books and small print.

Like Madam Howe, Joshua Stillman comes from the Revolutionary War district and has great family traditions to uphold. He upholds them with great humor. Not only is he full of old war and family lore, but he has been mixed up with things literary. He has known men such as Lowell and tells yarns about Emerson and Oliver Wendell Holmes.

He too came West in a prairie schooner and remembers all its wildness, its uncouthness, its railroadless state. And he tells marvellous stories about snakes, Indians and the little Chicago town built out on the mudflats. He remembers very well indeed the steady stream of ox-teams toiling over the few crude state roads. And he has in his house rare volumes, valuable editions of famous works. He lets you examine these if he thinks you are trustworthy and have a gentle way with books.

There is another rare soul, the Reverend Alexander Campbell, who must be introduced this rainy spring day. He is a retired Green Valley minister and is full of humor and wisdom. He is an easily traced descendant of the Scottish Stuarts. On a rainy day you will always find him busy writing up the history of his family. Not that he himself cares a fig for his genealogy. He is writing the book because it gives him something to do and earns him a little peace from the women folks.

He is a man whom the Lord has seen fit to try with a host of female relatives, all family proud. He can fight the Devil and has done so quite gallantly in four or five volumes of really good old-fashioned sermons, "books," as he will tell you with a twinkle in his eye, "that nobody could or would read nowadays." But he can not fight the women of his family, so with a mournful chuckle he sits down every rainy day and labors mightily on this great "historical work."

On sunny days he goes about his grounds, petting his trees and his chickens, and working in his garden. He has several ingenious methods of fighting weeds and raises the earliest, best and latest sweet corn in Green Valley.

But men like the Colonel and Joshua Stillman and the Reverend Alexander Campbell are representatives of Green Valley's leisure class. They give Green Valley its high peace, its aristocratic flavor. But they are a little remote from the town's workday life, being given to dreams and memories and scholarly pursuits. They know little of the doings and talks that go on in Billy Evans' livery barn, or the hotel. They do, of course, go to the barber shop, the bank and the postoffice, and always when abroad give courteous greeting to every townsman. But they have never sat in the smoky, red-painted blacksmith shop or among the patriarchs and town wits who in summer keep open-air sessions on the wide, inviting platform in front of Uncle Tony's hardware store, and in winter hold profound meetings around the store's big, glowing stove.

Uncle Tony's is the most social spot in town and is from a news-gathering point of view most ideally situated. Sitting in one of the smooth-worn old armchairs that Uncle Tony always keeps handy, you can view the very heart of Green Valley's business life. Without turning your head scarcely you can keep an eye on Martin's drug store, keep tab on the comings and goings of the town's two doctors, and the hotel's arriving and departing guests. If a commotion of any kind occurs in front of Robert Hill's general store you see all the details without losing count of the various parties who go in and out of Green Valley's new bank.

Twice a day the active part of Green Valley dribbles into the post-office where friends instantly pair off and mere acquaintances stand idly by and discuss the weather. Besides its mail,

Green Valley usually buys two cents' worth of yeast and a dozen of baker's buns and then goes down the street and orders its regular groceries at Jessup's.

Jessup's has been the one Green Valley grocery store ever since the flood or thereabout, so venerable an establishment is it. Green Valley would as soon think of changing its name as permitting a new grocer to open up a rival store. And nobody dreams of disloyalty when buying trifles at the post-office. In fact housewives are openly glad that Dick, the postmaster, has taken to keeping strictly fresh yeast for their leisure days and nice bakery things for times of stress and unexpected company.

Dick Richards is a small, smiling, curly-headed man who looks older than he should. This is because he wears a big man's mustache and is a self-made boy. His parents died when he was barely old enough to realize his loss and since then he has fought the world without a single weapon unless cheerfulness and a giant patience can be called weapons. Small, ungifted, he early learned to be content with little. But side by side with this cheerful content is always the giant hope of great things to come. And so though Green Valley buys only its yeast and buns over his little counter he is happy and wraps each purchase up carefully. And all the time he is thoughtfully, carefully setting out other handy things and aids to the harassed housewife. For with his giant patience Dick is waiting,—waiting and planning for a time that is coming, that he knows must come. He talks these matters over with no one except Joe Baldwin. He and Joe are great friends. Joe's little shop is such a restful, hopeful place and Joe himself a gentle rather than a loud and swearing man. One can talk things over joyfully with Joe and feel sure of having one's confidence understood and kept. Like Joe, Dick shrinks a little from the noisy, wholly earthy atmosphere of the livery barn and blacksmith shop. He and Joe often go together of a Saturday to the barber shop. They usually stay after closing hours for the barber is their mutual friend.

This barber, John Gans, is a talker, a somewhat fierce and vehement little man who lectures on many subjects but mostly on human rights and politics. Joe and Dick, both silent men, look with awe at John's great mental and discoursive powers. And because his views are theirs they listen with something like joyful gratitude to hear their own thoughts so clearly and fearlessly expressed.

The fiery little barber is thought by some to be a German anarchist and by others a Russian socialist. Joe and Dick have been repeatedly warned against him. But they are his loyal friends at all times. This three-cornered friendship is little understood by the town and ridiculed as a childish thing by the great minds that foregather at Uncle Tony's.

But Grandma Wentworth remarked one Saturday afternoon, right in the heart of town too, when Main Street was so crowded that everything that was said aloud would be told and retold at church the next moraine and repeated through the countryside the week following,—pointing to Joe, Dick and John who all three happened to be going to the bank for change,—"There go Green Valley's three good little men. And that makes me think. I have another letter from Nanny Ainslee from Italy enclosing foreign stamps for John."

Now until then nobody knew that John Gans was collecting stamps. But that's Grandma Wentworth. She always knows things about people that nobody else knows. And when any Green Valley folks go a-traveling they sooner or later write to Grandma Wentworth. Sooner or later they get homesick for Green Valley and they write for news to the one person who, they know, will not fail to answer.

Of course some of them, like Jamie Danby, get into trouble. Jamie ran away from home with a third-rate show. The show got stranded somewhere in the western desert and Jamie wanted to come home. He knew that his mother would be glad to see him but he wasn't at all sure of his father. So he wrote to Grandma Wentworth, begging her to fix things up. And she did.

And there was Tommy Dudley who went away home-steading somewhere out West and who writes regularly to Grandma Wentworth in this fashion:

". . . for heaven's sake send me your baking-powder biscuit recipe and how do you make buckwheat pancakes, and send me all kinds of vegetable seeds and what's good for chicken lice and a sore throat, and tell Carrie Bailey I ain't forgot her and that as soon as I've got things going half-way straight here I'll come back and get her. Just now the dog, the mules and chickens and a family of mice and I are all living peacefully together in the one room but we're awful healthy if a good appetite is any kind of a sign. I can't write to Carrie because her folks open all her letters and they'd nag her into marrying that old knock-kneed, squint-eyed, fat-necked son-of-a-gun of an Andrew Langly, if they thought she was having anything to do with a worthless heathen cuss like me. And say, Grandma, throw in some of your flower seeds, those right out of your own garden, you know, the tall ones along the fence and the little ones with the blue eyes and the still white ones that smell so sweet. You don't know how lonesome I get off here. I've got that picture of you in the sunbonnet right where it's handy, but how I wish I had a picture of you without the sunbonnet so's I could see your face, and say, Grandma, since I've been alone out here I've come to see the sense in praying now and then, and tell Freddy Williams I'll knock the stuffin's out of him when I hit town which will be in about two years at the latest. He knows what for. Is Hank Lolly still talking his way into three square meals a day and drinks, and is all the news still ground over at Uncle Tony's gossip factory and is Mert Hagley as big a tightwad as ever and is it true that Billy Evans married a red-headed girl from Bloomingdale and started a livery barn, and

has Green Valley got a minister yet that's suitable to you and Uncle Roger Allan? I'll have to stop and run out to the mail box with this. The nearest one is twenty-five miles away but that's near in this country and now for pity's sake, Grandma, don't forget …"

She didn't forget a thing. The messages were all delivered, the seeds sent off and every question fully answered. Grandma did more than that. She had Nanny Ainslee take pictures of the various Green Valley institutions while going full blast. How Tommy laughed at the familiar faces in Uncle Tony's armchairs and at Hank Lolly leaning up against the livery barn, and how homesick he grew as he looked at the crowd getting off at the station, and the school children playing in the old school yard where he used to play. The picture of Grandma Wentworth and Carrie standing on Grandma's front porch hurt his throat and shook him strangely. That was Tommy Dudley.

And there was Susie Melton. Grandma saved and remade Susie that time she went to New York to see the world. Susie had taught a country school for twenty years, ever since she was sixteen, and that trip to New York was her first vacation. Susie was an innocent soul and the very second day in the great city some heartless thief took everything out of her purse but a two-cent stamp. Susie was panic-stricken and the only thing she could think of was Grandma Wentworth's face. So she took that stamp and sent a letter to Green Valley and it was Grandma Wentworth who really managed that vacation though to this day nobody but she herself knows how and she won't tell. Susie came back so rejuvenated, with such color in her cheeks, such brightness in her eyes, and so much snap and spunk in her system that Jake Tuttle up and married her two months after she came home. And he's been happy ever since for in spite of her school-teaching handicap Susie has turned out to be a born cook and housewife. And as if to make up to her those twenty colorless years Providence sent Susie twin boys at the end of her first year and twin girls at the end of the third.

This blossoming out of little drab Susie Melton was a shock to Green Valley. But Grandma Wentworth wasn't a mite surprised and said she knew that Susie would come into her own some day. As for Jake, he is so in love with his rosy little wife and his four good-looking children that he just goes on raising bumper crops without hardly knowing how he does it. And he says he doesn't hanker much after heaven; that home is plenty good enough for him. And when he goes to town Jake takes care to tie his team in front of Billy Evans' place instead of the hotel.

"Not that I can't take a drink or two and stop," he explained to Billy, "but I have good cider and buttermilk and Susie's grape juice to home and the smartest of us ain't any too wise while we stand beside a bar. And I'd ruther go home dead than go back to Susie and the children the least bit silly with liquor. When the Almighty sends a man like me a family like mine He's got something in His mind and I ain't agoing to spoil things just for a drink or two of slops."

So on rainy days Billy's office is the gathering place for such men as find the atmosphere in the hotel and blacksmith shop a little too fragrantly spirited for their eventual domestic happiness.

Not that Billy is a teetotaler. No, indeed. He has his drink whenever he wants it. And he good-naturedly permits such staggering wretches as the hotel refuses to accommodate to sleep it off in his barns. And he is the only man in Green Valley who ever seriously hired Hank Lolly and kept him sober twelve hours at a stretch. The other business men make considerable fun of Billy's hired help; the trifling boys he hires, boys that everybody else has tried and sent packing. Billy says nothing though he did explain fully to Grandma Wentworth once.

"You see it's like this, Grandma. I ain't fixed to pay fancy wages just yet and those kids that everybody runs down ought to be off the streets doing something. Of course some of them *are* trifling. But I ain't such a stickler for sharp-edged goodness myself nor in any way at all virtuous. I'm terrible easy-going myself and I know just how kids like Charlie Pinley feel working for a man, a careful, exact man like Mr. James D. Austin. By gosh! if I had to work a whole week for Mr. Austin I'd kill myself. Never could stand too much neatness and worrying about time being money and human nature too full of meanness. No, sir,—I can't live like that. I guess maybe it's because I'm kind of no-account myself that I understand these kids and they understand me. They all like horses same as me and I pay them all I can afford and will do more for them when things pick up and grow.

"Now there's people as laugh about me hiring Hank Lolly. I guess it's the first time Hank has ever held a job longer than a week. But I tell you, Grandma, I like Hank and I understand him. And I don't ever think I'm fit enough myself to be forever preaching at him about reforming. I figure that what a man eats and drinks is none of my business in a way. But I did explain to Hank that if he would come and work for me I'd furnish him with so many drinks every day and meals and a comfortable place to sleep. I showed him that it was better to be sure of a few drinks every day than to get blind drunk on a week's wages and then go weeks maybe without a decent spree, without decent meals, maybe without underwear and an overcoat. And Hank saw the sense of that. He gets his meals up at the house. My old woman (Billy's wife was a pretty girl of twenty-three and still a bride) sides in with what I'm doing and she sets Hank down every day to three square meals. And a man just can't hold so much liquor on a comfortably filled stomach. Anyhow, Hank is doing fine and I'm putting a few dollars in the bank unbeknownst for him. I can't trust him just yet with any noticeable amount of cash. But I'm never down on him for his drinking. No, sir! Every time he feels that he must get drunk or die why he just comes up and tells me and I get

him whatever he thinks he needs for his jag and let him get full right here where I can watch him. Why—Grandma, Hank has an easier life than I have. He doesn't need to worry about anything and he knows it. And I'll be goshed if I don't think he's improving. He don't need a jag near so often as he used to and I can trust him now with any kind of work. Why, only last week I gave him a moving job, a big one, and sent him off twenty miles with my two best teams. And he brought those loads of furniture back O. K., dry and without a scratch, though I couldn't sleep all night listening to the buckets of rain dashing against the house and thinking of Hank drunk out there in it with the furniture and wagons in splinters and the horses dead maybe. And honest, when I saw him pull up into the barns, I just hauled him off that seat and—well—I just said things, told him what I thought of him and how I appreciated what he'd done. 'And now, Hank,' I says, 'you can have the greatest old jag you've ever planned on for this.'

"And I'm goshed if he didn't laugh out kind of funny and says he, 'Billy, I'm so goldarned wet right now that I couldn't stand another drop of wetness anywhere. But all these five hours that the rain was a-sloshing me I kept thinking of them there apple dumplings with cream that Mrs. Evans makes (Hank always calls the old woman Mrs. Evans). So, Billy, if it's all the same to you and I could get full on them there apple dumplings, why, them's my choice.'

"Well—say, I just jumped to the telephone and I guess the old woman was making apple dumplings before I got through talking. Anyway, Hank filled up so that he said he felt like a flour barrel with an apple tree a-sprouting out of it. And Doc Philipps says it's a good sign, Hank liking sweet things that way, because a man soaked in alcohol can't abide sweets.

"And so that's Hank. Now this week I hired that little spindle-legged Barney boy. I hired him to keep this dumbed office clean so's my old woman wouldn't raise such hell every time she steps in here. I'm goshed if this here stove don't get fuller of ashes quicker than any other stove in Green Valley. And you know the boys who come in here do spit about careless like and that dumbed screen door is always open and the calendars do get specked up considerable. And the old woman is just where I don't want her being upset about anything.

"Well, I hired that Barney boy to keep the place clean. You know that So-and-So (we won't mention any names) fired him because he said the kid stole money. Well, now—Grandma, you know that's a hard thing to start out a boy in life with in a town of this size, especially a little spindle-legged one at that. I felt real sorry for the young one so I calls him in here day before yisterday and I says:

"'Look here, Barney, could you keep this place clean?'

"'Sure,' he says.

"'All right, then sail in now. The broom's right behind the door somewheres and scarcely used and there's sawdust and rags somewheres in the barn. Ask Hank about them. And Barney,' I says, 'here's the money in this right-hand drawer. Sometimes people come in when everybody's out and you might have to make change.'

"The boy kind of flushed but I didn't let on I noticed. I only said, 'You know, Barney, I'm just beginning this business and I'm poor so you keep a sharp eye on the change and help me get this business going lickety-split so's we'll all be rich together. For when the profits go up here the wages are going up. It isn't just my livery barn, Barney, but yours, too, so just you go to it and if ever you want anything or make a mistake just you come and tell me and it'll be all right.'

"Now, Grandma, that's all I said to that young one and I'll be goshed if I don't think that kid's turning out to be the best bet I've made. But, of course, I always think that about every one of them. But, honestly, Grandma, Barney has brought in five new customers and last week he kept chinning and holding on to a sixth man that come in here until I came in and made the deal. Never let go of him a minute and just entertained him to kill time and give me a chance to get here. And I'm going to buy some books to learn myself and Barney bookkeeping. We can't none of us keep books here and that dumbed account book is lost every time you want it and I've got the poorest memory. Of course, now and then a party comes in and tries to get out of paying but the boys usually settle him and so I don't lose much that way. But the old woman wants me to do this slick and proper and her word goes. So Barney and I are going to study.

"I'm telling you all this, Grandma, because you always did understand my crazy way of doing things ever since that time when you sent me to the store for that can of molasses and I give the money to the tramp instead. Remember?"

Billy laughed heartily at the memory and Grandma Wentworth laughed, too, laughed so hard that she had to wipe her eyes. And she smiled all the way home.

"Some day," said Grandma Wentworth to her old friend and neighbor, Roger Allan, "I'll ask some minister to preach a sermon on 'God's Humor.' I suppose that the Almighty gets so tired running things just so and listening to petitions for sunshine and petitions for rain and to prayers for automobiles and diamonds and interest on mortgages and silk stockings, death and babies that some days he just gets tired of being a serious God and shuffles things up for a joke. And, mark me, Roger, that boy, Billy Evans, is just one of God's tender jokes. If only people would see that and laugh.

"Now, Billy has no money sense, no business ability. That's what the real business men like George Hoskins and all the old blessed Solomons at Uncle Tony's say. Yet Billy is making money. His business is growing just because without knowing it Billy has got hold of the biggest force in the world to run his business. He's just using love,—plain, old-fashioned love,—and love is making money for Billy. He's picked out of the very gutters all the human waste and rubbish that the others, the wise business men, threw there and with the town's worst drunkard and half a dozen mistreated, misborn, misunderstood boys he's playing the business game and winning. He's got the knack of making his help feel like partners and he's so square and sensible in his dealings with them that they are all ready to die for him. Now if that isn't the greatest kind of a business gift I want to know.

"And every time I think of smiling, untidy Billy Evans with a pretty wife as neat as wax, living in a house that she has made as sweet and pretty as a picture—well—I just laugh. Nobody but God could have arranged things and balanced them up like that. Talk about any of us improving things in this world! If we'd only learn to mind our own business as well as God minds His."

But very few besides Grandma Wentworth understood Billy and his livery barn. Even Joe Baldwin failed to see just what Billy was doing in his droll, unconscious, warm-hearted way. Still Joe liked Billy. In fact, everybody liked Billy. And he was welcomed everywhere and nowhere more than in George Hoskins' blacksmith shop.

Next to the bank building George Hoskins was considered the most solid thing in town. He was the brawny blacksmith and people said a very rich man. He was big in every way. Big in body, big in temper, big in his friendships, big in his drinks. He was indeed so big a man that he did not know how to be mean or little in any way. He did not know his own great strength nor think much of the weakness of his fellows. His grand proportions and great simplicity were what attracted men to him. Women did not know and so could not like him.

To them George Hoskins was a great, grimy ogre. George, big in all things, was big in his love for the tiny woman who was his wife. Other women George did not see though he spoke to them on the street. He had pleaded on bended knees for the love of his tiny woman and when he got her all other women became just strange shadows. So only his wife and Doc Philipps knew how tender a heart was his.

Green Valley housewives caught glimpses of this man's great figure towering above the roaring forge and saw the crowd of lesser men, their husbands, gathered about him. They went home and told each other that George Hoskins was a big, rude brute, that he drank like a fish and would bring the town to ruin, for he was the village president.

And while they were saying these things about George Hoskins he was perhaps throwing out of his shop some smug traveling man who had stepped into it to get in out of the rain and had mistakenly tried to make himself at home there by telling a filthy yarn that sullied all womanhood.

These then are a few of the many human attractions of Green Valley. They are listed here to give the right sort of setting and the proper feel to this story of Green Valley life.

CHAPTER V

CYNTHIA'S SON

So Cynthia's son came home and Green Valley took him to its heart and loved him as it had loved his mother long ago. Everywhere he was spoken of as Cynthia's boy and no one seemed to remember that he was born in heathen India instead of in the old porticoed house on the Churchill farm.

Green Valley knew that very first week, of course, that Cynthia's son was very nearly twenty-eight years old and that his full name was John Roger Churchill Knight. But what it did not know for some weeks was that among other interesting things Cynthia's son was a minister, a duly certified preacher of the gospel. It was remembered in a general way that Cynthia's husband had been some sort of a wonderful foreign missionary or something; but a man who was Joshua Churchill's only grandchild and heir needed no other ancestor. So Green Valley was astounded one Sunday morning, when the Reverend Campbell was unexpectedly ill, and the Reverend Courtney off somewhere answering a new call, and Green Valley without a pastor, to have Cynthia's boy quietly offer to take charge of the services.

If Green Valley was astounded to hear that Cynthia's son was a minister it was too awed to speak in anything but an amazed whisper of that first sermon that the tall young man from India talked off so quietly from the pulpit of the old gray stone church.

To this day they tell how without a scrap of paper to look at, without raising his voice in the slightest, this boy made Green Valley listen as it had never listened before. For an hour he talked and for that length of time Green Valley neighbored with India, saw it as plainly as if it was looking over an unmended, sagging old fence right into India's back yard.

With the simplicity of a child this boy with Cynthia Churchill's eyes and smile and voice told of Indian women and children and Indian homes. The colors, the smells, the mystic beauty and the dark tragedy of it he painted and then very gently and easily he told of his trip back to his mother's home town and so without a jar he landed his listeners, wide-eyed, breathless and prayerfully thankful for their manifold blessings back in their own sunlit and tree-guarded streets.

For no reason at all seemingly Green Valley began to wipe its eyes and come out of its trance. Neighbor looked at neighbor and strange things were seen to have happened.

Old man Wiley, the aged and chronically sleepy janitor was actually sitting wide awake. Old Mrs. Vingie, who for years annoyed every Green Valley parson by holding her hand to her right ear and pretending to be deafer than she really was, was sitting bolt upright, both ears and hands forgotten. For once Dolly Beatty forgot to fuss with her hat or admire her hands in the new lavender gloves two sizes too small. The choir even forgot to flirt and yawn and never once looked bored or superior.

Jimmy Rand, after having carefully inserted in his hymn book a copy of Diamond Dick's latest exploits, forgot to read it. And the row of little boys whose mothers always made them sit in the very first pew never so much as thought of kicking each other's shins or passing a hard pinch down the line or even quietly swapping lucky stones and fish hooks for a snake skin or a choice piece of colored glass.

Why, it was even reported that Mert Hagley so far forgot himself as to absent-mindedly drop a bill into the basket when it came by. Some said, of course, that Mert was after the repair work on the old Churchill homestead but those nearest Mert swore that this could not be, that Mert had looked as surprised as those around him when he saw what he had done. Green Valley laughed and said a miracle had happened. And even Seth Curtis got curious and remarked that he had half a mind to go and hear the boy himself, that anybody who could peel a bill off of Mert Hagley's roll was surely a curiosity.

Cynthia's son had walked with Roger Allan through the twilight of his first real day in Green Valley to Grandma Wentworth's cottage and the three had sat talking until the small hours. Then Grandma had taken Cynthia's tall son up-stairs into the large airy guest room. She came down a little later to find Roger gazing at a framed photograph of a long gone day.

She came and looked too at the group of young faces. At herself, then a girl of eighteen; at the boy beside her who later became her husband; and at Cynthia, lovely Cynthia Churchill, laughing out at life in her sweet yet serious way.

"Well, Roger," Grandma spoke softly with a hint of tears in her voice, "we have waited years, you and I, for a message from her, a heart message. And now it has come—it has come. She has sent us her boy."

"Yes," breathed Roger Allan, "she has sent us the message—she has sent me her son."

They knew, these two, why he had come. It may be that even the tall young man whose father and mother were sleeping the long sleep in far-off India may have guessed why in the end the frail but still lovely mother had begged him to go back to Green Valley, to its sweet old homes and warm-hearted folk. To bring comfort and find it—that had been the little mother's plan.

He believed he would find it. The loneliness that had tired him so ever since his mother slipped away was no longer a sharp, never silent pain, a great emptiness, but rather a sweet sorrow that was almost a friend.

He slept in the big airy room with its patchwork quilt of blue and white, its rugs and curtains to match, and looked at pictures of his mother. From the windows he watched the sun rise and shine on the merry little hills and the yellow road that wound up to his mother's old home. As he breathed in the wine of the spring mornings he comprehended the great hunger, the wild longing, that at times must have overwhelmed the little mother in those last days in India. And he thought he understood those last words of hers.

"Son, you must stay with your father as long as he needs you. But when that duty is over you must go back to the little green town on the other side of the world. Your father and I brought a message to India. You must take one back to my people. Oh, you will love it—you will love it—the little dear town full of friends and everywhere the fragrance of home. Oh, there are many there who will love you for my sake and who will make up to you for—me."

Her hand caressed his hair and her voice trailed off into a sigh for she knew what he didn't, wouldn't believe—that she was never to see that little green town across the gray-green ocean waves.

At the very last she had whispered:

"Oh, Boy of Mine, when you go home greet them all for me. And if ever you go to rummaging about in the attic remember you must never open the square trunk with the brass nail heads unless Mary Wentworth is there to explain. Tell Mary I love her and that I am not sorry. She will understand."

So as he looked out of Grandma Wentworth's upstairs windows he remembered those last talks and understood that yearning for home. When he had been in Green Valley only a few weeks the old life began to grow vague and unreal. The mother was real and near. But the splendid figure of his father was fading into a strange memory. He was a father to be proud of, that strong, cool, selfless man who had asked nothing of life but to take what it would of him.

He had seemed so towering, so enduring, that preacher father. Yet when the frail mother went the strong man followed within a year. So then there was nothing to do but go home to Green Valley. He went. And the spirit of the vivid little mother seemed to have come with him. Every day that he spent in the town that had reared her seemed to bring her nearer. He could picture her going about the sunny roads and friendly streets and stopping to chat and neighbor with Green Valley folks.

So he too roamed over the town and chatted and neighbored as he felt she would have done. That was how he came to know every nook and cranny, every turn of the happily straying roads and all the lame, odd, damaged and droll characters that make a town home just as the broken-nosed pitcher, the cracked old mirror in an up-stairs bedroom, and the sagging old armchair in the shadowy corner of the sitting room make home.

Not only did he come to know these people but he understood them. For his was the quick eye and interpreting heart willed him by a great father and an equally great mother. And because he came into Green Valley with a fresh mind and a keen appetite for life nothing escaped him, not even old Mrs. Rosenwinkle sitting in paralyzed patience beside the open window of her little blind house.

He was strolling one day up the little grassy lane, thinking that it led into the cool, thick grove back of the little house that stared so blindly out into the green world. He had been following a new bird and it had darted into the grove. So he came upon the little house and the still grim old soul who sat at the open window as if to guard that little end of the world.

It was a snug, still spot, that little green lane, and was so carpeted with thick grasses and screened with verdure that the harsh noises of a chattering, working world could not ruffle its peace and serenity. Cynthia's son filled it and the still, lonely old woman was fascinated with his bigness, his merry gladness, but most of all with his understanding friendliness. She told him all her story, her past trials and present griefs. And he told her strange things about people he had seen in other parts of the world, blind people living in foul alleys instead of sunny lanes, crippled ones with neither home nor kin of any kind. He told her much but made no effort to convince her that the earth was round, and when he went he left with her the very fine pair of field glasses with which he had been tracking the wonderful song bird that had escaped him. He showed her how to use them and for the first time in fifteen years old Mrs. Rosenwinkle forgot that she was paralyzed.

When he came in to his supper that evening Cynthia's son wanted to know why old Mrs. Rosenwinkle couldn't have a wheel-chair, one of those that she could work with her hands. He said that he thought she must be pretty tired sitting beside that window even if it was open. And why couldn't she have a window on each of the other sides of her room?

Grandma stared.

"My stars—boy! There's no reason that I know of why that old body can't have a wheel chair or more windows. Only Green Valley hasn't ever thought of it. She's always been so set in her notions and so out of the way of things that I expect we have forgotten her."

The third time that Cynthia's son brought little Jim Tumley home because the little man's wandering feet could not find their way to shelter, he wanted to know why little Jim was not in the choir. So Grandma told him, and it was his turn to be puzzled.

"But I don't understand. The church is for the weak, the needy, the blind, maimed and foolish who don't know how to seek happiness wisely. The happy, strong, sensible people don't, as a matter of fact, need looking after," said Cynthia's son.

"My!" laughed Grandma, "I believe I've heard that or read that somewhere. Do they really practice that kind of religion in aged India? In these parts the churches are still built by the good for the good and the unfit have to shift for themselves."

But when he asked why Jim Tumley didn't have a piano to take up his spare time and keep him out of harm's way, Grandma was a bit scandalized.

"Why, people in Jim Tumley's circumstances don't own pianos. It wouldn't be proper. A second-hand organ is all they have any right to be ambitious for. Why, Mary Tumley would no

more think of touching her savings, of buying a piano, than I would think of buying a second black silk or a diamond ring. So much style would be wicked."

"But if it would help to save the little man—if—"

"Well," smiled Grandma, "I'll mention it to Mary the very next time I see her."

"Do. And while you are about it you might ask Jim to sing a solo for us both Sunday morning and evening. If little Jim Tumley doesn't sing I won't talk," said the Reverend John Roger Churchill Knight.

So Joshua Churchill's rich grandson, Cynthia's son, traveled the high roads and low roads and had all manner of experiences and adventures and he discovered many stray, odd facts which later came in mighty handy.

He rode out into the country districts with Hank Lolly, sitting beside that worthy on the high wagon seat and listening most carefully to the description of every farm, its inmates, the barn dimensions and contents, the depth of the well, cost of the silo, number of pigs, sheep, the amount of tiling, and the make of the family graphophone.

Sometimes busy farm wives came hurrying out from the back or side doors, wiping their hands on their aprons, to ask Hank to take a mess of peas or beans to a less fortunate neighbor or to carry a basket of dishes over to the next farm where the thrashers were going to be for supper; and "Hank, just bring me a setting of turkey eggs from Emily Elby's. I've 'phoned and she has them all ready."

Mrs. Tooley, up the Elmwood road, entrusted the obliging Hank with the following message:

"Tell Doc Mitchell that if he don't get my new set of teeth ready for the thrashing I'll hev the law on him for breaking up my happy home. Two of my old beaux're coming to the thrashing and if they was to see me without my teeth they'd jest naturally make Jim miserable and me a divorcee."

Mrs. Bodin was sending her daughter, Stella, some little overalls made over for the twins from their grandpa's and a bottle of home made cough medicine "and one of my first squash pies for Al. And here's a pie for your trouble, Hank, and a few of these cookies you said you like."

Hank stowed everything carefully away, with no show of nervous haste, and when they were well started remarked to John Churchill Knight:

"You know the best part of staying sober is that you get taken in on so many things and almost you might say into so many families. People tell you things and ask your help and advice and by gum after awhile you get to feeling that maybe you're somebody too instead of jest a mess of miserableness. Why, I've got friends jest about everywhere, I guess.

"There's them as asks me sarcastic like if I don't find this kind of work dry and lonesome but I jest ask them to come along and see. Why, do you see that there house yonder? Those folks are relatives of Billy Evans' and as soon as ever I turn this corner, Mollie, that's the youngest girl, will start the graphophone going with my favorite piece. The last time I come by I found a box of candy on the mail box for me. That was from Winnie, the oldest, for bringing home her new dress from the dressmaker's.

"Yes, sir, it's jest wonderful how human and pleasant everybody is. Why, if I jest keep on a-being sober and associating with folks like this—why—I'm jest naturally bound to be kind of decent myself. And when you think of what I was—well—there's no use in talking—I was low—jest low. Ask anybody but Billy Evans and they'll tell you fast enough. Of course Billy's naturally prejudiced and his word ain't hardly to be credited.

"And here I am on a nice summer morning riding with the minister and with the whole country acting as if I'd always been decent."

Maybe it was Hank who first called him the minister. It may of course have been that old Mrs. Rosenwinkle, who, not knowing his name for some time, explained him to her daughter as "the new preacher of the lost."

At any rate, when Fanny Foster came to make her periodical report it was found that to the lonely, the outcast and the generally unfit Cynthia's son was "the new minister." And his influence was already felt by those who as yet regarded him as just a Green Valley boy who was helping out. Fanny Foster voiced this sentiment in Joe Baldwin's shop when she was paying for the four patches Joe had just put on her second best pair of shoes.

"Well—I shouldn't wonder if Green Valley hadn't got a minister to its taste at last. He hasn't been regularly appointed and I guess he don't realize himself that he's it but I'm pretty sure that the minute Parson Courtney steps out that's just what's going to happen. Of course there's them that says it can't. Mr. Austin says it would be a terrible mistake, that he's too young; and Seth Curtis says no rich man would be fool enough to pester himself with a dinky country church. But I guess people like Seth and Mr. Austin ain't the kind of people that have much to say. He's doing

regular minister's work, comforting the sick and picking up the fallen and pacifying the quarrelsome, and it's work like that that'll elect him.

"And he's getting mighty popular, let me tell you, even with them that no other minister could please or get near. There's old Mrs. Rosenwinkle. She loves him just because he never tried to tell her that the earth was round. Why, she says he's as good as any Lutheran. And Hank Lolly said that maybe when that new suit Billy's ordered him out of the new mail-order catalogue gets here, he'll go hear him preach. It seems the minister's been driving around with Hank all over creation and Hank says he can get along with him as easy as he does with Billy.

"And did you hear what he did for Jim Tumley? It seems the minister told Grandma Wentworth what a fine voice Jim had and what an ear for music. And he was most surprised that Jim never even had a second-hand organ of his own in the house but had to go over to his sister's, Mrs. Hoskins, for to play a little tune when the fancy took him. He said it was an awful pity that a man who wanted music so badly and was always so obliging at weddings and funerals and entertainments should be without a proper instrument. And Grandma just said, 'My land, nobody's ever thought of that but I'll speak of it.'

"Well, she did and the consequence is that Mary Tumley is so nervous she can't sleep. She says if she takes the savings out of the bank there won't be enough money for a Keeley cure, or a respectable funeral for Jim in case he dies. She's struggled and struggled but come to the conclusion that it wouldn't be right and would set an awful example to the Luttins next door, who are extravagant enough as it is.

"But it's my notion that Jim Tumley will get his organ and maybe a piano. I saw him going in with Frank Burton on that early morning train and it means something. Besides, Grandma told me that Frank fairly hates himself for not thinking of it before and waiting like a born idiot for a boy to come all the way from India and tell him what to do for his best friend.

"Agnes Tomlins says she's got a good mind to go and see the minister about Hen. She says that if Hen don't quit abusing her and tormenting her she's going to leave him; that her sister Mary over in Aberdeen has a big up-stairs bedroom all aired and waiting for her. It seems that Hen's more than contrarily stubborn lately. He's contradicted Agnes publicly time and again and gone against her in private till Agnes says there's no living with him.

"But she says she would overlook everything except Hen's keeping a secret drawer in his chiffonier. It seems Hen has gone and locked that bottom drawer and Agnes can't either buy or borry a key that will open it. And she can't find where Hen has hid his, try as she may. And when she mentions that drawer to Hen, saying she wants to red up, he lets on like he don't know what she's talking about but he does, because he told Doc Philipps, when he went to see about his liver, that if he couldn't wear a soft collar or a soft hat like other men and keep a dog and smoke in the house, and eat strawberries or whistle or go to ball games on Sundays and prize fights on the sly, why, there was one thing he could do and would have and that was a drawer, a whole chiffonier drawer, all to himself. And that he bet there weren't many men in Green Valley that could say as much. Hen just swore that he intends to have something all his own and that nobody'll open that drawer except over his dead body.

"Dolly Beatty was sitting in the waiting room and heard him. Of course, she's a great friend of Bessie Williams and told her and Bessie told Laura Enbry and of course it got to Agnes. So she's going to speak to the minister and maybe get a divorce, which will be the first divorce scandal in Green Valley.

"Now that's the sort of thing that goes on in Green Valley. And if the new minister is supposed to calm these troubled waters he's got my sympathy. Joe, I think you're charging me ten cents too much for these patches. They're not as big as the ones you put on the other pair and those were fifty cents."

So without a conscious move on anybody's part Cynthia's son became Green Valley's minister. All the necessary rites gone through, Green Valley accepted him as it accepted the sunshine and rain, the larks and wild roses, and all the other gifts that heaven chose to send.

Roger Allan and Grandma Wentworth began to call him John. But Nanny Ainslee always spoke of him and addressed him as Mr. Knight. And he discovered after a time that for some strange reason he did not like this.

One day he mentioned the matter. He was walking home from church with her. Mr. Ainslee had invited him up for Sunday dinner and the party of them were chatting pleasantly as they walked along together.

In asking him a question Nan addressed him as Mr. Knight. Then it was that he stopped and made his startling request. He addressed them all but he meant only Nan.

"I wish," he said suddenly, "you would not call me Mr. Knight."

Mr. Ainslee and Billy hid a smile, said nothing and walked on. But Nan stopped in amazement.

"Why not?" she asked a little breathlessly.

"Nobody else does. I was never called that in India. It makes me feel lonely, and a stranger here."

"But," Nanny's voice was colorless and almost dreary, even though a wicked little gleam shot into her eyes, "what in the world shall I call you? I can't call you—*John*. And 'parson' always did seem to me rather coarse and disrespectful."

He had stopped when she did and now was looking straight down into her eyes. Before the hurt and surprise and bewilderment in his face the wicked little gleam retreated and a deep pink began to flush Nanny's cheeks. The suspicion crossed her mind that this tall young man from India with the unconquered eyes and the directness of a child might be a rather difficult person to deal with.

He just stood there and looked at her and said never a word. Then he quietly turned and walked on up the road with her.

For the first time in her life Nanny felt queer in the company of a man, queer and puzzled and almost uncomfortable. She was not a flirt and her remark was commonplace and trivial. Yet this new chap was taking it seriously and making her feel insincere and trifling. She told herself that she was not going to like him and kept her eyes studiously on the road and wayside flowers.

They mounted the front steps in silence but before he opened the door to let her pass in he paused and waited for her to raise her eyes to his. She did it much against her will. He spoke then as if they two were all alone in the world together.

"It is true that you have not known me long. But I have known you for some time. I saw you leave Green Valley one summer night last year and I came from the West two months before I should have just to see if you got safely back at lilac time."

At that Nanny's eyes lost all their careful pride and he saw them lovely with surprise. So he explained.

"I was standing on the back platform of the Los Angeles Limited the night you went East with your father."

Then a smile that the Lord gives only now and then, to a man that He is sure He can trust, flitted over the tall boy's face as he added:

"And the very first evening I came back to Green Valley I held you in my arms—rescued you."

He laughed boyishly, plaguing her. But she stood motionless with amazement,—too angry to say a word. When that smile came her anger faded. Through her heart there flashed the mad conviction, through her mind the certain knowledge, that for her in the time to come the height of bliss would be to cry in this strange man's arms.

Then she recollected herself and flamed with shame so bitter that her lower lip quivered and she hoped he would ask her again to call him John so that she could make him pay for her momentary madness.

But he never asked again. It seemed he was not that kind of a man.

CHAPTER VI

GOSSIP

The last and surest sign of spring's arrival in Green Valley is gossip. The mornings may be ever so full of meadow larks, the woods moistly sweet and carpeted with spring's frail and dainty blossoms, but no one dreams of letting the furnace go out or their base burner get cold until they see Fanny Foster flitting about town at all hours of the day and behold the array of shiny armchairs standing so invitingly in front of Uncle Tony's hardware store.

When these two great news agencies open up for business Green Valley laughs and goes to Martin's drug store to buy moth balls and talks about how it's going to paint its kitchen woodwork and paper its upstairs hall and where it's buying its special garden seed.

Then the whole town wakes up and comes outdoors to work and talk. There are fences to be mended and gardens to be planted and houses to be cleaned and all the winter happenings to be gone over. All the doctor cases have to be discussed critically and the winter invalids, strong once again, come out to visit one another and compare notes. Letters from special relatives and

former Green Valley souls are passed around and read and all new photographs and the winter's crop of fancy work exhibited and carefully examined.

Everybody talks so much that nobody listens very carefully, only half hearing things. And when the spring madness and gladness begin to settle and people start to repeat the things they only half heard strange and weird tales are at times the result. And from these spring still more fantastic rumors and versions that ripple over Green Valley like waves of sunshine or cloud shadows, sometimes causing much joy and merriment and sometimes considerable worry and uneasiness.

And all these rumors come eventually to Uncle Tony's where they are solemnly examined, edited and frequently so enhanced and touched up in color and form as to sound almost new. Then they are sent out again to begin life all over. Many of them die but some live on and on, and after a sufficient test of time become a part of the town chronicles.

Everybody, of course, takes a hand at helping a yarn get from house to house but nobody makes such a specialty of this sort of social work as Fanny Foster. There are some Green Valley folks who attribute Fanny's up and down thinness to this wearing industry yet both men and women are always glad to see her and her reports always drive blue cares away and provoke ripples of sunny laughter.

Everybody in town has tried their hand at hating Fanny and despising her and ignoring her and putting her in her place. But everybody has long ago given it up. Stylish and convention-loving newcomers are always disgusted and keep her at arm's length. But sooner or later such people break an arm or a leg right in the midst of strawberry canning maybe and it so happens that nobody sees them do this but Fanny. And when this does happen they don't even have to mortify themselves by calling her. She just comes of her own accord, forgetting the cruel snubbings. She fixes that stand-offish person as comfortable as can be, makes them laugh even, and telephones to the doctor. Then she rolls up her sleeves and without so much as an apron has those strawberries scientifically canned and that messy kitchen beautifully clean.

And the curious, the pitifully, laughably incomprehensible part of it is that in her own house Fanny absolutely never can seem to take the least interest. Her own dishes are always standing about unwashed. Her kitchen is spoken of in horrified whispers; her children, buttonless, garterless, mealless, stray about in all sorts of improper places and weather. The whole town is home to them but they generally feel happiest at Grandma Wentworth's. She sets them down in her kitchen to a hot meal and then makes them sew on their buttons under her watchful eye. Sooner or later, usually later, Fanny comes as instinctively as her children to Grandma's door to report Green Valley doings.

This particular spring things promised to be unusually lively. But the rains, though gentle, had been persistent and Fanny was a full two weeks behind with her news schedule. But if late, her report was thorough. She dropped wearily into Grandma's soft cushioned kitchen rocker, slipped her cold feet without ceremony into the warm stove oven and began:

"Good land! I never see such a town and such people and such weather! Jim Tumley's drunk again and as sick as death and Mary's crying over him as usual and blaming the hotel crowd. She says he's a good man and don't care for liquor at all and that their liking to hear him sing ain't no reason for getting him drunk and a poor way of showing their thanks and appreciation, and that they all know that he can't stand it, him being weak in the stomach that way, like all the Tumleys. Mary's just about ready to give up everything and everybody, she's that discouraged.

"Well—that's one mess and now there's Uncle Tony in another. It seems Uncle Tony sold Seth Curtis a hand axe for a dollar and ten cents. Of course Seth paid for it like he always does—right away. But you know how forgetful Uncle Tony is getting. Well, it seems he clean forgot about Seth paying and sent in a bill for a dollar. And now Seth's hanging around, wanting his ten cents back and saying mean, smart things.

"And that lazy, gossiping crowd of worthless men folks was just killing themselves laughing and making fun of poor Uncle Tony, sitting right in his very own chairs and warming their lazy feet at his comfortable fire. Uncle Tony happened to be out and those loafers just started in and what they said about that kind old man made my blood boil. They were all mean enough, with Seth egging them on every now and then about that dime that he was cheated out of. But Mert Hagley was the worst. Of course, everybody knows Mert's just dying to hog Uncle Tony's business along with his shop, as if the stingy thing wasn't rich enough already. Well, when Mert heard about that ten-cent mistake he said it was about time there were a few business changes in Green Valley, that a few business funerals would help a lot and freshen up things; that Uncle Tony was no business man, and a lot of that sort of stuff. And of course Hughey Mason, being a smart Aleck, pipes up and says, 'That's so, Uncle Tony is no business man. Why, Tom Hall says that when you find Uncle Tony's emporium locked at eleven o'clock of a winter morning you can bet your bottom dollar Uncle Tony's home shaking down the furnace, and if it's closed at four of a summer afternoon Uncle Tony's sneaked off home to mow the lawn.'

"Well, those idiots and old hypocrites were talking just like that, goodness knows how long. They never took the trouble to see if Uncle Tony was really around or not. But all of a sudden I looked around the corner of the middle row of shelves and there was that poor old man sitting as

still as death in his cashier's cage and looking sick to death. You know he wouldn't cheat a soul, and as for that store, he'd die without it. It's all the family he has. Well I had stepped in there to buy a couple of flat-irons. The children mislaid mine. But I walked right out for I didn't want to call him out to wait on me.

"I was so mad I just walked around the block till I met Mrs. Jerry Dustin right at Simpson's corner and I told her the whole thing. She was as hurt about it as Uncle Tony and kept holding on to Simpson's garden fence and saying, 'Dear me, Fanny, we must do something. I have a message for Tony, anyway, and this is just the time to deliver it.'

"So back we went and we met Uncle Tony stepping in at the front door too. He must have sneaked out the back way and come around the front so's not to let on he'd heard anything. He was kind of white and miserable about the mouth and his eyes looked out kind of blind. But he smiled when Mrs. Jerry Dustin said, 'Good morning, Tony.' I wonder," Fanny digressed, "if it's true that Uncle Tony wanted to marry Mrs. Dustin once. Sadie Dundry says so but you know how unreliable Sadie is about what she knows.

"Well, anyhow, those miserable men things around that stove just smiled at Uncle Tony like so many Judases and all commenced talking at once. But Mrs. Dustin didn't give them much chance. She just took up all Uncle Tony's attention and time. She bought and bought, being real careful of course to ask only for the things she knew he had; and to top it all she bought four quarts of robin's-egg blue paint. You know that's Uncle Tony's favor-ite woodwork paint and nobody goes in there for paint but what he's trying to get them to buy robin's-egg blue. Seems his mother's kitchen on the old farm was done that way and Uncle Tony's never been able to see any other color.

"Well, I thought those four cans of paint was about the highest kind of good luck but when Mrs. Dustin give her message I nearly fell dead, and as for them old he-gossips they were about paralyzed, I guess. Why even you, Grandma, couldn't hardly guess what that message was;" here Fanny pulled up a sagging stocking and hurried on lest she should be interrupted.

"It was nothing more nor less than that Bernard Rollins, the artist, wants to paint Uncle Tony's portraiture. 'And, of course, Tony,' said Mrs. Dustin in that sweet way of hers, 'you won't refuse, will you?' And I declare the lovely way she looked at him and he at her I come near believing Sadie might be right by accident. But, land—in this town everybody has growed up with everybody else and somebody is always saying that somebody is sweet on somebody else or was when he or she were young.

"So there's that portraiture to look forward to. And now there's that yarn that some careless busybody started about Nanny Turner being left a fortune of eighteen thousand dollars. Everybody's been crazy, praising her luck to her face and envying her behind her back. Everybody most but Dell Parsons. Dell felt sick when she heard it because she and Nanny have been such friends and Dell just knew that no matter how they'd both try to keep things the same there'd always be that eighteen-thousand-dollar difference between them when now there's nothing dividing them but a little low honeysuckle fence with a gate cut through it. And there would, of course. Nanny'd be on one side, cutting aprons out of nice new gingham, and Dell'd be on the other, cutting *her* aprons out of Jim's old shirt backs.

"But as soon as Nanny heard it she up and told everybody it wasn't so, that she and Will wouldn't thank anybody for a fortune now that they've paid for their home and garden.

"I met Jessie Williams in the drug store. She was buying dye to do over her last year's silk and she says Nanny was a fool to contradict a fine story like that. That she should have said nothing and used the rumor to her social advantage. Jessie says that story alone would have brought that uppish Mrs. Brownlee that's moved into that stylish new bungalow next to Will Turner's to time and sociability. Though the daughter isn't uppish a bit, so Nanny and Dell says, and visits right over the fence and just loves the children. But she don't know anything seemingly—the daughter don't. Wears fancy caps and high-heeled shoes to work in mornings and was caught planting onion sets root up and doing dishes without an apron and drying them without scalding them first. But they say she's awful sweet and pretty, in spite of her terrible ignorance.

"Old Mr. Dunn told me this Mrs. Brownlee was a bankrupt's widow, that when the husband died there was nothing left but this Green Valley lot, which he bought absent-mindedly one day, and his life insurance which though was a good one. And the widow having no money didn't want to stay amongst her rich city friends and so she's come here. They say she hates Green Valley like poison but that the girl Jocelyn thinks it's fun living here, even though her hands are blistered and there's no place to go evenings. I heard that David Allan's been plowing up the Brownlee garden lot and helping the girl set things out.

"And now, Grandma, what of all things do you suppose has happened? Old man Mullin's back. Nobody can hardly believe it. He's been gone these ten years and nobody blamed him a mite when he left that miserly, nagging wife of his and went off to California. Why, they say she nearly died giving him a ten-cent piece every week for spending money and that he used to work on the sly unbeknownst to her to get money for his tobacco and then didn't dare smoke it where she could see him. And he's come back. Some say he's got so much money of his own that she can't worry him and that he's got to be so deaf besides that he's safe more or less.

"And as if that wasn't enough, there's talk of Sam Ellis's selling the hotel and going out of business. It seems since the two boys and the girl came back from college they've talked nothing but temperance and prohibition. Not that they are a mite ashamed of Sam. But not one of them will step into the hotel for love or money. And Sam's beginning to think as they do, seems like. For they say he was awful mad when he heard about Jim Tumley getting so full he was sick. Sam was out that afternoon and he says Curley Watson, his barkeeper, is a danged chucklehead. And that ain't all. They're saying that Sam told George Hoskins to let up on the drinks the other night, that maybe he could stand it but other men couldn't. And Sam the hotel keeper, mind you! Of course Sam is well off but still the men haven't got over it yet. They say you could have heard a pin drop and that George stood with his mouth open for five full minutes.

"Somebody told John Gans that there was going to be another barber shop in town and so he's excited. And Mr. Pelly and Mrs. Dudley had their first fight this year over their chickens. Mr. Pelly swears she lets them out a-purpose before he's awake in the morning and Mrs. Dudley says that if he don't mend his fence and hurts a feather of a single one of her animals she'll have him before Judge Hewitt.

"Of course, Marion Travers is spending every cent of her husband's salary on new clothes, trying to get in with the South End crowd. And Sam Bobbins has given up trying to raise violets to make a sudden fortune. He's changed his mind and gone to raising mushrooms down in his cellar. Simpson's gray horse is dead, the lame one, and one of the White twins cut his head pretty bad on a toy engine and Benny Smith's wife is giving strawberry sets away. Jessups are all out of tomato plants and onion sets and won't get any more, but Dick has them, besides a real tasty looking lot of garden seed. Ella Higgins actually found that Dick had two kinds of flower seed that she'd never grown or heard of.

"Mrs. Rosenwinkle's full of rheumatism with all joints swelled and says the world is coming to a terrible end. I guess she figures though that she and those two grandchildren of hern will be about all that's left after the thing blows over. My land, ain't some folks ignorant! And—what was I going to say—oh, yes, of course Robinson ain't expected to live—and well—what *was* it I was going to say—something that begins with a c—good land, there's the 6:10 and I bet John's on it. He never misses his train twice in a year's time. Get out of here, children. You know your father wants to see you all at home when he gets there."

There was a scramble for the door and Grandma Wentworth's heart ached for John Foster, the big, silent, steady man who brushes his girls' hair every Sunday morning and brings them fresh hair ribbons and who somehow manages to get them to Sunday School looking half respectable. John never says a word scarcely to any one, from one week's end to the other. He never spends a free hour away from home, he never invites a man to his house, and he seldom smiles except at the children or when visiting with Grandma Wentworth or Roger Allan, his two friends and nearest neighbors. Sometimes he goes for long walks with his girls and little Bobby. Most people think him a fool and he knows it.

Grandma Wentworth sighed a little as she thought of John Foster. Then she put fresh wood on her fire and poked at the stove grate till it glowed. She smiled as she remembered Fanny's report.

"Well, spring is here for certain. Now we'll have a wedding and some new babies. They always come next."

Then sitting there beside her glowing stove Grandma fell to dreaming of Green Valley and the Green Valley folks of other days, Green Valley as it used to be in the springs of long ago. Of the days when Roger Allan was a young, strength-mad fellow and Richard Wentworth was his chum and her lover. And she remembered too how right Sadie Dundry was. For Uncle Tony, in the springs of long ago, had loved the girl who was now Mrs. Jerry Dustin.

They were such wander-mad dreamers, Tony and Rosalie, and exactly alike in those days. They used to go together to watch an occasional picnic train or election special go through the station, and they thought because they were so exactly alike they would most surely marry. But life, that wisely and for posterity's sake mates not the like but the unlike, brought Jerry Dustin on the scene,—good, practical, stay-at-home Jerry Dustin. And the girl who used to sit with Tony on the station bench and watch the trains pull out into the wide big world left her childhood friend sitting alone and went to Jerry, answered his smile and call.

So Tony sits alone, for he still visits the station on sunny afternoons. But now he doesn't sit on the bench but perches on the top rail of the fence and curls his toes about the lower one.

Bernard Rollins caught him sitting so once, day-dreaming over the past. It was Tony's face as Rollins saw it then,—full of a young, boyish wistfulness and sweet pain, unmarred dreams and unstained, unbroken illusions,—that Rollins wanted to paint. Rollins knew that Mrs. Dustin was a great friend of Tony's and that she would be the best person to coax a consent from the shy, gentle old man.

Life, mused Grandma, was a matter full of sweet and incomprehensible things,—things that now, after long years when the stories were almost finished, seemed right and just enough but that at the time were cruel and hard to bear. There was Roger Allan and that lonely stone in the

peaceful cemetery. It still seemed a cruel tragedy. Like Mrs. Jerry Dustin she wondered often about it.

The soft spring night was full of memories and the wood fire sang of them sadly, sweetly and softly. Grandma rose and mentally shook herself.

"I declare, I believe I'm lonely or getting old or something," Grandma chided herself; "here I am poking at the bygone years like an old maid with the heartache and here's the whole world terribly alive and needing attention. And here's Cynthia's boy back from India, and a real Green Valley kind of minister, I do believe; a straightforward chap to tell us of life, its miracles and mysteries; of God and eternity as he honestly thinks, but mostly of love and the little happy ways of earthly living. A man who won't be always dividing us into sheep and goats but will show us the sheep and the goat in ourselves. This is a queer old town and it almost seems as if a minister wouldn't hardly have to know so much about heaven as about fighting neighbors and chickens, gossiping folks like Fanny and drunken ones like Jim Tumley. Well, maybe,—"

But just then she looked up and found David Allan laughing at her from the doorway.

"Stop dreaming and scolding yourself, Grandma," laughed David. "There's a little city girl living up on the hill back of Will Turner's who needs you most awful bad. I offered to bring her down here but she thinks it wouldn't be proper. She says you haven't called and she wants to do things right and that maybe you wouldn't want to know her. She's mighty lonely and strange about Green Valley ways of doing things. I most wished to-day that I was a woman so I could help her. Her mother's been sick more or less since they come here and she's looking after things herself. I'd like to help her but there's things a man just can't tell a girl or do for her. Uncle Roger sent me over here to tell you to come across and talk about some church matters with him. But I think this little girl business ought to be tended to right away."

"Rains and gossip and new girls and first violets. I declare, it *is* spring, David. And Nanny Ainslee is back. Of course, I'll see about that little girl. You tell her I'm coming to call on her the day after tomorrow. Tell her I'll come up the woodsy side of her garden and I'll be wearing my pink sunbonnet and third best gingham apron."

Grandma took up a pan of fresh light biscuit, rolled them up in a crisp linen cloth and started out with David.

Outdoors she stopped and breathed deeply.

"I declare, David, I was almost lonesome before you stepped in but now I feel—well, spring mad or something. I do believe we'll have a wedding soon and a real old-fashioned springtime."

CHAPTER VII

THE WEDDING

Grandma Wentworth got her wedding but not just the kind of a wedding she had expected.

"Though, when you stop to think of it, an elopement is about as proper a spring happening as I know of. It's due mostly to this weather. We had too much rain in April and nothing but sweet sunshine and mad moonlight ever since."

Most Green Valley courtships and weddings are conducted in a more or less public and leisurely fashion and elopements are rare. Green Valley was at first inclined to be a little shocked and resentful about this performance. Weddings do not happen every day and Green Valley was so accustomed to knowing weeks beforehand what the bride was going to wear, and how many of the two sets of relatives were to be there, and who was giving presents and what, and what the refreshments were going to cost, and just how much more this was than what the bride's mother could afford to spend, that there was a little murmur of astonishment, resentment even, when it was found that just a bare, bald marriage had been perpetrated in the old town. Green Valley did not resent the scandal of the occurrence. It was the absence of details that was so maddening. But gradually these began to trickle from doorstep to doorstep and by nightfall Green Valley was crowding out of its front gates with little wedding gifts under its arms.

It seems that little, meek, eighteen-year-old Alice Sears had eloped with twenty-one-year-old Tommy Winston. She explained her foolishness in a little letter which she left on the kitchen table for her mother. The letter ran something like this:

Dear Mother:—

It's no use waiting any longer for any of the good times or new dresses you said I'd have by and by. We never have any good times and I'm tired waiting for a real new hat. Tommy's going to buy me one with bunches of violets on it and he don't drink, so it's alright and you don't need to worry. I'll live near and be handy and don't you let father swear too much at you because I did this.

Your loving child,
ALICE.

When Mrs. Sears found the letter she read it six times, over and over till she knew it by heart. It wasn't the first such letter she had ever had. When Johnny went off to Alaska or somewhere away off, because his father took the twenty-five dollars that the nineteen-year-old boy had saved so prayerfully for a bicycle, Johnny had left just such a letter. When Jimmy went away he left a letter that sounded very much like it on the top of his mother's sewing machine.

It wasn't a bicycle with Jimmy. It was chickens. Jimmy was wild over chickens. He was a great favorite with Frank Burton. He helped Frank about the coops and was so handy that Frank paid him regular wages and gave him several settings of eggs. And in no time the boy had a thriving little chicken business that might have grown into bigger things. But Sears sold the whole thing out one day when he wanted money worse than usual. And Jimmy, white to the very roots of his reddish-brown hair, cursed his father and left home. He wandered about, the Lord knows where, but eventually joined the army. He wrote home once to tell his mother what he had done and to say that he intended to save all his pay for the three years and start a chicken farm with it somewhere.

And now gentle, little, eighteen-year-old Alice was gone too.

Mrs. Sears sat down and cried in that patient, helpless, miserable way of hers. She didn't know just what she was crying for, herself or the children. Life was a hopeless, unmanageable tangle that seemed to give her nothing and take her all. So Mrs. Sears sat and cried. It was a habit she had.

Fanny Foster came along just then. She had run over to see if she couldn't borrow a cake of yeast. She was going to town in an hour, she said, but she wanted to set her bread before she went and she'd bring yeast back with her and—

"Why, for pity's sake alive, Mrs. Sears, what's the matter?"

That was just Fanny's luck or perhaps her misfortune, her happening on events first-hand that way. She read the letter of course, sympathized with Mrs. Sears, patted her check and told her not to worry, that everything would be all right and to set right still, that she'd be right back to do the dishes and stay with her.

And Fanny hurried to town, talking all the way. She came back in record time but by the time she had her hands in Mrs. Sears' dishpan Green Valley was already buzzing with astonishment. Some were shaking their heads in utter unbelief, some were smiling and one or two who had slept badly were saying something like this:

"Well, did you ever! And you never can tell. Those meek, quiet little things are usually deep. And the dear Lord only knows what the true state of things is. And poor Mrs. Sears! Of course, she's done her best, but isn't it too bad to have a batch of children turn out so kind of disappointing and her so meek and patient and hard-working!"

In three hours the news had gotten out to the out-lying homes and Sears, the little bride's father, heard it as he was nailing siding on one of the two new bungalows that were being built in that part of Green Valley.

When Sears heard the rumor he put down his hammer and quit work. He was a man who made a practice of quitting work at the least provocation. He said what a man needed most was self-respect and he, Will Sears, would have it at any cost. He had it. In fact, he was so respectful and thoughtful of himself that he never had time to respect the rights of any one else.

Green Valley saw him going home and because Green Valley knew him well and respected him not at all it took no pains to hush its chatter, and so he heard a good deal that it may have done him good to hear. At any rate, it sort of prepared him for what came later.

He stamped into the house and wanted to know why in this and that he hadn't been told about all this before he went to work, and what in this and that she meant by such doings and goings on.

And Mrs. Sears, whose greatest daily trial was getting her husband off to work on such mornings as he felt so inclined, said tearfully:

"Why, father, you know that when I'm getting you off of a morning I wouldn't see a twenty-dollar gold piece if it was right before my eyes on the table. I never found the piece of paper with

Alice's letter on it till you'd gone and I'd set down for a cup of coffee."

For thirty years Milly Sears had called her husband "father" and now that he had fathered all his children away from home she still called him "father." Poor Mrs. Sears had no sense of humor.

After her pitiful little explanation Mrs. Sears sank down into her rocker and went back to weeping. It was her way of taking life's sudden turns.

Sears tore through the house and every once in a while he'd walk back to the kitchen and swear. Sears was not in any way a likeable man. Though so self-respecting, he had all his life been careless about his language and his breath. That was probably the reason why his children never got the habit of running out to meet him or bringing their thorns and splinters for him to pull out with his jackknife. He was a man who never stopped in the front yard to see how the clover was coming up, who never hoed around his currant bushes or ever found time to prune his fruit trees. He was in short a mean, selfish man who was yet decent enough to know himself for what he was but not decent enough to admit it and mend his ways. It may be that he did not know how to go about this.

At any rate, here he was, pacing back and forth in his still, empty house, swearing and threatening all manner of terrible things. That was his way of showing his helplessness.

And all about this helpless, incompetent father and patiently sobbing mother the Green Valley world buzzed and the prettiest kind of a May day smiled. All their life was a muddle with this dreary ending but the world outside was as young, as bright, as promising as ever. Something of this must have come to these two for Mrs. Sears' sobs quieted and out in the front room Sears sank into a chair and grew still.

And then it was that Fanny Poster, who had been flitting about like a very spirit of help and curiosity, flitted down the road to Grandma Wentworth's. For Fanny felt that somebody had to do something and Fanny knew that nobody could do it so efficiently as the strong, sweet, gray-eyed Grandma Wentworth who, for all her sweetness, could yet rebuke most sternly and fearlessly even while she helped and advised wisely.

Green Valley had its generous share of philosophers and helpful spirits but Grandma Wentworth towered above them all. And every soul in the village, when in trouble, turned to her as naturally as flowers turn their faces to the sun.

Her little vine-clad cottage sat just beyond the curve where the three roads met at Old Roads Corners. Her back garden was full of the choicest vegetables and sweetest-smelling herbs and there was a heavenly array of flowers all about the front windows. The neighbors said that Grandma Wentworth's house and garden looked just like her and ministers usually sent their spiritually hopeless cases to her because she dared and knew how to say the soul-necessary things that no bread-and-butter-cautious minister can find the courage to say.

The path to Grandma's house was worn smooth by the feet of the many who came for advice, encouragement and for sheer love of the woman who lived in that little garden.

And so Fanny went flying to Grandma now, perfectly, childishly confident that Grandma would and could fix up everything. She began to talk as soon as she opened the door. But what she saw in Grandma's kitchen sent the words tumbling down her throat.

For there sat little Alice, eating a late breakfast with Grandma. She looked a little scared around the eyes but smiley round the mouth and there was a gold ring on her left hand.

When Grandma caught sight of Fanny she smiled.

"Come right in, Fanny. I've been expecting you. But first let me make you acquainted with Mrs. Tommy Winston. That rascal of a boy run away with her last night as far as Spring Road, where Judge Edwards married them. And then Tommy brought her here to me to spend the night while he went and rented that funny little box of a house just back of that stylish Mrs. Brownlee. And that's where the wedding supper's going to be to-night. Of course you're invited. I'm going right now to see Milly Sears about what we must cook up and bake. I was going over to get you too to help out. The little house'll need overhauling but I know I can depend on you, Fanny. Do your very best and there'll be—"

But by this time Fanny found her voice and began to tell about how Sears was going on. But Grandma only smiled and said, "Yes, of course, I know. But don't worry about that. I'll attend to Will Sears. You two just skip along now to the house and start the wedding."

Grandma walked over to the Sears cottage without any show of worry or hurry. But she wasn't smiling. Those gray eyes of hers were sparkling with something very different. And when Will Sears saw her coming in the gate he was both relieved and uncomfortably uneasy.

She came right in and just looked at that desolate couple for a few seconds. Then:

"Will Sears," she asked briefly, "what are you aiming to do about this?"

Sears, who couldn't do anything, didn't know how to do anything about it but swear, said pompously:

"What any decent, respectable, hard-working man would do,—bring back the girl and horsewhip that whippersnapper."

Then Grandma, who knew just how much this sort of bluster was worth, let herself go.

"Will Sears, if you honestly have an idea that you are a decent, respectable, hard-working man, hold on to it for the love of heaven, for you're the only human in this town that has any such notion."

"I work," Sears began defiantly.

"Oh, yes, Will, you work in a sort of a way; though I can remember the time when Green Valley folks thought you were going to be a big contractor. You promised well but somehow you never worked hard enough. You work at things now to keep your own miserable self alive, I guess, because when you get through using your week's wages there's hardly enough left to keep bare life and decency in your family."

"I'm not a drunkard," Sears muttered, "and you know it."

"No, you're not a drunkard, Will Sears, more's the pity. When it comes to choosing between a man who gets openly drunk and staggers down Main Street in drunken penitence to his wife and children and the man who drinks just enough to be a surly, selfish brute and yet look half-way respectable on the outside, why, give me the drunk every time.

"You don't get drunk, only just full enough to have your family afraid and ashamed of you. You have made life a hateful, shameful, miserable existence for your wife and children. You've robbed them of every right and what pitiful little possessions, hopes and plans they'd been able to find for themselves. That's why John's in Alaska, Jimmy in the army and Alice an eighteen-year-old wife. A precious father you've been to make your children choose the bitter snows, the jungle and a doubtful future with a stranger to life with you, their father."

"I've fed my children and clothed them," again muttered Sears.

"Yes, Will, you have. But—man, man—it takes more than just blood, three begrudged meals a day and a skimpy calico dress to prove real fatherhood. But I'm not blaming you any more than I'm blaming this wife of yours.

"For thirty years, Milly Sears, you've been so busy trying to be a doormat saint that you had no time to be a strong, useful mother. When you married Will he was no worse than the average fellow. He had faults aplenty but he had goodnesses too, and hopes and dreams. And you, you Milly, let all the hopes and dreams die and the faults grow and multiply. Just by letting Will backslide, forget and grow careless.

"Somebody told you that patience was a pretty ornament. It is if it's the genuine article and properly used. But letting a man spend his wages hoggishly on himself and robbing his children and driving them from their lawful home and cheating you out of every right and even your self-respect is nothing to be patient about. As for tears, they have their uses, but they never mended wrongs that I know of. It's fool, weeping, patient women that make selfish, mean men. It's plain, honest, righteous anger that brings about the reforms in this world.

"If the first time that Will got ugly drunk or swearing cross about nothing you had stood up for yourself and the children and reminded him sharply of the decencies instead of crying softly and praying for patience, you wouldn't be sitting here, the two of you, in an empty house with your children God knows where.

"I've known you since before you were married and I'm sorry for you because I know—"

Then it was that Grandma Wentworth began to talk as only she knew how. She forgot nothing. She recalled to that man and woman all the beauty and the wonder of the beginning; the new furniture, the summer moonlight when their home was young and they were waiting for their first baby; his coming; his blue eyes and Jimmy's brown ones and little Alice's gentle ways. All the past sweetness that had been theirs and was not wholly forgotten she brought back, and in the end when they sobbed aloud she cried a bit with them, for they were of her generation. And then she rose to go.

"Well, now that I've had my say I'll tell you that I really came to invite you to your daughter's wedding supper to-night. Tommy Winston's married your Alice sure enough, but he's a good boy even if he is motherless and fatherless and has sort of shifted for himself in odd ways. He brought Alice to me last night all properly married and she's been with me ever since, so everything is all right and respectable, for which you may thank the dear Lord on bended knees. Tommy's been and rented the little Bently place over on the hill and is getting it into shape with a few pieces of furniture. It's such a doll house it won't take much to furnish it. I've found half a dozen things up attic and, Milly, if you look around, you'll find plenty here to help start the little new home in fair shape. Thank heavens, life in Green Valley is still simple enough so's people can every now and

then marry for love and not much of anything else. Though Tommy's got a little besides his horse and wagon. He's already bought Alice a new hat and fixings and he's going down to Tony's hardware store this afternoon to order up a good cook stove. So you see—"

But at this point Sears woke up and hoarsely, defiantly and a little tremulously announced:

"He'll do no such thing. I'm going down right now to buy that there cook stove."

So that was settled and a new home peaceably, respectably started as every home should be. And it would have been hard to say who was the busiest and happiest of all the people who helped make a wedding that day.

By three o'clock, however, everything was about done and there were only the final touches to be put on. Grandma engineered everything over the telephone and Green Valley responded whole-heartedly, as it always did to all her work.

Fanny Foster had found time to run down to Jessup's and buy the bride a first-class tablecloth and some towels. Fanny was always buying the most appropriate, tasty and serviceable things for other people and the most outlandish, cheap and second-hand stuff for herself. The tablecloth was extravagantly good, as Grandma sternly told her.

But, "La—what of it! I was saving the money to buy myself a silk petticoat," Fanny defended herself. "I wanted to know just once before I died what and how it felt like to rustle up the church aisle instead of slinking down it on a Sunday morning. But I just think a silk petticoat isn't worth thinking about when a thing like this happens."

So Grandma smiled and as she laid out her best black silk she made a mental note of the fact that Fanny Foster was to have, sometime or other, a silk petticoat, made up to her for this day's work and self-sacrifice. For Grandma was one of those rare practical people who yet believed in respecting the foolish dreams of impractical humans.

So it came about that everybody who could walk was at Tommy's and Alice's wedding. The bride wore a beautifully simple dress that came from Paris in Nan's trunk. And there were roses in her hair and Tommy hardly knew her, and her father and mother certainly did not, so dazed were they.

The little doll house was already a home, with all of Green Valley trooping in to leave little gifts and stopping long enough to shake Tommy's hand and wish him luck and health and maybe twins.

Indeed, Alice Sears' elopement and wedding became a part of Green Valley history, so great an event was it, what with the suddenness of it and the whole town being asked and Nan Ainslee coming home so providentially, and Cynthia's son making a speech.

The crowd was so great and so merry that the little Brownlee girl, having tucked her fretful mother up in bed, stole out to the garden fence and watched the doings with all a child's wistful eyes. David Allan, who happened to drift out that way, found her there and they visited over the fence. It took David quite a while to tell her what it all meant, for she was of course a stranger to Green Valley and Green Valley ways.

Grandma watched her town folk a little mistily that night and expressed her opinion a little tremulously to Roger Allan.

"Roger, did you ever see a town so chockful of people that you have to laugh over one minute and cry over the next?"

Nan's father, walking home with her through the quiet streets, stopped to light a cigar. When it was burning properly he remarked innocently to his daughter:

"I don't know when I've met so unusually good-looking and likeable a fellow as this minister chap, Knight."

Nan looked at her father with cold and suspicious eyes and her voice when she answered was scornful.

"You thought, Mr. Ainslee, that you met the handsomest and most likeable chap on earth in Yokohama—if you remember," she reminded him icily.

"Yes, of course—I remember. But I have come to believe that I was somewhat mistaken in that boy in Yokohama. He lacked something that this chap has—an elusive quality that is hard to put a name to but which is one of the big essentials that makes for success."

"Ministers," drawled Nanny wickedly, "have never been noticeably successful in Green Valley."

"No," admitted her father, "they haven't. And of course it's too bad the boy's a minister. He's badly handicapped, naturally. Still, I never remember when I'm with him that he is a parson. It may be that women feel the same way. And you noticed that he had the good sense not to wear a

frock coat to this informal little wedding. I can't recall that he has ever worn a frock coat since he's been here. I think you'd like ministers, Nanny, if they weren't so given to wearing frock coats. In fact, I'm willing to bet that you are going to like this wonderful boy from India immensely."

Nanny stood still and faced her father.

"I loathe ministers—in any kind of a coat," she explained firmly. "And I'll bet no bets with you. Such offers are unseemly in a man of your years and already apparent grayness. They are, moreover, detrimental to my morals. I should think you'd be ashamed,—and also mindful of your former losses and mistaken prophecies."

"Oh," her father assured her, "I admit my losses and mistakes. But I have by no means lost hope or faith. You never can tell. I'm bound to guess right some day. And I'm rather partial to this minister chap. It would be so natural and fitting a punishment for an irreverent young woman. For Nanny," the father added with teasing gentleness, "sweet as you are and lovable, a little reverence and religion wouldn't hurt you."

"I've always heard it said," demurely recollected Nanny, "that girls generally take after the father."

"That may be," agreed this particular father. "In that case I should think you'd be willing to marry a little religion into the family for my sake, if not your own."

Nanny's patience was beginning to feel the strain.

"Mr. Ainslee," she warned him sternly, "if this was snowball time instead of springtime in Green Valley, I'd snowball you black and blue."

CHAPTER VIII

LILAC TIME

To the knowing and observant and the loyal Green Valley is dear at all times. But what most touches and wakens a Green Valley heart is lilac time.

There are on the Green Valley calendar many red-letter days beside the regularly recurring national holidays, but lilac time, or Lilac Sunday, is Green Valley's very own glad day. It is in the spring what Thanksgiving is in the fall and wanderers who can not get home for Thanksgiving and Christmas ease their homesick hearts with promises of lilac time in the old town.

On this particular Lilac Sunday, Nan, radiant and dressed in the sort of clothes that only Nan knew how to buy and wear, was on her way to church. She was early and decided to pass the Churchill place. She always did at lilac time, for then it was fairly embedded in fragrance and flowery glory. She had cut the blooms from her own bushes and sent them on. She carried only a few of her most perfect sprays. She saw that the Churchill gardens too had been trimmed but plenty of beauty remained.

She stopped a moment to admire the wonderful old red-brick house glowing through the tender greens of spring. Her eyes drank in its beauty and then fell on two huge perfect lilac plumes on the bush nearest her. They were larger and lovelier than her own.

With a little smile Nan reached out to gather them. She broke off the first and was about to gather the other when Cynthia's son came slowly and laughingly from around the bush.

"Let me get it for you. You will soil your glove."

Nan was startled and unaccountably embarrassed. She flushed with something like annoyance.

"Mercy! I had no idea you were anywhere about. I suppose I'm greedy but these did seem lovelier than mine. This is Lilac Sunday and I thought—perhaps nobody told you—that as long as you had so many you wouldn't mind—I hope you don't think—"

She was so very evidently bothered over the whole affair, so disconcerted, she who was always so coolly dignified, that he laughed with boyish delight.

"Oh—don't explain, I understand," he begged.

The red in Nan's cheeks deepened. She stiffened and half turned away.

"Goodness," she exclaimed to no one in particular, "how I *do* dislike ministers. They always understand everything. You just can't tell them anything. How I loathe them! They're insufferable."

It was his turn to look a little startled and embarrassed.

"But you don't have to like me as a minister. I don't want to be *your* minister."

She looked up to see just what he meant. But he seemed to have forgotten her, for the smile had gone from his eyes and though he looked at her she knew that he didn't see her; that he was looking beyond her at some one, something else. When he spoke it was with a winning gravity and a wistfulness that Nanny tried not to hear.

"I miss my mother more than any one here can guess. Grandma Wentworth is wonderful. She is so wise and good and I love her. But my mother was young and gay and very beautiful. She played and laughed and talked with me. She was the loveliest soul I ever knew. You are very much like her. I have wanted you for a friend. I never had a sister but if I could have had I should have asked for a girl like you."

Oh, Nanny sensed the pitiful, childish loneliness of that plea! The wistfulness of the boy stabbed through her really tender heart. But Nanny Ainslee was a joyous, laughter-loving creature. And the idea of this boy whom already she half loved asking her to be his *friend*, his *sister*! Oh, it was childishly funny. How her father would chuckle if he knew that she who had dismissed so many suitors with platonic friendliness and sisterly solicitude was now being offered that same platonic friendliness and brotherly love. It was too much for Nanny's sense of humor!

So Nanny giggled. She giggled disgracefully and could not stop herself,—giggled even though she knew that the tall boy beside her was flushing a painful red and slowly freezing into a hurt and painful silence. But she could not save herself or him.

"You had better let me cut you a few more sprays," he said at last curtly.

She let him lay them in her arms and they walked to church in absolute silence. Nanny never knew that any living man could be so stubbornly silent. She was sorry and she wanted to tell him so. But he gave her no chance. It seemed he was a young man who never asked for things twice. Nanny was sorry but she was also, for some incomprehensible reason, angry. And the sorrier she grew the angrier she became. Cynthia's son seemed not to notice. He walked straight on into the church but Nanny stayed outside and held open court under the big horse chestnuts in front of the church door.

She had left the olive groves and almond groves, the thick roses and the blue waters of Italy, in order to be at home in time to see her native town wrapped up in its fragrant lilac glory.

She stayed out now, her arms full of lilac plumes, watching the little groups of her townspeople coming down the village streets toward the church whose bell was tolling so sweetly through the warm, spring air.

Here came Mrs. Dustin with Peter and Joe Baldwin with his two boys and Colonel Stratton with his sweet-faced wife. From the opposite direction came the Reverend Alexander Campbell with his wife in black silk, his sister in gray silk, his elderly niece in blue silk and his wife's second cousin in lavender. There was Joshua Stillman and his quiet daughter, Uncle Tony and Uncle Tony's brother William, with his four girls and Seth Curtis' wife, Ruth.

Seth never went to church, having a profound scorn for the clergy. But he always fixed things so his wife could go. He said ministers were poor business men, selfish husbands and proverbially poor fathers, from all he'd seen of them. Somehow Seth was a singularly unfortunate man in the matter of seeing things. But there was no denying the fact that he was an unusual husband. He had been caught time and again by his men friends and neighbors on a Sunday morning with one of his wife's aprons tied about him, holding the baby in one arm, while he stirred something on the stove with the other, and in various other ways superintending his household while Ruth was at church. But neither jeers nor sympathy ever upset him.

"No, I can't say that I've ever hankered for sermons much. They don't generally tally with what I've seen and know of life. But Ruth now can get something helpful out of even a fool's remarks and comes home rested and cheerful. I figure that a woman as smart as Ruth about working and saving sure earns her right to a bit of a church on Sunday if she wants it. And furthermore, I aim to give my wife anything in reason that she wants. It doesn't hurt any man to learn from a little personal experience that babies aren't just little blessings full of smiles and dimples but darn little nuisances, let me tell you. This little kid is as good as they make them but he gives me a backache all over, puts bumps on my temper and ties my nerves up in knots. And I've discovered that just watching bread or pies or pudding is work. And when a man's peeled the potatoes and set the table and sliced the bread and filled the water glasses and opened the oven a dozen times and strained and stirred and mashed and salted and peppered, he begins to understand why his wife is so tired after getting a Sunday dinner. And when he thinks of other days, washing days and ironing and baking and scrubbing and sewing days, why, if he's anyway decent he begins to suspect that he's darn lucky to get a full-grown woman to do all that work for just her room and board. And when he stops to count the times she's tied his necktie, darned his

socks and patched his clothes, besides giving him a clean bed, a pretty sitting room to live in, children to play with and brag about, and a bank book to make him sleep easy on such nights as the storms are raging outside, why, a man just don't have to go to church to believe in God. He's got proofs enough right in his kitchen. It's the wife who ought to go if it's only to sit still for an hour and get time to tell herself that there is a God and that some day the work will let up maybe and her back won't ache any more and Johnny won't be so hard on his shoes and Sammy on his stockings. Why, I tell you I'm afraid to keep Ruth from church, afraid that if she loses her belief in a married woman's heaven she'll leave me for somebody better or get so discouraged that she'll just hold her breath and die."

So Ruth Curtis went to church every Sunday. And Seth saw to it that she always looked pretty. This particular Lilac Sunday she was wearing the sprigged dimity that Seth bought her over in Spring Road at Williamson's spring sale.

Softly the bell tolled and the last stragglers came hurrying leisurely, every soul carrying the lovely fragrant plumes so that the church would be sweet with the breath of spring. Later, these armfuls of beauty would be packed into huge boxes and shipped to the city hospitals to gladden pain-racked bodies and weary hearts.

Nanny Ainslee was still outside waiting for Grandma Wentworth. Lilac Sunday Nanny always waited for Grandma and always sat with her, because of a certain story that Grandma had told her once when the lamps were not yet lit and the soft summer moonlight lay in windowed squares on Grandma's sitting room floor. Nanny began to inquire of the last comers. But Tommy and Alice Winston, still bridey and shy, said they had seen nothing of her, and even Roger Allan supposed of course that she must be in her favorite pew, known to the oldtimers as Inspiration Corner. For it had been observed that all ministers sooner or later delivered their discourses to Grandma Wentworth. They were always sure of her undivided attention. Other people's eyes and minds might wander, some might be even openly bored, but Grandma's uplifted face was always kindly and encouraging, even though the sermon was hopelessly jumbled. She was the surest, severest critic and yet each man preached to her feeling that with the criticism would come kindliness and the sort of mother comfort that Grandma somehow knew how to give to the meanest and most blundering of creatures. Indeed, it was the least successful of Green Valley's ministers who had designated Grandma's seat as Inspiration Corner. And then had in a final burst of wrath told Green Valley that like Sodom and Gomorrah it was doomed, that no mere man preacher could save it, that its only hope lay in Grandma Wentworth, who alone understood its miserable, petty orneriness.

He meant to leave town a sputtering, raging man, that minister,—full of what he called righteous wrath. But he went to say good-by to Grandma and experienced a change of heart.

He began his farewell by unburdening his heart and soul of all the ponderous doctrines that sunny, joyful Green Valley had refused to listen to. He spoke earnestly of the world's terrible need of salvation, the fearful necessity for haste and wholesale repentance and the awful menace of God's wrath. And the fact that he was a man entering his forties instead of his thirties made matters worse.

But Grandma listened patiently and when he was emptied of all his sorrows and worriments she took him out into her herb-garden, seated him where he could see the sunset hills and then she preached a marvellous sermon to just this one man alone. No one but he knows what she told him but he went forth a humble, tired, quiet man, filled to the brim with a sudden belief in just life as it is lived by a few hundred million humans. Five years later word came to Green Valley that this same man was a much loved pastor somewhere in the mountains. And Green Valley, perennially young, unthinking, joyous Green Valley, laughed incredulously as a sweet-hearted but wrongly educated child always laughs at a true fairy tale or a simple miracle.

"If I had the making and raising of ministers," Grandma was heard to say, apropos of this clergyman, "about the first thing I'd set them to learning would be to laugh, first at themselves and then at other people. And as for this repentance and exhortation business I believe it is worn out. Humans have gotten tired of that 'last call for the paradise express.' They like this world and its life and they know they could be pretty decent if somebody would only explain a few little things to them. It isn't that they hate religion but they want to be allowed to grow into it naturally and sanely. Religion getting ought to be the quietest, happiest process, just pleasant neighboring like and comparing of ideas, with every now and then a holy hush when men and women have suddenly sensed some big beauty in life. All this noise is unnecessary, for every living soul of us, barring idiots, repents several times a day even though we don't admit it in so many words. And as for righteous wrath—it's a good thing and I believe in it, but like cayenne pepper it wants to be used sparingly and only at the right place and on the right person. Any one would think to hear some ministers talk that the Almighty was a combination of Theodore Roosevelt, the Kaiser and a New York Police Commissioner working the third degree.

"I wonder what the colleges can be thinking of, turning loose such stale foolishness and old canned stuff on a mellow, sunny little home town like Green Valley that's full of plain, blundering but well-meaning, God-fearing people who work joyfully at their business of living and turn up more religion when they plow a furrow or make over the wedding dress for the baby than these ministers can dig up out of all their musty books. I've prayed for all kinds of qualities in ministers but I've come to the point where I ask nothing more of a preacher than a laugh now and then,

some horse sense and health.

"I used to think that only mature men ought to be sent out but now I shall be glad to see a boy in the pulpit to show us the way to salvation,—a boy it may be with a head full of foolish notions that old folks say are not practical and some of which won't of course stand wear; but a boy, with a glad young face, eyes full of faith and dreams and the sort of insane courage and daring that only the young know. Such a boy needs considerable education in certain earthly matters, of course, but he's lovable and teachable and will in time grow into a real, God-knowing, truth-interpreting man."

Oh, Grandma Wentworth was an authority on ministers—ministers and babies. And it was a baby that had kept her away from church this Lilac Sunday; a little, merry, red-headed boy baby that had come in the early morning to make glad the heart of unbusinesslike Billy Evans and his neat businesslike wife. For several hours Doc Philipps and Grandma had despaired of both baby and mother, but when the pink dawn came smiling over the world's rim Billy's little son was born alive and unblemished and Billy's wife crept back from the Valley of the Shadow and smiled a bit into Billy's white, stricken face. And Billy looked deep down into the brown eyes of the girl and the terrible numbness went out of his muscles and the icy hardness from around his heart and he slipped out into the morning world to thank the Great Spirit that moved it for His mercy and wonderful gift. He just stood on his front doorstep and, looking about his pretty home and remembering the miracle within the house, poured a great prayer into the heart of the glad morning.

Billy's house was one of the most picturesque of the many pretty homes in Green Valley. It had been a ramshackle, tumbled-down old cabin lost in a tangle of bushes and hidden from the road by a shabby, unsightly row of old willows. Billy was going to rent it for temporary barn purposes but his wife, who had a nimble and a prophetic eye, made him buy it. Then, under her supervision Billy enlarged and remodeled it and Billy's wife waved some sort of a fairy wand over it, for it became over night a lovely, story-book home. When everything was ready she had the unsightly willows cut, revealing a gently rising stretch of mossy sward ending in a cluster of old trees from which the cozy house peeped roguishly, tantalizingly. Two old walnuts guarded the little footpath to the door and two huge lilac bushes screened the porch from the too curious gaze of travelers on the road below. Indeed, so altogether taking and fascinating a bit of property did it become after its transformation that it was said that two of Green Valley's real estate men never went down that road without doing sums in their heads and calling themselves names for overlooking such a bargain. It takes constructive imagination to be successful in real estate.

And now around this cozy home spot Billy wandered deliriously, aimlessly. It was the tolling of the church bell and the smell of the lilacs that recalled to him the significance of the day.

"Why, he was born on Lilac Sunday and he's red-headed just like Her. Gosh—I must a bin born lucky!"

Billy looked once more all about his story-book home and then his eyes strayed away to Petersen's Woods, fairy green and already full of deep shadowed aisles, full of fretted beauty and solemnity. Beyond them lay the creek, a pool of silver draped in misty morning veils.

"Gosh—I wish to God I was religious!" suddenly, contritely murmured Billy Evans. In high heaven the angels, and in Billy's kitchen Grandma Wentworth, overheard and smiled.

When Hank Lolly came up from the livery barn for a late breakfast, his face drawn and eyes full of fear for the man and woman who had been family and home to him, Billy went down the footpath to meet him.

"It's all right, Hank! He's here, red hair and all," Billy informed him in the merest breath of a whisper. Hank wiped his face in limp relief and sat down quite suddenly on the grass beside the path. Instinctively Billy sat down with him.

They said nothing for a time, just looked and looked at the wide blue sky, the green sweet world, tried for perhaps the millionth time to sense Eternity and the what-and-why-and-how of it all and then gave it up and like children accepted the day, the little new life, the whole wonder of it as happy children accept it all, on faith and with untainted joy. It was just good to be there and there was no doubting the perfect May day. So they sat reverently until Billy, looking again at that mass of shimmering greens and into those church-like aisles, said:

"Hank, some one of us had ought to go to church to-day. I wish to God I had kep' up going to Sunday school. Mother got me started but she died before she could get me started in on church. So I never went. It's a terrible thing for a man not to learn religion along with his reading and writing and 'rithmetic. I used to think it was nobody's business whether I had any religion or not after mother died. I knew that where she was she'd understand. But I see now it was a terrible mistake thinking that way and not laying in a supply of religion. A man thinks he owns himself and that certain things are nobody's business, but by-and-by along comes a wife or a red-headed baby and things happen different from what you've ever expected, things that you just got to have religion for, and gosh—what are you going to do then if you ain't got any?"

This terrible situation being beyond the mental powers of Hank, that soul just sat still until

Billy puzzled a way out.

"Somebody'd ought to go to church from out this house to-day," went on Billy in a low voice. "Grandma Wentworth can't go on account of Her and It. I can't go because—gosh—I'm so kind of split, my head going one way and my legs another, that as likely as not I'd wind up in the blacksmith shop or the hotel or fall in the creek. I ain't safe on the streets to-day, Hank. And, anyway, I've got to keep up fires and water boiling and them dumb'd frogs under the willows from croaking so's She can sleep to-night. That leaves nobody but you, Hank."

Billy hesitated, realizing the enormity of the request he was about to make.

"Hank—I wish to God, you'd go and sort of settle the bill up for me. Just go, Hank, and tell Him, that's the Big Boss, how darned thankful we all are about what's happened to-day and that we'll do right by the little shaver and that we'll try to run the livery business so's He won't find too many mistakes when He gets around to looking over the books Barney and you and me's keeping. And you might mention how we've always made it a point to treat our horses well but will do better in the future. And tell Him I'll see that the Widow Green's spring plowing is done sooner after this. It was a darn shame her being left last like that but that she never asked me, me being so easy-going and she so neat, until the rest of them left her in the lurch. And tell Him I'll take the sheriff's job, though if there's one thing I can't do it's watching people and jumping on them. Just talk to Him that way, Hank. Put in any little thing you happen to think of and go as far as you like in promises and subscriptions. The business is moving and what promises you and I can't keep She'll find a way to pay off. And here's a ten-dollar gold piece to drop in the hat when it comes around. You—"

But Hank was standing now and looking at his employer with such terror in every line of his weather-beaten face that Billy paused again.

"My God—Billy! You ain't asking me—*me*—to—to—to—to go to *church*?" Hank's voice fairly squeaked and stuttered with the horror that clutched him.

"Hank, if there was any one else—"

But Hank, shaking in every joint and muscle of his still flabby body, wagged his head in utter misery.

"Billy, I'll do anything else for you and Mrs. Evans and little Billy—anything but that. I'll jump into Wimple's pond, get drunk, sign the pledge—anything but that. What you're a-wanting, Billy, ain't to be thought of. You're forgetting, Billy, what I was and what I am. Why, Billy, that there church belongs to the best people in this town and it ain't for the likes of me to go into such vallyable places, a-tramplin' on that there expensive carpet we both of us hauled free of charge last September. There's Doc Philipps and Tony and Grandma Wentworth and any number of good friends of mine in there. And do you think I want to shame them and insult them by coming into their church, disturbing the doings? You just let things be and when Mrs. Evans is up and around again she'll go like she always does when she's got enough vittles cooked up for us men folks. I'm a miserable, no-account drunk, that's what I am, Billy Evans, and I ain't no proper person to send on an errand to the Lord. Why, church ain't for the likes of me—it's—it's—"

But at this point language failed Hank entirely, and the enormity of the proposed undertaking once more sweeping over him, Hank searched for his bandanna and wiped the beads of cold sweat from around his mouth and the back of his stringy neck.

Billy was silent. He knew that Hank was right and that he had asked an impossible service of his faithful helper. Still there in the morning sun glistened the green grove and through the holiness of the spring morning tolled the old church bell. So Billy rose and walked slowly and a little sadly up the narrow path. And Hank walked up with him.

It was in silence that they sat down to their late breakfast. But in the act of swallowing his tenth cornmeal pancake dripping with maple syrup Hank had a sudden inspiration. The misery in his face gave place to a grim determination.

"Billy," he offered remorsefully, "I can't go to church for you, but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go to the dentist's and have these bad teeth fixed that Doc and Mrs. Evans and you have been at me about. Next to going to church that's the awfullest thing I know of and I'll do it. Doc says that bad teeth make a bad stomach and a bad stomach makes a bad man and it may be so. And as for that ten-dollar gold piece, I don't see why you can't send that by Barney, same as you'd send him to the bank for change or to Tony's to pay the gas bill. When I go back now I'll just send Barney along with it, and then I'll go see Doc Mitchell and let him kill me with that there machine of his."

That's how it happened that a little thin hand caught Nanny Ainslee's just as she was entering the church door and Barney of the spindle legs begged frenziedly for assistance.

"Aw, Nan—look at this!" and he held out the gold piece. "Billy Evans' got a little baby down to his house and he's clean crazy. Grandma Wentworth's bossing the baby show and she says for you to take the minister home to dinner. And Billy's sent this here and wants me to put it in the collection box and I don't dast. Why, say, old man Austin that passes the collection plate would have me pinched if he saw me drop that in it.

"And, anyhow, I ain't been liked around here ever since last Christmas when I got three boxes of candy by mistake. And, gee—Nan, I don't know what to do about it. Billy Evans is the best man in this here town and I'd do most anything for him, but he's such a good guy himself he don't see that church ain't any place for a kid like me and that it was a mistake to send me with this coin."

Nan's amazement gave way to sudden enlightenment. She knew now why Grandma Wentworth had not put in an appearance, and knowing Billy Evans well, she instantly comprehended the situation.

"Barney, what in the world are you talking about, saying this church is no place for you. This is just the place for a boy who gets several boxes of Christmas candy by mistake. You come right along with me."

"Aw, Nan, why can't you drop it in for me? I just ain't got the nerve. I'd rather get all my teeth pulled like Hank is going to do. Why, say, Nan, just the sight of old Austin makes my hair curl. I tell ya he don't like me and I'll be pinched—"

But Nan had already drawn Billy's spindle-legged assistant inside and as no man yet had been known to show anything but quiet pride when escorting Nanny Ainslee, Barney straightened manfully and with an outward serenity that amazed even himself he gracefully slid into a seat, having first gallantly stepped aside to permit his gracious lady to be seated. And life being that morning especially a thing of tender humor, they had no sooner settled themselves comfortably when Fanny Foster, the last comer, sank down beside them, breathing heavily.

Fanny Foster was always late for church, not from any notion that a late entrance was fashionable but because of some hitch in her domestic affairs. She always explained to the congregation afterward just what had caused her delay and the congregation was always ready to listen to her excuses, for they were as a rule highly original ones.

Fate was always sending Fanny the most thrilling experiences at the most improper times. The children were always falling into the cistern or setting the barn afire as she was about to start out somewhere. And such things as buttonhooks and hairpins had a way of disappearing just when she was in the greatest hurry. Not that the lack of these toilet necessities ever stopped Fanny from attending any town function.

If the buttonhook could not be found she set out with her shoes unbuttoned, borrowing the necessary implement on the way. If she had no hairpins she put her hair up temporarily with two knitting needles or lead pencils or anything like that that came handy, stopped at Jessup's, bought her hairpins, and while reporting news in Mrs. Green's kitchen did up her hair without the aid of brush, comb or mirror.

This trait Fanny came by naturally. She had had a droll grandmother. It was authentic history that once at the very moment when she was getting ready to attend a Green Valley funeral this grandmother's false teeth broke, leaving her somewhat dazed. But only for a moment, for she was a woman with a perfect memory. She suddenly remembered that the wife of the deceased had an old emergency set; so, slipping through the back streets, she arrived at the house of grief, borrowed the new widow's old teeth and wept as copiously and sincerely, albeit a little carefully, over the remains as any one else there.

Now, scarcely waiting to regain her breath, Fanny turned to Nanny with the usual explanations, only stopping to exclaim over Barney—"Land sakes, Barney, what are you doing here!" A breath and then in sibilant whispers:

"Well—I thought I'd never get here. When I come to dress I found the children had cut up my corset into a harness for the dog and Jessup's said they hadn't anybody to send up with a new one and John said he couldn't go because his foot's bad, him having stepped on the rake yesterday afternoon and not wanting to irritate it, so's he could go to work tomorrow as usual. And Grandma's up to Billy Evans' trying to keep him from going crazy or I could have borrowed one of hers. So I 'phoned Central to see if she couldn't hunt up somebody to bring me that new corset from Jessup's. Well, who does she get hold of but Denny, just as he's going past with a telegram for Jocelyn Brownlee. He brought the corset with the string gone and the box broken and asked me to help him figure out what that telegram meant. It said,

"'Coming better call it phyllis BOB.'

"There's few men that can write a proper letter. We had to give it up. And as if that wasn't enough, when I got to the creamery I met Skinflint Holden and he told me there was a lot of disease amongst the cattle and the men all got together and had a meeting and made Jake Tuttle deputy marshal or something. It's a wonder Jake wouldn't say something. I suppose he thinks the few old cows we have here in town ain't worth saving.

"Well, anyhow, I was hurrying along so's not to be late and just as I turned Tumley's hedge didn't Bessie come out with her face swollen so she looked homelier than Theresa Meyer. It seems she had a birthday and Alex brought her a big box of chocolates and they give her the toothache. She went to Doc Mitchell but he put her off because he was regulating and pulling every tooth in Hank Lolly's head. She was just sick to think she had to miss Lilac Sunday and Mr. Courtney's last sermon, but she told me to be sure and listen and if he let on he was sorry he was

leaving not to believe him, because he's had everything except the parlor furniture crated for a month. They've been eating off tin plates and drinking out of two enamel cups on the kitchen table. Bessie thinks that for a minister he's full of sin and self-pride. But I say even a minister—"

But at this point the hymn singing was over, the congregation settled itself in comfortable attitudes, and the careful Mr. Courtney rose to deliver his farewell sermon.

It was a sermon that stirred nobody. Green Valley was as glad to see the Reverend Courtney departing as he was to go. His one cautious reference to their pastorless state, for he did not know that Green Valley had already selected its new minister, brought not a line of worry to the faces turned so politely to the pulpit, for on Lilac Sunday and to a farewell sermon Green Valley was ever polite.

Green Valley, listening, thought with relief of the Sundays ahead and felt very much the way a hospitable housewife feels when an uncongenial guest departs and the home springs back to its old cheery order and family peace.

When the services were over Green Valley strolled out into the May sunshine in twos and threes and stood about as always in little groups to exchange the week's news. Billy Evans' new happiness, the ten-dollar gold piece and all its attending incidents were duly talked over. Under the horse chestnuts Max Longman was telling Colonel Stratton how the day before Sam Ellis had at last leased the hotel to a Chicago man. It was reported that there was to be no new barber shop, but that over on West Street a poolroom, also run by a city stranger, was already doing business. Several people had passed it that morning on their way to church and all said it had a peculiar appearance.

"Looks like one of those woebegone city dens, with its green plush curtains so you can't see what's going on inside. All it needs is fly specks on the windows and a strong smell at its side door. That'll come with time. I hear you can play billiards and pool in there and there's some slot machines for those too young to take a hand at cards."

So said Jake Tuttle, who now that he was a deputy sheriff on the watch for diseases threatening his and his neighbors' cattle, suddenly realized that there might be such a thing as a deputy sheriff to look out for the physical and moral health of humans.

Green Valley listened to Max Longman's announcement and Jake's comment and made up its mind to go around and see. Sam Ellis' withdrawal from business made Green Valley folks a little uneasy. The hotel in other hands might become a strange place. For a moment an uncomfortable feeling gripped those who heard. Sam, an old friend and a neighbor, with his genial good sense and old-fashioned hotel was one thing. A stranger from the big and wicked city was another.

Green Valley almost began to worry a bit. But on the way home this feeling wore off. How could things change? Why, there were the Spencer boys taking turns at the ice-cream freezer on the back porch. There was Ella Higgins coming out with a saucer of milk for her cat. Downer's barn door was open and any one could see by the new buggy that stood in it that Jack Downer's brother and family had driven in from the farm for a Sunday dinner and visit. Williamson's dog, Caesar, was tied up,—a sure sign that Mel and Emmy had gone off to see Emmy's folks over in Spring Road. The chairs in Widow Green's orchard told plainly that her sister's girls had come in from the city for the week-end. On the Fenton's front porch sat pretty Millie Fenton, waiting to put a flower in Robbie Longman's buttonhole. While everybody knew that just next door homely Theresa Meyer was putting an extra pan of fluffy soda biscuits into the oven as the best preparation for *her* beau.

So Green Valley looked and smiled and went joyously home to its fragrant, old-fashioned Sunday dinner. New elements might and would come but this smiling town would absorb them, mellow them to its own golden hue and go on its way living and rejoicing.

Cynthia's son went to dinner with the Ainslees. He walked with Mr. Ainslee while Nan and her brother went on ahead. Nan was almost noisily gay but no one seemed to be at all aware of it.

The dinner was delicious and went off without the least bit of embarrassment. At the table Nan was as suddenly still as she had been noisily gay. She let the men do the talking while she scrupulously attended to their wants. Once she forgot herself and while he was talking studied the face of Cynthia's son. Her father caught her at it and smiled. This made her flush and to even up matters she deliberately put salt instead of sugar into her father's after-dinner cup of coffee. Whereupon he, tasting the salt, made an irrelevant remark about handwriting on the wall.

CHAPTER IX

GREEN VALLEY MEN

Close on the heels of Lilac Sunday comes Decoration Day. And nowhere is it observed so thoroughly as in Green Valley.

The whole week preceding the day there is heard everywhere the whir of sewing machines. New dresses are feverishly cut and made; old ones ripped and remade. Hats are bought, old ones are retrimmed. Buggies are repainted and baby carriages oiled. Dick does a thriving business in lemons, picnic baskets, flags, peanuts and palm-leaf fans, these being things that Jessup's chronically forget to carry, regarding them as trifles and rather scornfully leaving them to Dick, who makes a point of having on hand a very choice supply.

This fury of work gradually dies down, to be followed by such an epidemic of baking that the old town smells like a sweet old bakery shop with its doors and windows wide open. There is then every evening a careful survey of the flower beds in the garden, a rigid economy of blossoms and even much skilful forcing of belated favorites.

The last day is generally given over to hat buying, the purchasing of the last forgotten fixings and clothes inspections. From one end of the town to the other clotheslines, dining-room chairs, porch rockers and upstairs bedrooms are overflowing with silk foulards, frilled dimities, beribboned and belaced organdies, not to mention the billows of dotted swiss and muslin.

On short clotheslines, stretched across corners of back and side porches or in the tree-shaded nooks of back yards, may be seen hanging the holiday garments of Green Valley men. But what most catches the eye are the old suits of army blue flapping gently in the spring breeze with here and there a brass button glinting. There are a surprising number of these suits of army blue just as there are a surprising number of graves in the little Green Valley cemetery over which, the long year through, flutters the small flag set there by loving hands each Decoration Day.

There are all manner of cleaning operations going on in full view of anybody and everybody who might be interested enough to look. For there is no streak of mean secretiveness in Green Valley folks.

This is the one time in the year when Widow Green takes off and "does up" the yellow silk tidy that drapes the upper right-hand corner of her deceased husband's portrait which stands on an easel in the darkest corner of her parlor. This little service is not the tender attention of a loving and grieving wife for a sadly missed husband but rather a patriotic woman's tribute to a man, who, worthless and cruel as a husband, had yet been a gallant and an honorable soldier.

As the widow sits on the back steps carefully washing the tidy in a hand basin and with a bar of special soap highly recommended by Dick, she looks over into the next yard and calls to Jimmy Rand and asks him whether he's going to march with the rest of the school children and will there be anything special on the programme this year. And he tells her sure he's going to march. Ain't he got a new pair of pants, a blouse, a navy blue tie and a new stickpin? And as for the programme, he warns her to watch out "fur us kids because we're going to be fixed up for something, but I dassent tell because it's a surprise the teachers got up."

This is the one day in the year when Jimmy Rand polishes his grandfather's shoes with scrupulous care and without demanding the usual nickel. He takes his payment in watching the blue army suit swaying on the line under the tall poplars and in hearing the crowds on Decoration Day shout themselves hoarse for old Major Rand.

It is the one time too when Old Skinflint Holden gets from his fellow citizens and neighbors a certain grave respect, for they all know that on the morrow among the men in blue will be this same Old Skinflint Holden with a medal on his breast.

Though every preparation has seemingly been made days ago, still that last night before the event is the very busiest time of all.

Joe Baldwin's little shop is crowded. Jake Tuttle is there with the four children, buying them the fanciest of footgear for the morrow. The two Miller boys, who work in the creamery until nine every night but have special leave this day to purchase holiday necessities, are standing awkwardly near Joe's side door and waiting patiently for Frankie Stevens and Dora Langely, better known as "Central," to depart with their black velvet slippers, before making any effort to have Joe try his wares on their awkward feet. Little Johnny Peterson comes in to inquire if Joe has sewed the buttons on his, Johnny's, shoes, and Martha Gray has a hard time trying to decide which of two pairs of moccasins are most becoming to her youngest baby. Any number of youths are hanging about waiting for Joe to get around to selling them a box of his best shoe polish and some, getting impatient, wait on themselves. Joe, with his spectacles pushed up into his hair, is rushing around from customer to customer and through it all is dimly conscious of the fact that outside under the awning Dolly Beatty is waiting anxiously for the men folks to get out before she ventures in to buy her Joe's special brand of corn salve and bunion plaster.

And so it is all the way down Main Street. In the gents' furnishings' corner of Peter Sweeney's dry-goods store Seth Curtis is buying a new hat, a little jaunty hat that seems to fit his head well enough but doesn't somehow become the rest of him. Seth looks best in a cap and always wears one except, of course, on such state occasions as the coming one. He asks the Longman boys how he looks in the brown fedora Pete has just put on his head and Max Longman laughs and wants to

know what difference it makes how a married man with a bald spot looks. Then he turns away to pick out carefully the kind of tie that will make him most pleasing in Clara's sight on the morrow.

In the ladies' department of that same store Jocelyn Brownlee is asking for long, white silk gloves. A little hush falls on the crowd of feminine shoppers as Mrs. Pete gets the stepladder, mounts it and brings down with a good deal of visible pride a pasteboard box containing six pairs of white silk gloves that Pete bought three years ago in a moment of incomprehensible madness, a thing which Mrs. Pete has never until this minute forgiven him.

Jocelyn, pretty, eager, unaffected, selects the very first pair and is wholly unconscious of the stir she has made. It is only when David Allan comes up and asks her if she is ready that she becomes confused and conscious of the watching eyes of the other buyers.

She has promised to go to the Decoration Day exercises with David and has hurried to buy gloves for the occasion not knowing, in her city innocence, that gloves aren't the style in Green Valley, leastways not for any outdoor festival.

David watches the gloves being wrapped up and that reminds him that it wouldn't hurt to buy a new buggy whip, one of the smart ones with the bit of red, white and blue ribbon on its tip that he saw standing in Dick's window.

So he and Jocelyn go off together to get the whip. It is the first time that Jocelyn has been out in the village streets after nightfall and she looks about her with eager eyes.

"My—how pretty the streets look and sound! It's ever so much prettier than village street scenes on the stage!" she confides to David. And David laughs and takes her over to Martin's for a soda and then, because it is still early, he coaxes her to walk about town with him and as a final treat they stop in front of Mary Langely's millinery shop.

Mary Langely's shop stands right back of Joe Baldwin's place on the next street. Mary is a widow with two girls. Dora is the Green Valley telephone operator and Nellie is typist and office girl for old Mr. Dunn who is Green Valley's best real estate and lawyer man. He sells lots, now and then a house, writes insurance and draws up wills, collects bills or rather coaxes careless neighbors to settle their accounts, and he absolutely does not believe in divorce or woman suffrage. These two matters stir the gentle little man to great wrath. His wife is even a gentler soul than he is. She is the eldest of the Tumleys, sister of George Hoskins' wife and to Joe Tumley, the little man with a voice as sweet as a skylark's.

You go to Mr. Dunn's office through a little low gate and you find an old, deep-eaved, gambrel-roofed house with a hundred little window panes smiling at you from out its mantle of ivy. You love it at once but you don't go in right away, because the great old trees won't let you. You go and stand under them and wonder how old they are and lay your hand caressingly on the fine old trunks. And then you see the myrtle and violets growing beneath them and near the house clumps of daisies and forget-me-nots. And then you spy the beehives and the quaint old well and you walk through the cool grape arbor right into the little kitchen, where Mrs. Dunn, as likely as not, is making a cherry pie or currant jell or maybe a strawberry shortcake. She is a delicious and an old-fashioned cook. Why, she even keeps a giant ten-gallon cooky jar forever filled with cookies, although there are now no children in this sweet old manse. Nobody now but Nellie Langely who goes home every night to the millinery shop where she helps her mother make and sell the bonnets that have made Mary Langely famous in all the country round.

Green Valley folks have never quite gotten over wondering about Mary Langely. When Tom Langely was alive Mary was a self-effacing, oddly silent woman. People said she and Tom were a queer pair. Tom had great ambitions in almost every direction. He even made brave beginnings. But that was all. Then one day, in the midst of all manner of ambitious enterprises, he grew tired of living and died. And then it was that Mary Langely rose from obscurity and made Green Valley rub its eyes. For within a week after Tom's death she had gathered together all the loose ends of things that he had started, clapped a frame second story on the imposing red brick first floor of the house Tom had begun, converted this first floor into a store, and inside of a month was selling hats to women who hadn't until then realized they needed a hat.

There were more electric bulbs and mirrors in Mary's shop than in any three houses in Green Valley. That was why it was always the gayest spot in town on the night preceding any holiday.

It was interesting and pleasant to watch through the brightly lighted windows and the wide double glass doors the women trying on the gay creations and hovering over the heaps of flowers and glittering ornaments heaped upon the counters.

Jocelyn and David stood in the soft shadow of an old elm and while they watched David explained the customers going in and coming out. He told her that the tall straight woman buying the spray of purple lilacs for her last year's hat was the Widow Green. The short, waddly woman trying on the wide hat with the pink roses was Bessie Williams. The tall girl with the pretty braids wound round her head was Bonnie Don, big Steve Meckling's sweetheart. Steve, David explained, was so foolishly in love that he was ready to commit murder if another lad so much as looked at Bonnie.

The tall quiet man buying hats and ribbons for his girls was John Foster. And the little bow-

legged one, with the hard hat two sizes too big, was Hen Tomlins who always went shopping with his wife.

So Green Valley made its purchases and hastened home to pack its lunch basket and lay out all its clothes on the spare-room bed. Even as David and Jocelyn walked home through the laughing streets, lights were being winked out in the lower living rooms only to flash out somewhere up-stairs where the family was wisely going to bed early. No one even glanced at the sky, for it was taken for granted that Green Valley skies would do their very best, as a matter of course.

When the last star began to fade and the first little breath of a new morning ruffled the soft gray silence a sudden sharp volley rang out. It was the Green Valley boys setting off cannon crackers in front of the bank. And it must be said right here that that first signal volley was about all the fireworks ever indulged in in Green Valley. This little town, nestling in the peaceful shelter of gentle hills and softly singing woods, naturally disliked harsh, ugly sounds and was moreover far too thrifty, too practical and sane a community to put firearms and flaming death into the hands of its children. Green Valley patriotism was of a higher order.

At that sharp volley Green Valley awoke with a start and a laugh and ran to put flags on its gateposts and porch pillars and loop bunting around its windows. And when the morning broke like a great pink rose and shed its rosy light over the dimpling hills and lacy, misty woodlands the old town was a-flutter with banners, everybody was about through with breakfast and certain childless and highly efficient ladies were already taking their front and side hair out of curl papers.

At eight o'clock sharp the school bell summoned the children. Then a little later the church bell summoned the veterans. And by nine the procession was marching down Maple Street, flags waving, band playing and every face aglow.

First came the little tots all in white, the boy babies bearing little flags and the girl babies little baskets of flowers, with little Eleanor Williams carrying in her tiny hands a silken banner on which Bessie Williams, her mother, had beautifully embroidered a dove and the lovely word, "Peace."

Then came the older children, a whole corps it seemed of Red Cross nurses, followed by a regiment of merry sailor boys. There were cowboys and Boy Scouts, boys in overalls and brownies. There were girls in liberty caps, crinolines and sunbonnets.

So grade after grade Green Valley's children came, a proud and happy escort for the men in blue who followed. Nanny Ainslee's father led the veterans, sitting his horse right gallantly. Nanny and her father were both riding and so was Doc Philipps.

There were plenty of people on horseback but most of the town marched, even The Ladies Aid Society, every member wearing her badge and new hat with conscious pride and turning her head continually to look at the children, as the head of the procession turned corners. The young married women with babies rode in buggies, from every one of whose bulging sides flags drooped and fat baby legs and picnic baskets protruded.

Everything went smoothly, joyously along, though a few incidents in various parts of the procession caused smiles, gusts of laughter and even alarm.

Jimmy Rand had a few anxious moments when the four fat puppies he thought he had shut safely into the barn came yelping and tumbling joyously into the very heart of the marching crowds.

Jim Tumley was down on the day's programme for several numbers. But as the line swung around the hotel and the spring winds stained with the odors of liquor swept temptingly over him he half started to step out of line. But Frank Burton guessed his trouble and ordered Martin's clerk, Eddie, to bring the little chap an extra large and fine soda instead.

Mrs. Hen Tomlins upset things by ordering Hen back home to change his shirt. It seems that Hen had deliberately put on a shirt with a soft collar and in the excitement of getting under way and trying to remember which way her new hat was supposed to set Mrs. Hen had failed to notice the crime until, her fears set at rest by Mary Langeley, she turned around to see if Hen looked all right.

Uncle Tony was in a great state of excitement. He was continually leaving his place in The Business Men's Association to have a look from the side lines at the imposing spectacle.

Here and there mothers close enough to their offspring were suggesting a more frequent use of handkerchiefs and calling attention to traitorous garters and wrinkled stockings. Tommy Downey had forgotten what his mother had told him about being sure to put his ears inside his cap and those two appendages, burned and already blistered by the hot May sun, stood out in solemn grandeur from his small, round, grinning face. The school teachers were keeping anxious eyes on their particular broods and insisting that the eager feet keep solemn step to the music.

Sam Ellis' new greenhorn hired girl, Francy, was sitting in the back seat of the buggy, holding down the brimming baskets and leaning out as far as possible so as not to miss anything that might happen at either end as well as the middle of the procession. She had been utterly unable to pin on her first American hat with hatpins, so had wisely tied it to her head with a large red-bordered handkerchief which she had brought over from the old country.

Jocelyn Brownlee, sitting beside David in his smart rig, had begged him to go last so that she could see everything. This was her first country festival and no child in that throng was so happily, wildly eager to drain the day to the very last drop of enjoyment.

Jocelyn and David however did not end the procession. Behind them, though quite a way back, was Uncle Tony's brother William. William was driving his span of grays so slowly that the pretty creatures tossed their heads restlessly, impatiently, lonely for the companionship of the gay throng ahead.

But though their owner knew what they wanted he held them back sternly. But he looked as wistfully as they at the fluttering flags and listened as keenly to the puffs of music that the wind dashed into his face every now and then.

Every Decoration Day Uncle Tony's brother William rode just so, slowly and alone at the end of the gay procession. On that day he was a lonely and tragic figure. Loved and respected every other day in the year, on this he was shunned. For he was the only man in all Green Valley who, when conscripted, would not go to the war but sent a substitute, one Bob Saunders.

Bob was killed at Gettysburg and nobody mourned him, not even his very own sister though Green Valley was duly proud of the way he died. Only on this one day did Green Valley remember the man whose death was the one and only worth while deed of a misspent life. But on this one day too Green Valley shunned the man who sent him to his death.

So every Decoration Day William came alone to put a wreath on Bob's grave and watch the exercises from a distance. When it was over he went home—alone. And Green Valley let him do it year after year.

He was never known to murmur at Green Valley's annual censure nor did he ever seem to hope for forgiveness. Green Valley had asked him once why he had done it and he said that he would have been worthless as a soldier because he did not believe in killing people and was himself horribly afraid of being butchered.

Green Valley was appalled at this terrible confession, at the absence in one of its sons of even the common garden variety of courage. It did its best for a while to despise William. But it is hard work despising an honest, quiet, just and lovable man. So gradually William was allowed to come home into Green Valley's life. And it was only on this one holiday that he was an outcast. Neither did any one ever remind William's children of what years ago their father had done. But of course they knew. Their father had told them himself. They were in no way cast down. They were all girls who loved their father and did not believe in war.

In that fashion then, and in that order, Green Valley marched down Main Street, up Grove, through lovely Maple and very slowly down Orchard Avenue so that Jeremy Collins, who was bedridden because of a bullet wound suffered at Shiloh, could see his old comrades with whom he could no longer march.

All the way down Park Lane the band played its very best and loudest as if calling from afar to those comrades who lay sleeping beneath the pines and oaks of the little cemetery. And just as the Green Valley folks came in sight of the white headstones the Spring Road procession came tramping over the old bridge, and Elmwood, with its flags and band, was coming up the new South Road. The three towns met nicely at the very gates of the cemetery and together made the sort of sound and presented the sort of sight that lingers in the heart long after other things have faded from one's memory.

Then the bands grew still and there was quiet, a quiet that every minute grew deeper so that the noisiest youngster grew round-eyed and the fat sleek horses moved never a hoof. And then, sweet and soft through the waiting, hushed air, came the notes of Major Rand's cornet. He was playing for his comrades as he had played at Shiloh, at Chickamauga and many another place in the Southland. He played all their old favorites and then very, very softly the cornet wailed—"We are tenting to-night on the old camp ground"—and somewhere beside it little Jim Tumley began to sing.

From the high blue sky and the softly stirring tree-tops the words seem to drop into little hearts and big hearts and the sweet, melting sadness of them misted the eyes. When the last feathery echo had died away the men in blue passed two by two through the cemetery gate. Reverend Campbell, who had been their chaplain, said a short prayer. At its end the children, with their arms full of flowers, crowded up and the men in blue stopped at every grave. The little boys planted their flags at the head and the little girls scattered the blossoms deep.

From beyond the gates Green Valley and Spring Road and Elmwood watched its heroes and its children. In David Allan's smart rig sat a little city girl, her face crumpled and stained like a rain-beaten rose. She was saying to no one in particular, "Oh—my daddy was a soldier too but I

know that he never had a Decoration Day like this."

The bands played again and each class went through its number on the programme with grace and only a very few noticeable blunders. Tommy Downey, ears rampant, a tooth missing and a face radiant with joy and absolute self-confidence, mounted the bunting and flag-draped stage and in a booming voice wholly out of proportion to his midget dimensions and in ten dashing verses assured those assembled that the man who wore the shoulder straps was a fine enough fellow to be sure, but that it was after all the man without them who had to win the day.

The old country roads rippled with applause and Tommy's mother, forgetting for once Tommy's funny ears which were her greatest source of grief, drew the funny little body close and explained to admiring bystanders that Tommy "took" after one of her great-uncles, a soul much given to speech making.

So number after number went off and then there came the speech of the day. It had been decided at the last moment that Doc Philipps must make this, because the specially ordered and greatly renowned speaker, one Daniel Morton from down Brunesville way, had at the last moment and at his ridiculous age contracted measles.

Now Green Valley knew how Doc Philipps hated to talk about almost everything except trees. But Green Valley also knew that Doc could talk about most anything if he was so minded. He was, moreover, as well known and loved in Spring Road and Elmwood as he was in his own town. So Green Valley folks leaned back, certain that this speech would be worth hearing.

The bulky figure in army blue stepped to the edge of the platform and for a silent minute towered above his neighbors like one of the great trees he so loved. Then, without warning or preface, he began to talk to them.

"War is pretty—when the uniforms are new and the band is playing. War is glorious to read about and talk about—when it's all over. But war is every kind of hell imaginable for everybody and everything while it's going on! And they lie who say that it ever was, is, or can be anything else. Every soldier here to-day above ground or below it will and would tell you the same.

"And they are fools who say that wars cannot be prevented. War is the rough and savage tool of a world as yet too ignorant to invent and use any other. But here and there, in odd corners of the world, an ever-increasing number of men are recognizing it as a disease, due to ignorance, as possible to cure and wipe out, as any other of the horrible plagues of mankind.

"When I was twenty-three I too believed in war. I liked the uniform, I liked the excitement of going, I liked the idea of 'fighting for the right.' I was too young and too ignorant to realize that older, better men than I on the other side felt just as right as I did. In those days war was the only tool and we thought it right, and some of us went hating it and some of us went shouting like fools. I went for the lark of it, for I knew no better. I marched away in a new uniform with the band playing and the flags snapping. And on the little old farm my father gave me I left a nineteen-year-old wife with my one-year-old baby.

"Next door to that wife and baby of mine lived a man who did not believe in war, a man who, even when conscription came and he was called, refused to go to war. He hired a substitute and stayed at home. And for that Green Valley has marked that man a coward and every year sits in judgment upon him.

"Yet the man who would not go to war stayed at home to plough my fields and plant them. He it was who saw to it that that wife of mine and the wives of other war-mad boys did not want for bread. He stayed at home here and minded his business and ours as well. He wrote letters and got news for our women when they got to fretting too hard. He harvested our crops, tended our stock, and mended our fences because he is so made that he cannot bear to see things wasted, neglected, ruined.

"As a soldier that man was worthless, for the business of a soldier is to kill, to burn, to waste, to maim. He knew that and he knew that being what he was he could serve his country better doing the things he liked and believed in.

"I came out of that war a physical wreck but with a heart purified. I saw such a hell of evil, such destruction, such misery that to-day I am a doctor and a planter of trees. When I saw men torn to rags and lovely strips of woodland ripped to splintered ugliness I vowed that if I ever came through that madness I would make amends. I swore I would go through the world mending things. So terribly did those war horrors grip me. And I have tried to keep my promise. For every tree I saw splintered I have tried to plant another somewhere. I have been able to do this because of that old neighbor of mine.

"When I came home a wreck and said that I wanted to be a doctor, people laughed at the idea. But the man who does not believe in war came to me at night and offered to help me through the medical school. It was that man who made a doctor of me. He had the courage to believe and trust when every one else laughed.

"Yet that is the man Green Valley has been punishing all these years. You have been counting that man a coward when you know he is no coward. When Petersen's fool hired man let that bull

out of its stall to rage through Green Valley's streets it was Green Valley's coward who caught him at the risk of his life. When Johnny Bigelow was sick with smallpox it was the coward who nursed him.

"You know all that. Yet, because of outlived and mossy tradition, you let that man ride alone, keep him out of a Green Valley day, you who count yourselves such good neighbors.

"I tell you we men in blue and gray are dead and our tool of war is a poor and clumsy thing of the past. Ours was a brave enough, great enough day. But it has passed, its story is over and done with.

"It is the new brand of courage that the new generations want and will have. And no old soldier here but is glad to feel that the days of bloodshed are over, that somewhere in the days ahead there is coming the dawn of peace, a world peace forevermore."

As suddenly as he began he stopped, for a long second there was a strange silence. For just the space of ten heart flutters there was amazement at this new style of address. No old soldier had ever talked to them in that fashion. But when they saw him striding over that stage and headed straight for William the storm broke and eddied out to where William sat, holding in the grays, not even dreaming that at last he was understood and forgiven.

After the last songs were sung the sun stood high. So then the great gathering broke into little family groups that strolled off up the roads in every direction. Here in shady spots tablecloths were spread and soon everybody seemed to be opening a basket and the feast was on.

In half an hour all manner of things had happened. The Whitely twins fell into some strawberry pies, and supposedly hard boiled eggs were in many cases found to be extremely soft boiled. Boys of all sizes were beginning to be smeared from ear to ear and two of Hen Tomlin's wife's doughnuts were found to be quite raw inside, a discovery that so stunned that careful lady that she never noticed Hen had taken off his stiff linen collar, opened his shirt and tucked both it and his undershirt into a very cool and comfortable décolleté effect.

In another half hour fat babies fell asleep where they sat, their little fat hands holding tight to some goody. Boys old enough to wonder about the contrariness of things mortal looked sadly at the still inviting tables and marveled that a thoughtful and farseeing Providence should have made a boy's stomach in so careless and penurious a fashion.

They made as many as a dozen trials to see if by any chance some corner of the said organ could be further reenforced. But when even ice-cream and marshmallows refused to go down they gave up and dragged themselves away to some spot where a more lucky or efficient comrade was still blissfully busy.

The married men openly loosened their belts and looked about for a quiet and restful spot. The unmarried ones went sneaking off where their mothers and their best girls couldn't see them smoking their cigarettes.

In the general relaxation Dolly Beatty slipped off her tightest shoe, one bunion and four corns clamoring loudly for room. And though nobody saw her do it, everybody knew that Sam Bobbins' wife had gone behind some convenient bush and taken off her new corset.

In this quiet time old friends searched each other out and sat peacefully talking over old times. The married women kept their eyes on the strolling couples, hoping to see a lovers' quarrel or discover a new and as yet unannounced affair. Little by little news was disseminated and listened to that in the elaborate preparations of the past days had been overlooked or unreported.

David and Jocelyn were in the crowd of merrymakers and yet not of it. They had selected a fine old tree a little removed from the thick of things and here Jocelyn spread their luncheon.

"It's a lucky thing," she explained shyly, "that Decoration Day doesn't come earlier in the year or I'd never have dared to go to a party like this and be responsible for lunch. About all I knew how to make when we came to Green Valley was fudge, fruit salad and toasted marshmallows. And before Annie Dolan came to teach me how to do things I nearly died trying. I was all black and blue from falling down the cellar and scarred and blistered from frying things. But now I know ever so much.

"I can make two lovely soups and biscuits and apple pie and gravy. And I know how to clean and stuff a turkey. Only last week Annie taught me how to make red raspberry and currant jell. And my burns are nearly all healed except this one. It was pretty bad, but I was ashamed to go to the doctor's so it's not quite healed yet. That's why I just had to have gloves to cover the bandage. But nobody else seems to be wearing elbow gloves so I guess I'll take mine off and be comfortable. Would you mind putting them in your pocket for me?"

David caught the silken ball she tossed him and carefully tucked it away. He insisted on seeing the burn but Jocelyn waved him aside, declaring that her hunger was worse just then.

So they ate and then sat and talked quietly of everything and nothing. All about them people

laughed and chattered. Every now and then some one called to them and they answered correctly enough, yet knew not what they had said. For as naturally as all the simple unspoiled things of God's world find each other, so this sweet, unspoiled little city girl and the big, unspoiled country boy had found each other. And a great content possessed them. They did not know as yet what it was but knew only that the world for them was complete and every hour perfect that they spent together.

They sat under their tree even after the games and races had begun and were rather glad that in the excitement over the afternoon's programme they two were forgotten and free to roam about.

They went down to the creek where the burned arm was unbandaged. Jocelyn was rosily pleased to see David frown at the ugly raw scar. He gathered the leaves of some weed strange to her and when he had pounded them to a cool pulp he laid them on the burn and once more bound up the arm. He was as glad to do it as she was to have him and each knew how the other felt.

They strolled through the now deserted cemetery and read the epitaphs on the mossy stones and yet nothing seemed old or sad or caused them the least surprise. They saw Nanny Ainslee standing with Cynthia's son before a stone that had neither name nor date but only the love-sad words:

"I Miss Thee So."

But they thought nothing of it. The world was far away and they were serenely happy in a rarer one of their own.

Slowly the golden afternoon was waning. Little children were beginning to pull on their stockings, mothers began packing up the baskets and fathers were harnessing the horses. Soon everybody was ready and Green Valley, Spring Road and Elmwood, with many waves of flags and hands, each started down its own road toward home.

It was a tired, happy town that straggled down Main Street just as the sun was gilding it with his last rays. Green Valley mothers were everywhere hurrying their broods on to bread and milk and bed. In the sunset streets only the little groups of grown-ups lingered to talk over the day and exchange last jokes before going on toward home and rest.

CHAPTER X

THE KNOLL

There were whole days when Cynthia's son did nothing but loaf,—whole days when he went off by himself into the still corners of his world and let the whole wide universe talk and sing to him and awe him with its mystery.

He would lie for hours in some cool, shady fern nook under a sheltering road hedge or in the shade of some giant tree friend. At such times he scaled the thinking, wondering part of himself and opened wide his heart to the great whisper that rippled the grain, to the sweet song that swelled the throat of the oriole and lark, to the beauty that dyed the heavens and the earth, to the glad struggle for life everywhere.

In this way he had always healed all his griefs, freed his soul from doubts and stilled the many strange longings that made his heart ache for things whose name and nature he knew not.

He had discovered many of these still, restful corners from which to watch life as it went by. But his favorite spot was right on his own farm.

At the very end of the Churchill estate, as if thrown in for good measure, was a little knoll, smooth and grassy and crowned with a little grove of God's own planting.

For there were gathered together big gnarled oaks, maples, old hickory trees and many poplars. There were on that knoll three snowy, bridal birches, the rough trunks of horse-chestnuts and a few solemn pines. As if that were not enough, in the very heart of this woody temple were two shaggy old crab-apple trees and one stray wild plum.

In the spring here was fairyland. And into it Cynthia's son retired at every fair opportunity. Here he sat and looked off at the dimpling, rippling farmlands, the wandering old roads and at Green Valley roofs nestling so securely in their setting of rich greens and dappled sunshine.

From his seat beneath an oak he could see Wimple's pond with its circle of trees and through the far willow hedges caught the glittering sheen and sparkle of Silver Creek. And there before and below him lay the mellow old farm that his grandfather had left him.

The warm brick walls with their wide brick chimneys already had a welcoming look. For the tenant was gone and the old home was being repaired for its owner. But from the knoll no sound of hammer or sight of workmen marred the soft silence and sunny peace of the day. So Green Valley's young minister sprawled comfortably down, closed his eyes and let the earth music wrap him round.

He was not even day dreaming the day Nan Ainslee stumbled on him there under the oaks and pines. She had discovered the knoll when she was six years old and claimed it for her very own, sharing its beauties with no one, not even her brother. When she grew to young ladyhood she often left Green Valley for wonderful trips to the ends of the world. But she always came back to the lilacs and the seat under the great oak.

At every return she hastened out to see anew her home valley as it looked from her grove. So it was with something very close to annoyance that she looked at the sprawling figure of the usurper.

"Well, for pity sakes! What are you doing here?" she demanded.

He opened his eyes slowly and looked at her. She fitted in so well with the velvet whisper of the wind, the cool blue of the sky and the world's fresh beauty that he took her appearance as a part of the picture and was silent. It was only when she repeated her question rather sharply that he sat up to explain.

"Why, I found this spot months ago! It is the stillest, most heavenly nook in Green Valley. I come up here whenever I'm tired of thinking."

"Well—I found this place years and years ago," Nanny complained.

"What's the matter with us both using it?" he said very civilly.

"But," objected Nan, "this is the sort of a place that you want all to yourself."

"Yes, it is," he agreed and did not let the situation worry him further. He didn't offer her a seat or give her a chance to take herself off gracefully. And Nanny was beginning to feel a little awkward. She wasn't used to being ignored in this strange fashion.

"Are you very old?" the minister asked suddenly and looked up at her with eyes as innocent and serene as a child's.

"I'm twenty-three," Nan was startled into confessing.

"Why aren't you married?"

As she gasped and searched about for an answer he added:

"In India a girl is a grandmother at that age."

"This isn't India," smiled Nan good-naturedly, for she saw quite suddenly that this big young man knew very little about women, especially western women.

"No—this isn't India." He repeated her words slowly, little wrinkles of pain ruffling his face. For his inner eye was blotting out the Green Valley picture and painting in its stead the India of his memory, the India of gorgeous color, the bazaars, the narrow streets; the India that held within its mystic arms two plain white stones standing side by side and bearing the inscriptions "Father" and "Mother."

Nan, not guessing what was going on in his heart, took advantage of his silence to get even.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Why aren't you married?"

"Why in the world should I be?" he wanted to know.

"Green Valley men are usually the fathers of two or three children at your age," she informed him calmly.

"Oh," he smiled frankly, "of course I shall marry some day. But a man need never hurry. He, unlike a woman, can always marry. And I intend to have children—many children, because one child is always so lonely. I know because I was an only child."

This astounding piece of confidence kept Nan's tongue tied and for a few seconds all manner of funny emotions fought within her. She wanted to laugh, to get angry at the lordly superiority of

the idea that a woman must hurry to the altar. She felt that she ought to feel embarrassed but the innocent sincerity with which it was all uttered kept her from blushing and her eyes from snapping. She told herself instead that of all man creatures she had ever encountered, this boy from India was certainly the weirdest. And she wondered what a woman not his mother could do with him.

After a while she tried again.

"Don't you feel rather guilty loafing here in the sunshine?"

"No. Why—what should I be doing?"

"These beautiful afternoons you ought to be devoting to pastoral calls."

"But I attended to all the day's work this morning. I helped Uncle Roger Allan build a fence and doctored up David's pet horse, Dolly. I spaded up a flower plot for Grandma Wentworth and visited little Jimmy Trumbull who's home from the hospital. Doc Philipps says he won't be up for some time yet, so to cheer him up I've promised him a party. I also drove to the station with Mrs. Bates' ancient horse and brought home her new incubator. While I was there Jocelyn Brownlee came down to get a box she said she had there. Some teasing cousin sent her a little live pig and when she found out what was in the box she didn't know what to do. So I put the pig beside the incubator and sat Jocelyn beside me and we proceeded on our way.

"That horse belonging to Mrs. Bates is certainly a solemn, stately beast but Jocelyn's little pig was anything but stately. We made an interesting and a musical spectacle as we went along, and I know that one little red-headed boy in this town was late for school because he followed us halfway home. We passed the Tomlins place and Hen was sitting at the window, propped up with pillows. It was his first day up and we made him laugh so hard that his wife was a little worried, I think."

"Agnes is rather good to Hen these days, isn't she?" Nan ventured to ask, for the whole town knew how Agnes had gone to the minister with her domestic troubles and how in some mysterious fashion this young man had worked a miracle. For both Agnes and Hen were as suddenly and happily in love with one another as though they were newly married instead of being a middle-aged and childless couple.

But that was all the town did know about the matter. For strange to say Agnes, who had talked loud enough and long enough before about her unhappiness, now was still, with never a word to say about what made her so contented and happy. Green Valley saw her look at Hen as if he were suddenly precious and smooth his pillow and wait on him. And Green Valley wanted to know all about it. But so far nobody knew but Agnes, Hen and the new minister and he didn't seem inclined to speak about it. Not even to satisfy Nanny Ainslee's curiosity.

Once more Nanny was embarrassed and a little angry. She swung up her sunshade and started to go. This minister man with his ignorance of women and his knowledge of Hen's domestic affairs was, she told herself, a crazy, impossible creature and he could sit in his little grove on his little knoll till he died for all she cared. She'd take mighty good care never again to stray into his domain.

But just as she really got up speed the big chap under the oak stood up and spoke.

"Don't go, Nan."

The shock of hearing him say that stopped her and turned her sharply around, so that she looked straight at him and found him looking at her in a way that made the whole green world suddenly fade away into misty insignificance. Something about that look of his made her walk back.

But she trailed her sunshade a little defiantly and kept her eyes down carefully. She was a little frightened too. Because for the first time in her life she was conscious of her heart. She felt it beating queerly and almost audibly. With every step that she took back toward him she grew strangely happy and strangely angry.

He silently arranged a seat for her beside him and she sat down, folded her hands in her lap, looked off at the village roofs and waited.

He looked at her a long time. For Nanny was good to look at. Then he began to talk in an odd, quiet way as if they two were at home alone and the world was shut out and far away. And he told her the story of that locked drawer in Hen Tomlins' chiffonier.

That drawer and Hen's growing stubbornness, due no doubt to the gradual coming on of his serious illness, had very nearly been the death of poor, dictatorial Agnes Tomlins. She had always picked out Hen's shirts, bought his ties and ordered his suits and Hen had never rebelled openly. Nor did he, so far as she knew, ever dare to have a thought, a memory or a possession of which she was not fully informed.

But this last year Hen had become secretive, openly rebellious, strangely despondent, with

now and then flashes of a very real and unpleasant temper. Agnes, baffled, curious, hurt, angry and afraid, had at last taken her burden to the boyish minister and then went in trembling triumph to Hen and told him what she had done.

"Yes," Hen told her quietly, "I know. He was in here when you went to the drug store and told me. He advised me to open that drawer and let you see what's in it. And I'll do it to please him. But I won't open it myself and he's the only one I'll let do it. So just you send for him. As long as you told him, I want him to see there's nothing in that drawer that I need to be ashamed of."

At this point in the story Cynthia's son paused and looked so long at the sun-splashed village roofs that.

Nan stirred impatiently.

"Well—what was it that Hen was guarding so carefully from Agnes?" she wanted to know.

"Oh—just odds and ends—mostly trifles. There was a dance programme, a black kid glove of his wife's, some letters from a chum that's dead, an old knife his grandfather once gave him when he was a boy, the last knit necktie his mother had made him and a box of toys, beautiful, hand-carved toys.

"It seems that the Tomlinses had a baby a long time ago and all the time they were expecting it Hen was carving it these beautiful toys. It was a boy and, lived to be a year old, just old enough to begin to play with things. Then it died. And nobody, it seems, knew how Hen missed that baby, not even his wife. But he had kept that box of toys in his tool shed all those years and in the last year had put it in the drawer with a few other treasures which he had had hidden in odd crannies without anybody suspecting. It was all he had, he said, that was his very own. And he showed me the handle of the little hammer where the baby's playing hands had soiled it."

It seems that Hen explained the other things too. The dance programme he saved because that was where he first knew that his wife cared about him. She had selected him for the lady's choice number. The other things Hen kept because they were given to him by people who had all sincerely liked him.

"You see," Hen had said, "nobody knows how hard it is to be a little man. Nobody respects you. Your folks always apologize and try to explain your size or tell you not to mind. And strangers and friends poke fun at you. After a while, of course, you learn to laugh at yourself on the outside and folks get to think that it's all a joke for you too and that you don't mind. But you never laugh on the inside or when you're by yourself. And you get awful tired of looking up to other people all the time and you begin to wish somebody'd look up to you once in a while.

"I used to think Aggie thought a heap of me even if I wasn't as tall as other men. Grandfather and mother and Bill Simons cared a whole lot and they didn't mind showing it often. I banked an awful lot on that baby. And he did sure like me. He followed me all around and minded me better than Aggie. It was me that always put him to bed and took him up in the morning. And he'd look up at me and raise his little hands to me and—"

Cynthia's son looked steadily at Nan.

"Do you want to hear any more?" he asked gently.

"No—no—I don't. Oh, you shouldn't have told me. I'm not good enough to be trusted with things like that," Nanny said brokenly and winked and winked her long lashes to shake off the tears.

"You wanted to be told. You were going away because I didn't want to tell you," he reminded her quietly.

"I know, but I'm just naturally spoiled and mean and wicked. But oh, won't I be nice to poor Hen Tomlins after this!"

"I'm going to have him take charge of a class in wood-carving as soon as we can get one together. He's a master hand at that sort of work and there are any number of boys in this town who will love it and look up to Hen," said the man who did not understand women. The sun was slipping low in the west, pouring a flood of mellow gold over the landscape. It caught the attic windows of the old brick farmhouse that was so nearly ready for its new and young owner.

"Look," exclaimed Nan, pointing down toward it, "there is fairy treasure in your attic."

"Yes," he smiled, "there is. There are trunks up there full of all manner of things that five generations of Churchills could not bear to burn or give away. Some day when the rain is drumming on the roof and the gutters are spouting and all the birds are tucked away in dripping trees and the world is misty with tears, I'm going up there and just revel in second-hand adventure, dead dreams and cobwebs."

"Oh, my gracious, how I'd like to be there too," enviously cried Nanny Ainslee and the next moment crimsoned angrily at herself.

"If you won't mind coming to my house in the rain," said the man who did not understand women—but Nanny wasn't listening. The setting sun flared into a last widespread glory that bathed every grass blade in Green Valley and in this strong and golden light Nan saw the 6:10 pulling in and Fanny Foster hurrying home. Jessup's delivery boy, driving back from his last trip, was larruping his horse and careful Ellen Nuby was taking in her clotheslines.

On the back porch of the Brownlee bungalow Jocelyn was shaking a white tablecloth, for the Brownlees had supper early. Jocelyn flapped and flapped, then folded the cloth neatly as she had seen Green Valley matrons do. That done, she waited.

David Allan was coming home over the hills with his team and Jocelyn was waiting till he came closer before she waved to him and greeted him. All Green Valley knew of these sunset greetings and approved.

So now Nan, with a smile of understanding sympathy, watched and waited too. She could almost see Jocelyn's happy, eager child face. David slowly drew nearer. But after one careless look at the little figure on the porch, his fine head drooped and he went on without a word and left Jocelyn standing there.

From her tree shelter Nan could see the little city girl standing very still, staring after David. Then slowly the little figure went down the steps and into the back garden. There it stood motionless again, staring into the fading sky as if seeking an explanation for David's strange conduct.

But up on the hilltop Nanny beat her hands softly and cried out in pain for Jocelyn. For Nanny knew her Green Valley and she knew that the story of Jocelyn's morning ride with the minister in the Bates' ancient carryall had already gone the rounds, even finding David in the furrows of the fields. And now the big boy was worried and wretched and perhaps angry at the little city girl whom he had so openly courted.

"Oh, dear!" Nanny began to speak her mind but stopped abruptly. For how could she tell this young man from India that he had that morning spoiled forever perhaps a lovely romance. She knew that he was innocent, as innocent as Jocelyn. And she knew that Green Valley meant no harm. It was nothing. And yet so often trouble, sorrow and heartache start in just that kind of nothingness. Out of playful little whirlwinds of careless laughter cruel storms are born.

When Cynthia's son turned to walk home with her Nanny waved him back and spoke curtly.

"My goodness—no! You mustn't. I never let anybody escort me about this foolish little town."

Then she hurried home alone and left John Knight standing on his hilltop.

CHAPTER XI

GETTING ACQUAINTED

Nobody but a Green Valley man would have dared to do the things that the new minister did in those first months, when even the most daring of reverend gentlemen is apt to be a bit careful and given to the tactful searching for the straight and narrow path which is the earthly lot of pastors.

Cynthia's son however was one of those unconsciously successful men who are so simply true to life and life's laws that the world joyously meets them halfway. And then too his was a rich heritage.

From his great preacher father he had the power of seeing visions and dreaming dreams and the still greater gift of making and persuading other people to see them too. From his mother he had the comrade smile and warm intuitive heart that brought him close to even little souls. And from old Joshua Churchill came that rock-like determination, the uncompromising honesty and, better than all else, that rare common sense touched with humorous shrewdness without which no man can greatly aid his fellows or enjoy life.

All this the new Green Valley minister had, besides bits of very valuable and legal papers and the old porticoed homestead dozing on a hill and waiting for the touch of a young hand to wake it into vigorous and new life. Such parts of Green Valley as failed to appreciate the more spiritual qualifications of the tall young man from India were properly impressed with his worldly possessions.

So it was that armed with these advantages Cynthia's son went his way, smashing hoary precedents and the mossy conventions that will spring up and grow fibrously strong even in so sunny a spot as Green Valley.

Nobody was surprised, of course, to see little Jim Tumley in the choir; nor to hear that the minister was giving him lessons on the new piano whose arrival the prophetic soul of Fanny Foster had predicted. People passing the Tumley house did however stop beside the hedge and listen in amazement to the minister playing, for he played surprisingly well. When complimented on this accomplishment he explained that his mother had had a piano in India and had taught him how.

But nobody in Green Valley dreamed of seeing old Mrs. Rosenwinkle marketing right in the madly busy heart of town all on a Saturday morning. But there she was in her wheel chair, with the minister alongside to see that the road was safe and clear.

And they say that every little while, right in the midst of her bargaining, she would look around and say:

"My, but the world is big and pretty."

And when somebody reminded her of her belief that the world was flat and ended on the far side of Petersen's pasture she never argued the matter fiercely, as was her wont, but said instead that it *had* ended for her with Petersen's pasture until the day the new minister came.

And her daughter told how the paralyzed old body prayed day and night for this new minister's salvation, he being other than a Lutheran. Somebody thought that too good a joke to keep and told Cynthia's son how hard old Mrs. Rosenwinkle was praying for his soul. They expected him to laugh. But he didn't. He looked suddenly serious just as his mother used to do when something touched the deep down places in her heart.

All he said was that no man could ever have too many women praying for him and that he was grateful as only a man whose mother was sleeping thousands of miles away in a foreign land could be grateful.

He had his mother's trick of letting people look quite suddenly into that part of his soul where he kept his finest thoughts and emotions. And people looked and saw and then usually tiptoed away in puzzled awe or a dim sympathy. And he had such a habit of turning common sense and daylight on matters which seemed so baffling until he explained them.

It was just the minister's plain, common sense that finally got Hank Lolly into the church. When the minister first suggested that Hank ought to attend church services that worthy stared in amazed horror at his new friend. And he gave his perfectly good reasons why the likes of him had no right to step on what was Green Valley's sacred ground.

"Hank, you are entirely mistaken. I have seen you go into Green Valley parlors and every other room in the house. I watched you move that clumsy old sideboard of Mrs. Luttins down that narrow stairway and then through the little side gate. You never chipped a bit of plaster or trampled a flower beside the walk. Why, you never even tore a bit of vine off the gate. And yesterday I saw you walking your horses ever so carefully to the station because inside the van little Jimmy Drummond was lying on stretchers, going to the hospital. And I was told that Doc Philipps said he wouldn't have trusted another driver with Jimmy."

"But," groaned Hank, "people like me don't go to church."

"Hank, most ministers don't ride around the country on a moving dray. But I rode out with you many a time and I sort of feel that you might come along with me now and then and see the people and things along my route. You've given me a good time and I'd like to pay back. You'll like the music and I'm sure you'll understand it all, because I talk English you know. And anyhow, things get as lonesome sometimes for a minister in the pulpit as the roads get for a dray driver and I'd appreciate it to have a friend like you along. I never know when I'll need a lift and a little help that you could give. Sometimes we have to move the Sunday-school organ about and there are windows that stick and all manner of things about a church that only a practiced mover and driver could do. You know the janitor is rather old and infirm and as for me—well, Hank, when you come down to it, that's about all we ministers are, just movers. Our business is to help find just the right and happiest places for people, to show them their part in the game of life and keep them from bruising themselves and others. I'm doing about the same sort of work as you are; that's why I'm asking you to come along with me."

"Well—if you put it that way,—" murmured Hank, still miserable, "why, maybe I could drop in. Billy's ordered me a new suit and so—"

"That settles it then, Hank. For there's no sense in getting a new suit unless you go out in it. And there's no sense in going out unless you have some definite place to go to. Why, half the people get clothes just to go to church and the other half go to church just to wear their clothes. I'll expect you. You can sit comfortably in the back and watch things and tell me later what you think of the way things are managed here. You'll see things from the door that I never see from the pulpit."

Hank went to church in a pair of shoes that squeaked agonizingly and a suit of clothes that was a marvel of mail-order device. He also wore a Stetson hat that was new when he entered the church door but which, through nervous manipulation, aged terribly in that first half hour.

He came early because he felt that he could not endure the thought of entering a crowded church and then suffered torment as one by one the congregation nodded to him or addressed him in sepulchral whispers. When, however, Grandma Wentworth sat down beside him and visited comfortably before services, and Nan Ainslee stopped to thank him for something or other he had done for her the week before, he felt better.

As soon as Jim Tumley began to sing and the minister to talk Hank forgot about himself and became absorbed in the proceedings. He told the minister later that he'd meant to keep an eye on things for him but that he got so interested he'd forgotten. About all that he had observed was that Mrs. Sloan passed her handkerchief a little too frequently and publicly to the little Sloans. Hank said he thought they were old enough to have handkerchiefs of their own. He also felt sure, he said, that Mrs. Osborn and Mrs. Pelham, Jr. were on the outs again, because of the fact that though Mrs. Pelham's switch was falling loose and Mrs. Osborn sitting right behind her saw it, she made no effort to repin it or tell the unfortunate woman about it. Hank further informed the minister that that second Crawley boy was a limb and closed his observations by asking the Reverend John Roger Churchill Knight if he didn't think Nanny Ainslee was the prettiest girl in church? Whereupon the minister promptly agreed with him.

That, then, was Hank Lolly's introduction to a proper and conventional religious life. Hank, as soon as he felt sure that he was going to survive the experience, became wonderfully interested and the next Sunday reappeared with Barney in tow. It seems that Barney also had been provided with a new suit and accessories and Hank had promptly demanded his presence in church.

"You ought to go once, Barney, if only to show the minister that you're rightly grateful to him for showing you about them there books and figures and a-pointing out your mistakes to you. And anyhow, if you don't go, you'll be hanging out in that there pool-room, and first thing you know you won't be decent and respectable and Billy'll have to fire you."

"What do you know about that there poolroom, Mr. Lolly?" demanded Barney.

"Never mind. I know what I know. You're trying to be smart and I'm surprised. I've heard of your kid doings in that place and I'm surprised, that's what I am. You don't see Billy Evans trying to make money in cute ways over night. No, sir! He does a day's work for a man and throws in a little for good measure before he takes a day's wages. And he don't do business behind closed doors and thick curtains, neither. So just you keep out of that there poolroom or I'll take you over to Doc Mitchell's and have every one of them there crooked teeth of yourn straightened out."

"All right, Mr. Lolly, I'll do just as you say and go to church. It ain't as hard as it sounds, that ain't. Because, honest, Hank, ain't that there minister a fine guy? He's as good, I believe, as Billy. He asked me to come on and be in his Sunday-school class and get in on some fun. And he says to wait until he gets his barn fixed; that he'll show us boys something. And I bet he will. Why, say, Hank, maybe he kin do all sorts of circus stunts. You know he's from India and that's where all the snake charmers and sword swallowers come from, ain't it?"

In this perfectly simple and artless fashion Cynthia's son went about the creation of his own special Sunday-school class and when he got through the result was startling. It was the largest and somebody said the weirdest Sunday-school class ever seen in Green Valley. Indeed, when Mr. James D. Austin, who was about the most respectable man in town, saw it he grew quite distressed and suddenly very tired.

He had tried, since the age of ten when he had formally and publicly joined the church on the very crest of a great religious wave, to do his part towards making and keeping the Green Valley church on a high spiritual plane. He felt at times that he was close to success and now here from the very ends of the earth came a boy to upset all his plans.

So Mr. Austin suddenly felt ill and old and he went to see Doc Philipps about a tonic. Doc Philipps, who could have been as good a lawyer as he was a doctor, asked a few questions about politics, religion and Mrs. Austin's lumbago and knew exactly what was the matter with James D. Austin. The next time he ran across Cynthia's son he hailed him.

"Look here, Knight, what you been doing to James D. lately? Been turning his nice little church all upside down, ain't you? Driven him right into a fearful case of grouch and an I-am-through-with-the-things-of-this-world attack, that's what you have."

Cynthia's son looked very soberly and very directly at his friend the doctor and turned on his heel.

"Doc, I'm going to see that poor man right now," said he and Doc Philipps, in telling Nan Ainslee about it afterwards, swore that not only the minister's two eyes but his very voice twinkled.

Cynthia's son found Mr. Austin in his proper and neat office. He went straight to the point.

"Mr. Austin, I've just heard that you were not feeling well, that you were seriously ill from overwork. I can readily believe that. You need rest and a change and freedom from wearisome responsibilities. I think I know just how you feel. Sort of tired and listless. Mother used to get that way in India. Even father used to say sometimes that things did every once in a while look

mighty hopeless and useless, but that they'd look bright again after a week or two in the hills. So then we went off for a vacation. That's just what's the matter with you. You need a vacation. And in so far as I can I want to help you get one. You work too hard for the church. Keeping track of accounts and generally managing church matters is always a trying matter. Father always found it so.

"So I have been thinking of getting you an assistant, some one to look after things while you take a rest. Why, they tell me you have shouldered church responsibilities since you were a child."

"Yes," modestly admitted the most respectable Mr. Austin. "I have worked for the church these many years and I do need a vacation. But who is there to attend to these matters? I know of no one in Green Valley who could fill my place."

So in complacent, pathetic self-conceit said poor Mr. Austin. And he was utterly unprepared for what followed.

"Why," said Green Valley's new minister without so much as winking an eyelash, "I've been thinking of Seth Curtis for the place. I have been wondering just how I could interest Seth in his town church, how to make him see that its business is his business, and this is my opportunity. Seth, they tell me, is very good at figures. Somebody said that Seth could figure to live comfortably on nothing if he found he had to. Now most churches are perilously near the place where they have to live on nothing and so, if any one can steer our finances in an exact and careful manner, Seth can. And it is the only, absolutely the only way in which he can be interested."

"But," the horrified Mr. Austin found his voice at last, "Seth Curtis is impossible. Even if he joined the church he would be an unbeliever. I have heard him criticize churches. Why, it can't be thought of! Why, what would people say if you were to put a man like that right into church work? It would be sacrilege."

There was a little pause and when the minister spoke again there was the unmistakable ring of cool authority in his voice. Mr. Austin suddenly realized that he was speaking to his pastor, the Reverend John Roger Churchill Knight. And as Mr. Austin himself worshipped authority and always saw to it that in his little sphere his own slightest word was obeyed, he listened respectfully.

"I think, Mr. Austin, you are mistaken about Seth Curtis. Seth does not make fun of religion. He merely criticizes churches and their management. Seth is what in these times we call an efficiency expert. And it always makes such a man impatient to watch waste of money and effort.

"Seth must think well of the church for he sends his wife and children. And no sane man sends what is dearest to him to a place he does not approve of. Besides, Seth has a very high opinion of you, Mr. Austin."

Which of course had nothing to do with the case. Yet it may have been this irrelevant, human little touch that settled it. For after a little more talk Mr. Austin gave in and, figuratively speaking, turned his face to the wall and hoped to die. And the minister went off to persuade Seth Curtis that his church needed his services.

And that was not nearly as difficult a matter as Green Valley thought it was. For Seth had sense and a love of order and economy and the minister talked to all that was best and wisest in Seth. Though Seth's head was growing bald and Cynthia's son was just a youngster, yet the boy seemed to take Seth's heart right into the hollow of his hand and talk to it as no one but Seth's wife Ruth talked. So to the amazement of himself and family and all of Green Valley Seth Curtis went into the church for the very quality in his make-up that his neighbors were in the habit of ridiculing.

It was amazingly funny, Seth's conversion. But when Green Valley heard how the minister got acquainted with Frank Burton Green Valley laughed and laughed and forgot to eat its meals in telling and retelling it.

Frank Burton, besides being, according to his neighbors, a hopeless atheist, was unlike other Green Valley men in that he had to take a much earlier train to the city mornings and came home two trains later than the other men. Grandma Wentworth always said that it was that difference in Frank's train time that made him so bitter at times.

Frank did, however, have his Saturday afternoons and Sundays, and these he spent almost entirely with his chickens and garden and strange assortment of books. He was a man who did his own thinking, never gave advice, never took it and believed in all creatures tending strictly to their own affairs.

Every once in a while, perhaps from a sudden heart hunger, Frank would select from a whole townful of human beings some one soul for friendship. Frank never got acquainted accidentally. He picked out his few friends deliberately and loved them openly and forever.

Of course, Frank's oldest and dearest friend was Jim Tumley. People said they were born

friends. Their mothers had been inseparable, the boys were born within a few days of each other and seemed to be marked with a passion of loyalty for one another. Only in their love for music were they alike however.

Frank was a big, square, burly man who went his way surely, confidently, though a little belligerently. Jim was little and fair and ever so gentle. There was never a harsh word in Jim's mouth or a bitter thought in his heart against the world that often bruised him because of his gentleness and frailty. Jim had had only one fight in his life.

When he and Frank were about twelve years old, strange to say, Jim was the taller and stronger. And it was then that Jim fought and vanquished a bully who for months had been making Frank miserable.

Frank never forgot that one fight of Jim's. He shot head and shoulders over his friend and filled out beyond all recognition and took his turn at fighting. And most of his battles then as now were over little Jim Tumley.

To Frank, Jim was the one great friend life had given him. To very many people in Green Valley Jim was just a gentle, frail little chap with a beautiful, golden voice and a miserably weak stomach.

When the new minister put Jim in the choir, Green Valley was mildly surprised though it quickly saw the common sense of the arrangement. But Frank Burton was for the first time, to Green Valley's certain knowledge, wholly pleased. And he showed his pleasure by never once saying one single, scathing, cynical thing, even when told that Seth Curtis was keeping the church books and getting religion on the side. And he could have said so much.

What he did say was that he wouldn't mind seeing this kid minister from India. For though months had passed since Cynthia's son arrived Frank had never seen him. His unfortunate train time and his home-staying habits kept him from meeting the newcomer. He pictured him as a rather immature, likable, enthusiastic young person whom it might not be a trial to meet once and then forget. And Frank made up his mind that if he ever ran into the boy he would be sincerely courteous to him in payment for his kindness to Jim. Then he promptly forgot everything in his plans for a new chicken house.

He was reading his favorite poultry journal on the train one night when the tall stranger accosted him. Frank didn't remember meeting the man, but the stranger seemed to know him, so without hardly knowing why or how Frank began to talk. And it was surprising how much the stranger knew about chickens, pheasants and wild game. Indeed, he knew so much that five stations from the city Frank was showing him diagrams of his new chicken house and explaining how anxious he was to get at it before the fall rains commenced but that he had so little time, only his Saturday afternoons and Sundays.

"Let me give you a hand then Saturday, Mr. Burton. I need outdoor work and I'd enjoy building a chicken house and neighboring properly with you Green Valley folks. You know I'm new to Green Valley and as long as I intend to spend the rest of my life here I've a lot to learn."

"Well, there are worse places than Green Valley," admitted Frank, thinking that the man must be the occupant of some one of the new bungalows that had gone up that spring and summer.

"Green Valley," continued Frank, "has its faults and its fools and bad spots here and there in the roads and entirely too much back-fence and street-corner gossip. But I've seen days here in Green Valley that just about melt all the meanness out of one, they're so fine; and moonlight so soft and pure and holy that you wouldn't mind dying in it. And Green Valley folks are ornery enough on top and when things are going smoothly for you. But just let there be a smash-up or a stroke of bad luck and their shells crack and humanness just oozes out of them. They're about as decent a lot as you'll find anywhere."

This, after a hard day and on an empty stomach, was a remarkable speech for Frank Burton. He was not much given to voicing his real feelings and showing his heart to light-hearted Green Valley and usually covered his deeper sentiments with a sturdy flow of fault-finding.

But there was something magnetic about the young stranger and to his own growing surprise Frank talked on and enjoyed doing it. The two men left the train together and parted at Martin's drug store with the understanding that if it didn't rain they would on the coming Saturday start on that chicken house.

And they did. Frank came home that evening in unusually fine spirits and asked his wife about the various new people. He told her of his meeting with the stranger who seemed to know him but whom he did not remember ever seeing before.

Jennie guessed him to be, "Mrs. Hamilton's husband. I've never seen him either but they say he's such a pleasant man. They're both Christian Scientists or something like that and she's ever so nice a woman. They've only been here a few months but everybody likes them."

"Well," spoke up Frank, still thinking of the pleasant passing of what was usually a tiresome train trip, "if Christian Science makes a man as likable and neighborly as that I, for one, approve

of Christian Science. What did you say his name was—Hamilton?"

It was because Frank was so willing to let every man worship his God in his very own way that Green Valley, that is the religiously watchful part of it, had decided that Frank was an atheist. For, said these cautious children of God, "He who is willing to believe in all things believes in nothing."

But it wasn't religion that the two men talked that Saturday afternoon. The sun was warm, the lumber dry, the saws sharp and with the work going smoothly along there was plenty of time for talk, talk on all manner of subjects.

Frank's wife had gone over to Randall's to a special meeting of the sewing society. Not only were the women going to cut out and make up little aprons and dresses for the inmates of the nearest orphanage but they intended to discuss several new social problems that confronted Green Valley. The two most vital being "What do you make of that new saloon keeper and his wife?" and "What goes on behind those poolroom curtains, especially nights?"

Not that there was in Green Valley any interfering Civic League or any such thing as a Pure Morals Society. Green Valley had never had to resort to such measures. It had hitherto trusted human nature, Green Valley sunshine and neighborliness to do whatever work of social mending and reforming had to be done.

But something had happened to the big city to the east, some new mayor or some new civic force had stirred things up in that huge caldron of humanity and slopped it over so that it had begun to trickle away into such quiet little hollows as Green Valley. It trickled so slowly and was as yet so thin a stream that the little towns were hardly aware of it as yet.

Green Valley was only just beginning to itch and wiggle and search and wonder what the matter could be. It was the women, the mothers, who scented trouble first. The men were still placidly doing the same old Saturday afternoon tasks, mowing lawns, talking road improvements, swapping yarns and brands of tobacco or, like Frank Burton, doing various building jobs about their premises.

Frank and his helper were certainly enjoying themselves. When the skeleton of that hen house was half up Frank thought it was about time to call a halt for refreshments. He went to the ice-box and brought out a nice home-boiled ham, commandeered a golden loaf of fresh bread, searched about for pickles, mustard, preserves and butter. Then they sat down. And as he ate Frank again waxed talkative.

"I've heard people," he said, "both men and women, talk about marriage being slavery and a lottery and not worth the price folks have to pay for it. But I'm freer as a married man than ever I was single. Why, where I boarded before I married Jennie, you couldn't get a slice of bread and butter or a toothpick between meals even if you'd been a growing kid. And in those days I was always hungry. And I've always hated restaurants where food is cooked in tanks instead of nice little home kettles in a blue and white kitchen. And I hate restaurant dishes. There's never anything interesting about them. And most waitresses are discouraging sort of girls. I just kind of existed in those days.

"But ever since I've married Jennie I've lived. Jennie never talks much about what she's cooking. But she'll let you come in the kitchen and lift the kettle lids if you want to and poke around and never once let on that you're a nuisance. And she never gets angry if you dig into the fresh bread or crack the frosting on the new cake. So take it all in all I've always considered all this talk about married life being nothing but self-sacrifice just so much rot—why—hello, Sammy!"

This to a little overall-clad figure that was pressing itself insinuatingly against the back gate.

"Want to come in and help with the tools?" called Frank, well knowing that that jar of Jennie's preserves was perfectly visible from that back gate.

Sammy said hello and sure he'd come in and help, and did with remarkable speed. When he came up to the two men he looked shyly at Frank's assistant and said, "Hello! What are *you* doing around here?"

And the tall stranger laughed and said he was helping with the tools too.

And then Frank asked Sammy if his mother allowed him to eat between meals and Sammy said, "Oh, sure—I kin eat any time at all—it never hurts me." So Frank got him nicely started.

In no time at all however two other figures appeared and swung themselves up on the back fence. They sat quietly, at first waiting for some one to discover them. Both men had their backs to the fence now and Sammy, though perfectly aware of the new arrivals, was selfishly busy.

So presently two pair of bare feet began to swing harder and harder and a careless but piercing whistle began to challenge a selfish world's attention.

Frank winked at his helper and said nothing nor moved.

The whistle became shriller. And then came a sudden suspicious silence that evidently made Sammy a little uncomfortable. He knew just about what was coming.

"Hello—Pieface," came one gentle greeting.

"Hello—Dearie," chirped the owner of the second pair of bare feet.

"Look at Mother's Darling feeding his face!"

"Isn't he cunning! Isn't he cute!"

A third figure swung itself to the top of the fence.

"Don't fill your little tummy too full, Sammy dear," it contributed dutifully.

At the malice and scorn that fairly dripped from the words Sammy raised resentful eyes from his slice of bread and jam. Frank smiled hopefully.

"Oh, Frank, Sammy goes to Sunday-school he does."

"Every Sunday—don't ya, Sammy?"

"Bet he goes to Sunday-school just to sponge. Bet he's a grafter—bet he—"

But at this point Frank's helper turned about and faced the fence. And a strange thing happened. The three little figures sitting in a row gave one look, one shout of, "Holy gee—it's *him*!" and vanished as suddenly as they had come.

Frank laughed and then grew puzzled.

"Some friends of mine and Sammy's. I wonder what made the little imps bolt like that. They usually sit on that back fence till every bit of language is used up. Why, they hadn't got more than started and Sammy here hadn't even begun. What ailed you, Sammy?"

"Oh, I rather think I frightened them," said Frank's assistant. "But I think that before long they will feel enough at home with me to come and sit on my back fence."

Sammy was left to clear up while the men went back to work. Both hammers were merrily ringing when old man Vingie strolled by and stopped to visit. He went on presently but before he was out of sight Bill Trumbull and Old Peter Endby came up.

There was a worried look in Bill's large florid face and the light of utter unbelief in Peter's eye. They both laid their arms neighbor fashion along the fence and watched the toilers silently for a few seconds. Then Peter spoke up in grieved tones:

"Seems like you might have asked old neighbors to give you a hand, Frank. I had no notion you was in any such turrible hurry to start this here new chicken house of yourn. It don't look respectable or kindly, you acting that way, neglecting to tell old neighbors—"

"It's a slander on this here neighborhood, that's whot it is, Frank," Bill Trumbull complained. "Here's Peter and me both old-time carpenters, full of energy and advice and ripe years and experience, and you don't drop so much as a hint. Why, I remember the time when we put up barns with wooden pegs and durn good barns they were and are, for there's some of them still standing as strong as the day they were built. There's the Churchill barn. That's our work, Peter's and mine. Seems you've forgotten considerable, Frank. Why, your father wouldn't have thought of starting a chicken house without first talking it over with us."

When they had passed on, Bill supporting Peter's left elbow so's to case the rheumatism in his partner's left knee, Frank turned amazed eyes to his assistant.

"Now what in time," he wanted to know, "is the matter with those two precious old lunatics? Why, Pap Trumbull and Dad Endby are both over eighty. Dad's so twisted with rheumatism that he couldn't bend to pick up his pipe if he dropped it. And Pap's got asthma so bad that it's all he can do to draw his breath on the installment plan. Why, I've never consulted them in all my born days though I always let them come over and criticize my work to their heart's content. But something's eating them to-day."

"Perhaps they're surprised at seeing me, a comparative stranger here, helping you. They may even be a bit jealous, you know."

Frank's assistant volunteered this explanation wonderingly as if he too were puzzled about something.

"Well—it gets me," murmured Frank, then added under his breath, "well, by jinks—if here ain't old Knock-kneed Bailey and Shorty Collins going by. And they're looking this way. And by the Lord Harry—there's Curley Anderson. Why, Curley hasn't been over on this side of town since he sold that little house of his that he built all by himself, working nights, with nothing but an old saw and a second-hand hammer. His wife was left a fortune right after and made Curley sell and

build her a cement block villa over on Broadway. She won't even let Curley walk down this way, though they say he hates her villa and just hankers for this little bit of a home he built himself here ten years ago.

"Well—by the holy smoke—look yonder! I'm seeing things to-day. Why there's Dudley Rivers and James D. Austin, that holy man, and he's actually bowing to me. Now what do you know about that? What's going on in this town to-day, anyhow? It must be something unusual to bring out a crowd like that."

Frank's lower jaw suddenly dropped. Sudden suspicion leaped into his gray-blue eyes. He turned to the man who all afternoon had been helping him build his chicken house.

"Say—who in hell—are you anyhow?"

And Cynthia's son mopped his thick hair and looked as suddenly dumfounded. After that he grinned.

"For pity sakes—don't you know me? Why, you were pointed out to me the very second week I came as the town atheist. I supposed of course I had been pointed out to you. I'm Cynthia Churchill's son. I buried father and mother in India and then came home, as they wanted me to. And I'm glad I came. It's home and these Green Valley folks are my people. They have made me feel welcome. I supposed everybody knew me from seeing me about town."

For a long while Frank said nothing. With the explanation his momentary anger and amazement died away. He was remembering, remembering Cynthia Churchill. Why, he remembered as though it was yesterday that when she was twenty he was ten. And he had loved her because she had once helped him to tie up his pet chicken's broken leg.

And so this tall big chap with the glad eyes was Cynthia's son! Years ago the mother had tied up his pet hen's leg. And to-day her son had helped him build his most pretentious hen house.

"No," said Frank at last, "I didn't know you were the chap from India. I thought you belonged up in one of those new bungalows. Of course, that accounts for the crowd. Why, we've been making history here in this back yard this afternoon. The atheist and the preacher building a chicken coop! Oh, say, John, Green Valley will be talking about this fifty years from now. Let's have some buttermilk. This thing has just about knocked me over."

When they had had two glasses apiece Frank again inspected his assistant.

"But say—do ministers in India do such darn common things as building chicken houses? I can't remember ever seeing a minister mixing so carelessly with us low-down sinners or standing around in public with his sleeves rolled up and his frock coat off. Aren't you a queer breed of parson?"

"Maybe," Cynthia's son admitted, "but so was father. He could help bring a baby into the world, could wash and dress it, cure it if it was sick, bury it if it died. He could teach a woman how to cook a meal and cut out a dress. He knew how to heal a horse's sore back and how to help a man get over needing whisky. He used to brush my mother's hair nights when her head ached and make whistles for me and tell the little brown children stories, study the stars with the old men and coax the women into using his medicines instead of their charms."

"For heaven's sake! When did your father get time to talk religion?" wondered Frank.

"Oh, he never talked religion much. He just sort of lived and neighbored with his people and just laughed most of the time at mother and me. He was always busy and never took care of himself. Just before he died he explained things to me. He said:

"'Son, I came out of the West to bring a message to the East. You go back to the West with a message from the Orient. Tell them back home there that hearts are all alike the world over. And that we all, white men, black men, yellow men and brown men, are playing the very same game for the very same stakes and that somehow, through ways devious and incomprehensible, through honesty and faith, failure and perseverance, we find at last the great content, the peace that passeth understanding.'

"So I have come home to preach that. But I haven't had time as yet to do much. I've been getting up a Sunday-school class and getting Seth Curtis interested in the church finances and getting acquainted with Hank Lolly and Mrs. Rosenwinkle and—atheists."

"Yes—and among other things you've put Jim into the choir."

"Oh, that was easy—just common sense. It's going to be ever so much harder though to get at Jim Tumley's generous friends and convince them that Jim's stomach won't stand their friendly donations.

"I don't know how I'm going to show them that if they love him they must protect him from themselves. It's going to be hard work. But he's worth saving, that little man with the lark's voice and the gentle heart."

When Jennie, hearing the news, hurried home from the other end of town, really frightened for the first time in her married life, the young minister was gone and Frank was sitting out on the back porch staring at nothing.

"Frank," Jennie began breathlessly, "is he gone?"

"Yes—he's gone."

"Frank—you—I hope you didn't get mad at him. He's different—not like other ministers—and he's really a boy in some things."

"Jennie," and Frank reassured her, "you're darn right that boy is different. He's so darn different from all the rest of them I've met that I'm going to church next Sunday. James D. and Dudley and others of that stripe will probably die of shock but just you press your best dress, Jennie, for we're surely going. Why that man's no minister. Don't slander him. He's a human being."

Jennie's eyes grew a bit misty, for with no babies to love, Frank was her all in all and her one great sorrow was that so few people knew the real Frank.

"And come to think of it, Jennie," Frank mused, "you weren't so far wrong in thinking that it was a Christian Scientist who was coming. I guess that's just about what he is—a Christian scientist."

CHAPTER XII

THE PATH OF TRUE LOVE

Nanny was cross. She had lost her bubbling merriment and her family wondered.

"Sis, I believe you will be an old maid, all right. I'm beginning to see the signs already," her brother lazily told her one day when to some innocent remark of his she made a snapping answer.

Mr. Ainslee laughed.

"You aren't reading the signs correctly, Son," he said. "Nan's crossness can be interpreted another way. It's my private opinion that Nanny's in love."

Whereupon Mr. Ainslee dodged for he fully expected that Nanny would hurl a pillow his way. But Nanny didn't. She turned a little white, caught her breath a little hurriedly and then stood looking quietly at the two men. When she left the room her father was a little worried and her brother a little uncomfortable.

"I guess we'd better let up on the teasing, Dad," the boy suggested in the serious, soft voice that had been his mother's, the mother who had never teased.

"I wouldn't hurt Nanny for the world," penitently murmured Mr. Ainslee. "I had no idea—oh, Son," he suddenly groaned, "I wish your mother was here to look after us all."

And the great diplomat who was known and welcomed at the courts of great nations was suddenly only a plain man, crying out his heart's need of the loved woman he had lost so many years ago.

And because the boy was the son of the woman for whom his father grieved he knew how to sympathize and comfort the man.

"I've missed her too—lots of times—even though, Dad, you've been the most wonderful father two kids ever had."

The man stared out into the sunny world outside the windows and all unashamed let the tears fill his fine eyes.

The boy, seeing those tears, all at once remembered now many times, when he was an unheeding youngster, he had seen this same father sitting at the departed mother's desk with his head pillowed in his arms.

"Dad," the boy's awed voice questioned, "is love a thing as big and terrible and lasting as that?"

The man wiped his eyes and smiled.

"Yes, Son, love is as wonderful and lasting and in a way as terrible as that. It was wrong of me to tease Nanny. But I have been worried about my motherless girl. I'd like to see her happily settled. Somehow I've never worried about you."

"No," and the boy smiled an odd little smile that showed just how he had missed a mother's petting, "it's always mothers that worry about the boys, isn't it?"

At this second revelation and blunder Mr. Ainslee was so startled that he forgot to go in search of Nanny.

As a matter of fact Nanny had left the house. She wanted to go to the knoll and think over carefully certain matters that had been puzzling her of late. But she dared not go to the grove on the hilltop. For only half an hour before she had seen Green Valley's young minister walking up to her old seat under the oaks. Perhaps if her father had not said what he did—Nanny frowned impatiently, then sighed and walked down the road to Grandma Wentworth's. She told herself that she was going down to visit Grandma and tell her the week's news. But she was really going to find heartease and because at Grandma's she would hear oftenest the name that now had the power to quicken her heart beats and bring her a pain that was strangely edged with joy.

Grandma was weeding her seed onions and very sensibly let Nanny help. Nanny's fingers flew in and out and because she dared not tell her own heart troubles she told Grandma about Jocelyn and David and the foolish bit of gossip that had come between them.

"I think, Grandma, somebody ought to do something about it. Can't you—"

Grandma shook her head.

"Nanny," Grandma mourned, "I'm afraid to meddle in things like that. Love is a wonderful strange thing for which there are no rules. And the hearts of men and women must all have their share of sorrow. For it's only through pain and endless blunders that we human folks ever learn. I've seen strange love history in this town and lots of it. And I've learned one thing and that is that each heart wants to do its loving in its own way without help or hindrance from the rest of the world. So we'd best say nothing and let David and Jocelyn find a way out of their trouble and misunderstanding."

But Nanny, with all the impatience of youth, rebelled.

"It's foolish," she stormed, "when just a dozen frank words would straighten it out."

"Yes—a dozen words would do it," sighed Grandma, "But think, Nanny, what it would cost David to say those dozen words—or Jocelyn."

"Conventions are foolish. Honesty is better."

"Yes, honesty is always best. But truth is something that lovers find hardest to manage and listen to. And you know, Nanny, even a happy love means a certain amount of sorrow."

"Does it?" the girl wondered.

"Yes," said Grandma softly, "it does, as I and many another woman can testify. I'm only hoping that a love great and fine will come to Cynthia's boy and that it won't cost him too much."

"Why," asked Nanny carelessly, "should life be easier and richer for him?"

"Because long before he was born his mother paid for his birthright and happiness with part of her own, and if God is just and life fair then her courage and sorrow ought to count for something and her loss be his gain."

"Hadn't you better tell me the whole story, Grandma?" begged Nan.

"It isn't exactly all mine to tell. But some day I dare say I shall."

Grandma rose and glanced mischievously at the girl.

"Nanny, I'll tell you the day you come to me and tell me you're in love. Not engaged, you understand, but in love."

Again Nanny whitened and caught her breath and then looked quietly at Grandma in a way that made the dear old soul say hurriedly:

"There, there, child, I didn't mean to meddle or hurt."

To herself she added, "We're all blundering fools at times. And why is it that youth always thinks that all the world is blind and stupid?"

Grandma's penitent mind then recalled the box of pictures that Cynthia's son had brought down to show her the night before. It still stood on the living-room table. So the wise and tender soul sent Nanny in to fetch it.

They sat on the back steps and looked at pictures of Cynthia in her far-away home in India. There were pictures of her husband and the brown babies and of their neighbors. But mostly the pictures were of a boy, a drolly solemn little fellow. Nanny exclaimed again and again over these and the one of the boy holding a pet hen in his arms she fairly devoured.

"What a darling kiddy he was," she laughed tenderly. "No wonder his mother loved him so."

"He ought to be a fine boy. His mother paid a big price for him," Grandma told her.

But Nanny didn't hear. She had just discovered that there were two of those boy and hen pictures and she wondered if—

Just then Grandma spied a hen in her lavender bed and went off to shoo her out. And while her back was so providentially turned Nanny Ainslee, an honorable, world-famous diplomat's only daughter, coolly and deliberately tucked the picture of a little boy and his pet hen down into the bosom of her gown.

Shortly after Nanny said she guessed she'd have to be going, that it was getting late and that she had had an argument with her father just before she came and had been short an answer. But that she had just this minute thought of something to say.

Grandma let her go without a word because she thought that, like herself, the girl had seen Cynthia's boy coming down the hill and wished with girlish shyness to be out of the house when he came. But Nanny had not seen him, had not been watching the roads, so taken was she with her guilty secret. Her surprise when she almost ran into him was genuine enough.

His face lighted at sight of her.

"I spent the afternoon up on the hill. I thought maybe I should find you there. It was rather lonesome."

He had evidently forgotten and forgiven her rudeness on the hilltop that day when they had been up there together. Nanny was suddenly so happy and confused that she could think of nothing to say except to make the formal little confession:

"I have been visiting Grandma Wentworth and looking at pictures of you. You were a mighty nice little boy in those days."

The new softness in her words made him look at her wistfully for a second but the hint of laughter that went with it made him cautious. This lovely, laughing girl had hurt him several times and had laughed at him. He meant to be careful. So he said gravely and politely:

"Did you see the pictures of my mother?"

"Yes. She must have been a wonderful and an adorable mother."

That made him happy. He wanted very much to turn and walk back with her, this girl whose presence always brought him such pleasure. But she had forbidden him to do this. It seemed that in his home land women were wonderfully independent creatures.

So he let her go on alone and with a disappointed heart. For Nanny had hoped that he would ask and she had meant to let him. With the disappointment came the taunting memory of her words to Grandma Wentworth: "Honesty is best. A dozen words would do it."

That evening when her father clumsily tried to make amends Nan said carelessly:

"Never mind, Dad. I *am* in love—with a little boy and his pet hen."

But she had the grace to blush. And that night as she slipped the picture under her pillow she said a little defiantly:

"Well—what of it? All is fair in love and war."

CHAPTER XIII

AUTUMN IN GREEN VALLEY

Joe Baldwin was standing in front of his little shop. He was bareheaded and that meant that he was worried. For it was only in moments of mental distress that Joe laid aside the black cap that gave him the look of a dashing driver of the Twentieth Century Limited.

In the autumn dusk a chilly little wind played about the street corners and wailed softly

through the thinning tree-tops. The big lamp above Joe's workbench was unlighted so the little shop was in darkness except for the fitful wavering of the ruddy wood fire in the big stove.

The streets were empty and quiet. It was an hour after supper and Green Valley was indoors sitting about its first fires and talking of the coming winter; remembering cold spells of other years; thanking its stars that the coal bin was full and wondering whether it hadn't better put on its heaviest underwear.

Joe knew just about what Green Valley was thinking and saying. From where he stood he could see what a part of Green Valley was doing. For this early in the evening Green Valley never pulled down its shades. So when the lights flared out in the Wendells' west front up-stairs window Joe saw Mrs. Wendell go to the clothes closet and bring out various newspaper parcels. Joe knew very well that those parcels contained furs.

Furs and ferns were Mildred Wendell's two passions. She had furs of all sizes and colors and weights, beginning with the little muff and tippet her favorite aunt had given her long ago when she was only five to the really beautiful and expensive set her son, Charlie, had given her for her last birthday. As for ferns, she had so many that Green Valley always went to her for its wedding and funeral decorations. And she was only too happy to lend her collection of feathery beauty.

From where he stood on his doorstep Joe could look down three streets and see Green Valley in its shirt sleeves and slippers and its gingham apron, so to speak. He could look over the white sash curtains right into Mert Hagley's kitchen for Mert lived behind his store. Joe saw Mary, Mert's wife, turning the pages of the evening paper and studying the advertisements. And he knew as well as he knew his own name that Mary was talking to Mert about a new heater, begging him to buy a nice new hard-coal heater instead of the second-hand hot blast stove he was thinking of buying from some man in Spring Road.

John Henderson had another one of his bad headaches for Joe saw him lying on the dining-room couch. His wife was applying cold-water bandages and tenderness to that bald pate of his when she knew better than any one that what he needed was a stiff dose of salts and castor oil and a little self-control on the nights she had ham and cabbage for supper.

Over in the Morrison cottage Grandma Whitby was knitting stockings for the little Morrisons at a furious rate and every once in a while sending one of the children out for more wood or a fresh pail of water or some more yarn. Joe could see the children sitting around the dining-room table with their books and games and arguing with each other every time the grandmother made a new request.

Grandma Whitby was a dictatorial old soul. She not only was eternally busy herself but she kept everybody around her forever on the jump. Mrs. Morrison was her only child and once in a moment of bitterness said that her eight children seemed like a houseful until they got to running errands for mother and that then she realized that eight wasn't anywhere near enough. And the Morrison's second boy, John William, once explained to Joe that he wore out his shoes, "running errands for Granny."

Alice Richards' baby was ailing again. Joe could see Allie walking the floor, could almost hear her comforting the restless mite in her arms.

Somebody came hurrying down the street and as they passed a street lamp Joe saw that it was Mrs. Downey, taking Tommy to the dentist. Doc Mitchell was a nice enough chap but as Joe watched Tommy's legs saw the air he thought the doctor might be a little mite gentler with the boy orator. But Doc was getting old and he was probably tired. These first autumn days before the snap and sparkle and snowy gleam of real winter sets in always told on the older folks. They sort of seemed tired and worried and sad.

So Joe stood there, looking at the purple and green and magenta-pink lights of Martin's drug store, the sleepily winking lights of the little station and the mellow golden glow of Sophie Forbes' yellow parlor lamp. Then he turned and looked straight down his own street, past the post-office, the tin shop, the dry-goods store to the spot where a faint light seeped through drawn curtains and faint rowdy noises came from behind closed doors.

It was what he guessed was behind those closed doors that had brought Joe out of his shop bareheaded and caused him to feel as Doc Mitchell maybe felt—a little old and sad and tired and even a bit helpless.

Usually on this first night of autumn Joe's shop was crowded with noisy feet and voices of all sizes that squeaked one minute in a shrill soprano and in the next sank to a ragged bass. Joe's shades were never drawn and all the world could see the boys playing Old Maid and Rummy, shooting caroms or sitting on the counter, swinging their feet, eating apples and cracking nuts for themselves and Joe who was questioning them about the day's happenings.

But to-night—involuntarily Joe turned and looked back into the soft darkness of his little shop where the firelight flickered softly, tenderly through the gloom. His heart cramped. Then he looked again to the place where heavy curtains were drawn over dirty windows. He caught again that muffled rough noise of young voices. And his mind was made up.

He stepped back into his shop, turned on all the lights, put the basket of ruddy apples on the counter, straightened the pile of old magazines and pulled out the carom board, the box of chess and checkers. He took a last housewifely look around, then put on his hat and coat and started out. There was pain and anger and a terrible determination in his usually gentle face.

But as he stepped to the door it opened, admitting Mrs. Jerry Dustin. That sweet-faced little woman looked about with anxious eyes, then turned to the little shoemaker.

"Joe—I'm looking for Peter. Wasn't he here with you? He said he was coming here to see the boys."

"He was here and he saw the boys. They all went off together."

"Joe"—fear and worry leaped to the lovely corn-flower eyes, "Joe—not—surely they didn't go—they aren't down *there*?"

"That's just where they are. I was just going after them."

For still seconds this father and mother of boys looked at each other in misery. Both were thinking the same thing, both shrank from what was before them, but even as Joe squared his shoulders Mrs. Dustin straightened hers.

"I'm going with you, Joe."

So down the autumn street went these two. Joe, because he had promised Hattie when she was sick unto death that he would always watch over the boys, would love and cherish and guard them.

Mrs. Dustin was going because Peter was her baby, her strange, weird duckling, full of whimsical fancies and fantastic longings. He was a sort of dream child for whom she alone felt wholly responsible. All the others were good, understandable children. But Peter was odd and nobody but his blue-eyed mother knew how to handle him.

"Rosalie, I've never whipped those boys of mine. Some way I couldn't with Hattie gone and them having no one but me. But maybe it was a mistake."

"No, it wasn't, Joe. The Greatest Teacher that ever lived used only truth and gentleness and look at the size of His school now. No—this trouble isn't in the children exactly. It must be in us. We're stupid and don't know how to do for the children. People say that young folks must be young folks. And we let our boys and even our girls flounder through a lot of cheap foolishness before we expect them to settle down.

"But it's my opinion, Joe, that letting them flounder all alone through these raw years of their life is plain wickedness. Peter has a good home and he's loved and he knows it. Yet he's got to the place now where he wants something that I and the home can't seem to give him. I don't know just what it is. But this place, Joe, bad as it is, must have the thing that our half-grown children want and that's what brings them here even against our will. And I'm going to-night to find out what it is."

"It can't be good for them, Rosalie, when it drives them into lying and stealing. Why only to-day Josie Landis sent Eddie to me with fifty cents for the shoes I mended for her. And he gambled that fifty cents away in the slot machine and came and told me a lie!"

"Little Eddie Landis! Why—Joe, he's just a baby."

"Well—that's what the place is doing to the babies. I don't like it. It's dirty and sneaky and it's working hand in hand with the saloon. It has no business in this town."

"But, Joe, it must have something that this town wants or it wouldn't be doing business. It can't be all pure wickedness."

But Joe's anger was rising in leaps and bounds so that his very hands shook. Mrs. Dustin stopped and laid a soothing hand on the little shoemaker's arm.

"Joe, whatever you do don't get angry in there. Hold on to your temper and don't let yourself even look mad if you can help it. We mustn't humiliate the children for they'd never forgive. You better let me do all the talking at first."

Joe nodded and with that they came abreast of the curtained windows and stood still for a second to gather up their courage. Then Mrs. Dustin very quietly opened the door and stepped in with Joe.

She stood smiling at the door and at sight of her the noise stopped as if by magic. Every child there knew the lovely, blue-eyed little mother of Peter Dustin. The only one who did not know her was the proprietor standing in stupid wonder behind his counter. But she pretended not to see his astonishment as she made her laughing explanations.

"We got lonesome, Joe and I. You know these first autumn nights do chill us older folks a bit

and make us sad. We want bright fires and lots of children racketing around to keep us from feeling old and frightened. And I guess the children get the blues from us for I notice that that's just the time they want to get off by themselves for a good time. We're all trying to forget that the year is dying, I expect, and we're crowding together to cheer each other up. That's what's making the streets so lonely to-night. As I came along I felt so bad that I thought I'd just drop in on Joe and get cheered up with the children. They're usually there. But Joe was standing on his doorstep as lonely as I was. He was missing the children too. We saw your light and heard the children laughing, and we just thought we'd come in and see if we couldn't feel young again. We didn't come in to spoil your fun, so just you go on with it. Joe and I'll watch and maybe join in. You were dancing, weren't you, Mollie?"

Mrs. Dustin asked this of a little russet-haired girl of fourteen who in her sudden amazement at the visitors was still standing in the middle of the floor with her arms about Peter, who had a mouth organ in his mouth. She was a graceful little thing and she had been teaching Peter how to dance. But now she stood stiff with fright and embarrassment.

"Why, don't be afraid of my mother, Mollie," Peter said gently, for he himself was in no way frightened at his mother's appearance.

So when Mrs. Dustin repeated her question, Mollie said shyly: "Yes, ma'am, we were trying to dance."

"Bless me," laughed Mrs. Dustin. "Why, I never realized that Peter was old enough to want to dance. You should have told me, Peter Boy. Why, you should have all told me, because," she smiled gloriously at them all, "because I used to be the star dancer twenty-five years ago. Wasn't I, Joe?"

"You sure were," Joe answered promptly. His face still looked a little queer and his voice was not quite steady but he was bravely following the wise little woman with the blue eyes.

"Let me show you. Play something, Peter."

Mrs. Dustin picked up Mollie and began to dance. And in exactly five turns about the room all the poetry, the joy of motion in Mollie caught fire and her little slim feet just fairly twinkled in happy abandonment.

"Why, Mollie, girl, you're a fairy on your feet," praised Mrs. Dustin and the happy face at her breast flushed with pleasure and gratitude at the words.

Peter was not the least bit surprised at his mother's antics. He knew that she was a glorious mother and full of surprises. The other youngsters however were not so sure. So Peter suggested to the proprietor that he start the graphophone. The proprietor nodded and soon they were all dancing, Mrs. Dustin taking a new partner every few minutes.

"And children," she suddenly remembered, "Joe can jig—why, he used to jig beautifully."

So Joe took his turn in amusing the children and while he did it Mrs. Dustin examined some machines lined up along the wall.

"When you drop a nickel in the slot do you get gum, peanuts or your fortune told or does a Punch and Judy pop out?" she laughingly and innocently asked Sim and Sammy Berwick who stood near.

Sim looked uneasy and Sammy said, "Aw, them things are no good, Mrs. Dustin. You don't want to monkey with them. You might—"

But Mrs. Dustin was already dropping her nickel in and when Peter came up she was shaking out an empty purse.

"Why, Peter, what's the matter with these machines? I guess I didn't work them right. I've dropped all my money in, and I haven't gotten a thing. It's the money I was saving for the framing of that picture Mr. Rollins gave me. Don't you think you can get it for me? Jemmy Hills sent me word to-day that the picture was all framed and ready."

Peter all at once looked sick. He knew how his mother had been saving to buy a pretty frame for the lovely water color Bernard Rollins had given her. She had even given up the idea of a new knot of flowers for her hat. And now she had dropped the precious coins down the hungry mouth of a slot machine. And the worst of it was she didn't seem to know what she had done.

"Mother," Peter began miserably, "you've lost the money and I don't see how you can ask—"

"Oh, well, Peter Boy,—never mind. I expect it's some new game and I didn't play it right. I'm sorry I was stupid. Let's see what else we can do. I wanted to treat you children to soda but maybe Joe has some money. Joe," she called merrily to the shoemaker, "won't you treat?"

Joe caught the odd little note in her voice. His hand rattled the loose change in his pocket and he smiled a spontaneous smile that had however more than a bit of malice in it.

"Sure, I'll treat," and he turned to the proprietor who still looked as though he was seeing things but came to life when Joe stepped up to the counter.

"What'll you have?"

"Oh," said Joe carelessly, "give me what you give the rest of the boys," and here Joe winked at the proprietor.

"And I'll have the same," laughed Mrs. Dustin, and again Joe winked at the proprietor.

But the children had grown strangely quiet, especially the boys. And slim Mollie once more grew frightened as she watched the proprietor setting out glass after glass of foaming beer.

Mrs. Dustin was busy talking to the children and didn't seem to see the foaming glasses until Joe called,

"Come on, everybody—line up."

Then the lovely mother face was raised and at the look that came into the blue eyes every child there grew sick and miserable.

"Ah, gee—whad he give her that for?" muttered Sammy Berwick.

But Mrs. Dustin, after looking once into Peter's tortured eyes, stood up and laughed.

"Well, children," she confessed, "I've never tasted beer in my life, but it's your party and I invited myself so it would be rude to refuse."

And with that she picked up her glass.

"Well," laughed Joe, "this is my first drink too. But I'm not going to be an old fogey. What's good enough for my boys is good enough for me."

Every child there held its breath for they knew that Joe spoke the truth. As for the proprietor, that puzzled man thought that the little shoemaker was trying to be funny and he laughed his first laugh that evening.

Peter Dustin stood beside his mother, his horrified eyes on the little toil-worn hand that was curled about the stem of a beer glass. He wanted to snatch that glass away, wanted to shout to her not to touch the stuff. But his throat was closed and he was conscious only of the fact that somewhere down inside of the anguish that filled him something was praying for help, something was begging God to keep the little, blue-eyed mother stainless and sweet and unharmed.

Joe's boys were not beside their father. They were at the other end of the counter staring, just staring, unconscious of everything, hearing only that strange new laugh of their father's and noticing what no one else except Mrs. Dustin saw—that Joe's hand as he raised his glass shook wretchedly.

And then, before any of them could bring their glasses to their lips, the thing the anguished soul of Peter Dustin had been praying for happened. The door opened and within its frame stood the big handsome figure of Green Valley's new minister.

One glance of his took in the scene and the smile he wore never changed nor did an eyelash so much as quiver even after the blue eyes of Peter's mother had flashed their message.

"Well—I've come to invite folks to my party and I find a party going on. I'm going to give a housewarming soon, and I came over to ask Williams here where he bought his graphophone and records. We must have one at my party so that when the musicians get tired we can have other music. And, Williams, I'm expecting you to come over that night and run the thing for me. I shall be too busy attending to other matters. And now, as long as we're all here would you mind letting me hear 'Annie Laurie' again?"

The song was put on and the children crowded round.

Joe and Mrs. Dustin were listening silently to the song that always brought back old faces and scenes and that old haunting ache for the things of long ago.

"That's my favorite tune," said the proprietor suddenly to Mrs. Dustin.

"It's one of mine too," she smiled back with soft, shining eyes.

"My wife's name was Annie," he said again and as suddenly.

"Have you lost her?" Mrs. Dustin asked gently.

"Yes. Quite a while ago. You make me think of her. She was little and had blue eyes. She died on me when the baby came. She took the baby with her."

"Oh," murmured Mrs. Dustin and she forgot the beer growing stale on the counter, forgot the

slot machines against the walls, forgot everything but this man who for this minute stood out from a world of men with this unhealed sorrow in his heart.

"And for bonny Annie Laurie
I'd lay me doon and dee,"

sang the famous singer softly and the proprietor turned his head away.

"It gets damn lonesome sometimes," he said huskily. And at that a toil-worn hand touched his arm in healing sympathy and a little shoemaker who had come out into the night with anger in his heart said with a huskiness that rivalled the proprietor's,

"My God, man, don't I know!"

The minister played other tunes, then he pulled out his watch and laughed and that ended the party. In a few minutes he was alone with the proprietor.

When the last footstep had lost itself in the still streets the proprietor turned to the big young man who was sitting on an ice-cream table, carelessly swinging his feet.

"I feel so damn funny," said the proprietor, "and all shook up to-night. And I don't know whether it all really happened or whether I just dreamed it—the little woman with the blue eyes and the soft-faced little guy. Say, parson, what were they after, anyway?"

"Williams," the parson made grave answer, "I rather think those two were looking for their children." And Cynthia's son told the story of Joe and Hattie and Mrs. Dustin and Peter as Green Valley had told it to him. And when it was told the two men sat still and listened to the little wind mourning somewhere outside.

"Yes—that's it. They were looking for their children. If mine hadn't a-died that's maybe what I'd be doing now. Oh, God, parson, I'm in wrong again. I've been in wrong ever since Annie died. If she was alive I'd be working in a machine shop somewheres, bringing home my twenty-two a week with more for overtime and going around with my wife and the kid and living natural, like other men. My God," he groaned, "the lights just went out when she went and I've been stumbling around in the dark, not knowing how to live or die.

"I quit work the day after I buried her. What was the use of working then? I had half a mind to blow in all I had but I couldn't. Seemed like she was still there with me, trying to cheer me up. I slunk around like a shadow for months. And then I got hungry for people. A single man don't get asked around much and he's got to hang around with the boys.

"So I took what money I had and started a pool-room. I thought maybe I'd feel better seeing people around all day. Well—it wasn't so bad. But one night a little woman with a baby in her arms came to the door and begged me to send her husband home and not let him play in my place any more. She said she had no milk for the baby and no fire, that he was spending everything he earned in my poolroom.

"So help me, God, parson, that part of it had never struck me. I ain't bright and never was. But I ain't no skunk. I give that woman some of her own money back and that week I sold out at a loss and slunk around some more. I couldn't go back to my own work. I had a grudge against it, someway. By and by the money was all gone and an old pal of mine offered to set me up in business out here, away from the city and old memories. And here I am again—the same old fool and numbskull. I'll sell out this week and git. What I'll do I don't know. I'm not a smart man. It was always Annie that did the heavy thinking and the advising and had the ideas for starting things."

The boy who was born in India, who had heard hundreds of gripping, human tales in that land of story and proverb, listened as if this was the first breath of grief his heart had ever experienced. Then he took the dead Annie's place.

"Williams, sometime next spring, Billy Evans is going to add a garage to his livery barn. He'll need a mechanic. That will be just the place for you. In the meantime I'm buying a little car and am in need of a driver. So until Billy is ready you'd better come and bach with me. The farm is big and I'm nearly as lonely at times as you are."

And he told his poolroom friend a tale of India and of two plain white stones that lay somewhere within the heart of it.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHARM

It was a wonderful charm—that picture of a little boy and his pet hen. Nanny carried it about during the day and felt almost safe and easier of heart. She wondered what had become of all her old happiness, the carefree joy that had been hers before she met the boy who came from India and who did not understand women.

Ever since that day on the hill top Nanny's life had been troubled. She was haunted with strange, vague fears. She woke up one morning with the knowledge that she had dreamed the night long of the boy from India. That afternoon she found herself unable to think of anything but him.

A panic seized her. She began to be afraid of herself. She caught herself looking out of the windows and down the dusty summer roads, at first unconsciously and then with a curious expectancy that grew to a longing so real that she could not help but understand.

It came to Nanny with a terrible shock—the knowledge that at last she loved a man. She remembered then the eyes of the men who had loved her and whom she had so carelessly sent away. She understood then the hurt they had carried away with them and hoped penitently that each had found the comfort and love he had craved.

She wondered how and where she was to look for comfort. She saw with something very much like horror that, unlike the men who had sought her, she dared make no plea, could not by word or look give any sign of what had befallen her.

If others came to know, her misery would be unbearable. The terrible thought came that perhaps Cynthia's son might come to see. At that the earth seemed to go soft beneath her feet and her world lay blurred in a mist of amazed misery.

She was wretched and gay by turns. The day came when her father and brother noticed this and spoke of it. Then it was that Nanny turned white and walked away to Grandma Wentworth's. She had half a mind to tell Grandma and perhaps through that wonder-wise soul find her way back to peace and sanity. But Grandma had teased too and so Nanny held on desperately to her secret, wondering how she was to go on enduring.

When she came to the picture of the little, grave-eyed chap Nanny stole it without a moment's hesitation. And it acted like a charm. Lying warm above her heart it dulled the longing and helped her to laugh again, gayly, saucily even.

She had brave minutes when with her eyes on the picture she told herself that it wasn't the man she loved but this grave-eyed boy in him that had never grown up or died. She had always loved children, she told herself, so there was no shame in that. But the next minute her heart would call up the image of this boy grown up, a boy still, but a boy with a man's eyes and a man's dormant strength. Being an honest soul Nanny flushed and cried for the mother she could not remember.

Still as the days went by Nanny found that the little fellow stood gallantly by her. Somehow he helped her to grow used to the pain and the burning joy of her secret. He helped her to endure the questions and the teasing that is the lot of girls as lovely as Nanny.

He helped her to laugh when she felt like crying. And best of all he steadied her when Cynthia's son was by, when her heart was beating horribly and her head was dizzy with happiness and fright.

She was a new girl to the boy from India. He was no longer afraid of her. She no longer said bright, sharp things that puzzled and hurt him. She was quiet and kind and frequently now exceedingly ill at ease.

One day while they were walking along the road he stopped suddenly and looked at her.

"Are you tired?" he asked abruptly.

"No—I'm not tired," Nanny said a little surprised at the question.

"Are you ill?" he next wanted to know.

"Ill? Why—no. Not that I know of."

He searched her eyes for the truth. Nanny, not daring to trust herself, turned away her head with an unsteady little laugh.

"Why?"

"Because," the puzzled boy explained, "you have been so quiet and so nice and kind to me."

The laughable innocence of him was all that saved Nanny that time.

She thought of going away. But she lacked the courage. The thought of going made the pain

worse and there was no place in all the world to which she cared to go.

Then a brilliant idea came to her. It might after all, she told herself, be purely imaginary,—this strange torture that she thought was love. It might after all be only a foolish fancy born of her quiet isolated life in the dreamy old town. She would fill the house with people, with men and women and music.

So for a time the Ainslees were very gay. House party followed house party and there were always guests. Secure with the security of numbers Nanny invited Cynthia's son. Then she stood back and watched him draw both men and women about him. He was utterly at ease with the men but quiet and reserved with the girls. Instinctively he sorted out the comfortable, less brilliant ones and chatted with them, all unconscious of the light in the eyes of the others. Nanny watched him and as she watched there was born in her heart a new fear and torture. She realized that some day love would come to Cynthia's son and feared that she would have to stand by unseen and forgotten.

So then she began to distrust those of her feminine guests who smiled at him and chatted with him. And as soon as she decently could she sent all her company packing. When they were gone she knew beyond any possibility of doubt that she loved him and would always love him and that the vengeance that her father had predicted had overtaken her.

The very next time Cynthia's son came he found the house quiet and Nanny alone.

"Are they all gone?" he asked.

"Yes," she told him.

"When is your next crowd coming?" he wondered.

"There aren't going to be any more crowds," Nanny informed him.

"That's nice. It's pleasanter this way."

Nanny's poor heart longed to ask why but it dared not.

So then she drifted and didn't care. Though she prayed a little miserably at times for peace and a home shore. They seemed to meet by accident on the sunny summer roads and whenever they did they strolled on aimlessly but contented. Because she was now so quiet and kind he told her things that he had never told to any one else. She marvelled at the simple heart of him, its freedom from self-consciousness. She had not dreamed that there was anywhere in the world a grown-up man like that.

Had he been different she could never have lived, it seemed to her, through the fearful hour of humiliation on the Glen Road. She stooped for a spray of scarlet sumach one early autumn afternoon. They had been looking through the hedges for the first hazel nuts and he was standing beside her when, in some way, the little picture worked its way out of her soft silk blouse and fell at his feet, face up.

Fright as terrible and as cold as death laid its hand on Nanny's heart. It seemed to her that she never again could raise her eyes to his. Fortunately her body went through its mechanical duties. She bent, her hand picked up the picture, and her voice of its own accord was explaining:

"This belongs to you. I took it the day I was looking over the pictures at Grandma Wentworth's. I should, of course, have returned it long ago but I kept neglecting to do it. It's one of the dearest child pictures I have ever seen."

She raised her eyes then, eyes as careless as she could make them. Fright kept the flame of bitter shame from her cheeks and the tremor out of her voice. She held the little picture out to him, forcing her eyes to meet his.

And those eyes of his looked down at her, first with wonder and then with a pleased smile, and she knew that he didn't know, didn't understand, saw nothing strange in the incident. He took her calm explanation for the whole truth. The man had absolutely no vanity.

"Why, I don't want that," he told her wonderingly. "Are you making a collection of children's pictures?" he asked with such innocent curiosity that Nanny's self-control gave way and she laughed until she cried. He stood by, helpless and puzzled. When Nanny, having gotten to the tears, searched in vain for her handkerchief he gravely offered his.

Nanny took it and used it and then looked up at him with eyes as full of laughing despair as his were full of bewilderment.

"John Roger Churchill Knight—you will some day be the very death of me."

CHAPTER XV

INDIAN SUMMER

"Well, I guess this is about the last spell of pretty weather we're going to have," sighed Fanny Foster as she sat herself down on Grandma Wentworth's back steps and went right to work helping Grandma sort the herbs and bulbs and the seeds she had been gathering for a whole week.

"I'm hoping not," said Grandma, "though when the air is like warm gold dust, and the sun's heat just mellows you through and through, and the last bobolink calls from the hill, why, a body just knows such perfect days can't last. Still, I'm hoping it'll stay a bit longer, though I can't say I'm not ready for cold weather."

"Oh, I guess everybody is," agreed Fanny with that joyous, bubbling, luxurious note that Grandma knew so well. "I saw Mary Hagley polishing her very knuckles off on that second-hand stove Mert bought from that watery-eyed man from Spring Road who drives through here with the lame buckskin horse and pieced-out harness. Lutie Barlow's got her fall tinting and painting all done. She's painted the inside of her chicken coops a bright yellow, so's to fool her hens into thinking the sun's forever shining, and the inside of her stormshed a red, so's to make it seem warmer when she goes out there on a cold day to the coal and wood box. There ain't anybody can beat Lutie on color ideas.

"Minnie Eton's dyed her heavy lace curtains in coffee and has a new set made for the dining room, besides having a picture of the third boy enlarged for the parlor. She started crocheting the lace for a new bedspread for her company bedroom yesterday. And—oh, my lands, I forgot to tell you the rest of that second-hand stove business. You see Mary was feeling pretty bad about having to put up with another old stove and envying Cissie Harvey hers. Cissie's new parlor stove is a monster, made seemingly of nothing but pure nickel and isinglass. Mary went over to look at it and when she come home and took another look at her old thing she just sat down and cried. She cried till she was too tired to care and then went to Jessup's for some stove polish. On the way she met Judy Parks who told her that Dick had a new kind of polish that gave a beautiful shine without hardly any work. So Mary got that and it proved to be all Judy said it was and in no time at all Mary turned that old stove of hers into a shining glory. And just as she was standing back admiring her work in comes Cissie, wringing her hands. The baby had poked out every last one of those isinglass windows while Cissie was in the kitchen warming up his milk. And there you are. And there's people that say there is no God and no justice in this world.

"Josephine Rand's starting in on her rugs and begging rags from friends and enemies. She's going a little easy though since last week. She cut up what Ted says was a perfectly good pair of his pants. He had them hanging up in the basement and was hoping Josephine would wash and press them some day. He kept them down in the basement because he knew that if he left them in his closet she'd give them away to a hobo on account of her always feeling so sorry for tramps and believing everything they tell her. Ted says he always liked these particular pants on account of them making him look slim and being made of the same kind of cloth as his first long pair of pants that he got as a boy. So he was cherishing them and Josephine goes and cuts them into tatters. He's so mad, she says she don't dare leave a rag rug in his sight.

"Mat Wilson and his wife ain't on the very best conjugal terms either. It seems Mat has a felon right under his thumb nail, about the worst place you can have one, he thinks. It's kept him awake nights and made him miserable, so naturally he felt entitled to a good deal of sympathy. And he got it. Everybody has sympathized so much that Clara just got mad and said that that there felon of Mat's isn't half as bad as the one that she had at the end of her thumb two years ago. She says she got hollow-eyed and consumptive looking with hers but that Mat looks about the same as usual, maybe brighter. Anyhow, they've argued and scrapped about their felons so that Clara's aunt's gone off for a visit to Ioway, and Mat says that there sure is a recompense for everything in this world, even felons and domestic misery, and Clara wants to know if he's meaning to insinuate that her aunt is a nuisance, because if he is she ain't going to send his aunt the Christmas present that she's got half done for her. But Mat won't say, just keeps showing his thumb to everybody and talking about silver linings to every cloud. There's no use talking, some men are aggravating.

"Mandy Jutlins don't know whether to have the telephone put in or not. She says the Lord knows she has enough children to run all her errands and take all messages and that the two dollars a month comes in handy for a new pair of shoes. And if it's in she says more than likely she'll be wasting her time listening to a lot of silly gossip. Of course that was a foolish remark for Mandy to make, seeing all her friends have telephones. Two or three's took it personal and aren't speaking a word to Mandy but plenty about her. One of them is supposed to have said that it's a fact that Mandy doesn't need a telephone, that she talks enough without it, and that in her opinion the worst kind of a gossip is the kind that stays at home the whole enduring time, never taking pains to see how things really happen and always knowing everything.

"Emmy Smith doesn't know what to do with her oldest girl, Eleanor. Eleanor just won't wash

the knives and forks and spoons. She'll scrape and scald and polish the pots and pans and does the china beautiful, but she will leave the knives and forks and even hides them away dirty. Did you ever hear of such a thing? Emmy can't explain it unless it's due to the shiftless streak in all the Smiths.

"Agnes Hooper's crab-apple jell is about all gone and here it's hardly cool yet. Those boys of hers just want to live on crab-apple jell and Aggie says she's got to the end of her strength and patience, that Charlie'd better pull up and move out among the Mormons where he could have a couple of more wives to help keep those boys filled up.

"Jennie Burton's sauerkraut isn't going to keep and hasn't turned out well, she thinks. Fremy Stockton says it's because she forgot to put in a little mite of sugar and altogether too much salt.

"Grace Cook's husband bought a whole pig from some farmer Bloomingdale way, thinking it was going to be good and cold by this time. And Grace has got up at four o'clock every morning for a week and stayed up till midnight, trying to get that pig out of sight. She's rendered lard and made sausage and salted and smoked meat till every crock is full. Yesterday she was making head cheese, sick to her stomach and crying because there were still the four feet to cook up, and she said she didn't know how to cook them and that each one looked to her about as big as the kitchen stove.

"So I just took off my hat and put those four pig's feet on the stove to simmer, and I helped her to get the head cheese out of the way. When there's two working and talking, why, the time goes and when we turned around there were those pig's feet as tender as could be, so when the children came in we sat down and had pig's feet with horse-radish. Grace wouldn't touch them; said she had enough pig in her system to last her ten years and she knew she'd break out in gumboils.

"I suppose you've heard how Malcolm Gross thought he'd lay in a nice supply of maple syrup for his buckwheat pancakes this winter, and how the children went to tasting and forgot to cork the big can, and the cat went climbing around for mice and bacon rind and knocked the thing down. Florence says there's maple syrup tracked all over the house and she says her rugs are ruined.

"It seems as if Grove Street was full of trouble, for while Grace was crying over her pig, Elsie Winters next door was crying over her blue henrietta dress that didn't dye right. Elsie swears it was old dye Martin sold her and wishes we'd have another drug store because a little competition would do Martin good. And next door to Elsie, Pete Sweeney's tickled to death. He says it serves Elsie right, that Green Valley women've got a mania for dyeing things and trying to make 'em last forever; that he's had two bolts of just the kind of color Elsie was trying to get but that she wouldn't look at it.

"And Pete Sweeney's not the only one that's down on the women. Andy Smiley cleaned up so much money on those new bungalows that he went to the city and came home with twenty-five dollars' worth of ostrich plumes for Nettie. He said he was bound that Nettie'd have a real hat once in her life, that he's tired of watching her making her own hats, even piecing out the shapes with bits of cardboard and trimming and retrimming. She got in the way of it the first ten years they were married, when Andy was having such poor luck and now, poor thing, I guess she can't get out of it, because the day after Andy brought the plumes Nettie went to the city and bought a thirty-nine-cent shape to put them on. And she's wearing it like that, looking worse than ever. They say Andy's swearing awful and that Mary Langely almost cried when she saw those lovely plumes and begged Nettie to come in and let her fix up her hat proper and without charge. But Nettie just smiled that happy little smile of hers and shook her head.

"Andy Smiley ain't the only one that's doing well. Johnny Peters got a raise the other day and Claudie's treated herself to two dozen beautiful linen dish towels. She says she's used flour sacks to wipe dishes ever since she was six years old and she's always been hoping she'd be rich enough some day to have real linen dish towels. So she's got 'em. But they're so nice she hardly likes to use them, and the two weeks she was sick and had to have her washing done at the laundry she was mighty careful not to send them. She washed them herself right there beside her bed, and her sick with rheumatism. They say Doc Philipps used awful language, for he caught her right at it. But when she explained he just blew his nose and never said another word. But he talked to Johnny and Johnny went out and bought four dozen dish towels such as Green Valley has never seen. Why, Sadie Dundry says even the Ainslees haven't got dish towels like that. Doc says that if he can coax some man to get Dolly Beatty good woolen stockings and keep her from wearing those transparent things this winter he'll be almost happy; says if Dolly should marry that widower he'll talk to him.

"All Elm Street's laughing at Alexander Sabin and Carrie and their pump. That pump of theirs has been out of order all summer and Carrie's been sick from nothing else but getting mad every time she'd go out for a pail of water. Alexander promised to fix it but instead of that he's repaired everybody else's all up and down Elm Street and just can't seem to get started on his own. Carrie's going on a strike to-morrow, ain't going to cook a mouthful of victuals, she says, until that pump is fixed. The neighbors, much as they like Alexander, are all on her side and have promised not to invite him in, even for a drink of water from the pumps he's fixed. And his mother's away at Barton, nursing her sick sister, so it looks as if Alexander will be starved into

fixing that pump of his.

"Debby Collins is going to give the minister one of her cats, the one that has to have a cold potato for its lunch every day. She says it's the most mannerly of all her cats and that she'd never think of giving it to any one but the minister and not even to him but that now that he's going to have a proper home and a housekeeper, why, it'll be safe.

"Everybody, of course, is crazy about the housewarming the minister is going to give next week. I guess everybody is going. It'll be a fine night for thieves, Bessie Williams says, with every soul gone. That girl's mind just naturally turns to evil. She knows there ain't ever been a thing stolen in this town, less it was a kiss or two. But Bessie's the only one, so far as I could hear, who was borrowing trouble. The rest of the town is dying to get into that house that's been closed so long. And everybody's curious to know just what Hen Tomlins's been doing to the furniture. You know when the minister found out what a fine wood-carver and cabinet-maker Hen was he had him go through the house. And they say that Bernard Rollins, the portraiture man, is mixed up in the housewarming too. But nobody can figure out how. And that ain't the worst. Uncle Tony says that he heard that the minister bought out the poolroom man, because some one saw the music box being hauled over to the minister's house. You know Jake and some others were planning to run that poolroom man out of town, even whispering about tar and feathers. But the minister asked them to let him manage and try to fix things up first. So they did and he's done it, because the poolroom's closed; the stuff went out yesterday and Effie Struby's brother Alf swears he saw that poolroom man fooling with the minister's automobile out in the barn. But you know how near-sighted Alf is and his word ain't credited much, and everybody's so busy getting ready for the party that they can't stop to investigate. And ain't it funny how none of us don't somehow ask the minister things, just wait until he tells us? And ain't he got a funny way of just talking about nothing special, only being pleasant, and then letting you find out weeks after that he did tell you something that you'd been needing to know? My! I bet that boy could give a child castor oil and make him honestly think it was candy. Why, they say that as far as anybody can find out, he's never give that poolroom man even one good talking to. Jake, who's been itching to lambaste the man, says 's-far's he can see, it was the poolroom man who did all the talking. And once Jake says he just dropped in himself, just to see what line of argument the minister was using, and he says that he'd be danged if the minister did a blessed thing but play 'Annie Laurie' and 'We'd Better Bide a Wee' over and over on that music box. Jake hasn't figured it out yet.

"Why, Grandma, there's some thinks maybe Cynthia's son has brought back some Indian magic. They say India's chuckful of it—but law—it'll take more than magic to save little Jim Tumley, for he's beginning again. While the minister kept close he was all right but the housewarming and that poolroom took up time, and then Jim's sister, Mrs. Hoskins, got sick and Jim goes there to play and sing to her, and you know what George Hoskins is. He must have his drink and offer visitors some—and poor Jim—just the smell of it knocks him out. The minister says Jim must be saved. But how's it to be done, tell me that? There ain't anything smart or knowing about me, but the minister'll never save Jim Tumley less'n he kills off a few of our comfortable, respectable drinkers and closes up the hotel. And I tell you, nobody but God Almighty could make this town dry."

"Well, Fanny," smiled Grandma, "I've noticed that if there ever is a job that nobody but the Almighty can handle, He generally takes it in hand and settles it."

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOUSEWARMING

Jocelyn Brownlee was dressing for the minister's party. She was laying out the prettiest of her pretty things and sighing as she did it. For what two months before would have seemed a joyous occasion was now nothing but a painful, trying ordeal, an ordeal that must, however, be gallantly gone through with.

Ever since that afternoon when she had stood on the back porch waving joyfully to David and received no answer her world had lost its color. All the rose and gold had faded and she stood lonely and lost and cold in a mist of mystery.

She had seen David since that day, had even spoken to him. But her words were few and full of a gracious courtesy that put a whole wide world between them.

"Are you going to the minister's housewarming, Jocelyn?" David had asked painfully. He had realized the raw cruelty of that afternoon and had come over to explain and make amends.

"Yes—I'm going, David. All the town will be there, won't it?" she had answered and asked gently.

"Shall I stop for you?" begged the big boy.

"Why, no, David—thank you. I shall not need an escort. It's such a little way and I'm used to Green Valley now." But David knew just how afraid this city mouse was of the country roads at night.

She was such a gracious little body as she stood there in her garden that David wondered how he had ever for a moment doubted her and what madness in his blood had made him yield to the cruelty that had shut her heart and door to him.

For closed they were and gone was the simple, confiding girl who had picnicked with him one May day. In her place was this quiet young woman who talked to him pleasantly but did not ask him in, and who scared him with her calm and sweetness and drove the stumbling explanation from his lips.

So Jocelyn was laying out her pretty things and sighing. As long as she was not going with David she decided to wear the smart slippers with the high heels and the pretty buckles. David did not approve of high heels.

She knew that a great many of the Green Valley women would wear dresses with collars to their chins. So she smiled just a bit wickedly as she glanced at the soft, misty dress like pink sea foam, from which her head and lovely throat rose like a flower. She wondered if it was wicked to be glad that she was pretty and to want David to see just how pretty she really was.

She didn't want to go, but go she must, for she knew Green Valley. She knew it and loved it. But she feared it too, because she did not know it well enough.

So half-past eight found her stepping daintily and a little tipsily in her high-heeled slippers over the road, after the last stragglers. She did not want to be seen going in alone and so hung back till the last, a lonely little figure in the cool shadows. Yet she was not so far back that she could not feel the comforting nearness of the folks ahead. She even heard snatches of conversation and smiled understandingly, for she too knew now the little daily trials, the family sorrows and dissensions, the occasional soul tempests, the laughable ways and tenderly pathetic ambitions of these simple, guileless human folks.

She heard enough to know that the couple just ahead was Sam Bobbins and his wife, Dudy; the Sam Bobbins who tried to get rich raising violets and failed; who then began raising mushrooms in his cellar and failed; who last year spent good money trying to raise pedigreed dogs and failed; and who only the week before paid ten dollars for a fancy rooster and was happily telling his neighbors how rich he was going to be, selling fighting stock. His wife stepped on her skirt and ripped it. Jocelyn could hear her worried wail and Sam comforting her with promises of new dresses when the roosters began to sell. She could hear fat Mrs. Glenn puffing and laughing her way up the little crests of the road and could guess that her thin husband was doing his best to help her.

She was so interested in the folks ahead that she forgot to be afraid and never once glanced back into the shadows. Had she done so she might have seen David loitering along, keeping faithful watch over her. So nicely did he time his steps that when she reached the door of the minister's country house he was right behind her, and all Green Valley saw them come in together.

When Jocelyn, in slipping from her evening wrap, turned and saw him and flushed, he covered her confusion by saying reproachfully but gently:

"Those slippers are ever so pretty, Jocelyn, but you ought not to wear them on these rough country roads and they are hardly warm enough for these cool evenings, are they?"

She gave him a little smile full of saucy wickedness for she heard the pain in his voice and saw the lover's hunger in his eyes and knew that she was loved well and truly. But she had been hurt and she was too much a woman and far too human not to take her turn at gentle cruelty.

"What a couple," breathed Joshua Stillman, standing beside the blazing fireplace with Colonel Stratton. "She's like a dewy sweet rosebud and he's a regular story-book lover in looks and a rare fine boy. We haven't had a wild rose romance like this one for a long while."

"We'll have a finer when that young parson wakes up. He has the look of a great lover, and look at the love history of the Churchills."

t was evident that no man there dreamed of criticizing
the dress that looked like pink sea foam. Even David drank in the picture of his little sweetheart and saw how necessary to this wild rose sweetness the high-heeled slippers were. He wondered if ever in his life he would kiss her and, should such glory come to him, if he would live through the joy of it.

It was the women who were inclined to murmur. But as soon as they caught a look or a smile meant just for them their primness melted. Their duty to their conscience and their upbringing done, they smiled back lovingly at the girl, for who could be critical of a sweet wild rose!

Jocelyn was not the only one whose gown had no collar. Nan Ainslee wore a plain dress that was so beautiful it made the women catch their breath. When Dolly asked the Green Valley dressmaker if she could make her one like it, that body sighed and shook her head and said that she knew that that dress looked awful simple but that it wasn't as simple as it looked and she knew better than to try and copy it.

Some one overheard and asked somebody else why Dolly Beatty should happen to want a dress like that, and instantly somebody smiled and whispered that Charlie Peters, the widower from North Road, was making eyes at her and calling regularly.

So the ball was set rolling and soon everybody knew that Grandma Wentworth had just had a letter from Tommy Dudley, saying that he was doing so well out West on his homestead that he was building himself a new house and was aiming to make Green Valley a visit next lilac time.

And Jimmy Sears, Milly Sears' second boy, was a sergeant in the army and was having a wonderful time somewhere down in Panama. Milly had a letter from him with photographs and was showing them around. Not only did Jimmy give her news of himself but he wrote that John, the oldest boy, was up in Canada and doing well. Jimmy was sending his mother and sister Alice some wonderful laces and embroideries and Frank Burton several kinds of strange fowl by a sailor friend from one of the warships who was going home. So patient, long-suffering Milly Sears was wholly happy for the first time in years.

And no sooner had all this news been digested than somebody discovered a diamond ring on Clara Tuttle's left hand. So Clara was surrounded and an explanation demanded. But before she could conquer her blushes and stammer out her news Max Longman came in from another room and, putting his arms about her, said, "Don't be afraid, girl of mine, I'm here." And so everybody knew then that it was Max, after all, and not Freddy Wilson.

Over near one of the big windows Steve Meckling was looking down at Bonnie Don.

"Bonnie, when will you stop torturing me? When will you let me give you a ring?"

Bonnie was Clara Tuttle's chum and she was watching Clara's face, the light in Clara's eyes, the happy curve of her lips. It was a happiness that made Bonnie's eyes wistful.

"Steve," she said softly, "would you always love me and be gentle with me?"

At that big Steve caught his breath and put his hungry arms behind his back out of temptation's way and said huskily, "Oh, Bonnie, girl, just try me!"

So Bonnie raised her eyes and the big man was at peace.

Billy Evans was the last to arrive. He had to get all the old folks to the party before he and Hank could put in an appearance. But his wife and little Billy were there, little Billy with his ruddy hair curling about his merry little face and his eyes dancing at everything and every one.

Green Valley was full of lovable little ones, but they were as a rule kept closely sheltered in the front and back yards. But Billy was a town baby. His days were spent in and around his father's livery barn. He went to his twelve o'clock dinner perched on Hank Lolly's shoulder, and it had gotten so no gathering of men in his father's office was considered complete without him.

And maybe it was just as well; for since Billy's coming there was less careless language, less careless gossip. And if some one's tongue did slip now and then, Hank Lolly had a way of putting his head in and saying solemnly:

"Guess you forgot that Mrs. Evans' boy was around when you said that."

For Hank Lolly was little Billy's proud godfather and Billy's welfare was a matter that kept Hank awake nights.

It was Hank who introduced little Billy to all the livery horses and patiently developed deep friendships between the animals and the child.

"I've fixed it so's no horse of ourn'll ever hurt the boy. But that ain't saying that somebody's ornery critter won't harm him. There's some awful mean horses in this town, Billy," Hank worried. But Billy Evans only laughed.

"Hank," he said, "with you and God taking turns minding that kid, and his ma and me doing a little now and then, I guess he'll grow up."

So Billy was at the minister's party, as were very nearly all the other Green Valley youngsters. For these were old-fashioned folks whose entertainments were so simple and harmless that children could always be present.

As a matter of fact Green Valley folks never had to be entertained. All one had to do was to call them together and they entertained themselves.

Cynthia's son knew this. So he had made no elaborate plans. He knew too that it was the old

homestead they came to see, and to find out what that poolroom man was doing in his back yard, and why Hen Tomlins had been coming up so regularly, and why Bernard Rollins had been asking to see people's old albums for the past three months.

So Cynthia's son had no programme. He just threw open every door and invited them to walk through and look. He explained that in the kitchen his housekeeper, Mary Dooley, and her two cousins from Meacham were getting up the refreshments and that any one who strayed in there would in all probability be put to work.

Still he wanted Green Valley housewives to go in and see if they could think of anything that would make Mary's work easier. He had, he said, tried to make that kitchen a livable kind of a room, a room that would be easy on a woman's feet and back and restful to her heart.

In the library and scattered all about were samples of Hen Tomlins' art. Hen was a rare workman, their minister told them. With his box of tools and his cunning hands Hen had taken old, broken but still beautiful heirloom furniture and refashioned it into new life and beauty.

In his little study just off the library his Green Valley neighbors would find all manner of oriental things, treasures gathered for him by his wonderful mother and father and given to him by his many dear and far-away Indian friends. He had put little cards on the articles, explaining their history and uses.

For the babies there were big, quiet, safe rooms upstairs, and for the young people there was the hall and the back sitting room, the piano, the music box and Timothy Williams. Timothy was the man who up till the day before yesterday had owned and run the poolroom. But he wasn't in the poolroom business any more. He was now his, John Knight's, assistant and friend. Timothy's story was a common enough little story—the story of a man without a home. If they'd all listen a minute he'd tell them all there was to tell.

So, in the midst of a merrymaking, John Roger Churchill Knight introduced Timothy Williams to Green Valley, introduced him in such a way as to pave a wide clear path for him into Green Valley hearts. And so quick was Green Valley's response that before that same merrymaking was over Green Valley was calling him Timothy and inviting him over for Sunday dinner.

So then they were all provided for. And here was the house. It was years since some of them were in it, and to a home-loving, home-worshipping people it was a treat to go from room to room. In spite of the changes, the newness everywhere, there was much of the old home left. Its soul was still the same. The new hangings, the new wicker furniture, the oriental treasures were all duly inspected, commented upon and admired.

But it was the old things, the Green Valley things that made the great appeal. And Green Valley folks rested loving hands every now and then on some fine old heavy chair that a long-gone Churchill had with his own hands fashioned from his own walnut trees.

There were pictures to look at, old familiar faces, the faces of men and women who had been born and raised in this joyous little valley town; who had gone to the village school and had in their courting days strolled over the shady old town roads.

Here was a picture of Cynthia's mother in a crinoline with her baby on her knee. There was a famous artist's painting of a storm passing over the wooded knoll that now was John Knight's favorite retreat. The famous artist had been visiting John Knight and had painted the storm as he watched it from the sitting-room windows.

There were old candlesticks, guns, old dishes, old patterns, hand-sewn quilts and such little things of long ago as stirred the oldest folks there very nearly to tears and awed even the youngsters into a wondering respect for the old days they could never know.

The old house hummed with the treasured memories of a hundred years. Groups of twos and threes stood everywhere about, hovering over some article. In every such group there would be at first a short hushed silence, then would come the sudden burst of memories spattering like a shower of raindrops; then the turning away of eyes full of misty, unbelieving, far-away smiles.

Cynthia's son watched and smiled too. But his thoughts flew back and he longed with a cruel ache for the mother who lay sleeping in a far and foreign land.

By and by a gong sounded somewhere. That was the signal for supper. So they gathered around the tables and Cynthia's son explained that Bernard Rollins had for the last three months been painting a portrait of Cynthia Churchill, Cynthia as they knew her. That was why Rollins had searched old albums for pictures that might give him an idea of the sweetness of her smile. That was the surprise of the evening and the meaning of the shrouded picture above the library fireplace. She had so loved Green Valley, had so longed to be there.

They sat very still and waited while Grandma Wentworth uncovered the face of the girl who had been so loved by Green Valley folks. Grandma's face was a little white with memories and the hand that was reaching for the cord to draw away the covering shook a little. Cynthia Churchill and she had been dearer to each other than sisters. They had gone to school together in the days of pinafores and sunbonnets and picked spring's wild flowers along the roadsides and in the

woodlands. They had knitted and made lace together, gone to picnics and parties, always together, until the time came when a tall Green Valley boy walked beside each. And even then they were inseparable. Why, they made their wedding things together and when Mollie Wentworth passed out of the village church a wife, Cynthia, lovely as the bride, walked behind as bridesmaid. And Mollie was to have returned the favor in a few days. But something happened, something tragic and cruel, and lovely Cynthia never wore the wedding gown that had been fashioned for her. It was packed away and on what was to have been her wedding day Cynthia left Green Valley and was gone a long while. She came back once or twice but in the end Green Valley heard that she married a wonderful missionary and sailed away to India.

So Grandma's hand shook and her face was white. But when the covering slipped off and a lovely, laughing face looked down at them Grandma smiled, even though the tears were running down her cheeks.

Yes, that was Cynthia. Disappointment could never mar the high joy of her nature. She was laughing at them, telling them that with all its sorrows and bitterness and heartache life was worth while.

Her son stood beneath her picture and read to them parts of her letters, last messages to many of them. She had written them on her deathbed and they were full of yearning for the town of her birth, for the old trees and familiar flowers, home voices and the sound of the old church bell sighing through the summer night.

"But," ran one letter, "I am sending you my son and I want you to tell him all the old stories and town chronicles, sing him all the old songs and love him for my sake—for he's going home—going home to Green Valley—alone."

Oh, they cried, those Green Valley folks, for they were as one family and they guessed what it must have been to die away from home and kindred.

But Cynthia's son did not weep. He had shed his tears long ago and had learned to smile. He was smiling at them now.

"I had planned to have Jim Tumley sing some of the old songs for us to-night. But Jim isn't here and so if somebody will offer to play them we can all sing. Jim promised he'd come," the young host's face was troubled and they all guessed what was worrying him, "but he isn't here—"

"Yes—he—is," a strange voice chirped somewhere near the door. Green Valley turned and looked and froze with horror. For there, staggering grotesquely, came little Jim Tumley, a piteous figure. He had kept his promise to his new friend—he had come to sing the old songs.

Not a soul stirred. Only somewhere in the heart of the seated audience Frank Burton groaned. This was a fight that he could not fight for little Jim.

Nan Ainslee had stepped to the piano but her fingers were lead. And for once the young minister was unable to rise to the situation. A dark agony flooded his eyes and kept him motionless. It was the look Grandma Wentworth had once seen in Cynthia's eyes. And it was that look that took the strength from Grandma so that she too was helpless.

For sick, still minutes Green Valley watched little Jim stumble about and fumble for his handkerchief. They stared at the stricken face of their minister and at the laughing face whose memory they had come to honor.

And then, when the deathly silence was becoming unbearable, a girl in a dress like pink sea foam rose from her chair and stepped quietly, daintily down the room until she stood beside the swaying figure of Jim Tumley. She placed her hand gently on the little man's arm and turned to her Green Valley neighbors.

"I shall sing the old songs with him," she said quietly.

She found an armchair and put the docile Jim into it. Then she smiled at Nan Ainslee and told her what to play.

Nan's fingers touched the keys softly and from the slim throat that rose like a flower stem from the pink sea foam there rolled out a great, deep contralto.

It was unbelievable, that rich deep voice. It blotted out everything—little Jim, the room, all sense of time and place—and brought to the listeners instead the deep echoes of cathedral aisles, the holy peace of a still gray day and the joy of coming sunshine. She sang all the old songs, tenderly, softly. When she could sing no more and they showered her with smiles and tears and applause, she raised her hand for silence, for she had something to say.

"I am glad you liked the songs. I always sang them for father. I am glad that I could do something for you, for you have all been so wonderfully kind to me from the very first day that I came to Green Valley. But why are you not kinder to Jim Tumley? Why don't you vote the thing that is hurting him out of your town? If the women here could vote that's what they would do. But surely you men will do it to save Jim Tumley."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LITTLE SLIPPER

They sat stunned and stared at the slip of a girl in pink who was speaking in so matter-of-fact a fashion.

And then Seth Curtis laughed; but he laughed kindly.

"Why," he shouted, "she can't only sing; she can preach too—woman suffrage and prohibition."

The laugh grew and smiles went round and the whole trying situation eased up. Jocelyn laughed too and turned to say good night to her host. And from somewhere in the crowd Frank Burton strode up and carried Jim out and drove him home.

Everybody began to get ready to go, glad that the evening so nearly tragic had been happily saved. And all Green Valley mentally promised to repay the girl who had had the wit and the sweetness to serve in an hour of need.

But while the young people and the married ones with children were crowding out through the front door, Grandma Wentworth was still in the library, staring up into the laughing eyes of the dearest friend life had given her and taken away.

"Cynthia, dear," whispered Grandma brokenly, "it is still here, the thing that hurt you so—that made a widow of me at twenty-eight. We have grown no wiser in spite of the pain."

Sitting in the armchair that Jocelyn had pulled out for Jim Tumley was Roger Allan. His face was a-quiver with pain. And he too was staring hungrily at the pictured face.

"Oh, Roger," wept Grandma, "if only we could have her back, her and Richard."

"Yes," hoarsely whispered he, "if only the years would come back and we could have another chance to live them."

Over in one corner of the room Green Valley's three good little men were discussing something hotly. That is, the fiery little barber was discussing something. The other two just listened.

"I tell you that preacher boy is right. This town needs a home, a place where it can all get together for a good time. No one home, not even this one, is big enough. That's why part of the town hangs out in the hotel, another part in the blacksmith shop, the kids in Joe's shoe shop or a poolroom. We need a big assembly room with smaller rooms off of it for all kinds of honest fun—pool, billiards, bowling, dancing, swimming. I tell you I ain't crazy and no more is the preacher. And Joshua Stillman's library that he pretty near gave all his life and money to needs to be moved out into the sunlight and stretched to its full, grand size. I tell you it would be a great thing for this town. This town's sociable but it ain't social—no, sir!"

Sam Ellis was going home from the party with his girl and two boys.

"Well, father," bitterly spoke up the eldest, "it's still our saloon that's killing Jim Tumley, even though we aren't running it."

"Oh, father," murmured Tessie miserably, "can't you do anything about it?"

Sam groaned.

"Dear God—what can I do? I tell you selling the hotel or renting it or dynamiting it won't stop drinking in this town, so long as there are men in it who want drink and will drink. I don't think even the vote that that little girl suggested will do it. If you vote it out you'll have blind pigs to fight. No, sir! It ain't my fault nor no one man's fault. The whole town's to blame. There's only one thing will stop it. If men in this country will quit making it other men will stop drinking it. So long as it's made it'll be used. The whole country's to blame."

Fanny Foster, having nobody else to talk to, was speaking her mind to John, her husband.

"I told Grandma Wentworth nobody but the Almighty could do anything for Jim. You'll see that I'm right. I know."

Fanny was right. But what she did not know was that she herself was to be one of the instruments with which a stern and patient God was to clean out forever the one foul blot on

Green Valley life.

The one person who was not discussing Jim Tumley and his trouble was Jocelyn. She couldn't. She was too occupied with troubles of her own.

She had been the first to leave. She slipped away unobserved for she could not bear to have Green Valley see her leave without an escort. So she got away as noiseless as a fairy. And for the first few rods all was well. The excitement of the past hours, the worry of getting away unseen, kept her mind occupied. But as the night wind cooled her cheeks and the lighted house back of her grew smaller she grew frightened. She was, after all, a city girl and to her there was something fearful in the stillness of the country and the loneliness of the dark road. She hurried her steps, jumped at every sound and grew cold from pure terror as the awful stillness and emptiness closed in about her. She stood still every few minutes, staring at blurred bushes beside the road. The screech of an owl almost made her scream. And in the dark the hard lumpy road hurt her feet cruelly. The little slippers were never meant for dark country roads. So Jocelyn had to pick her steps, and with every second's delay her terror grew.

Finally the trees thinned a bit and for a good space ahead there was a clearing where the night was not so dark and the road not so lumpy. She hurried to get out of the smother of trees. When once she crossed that open space all would be well, she told herself, for then the village lights would wink at her and the sidewalks begin. As soon as she could see her own lighted windows and set foot on a cement walk she would no longer be afraid.

So, head bent, she hurried along and was almost near the walk when, looking up, she saw a man hurrying toward her through a little footpath that led to the road. She stood motionless with horror. Then the scream that had hovered on her lips all the way escaped her and she tried to run.

She did not run far. For one of the high-heeled slippers just curled up under her and she went down, sobbing "David—David."

And she kept sobbing just that over and over even after David had picked her up and folded her safe in his arms. He tried to soothe her and explained that he had missed her, had guessed that she would try to get home alone down this road and so took the short cut in order to catch up with her and make sure that she got home safely. He never dreamed of frightening her so, but she was safe with him now and there was absolutely nothing to fear.

"But my foot, David. It's swelling. I can feel it—and it hurts."

David took off the little slipper and put it in his pocket. Then he told her not to worry because he could carry her home easily enough. But first he sat down with her on an old stone wall and talked to her until the last sob died away and her head nestled gratefully on his big comfortable shoulder.

"Jocelyn," he asked presently, "are you still angry with me?"

She shook her head.

"I've never been angry with you, David. But I thought you didn't want to be bothered any longer with a silly girl like me and so—I tried to help and be sensible."

"I know. I was crazy that day you rode through town with the minister. I had no right—"

"Oh,"—she raised her head and looked at him in shy wonder and shocked relief, "oh, David—was it that—you were hurt at that?"

For answer he gently drew her close to him.

"But David, I didn't go riding with the minister. I was just taking a little pig home that a boy cousin of mine, who loves to tease me, sent me. I didn't know anything about pigs and the minister happened to be there and helped. He meant no harm."

"Oh, I know, Jocelyn. But he is such a wonderful man. Only another man, I guess, can know what a fine chap he is. And I thought if he did like you I couldn't stand in your way. I found out, of course, that I was mistaken. The minister doesn't care anything about girls. But that wasn't all. You know, Jocelyn, I'm Uncle Roger's own nephew but I bear his name because he legally gave it to me and because I have no name of my own. I was a fatherless baby and a girl like you ought to be courted by a better man than I am."

It was costing David Allan something to tell the girl in his arms all that. She guessed how the telling must hurt the boy, for she stopped it with a little, tender laugh.

"But, David dear, I knew all that the day you took me to the Decoration Day exercises. Grandma Wentworth told me. She said she knew you'd likely tell me yourself some day but she said that she liked you and she noticed that people who liked you always liked you a little better after they heard that."

He sat still, overwhelmed with her sweetness. Then, "Jocelyn, is it only liking?"

Her answer came like a soft note of joy.

"No, David. It's something bigger than liking and when you wouldn't speak to me that afternoon you darkened all my world."

She had not shed a tear through all those lonely days but now she buried her face in David's breast and cried bitterly.

And then it was that David kissed his sweetheart and the touch of her answering lips healed forever the dull ache that had gnawed at his heart ever since he was old enough to understand the story of his cheated childhood.

They sat in the soft darkness of the night that was full of autumn sighs, a night that stirred in their hearts wistful longings for a low, snug roof singing with rain and a drowsy little home fire beneath it.

When they had sat long enough to remember their great hour forever and had repeated the litany of love to each other till they sensed its wonder, David said regretfully:

"And now I must take you to your mother. And Jocelyn, I'm terribly afraid of that mother of yours."

Jocelyn laughed.

"Why, David, mother isn't as bad as all that. And she likes you. She said you made her think of father. And, David, she's always given me everything I've honestly wanted and she could give. She hasn't been out much here. She hasn't cared to do much of anything since father died. But in the city she used to be so busy. You know she's a great club woman and a suffragette and oh, such a beautiful speaker. It's from her I get my funny, big, deep voice. She used to be in such demand at meetings. But she's given it all up. She blames herself for leaving father so much and not going out to the country with him. He never asked her to leave the city but I know he wanted to. When he died she just came out here to do penance. She thought there wasn't anything for her to do in a place like this. But just wait till I tell her about Jim Tumley. Oh, she'll know what to do. Why, mother's wonderful in her way, David! Why, I just know she can do something for Jim Tumley."

David shook his head.

"Jocelyn," he sighed, "it'll take this whole town and God Almighty too to save Jim Tumley now."

"Well, mother will do her share. And, Dav—id, I'd like another kiss—if you don't mind."

David didn't mind in the least.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MORNING AFTER

The very best part of every Green Valley doing is talking it over the morning after.

Nobody even pretended to work the morning after the minister's party. Dell Parsons never even brushed out her lovely hair that morning; just wound it round her head in two big braids and went through the little gate in the hedge to talk it over with Nan Turner.

She found Nan standing over a steaming dishpan, stirring the dishes about absent-mindedly with the pancake spoon. At the sight of Dell she turned her back on the cluttered sink.

"Dell, I'm only just beginning to take in the meaning of what that little neighbor girl of ours said last night. Why, Dell Parsons, we've both been born in this here town; we're only twenty-two miles out from the heart of one of the world's greatest cities and we've never sensed the true meaning of this thing they call woman suffrage and prohibition. Why, we've poked fun at it and jogged along our ignorant hayseed way and watched and watched little sweet-hearted men like Jim Tumley just stumble miserably into their graves, or a man like Sears drive his children from their home and curse his wife, or perhaps we've shuddered at the sight of Hank Lolly lying drunk in the road among the wild flowers.

"When one of our drunkards dies we cut our choicest flowers and go to the funeral and maybe cry with the wife and children and then go home and wait for the next one to do it. Of course, we talk to the children and try to scare the boys into letting it alone. But that doesn't do much good because, Dell, we don't bury enough drunkards at one time to make a strong

impression and convince the boys that we are right. Our boys see big, respectable men like George Hoskins and Seth Curtis and even good Billy Evans taking their drinks regularly and living and prospering. So they make up their minds that mothers are all a little bit crazy on the drink question. And the first thing we know we find that our boys have been washing down their cigarettes with a drink. And in those first sick five minutes we know, Dell, that the thing has beaten us to the boy."

"Yes," mused Dell aloud, "but we aren't the only ones who feel beaten. The men aren't all against us, Nan. Lots of them right here in this town are on our side. And I tell you it's no joke for a natural man who loves to hang around and pal with his neighbors to put himself in the position of a spoilsport or an odd goody-goody. There's Uncle Tony's brother William. He's been against war and drink and smoking all his life, and look at the dog's life he's led. Nan, I believe the men are as helpless as we. The Thing has grown so huge that we can't fight it. It's got us all. And we're so helpless because we're ignorant and won't think this thing out. Look at Frank Burton, who'd give his soul to save Jim Tumley's. Yet it's only last year that he gave up having drink in the house. He never realized until so late that just by having it around he was hurting the man he'd die to save. And there's Billy Evans. Why, Nan, Billy has sat up nights pulling Hank Lolly through a jag. Yet Billy lets Hank see him take a drink every day. And, Nan, it must be plain hell for Hank to see that. Why, Billy wouldn't tempt Hank or make him suffer torment knowingly for a million dollars. And yet he does it every day of his life because he's ignorant, doesn't know any bigger, finer, more unselfish way of helping Hank. No, Nan, you can't make me believe our Green Valley men are a mean lot, meaner than others. They just don't know and when once they realize, why, they'll put an end to it themselves fast enough."

"That's all right, but, Dell Parsons, you know that the world over men have to be nagged and coaxed into seeing the right by their women folks. And I tell you I'm going to begin right now to do a little of both. And as for that vote—I've laughed about that long enough. Now I'm going after it. It's just struck me that we women need a vote about as much as we need a pair of scissors, a bread board or a wash boiler, cook stove and bank book. We need it along with the other things to keep our children properly clothed, fed, housed and educated."

The blacksmith shop was closed. George Hoskins' wife was pretty sick. So the crowd that was usually seated about the forge was crowded into Billy Evans' office.

It was a big crowd but it wasn't feeling any jollier because of its size. Each man there had had a word or two with his wife that morning. Not a few wives had begun to discuss the Jim Tumley incident seriously the minute they got home and got the children to bed the night before. Every man in Billy's office felt more or less uncomfortable and talked in nervous, disconnected snatches.

Said one:

"Well—I drove in to town this morning so's not to have words with Rose—and just to escape the whole dumbed subject—but if—I'd known that everybody I met and talked to and set down with—was a-going to talk about the same dumbed thing I'd a-stayed to home."

"The whole trouble," argued another, "is just women's imagination, that's all. I never saw a woman that had a living father, brother, beau, husband, brother-in-law, father-in-law, cousin or boy baby in arms that she wasn't worrying all the time night and day that drink'd get him. It's just their way of being foolish, that's all. And as for all this talk about the terrible danger and it being a menace to the future generation, that's all slop and slush."

Billy was irritable this morning for the first time in months. It must be remembered that Billy's wife was red-headed and a highly efficient soul. She had very frankly and plainly told Billy what she thought of a town that was run in so slack a fashion that it couldn't protect one of its own lovable citizens. She had never spoken so sharply in all their days together and Billy felt that he had lost his bride forever. And he had.

"Well—boys, I'll tell you," sighed Billy. "The old woman gave me hell, I tell you—as if—great gosh, it was all my fault. The women are partly right and we all know it. That's why they talk up so and why we have to take it. I've about come to the conclusion that as long as the women are partly right and we are partly wrong I'm going to quit it, as far as I myself am concerned. But don't think for one minute that I fancy that I have a right to vote this town dry for any other man. Live and let live's my way of thinking and doing."

"Well, Billy," spoke up Jake Tuttle who had come out strongly for a dry town, a dry state and a dry country, "you're fair and square and a-doing all you honestly can. Maybe the time will come when you'll feel that voting it out is the only thing."

"Why," grumbled another member of this caucus, "anybody'd think that this whole town had ought to turn in and just die of thirst on account of a man that ain't much bigger than a pint of cider and never did have no proper stomach. Why, who ever heard of sech a thing as a whole town being run for one man?"

"A town that ain't run fair and square for one man isn't run fair and square for any man," insisted Jake. "And as for hearing strange things, I've heerd tell of a man once, a poor kind of low-

style Jew he was, lived over in a little two by four town called Nazareth, who not only believed in going dry and hungry for other people but actually died so's to show them a finer way of living and a braver way of dying. I've heerd tell that they called that man the Greatest Fool that ever lived and that they killed Him fur His foolishness. So, if this whole town should turn in an' help Jim Tumley there'd be nothing new in that."

The pause that followed would have been uncomfortable if Seth Curtis hadn't opened the door just then and squeezed in.

Seth was mad. For the first time since their marriage he had quarrelled with his wife. Docile, sweet-tempered Ruth Curtis was aflame with mother wrath. She, like a great many Green Valley women, thought of Jim Tumley not as a man but as a voice, the voice of a lark on a summer morning. That other men's selfish strength should still that voice made her sweet eyes flame and her soft voice shake with anger. That Seth, who so hated waste of any kind, could stand calmly by while a lovable human soul was being thrown away puzzled her at first. She tried to argue with him. If Jim Tumley were trying to save his burning barn or mend his fence Seth would have helped him gladly. But Jim was trying to save his body and soul and Green Valley men, even though they knew he was not equal to the struggle, could not see that it was their business to help.

Seth resented this passionate fight for little Jim that the women were making. In his anger Seth could not see that beyond the figure of the gentle singing man stood the children of Green Valley. In this harmless little man who could not save himself every mother saw her boy, her girl; one a drunkard-to-be perhaps, the other mayhap a drunkard's wife and the mother of more drunkards.

Seth's eyes blazed around Billy's crowded office and he waited for the question that he knew he would be asked:

"Well—Seth—you voting the town dry this morning?"

And then Seth let loose. He said fool things to ease his ugly temper but he wound up his argument with the telling reminder that Green Valley couldn't afford to lose the fifteen-hundred-dollar yearly license tax.

"Not only would we men lose our freedom and be a thirsty lot of wife-driven idiots but our taxes would rise."

And that argument told. It had been overlooked somehow. But at the mention of it every man's face but Jake's brightened. Why, sure—Seth was right. That fifteen hundred dollars kept the taxes down and was an argument that ought to appeal to every Green Valley woman whose life was an eternal struggle to save.

"Why, yes, that's so," agreed Jake. "It seems as if the women ought to see that, but like as not they'll talk back and say that if there was no hotel bar to attract us men there'd be less time wasted and more than fifteen hundred dollars' worth of extra work turned out. And for all they talk so everlastingly about saving, there's some kind of money that no nice woman will touch with a ten-foot pole. And just put it up to them as to which they want, Jim Tumley or fifteen hundred a year, and see what they say."

Jake was the richest man of all the men packed in Billy Evans' office. He could afford to talk bravely for he had no need to curry any man's favor. And he could demand respectful attention for his opinions. There were those present who resented this independence.

"These farmers nowadays are getting danged smart and officious," muttered Sears to Sam Bobbins.

But Sam wasn't listening. He too had an argument and he wanted to voice it.

"Mightn't the closing of the bar lose us a lot of outside trade, ruin our business life?"

At that Billy's eyes twinkled.

"By gosh—Sam—I hadn't thought of that. I sure would miss the poor drunks that crawl in here to sleep it off. And like as not I'd not get to drive old man Hathaway home every time he hits town and tries to paint it red. Never have dared to leave that old fool in town when he was drunk. Never can tell what that poor miserable mind of his mightn't prompt him to do. Might set fire to something or hang himself on somebody's front door."

As town marshal Billy had a pretty accurate idea of the kind of trade that the hotel bar attracted. There was a levity in Billy's voice and a dancing light in Billy's eye. He could never take anything seriously for any great length of time. However, old man Sears didn't like this attitude of Billy's.

"It isn't only losing that fifteen-hundred-dollar license and losing outside trade but we'd be robbing an honest and respectable man of his livelihood," said Sears with his most ponderous air.

An unwilling, sheepish grin ruffled every man's face and Seth said with a rasp:

"Well, Sears, I wouldn't lose any sleep worrying about that honest, respectable man's livelihood if I were you. He owns a fine seven-passenger car, some fancy driving horses, and that diamond pin he wears week days in his tie would keep my meat bill paid for many and many a day. No, I can't say that I'd let that make my conscience ache."

"What say if we all go over and ask him what he thinks of it. It looks like rain and I'll have to be starting for home," suggested the bright and peace-loving soul who had left home that morning to avoid unpleasantness.

This brilliant suggestion was promptly acted on and they filed out, leaving Billy standing alone in the doorway. Billy watched them shuffle into the hotel, then he looked up and down Main Street, studying every old landmark and battered hitching post. He told himself that he hoped the old town wouldn't change too much. Hank Lolly came out of the barn just then and Billy turned to him.

"Hank, that innocent little girl in a pink dress last night has sure raised one gosh darned lot of argument in this here town."

"Billy," Hank's voice shook a little, "Billy, I heerd some of those arguments—in there. But, my God, Billy—look at me—look at me! I'm the best argument in this here town for voting that bar out. For, Billy, so long as that hotel sells liquor, so long as the doors swing open so that the smells can get out, and so long as the winds blow in Green Valley, bringing those smells to me—just so long I'll be afraid—afraid. And Billy, if ever I let go again, it'll be the madhouse for me. I know. I've had a grandfather and two uncles go that way."

Over at the hotel the high, foaming glasses slid along the bar. The hotel man with the diamond in his tie greeted the men who lined up at the rail with an indifferent smile. The glasses were raised and drained. And then some bold spirit asked the man with the diamond how he'd feel if the town went dry.

"Why," drawled that individual, "I've been looking down men's throats and watching their Adam's apple and listening to them guzzling their liquor for something like twenty years now and I wouldn't mind a change. I left the city because I was hankering for something I didn't know the name of. Thought I'd find it here. Thought this was a mighty restful town. It is—but not for me and my business. But I'm glad I came, for that young parson of yours put me next to what I really want to do. I've been wanting all my life to run a stock farm. But I didn't know it till that kid preacher told me so. Seems he's been knocking around the country with Hank Lolly and knows of two or three that are up for sale. I'm going out with him next week to look at them. So this town running dry won't upset me any. I've just about made up my mind to quit this game and spend the rest of my life with—cattle. I won't mind the dryness. I don't drink. Never have."

The rain that had been threatening for an hour came suddenly, came down in big angry drops; and there was everywhere in town a scurrying for home. Men buttoned their coats and bent their heads and hurried home, hoping to find there cheerful wives and peace.

They found their wives cheerful enough, almost suspiciously so, and exceedingly busy with the telephone. By listening to several one-sided conversations Green Valley men learned that while they had been discussing things in Billy's office, Mrs. Brownlee had called on Jim Tumley's wife and on several other more prominent Green Valley matrons; had telephoned to others and had in three morning hours organized a Woman's Civic League.

"A Civic League? What's that? And what for?" Green Valley husbands wanted to know.

"Why, I don't know. I said yes, of course I'd join. I couldn't be mean to the woman after what her little girl did last night," said Green Valley wives.

CHAPTER XIX

A GRAY DAY

Up on his wooded knoll Green Valley's young minister lay grieving and staring up into a gray unhappy sky, a sky choked with thick gray clouds that hung so low and were so full of sadness that even the little hills mourned and the Green Valley world all about lay hushed and penitent.

Summer was dead and everywhere tired winds moaned and sighed and sobbed and then grew suddenly still. The fine old trees were shriveled and weary, as if trying were no longer worth while. They craved sleep and peace—just rest. The gay grasses were dry and faded and when the little winds tried to rouse them they only rustled impatiently, dolefully and murmured, "Oh what's the use?"

The heart of Cynthia's son studied the low brooding sky, the dying world, listened to the wailing, mourning winds, the sighing of the grasses and it too said wearily, "Yes—what's the use of anything?"

What's the use of working and trying when the thing you want most to do you can't do. What's the use of longing when the thing you crave most can never again be given to you? What's the use of feeling big, eternal, divine, when you know that every day is dwarfed by your limitations, every friendship marred by your helplessness, every dream blurred by your ignorance? The sweetest things in life, Cynthia's son told himself with all the bitterness of youth, were memories and hopes. Memories of happy moments, hours perhaps, memories of perfect days and hopes of new days, new friends, new skies.

To-day all hope seemed dead, gone from the hillsides with the summer flowers. And the world was a sad and a lonely place. Cynthia's son had yet to learn that gray days are home days. That if it were not for gray skies there would be no low roofs gleaming through tree tops, no home fires glowing anywhere. Gray days are heart days, for it is then that the heart hungers for sympathy, for kinship. It is then that men draw together for comfort and cheer.

Cynthia's son never felt quite so alone in the world before—the last of his line. He was young and did not know what ailed him. So he lay heartsick and puzzled on his hill top and wished he had some one all his own to talk to.

There are things you can whistle to a robin, whisper to a tree friend or look into the heart of the sunset. There are problems you can argue out with a neighbor or solve with the help of a friend. But the heart has certain longings that you can share only with some one who is all your own and very, very dear.

It is hard to be the last of a line, Cynthia's son told himself bitterly, and in his loneliness he turned over and hid his face on his arm and let his homesick heart stray off across the seas to the land that for so long had been home to him, the land that held the dead hearts that had always robbed his gray days of all sadness.

He craved the hot sunshine, the brittle blue skies, the crowded little lanes full of filth and feet and eternal noise. Perhaps there in the old home he might find eyes that held a bit of the great love he longed for, a voice that had in it the hint of a caress, the note that would give him new courage, new hope.

No—he did not know what was the matter with him. All he knew was that summer was dead and that he had no one in all the world he could call his very own. He did not know that lying there he was really waiting for a step and a voice, a step that would stir the leaves with a joyous rustling, a voice that even on a gray day sounded gay and sunshiny. He had always liked Nan Ainslee's voice. Lately he had begun to notice other pleasant things about her. Last night, for instance, he had for the first time seen her hair, the beauty of her creamy throat and had really looked down into her laughing, wide eyes and forgotten all the world for a second or two. And the hand she gave him when she said good night was warm and full of a strange comfort. He had almost asked her to stay a while after the others left and sit beside his fire in a low chair and talk the party over with him.

The world was so still it seemed as if it waited with him. And then it came—that voice warm and gay.

"Hello—you here again?"

Then something about that head buried on that out-flung arm made her laugh softly, oddly, and say, "Isn't this a delicious, restful, dozy day? You'd better sit up and look at those shaggy gray clouds over yonder. Or are you listening to the little winds sighing out lullabies? I came here today to hear the world being hushed to sleep."

He heard and his heart jumped queerly. But he didn't raise his head until he was sure the homesick longing for some one all his own was gone from his eyes.

She had on a gray dress as soft as wood smoke. He caught flashes of flame color beneath the gray and at her breast fluttered a knot of scarlet silk. She looked like somebody's home fire, all fragrant smoke and golden flame and ruddy coals. Her eyes held the dancing lights, the visions and her voice had the tender warmth. She was the spirit of the day and the sight of her comforted his soul and filled his heart with content.

"I think it is a sad day," he said, "and I have been desperately lonely for India and my mother and father and all the little brothers and sisters and playmates that I never had. The only playmates I ever had were camels and missionaries and a few brown babies and two white hens."

He had not meant to talk in this grieving, childish fashion. But something about her brought his heart thoughts to his lips. And to-day he found no pleasure in looking down on the village roofs where Joe Tumley lay sick and miserable and Mary, his wife, wept and men and women talked and argued as he very well knew they were talking and arguing.

"What! No playmates? No boy friends—not even a dog?" Nan grieved with him.

"Oh, I had an Irish soldier's boy for two months once and a little brown dog for a week. Mother was always afraid of disease."

He could hardly believe that remembrance of these long-past things was in him. Yet he was suddenly remembering many old, old matters and with it came back the old, childish pain.

She sat down on the oak stump quite near him and there was more than pity in her eyes, only he did not see.

"Why," she advised gently, "you must have a dog at once. I can give you a wonderful collie and then on gray days you can bring him up here to your hill top or go tramping through woods and ravines with him. A dog is the finest kind of company for a gray day. And there is your attic. Why, I always spend hours in my attic these still, gentle days. I go up there to read old letters and look over old boxes full of queer keepsakes. I sit in a three-legged chair and sometimes, if I find an old coverless book and if the rain begins to drum softly on the shingles, I go to sleep on an ancient sagging sofa and dream great dreams. Haven't you ransacked that attic of yours yet?" she wanted to know.

"No. And the housekeeper insists on my doing it soon. Says that if I'm going to give Jimmy Trumbull that party I promised him I'd better have the barn and the attic all fixed up for it, because the boys wouldn't have any fun in the house and the house wouldn't stand it any better."

And then because neither one of them could think of anything else to say they were perfectly still there on the hill top. There seemed to be no need for speech. Nanny looked down at the little town and Cynthia's son lay contentedly at her feet, looking at her and rustling the dead leaves with an idle hand.

It might have become dangerous, that contented silence. For Nan at least was thinking. She was thinking how often she came to the hill top to visit with this man at her feet and how seldom he came to her door to visit with her. When he came it was not to see her but her father, her brother. With a sick shame Nanny thought how the sight of him, the sound of his voice, the very mention of his name made her heart fill with warm gladness. She loved him and he had no need of love—her love. She who had turned men away, men who were—

She rose suddenly. There was a kind of terror in her eyes and she locked her hands together to warm them, for they had suddenly grown icy cold.

"I must go," she murmured in real distress.

But he just looked up and put out his hand. And she sat down again and let her hand rest in his. And half her joy was pure misery. For she did not understand the ways of this strange, boyish man and she did not know what the end of such a friendship could be.

When those first angry drops pattered down on the leaves Nanny started up in alarm and would have raced for home. But he caught her quickly, slipped her cloak on, and before she had time to protest, they were running hand in hand down the hillside. Just as the full fury of the storm struck the house they banged the front door shut and stood panting and laughing in the hall.

It was very pleasant to sit by his fire and let the storm and the ruddy flames do the talking. But even as she sat and dreamed Nanny knew it would never do. Green Valley knew and loved her but that would not save her. So Nanny walked to the telephone and called up the one soul it was always safe to tell things to. And twenty minutes later Grandma Wentworth arrived.

It was while they sat talking in cozy comfort before the snapping fire that Cynthia's son suggested the attic.

"Mother told me once never to rummage through her old trunks unless Mary Wentworth was by to explain. So come along."

Grandma looked a little startled at that.

"We'll go," she said. "It's the finest kind of a day to go messing in an attic. But I'll step into the kitchen first and borrow two all-over aprons. My dress isn't new but Nan's is."

The old Churchill homestead was built in the days when folks believed reverently in attics. Not little cubby-holes under the roof but in generous, well-lighted, nicely-floored affairs that less reverent generations have turned into smoking dens, studios and ballrooms.

A properly kept attic in the olden days was no dark, musty-smelling, cobwebby affair. It was as neat in its way as the parlor and a hundred times more interesting. The parlor was a stiff room with stiff furniture and stiff family portraits. The attic was a big, natural room filled with mellow light, a vague hush and memories—memories of lost days, lost dreams, lost youth with its joys and hopes and sorrows.

People instinctively speak softly and reverently in an old-fashioned attic. Much of the irreverence of the young generation is due to the fact that men have stopped building the wide,

deep fireplaces of old and the old-fashioned style of attic. When you take the family hearthstone and the prayer and memory closet out of a home you must expect irreverence.

There were plenty of wonderful attics in Green Valley, but not many were so crowded with colorful riches as the attic which Cynthia's son owned. When Cynthia was a girl that attic was generously stored. Cynthia's mother made her pilgrimages to it and added to its wealth of memories. Before Cynthia herself sailed away to far-off India she carried armfuls of her own heart treasures up there. One gray day, twenty gray days, could not exhaust this Green Valley attic.

Cynthia's son, being a man, went up heedlessly, even a little noisily, for attics were to him a new thing. Nan went breathlessly, her heart thumping with delight. She guessed that much joy and beauty and wonder lay stored in that great room. Grandma went up slowly and a little tremblingly. She remembered that the very last time she had climbed those attic stairs Cynthia had been with her. Their arms had been full of treasure and their eyes had been full of tears.

The three now had no sooner reached the last step than the attic laid its mystic hush upon them. They stood still and looked about, each somehow waiting for one of the others to speak. It was Grandma who broke the silence softly:

"You had some of the old furniture moved there in the corner but the rest is just as it was forty years ago—when I was here last."

Grandma knew the history of pretty near everything in sight and they followed her about, looking and listening. Somehow there was at first no desire to touch and handle things. But soon the strange charm of an old attic stole over them and they began to look more closely at things, to exclaim over weird relics, to touch old books and quaint garments. Then as the wonders multiplied and the rain drummed steadily on the roof, time and the world without was forgotten and the three became absorbed in the past.

When first she had looked about her Grandma's eyes had searched for a certain trunk, and when at last she spied it something like an old grief clouded her eyes. But as she peered about and began pulling things out to the light she forgot the trunk with the brass nailheads. She laughed when she came across the crinoline hoops and the droll little velvet bonnets.

"Here are your great-grandmother's crinolines, John. My! The times we girls had playing with these things, for even in our day they were old-fashioned. And this little velvet hat I remember Cynthia wore once to an old-time social and took a prize."

Over in another corner Nan was making discoveries.

"My conscience—look at this!" she suddenly cried. "Here's an etching, a genuine etching, a beautiful thing and all covered with dust. Why, the one I bought for a hundred and fifty dollars in Holland last year isn't half as good. Why, whoever had it put up here?"

From the other side of the huge room Cynthia's son wanted to know if an old grandfather's clock couldn't be mended.

"Why, it must be as old as the hills. It has a copy of Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanac pasted on the back. It—why, it's an heirloom and I'm going to get it patched up."

"That clock used to tick in the up-stairs hall forty years ago—I remember—" Grandma stopped as if a sudden thought had struck her. She dropped an old faded lamp mat and a rag rug and came over to look at the face of what had been an old friend. Many and many a time its mellow booming of the hours had cut short a lengthy, merry conference in Cynthia's room and sent her scurrying home to her waiting tasks.

"John," whispered Grandma with sudden intuition, "I don't believe there's anything the matter with that clock. It was stopped—they said your grandfather stopped it after your mother left for India. I used to watch him wind it—here, let me at it. Yes," triumphantly, "here's the key."

Grandma's hands shook noticeably and her lips trembled as she wound it. And when it began to whir and then settled down to its clear even tick Grandma just sat down and cried a bit.

"I can't help it," she explained as she wiped her eyes, "that clock knows me as well as I know its face. Why, many a time Cynthia and I'd sit right where we could look at it—while we were telling each other foolish little happenings—so's we wouldn't talk too long."

Grandma went back to where she had left that faded lamp mat but she knew what was about to happen in that attic that day. She picked up one thing after another but she no longer saw what it was her hands were holding. For above the steady patter of the rain she could hear the old clock ticking. And to her, knowing what she did, it seemed to say:

"Tell him—tell—him—Cynthia wants you to tell him."

So she just sat down in an old chair and waited for Cynthia's son to find that square trunk with the brass nail-heads. She tried to read something in some faded yellow fashion papers but

the letters jumped and blurred. And she was glad to hear the boy's shout of discovery.

"Why, here's that trunk mother must have meant! Come over here, Grandma, and look at it."

She went and sat down and was so quiet that Nanny, who had been looking up from the pictures she was dusting, laid them down and came over to watch too. Something about Grandma's drooping head and folded hands must have touched the boy, for as he turned the key in the lock he looked up and asked a question.

"Do you know what's in it, Grandma?"

"Yes," she nodded, "I know what's in it because I helped fill it. Open it carefully."

So the boy raised the lid slowly. Very carefully he removed the old newspapers, then the soft linen sheet and took out a flat bundle that lay on top, all snugly pinned up. Nan helped take out the pins, then gave a smothered cry at the lovely wedding gown of stiff creamy satin.

In silence the other things were brought out. The lacy bridal veil, the little buckled slippers, the full, filmy petticoats and all the soft white ribbony things that it is the right of every bride to have. Down at the very bottom of the trunk were bundles of letters, some faded photographs and a little jewel box in which was a little silver forget-me-not ring.

Grandma put out her hand for the faded photographs, stared at them, then passed one to Cynthia's son.

"Look closely and see if you can guess who it is?"

He took it to a window and looked long at the pictured face but finally shook his head.

"Give it to Nan," directed Grandma.

Nan looked only a second.

"Why, it's Uncle Roger Allan!"

"Yes—it's Roger Allan."

"But what has—" began Cynthia's son, when Grandma interrupted him.

"You'd better both sit down to hear this," she suggested. "Of course, I knew, John, the very first week you were home, that your mother never told you about this trunk. I can see why and I agree with her. In the first place it all happened nearly forty years ago. Then she couldn't be sure that the trunk was still here. It wasn't altogether her story to tell. She knew you were coming home to Green Valley and she didn't want to prejudice you in any way. She knew that if you learned to know Green Valley folks first you'd understand everything better when you did find out. I'm glad to have the telling of it. I'm glad to do her that service and, after all, it's my story as much as hers.

"We were great friends—Cynthia and I—dearer than sisters and inseparable. Our friendship began in pinafore days. We weren't the least bit alike in a worldly way. Cynthia was pretty—oh, ever so pretty—and rich. I was what everybody calls a very sensible girl, respectable but poor. But what we looked like or what we had never bothered us. In those days the town was smaller and playmates were scarcer. When we boys and girls wanted any real interesting games we had to get together.

"The two boys at our end of town who were the nicest were Roger Allan and Dick Wentworth. They did everything together, same as Cynthia and I. It was natural, I suppose, that we four should sort of grow up together, and that having grown up we should pair off—Cynthia and Roger, Dick and I.

"We went through all the stages until we got to the forget-me-not rings and our wedding dresses. The boys were very happy the day they put those rings on our fingers and we were—oh, so proud! It hurts to this day to remember. I think Cynthia and I were about the happiest girls life ever smiled at. Only one thing troubled us.

"In those days Cynthia's father owned the hotel. That meant then mostly a barroom. Of course, he himself was never seen there unless there were special guests staying over night. It was a lively place, almost the only really lively place in town. I suppose men had more time then and prohibition was something even the most worried and heartbroken drunkard's wife smiled about unbelievingly. Men had always had their liquor and of course they always would. Women's business was to cry a bit, pray a great deal and be patient. As I said, all men drank in those days and the woman didn't live that hadn't or didn't expect to see her father, sweetheart, husband or son drunk sometime. We all hoped we wouldn't but we all dreaded it. We heard tell of a man somewhere near Elmwood who never drank a drop but he didn't seem real. Our mothers, I expect, got to feel that drunkenness was God's will and the drink habit the same as smallpox or yellow fever. It was sent to be endured. We all felt that there was something wrong somewhere and a terrible injustice put on us but we didn't know what to do about it and so we all tried to learn to be cheerful and like our men in spite of their shortcomings.

"But one woman in this town was an out-and-out prohibitionist. She was Cynthia's mother. She came from some odd sort of a settlement in the East and Cynthia's father used to laugh and say he stole her. And I think he did. She was so lovely and sweet and had such strange notions of right and wrong. But for all her sweetness she was firm. And she set her face sternly and publicly against drink. It was the only thing, people said, about which Joshua Churchill and his wife Abby ever disagreed. Though she didn't convince him still she went to her grave without ever seeing her husband drunk.

"And her girl, Cynthia, swore that she would do the same. For Cynthy was just like her mother and as full of strange notions of right.

"Well, it was bound to happen. The wonder of it is it didn't happen before. I think I always knew that Dick and Roger drank a little sometimes with the other boys. But Cynthia never thought about it, I guess. She was an only child and guarded from everything and she supposed every man was like her father. And, anyhow, she was too happy to think of trouble. Dick and Roger were considered two of the best boys in town. There were stories now and then of Roger's mad doings but they never got to Cynthia, and if they had she would have just laughed, I expect, so sure was she that her boy was all she thought him.

"I was to be married one week and Cynthy the next. We had our wedding things ready. And my wedding day came. Cynthy was bridesmaid and Roger was best man and everything went off beautifully until the dance in the evening. Dick and I were too poor to take a wedding trip so we had a dance instead.

"And then came the tragedy. Some of the older men did it. They didn't stop to think. But they meant no real harm. In those days it was considered funny to get another man drunk. But they didn't know Cynthia's strange heart. They brought drink, more than was at all necessary and—and—all I remember of my wedding night is standing in the moonlight, holding on to Cynthia and crying miserably. I knew it would come sometime but I never dreamed it would come to hurt me then.

"But Cynthy didn't cry. She never said a word—only her whole little body seemed turned to ice. She smiled and helped us to get through with things as best we could but the smiles slipped like dull beads from her lips instead of rippling like waves of sunshine over her face.

"I had been crying for myself, over my boy, but when I saw how Cynthy took her trouble I saw that she was hurt far worse than I. But I never dreamed that things could not be mended, that she would take back her wedding day. But that's what she did.

"She refused to see Roger. Her father pleaded with her, even her mother begged her to think; the wedding was all planned, everything prepared; relatives from a distance had already started. But Cynthia never stopped smiling and shaking her head. Roger was frantic and begged me to come with him, to make her listen. I went and Dick went with me.

"When Cynthy saw me she let us in. Her father and mother and two aunts came in when they heard us. In the midst of these people Roger and Cynthy stood looking at each other with death in their eyes. They didn't seem to know anybody was there.

"'Cynthy—I love you—I love you,' Roger begged.

"'I know, Dear Boy, I know!' she cried back to him.

"'Forgive—my God, Cynthy, forgive.'

"'I do.'

"'Marry me.'

"'Oh, I want to—oh, I want to marry you,' sobbed poor Cynthy.

"'Then marry me. I'm not good enough—but I know no other man who is.'

"'Oh—Roger—Roger—you are good enough for me—you are good enough for *me*. But you are not good enough for my children. You are not good enough to be the father of my son.'

"I think we all knew then that it was useless. There was no answer and we were too startled to say anything. Roger grew white and the strength seemed to leave his body. His eyes filled with horror and fright.

"'Cynthy, sweetheart—' he moaned and she flew to comfort him. She let him hold her and kiss her. Then she drew his head down and kissed his hair, his eyes, his lips. She laid his hands against her cold white cheeks, then crushed them to her lips and fled.

"Roger never saw her again.

"She went away and was gone a long time. I got letters every now and then from out-of-the-way places.

"For five years I was happy. It was hard to live without Cynthy. But Roger had left town and Dick was good to me. I knew that the shock of Roger's tragedy had kept him from touching anything those five years. But as time passed and memories faded I grew afraid once more. Dick was no drinking man but everybody drank a little then, even the women. Men joked about it and the women, poor souls, tried to. Well—just five years almost to a day they brought him home to me—dead. He had had a few drinks—the first since our marriage. He was driving an ugly horse—and it happened.

"Some way Cynthia heard and she came home to comfort me. I think that when she stood with me beside Dick's grave she was glad she had done what she had done and felt a kind of peace. Roger was still gone but it would not have mattered. It was then that we carried these wedding things up here and locked them in this old square trunk with the brass nail-heads. And we thought that life for us both was over.

"Cynthy's father was glad to have her home. He sold the hotel and never went near it. He tried in every way to make up to Cynthy and his wife. For Cynthy's mother grieved about it all long after Cynthy had learned to smile again. And that nearly killed Cynthy's father. Some folks claimed it really did worry Mrs. Churchill to death, for she died the spring after Dick was buried.

"After that Cynthia took her father traveling, for he was very nearly heartbroken over his wife's death. It was somewhere in England that they met your father, John. Of course, I can understand how a man like your father must have loved Cynthy on sight. But she never could understand it. She thought she was all through with love. She wrote and told me how she had explained all about Roger and how he had said it made him love her all the more. She tried to fight him but strong men are hard to deny. He had a hard time of it, I imagine, but he won her at last and took her away to India. She wrote me when you were born and for some years after, but toward the end, when she was sick so much, I think my letters made her homesick.

"Roger came back. His stepsister got into trouble and died, leaving little David. Roger took him and raised him in memory of the son he knew he might have had. When he found Cynthia was married he had that stone put in the cemetery. He explained the idea to me.

"'The girl, Cynthia, was mine and I killed her. She is dead and it is to the memory of her sweetness that I have erected that stone. The woman, Cynthia, is another man's wife.'

"So that, then, is the history of that trunk. The thing, John, that is killing little Jim Tumley is the thing that worried your grandmother to death, nearly broke your mother's heart and certainly embittered her youth, that sent your grandfather into exile and made a widow of me. It robbed Roger Allan of the only woman he could love.

"Since that day a great many of us have learned to fight it. And there are now any number of men in Green Valley who are opposed to it and who even vote the prohibition ticket. But Green Valley is still far from understanding that until the weakest among us is protected none of us are safe.

"Some day perhaps the women will cease worrying. But before that day comes many here will pay the price. And it is usually the innocent who pay. Now let's put these memories back before they tucker me out completely."

Cynthia's son stood spellbound. He stared at the faded pictures and the little silver ring. Nan was pinning up the wedding dress and weeping openly and unashamed. It was the sight of her quiet tears that brought him back to earth.

"Oh—Nan—don't. Don't grieve about this evil thing. We're going to fight it and fight it hard. We shall save Jim Tumley yet and purify Green Valley."

When Nan got back home she went up to her room and looked down to where Cynthia Churchill's old home glowed among its autumn-tattered trees.

"What a woman! What a mother! And he is her son!"

She stood a long time at her window, then turned away with a little sigh.

"I am not made of heroic stuff. But I shall see to it that my son need never be ashamed of his mother. If one woman could fight love so can another."

When Grandma was taking off her rubbers in her little storm-shed she smiled and fretted:

"Dear me, Cynthy, that boy of yours is as innocent right now as you were in the olden days. He—why, he just doesn't know anything!"

CHAPTER XX

CHRISTMAS BELLS

After the last bit of glory has faded from the autumn woods and the first snowfall comes to cover the tired fields, Green Valley, all snugly housed and winter proof, settles down to solid comfort and careful preparation for the two great winter festivals—Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The question of whether the Thanksgiving dinner is to be eaten at home or whether "we're going away for Thanksgiving" has in all probability been settled long ago. For in Green Valley Thanksgiving invitations begin to be exchanged and sent out to distant parts as early as July. That is, of course, if the matter of who's to go where had not already been settled the Thanksgiving before. In some families the last rite of each Thanksgiving feast is to discuss this question and settle it then and there for the following year. Conservative and clannish families who live far enough apart so that little quarrels can not be born among them to upset this fixed yearly programme usually do this.

The greater part of Green Valley however leaves itself absolutely free until some time in August. By that time though, the heat is so intense that stout, collarless men in shirt sleeves, in searching about for some relief, think gratefully of Thanksgiving and snowdrifts and ask their wives whom they are planning to have for Thanksgiving.

"Why," may be the answer, "I hadn't thought of it yet. But I rather think Aunt Eleanor expects us this year."

"Well," answers the husband, "all right. Only if you decide to go, don't forget to take along some of your own pumpkin pies. Your Aunt Eleanor's never quite suit me. I like considerable ginger in my pumpkin pies."

Another husband may say, "No, sir! Not on your life are we going to Jim's for Thanksgiving. That wife of his is much too young to know how to make just the right kind of turkey dressing. And I'm too old to take chances on things like that now. Those pretty brides are apt to get so excited over their lace table doilies that they forget to put in the sage or onions and there you are—one whole Thanksgiving Day and a turkey spoiled forever. No, sir—count me out!"

Sometimes wives say, "We've been invited to three places, Jemmy, but let's stay home. When we go out I always get white meat and I hate it. And I like my cranberries hulls and all instead of just jell."

It is just such little human likes and notions that finally decide the matter. And so it was this year.

Sam Bobbins' eldest sister was having Sam and his wife "because Sam's spent so much money for his fighting roosters that he ain't got money for a Thanksgiving turkey."

Dolly Beatty's mother was having Charlie Peters for Thanksgiving dinner and all the immediate relatives to pass judgment on him. He had proposed and Dolly had accepted but no announcement was to be made until all the Beattys and Dundrys had had their say.

Frank Burton and Jenny were going by train to Jennie's rich and haughty and painfully religious aunt in Cedar Point. All Jennie's sisters, even the one from Vermont, were to be there and Jennie did want to go to visit with the girls. She and Frank had never been invited to any semi-religious festival by this aunt, owing to Frank's atheistic tendencies.

But the haughty and religious dame had heard rumors and was curious.

"I'll go for your sake, Jennie. But she'll be disappointed. Maybe I'd better shave my mustache so's to let her see some change in me."

Of course everybody who had a grandmother in the country was going to grandma's and early Thanksgiving morning teams were arriving for the various batches of grandchildren.

That was the only fault one could find with a Green Valley Thanksgiving—that so many went away to spend the day.

But with Christmas it was different. Christmas in Green Valley was a home day. The town was full of visitors and sleigh bells and merry calls and walking couples. Everybody was waving Christmas presents or wearing them. For Green Valley believed in Christmas presents. Not the kind that make people he awake nights hating Christmas and that call for "do your shopping early" signs. But the old-fashioned kind of presents that are not stained with hate or worry or debt.

The giving of Christmas presents was the pleasantest kind of a game in Green Valley. Of course everybody knew everybody's needs so well that weeks before the gifts, wrapped in tissue paper, lay waiting in a trunk up in the attic. And as a general thing everybody was happy over what they got. No present cost much money but oh, what a world of thought and love and fun went into it. Nor was it hard for Green Valley folks to decide what to give.

When Dell Parsons saw her dearest friend admiring her asparagus fern she divided it in the fall and tended it carefully and sent it to Nan Turner on Christmas morning.

When folks found out that some time next spring Alice Sears might have a baby to dress they sent her ever so many lovely, soft little things so she would not have to worry or grieve because her first baby could not have its share of pretties.

As soon as Green Valley knew that Jocelyn Brownlee was engaged it sent her a tried and true poor-man's-wife cookbook, big gingham aprons, holders to keep her from burning her hands and samples of their best jellies, pickles and preserves.

And such a time as Green Valley grandmothers had weaving, knitting and crocheting beautiful rag rugs to match blue and white bathrooms, yellow and green kitchens, pink and cream bedrooms. And every year there was a large crop of home knitted mittens that Green Valley girls and boys wore with pride and comfort. No city pair of gloves ever equaled grandma's knitted ones that went very nearly to the elbow and were the only thing for skating and coasting.

Christmas was the time too when dreams came true. Fanny Foster knew this when Christmas morning she opened a parcel and found a beautiful silk petticoat. No card came with it but Fanny knew.

Hen Tomlins had a baby boy for his best Christmas gift. Agnes had always opposed all talk of adopting a baby, but this year that was her gift to Hen. And they were all happy about it.

Of course, even in Green Valley a certain amount of foolishness prevailed. Everybody smiled when a week before Christmas Jessie Williams said she had all her presents ready but Arthur's; that she was waiting for the next pay day to get his; that she believed she'd get him a new pink silk lamp shade but she knew beforehand he wouldn't be pleased and would only say that he wished to heaven she'd let him have the money.

Lutie Barlow was badly disappointed with the hundred and fifty dollar victrola her husband bought her. She said she wanted a red cow to match her Rhode Island Reds.

Perhaps no one in Green Valley was so generously remembered as the young minister. But though every one of the many gifts that came pleased him he was strangely unhappy and restless. Invitations as usual had poured in on him but he had chosen to spend the day with Grandma Wentworth. And yet, though he was glad to be with her, his thoughts strayed off to a certain gray day in the fall when he ran down a hill with a girl's hand in his. He remembered the surge of joy that had rushed through him when he got her safely into his storm-proof house and banged shut the door on the stormy world without.

He thought of the hour they spent in silence before the fire that roared exultantly as the storm tore with angry fingers at the doors and windows. That, he now felt, was the most perfect hour of his life.

His mind was struggling to understand these memories, these strange new emotions. He had a queer feeling that something wonderful was waiting just outside his reach, something was waiting for his recognition.

He was standing in Grandma Wentworth's dining room, looking out the window at the winter landscape. Grandma was in the kitchen seeing to the dinner, for she was to have quite a party—Roger and David, Mrs. Brownlee and Jocelyn, Cynthia's son and his man Timothy.

Idly Cynthia's son watched the rest of the party coming through the little path that led to Grandma's door. He saw them all plainly through the curtains and plants that screened him. Jocelyn and David came last. David made a great to-do about stamping the snow off his feet, taking pains to stand between Jocelyn and the door. Then, just as Jocelyn was about to slip past him, the minister saw David reach out and sweep the girl into his arms. And Cynthia's son could not help but see the glory in the boy's eyes as the girl's wild-rose face turned up to meet her lover's kiss.

For blind seconds John Roger Churchill Knight crashed through space. And then the next minute he was living in a shining world that was all roses and skylarks and dew. He laughed, for all at once he knew what ailed him; he knew that the wonderful, tantalizing something that had so steadily eluded him, tormented him was—just Nan, the girl of the gray day, the log fire and the storm.

He was the maddest, gladdest man in all Green Valley that day until he remembered that he had sent Nan no gift, not even a greeting or a word of thanks for the beautiful collie dog she had sent him. He stood in horrified amazement at his stupidity. Jocelyn had been showing them her new ring. And Nan, his sweetheart, had not even a Christmas card.

Cynthia's son went to the telephone but even as he raised the receiver he somehow guessed what the answer would be.

Nan's father answered.

"Why, John, she left on that 1:10 for Scranton, Pennsylvania. It's the first fool thing I have ever known her to do. Stayed right here till she'd given us our Christmas gifts and dinner and then off she went to see this old aunt in Scranton. Why, yes—you can send a telegram. She'll get it when she arrives."

So it happened that when a tired, homesick, wretched girl reached her aunt's house in Scranton, Pennsylvania, she found the one gift for which her heart had cried all that long, long Christmas day. It was just a bit of yellow paper that said:

"oh gray day girl don't stay too long the
fire is singing your chair is waiting and I have
so much to tell you come home and forgive."

CHAPTER XXI

FANNY'S HOUR

Nobody had asked Fanny to be a member of the Civic League but she was its most energetic promoter, its most zealous advocate. Never had she had such a cold weather opportunity.

Fanny hated cold weather. It shut people up in houses, shut their mouths, their purses, their laughter. It made life grim and rather gray. Fanny loved sunshine and open sunny roads. She tried to do her duty in winter as well as in summer but when the weather drops to ten or twenty below the sunniest of natures is bound to feel it.

But this winter Green Valley women were so stirred and roused that they thought of other things beside the price of coal and sugar and yarn. The short winter days fairly flew. The Civic League was young but already it was laying out an ambitious spring programme. No mere man was a member but all the men had to do was to show a little attention to Fanny Foster to know what was going on.

"We're going to set up a drinking fountain in the business square," Fanny explained. "The men of this town have the hotel but the horses never did have a decent trough of clean water. And we're going to have a little low place fixed so's the dogs can get a drink too. This is to prevent hydrophobia.

"We've already started the boys to building bird houses so's to have them ready to put up the first thing in the spring. There'll be less killing of song birds with sling-shots, though of course there's never been much of that done in Green Valley.

"Then that crossing at West End is going to be attended to. There's been enough rubbers lost in that mudhole to about fill it, so it won't take much to fill it up. We're going to have a little bridge built over that ditch on Lane Avenue so's we women don't dislocate our joints jumping over it. But first the ditch is going to be deepened and cleaned so's it won't smell so unhealthy. When that's done the ladies aim to plant wild flowers along it, careless like, to make it look as if God had made it instead of lazy men.

"We're going to suggest that all buildings in the business section put out window boxes. We'll furnish the flowers. It will give a distinctive note of beauty to the town." Fanny was carefully quoting Mrs. Brownlee.

"Billy Evans' wife promised to see to it that Billy painted the livery barn and there's a delegation of ladies appointed to wait on Mert Hagley and see if we can't get him to mend his sheds. They're so lopsided and rickety that Mrs. Brownlee says they're an eyesore and a menace to public safety.

"There's another delegation that's going to ask the saloon keeper to keep the basement door shut when the trains come in so's to keep that beery and whisky smell out of the streets as much as possible while maybe visitors are walking about.

"We're going to send a special committee to see what the railroad will do about fixing up this old station or, better still, giving us a new one and beautifying its grounds.

"We're planning to see Colonel Stratton about starting up a club for the preservation of our wild flowers and Doc Philipps is to have charge of a fight on the moths and things that are eating and killing our fruit trees.

"The school buildings will be investigated and conditions noted. Doc Philipps says that if the heating plant and ventilation and light was tended to we wouldn't have so much sickness among the children or so many needing glasses.

"As soon as spring really comes the Woman's Civic League is going to start up a clean-up campaign. Of course, Green Valley never was a dirty town. Everybody likes to have their yard nice but there's considerable old faded newspaper and rusty tin cans lying along the roads farther out and in unnoticed corners that nobody's felt responsible for. That will all be attended to. We'll have no filth, no germs, no ugliness anywhere, Mrs. Brownlee says.

"And I've been appointed a committee of one to wait on Seth Curtis and call his attention to the careless way he leaves his horses standing about the town. Those horses are dangerous and getting uglier in temper every day. And Seth is just as bad."

This was only too true. Seth had grown bitter and even reckless of late. Ever since his quarrel with Ruth about Jim Tumley Seth had been boiling with temper. Old poisons that had spoiled his life in many ways and that he thought he had conquered crept back to tyrannize over him. Poor Seth had had so much discipline in his youth that the least hint of pressure threw him into a state of vicious rebellion. Seth had a fine mind, could think quicker and straighter to the point than a good many Green Valley men. But when that mind was clouded with anger and stubbornness Seth was a hopeless proposition. Ruth was his one star and even she, Seth felt, had set herself against him.

So Seth, who seldom had frequented the hotel, was there almost every day now when he should have been working. He even drank more than before. Not that he cared more for it but it was his way of showing independence.

So Seth was very ugly these days and his horses suffered as they had never suffered before. They too were growing ugly and vicious and so nervous that the least noise, the least stir, sent them into a quivering frenzy of fright.

Every one in Green Valley knew this and not a few men and women were worrying. Several men were making up their minds to speak sharply to Seth about it. But everybody smiled and even felt relieved when they heard that Fanny had offered her services to the Civic League in this capacity. Green Valley knew Seth and knew Fanny Foster. Fanny would most certainly tell Seth about it. And everybody knew just how mad Seth would get. Fanny would not of course accomplish much. But she would open up the subject, suffer the first violence of Seth's anger and so make it easier for some more competent person to take Seth to task and force him to be reasonable.

The minister had spoken to Seth long ago but though Seth listened quietly to the quiet words of the one man he had come to love in his queer fashion, he had set his jaw grimly at the end and said, "No, sir! I've made up my mind not to stand this interference with my personal liberty and God Himself can't budge me!"

"Yes, He can, Seth. But don't let it go that far," Cynthia's son had begged.

Now all Green Valley was waiting to see Fanny tackle Seth in the name of the Civic League. It would be funny, everybody said.

Fanny did it one sunny afternoon in early spring when the streets were gay with folks all out to taste the first bit of gladness in the air. Fanny did it in her usual lengthy and thorough manner and permitted no interruptions. She was talking for the first time in her life with authority vested in her by a civic body. So there was a strength and a conscientiousness about her remarks that struck home.

Seth was standing alone on the hotel steps when Fanny began talking but all of Green Valley that was abroad was gathered laughingly about her when she finished and stood waiting for Seth's answer.

Seth had had a glass too much or he would never have done, never have said what he did and said that day. He would never have taken poor, harmless, laughter-loving, happy-go-lucky Fanny Foster, who had never done a mean, malicious thing in her life, who had let her world use her for all the little hateful tasks that nobody else would do and in which there was no thanks or any glory,—Seth in his senses would never have held up this dear though unfinished soul to the scorn, the pitiless ridicule of her townsmen.

If Fanny had been touched with fire and eloquence because she spoke with authority, Seth too talked with a bitter brilliance that won the crowd and held it against its will. With biting sarcasm and horrible accuracy Seth drew a picture of Fanny as made Green Valley smile and laugh before it could catch itself and realize the cruelty of its laughter.

Fanny stood at the foot of the wide flight of stairs like a criminal at the bar. As Seth's words grew more biting, his judgments more cruel, Fanny's face flushed with shame, then faded white with pain.

But Seth went too far. He went so far that he couldn't stop himself. And the crowd who had gathered to hear a little harmless fun now stood petrified and heartsick. No one stirred, though everybody was wishing themselves miles away. And Seth's voice, dripping with cruelty, went on.

Then all at once from the heart of the crowd a little figure pushed its way. It was Seth's wife,

Ruth. She walked halfway up that flight of stairs and looked steadily at her husband. Seth stopped in the middle of a word.

"Seth Curtis," Ruth's face was as white as Fanny's and her voice rang out like a silver bell, "Seth Curtis, you will apologize, ask forgiveness of Fanny Foster, who is my friend and an old schoolmate, or before God and these people I will disown you as my husband and the father of my children. Fanny Foster never had an apple or a goody in her lunch in the old school days that she didn't share it with somebody. She has never had a dollar or a joy that she hasn't divided. No one in Green Valley ever had a pain or a sorrow that she did not make it hers and try to help in some way. And in all the world there can be no more willing hands than hers."

The silver voice stopped, choked with sobs, and Ruth's eyes, looking down on the shrunken, bowed figure of Green Valley's gossip, brimmed over with tears.

Seth, sober now, stared at his wife, at the broken, crushed Fanny, at the crowd that stood waiting in still misery.

Ruth walked down to Fanny and flung her arms about her. Fanny patted her friend's shoulder softly and tried to comfort not herself but Ruth. "There, there, Ruthie, don't, don't take on so. Remember, you're nursing a baby and it might make him sick. It's all right, everything's all right. Only," Fanny's voice was dull and colorless and she never once raised her head, "only I wish John wouldn't hear of this. I've been such a disappointment to John without—this."

Though she spoke only to Ruth everybody heard. It was the first and only favor Fanny Foster had ever asked of Green Valley. And Green Valley, as it watched Ruth lead her away, swore that if possible John should not hear.

But John did hear three days later. And then the quiet man whose patience had made people think him a fool let loose the stored-up bitterness of years. He who in the beginning should and could have saved his girl wife with love and firmness now judged and rejected her with the terrible wrath, the cold merciless justice of a man slow to anger or to judge.

It was springtime and Grandma, sitting in her kitchen, heard and wept for Fanny. The windows at the Foster house were open and John talked for all the world to hear. His name had been dragged through the gutter and he was past caring for appearances. Grandma writhed under the words that were more cruel than a lash. At the end John Foster swore that so long as he lived he would never speak to Fanny. And Grandma shivered, for she knew John Foster.

For days not even Grandma saw Fanny. Then she saw her washing windows, scrubbing the porch steps, hanging up clothes. There came from the Foster house the whir of a sewing machine, the fragrant smell of fresh bread. The children came out with faces shining as the morning, hair as smooth as silk, shoes polished. And Grandma knew that if John Foster found a speck of dirt in his house he would have to look for it with a microscope. But there was a kind of horror in the eyes of Fanny's children. They didn't play any more or run away but of their own accord stayed home to fetch and carry for the strange mother who was now always there, who never sang, never spoke harshly to them, who worked bitterly from morning till night.

Every spring Fanny Foster used to flit through Green Valley streets like a chattering blue-jay. But now nobody saw her, only now and then at night, slinking along through the dark. And many a kindly heart ached for her, remembering how Fanny loved the sunshine and laughter.

But at last the spring grew too wonderful to resist. Even Fanny's numb heart and flayed spirit was warmed with the golden heat. She had some money that she wanted to deposit in the bank for John. For Fanny was saving now as only Fanny knew how when she set her mind to it. And she had set not only her mind but her very soul on making good. Every cruel taunt had left a ghastly wound and only work of the hardest kind could ease the hurt.

Fanny walked through the streets as though she had just recovered from a long illness. Everybody who saw her hurried out to greet her and talk but she only smiled in a pitiful sort of way and hastened on. It was nearly noon and she wanted to avoid the midday bustle and the crowds of children. She had set out the children's dinner but she hoped to get back before they reached home.

She came out of the bank and stood on the bank steps. She looked down the streets. Nobody was about and so against her will her eyes turned to the spot where she had been so pitilessly pilloried a month before.

As then, Seth's team was standing in front of the hotel. Little Billy Evans was climbing into the big wagon. She watched the child in a kind of stupor. She knew he ought not to do that. Seth's horses were not safe for a grown-up, much less a child. She wondered where Seth was or Billy Evans or Hank. She wondered if she'd better have them telephone to Billy from the bank and have him get little Billy. She half turned to do that and then out of the hotel door Jim Tumley came reeling and singing. Only his voice was a maudlin screech. Little Billy had by this time gotten into the wagon, pulled the whip from its socket, and just as Jim came staggering up, touched the more nervous of the two horses with it. And then it happened—what Green Valley had been dreading for months.

When men heard the commotion and turned to look they saw Seth's horses tearing madly round the hotel corner. Little Billy Evans was rattling around in the wagon box like a cork on the water and Fanny Foster, swaying like a reed, was hanging desperately to the horses' heads.

Hank Lolly was pitching hay into the barn loft. He saw, jumped and then lay still with a broken leg. Seth saw and Billy Evans and scores of other men, and they all ran madly to help. But the terrified animals waited for no man. And then from the throats of the running crowd a groan broke, for the school doors opened and into the spring sunshine and the arms of certain death the little first and second graders came dancing.

The school building hid the danger from the children and they did not comprehend the hoarse shouts of warning. But Fanny heard, heard the childish laughter and the screams of horror. She knew those horses must not turn that corner. Her feet swung against the shafts. Her heel caught for a minute and she jerked with all her might. The mad creatures swerved and dashed themselves and her against a telegraph pole.

When they picked up little Billy and Fanny they were both unconscious. One of Billy's little arms was broken, so violently had he been flung about and against the iron bars of the scat. Fanny's injuries were more serious.

They took her home to her spotless house with the children's dinner set out on the red tablecloth in the kitchen. The pussy willows the children had brought her the day before were in a vase in the center. Her husband came home and spoke to her but she neither saw him nor heard. They gave him a blood-stained bank book with his name on it.

And so she lay for days and sometimes Doc Philipps thought she would live and at other times he was sure she couldn't; but if she lived he knew that she would never again flit like vagrant sunshine through Green Valley streets. She would spend the rest of her days in a wheel chair or on crutches.

When they got courage finally to tell her, Fanny only smiled and said nothing. But she ate less and smiled more and steadily grew weaker and weaker and as steadily refused to see her husband.

"No," she said quietly, "there's nothing I want to see John about and there's nothing for him to see me about any more. I guess," she smiled at the gruff old doctor, "you're about the only man I can stand the sight of or who would put up with me."

"Fanny," Doc Philipps told her, "if you don't buck up and get well, if you die on my hands, it will be the first mean thing you ever did."

"Oh, well—it would be the last," laughed Fanny.

"Fanny, don't you know that Seth Curtis and nearly all the town comes here at least once a day? How do you suppose John and Seth and the rest of us will feel if you just quit and go?"

And then in bitterness of heart Fanny answered.

"Oh, I'm tired of living, of being snubbed and made fun of. I'm past caring how anybody else will feel. I tell you I'm a misfit. God never took pains to finish me. I've been a miserable failure, no good to anybody. My children will be better off without me. John said so."

"My God!" groaned the old doctor, "did John say that?" He knew now that no medicine that he could give, no skill of his would mend a heart bruised like that.

"Yes—he said that—and a whole lot more. Said I've eternally disgraced him and dragged him down and will land him in jail or the poorhouse. And I guess maybe it's so. Only all the time he was talking I kept thinking how he teased me to marry him. I really liked Bud Willis over in Elmwood better, in a way, than I did John. And I meant to marry Bud. He wasn't as good a boy as John, but he was so jolly and we'd have had such a good time together that I'd never have got mixed up in any mess like this. Maybe we would have ended in the poorhouse but we'd have had a good time going, and I bet Bud and I would have found something to laugh at even when we got there. Oh, I'm glad it's over. Don't think I'm afraid to die. I kind of hate to leave Robbie. Robbie's like me. And some day somebody'll tell him what a fool he is—like they told me. I wish I could warn him or learn him not to care. But, barring Robbie, I'm not afraid to go. But I'd be afraid to live. To live all the rest of my days on my back or in a chair—I—who was made to go? John can't abide me well and able to work. He'd hate the sight of me useless. No, sir! There's nothing nor nobody I'd sit in a chair for all the rest of my life."

"Yes, there is—Peggy."

John spoke from the shadowy doorway, for the dusk had fallen.

"You will do it for me, girl. I'll get you the nicest chair and the prettiest crutches. And when you are tired of them I'll carry you about in my arms. And you'll never again—I swear it—be sorry that you didn't marry Bud Willis."

The spring twilight filled the room. Through it the doctor tiptoed to the door and left these two to build a new world out of the fragments and blunders of the old.

CHAPTER XXII

BEFORE THE DAWN

"I wonder if Fanny's sacrifice isn't enough to drive the evil thing out of our lives and out of Green Valley forever. Seems as if everybody ought to vote the saloon out now," said Grandma Wentworth to Cynthia's son a couple of weeks later, when the whole town was celebrating because Fanny Foster had sat up for the first time in her chair that day.

After all, John didn't buy Fanny her chair. Seth Curtis wanted to do it all himself but Green Valley wouldn't let him. It was a wonderful chair. You could lower it to different heights and it was full of all manner of attachments to make the invalid forget her helplessness. Of course Fanny was still too weak to use these but she knew about them and seemed pleased, even said she believed that when she got the hang of it she could get about the house and yard and might even venture into the streets in time.

And early in the morning of the day she was to get up Doc Philipps drove up in his buggy with what seemed like a young garden tucked inside it. Fanny's garden and borders had been sadly neglected during her sickness. The doctor had had John clean the whole thing up and then he came with his arms and buggy full of blossoming tulips, hyacinths and every bloom that was in flower then and would bear transplanting. And for hours he and John worked to make a little fairyland for Fanny.

"My God, John, I couldn't mend her body—nobody could. But between us we have got to mend her spirit." And the old doctor blew his nose hard to hide the trembling of his chin.

But no chair, no amount of tulips and hyacinths, could make up to Fanny the loss of her body. And Green Valley knew this. So Green Valley was talking more seriously than ever of driving out from among them the thing that was pushing Jim Tumley into a drunkard's grave, that was estranging hitherto happy wives and husbands and maiming innocent men, women and children. Little Billy was all right again but he was now a timid youngster and inclined to be jumpy at sight of a smartly trotting horse. Hank Lolly's leg was healed up but Doc said he would always limp a bit. Seth and his wife had made up, of course, but neither of them could ever efface from their hearts and memories the cruel scenes that had marred their life this past year.

Seth no longer went near the saloon. He had paid dearly for his stubbornness and would continue to pay to the end of his days. Billy Evans had swung around and was fighting the saloon now with a grimness that was terrible in one so easy-going and liberal as Billy.

But nothing seemingly could convert George Hoskins. And so long as George Hoskins was against a measure its passage was a hopeless matter, for men like George always have a host of followers.

George was a huge man whose mind worked slowly. When he first heard the talk about the town going dry he laughed—and that was enough. No one argued the matter with him for no one relished the thought of an argument with George. And only the minister had dared to mention Jim Tumley. In his big way George loved little Jim, but since his wife had sickened George spent every spare minute in her sick room and so witnessed none of the scenes that were rousing Green Valley folks into open rebellion against the evil that enslaved them.

George belonged to the old school that declared that to mind one's own business was the highest duty of man. No one in Green Valley, not even Cynthia's son, could make the huge man understand that he in a sense was little Jim's keeper; that since Jim could not save himself the strong men of the community would have to do it for him. George wondered at the seriousness with which the thing was discussed. He treated it as a joke. And this attitude was doing more harm than if he had been bitterly hostile to the idea.

The Civic League was counting the votes, wondering if Green Valley could go dry over George Hoskins' head. But Grandma Wentworth was hoping for one more miracle before election day.

"Something'll happen to swing George into line. We Green Valley people have always done everything together. It would spoil things to have one half the town fighting the other half. We must do this thing with everybody's consent or it will do no good. So let's hope for a miracle."

And then the whole thing was wiped out of everybody's mind by the death of Mary Hoskins. It was over at last and nobody but the doctor knew how hard the big man had fought for his wife's

life. So nobody quite guessed the bitterness of the big man's grief. But everybody had heard that Mary's last words were a plea to have little Jim sing her to her last sleep and resting-place. And George had promised that Jim would sing.

Jim had been drinking so steadily of late that he was a wreck. People wondered if he could sing. When they told him his sister was dead he laughed miserably and said nothing. No one was surprised when the hour for the funeral services arrived to find Jim missing. Messengers had to be sent out. They searched the town but could find no trace of Jim. For an hour Green Valley waited in that still home. Then the undertaker from Elmwood whispered something to the crushed, terrified giant who stood staring at the dead face of his wife like a soul in torment.

Mary Hoskins left her home without the song George had promised her.

At the grave there was another, a more terrible wait.

"My God—wait! They'll find him. God, men—wait—wait! I can't bury her, without Jim's song. I promised her—I tell you I promised—oh, my God—it was the last thing she wanted—and I promised."

So Green Valley waited, with horror in its eyes and the bitterness of death in its heart. As the minutes dragged women began to sob hysterically, in nervous terror. Men looked at the yawning grave, the waiting coffin, the low-dropping sun and mumbled strange prayers.

Through a mist of tears the waiting watchers saw Hank Lolly and Billy Evans pass through the cemetery gate, dragging something between them. It was something that laughed and sobbed and gibbered horribly. Hank and Billy tried to hold the ghastly thing erect between them but it slipped from their trembling hands and lay, a twitching heap, at the head of the open grave.

That was Green Valley's darkest hour. And after that came the dawn. The following week Green Valley men walked quietly to the polls and as one man voted the horror out of their lives. The day after little Jim went off to take the Keeley cure. And then for two long weeks Green Valley was still with the stillness of exhaustion.

Spring deepened and brought with it all the old gladness and a new sweet peace, a peace such as Green Valley had never known. Gardens began to bloom again and streets rippled with the laughter of neighboring men and women. Life swung back to normal. Only the hotel stood silent, a still vacant-eyed reminder of past pain. Nobody mentioned it. Every one tried to forget it. But so long as it stood there, a specter within its heart, Green Valley could not forget. It was said that Sam Ellis had put it up for sale. But who would buy the huge place?

Then it was that Green Valley's three good little men came forward. Joe Gans, the socialist barber, was spokesman. He presented a plan that made Green Valley catch its breath.

Why—said the three good little men—could not Green Valley buy the hotel for its own use? Why not remodel it, make a Community House of it? Why not move Joshua Stillman's wonderful library out of the little dark room into which it was packed and spread it out in a big sunny place, with comfortable chairs and rockers and a couple of nice long reading tables? Why not fix a place for the young people to dance in and have their parties? Why not have a real assembly hall—a big enough and proper place to hold political meetings and all indoor celebrations? Why not have pool, billiards, a bowling alley? Why not have a manual-training room for Hen Tomlins and his boys? Why not have a sewing room and cooking for the girls?

Oh, it was a glorious plan and Green Valley listened as a child does to a fairy tale. Of course it couldn't really be done, many people said, but—oh, my—if it only could!

But the three good little men had no sooner explained their fairy dream than things began to happen. Cynthia's son came forward with the first payment on the property. Colonel Stratton, Joshua Stillman, Reverend Campbell offered to take care of other payments. Jake Tuttle telephoned in from his farm that he was in on it. The Civic League offered to do all the cleaning, the furnishing, to give pictures, curtains, potted plants. The church societies offered to make money serving chicken dinners on the hotel veranda to motorists who, now that Billy Evans had a garage, came spinning along thick as flies. Nan Ainslee's father, besides contributing to the purchasing fund, offered to provide the library furniture, the billiard and pool tables. Seth Curtis and Billy Evans not only gave money but offered to do all the hauling. That shamed the masons and carpenters into giving their Saturday afternoons for repair work. And after them came the painters and decorators, with Bernard Rollins at their head. So in the end every soul in Green Valley gave something and so the dream came true, as all dreams must when men and women get together and work whole-heartedly for the common good.

CHAPTER XXIII

FANNY COMES BACK

"If only I felt the way I look. If only my feelings had been smashed too," sobbed Fanny to the doctor that first week that she sat up in her chair. "But I'm just the same inside that I always was and I want to go and see and hear things."

So the old doctor, who knew how much more real were the ills of the spirit than any hurts of the flesh, dropped a word here and there and now no days passed that Fanny did not have callers, did not in some way get messages, the vagrant scraps and trifles of news that, so valueless in themselves, yet were to Fanny the lovely bits of fabric out of which she pieced a laughing tale of life.

Outwardly Fanny was changed. She was pale and quiet and her thick lovely hair was always smooth now and glossy and carefully dressed. It was the one thing she still could do for herself and she did it with a pitiful care. She looked ten years younger, in a way. And her house was spick and span at ten o'clock every morning now. From her chair she directed the children and because in all Green Valley there was no woman who knew better how work ought to be done it was well done. And then came the long empty hours when she sat, as she was sitting now, in her chair on the sunny side of the house where she could look at her little sea of tulips and hyacinths and drink in their perfume.

She had been trying to crochet but had dropped her needle. It lay in the grass at her feet. She could see it but she could not pick it up. She had not as yet acquired the skill and the inventive faculty of an invalid.

And so she sat there, staring at the bit of glistening steel as wave after wave of bitterness swept over her. Her tragedy was still so new that she could feel it with every breath. Every hour she was reminded of her loss by a thousand little things like this crochet hook. She was forced to sit still, her busy hands idle in her lap, while spring was calling, calling everywhere. She told herself, with a mad little laugh, that she would never again pick up anything; never again would she run through her neighbors' gates, tap on their doors and visit them in their kitchens. Never again could she hurry up the spring street with the south wind caressing her cheek. No more would she gad about to learn the doings of her little world. Would it come to talk to her, to make her laugh now that she was helpless? Was she never to hear the music of living? Was she to lose her knack of making people laugh? To lose her place in life—to live and yet be forgotten—would she have to face that?

These were some of the thoughts that were torturing poor Fanny that day. And then she gave a cry, for around the corner of the house came Nanny Ainslee in just the same old way. Grandma Wentworth and the minister were just behind her.

They stared lovingly at each other, the girl who was as lovely as life and love and springtime could make her, and the woman whom the game had broken. Then Nanny spoke—not to the broken body of Fanny Foster but to the gipsy, springtime spirit of Fanny.

"I only just came home, Fanny. I went through town and saw pretty nearly everybody, and every soul tried to tell me a little something. But it's all a jumble. So, Fanny Foster, I want you to begin with Christmas Day and tell me all that's happened in Green Valley while I've been away."

Never a word of her accident, never so much as a glance of pity at the wonderful chair. Just the old Nan Ainslee asking the old Fanny Foster for Green Valley news.

In the scarred soul of Fanny Foster, down under the bitterness and crumbled pride, something stirred, something that Fanny thought was dead forever.

Then Nanny spoke again.

"I have come to tell you that I am to be married to John Roger Churchill Knight. I have told no one but you and Grandma. I have promised to marry him in June, so I haven't much time to get ready. I'm hoping, Fanny, that you will come and help out."

At that, of a sudden all the old-time zest for living, the joy of seeing, hearing and doing, surged to Fanny's very throat and force of habit brought the words.

"Oh, land alive, Nanny," fairly gurgled the old Fanny, "such a time as we've had in Green Valley! It was that awful cold spell after Christmas that began it. Old man Pelley died—of complications—and everybody thought Mrs. Dudley would sing hymns of praise in public, they'd fought so about their chickens. But I declare if she didn't cry about the hardest at the funeral and even blamed herself for aggravating him.

"Of course him dying left old Mrs. Pelley alone in a big house, and her being pretty feeble, she felt that Harry and Ivy ought to come and live with her. Well,—Ivy went—but she vowed that there were two things she would do, mother-in-law or no mother-in-law. She said she'd put as many onions in her hamburger steak and Irish stew as she pleased—you know Mrs. Pelley can't stand onions—and she'd have a fire in the fireplace as often as the fancy struck her. Everybody thought there'd be an awful state of things—but land—now that Mrs. Pelley has got used to the open fire you can't drive her away from it with a stick and she don't seem to bother her head

about Ivy's cooking and last week she actually ate three helpings of hamburger steak that Ivy said was just reeking with onions.

"A body's never too old to learn, I suppose. There's Henry Rawlins suddenly took the notion to quit smoking. Ettie'd been at him for twenty-five years with twenty good reasons to quit, but no. And all of a sudden—when Ettie's give up hope and not mentioned it for a couple of months—he up and quits and won't even tell why. Ettie's worried—says he's eating himself out of house and home and wants to sleep about twenty-four hours a day.

"Talking about houses makes me think that the Stockton girls are having their house painted by a man with a wooden leg. Billy Evans picked him up somewhere and Seth Curtis was telling me how he came to lose that leg. Seems like he was prospecting somewheres in Montana, got drunk, froze it, gangrene set in and they had to amputate. They say he's a mighty smart man too. Maybe John'll get him to paint our house when he's through at the Stocktons.

"Talk about physical deformities! Eva Collins has got it into her head that she's too fat entirely and she's been dieting and rolling and taking all sorts of exercises religiously. Seems she got so set on being thin that she practices these exercises whenever she happens to think of it and wherever she happens to be. She happened to be right under the lights three or four times and so she smashed them, globes and all. Bill says she'd better reduce in the barn or else let him charge admission for a rolling performance to pay for the broken lights.

"So there's Eva trying to thin off and they say Mert Hagley's swollen all out of shape, having been stung almost to death by his own bees. Of course, nobody's sympathizing overmuch with Mert. He was so afraid of losing a swarm of bees that he forgot to be cautious and there he is laid out. But it isn't the bee stings that hurt him so much. Mary's been willed a good farm and a big lump of cash by some aunt that died a month ago and hated Mert like poison. And the thing's just gone to Mary's head.

"She's gone into the city on regular spending sprees and Mert's wild. He can't touch the farm and he's afraid Mary'll have that lump of money all spent before he gets out of bed. Everybody's hoping she will and advising her to buy every blessed thing she ever had a hankering for and things she never even heard of. Mrs. Brownlee, the president of the Civic League, even told her to buy a dish-washing machine, and heavens, if Mary didn't go right down and buy it. Doc Philipps advised her to buy herself the very best springs and mattress on the market—that it would help her back to sleep decently of nights. She's having hot-water heat put in and is going to do her washing with an electric washer. Seth Curtis put her up to that. And as soon as Mert gets better she's going visiting her sister in Colorado. She says she'll likely die of homesickness but that she's just got to go off somewhere to get used to and learn to wear properly all the new clothes she's got.

"Well, Mary's buying all these labor-saving machines got the whole town to thinking and spending. Dick's put in a new cash register they say is nice enough to have in the parlor. It made Jessie Williams buy a lot of new silver that she didn't need no more than a cat needs a match-box. But she got it and she gave a luncheon the other day to some of the South End crowd and tried to get just about all that silver on the table, I guess. Of course, it looked mighty nice but when the women came to eat they didn't know what to do with it. They got pretty miserable, all sticking to just the one knife and fork and spoon. And Jessie got so rattled that she just about forgot to use the stuff too. And finally old Mrs. Vingie, that Jessie asked just to have the news spread, got up mad as a hornet and marched out, saying she was too old to be insulted.

"Until a week ago Bessie Williams wouldn't speak to Alex. You know her hair's got awful white this last year and of course, her being kind of stout, she does look older than Al. But she says that's no reason why, when a peddler comes to the door with anything, Al needs to let the man think she's his mother.

"Mrs. Jerry Dustin's been to see Uncle Tony's portraiture hanging in the art gallery. She says it's so lifelike it made her cry. And she's awful happy about Peter. Peter's been posing for a picture for Bernard Rollins and while he was in the studio he got to fooling with the paints and brushes, and lo and behold, if he didn't daub up something that looked like his mother's face when she's smiling. They say Rollins jumped he was so surprised and he put the boy through some paces and swore he'd make a better artist out of him than he was himself. So there you are, and now Mrs. Dustin is dreaming of Peter in Italy, Peter in Rome, Peter everywhere in creation, and her tagging along with his brushes and dust rags. So she's happy.

"And Milly Sears is house-cleaning like mad, for both the boys are coming home from the ends of the earth to visit. And Alice is putting off the christening of her baby boy until they come. She was here to show me the baby the other day. It's a darling. Jocelyn Brownlee came with her and brought me samples of all her wedding dresses, wedding gown and all. As soon as the dressmaker is through I'm to go over and see the whole trousseau.

"There, I nearly forgot the best thing of all. It's about Sam Bobbins. My! Here we've all been pitying Sam and Fortune's just kicked in his door and walked in. You remember of course about Sam and his fighting roosters? Well, Sam went off for Thanksgiving to his sister's and while he was gone something ate up his prize stock. Must have been a skunk, Frank Burton says. Well, they say that Sam's heart was just about broken. Not just because his stock was gone but more

because he couldn't think of another thing to turn his hand to.

"Well, he got through the winter some way and then, while he was sitting in the train one day coming home, he overheard two men talking about turtles going up. Must have been two hotel men. Anyway, that gave Sam an idea and he started right in wading through Petersen's slough for turtles. Why, he pulled up barrels of them, and would you believe it, they sold in the city for real money! Sam went crazy—about as crazy as Mary Hagley got over her luck. And then along came rheumatism and knocked Sam flat, just when he was doing so well. Everybody said it was just poor Sam's luck. So there was Sam sick abed, thinking about those turtles moving off somewheres else maybe, or somebody else getting rich on them.

"And all the time he lay in bed groaning Sam's wife went around the house doing the same. Only her trouble wasn't turtles but corsets. Seems like Sam always promised Dudy that if he made any money she was to have plenty to spend. Well, he treated her mighty handsome about that turtle money. Dudy had the sense to take all he gave her and she vowed that for once in her life she'd get herself a corset that was comfortable.

"Well, Nanny, heavens only knows how many brands she tried but none of them seemed built for her. Some pinched her here and others squeezed her there and she was as full of misery as Sam was of rheumatism. Sam finally took notice and just to keep his mind off his own troubles he got to watching her suffering for breath and a nice shape.

"Now you know Sam's always thought the world of Dudy. So one day, when she was getting ready to go to the Civic League meeting to read a paper on the best ways of getting rid of flies and nearly crying because she couldn't get herself to look right, Sam said, half joking, 'By gum, Dudy, I'll *make* you a corset that will fit you.'

"Well, sir, the thing stuck in his mind and grew and grew, and heavens to Betsey, if Sam didn't really make a corset, even helping Dudy with some of the sewing.

"Dudy wore it and took everybody's breath away, she looked so nice and could breathe without puffing and laugh as much as she pleased. The women got to talking about it and mentioned it to Mrs. Brownlee. And mind you, Mrs. Brownlee went to Sam and asked him had he patented the thing. And when he said no she went to a woman lawyer friend of hers and she got Sam a patent, and first thing Green Valley knew here come three big corset men to town, all of them offering to buy Dudy's home-made corset. So Sam Bobbins has got his fortune and nobody's begrudging it to him. The whole town is mighty proud of Sam, I tell you.

"Good land—it must be four o'clock, for here come the children! My—Nanny, but it's good to have you home again!"

"Well," smiled Grandma, as she watched the spring twilight sift down over Green Valley that evening, "I've always said that this town was full of folks who make you cry one minute and laugh the next."

CHAPTER XXIV

HOME AGAIN

It had pleaded for forgiveness and an early homecoming, that little yellow slip that Nanny Ainslee treasured so. But the bluebirds were darting through leafy bowers and the ploughed, furrowed fields lay smoking in the spring sunshine before Nan came back.

A week after her arrival in Scranton the old aunt had been taken sick, and it was months before the old soul was herself again. Nan stayed through it all. But the day came when she was free to go back to the little home town where the cloud shadows were rippling over low, dimpling hills, already gay with the gold of wild mustard and the tender blues and greens of a new glad spring.

She came home one evening when Green Valley lay wrapped in a warm, thick, fragrant mist. So no one saw her step off the train straight into the arms of Cynthia's son. And nobody heard the quivering joy of his one cry at the sight of her.

"Nan!"

Slowly, as in a dream, they walked through their fragrant, misty world to where, in a deep, old hearth, a fire sang of love and home, dreams and eternal happiness; where an armchair waited with its mate and an old clock ticked on the stairs.

Oh, that first perfect hour beside his fire! He had pleaded so hard for it in all his letters. So she gave it to him, knowing that for them both no hour could ever again be just like that.

She sat and listened to the wonder of his love; then, frightened at the might of it, the lovely reverence of it, crept into his arms for sweet comfort. And he held her in awe and wonder against his heart, kissed the quivering lips and knew such joy as angels might envy. Then he took her to her father.

The next day, in the shy sunshine of a perfect day, they went hand in hand to their knoll to look once more upon their valley town and talk over all of life from the first hour of meeting.

And when they had satisfied the hunger for understanding the miracle that had befallen them he told her of all that had happened in the months that she had been away. How Jim Tumley slipped beyond the love and help of them all. How Mary Hoskins grew weaker and weaker. How the Civic League struggled and the three good little men dreamed and planned. How Fanny Foster came to pay the great price for Green Valley's salvation. How in death gentle Mary Hoskins paid too. He explained why Seth Curtis was a gentler man and why John Foster hurried home each day to laugh and talk with his crippled wife. He told her of that awful day that had crushed George Hoskins so that he went about a broken, shrunken man, praying and searching for peace through service. It was George who bought the beautiful new piano for the Community House, who was paying for little Jim's cure.

And then because the girl he loved was sobbing over the sins and sorrows of the little town that lay in the sunshine below them, he told her about the baby boy that Hen Tomlins had gotten for Christmas and how happy the little man was making toys for the toddler who followed him about from morning till night. And because her eyes were still wet with tears he laughed teasingly and said:

"And I never knew that I loved you until I saw David Allan kiss his sweetheart."

Of course, at that she sat up very straight and wanted to know all about it.

"I suppose you expect me to wait a whole proper year for my wedding day," he sighed after a little.

"I think we ought to. And I couldn't possibly be ready before then."

"Do you mean to tell me that it takes a whole year to make a wedding dress?"

And then the cruelty that lies in every woman made her shake her head and say, "No—that isn't why nice folks wait a whole year. They wait to give each other plenty of time to change their minds."

"Nan!"

And she saw then by his hurt white face that, man grown though he was, with a genius for handling other men, he would always be a child in some things. He never would or could understand trifling in any form, having all a child's honesty and directness. And she knew that she, more than any one else, would always have the power to hurt him.

"Nan," he asked slowly, "did you go to Scranton because you thought I might ask before you were ready?"

She laughed tenderly.

"Oh—Dear Heart—no. I went to Scranton because I was afraid I might propose before you were ready."

But he never quite understood that and she didn't expect him to. However, if she thought she had won, she was mistaken. The persistency in matters of love that is the heritage of all men made him say carelessly a half hour later:

"Oh, well—I suppose waiting a year is the best, the wise thing to do. But why must I be the only one to obey the law? Nobody else is waiting a year. All the other men are marrying their sweethearts in June. There's David and Jocelyn, Max Longman and Clara, Steve and Bonnie, Dolly Beatty and Charlie Peters. And only last week Grandma Wentworth got a letter from out West saying some chap is coming from the very wilds to marry Carrie. He's hired the reception hall of the Community House so that Carrie may have a proper wedding in case her folks refuse to give their blessing. So I'm going to marry all those chaps and then calmly go on just being engaged myself."

All of a sudden Nan saw why Seth Curtis gave in and joined the church, why Hank Lolly forgot his fears and came to the services, why the poolroom man gave up his business and was now a respected automobile man and mechanic; why the former saloon keeper was the happy owner of a stock farm; why Frank Burton no longer bragged about being an atheist but went to church with Jennie; why Mrs. Rosenwinkle no longer argued about the flatness of the earth.

He was always doing this to every one, this boy from India; always making people see how ridiculous and petty were the man-made conventions and human notions and stubbornness when looked at in the light of common sense and sincerity.

"Oh, well," Nan gave in with a laugh that was half a sob, "I may as well be a June bride with the rest. And now, John Roger Churchill Knight, take me down to see my town. I want to see all the new gardens, the new babies, the new spring hats and dress patterns.

"I want to see Ella Higgins' tulips and forget-me-nots and attend Uncle Tony's open-air meeting. I want to have an ice-cream soda at Martin's and wave my hand at John Gans while he's shaving a customer. I want to see all the store windows, especially Joe Baldwin's. I want to shake hands with Billy Evans and Hank Lolly and hug little Billy.

"I want to go to the post-office for my mail when everybody else is getting theirs. I want to know if the bank is still there and if the bluebirds and flickers are as thick as ever in Park Lane. I want to hear Green Valley women calling to each other from their back yards and see them leaning over the fences to visit—and giving each other clumps of pansies, and golden glow and hollyhocks. I want to see Mrs. Jerry Dustin's smile and ask her when I can see Uncle Tony's 'portraiture' at the Art Institute. I want to see the boys' bare feet kicking up the dust and their hands hitching up their overall straps and hear them whistling to each other and giving their high signs. I'm longing to know who's had their house repainted and where the new houses are going up.

"But—oh—most of all, I want to hear Green Valley folks say with their eyes and hands and voice—'Hello, Nanny Ainslee, when did *you* get back' and 'My, Nanny, it's good to see and have you home again.' So, John Roger Churchill Knight, take me down to see my home town—Green Valley at springtime."

They went down through Green Valley streets where the spring sunshine lay warm and golden. They greeted Green Valley men and women and were greeted as only Green Valley knows how to greet those it loves.

Though they said not a word, all Green Valley read their secret in their eyes, heard it in the rich deep note of the boy's voice, in Nanny's lilting laugh.

And having made the rounds the boy and girl naturally came to Grandma Wentworth's gate. They walked through the gay front garden, followed the little gravel path around the house, and found Grandma standing among her fragrant herbs and healing grasses.

They came to her hand in hand and said not a word. And Grandma raised her head and looked at them. Then her eyes filled and her lips quivered tenderly and the two, both motherless, knew that they had a mother's blessing.

It was so restful, that back yard of Grandma's, as the three sat there, talking quietly and happily. And the world seemed strangely full of a golden peace.

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