

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Plowing On Sunday, by Sterling North

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Plowing On Sunday

Author: Sterling North

Release date: July 6, 2014 [EBook #46200]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Giovanni Fini, Bruce Albrecht and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PLOWING ON SUNDAY ***

[i]

[ii]

PLOWING ON SUNDAY



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO · DALLAS
ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
OF CANADA, LIMITED
TORONTO

[iii]

PLOWING ON SUNDAY

By STERLING NORTH

NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1 9 3 4

[iv]

All rights reserved—no part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in magazine or newspaper.

*Set up and electrotyped.
Published October, 1934.*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NORWOOD PRESS LINOTYPE, INC.
NORWOOD, MASS., U.S.A.

[1]

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	BOOK ONE	PAGE
I		3
II		19
III		37
IV		54
	BOOK TWO	
V		73
VI		92
VII		111
	BOOK THREE	
VIII		131
IX		159
X		185
XI		202
	BOOK FOUR	
XII		215
XIII		225
XIV		239
	BOOK FIVE	
XV		255

[2]

[3]

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

1

Sarah Brailsford hurried through the April downpour holding her lantern with its shining reflector high above her and picking her way among the puddles which gleamed in the lantern light. Now and then she would stop to listen or would hallo in her sweet, anxious voice, "Stanley! Oh, Stan!"

The lantern cast gigantic shadows behind each boulder, fence-post and clump of hazel bushes as she splashed along between the rushing buggy ruts with an unreasonable panic in her heart. The willow branches from the trees beside the ditch whipped wetly across her face and shoulders. She brushed them aside without stopping and crossed the bridge over the flooded creek.

She lowered her head to fight the mounting wind, and labored up the hill through muddy

torrents until she stood at last beneath the giant cottonwood with half the world below her. Then as she rested, panting from her climb, the distant lightning flared and the panic left her.

There lay the lake she had known since she was a child, the marshes, the great banks of peat, the far dark mound covered with oak trees which was Charley's Bluff, the limestone cliff at Lake House Point rising white and majestic above the black, rain-swept waters. The fields and woods and rivers of Wisconsin lay all about her like the walls of home. [4]

She hurried on now, certain that she would find him, knowing that any moment she might hear the clop, clop of the horse's hooves and the creaking of the light spring wagon. And she was not surprised when at the turn of the road she heard his deep, full voice which even now that she had reached her forty-third year could move her. The man was roaring a hymn above the storm.

But she was not prepared for the sight which greeted her eyes when the lightning flashed again. Stud Brailsford was between the thills where the horse should have been, trotting through the rain, singing and hatless. The rain was in his graying curls and running down his face. He looked a giant in the lantern light.

"Stanley! Stanley! what's happened? And who's that in the wagon? You'll both catch your death."

She rushed to meet them crying out her surprise, and before her husband could answer had lifted the lantern to look into the eyes of the drenched girl on the wagon seat, eyes very bright and expectant, curls the color of straw bursting from under a wide-brimmed picture hat from which drooped two dilapidated ostrich plumes. The girl of perhaps eighteen straightened under Sarah's gaze. [5]

"Lightning struck Old Peg," the man explained, "so I played horse for Early Ann."

It's after midnight, Sarah thought. He's come from town with a strange girl, and....

"You must be about tuckered out," she said.

"Me, tuckered?" The big man laughed. "You should have seen me come up Gravel Store Hill."

"He's a good horse," the girl said. Her laughter was deep and unexpected. Her voice strangely rich for one so young.

"Get up in the wagon with the girl and put your coat around her."

Worrying about the child instead of me, thought Sarah climbing over the wheel to the wagon seat. She shared her rain coat with the shivering girl and warmed her with her own body, while Stanley Brailsford, with the strength of a stallion, pulled them both along the road, splashing and singing.

At last the girl ceased to shiver. She tilted her hat and pillowed her head upon the older woman's shoulder. And there she rested until Brailsford cried, "Here we are!" [6]

And so it was that Early Ann Sherman came to the Brailsford farm on Crab Apple Point in the dairy country of southern Wisconsin in April of the year 1913.

2

Stud Brailsford was a breeder famed throughout southern Wisconsin. He had a Poland China boar, a Jersey bull, and a Percheron stallion which were the talk of the countryside. He had cornfed sows which looked like minor blimps wallowing in his pig yards and scratching their ample backs against mail-order scratching posts which turned like screws twisting sinuous curls of soothing grease upward to salve the noble porcine flanks; soft-eyed Jersey cows whose pedigrees compared favorably with that of any reigning monarch; Shetland ponies, Shropshire sheep, and a small herd of goats.

On the little pond which lay like a blue mirror in a hollow between the hills a quarter of a mile north of the house he had tame geese, three varieties of tame ducks, as well as wild mallards, pintails, redheads, and canvasbacks brought home wounded from the fall duck hunting, clipped and kept to propagate more of their species. Wild Canadian geese he also had whose honking overhead in the short flights they essayed about the farm had all the fierce challenge of their kind, all the longing for distant marshes, and the fire of spring. [7]

For spring was upon the land—

Spring had come rushing up the Mississippi valley out of the warm Gulf states, out of the bayous and river bottoms bringing the fragrance of wet earth and leaf mold, the sweet smell of sap running in the maples, the acrid smells of dung and marshland. At Rock Island, Illinois, spring, and the wild fowl, had turned off the main stream to follow the Rock River valley up through Rockford, Beloit, Janesville, until at last with a final onslaught they had taken Lake Koshkonong and the farms and oak woods along its shores.

Overnight wildflowers bloomed on the hills, buttercups, anemones, dog violets, real violets, and the gaudy dandelions which children held beneath each other's chins to discover with great certainty who did and who did not like butter. Pickerel began to run up the creeks and back into the marshy bays of the lake; the little streams were flooded, and furry buds no larger than the ears of mice began to show on the black, gnarled branches of the oak trees. [8]

And spring to Stanley Brailsford meant plowing.

"Hi up there, Bess!" he shouted. "Get a move on, Jinny."

He guided the plow with one hand for a moment, using the other to slap the reins sharply across the sweating flanks of the team of mares. He turned them with an expert grace at the end of the furrow, went down along the fencerow and around the outer edge of the field.

A dozen white chickens, two or three bold robins, and Shep, the mischievous young farm dog

followed the furrow in an absurd parade. The birds were greedy for the pink angle-worms, fat, purple night-crawlers, and succulent grubs. The dog delighted in making the chickens leap six feet into the air with playful passes at their proud white tails.

"Get along you lazy hunks of horseflesh," Stud told the team. "Pretty near time we had this twenty planted. What you horses going to eat next winter, sawdust?"

He stopped for a moment to wipe his forehead with his red bandana pulled from the voluminous depths of his overalls pocket, gazed back over the neatly pleated acres of moist, black soil to the meadow beyond, and to the sandy beach of the big lake beyond that. A pickerel splashed in the shallow water. [9]

"Holy Moses, that must've weighed twenty pounds," Stud told the dog.

Even the fish were frisky today. Shep was frisky and so was Stud. Ulysses S. Grant was acting like a wild boar, Napoleon more like a Texas longhorn than a Jersey, while Admiral Dewey, the Shetland pony stallion was the worst of the lot.

The Admiral had a habit of biting bigger horses' legs, then leaping about, prancing and whinnying. Stud knew it was a bad policy to let a stallion run loose in the pasture but he couldn't find it in his heart to shut the little rascal in the barn. The Admiral and Mrs. Dewey were the happiest married couple he had ever seen. They had been running together for five years now. Five pony colts had made Mrs. Dewey look a bit matronly, but the little Stallion was still a holy terror.

"Sarah's a bit like Mrs. Dewey," thought the man. "Quiet, and good and sort of sweet. But me, I'm like the Admiral."

The dinner bell cut across his thoughts with its distant hollow clangor, now full and near as the breeze brought it directly to his ears, now remote and thin as the wind veered. The horses pricked up their ears and stamped impatiently, Stud, whistling loudly and merrily, unsnapped the tugs and clucked. Released from their dragging burden the team trotted over the soft earth at such a pace that Stud Brailsford had to break into a run; and the three of them, the two beasts and the man, came into the barnyard in a whirl of leaping, screeching chickens, hissing ganders, and the hearty hallo of Early Ann. [10]

3

On the broad kitchen stoop Brailsford scraped the black dirt from his shoes, then, whistling, went in to wash. Sarah hurried to prime the cistern pump which wheezed and creaked as it gushed forth a clear stream of clean-smelling rain water. He scrubbed face and hands with a coarse yellow soap, dried himself vigorously on the crash roller-towel, ran the family comb through his curls, and hesitated for a second to look at himself in the uneven glass of the old walnut-framed mirror.

What he saw evidently pleased him: clear blue eyes which could laugh or be very angry, wrinkles at the outer corners more from smiling than from squinting into the sun, a two-days' growth of heavy black stubble over cheeks both ruddy and tan, a good, straight English nose which went oddly but well with the slightly spoiled, pouting mouth; good teeth, a high forehead which bulged at the temples, but was in no way out of proportion to the leonine head with its mass of graying curls. He pulled at his jowls tentatively. No use shaving until Sunday morning. [11]

"Thought you rang the dinner bell, Sarah," he said smilingly as the hot, somewhat harassed woman shuffled back and forth from the roaring cook stove to the kitchen table. "Guess we'll have time for a tune."

He crossed the wide, low-ceilinged room to the graphophone on the big desk under the north window, pushed aside mail-order catalogues, the ten-pound family Bible and back numbers of farm magazines, gave the little crank a dozen turns, and from a homemade box studded with big wooden pegs drew a heavy cylinder record.

"Edison record," the huge tin horn painted like a tiger lily bragged in a cracked barytone. "For I Picked a Lemon in the Garden of Love Where They Say Only Peaches Grow...."

"You play that just to tease me," the woman said. She spoke softly and indulgently as a mother might speak to a mischievous child. [12]

Early Ann came in with an armload of smoothly split oak and hickory which she dumped into the wood box. Her strong round arms looked very capable for the task and there was something delightful about the disarray of her blond curls and the little beads of perspiration on her forehead. Her movements were effortless and unstudied.

Stanley found himself perplexed. Where had he seen the girl before, years ago? There was a momentary flash of moonlight and willow trees, but the vision evaded him. He gave up the puzzling problem as Gus, the hired man, came in from the barns.

"It's hawg cholera this time all right," announced the excruciatingly ugly man. "I don't doubt every one of them Poland Chinas'll be dead by next Sunday."

"That ain't hog cholera, and you know it," said Stud.

"Well, if it ain't it ought to be," said Gus, slouching into his chair at the table. "I'm plumb sick of them hawgs."

"They're good hogs," Stud said. "What's the matter with 'em?"

"Matter!" said Gus. "There's plenty the matter. You treat 'em better than you treat your hired help, that's what's the matter. I'll probably be sittin' up all night with that sow holding a hoof and takin' her temperature." [13]

"It's better company than you usually keep nights," said Stud.

"There you go again," Gus complained, "always accusing me of being out nights. You know as well as I do that I ain't courted a girl in twenty years."

"And with all the girls from Brailsford Junction to the Fort raring around like mares in heat every time they get sight of you."

"Hush, Stanley," said Sarah, "don't forget Early Ann."

"She'll just have to get used to us, Sarah," Stanley said. "She'll have to get used to the way we talk around here."

"Ain't we going to eat sometime today?" Gus asked. "I thought I heard the dinner bell."

"There, the duck's just done," said Sarah. She slipped it deftly onto the willow-ware platter.

"Duck on a Saturday?" asked Stud with mild surprise. He viewed the sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, the great bowl of gravy, baked apples, bread-and-butter pickles, the pile of hot homemade bread in thick slices, the apple and gooseberry pies and large graniteware pot of coffee with something like lust. [14]

"Duck on a week-day?"

"You know Peter came home today. He.... Oh, Stanley, he's quit school! He said he couldn't stand it another day."

"And so we kill the fatted calf," said Stanley quietly. "Well, why doesn't he come to dinner? What's keeping him?"

"He's upstairs changing into his overalls. You might as well begin."

She stopped half way between the stove and table as Stud began the blessing. She cast her eyes down as the words ran on.... "God is great and God is good, and we thank Him for this food...." She saw the wide pine boards of the kitchen, worn white and smooth from years of scrubbing. Then she shut her eyes and said a little prayer of her own for Peter and for Stanley Brailsford.

4

Something was troubling young Peter Brailsford, something he couldn't quite get at or understand. He wasn't at all certain why he had run away from school in Brailsford Junction, or why he had come home instead of hooking a freight for Chicago as he had originally planned. [15]

He hated school, and the farm, and most of all himself. He hated all the girls in the world. He was shy in the presence of his father, and sometimes felt a flare of impatience, almost dislike for the older man. He had left the dinner table quietly, slipped on a sweater patched at the elbows, glad to be away from the hired man's teasing, from his mother's over-solicitous love.

He strode across the lawn, leaped the fence, and started up the lane to look for the ponies, wondering in his mind who this new girl could be, thinking of the hot, angry scene in the Principal's office when he had announced that he was quitting, remembering how he had thrown his books into the creek, and jumped on his new red motorcycle, wild to be feeling the wind in his hair.

But even the thought of that happy, rebellious ride on his fine fast motorcycle with its shining nickel headlight and bright red mudguards was not enough to keep his mind from running hot with the vague injustices of the world. He kicked viciously at the tall dandelions and convenient lumps of dirt. Yet he could not have told precisely what it was that angered him, nor why the great peaceful spring had not caught him up as it had the rest of the world to warm his blood. [16]

He'd show them! He'd show everybody! All the stuck-up town kids with their smart ways, all the girls, Stanley, his mother, Gus, everybody!

There was a great deal wrong with the world young Peter thought. Much that could be better. He had never noticed before he went away to high school how his father and the hired man bullied his mother with their laughing banter, nor how cluttered the parlor was with its stuffed birds.

Momentarily he hated every inch of it: the stink of the barnyards, the cruelties of birth and death forever taking place about the farm; Gus the lecherous hired hand whispering to him of secret pleasures,—Gus forever proclaiming his hatred for women yet tearing out the underwear-clad wenches in the mail-order catalogues to hide in his bureau drawer.

Then with the inconsistency of youth in springtime Peter forgot his troubles upon seeing Lake Koshkonong spread out before him, flecked with whitecaps in the sun. He forgot his hatred for school, his contempt for farming. He cut himself a thorn stick and swished it through the deepening grass, whistled "Alexander's Ragtime Band," and with an awkward attempt at the tango whirled and bent and thumped his feet holding his visionary partner with a grace which he imagined would have shamed Vernon Castle. [17]

He clapped for an encore, bowed deeply to the girl, then feeling in his pockets found fish-hooks, sinkers, and dead night crawlers. "I'll go fishing catfish," he thought with excitement. "I'll get me some dead minnies, some rotten liver, and some clams."

Swinging along the lane, throwing stones at sparrows and adventurous woodchucks, he came at last to the back pasture covered with hazel bushes, sumac and thorn-apple trees. He made his way along the cowpaths calling the ponies, looking behind the clumping elderberry bushes until at last he came upon them.

The little Admiral ran up whinnying to nuzzle for the sugar lumps Peter usually carried, and there beyond stood the patient mare guarding her new-born colt, the wickedest-looking little

fellow who ever tried to scamper on unsteady legs.

He had been licked as clean as down and his small black hooves were as bright as jewels in the wet grass. The mare regarded him with troubled eyes and every now and again ran her wide nostrils over his flanks tenderly. So this was why the mare hadn't come down to the barnyard that morning! Peter slipped his arms under the warm pony colt to carry him home. The mare patiently followed.

[18]

[19]

CHAPTER II

1

Stud Brailsford stopped his team of sorrel mares beside the old mill and blacksmith shop, led Jinny in through the wide doorway and tied her to a wrought-iron ring worn with sixty-five years of friction. He lit the charcoal in the forge, pumped the ancient foot-bellows, and buried a shining shoe in the bright coals.

"This ain't going to hurt you a bit," he told the nervous mare. "Your ma, and your ma's ma, and a long ways back of that got nice new shoes in this same smithy."

He whistled happily as he rolled up his sleeves, showing huge brown arms with bulging biceps, tied on a leather apron, and lifting the heavy hammer gave the anvil a couple of preparatory whangs, bell-like strokes which rang out across the valley of the stream all the way to Cottonwood Hill and back again.

"Blamed if I don't like shoeing a horse," he told the sorrel. "Nothing like it to set a fellow up in the morning."

Stud had a weakness for his blacksmith shop and the adjoining mill which had once ground all the grist and cut all the lumber for the entire countryside. The old stone building was in ruins now, the mill-wheel fallen, and the dam washed away, moss and vines covered the rotting roof; but Stud would not tear it down.

[20]

He liked to come down here on a wet day and tinker around in the pile of wheels and machine parts which littered the floor. At a bench in one corner he kept his paraphernalia for stuffing birds, in another his saws and planes and chisels, his brace and bits and other woodworking equipment. He liked to make things, and fix things, and whang away at his anvil.

"Have to fix that bellows with a new cowskin," he announced to no one in particular. "Must have been made before the Civil War by my Granddaddy—and what a great old fellow he was!" Stud fished the glowing crescent of iron out of the coals and set to work with his hammer.

"Tailor made shoes for a pretty lady," he told the anxious mare. "Can't go barefoot like a blamed little foal."

So he had heard his father talk to sleek and shining mares in this same blacksmith shop, and so his father's father had doubtless talked to *his* horses on this very spot. Stud had a sneaking fondness for horses and ancestors. Particularly the big men who had come swinging into Wisconsin in the eighteen-forties to open up this country as if by miracle.

[21]

He had heard his father tell of the stormy voyage from England in a sailing ship, the long journey up the canal and through the Great Lakes, the landing at Milwaukee where the candle-lit taverns were over-run with settlers, frontier merchants, gamblers, whores, and itinerant ministers of the gospel who shared the unpartitioned floors, and waded democratically through the deep mud in the tavern yard where scores of oxen were tethered beside their clumsy carts.

Stud himself remembered the last of these "toad-crushers" with wheels cut from cross-sections of huge oak trees. Loaded with lead and pulled by as many as eight yoke of oxen, these carts drew the metal mined in Galena and Exeter across the wilds of intervening Wisconsin to the lake port of Milwaukee. The drivers were a wild and frisky crew, Stud had been told. It shocked and titillated his righteous old Daddy (who had watched the ox teams from this very window) knowing how the drivers whored and played at cards in Milwaukee and the thriving town of Galena.

[22]

Great fellows and great times, thought Stud Brailsford, dipping the hissing shoe into the tub of green water beside the anvil. Men who could carry a three-hundred pound barrel of salt up a steep loft stairs, Big Jock Macreeedy who had set the nine-hundred pound oak cornerpost on the lower eighty. His grandfather's brother (for whom Brailsford Junction was named) who had single-handed lifted the millstone in this very mill into its place.

"Hold up there, Jinny," he admonished, lifting her tasseled leg and catching the hoof between his leather knees. "This ain't going to hurt you a bit, Jinny. Nice new shoes for a pretty lady."

There had been a log house on the farm where the brick one stood now, and Stud had often heard his father tell how the deer came to eat the cabbages, and how one night a cougar had looked in at the window.... Rain came in through the cracks in the hand-split hickory singles, it whipped into the faces of the eight children sleeping in the loft on the corn-husk mattresses ... rain and snow in the winter, mosquitoes in the summer. Cracks between the logs which no amount of mudding would completely fill.

Stud could just remember the log house; it had been torn down the year he was five. There were wide stone fireplaces at either end of the big downstairs room, tallow candles made in a mold brought over from England on the sailing ship, a flintlock rifle with which his father could hit a squirrel at one hundred yards. There had been sweet-smelling roots and herbs hanging from the beams, seed corn, hams, and traps for catching bobcats and foxes that came to steal the chickens.

[23]

And kids all over the place. Three girls and five boys.... Stud wished he could have a family of husky youngsters like that. He didn't blame Sarah for the fact that all of her babies had died except Peter. But he did wish that Peter could have been a real farmer. He wished that he would quit mooning around and find a girl and use his fists more often. He wondered if the boy would actually run away to Chicago to work in an automobile or trailer factory. It made him bitter to think that farming wasn't good enough for his son.

Stud drove home the tapered horse-shoe nails with a viciousness which made the mare dance like a tumble-weed.

"Whoa, there, you ornery piece of horseflesh. Act like a lady or I'll larrup the living daylight's out of you."

[24]

Times were soft, Stud argued. Kids got notions in their heads. Like Peter wanting to build automobiles or trailers. Everyone riding instead of walking, talking about a device to milk cows by electricity, wearing gloves for husking in the fields.

When Stud was a boy men husked corn bare-handed. He could remember how his fingers cracked and bled in the cold, how one could follow his trail across the snow by the drops of blood. At night the men laughed about their split fingers, rubbed in hot tallow, and next morning went at it again.

Underwear was a luxury and almost unknown. Men wore their coarse homespun against their skin. The burrs in the virgin wool scratched like pins and needles.

Stud put another horse-shoe into the charcoal and worked the bellows. He tossed a handful of hickory nuts through the open window into the pig pen where the big sows cracked them between their teeth and swallowed them with noisy gusto. Stud noticed that the sick sow was back on her feet again and as greedy as any of her fantastically enormous sisters.

Better hogs than we raised in the old days, he thought. That's one place we've improved. Men get meaner and weaker and filthier, while hogs and cattle get to be better animals every year. That's on account of the way we breed the beasts. No romance. No guessing what's under a bustle. Just hard-headed facts and scientific breeding. Do the human race some good to have a first rate breeder put in charge for a few generations.

[25]

"Whang, whang," went the hammer on the anvil as sparks flew out like Fourth-of-July. "Hissss" went the second shoe in the tub of scummy water. The smithy was filled with the delectable odor of hot metal and scorching hooves and dung, age old dust and the first breath of crab-apple blossoms now bursting on the scraggly black trees beside the smithy window.

Man got meaner and smaller while the animals got greater and finer, thought Stud again, and that was why a man could give his best years to raising Jersey bulls like Napoleon, or Percheron stallions like Teddy Roosevelt ... could care for his cattle almost more than his family. There was a decency about animals not to be found in men.

This he had known ever since as a young man—a spoiled but good-looking young fellow who dominated his daddy and bought the big farm for a song—he had found that one can't trust bankers, share farmers, renters, or hired men, but one can trust horses, cows, and pigs....

[26]

"Give 'em your best and they'll give you their best," thought Stud. And no stock in the Rock River valley had better care or better feed than the Brailsford stock.

Stud thinks now, seeing Peter dash down the road like mad on his new red motorcycle, that a buggy was good enough for him at that age. No, he didn't get his first buggy until he was eighteen. It had red wheels and a fringed whip-socket, and his father had given him a spanking bay gelding to go with it. What a figure he cut courting Sarah to the tune of "I'm the Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo".... Black curls, a little mustache turned up at the ends, derby hat, pants tight over strong rippling thighs, smart checked coat. A dashing young giant, muscled like a bull.

And Sarah in her long flaring gown, curls down the back of her neck, rows and rows of buttons, puff sleeves and a waist so small he could reach around it with his two hands.

"Ah, Sarah, you were beautiful then," Stud says aloud. He slaps the mare sharply across her gleaming flank. "Get going, you lazy piece of horse flesh."

[27]

2

Miss Temperance Crandall bustled along the road with the air of a woman who has a mission in life. She noticed with shocked delight that there were several pairs of young women's bloomers on the Barton wash lines, no corset covers, and scarcely any petticoats. Bloomers, of all things! That was really too much. Temperance Crandall still wore drawers, and she always said the underwear her mother wore was good enough for her.

The diapers hanging in snowy squares behind the tumble-down Oleson household reminded her that the Oleson baby was born less than seven months after the young couple were married.... September, October, November, December, January, February, March, she counted again. And you couldn't tell her it was a seven-month baby. She had traipsed all the way out from town the second day after it was born to bring Mrs. Oleson a baby sweater she had knitted, and

she had had a good look at the cute little brat. Perfectly good fingernails and a huge mass of blond hair.

Peter Brailsford and Dutchy Bloom were coming down the road a mile a minute on their motorcycles, and just before they reached the spot where she was standing Dutchy stood up on the seat, let go the handlebars, and started yelling like a wild Indian. Why, he might have killed her! He might have run right over her.

[28]

"You better watch out, young man," she shouted after him, shaking her parasol. "You can't go up the narrow road to heaven on a motorcycle. You're just tearing down the wide, primrose path to hell."

The motorcycles were making so much noise that Dutchy did not catch the full import of her remarks, but he turned, nevertheless, and thumbed his nose in answer.

She went in at the Brailsford gate, took the letters out of the mail-box as she went by, stopped behind the lilac bush at the turn of the flagstone walk to peer through the envelopes, then composing bonnet, shawl, flounced skirt, and lace parasol climbed briskly up the wooden steps and opened the front door.

"Sarah!" she called. "Oh-h, Sarah! It's just me, Temperance Crandall. I just came to tell you...."

"Why, do come in, Miss Crandall," said Sarah, wiping her hands on her apron. "Won't you sit down?"

[29]

"I really haven't a minute," said the determined and bright-eyed person. "I've got to tell everybody along the road about the church supper next Wednesday night. I knew you'd bake the pies, Sarah. You do bake the loveliest pies if you would only use a little more shortening in the crust and be careful not to put too much cinnamon on your apples."

"Yes," said Sarah, "I suppose I can bake the pies."

"Oh, not all of them. Just ten or fifteen. I'll have the Barton girls bake the rest. They ought to do something for the good of their souls. Why, when I went past there a minute ago I saw they had bloomers on the line."

"I think bloomers are real sensible," said Sarah Brailsford.

"Oh, you do!" said Temperance. "Well, I don't. And what's more when I was listening in this morning to see if old man Whalen had got over his D.T.'s I heard Kate Barton and that good-for-nothing Joe Whalen going on something scandalous, throwing kisses over the wire and whispering about Saturday night. You can't tell *me* that silk bloomers do a girl's morals any good."

[30]

"Why shouldn't a girl have pretty underclothes?" asked Sarah. "They won't have many years to dress pretty and have a good time."

"I'm going to tell Reverend Tooton to preach a sermon on girls' bloomers," said Temperance. "What those girls need is a good dressing down and not so much dressing up. I must hurry back to town and see him this very afternoon.... But what I came to tell you about, Sarah...."

"Yes?"

"Well, now I sorta hate to do it. But it's for your own good."

"I'm sure we understand each other," said Sarah Brailsford, coolly, sitting proudly in her straight-backed chair.

"Well, I'm no one for beating about the bush," said Miss Crandall. "And far be it from me to stir up any trouble in a Christian household. But if you ask me, I'd watch that Early Ann."

"Would you mind if I closed the door into the kitchen?" Sarah asked quietly.

"No, shut the door so the hussy can't hear us," said Miss Crandall, "not that you can ever keep a secret from a hired girl so long as there are keyholes."

"What was it you were going to say?"

[31]

"Well, now, Sarah. I just want to do you a good turn same as I would expect you to do for me."

"Will you please come to the point, Miss Crandall?"

"Since you insist, Sarah, and may the Lord forgive me for telling you. But I think you ought to know that Early Ann Sherman is Stanley Brailsford's daughter, and the way they cut up together makes it all the nastier."

Sarah Brailsford swayed faintly, caught herself, and rose unsteadily to her feet. Her face was white and pinched, but her voice was clear and proud.

"I'll bake the pies, Miss Crandall." She opened the door with a hauteur which quieted even the garrulous Temperance Crandall. And it was not until she was beyond the lilacs that Temperance started worrying. "Now I've done it again. But someone had to tell her."

3

"You're a jinx," Gus told Early Ann as he stood beside her in the lamp light helping with the dishes. "Nothing but rain since the night you came. Never knew it to fail. That's what comes of having a strange girl on the farm."

[32]

"I ain't a strange girl," said Early Ann. "I certainly ain't as strange as you are. You're the strangest guy I ever seen."

"All Gundersons have got faces like mine," said Gus sadly.

"You ain't homely," said Early Ann. "You're awful handsome. Can you tango or sing, 'You Great Big Beautiful Doll'?"

"I can't sing nothing," Gus said. "Can't carry a tune worth a cent. Stud says maybe I could sing

better if I had my tonsils cut."

Early Ann giggled. She looked up with flashing eyes at the dour hired man and winked wickedly. She giggled again.

"You ought to see the picture postcards I got and the bon bon boxes, and the dance programs with silk tassels." (How she wished she *did* have these lovely, unattainable things!) "I bet I could teach you how to do the Castle Walk."

"Not me," said Gus. "No you don't." He cast an apprehensive glance at the girl and all but let a tureen slip out of his hands.

"You bust that tureen and I'll run you out of the kitchen with a broom," said Early Ann.

"My, my!" said Gus. "You're a wild woman, ain't you?"

[33]

"You bet I'm wild." She tossed her shining curls in the lamp light and added a kettle to the gleaming row of copper vessels hanging along the wall. "I used to bite like everything when I was a little girl."

"Let's see your teeth," said the hired man.

She flashed her white teeth, then opened wide her pretty mouth.

"Yep, you're a biter," Gus said. "But you ain't a day over seventeen by the looks of your molars."

"You don't know anything about girls," said Early Ann. "All you know about is horses."

From the other room came the voice of Sarah reading to Stanley by lamp light. Her voice was sweet, but particularly colorless this evening.

"Where'd you come from anyway?" Gus wanted to know. "And who are your folks? There ain't no Shermans in Brailsford Junction."

"None of your beeswax," the girl said firmly. "It's none of your beeswax where I came from."

"Not that I care," said Gus. "Not that I'm curious. Ishkabibble! I should worry."

"Oh, no. You ain't curious. You just got your tongue hanging out and your eyes popping, that's all. You're just running around like a couple of strange new dogs. You ain't curious."

[34]

"It ain't nice for a girl to talk the way you talk," said Gus. "It ain't proper for a girl to talk about dogs like that."

"I wasn't talking about dogs, I was talking about you," Early Ann said.

"Don't you ever want to be a lady, Early Ann? Don't you ever want to ride in a hansom cab or a limousine, with ostrich plumes in your hat, and a parasol? Don't you ever want to learn how to be sweet and talk nice like Sarah Brailsford?"

"She's lovely," said Early Ann with a sigh. "I sure wish I could be like Mrs. Brailsford. But I got a tongue like a little snake. I can't help what my tongue says.... Sure I want to be a lady and ride in a limousine. I want to be as graceful as Irene Castle, and dance like an angel, and have a house with swell brass beds and fumed oak mission furniture like you see in the Hartman catalogue, and a big cut-glass dish for the center of my table, and real lace curtains, and a new Ford with a Disco self-starter and...."

"Gee whiz, you must be figurin' on marrying a millionaire," Gus said.

"I want things," the girl said. "All I've had all my life is work, work, work."

Her fervor had flushed her cheeks and brightened her eyes until the vision of young loveliness before him made Gus forget that he was a woman-hater. He wished he were a good-looking young fellow with some money. She'd get everything she wanted soon enough.

[35]

"You better not let Temperance Crandall hear you talk like that," warned Gus. "She'd tell everybody from Stoughton to Fort Atkinson."

"What does she look like?" Early Ann asked with excitement. "Has she got a long scraggly neck and a raggedy black parasol, and a black shawl, and does she wear glasses?"

"That's her," said Gus.

"Let me get my fingers around that hag's neck," said Early Ann.

"You certainly do talk rough," said the hired man. "I wouldn't want to meet you alone somewhere on a dark night."

"She was over here today telling tales about me," said Early Ann. "They shut the door and I was too proud to listen. She's just a.... Oh, Gus, she's just a nasty old busy-body. Mrs. Brailsford came out in the kitchen as white as a ghost after she left and asked for the camphor."

"There's something mysterious about you," said Gus. "I knew it from the night you came."

"It's just talk," said Early Ann. "They don't know a thing. There's nothing in my life to be ashamed of.... But it seems like old ladies just can't leave a girl alone. There's nobody in my past who...."

[36]

Early Ann broke off abruptly in the middle of her sentence. Her eyes grew large and the terror crept down her cheeks and caught at the corners of her mouth. She started to scream, then bit her knuckles and with great deliberation turned away from the apparition at the window-pane. By the time Gus had rushed out into the yard no one was to be seen and the starlit night was silent and empty.

In the parlor Sarah still read to Stanley, unaware of anything beyond her own circle of lamp light. But as Early Ann listened in the throbbing stillness she heard the older woman falter and stop. Then she heard quiet weeping.

"Why ... what are you crying about, Mother?" she heard Stanley ask.

"Nothing, nothing at all," Sarah said. "I—I guess I'm just tired, that's all."

CHAPTER III

1

The basement of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Brailsford Junction rang with the shouts of children playing tag despite the scolding of their busy mothers. Flushed matrons buzzed in laden down with loaves of homemade bread, pans of biscuits ready for the oven, mason jars full of sweet, sour, and mixed pickles, bags of ground coffee, and huge pots of dressed and dismembered chickens so tender and plump that their flesh would have warranted the term "voluptuous" if stewed by a less austere generation.

Joe Whalen, town drunk, general roustabout, and janitor of the church was starting a paper fire in the furnace.

"Put in more paper," shouted Old Mrs. Crandall, mother of Temperance, who had left her room for the first time in months for this occasion. "Terrible weather for rheumatism, ain't it?"

"Terrible," shouted Joe.

"You don't need to holler at me," said Old Mrs. Crandall. "I ain't as hard of hearing as all that." [38]

She pulled her shawl a little tighter about her rheumatic shoulders, and cocked a sly old ear for the salty gossip Sister Atwell was passing on to Sister Bailey.

Girls of high school age, whispering and giggling, twisted long streamers of red, white, and blue crêpe paper in dizzy crescents from pillar to pillar of the festive room, while over each blazing chromo the same laughing girls hung shooting stars, bluebells, anemones, and other spring flowers.

The chromos were of the unforgettable period in religious art which offered holy scenes in dazzling triads, stirring masterpieces which could not help but move saints and sinners alike, pictures which carried a message and a warning. "Rock of Ages Cleft for Me" with a courageous lady in a white nightgown hanging perilously to a granite cross amid seas which would have sunk the *Titanic*; an amazingly tinted "Last Supper"; Christ driving the money changers from the temple with a ferocious rawhide blacksnake which Stud Brailsford privately admitted a man would not use on a team of balky mules.

Flowers were also heaped upon the golden oak upright piano, lacking three ivories, sadly out of tune, and showing unmistakable battle scars from the militant hammering it received during every Sunday School session, no less than from the attempts of Epworth League members to "rag" such sacred selections as "Holy, Holy, Holy." [39]

The kitchen was a mad-house. Along ten feet of glowing griddles perspiring sisters of the Ladies' Aid were stewing chickens, thickening gravy, starting great pots of coffee (two hours before suppertime with the result that church supper coffee had a wallop like 100 proof Bourbon) cutting slices of home-baked bread, quartering apple, pumpkin, and gooseberry pies, whipping half gallons of Jersey cream in wooden bowls two feet in diameter, pouring into boat-shaped cut-glass dishes jars of pickles, glass after glass of jams, jellies and preserves.

Crocks of golden butter and creamy cottage cheese made a formidable bulwark of richly laden earthenware in one corner, while a phalanx of ice cream freezers stood guard beside the kitchen door. And never except in time of war were seen such tubs of potatoes and kettles of peas.

Thirty tables for which thirty women had each brought her largest tablecloth were being set with six hundred ironware plates and as many indestructible cups and saucers, while what was smilingly known as the church silverware was lined up, knife, fork and spoon at the right of every plate. [40]

It was the scandal of the Ladies' Aid that some of these pieces of husky serviceware were not stamped as they should have been with "Property of the Methodist Episcopal Church" but were labeled instead "Property of the First Congregational Church" or, breath of popery, heresy and damnation, "Property of the St. James Catholic Church."

A venturesome member of the Ladies' Aid who had once attended a Congregational supper came back with the juicy information that the Congregational church had hundreds of knives, forks, and spoons marked with the bold Methodist insignia. This served as an excellent palliative to Methodist consciences.

No one, of course, had ever worried about what might have been stolen from the papists.

Into this wild and frantic scene shortly before supper time came Sarah Brailsford, Early Ann, and Gus. The hired man shuffled sheepishly behind the protecting women folks loaded to the gunwales with apple pies.

"Oh, Sister Brailsford, how *do* you do!" chorused the sisterhood. "My, what lovely apple pies!" [41]

They greeted Early Ann with reserved enthusiasm, insisting she must join the Epworth League, and Standard Bearers.

"So important that a girl gets the right atmosphere during her formative years," said Sister Dickenson.

Across the kitchen, however, the comments were less cordial: "Did you hear? And think of bringing her to a church supper! You mustn't breathe a word but Temperance Crandall told me in

strictest confidence...."

Meanwhile Gus, red of face and almost tongue-tied with embarrassment had been put to work mashing the potatoes. Women came with milk, butter, salt, and advice while Gus mashed on. Gus thought that perhaps he would not have been embittered about women so early in life had it not been for twenty-five years of church suppers.

2

Above the First National Bank of Brailsford Junction with its wooden Doric columns and gilt-lettered windows was the office of Timothy Halleck, attorney at law, justice of the peace, dealer in real estate and farm mortgages, notary, and Protestant father-confessor for half the town. [42]

To him came ranting suffragettes; militant members of the W.C.T.U. bent on destruction of the town's twenty-six easy-going saloon proprietors; the saloon proprietors; fathers of wayward girls; mothers of incorrigible boys; wives who were beaten, and husbands who had been cuckolded. Into Timothy's great hairy ears were poured the despairs and heartbreaks which have been the lot of man these many centuries.

His office was nothing less than amazing. Buffalo skulls and polished buffalo horns from his brother's ranch in Montana elbowed stuffed fish, antlers of deer, and the head of a wild cat upon the walls; five hundred dusty law tomes filled the sagging shelves; in a glass case stood a shock of prize Wisconsin wheat, seed corn, and dirty mason jars filled with every variety of grain known to horticulture. Enormous leaves of Wisconsin tobacco framed and labeled, Indian quivers, and year-old calendars vied for space on the wainscoting.

Half a dozen swivel chairs and as many spittoons gave the spot an air of luxurious informality to visiting farmers, whose well informed nostrils might have quivered distrustfully at the dusty stench of rotting law books had it not been synthesized with the comfortable aroma from the livery stable next door. [43]

Timothy Halleck himself, six feet two, large-boned, gaunt, hawk-nosed, with great brown eyes deep-socketed and thatched above with bristling brows, white-haired and gruff, ruled like a kindly tyrant in his chaotic kingdom. He was the town's one-man organized charity, a poverty-stricken philanthropist who denied himself so that he might help others; a widower, lonesome and fond of children.

He had a few old friends, among them Stanley Brailsford now entering his office.

"Well, Timothy," said Stud, uncomfortable in his serge suit and well-blackened bulldog shoes, "still making a living robbing the widows and orphans?"

"Sit down, you lazy, hog-breeding son-of-a-gun and have a cigar," said the lawyer. "How are those emaciated razor-backs doing on that run-down farm of yours?"

"Getting fatter and sassier every week," said Stud, biting off the tip of the cigar and scratching a match on the seat of his trousers. "What you been up to?"

"Just the usual day. Forging checks and foreclosing on octogenarians. Where've you been keeping yourself?" [44]

"Anywhere the fish are biting. There ain't much work to be done on a farm in the spring time."

"Need a good hand?"

"Maybe you could do my whittling," Stud said. "Anyhow it's a standing invitation."

"Might teach you how to raise hogs instead of razor-backs. Might breed you some beeves you could tell from bags of bones."

"Who'd you find to defraud your clients meanwhile?" Stud asked. "Where would you find a man to run your shell game while you was gone?"

The two old cronies glowered at each other joyfully and let fly at the nearest gobboon simultaneously and accurately, a symphony in expectoration which had taken nearly thirty years to perfect.

Their talk ran on: the spring floods in Ohio and Indiana, the price of hogs, milk, and eggs, the new trailer factory which was to occupy the old wagon-works on the creek bottom, President Wilson and his professorial theories, the German Kaiser and his fight to remove one of his tenant farmers, the ridiculous little Balkan squabbles.

And getting back to their own affairs Stud asked, "Are you going to the church supper this evening?" [45]

"No ..." said Halleck slowly. "Something about church suppers makes me feel ... Martha was always the center of everything, you know."

"I know," Stud said.

"You don't appreciate a woman until you've lost her," Halleck said quietly.

"No," said Stud, "I don't suppose you do."

"You're apt to take her for granted."

"Sarah's happy," Stanley said. "We get along all right."

"It isn't just getting along all right," the lawyer said, gazing down upon the street where small boys jubilant with spring were fighting, roller-skating, and playing marbles; little girls skipping rope, and chalking squares for sky-blue. "It's treating a woman like another human being. Like an individual."

He swung his chair to face his life-long friend.

"You ain't thinking of taking up woman suffrage, are you?" Stud asked with mild sarcasm. "Not

Pankhurst and Belle La Follette and that sort of thing?"

"They don't need our help, Stanley. It's we who need theirs. They'll get more than the vote. They'll get rid of corsets, smoke if they want to, go into business, live alone in a room like Early Ann Sherman wanted to...."

[46]

"I ... I wanted to ask you about her," Stud said. "I wanted you to tell me more than you could that night you put her in my spring wagon."

Halleck hesitated, looked down at the glowing tip of his cigar, then began slowly. "I don't think I know much more about her than you do, Stanley. She came to Brailsford Junction last winter and got a job stemming tobacco in one of the warehouses. She took a room across the track with Mrs. Marsden,—that front room downstairs with the outside door."

"And then ...?"

"Well, nothing really. She didn't tell anyone where she came from, or who her folks were, or why she wanted to live alone like that. She was pretty and proud and full of spunk, so the gossips got their tongues wagging ... Mrs. Marsden, and old Mrs. Crandall, and that blue jay, Temperance...."

"But what was wrong?"

"Nothing so far as I know. The Hubbards who live next door thought they saw a man around her window one night, and on another occasion Mrs. Marsden heard her scream, but when she reached the girl's room Early Ann was alone...."

[47]

"The sluts."

"Temperance Crandall and a delegation came to me—they always do—and said they wanted to swear out a warrant. I told them they couldn't swear out a warrant for a girl just because she was living alone and there was gossip...."

"Dirty-minded old women," Stud said.

"But they insisted it was up to me to do something. They said that if I didn't they would make it so uncomfortable for the girl she would have to leave town. I had to save the kid from that pack of she-bloodhounds."

"And you knew I'd been sort of figuring on getting a hired girl to help Sarah...."

"So I brought her down to your wagon that night. I knew you folks would take care of her. It was a chance to get her away from Temperance Crandall."

"Not so sure you got her away," said Stud. "Temperance turned in at our place the other day. No telling what she dished out to Sarah."

"She went clear out there to start trouble?"

"I reckon she did."

"That bitch," said Timothy Halleck.

[48]

3

At the church supper that evening Peter had a revelation. Maxine Larabee brushed against him in the coatroom, and he knew as though he had seen it in the paper that he was in love.

Not that Maxine had even noticed his presence. Why should she with every boy in Brailsford Junction running after her? She had simply swept by in her smart tailored suit and velvet hat exhaling the very faint odor of violets. It was not quite nice to use violet perfume in Brailsford Junction in 1913. It gave Maxine an air of sin and secrecy. Peter felt a trifle heady watching her disappear into the forbidden realm marked WOMEN from whence came the concerted giggles, shrieks, and titterings of a dozen high-school girls.

Peter yanked viciously at his two-inch starched collar, polished the bright yellow toes of his bulldog oxfords with his handkerchief, kicked and stamped to straighten the legs of his peg trousers which had an embarrassing manner of working up the calves of his legs exposing a vast expanse of green polka-dot socks to say nothing of the clips of his garters. He hummed through the tenor part to "When It's Apple-Blossom Time in Normandy," corrected a few minor errors in his harmony, then with the determination of a martyr entering the arena left the comparative safety of the coatroom and strode manfully into the bedlam of the church basement where whole flocks of chickens were being devoured by the famished Methodists.

[49]

Maxine Larabee! So that was what had been troubling him! But a fine chance he had with any girl as swell as Maxine. Particularly now that he had quit school. Why, even the college guys serenaded her; so did rich Bud Spillman the football hero and bully. She had more picture postcards and sofa pillows and fraternity pennants than any girl in Rock County. She had about twelve different dresses and six or seven hats, and a hat-pin which was supposed to have a real ruby set in the head of it. A fine chance he had with Maxine!

Peter was so absorbed in this new and disastrous turn of events that he failed to answer the greetings and friendly gibes with which he was met as he elbowed his way to the ticket table, purchased for thirty-five cents a frayed rectangle of cardboard, and finding a vacant seat, set to like the good young trencherman he was. He scarcely noticed when Mrs. Fulton whisked away his empty plate and returned plump, red, and beaming with a second helping, and he was half way through his pumpkin pie loaded with whipped cream before he noticed that something cataclysmic and world-shaking was about to occur. Maxine Larabee was taking the chair beside him.

[50]

"Gee, you're a regular swell tonight," the blond vision of loveliness crowned with a coronet braid murmured sotto voce to the embarrassed boy beside her. She looked approvingly at the

green polka-dot tie which matched the socks, the black curls slicked down on either side of the central part. "Why don't you take me down to the ice-cream parlor and buy me a lover's delight sometime?"

"Me?" Peter asked, astonished. "Me take you right down to the ice-cream parlor and buy you an ice-cream sundae?"

"Why not?" the girl wanted to know. "There isn't any law against it." She had a low, husky voice and a thrilling little laugh which made the goose-flesh stand up on Peter's arms and electric chills run up and down his spine.

"Why don't you take me for a ride on the handlebars of your new motorcycle sometime?"

"Aw, you'd get hurt," Peter said with a tinge of his boyhood contempt for mere girls springing up from some remote corner of his still adolescent mind. "You'd get your skirts caught in the spokes and we'd both go in the ditch." [51]

"Oh, I would!" said the girl, raising her eyebrows. "Oh, I would, would I! Well, I didn't the night Bud Spillman took me for a spin on his motorcycle."

"I can go faster than Bud Spillman," Peter said irrelevantly. "I ran him ragged the day we raced home from Janesville. I can go a mile a minute on my machine."

"Give me a ride sometime and let's see you do it."

"But gee whiz, Maxine..."

"Gee whiz, nothing!" the girl said. "Either you give me a ride on your motorcycle or I won't let you take me down to the ice-cream parlor."

"I'll give you a ride," Peter promised, glowering at the bit of pie-crust he was pushing about with his fork, "I'll give you a ride that'll blow all the hair pins out of your hair."

The girl tittered quietly. "You *are* a dear," she murmured. "But here comes mother. I'll see you at eight down by the post office."

Peter got up hurriedly as Mrs. Larabee, a buxom blonde of forty with exaggerated Gibson Girl figure nosed her way like a lake freighter through the lesser craft between her and her pampered daughter. [52]

"Won't you have my chair?" said the boy with a mixture of guilt and gallantry. "No, Mrs. Larabee, I'm absolutely all through with supper."

He disappeared like an eel into the milling crowd.

Outside it had started to rain lightly. He walked without hat or coat through the misty spring dusk, his brain a tumult of conflicting emotions. Oh, she was a beautiful girl. Such big, clear blue eyes, such shining blond hair ... like, like a regular gold crown on her head. Her skin was as soft as ... as the petal of a flower, and she had the littlest feet.

He wasn't worthy of her. He wasn't even worthy to touch the hem of her garments. He, a big awkward farm boy without any manners. He wished he could give himself a good poke in the jaw for not saying right away, "Why, of course, Maxine. I would be delighted to give you a ride on my motorcycle."

He thought he must be going crazy to have argued with her like that when she had just decided to notice him for the first time in their lives.

"You big country boob," he said abusively, "I'll bet a town fellow would have known what to say." [53]

His eyes and throat felt so funny that he thought maybe he was going to cry, but he choked back the tears angrily and hurried on through the spring evening watching the nighthawks skimming low over the houses, and the strange, soft flight of the bats. The wind sighed in the newly feathered elms and the arc-lights sputtered menacingly.

He felt incredibly alone, infinitely removed from the rest of the world. No other boy in history had been so suddenly and deeply in love, so troubled and filled with foreboding. He had never known such a hurt as he now felt in his breast, such an unbelievable longing, although for what he could not say.

Long before eight he was standing at the post office corner, and there he stood in the mist until long after nine. Maxine did not come.

[54]

CHAPTER IV

1

On the Brailsford farm the season rushed tumultuously into June bringing honey-locust bloom, wild roses, blue spiderwort and vetch, changing black fields to the geometrical green of growing corn, transforming Attila, the black pony colt with his white star and fiery eyes into a frisking, mischievous rascal who worried his mother constantly, metamorphosing the Jersey calves from fawn-eyed babies delicate as gazelles into willful stubborn young ladies who butted their pails of skim milk all over the barn lot.

"You little she-devils," said Gus, "you carnarned little hussies, keep your heads in your own pails and try to learn some table manners."

But either Gus was never cut out for a barnyard Emily Post, or the husky young heifers, shoats, and foals didn't give a tinker's damn which was the salad fork, for certainly to the most casual observer it was obvious that the little pigs thoroughly enjoyed wallowing in the delicious swill that filled their feeding troughs, loved to hang on squealing and complaining while their matronly mothers wandered aimlessly about the pig yard, and had no objection to nosing through the fence for a sinful afternoon among the radishes, peas, and lettuce of the garden plot. Attila, with forefeet braced, tugged at the mare's black udders until she sometimes turned and nipped his downy hide, and once when the foolhardy little colt started nuzzling around his daddy's flank, the Admiral, insulted to the very core of his masculine being, kicked and bit his tactless son into temporary good behavior. Nor were the black kittens in the barn above stealing milk from the brimming milk pails.

[55]

Peter, his imagination soaring at the thought of a trailer factory in Brailsford Junction, dreamed through the corn on the sulky cultivator, went through the whole eighty acres of waving green, then started through it again in an endless battle against the weeds. Early Ann picked half a milk pail full of wild strawberries on a southern slope.

The tobacco land was worked and reworked until the soil was as fine as silk before the tobacco setter with its big red barrel began its monotonous journey back and forth across the field leaving rows of green plants in its wake. Gus and Peter dropped plants from the low rear seats while Stanley drove the team, sitting high up on the barrel.

[56]

Evenings the men, covered with dirt and sweat, went down to the lake to bathe, waded out over hard sand nearly one hundred yards until they were in water deep enough for swimming. They splashed and roared and spluttered, sometimes raced half a mile out into the lake and back again.

The corn grew so fast that Stud claimed you could hear it if you listened carefully at night. The pumpkin vines between the hills of corn spread wide green leaves, and the spring lambs which Stud was pasturing in peas and clover began to look like something which would taste good with mint sauce.

At last it was haying time. And so with hard work and little time for play Stanley and Sarah Brailsford approached their twentieth wedding anniversary.

2

One evening Early Ann, Peter and Gus got out the croquet set for a dashing game on the front lawn. Stanley and Sarah brought out their rockers to furnish a gallery. A catbird who thought he was a bobolink was singing in the topmost branches of the poplar tree.

[57]

"I get the red ball and mallet," Early Ann announced.

"They're mine," cried Peter. "I always use the red ones."

"Try and get 'em," Early Ann taunted. Swinging the mallet menacingly she dashed behind the lilac bushes and out again, encircled the mail box and the big oak tree, and, laughing and screeching came to grips with Peter on an open strip of lawn. He tried to wrench the mallet from her hands and was surprised at her strength.

"Just try," Early Ann panted. She fought with a desperation which amazed the boy. Her hair came tumbling down and her eyes flashed fire. Suddenly she let go of the mallet and tore into Peter with small hard fists and flying feet. Stud was laughing until his sides hurt. Gus was rolling on the ground with mirth. While Sarah, seeing that the struggle was getting rough, cried out in consternation, "Children, children!"

"I hate you," Early Ann whispered passionately. "I'll scratch your eyes out."

"Don't hurt yourself," Peter advised with a superior, mocking note in his voice. He had her firmly by the arms now in a grip which he knew was hurting, but she did not flinch.

[58]

In another moment she was laughing and straightening her hair, but she recovered and kept the red ball and mallet.

The game began in the fighting atmosphere of technical pride, and deadly serious rivalry, which had marked the pioneer stump-pullings and sod-breakings of an earlier day, and which lived on in mortal golfing and bridge frays of the 1920's. Gus and Peter handled their striped wooden balls on the smooth green lawn with an accuracy which would have done credit to an expert of the cue driving the ivories about a billiard table. Gus was known for miles around as the croquet fiend who had scored all the hoops in one turn at a Sunday School picnic, while Peter could often run a hoop from a most disadvantageous angle.

Early Ann made up in temperament what she lacked in technical skill, and, whenever she had a chance to roquet on Peter's ball, sent him flying off into the deep grass.

"If Taft had played croquet instead of that sissy game golf, he'd still be president," Stud said. "If he'd pitched a good game of horseshoes he could've been king."

"Think of them White House lawns," sighed Gus. "Gee whiz! If I was president I'd make me the gol darndest croquet court you ever did see."

[59]

"Why don't we play like we used to, Stanley?" Sarah asked.

"The kids are too good for me," Stud admitted. "But I'll tell you what I'll do...."

"Tomorrow?"

"You bet! I'll challenge you to a game for our twentieth wedding anniversary, Sarah."

They touched hands for a moment, shyly, hoping the others would not see.

Playing grimly and consistently well, Peter overtook Gus and sent that doleful individual into loud and vituperative lament by driving the farm hand's ball under the distant front porch. He made his next hoop, roqueted on Early Ann, and continued his run to win the game.

He couldn't help comparing Early Ann Sherman to Maxine Larabee as they began their second game in the heat of bitter competition.

"Early Ann's all right for croquet, or swimming, or a tussle on the lawn. But she's not much of a lady," he decided, "and nothing at all like Maxine Larabee."

He shouldn't have let himself think of them in the same breath. Early Ann was nothing but a she wild-cat, and a tomboy. Once she had pushed Gus over the wood box; and she said "damn" when she got mad; and Gus had even seen her trying to smoke a cigarette.

[60]

Maxine would never do anything like that. Maxine would be ashamed to tussle or swear or even raise her voice. Maxine was a lady in every sense of the word. She looked just like the beautiful women in the magazines, with her picture hats and delicate motoring veils.

Peter bet if he could only have a new White Steamer she would notice him again as she had that night at the church supper. She might even let him take her for a ride way down the river road where they could have a weenie roast and sing songs together. She might go to Janesville with him for a movie and a midnight supper. Except that Maxine wasn't the kind of a girl who would eat a midnight supper with any boy. One of the fellows had told Peter that she was that kind of a girl and Peter had blackened both his eyes and made him eat dirt and yell "enough." It made him fighting mad when any other boy even mentioned her name casually.

He always felt like saying, "You leave her name out of this," the way men did in stories. But he was afraid it might sound silly.

The way she walked! Just wheeling along as though all her joints had ball-bearings. She was one girl who didn't need to practice with a book on her head to get a perfect carriage. And her golden hair, done up a new way every day. And such lovely white hands and pretty nails. No, Early Ann just wasn't in Maxine's class.

[61]

"Your turn," Gus shouted at Peter. "Better stop dreaming about your girl and try to learn croquet. I've got you down for the count this time around."

"Listen, hayseed," Peter said, "you better crawl into your cellar because this trip I'm going to blow down your shanty."

He took careful aim allowing for a little rise he knew in the lawn, curved gracefully and improbably through the distant hoop, roqueted on the astounded hired man's ball, drove him into a tangle of raspberry bushes, and made two more hoops before missing.

"Nothing but a greenhorn's luck," Gus complained. He fished his ball out of the thorns, brought it to within a mallet's-length of the court, and promised himself sweet vengeance with plays of prodigious technical brilliance when next it came his turn.

The summer dusk came down about them sweet and still. Far away over the hills they could hear the church bell calling the faithful to Thursday night prayer meeting in Brailsford Junction. The chimney swifts and martins filled the evening sky with their graceful, airy geometry, and the nighthawks swooped so low above them that one might see the pale oval underneath each wing. Far down the lake in some deep tangle of woods the whip-poor-will began.

[62]

Sarah hurried off to the ice house to fetch the half freezer of homemade ice cream left from supper, and with it a bowl of sugared strawberries. The game over, Early Ann went in for soup bowls and table-spoons. And together on the lawn, under stars so large, soft, and near they seemed almost to be caught in the upper branches of the oak tree, they ate such a dish for the gods as one may never find in these later years in distant cities.

The frogs began in the marshes along the lake. The crickets shrilled. Silence was all about them like a song.

After they had eaten, Peter and Early Ann pulled up the hoops and pegs, gathered the balls and mallets in their arms. They walked down the dusty driveway to the wagon shed carrying the set, and stopped at the milk house for a long cold drink from the pump.

They were too quiet, too delightfully tired and calm to wish to talk. Their struggle was forgotten, and there was no upsetting emotion of love or hate to keep them from kicking in comradely fashion through the dust.

[63]

Then something altogether out of keeping with their mood shattered the evening. The horses in the barn yard whinnied in fright; there were startled hoof-beats; a cow moored anxiously.

"Don't go," Early Ann pleaded, holding to the boy. "It might be...."

Gus and Stud came running.

"Someone after the stock, you think?" Gus asked.

They hurried in a straggling group down to the barnyard gate, saw a shadowy figure jump the far fence and disappear into the dusky brush lot, crashing through the branches.

"Tried to get in from the back road," Stud decided, "came up the lane and found himself in the barnyard. Just a tramp, I guess."

But Early Ann had her own opinion.

[64]

nights when they feel suddenly articulate after long months or even years of silence. These nights are better spent in talking than in sleep or even in love.

Stanley and Sarah Brailsford went up to their room with a lamp. A cool wind was blowing from the lake rustling the old lace curtains at the window. Stanley set the lamp with its brightly polished chimney, neatly trimmed wick, and glass base filled with kerosene (in which the lower end of the wick floated like some pale, peculiar fish) upon the jig-sawed walnut bureau with its cracked mirror, and tatted bureau runner.

The lamp light emphasized his gigantic proportions, projecting his huge shadow on the walls and ceiling, lighting one half of his strong face and leaving the other in darkness. He took off his number eleven shoes, red and white cotton socks, and coarse blue shirt stained at the arm pits. He yawned enormously.

Quickly, with little movements almost shy, Sarah Brailsford unfastened her gray-sprigged percale waist and skirt. She took off her shoes and stockings as though she were ashamed to have Stanley notice that the shoes were cracked, misshapen, and run over at the heel, the black lisle stockings one great mass of careful darns. Before she removed her undergarments she slipped her nightgown on over her head and worked beneath the gown unfastening her patched unmentionables. Sarah wished she could have pretty bloomers like the ones on the Barton line. Stud could afford a new thrashing machine that year but no new clothes for the family. She hung her garments neatly on a chair.

[65]

Unlike his careful wife, Stud Brailsford threw off his clothes and strode about the room in his long knit drawers like an early picture of John L. Sullivan if you overlooked Stud's graying hair. He stood at the window looking out at the moonlit night, enjoying the tickle of the wind in the heavy damp mat of hair on his big chest. He scratched luxuriously with big blunt fingers, then turned and rubbed his back against the window frame, yawned, blew out the light, kicked off his drawers, and threw himself naked upon the cool sheet.

The slats of the bed creaked and groaned under his weight, and Sarah, as always, held herself a little rigid so that she would not roll down into the hollow he created. By morning she might be snugly against him, but that would come about slowly through the relaxation of sleep during the long night.

[66]

Moonlight flooded the room glinting upon the flaked mirror, the oval chromos in walnut frames on either side of the dresser, the big white and gold washbowl and pitcher on the warped wash-stand, the tin chimney-hole cover gilded and decorated with a romantic landscape, the enamelware pot underneath the bed. It came sweetly over the face of Sarah who in this light was beautiful even at the age of forty-three.

Outside there were night sounds: a hoot owl whooping from Cottonwood Hill, a farm dog howling at the moon, and far away across the lake an answering howl from some equally miserable brother in sorrow. The curtains billowed, moths brushed against the screen, a bittern croaked in desolate flight over the marshes.

For some reason they did not fall asleep. Perhaps it was the excitement of the man in the barn lot, perhaps thoughts of the morrow when they would have been wed for twenty long years.

"I've been wanting to ask you for weeks now...."

"What, Sarah?"

"About Early Ann, could she possibly be ...?"

[67]

"Be what?"

"I hate to say it, Stanley. You've always been so good to me."

"Aw, Sarah, why don't you tell me what's eating you? You ain't afraid of me, are you?"

"No, not afraid, I guess. But maybe you won't like it. Maybe it will hurt you somehow.... But I must tell you, I can't go on without. Is Early Ann your daughter?"

"My daughter!" He sat up straight in bed and turned toward her. "Well, now. It ain't altogether impossible."

"Oh, Stanley! I knew it, but I wouldn't let myself think it. Only, why did you tell me?"

"I don't know what's eating you, Sarah. I didn't say for sure she was my daughter. I only said...."

"You said it was possible...." She was crying quietly now.

"Well, a young man sometimes...."

"I know. I couldn't be so stupid or so blind as not to see young men all around the country.... But who was she, Stanley? No, don't tell me."

"I—I don't remember her name," Stud faltered. "But I did notice that Early Ann's face was like...."

"I'll treat her real nice," Sarah said, addressing the cracked ceiling above her. "I'll treat her just like a daughter. We always did want a daughter, Stanley."

[68]

"Aw, Sarah," he said. "Aw, Sarah, I'm sorry." It was almost the first time in twenty years that he had told her he was sorry for anything. It was the first time in ten that he had tried to soothe her with his big, rough hands. She could tell that he was trying not to sob, and a sudden flow of pity came out of her heart for the great, clumsy fellow beside her whom she loved.

"I can forgive you," she said. "I can forgive you real easy."

"It ain't an easy thing to forgive."

"I do forgive you now for being unfaithful, Stanley."

"Unfaithful," he said, astonished. "I don't know what you mean."

"But you just said...."

"How old is the girl?"

"Eighteen, she claims."

"But, don't you see, Sarah. Then she can't be my daughter. That would be *after* we were married."

"You mean that never after we were married, not once, not even one time...." There was such a note of joy and relief in her voice that the big man beside her was moved to find her mouth and kiss it. [69]

"What a silly woman!" he said. "What a silly girl!" He laughed deeply, and suddenly hugged her until it hurt. She was laughing and crying by turns and kissing him as she had not since their honeymoon. She rubbed his beard the wrong way, thus giving him one of the most delectable sensations he could experience. And he kissed the nape of her neck as he used to years ago. A cock crowed in the moonlight and Stanley struck a match to read the time.

"Why, it's after midnight, Mother. It's the nineteenth of June, and we've been married twenty years."

[70]
[71]

BOOK TWO

[72]
[73]

CHAPTER V

1

On July 1, 1913, Greece delivered an ultimatum to Bulgaria. The G.A.R. turned out en masse for the bicentennial of the Battle of Gettysburg. The enfranchised women of Illinois promised a new era in politics, while deans of co-educational schools raved against the immorality of the Tango. Big panama hats were all the rage, with ankle length wrap-around skirts and frilly summer blouses. Girls ratted their hair and read Ford joke books to boys who sat beside them in the hammock holding a box of chocolate creams. Pitcher Brennan of the Phillies socked Manager McGraw of the New York Giants. The berry market was firm with a strong tone in swine. In Chicago the coroner promised he would do something about the crazy joy riders who had killed twenty people in Cook County during June.

But in the home of Temperance Crandall and her mother nothing else really mattered because now Temperance had a huge, careless, messy man to run after and do for. [74]

If you had told her six months before that she would stand for a man and a cat in her best bedroom Temperance would probably have tongue-lashed you out of her front door and down the street. But there they were, sleeping all day and out all night. A scandal and a caution if you asked Temperance. She wanted to blurt it out to the whole town but for once she held her tongue.

It was a trial and a tribulation, a plague of boils which would have tried the patience of Job. The Lord could testify that Temperance Crandall had the disposition of an angel and the patience of a saint, but even she could be driven only so far and not one inch farther.

"He throws his dirty socks and underwear all over the room," she told her image in the mirror. "He misses the porcelain spittoon a foot."

She yanked the kid curls out of her hair with a viciousness which added a tenth of an inch to the diameter of the bald spot which was starting on her crown, twisted her hair into a hard knot at the nape of her neck and punched in hairpins with fury.

The filthy man and his dirty cat in her very best brass bed, sleeping under her nicest patchwork quilts, dirtying her monogrammed pillow cases drawn taut and smooth over her finest goose-down pillows. [75]

"My land-a-living, why do you tolerate the brute?" she asked her scowling image. "He's the seven plagues of Egypt, and that's a fact."

Biting her upper lip touched with the lightest possible suggestion of a black mustache, she pulled upon the pink strings of her corset until the black enamel eyelets threatened to rip completely out of the fabric, hastily donned a corset-cover, thrust her legs into a luxurious pair of lisle hose, snapped on garters hanging from the corset before and aft, pulled them a bit too tight, added a pair of stiff white petticoats to her ensemble, then plunged like a swimmer into the mass of calico, which, when jerked into position over her gaunt posterior, assumed the general outlines of a dress.

For a moment a buttonhook clicked on the beady jet buttons of her high shoes; there was a snap as she pinned the chain of her pince nez to her under-developed bosom. A touch of rose water now and the effect was complete.

Down the stairs she pattered while the grandfather clock in the hall boomed five of a bright July morning. Beyond the hall window the bachelor buttons wore their brightest blue; the four o'clocks were just closing for the day, but the pastel trumpets of the morning glories, the sun-loving zinnias and climbing roses were at their best in a garden which had not changed its general appearance in forty years.

[76]

She banged the hall door at the foot of the stairs with a violence which shook the light-timbered house and sent down an avalanche of soot around the parlor stove-pipe, marched out the kitchen door and down the garden path to the not unromantic privy covered with grape vines and ivy.

Later as she washed in a graniteware washbowl in the kitchen sink she ruminated upon the disastrous day she had taken a man into her house. He had come up the long board walk which led back through nearly one hundred yards of trees and shrubbery to the hidden clapboard residence of the Crandall women.

"Heard you had a room to rent," he said, vaguely. "Nice and quiet back here." He looked about him with a dull but satisfied air and stroked the big black tom cat in his arms.

"It's three dollars a week, mister," Temperance had said severely. "That's just for bed and breakfast. I don't do no laundry, and I don't like cats. Besides there hasn't ever been a man in my house, and I don't think there ever will be." She banged her feather duster against the peeling porch rail.

[77]

"That's all right," the man said, "Tommy and I ain't particular."

"Oh, so you ain't particular," she mocked. "Well listen here my good man. You'd better be particular when you crawl into my best bed."

"I don't want to sleep in your bed. I want to sleep by myself."

"Don't get sassy or I'll bat you over the head with this feather duster," Temperance warned.

"All right, Sister," the man said. "All right. Are you going to rent me the room or ain't you?"

"I'll think about it," Temperance said. "Come in and have a chair but leave that filthy cat out of doors."

"It ain't a filthy cat," the man said. "Maybe in another life this cat was your grandmother." Temperance shuddered. The man stooped to come in through the door—his cat still safely in his arms. He slouched comfortably into a red plush easy chair and put his head back against the lace doily.

"Three dollars a week in advance," Temperance said. "And mind you I have a sick mother who mustn't be disturbed. She's bedfast and hard of hearing, and she'd probably have a relapse if she knew you was in the downstairs bedroom."

[78]

"I get you, Sister."

Why, Temperance Crandall! Whatever are you thinking of? the good woman asked herself while showing the man to his room. Why not tell Mother? Evil woman! Nasty woman! She bustled about the parlor flicking the dust from the gilded cat-tails, ferocious crayon portraits of her ancestors, and the model of the Washington Monument made of ground-up paper money.

But if Temperance had any idea she could deceive her mother she was rudely disillusioned the next morning when she took toast and poor-man's tea to the invalid.

"Temperance," shouted the old lady. "You've got a man in the house."

"But, Mother. How did you know?"

"Smelled him," said the old lady.

"Smelled him?"

"Tobacco and shaving soap. I'm no ninny."

Luckily her mother wasn't shocked, said that what they needed around the house was a man. But Temperance on due consideration decided not to tell the neighbors.

She remembered that Brailsford Junction was one bee-hive of gossips. They would be sure to suspect the worst and add a few details of their own. How Temperance hated gossips!

[79]

Not that everything wasn't Christian and proper with her mother there every moment for a chaperon. And not that Temperance would carry on with her roomer the way Mabel Bentley had done with that railroad man. Nevertheless some women she knew had evil minds. She didn't trust them.

She patted the sofa pillows embroidered with "God Bless Our Happy Home" into an engaging fullness of ripe curves, straightened the doily on the easy chair, and singing in a lusty off-keyed falsetto the touching strains of "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," rustled off to the kitchen to fix her boarder a tray.

My how the morning had flown. Eleven o'clock already. High time he was up and eating breakfast, the lazy, filthy brute and his dirty tom cat.

Such a big strange man. Huge, simply huge. And with a ferocious appetite. She thought he would eat her out of house and home. It cost more than three dollars a week to feed the big lummoX.

"Our hearts in Christian love," warbled the busy woman as she hastened about the old wainscoted kitchen, banging the spiders and pots loudly enough to wake the dead. He certainly should be up by this time. Almost noon, imagine! And Temperance up and busy since five o'clock.

[80]

Three boiled eggs, five slices of toast, a whole pot of coffee that held at least five cups, oatmeal in a bowl, cream and sugar, and, well, she might condescend to put one of those rambler roses from over the back stoop upon his tray. Not that he would appreciate it, the filthy, lazy thing. He'd better pay his board bill today or she'd throw him out like dishwater.

There, that tray looked nice. Altogether too nice if you asked Temperance Crandall. She whisked off her apron, looked into the kitchen mirror for a second, pushed her hair this way and that, sneaked a pinch of flour out of the flour bin and dusted it on her nose with the corner of a dish towel, then assuming the air of Fox's entire conference of martyrs picked up the tray for prompt delivery.

2

Joe Valentine was dreaming about a cat he had for a mascot in the Spanish American War, about the time the little tabby scratched hell out of the colonel, when the sharp rat-a-tat-tat at his bedroom door awoke him from his slumber. He pulled the covers up around his chest for the sake of modesty, thus exposing his large left foot. He buttoned the two top buttons of his summer underwear. [81]

"Come...."

"It's just me," said Temperance Crandall. "I hope I ain't intruding upon your privacy." She hesitated a moment on the sill, then boldly entered the room.

"Just a bite and a sup," said Temperance. She crossed to the bed to set the tray upon her roomer's unaccustomed lap, then screamed in terror as the black cat rose out of the covers like a bad dream, spitting and scratching.

"Horrid thing," she cried. "Evil, nasty thing. You'll be the death of me yet, you two."

She took in the room with one scornful glance: the bedspread thrown in one corner, the big shoes on her cedar chest, his clothes in a heap on the floor, a cigar-stub in her hand-painted porcelain pin tray.

"Ain't you ashamed to be so messy?" she cried, picking up his trousers gingerly and hanging them on the closet door-knob, putting his muddy shoes on the floor and rapidly folding the bedspread, catching the fold in her teeth but never ceasing to talk. [82]

"All right," said Joe, his mouth full of toast. He pulled a buttery and delicious central tidbit from the slice of toast and fed it to the cat.

"Cigar ashes everywhere," Temperance said. "You're just driving nails in your own coffin with that filthy weed ... nicotine ... plain poison ... look at the yellow on your fingers."

"All right," said Joe.

"Why don't you be a man?" said Temperance. "You're big enough, the Lord knows. Why don't you get a job? Gadding about all night."

"Why don't you go do your knitting?" Joe asked, wrapping his large mouth around an entire boiled egg.

"Well, I like that," said Temperance Crandall, placing her hands on her hips and glaring at the man in her best bed.

A pretty figure he cut: hair down in his eyes, a two-days' growth of beard on his face, a nose that went straight for an inch or two then detoured to the right, large loose lips, big even teeth stained with tobacco, heavy biceps that were somehow flabby, shoulders of a tired coal-heaver. The great toe of his large left foot which was protruding from beneath one of her best quilts twitched excruciatingly against the second toe of the same foot. The bottom of the foot was covered with yellow calluses. [83]

"You make me nervous," Joe said. He took another cup of coffee for a bracer.

"After the way I've slaved for you," said Temperance; "Done all your washing free, fixed your meals at any hour of the day or night when all you should get is breakfast. You're just a filthy brute."

"All right," Joe said.

"No appreciation. Never a thank you."

"I didn't ask you," Joe said. He ripped the center out of another slice of toast and offered it to the cat, then slowly sucked the butter from each of his fingers.

"Either you pay your board and room today or else ..." she threatened as she flaunted out of the room, slamming the door behind her. She found that for the first time in months she was dangerously near to tears, and she brushed these obvious symbols of weak, womanly emotion out of her tired eyes with angry knuckles. She just wasn't herself lately, she observed.

"I ... I'm going through the change of life," she thought, "and Lydia Pinkham ain't doing me a bit of good."

The thought suddenly came to her, as she slumped down beside the window unnoticed of the lush summer just beyond the screen, that there would never be any children for her. And for just a moment she let herself be sentimental and think of Timothy Halleck, of sleigh-rides through the frosty starlit nights, of Virginia reels, and box sociables, of poetry she had written as a girl, and again of Timothy Halleck, who never knew, and would never know to his dying day that Temperance Crandall sat by her front window morning and night to see him pass. [84]

From upstairs she heard the demanding voice of her mother whom she had taken care of uncomplainingly since her twenty-second birthday.

"Coming," she called.

3

What did you want, Joe Valentine? Where were you going? Wandering through countless nights, your cat on your shoulder!

The big man slouched through the alley behind Brailsford Junction's Main Street. He passed the litter of broken boxes, barrels and piles of rotting fruit in tangled shadows behind the Dingle Brothers' general store where bats swept low between the wooden buildings. His feet knew the cinders, and his eyes, like the cat's, could see in the dark. [85]

He skirted the cubistic mountains of empty beer cases behind the Golden Glow Saloon, the heap of manure behind the livery stable, the jumble of wrecked parts and rusting bodies piled at the back door of the Ford Garage.

A dirty stream bubbled in the ditch that paralleled the alley, and a huge black rat bloated with young leapt up the ash pile almost level with his face. The cat stiffened like some electric thing, lashed his tail and sprang. The rat went back on her hind legs waving ineffectual little feet exposing her vast soft belly. A shadowy struggle, a high-pitched squeal of terror. The man laughed shortly; slouched on.

He passed the Ritz Royal Hotel smelling of hash and strong disinfectant; the barred back windows of the First National Bank; the empty ice-cream freezers and cartons behind the Tobacco City Ice Cream Parlor.

All closed, dark and deserted, no laughter or singing, the player piano still. From the high clock tower of the old town hall the chimes spilled the half hour. Far away across the river a train whistled, rumbled over the railroad bridge, was muffled by the intervening hills, rushed dangerously upon the town screaming and clanging, swept westward, died away in a distant whisper of steam and clicking of wheels which lasted in the imagination long after the night was once more silent and deserted. [86]

The air was cool now after the long hot day. A breeze from the river valley to the east of the town swept through the alley stirring little whirlpools of dust. The air was suddenly filled with the cool breath of rotting oak leaves, dank river odors, algæ, fish and flowing water.

He thought of a shack among the willows, a box-car home on the river bottom; his mother coming home early in the morning, lighting the fire as though she had not been gone for nearly a month. Her dancing slippers were covered with mud, her party dress torn. The big man who was his father turned in his bunk, swore at the woman, went out banging the sagging screen door.

"Look Mother," Joe whispered, "we got a new kitten while you was gone."

River smells, fishing catfish down at the narrows, sitting all night on the sandbar listening to the "tick, tick," far down underneath the water, the splash of muskrats, the little crying noises made by raccoons in the cornfield on the hill, the whip-poor-wills, and the hoarse cry of night birds following the river. [87]

Oars dipping into the water, boats being pulled up on distant sandbars, the mosquitoes and the damp chill, the lordly battle with a sixteen pound catfish in the dark. Bad whiskey, later on a woman.

He breathed the night air wistfully. Never again a woman's arms about him. Lost, deprived, utterly alone. He was not aware of these thoughts as words. He did not think in words but in odors, colors, sounds, and a blind hatred which he could not understand. Cheated, haunted by some unknown thing, filled with sudden fear at a footfall, foolhardy in the face of actual danger. A man who could no longer call himself a man since that knife fight with a nigger in Rockford, Illinois.

He came at last to the one light burning in the alley, a dim green globe above a door (three steps down) between two walls of sweating brick.

The twenty-six legitimate saloons serving the eighteen hundred inhabitants of Brailsford Junction were closed at this hour. Only the blind pig offered solace to the Dago section men, the farm hands making a night of it in town, and Hannah Leary who had spent half her life looking up at ceilings of empty box-cars on the siding and at stars above the Brailsford Junction Cemetery. [88]

Joe hesitated at the top of the stairs, drinking in the aroma of the place: sweat, rot-gut whiskey, women. He ran the tip of his tongue over his full, loose lips; felt in his pocket for change.

A big man stumbled out of the door at the foot of the stairs, started forward, saw Joe blocking the way, and roared in a drunken voice—

"Getahelloutamawayou."

Joe did not move.

The man lunged forward, fell, leapt to his feet and charged up the stairs—

"Outamawaygodamnya."

Joe tipped him over with a right to the chin. At the bottom of the stairs once more the man drew a knife and waited his chance. Joe took a pair of brass knuckles out of his pocket, slipped them onto his hands, pressed the buttons with his thumbs and little knives appeared on each knuckle. He slashed at the air breathing deeply and feeling fine. He pranced on his toes.

"Come on up," he offered.

The other was more careful now, almost sober. He advanced a step at a time watching his footing, his knife drawn down and back for the uprip, the belly slash. He stank of whiskey and bad teeth. [89]

Joe let him reach the top of the stairs before he aimed a kick at the knife arm. The man dropped the knife, howling with pain, his arm half paralyzed. He threw caution to the winds, swung with his left, and tried to close. Joyfully, methodically, Joe slashed him to ribbons with the brass knuckles.

The man went down screaming and writhing while Joe ran lightly up the alley. He met the cat who sprang up and settled himself in the crook of Joe's arm. The cat was heavier now and licking his jowls with contentment. Together they dodged through the dark streets and alleys, between houses, and through the Crandall garden to the back door.

"Time we were leaving this dump," Joe told the cat.

A moment now for throwing his clothes and other few belongings into a knapsack, another moment for mussing up his bed as though he had been sleeping there all night, back to the kitchen door again where Temperance Crandall stood in her long white nightgown, a lamp in her hands.

He reached in his pocket for three dollars and put it on the kitchen table beside the door.

"Keep it," she said.

"Ain't that what you wanted?"

"I don't want your money."

He left her standing there looking at the three dollars on the table. He swung off down the dark street with his cat and knapsack, struck out into the country along the back roads which ran among the poor hill farms to the northeast. The farmhouses were dark. The cattle slept in the pastures. Hay was cocked in the fields and the mingled smells of drying alfalfa, timothy, red clover, and sweet clover came to his nostrils.

Like that early morning he had come along the country road and stopped to pump himself a drink at the farmhouse, and the woman had come out. That was before the fight in Rockford.

He swung along the dark roads talking to his cat, watching the sky with its sprinkling of large stars. He did not feel so lost since his fight. He almost remembered what it was he was searching for.

And so he came at last to the deserted hunting lodge on Lake House Point early in the morning with the sun on the whitecaps of Lake Koshkonong and the gulls screaming greedily about the cliff.

He looked across the bay to where Stud Brailsford's barns and growing fields lay sunning under the shoulder of Cottonwood Hill.

[90]

[91]

[92]

CHAPTER VI

1

For days now the main topic of conversation on the Brailsford farm had been the merits of the various makes of cars (a much more intriguing subject than the tramp who had been discovered half dead near Bad Pete's blind pig in Brailsford Junction). They talked Imperials, Elcars, Cuttings, Speedwells, Marions, and the swank new Garfords with the single headlight. They discussed pro and con the new-fangled gas and electric self-crankers. Some members of the family wanted Prest-O-Lites while others were eloquent for electric. Each had his own ideas concerning which of the marvelous creations had the most stylish lines.

Stud himself liked the notion of a big powerful White Steamer. He said with the price of gasoline going up every month a White would soon be a real economy. Besides you could go sixty miles an hour in a steamer.

"Sixty miles an hour!" cried Sarah, throwing up her hands in dismay.

"Shucks, that's nothing, Ma," Peter said. "I can go sixty on my motorcycle."

"Yes, and you'll break your fool neck some day," said Early Ann. "He pretty near went off the Busseyville bridge with me on behind last night."

"Peter, you must be careful," his mother said.

"Tattle-tale," said Peter. He kicked Early Ann's shins under the table, and she kicked back.

"Me for an Imperial," said Gus. "They're twenty years ahead of their time and the classiest looking buggies you ever hope to see."

But in the end, of course, they bought a Ford, and a second hand one at that, with brass braces in front and a figure that only an owner could love. It stood up in the air like a lumber wagon, and you could hear it coming for a mile. It boiled over at eighteen miles an hour, but that was all right because the worse they boiled the better they went. Stud shined the brass radiator until it glittered like the gilded roof of Solomon's Temple. Sunday was spent in tinkering with the magneto, the lighting system, and the carburettor—that was what finally wrecked the Sabbath day. You had to hold your thumb just right in cranking the thing to avoid a broken arm, and when the engine finally decided to perambulate the whole body shook like a dish of crab-apple jelly.

Stud had the appearance of a circus giant cramped over the steering wheel. He had difficulty in manipulating the trio of pedals with his large feet, and the idiosyncrasies of the spark and gas kept him guessing, but he whooped it up and down the road like a youngster with his first bicycle, and Sarah held on beside him, game as a Red Cross nurse in the face of inevitable death. Sarah purchased a linen duster and motoring veil. Stud bought himself a pair of motor-goggles

[93]

[94]

and a linen cap which he wore like Barney Oldfield with the visor in back. The entire family grew suddenly sensitive to Ford jokes.

Unfortunately, farming, even in those halcyon days, was not all driving the Ford; and so despite races between Peter and Stud,—the motorcycle versus the tin lizzy,—platonically midnight excursions by Gus in the borrowed motorcar, and thrilling family forays about the countryside, work went on as usual about the farm.

Crops were better than could have been expected. Some parts of the great Middle West suffered floods in the spring of that year and drought in the late summer, but on the Brailsford farm rains and sunny weather were neatly interspersed. The pumpkin vines opened their yellow flowers in corn which was waist-high by the fourth of July. The moisture kept the tobacco from spindling up too soon; it spread wide leaves of velvet green in rows which went as straight as arrows across the fertile north twenty.

[95]

Stud's Jersey heifers, sleek Poland China shoats, and Shropshire lambs looked like blue ribbon material down to the last little orphan. A lively pair of twin kids had the family captivated with their antics. At the age of six weeks this pair of baby billy goats were leaping about the shed roofs like veritable young chamois. Sarah discovered four beautiful new hybrids among her gladioli; and her chickens—Plymouth Rocks and Leghorns—might have stepped right out of the pages of the "Country Gentleman."

It was true that Sarah felt tired these days, and that Ulysses S. Grant, the great Poland China boar, was acting particularly vicious, but on the whole the farm was running like clock work.

Almost before the Brailsfords realized it the grain had all been cut, and the thrashing crew had descended in a hungry horde upon the farm. Some of the oats went sixty bushels to the acre, the wheat nearly forty.

What a time they had with the thrashers! The womenfolks from all over the country came to help with the baking and cooking. Country kids for miles around rode Admiral Dewey and his patient wife, took turns in carrying water to the men, slid down the hay rope, begged for cookies, played pomp-pomp-pullaway and run-sheep-run.

[96]

The teen-aged boys, after work in the fields, wrestled and boxed, not always in fun. The teen-aged girls, who helped their mothers as little as possible, watched the boys and giggled.

Out in the fields and at the thrashing machine the men labored in the hot, sticky atmosphere with barley beards in their shirts and sweat in their burning eyes. They pitched bundles of grain onto the wagons, pitched them off into the thrashing machine; they drew water for the steam engine and shoveled coal in under the boiler; they carried the great sacks of grain—which poured from the shoot, winnowed, clean, and plump,—and dumped them into the big bins in the granary.

They marveled at Stud's fine new red and silver thrashing machine with its blower which could send the golden straw into a pile at any point he wished. They looked forward to following this beautiful machine up and down the valley.

[97]

In Sarah's kitchen the hot and perspiring women fairly tumbled over one another in their efforts to prepare for the hungry men. They stewed chickens by the dozen, fried thick slices of ham, made brown ham gravy, boiled pecks of new potatoes, baked pies and cakes and opened cans of pickles. There was nothing fancy about the fare they served, but it was ample.

They were jovial, catty, good-natured, cross, polite, or rude as the spirit moved them. They dropped the "sistering" and "Missusing" of the church suppers and called each other plain Mary, Meg, Bert, and Cissy. They had a perfectly grand time for all their complaining.

And when the dirty men burst into the kitchen, joshing and pushing one another over chairs, pouring well water down one another's neck, splashing and crowding at the sink, and asking the women why they couldn't rustle together a little food for the real workers, the women thought of nothing but feeding and humoring the pack. If a man proved too obstreperous, however, these Amazons were thoroughly capable of forcing him to eat the extra food for which he was shouting, until at last he had to cry "enough," grinning sheepishly at his defeat, while his fellows jeered and taunted.

[98]

Against their better judgment, and in thorough contradiction to their pre-conceived distrust of Early Ann, these women were forced to admit some merit in the Sherman girl. They noticed how hard she worked in Sarah Brailsford's kitchen, how, although she kidded with their men-folks, she showed practically no inclination to lure them into the haymow, and how, above all, she was a friendly girl and not at all stuck up about her good looks.

Good looks she undoubtedly had, the men admitted as they lay about the lawn during the hour of rest after their big dinner. They complimented Stud upon his taste in hired girls, and suggested that it was no wonder Peter took her for rides on his motorcycle.

"She'll be riding a motorcycle herself one of these days," Peter said. "She's tomboy enough. I'll bet she could lick most of you guys in a wrastle."

"Been wrastling her much, kid?" the men wanted to know. "She looks like good wrastling."

Peter flushed. He had never thought of Early Ann as a sweetheart. He had been thinking all morning about Maxine Larabee, and how he hoped she would drive in at one of the farms where he was in charge of the big thrashing outfit. Stud had told Peter *he* could be thrashing boss that year and take the fine new machine all over the countryside. It would be wonderful to have Maxine hear him giving orders and directing all the men.

[99]

Maybe Bud Spillman would come up with a sneer on his face right while Maxine was there, and Peter would knock his block off. Nothing could be sweeter.

"I'd like to wrastle that girl," one of the men was saying. "I'll bet she'd make good wrastling."

During the past few weeks Sarah had tried to be particularly kind to Early Ann. She had

noticed how the girl had listened to her manner of speech and tried to imitate it, how she had dropped many of her "ain'ts" and "them theres," and was taking pains to set the table nicely. One day Sarah had shown her some of her battered text books left over from distant academy days. Early Ann had taken them to her room and had painfully waded through several of them during the long summer evenings. She had even asked Sarah to show her the notes on the organ and had practiced faithfully at her scales.

In matters of personal appearance, however, Early Ann had a flair which the older woman lacked. She had a way of doing her hair, of wearing a flower or a ribbon which made her beautiful even in an apron. But in matters of tidiness and cleanliness she learned much from Sarah. She brushed her teeth more often now, and every evening, to the tantalization of the hired man, bathed in the back pantry before she went to bed.

She actually worshiped Mrs. Brailsford.

"You're ... you're wonderful, Mrs. Brailsford," the girl had told her one afternoon when they were alone in the kitchen fixing supper. "It just seems like you're the kindest thing in God's world. I wish I *could* be your daughter like you said."

2

When the bins of barley, wheat and oats were full to overflowing and the thrashing crew had moved on to the Bussey farm, Stud found that work was slack for a moment, and he decided to take a little journey.

He filled the gasoline tank of his Ford from the big, red barrel mounted on sawhorses beside the milk house, poured two quarts of thick green oil into the engine, and emptied most of a sprinkling can of water into the ever-thirsty radiator.

Four new tires were lashed to starboard and port. Pumps, jacks, kits of tools, tire shoes, and extra inner tubes were stowed beneath seats and in tool boxes. Stud had lunch enough for a two-weeks' journey, and at Sarah's insistence a sweater, raincoat, rubbers, and three changes of shirts and underwear. He felt as adventurous as Daniel Boone.

Sarah waved until he was out of sight down the road, and returned to the kitchen biting her lip to keep back the tears. While Stud, racing along at twenty miles an hour through the dewy August morning, felt as fit as a fiddle and as cocky as a bantam rooster.

He noticed the fine new circular barn Ed Underwood was building upon the very site where two previous circular barns had been struck by lightning and burned to the ground. Just flying up in the face of providence to build another of those queer-shaped cow sheds on the same spot. He craned his neck to look over the high board fence at the Foote place where all the machinery stood rusting in the front yard. He could see that Cyrus Babcock's bull wouldn't furnish much competition for his Napoleon at the county fair that year. Cy took too much stock in this scientific stuff his son was learning at the University of Wisconsin. Science was all right in its place but—

"You gotta have a feel for raising cattle same as for playing the fiddle," Stud told the passing scenery.

He was genuinely glad to see that the Widow Morrison had a fine stand of tobacco and that One Arm Bert Howe had the best corn in miles. It was pretty tough about Bert and his tubercular girl.

The creek at Busseyville, meandering through its wide valley, looked so inviting that Stud drove his car in among the willows, kicked through a meadow of deep grass and dusty milkweed bloom on which the big, brown butterflies were gathered, and came at last to the deep hole at the bend where he had often gone swimming as a boy.

There was not a farm woman in sight, so Stud stripped, took a running dive, and sported in the cool, clear water. How fine it felt! He blew and bubbled, tried to swim to the bottom of the twelve foot hole and pick up pebbles, opened his eyes under the water and grabbed for the silver minnows with his big hands. Out again with the wind and sun upon his body! Into his clothes and back to the car where he sampled a pair of chicken sandwiches and drank noisily from the artesian well beside the road.

Another ten miles of hard driving over wagon roads which followed the ridge to the west of the lake, then into Fort Atkinson and on up the Rock River Valley. On either side spread the fertile black acres which had brought thousands of eager immigrants from across the sea. The sons and grandsons of the pioneers were thrashing grain and sweating in the fields.

Stud marveled when he thought how rapidly he was traversing these miles which would have taken days by ox-cart. Not a blowout, as yet, and not a broken spring. No trouble with the magneto, carburettor, or the engine.

Until he was twenty miles from home Stud would not let himself think what it was which had brought him on this wild goose chase. It sobered him when he remembered.

From the moment on that June night when Sarah had asked if Early Ann might be his daughter the simple mind of Stud Brailsford had been troubled and perplexed. He wanted to ask the girl outright what she knew about her mother but was embarrassed before her. He tried to recall each of the girls with whom he had had secret pleasure before he married Sarah. Suddenly it dawned upon him that Early Ann Sherman was undoubtedly the daughter of Tess Bedermier,—Tess, the girl with whom he had once gone swimming naked in Lake Koshkonong in the days when to even speak of a girl's legs was to risk an eternity in hell. It was a Sunday evening at that. He was supposed to be driving her to the evening services at the Methodist Episcopal church in Brailsford Junction.

[100]

[101]

[102]

[103]

[104]

Tess, the lovely and lost, the foolhardy and independent, the talk of the Ladies' Aid and the scandal of the countryside. She had been Doc Crandall's stylish hired girl during the last two years of the veterinarian's life. Of an age with Temperance and Sarah, Tess had been the most run-after girl in town during the years of 1890 and '91.

Stud had not told Sarah of his discovery, nor why, when looking into Early Ann's face, he was suddenly shocked (seeing the living, breathing image of Tess).

But could she be his daughter?

Maybe she was older than she would admit. If she were twenty-one, for instance....

He tried to analyze what it was that disturbed him and decided that if a man sees his daughter growing up from babyhood, perhaps helps to tend her, plays with her, teaches her to ride horseback and to swim; if he watches her sprouting up to young womanhood, sees her put up her hair and wear her first long skirts, then he can think of her as his daughter and not be troubled with her pretty ways and her fresh young body. [105]

But if it should happen that a father did not see his daughter even once in her life before she became a young woman, then he might be disturbed by her prettiness, seeing in her, her mother of years gone by.

It was not like Stud to be worrying about anything except possibly the crops and the stock. He took the world as he found it and found it good. He lived moment by moment and day by day and rested on Sunday.

But here was a new and troubling element in his life; a worry, and a dumb, sweet misery which he carried about with him, so that sometimes Gus would have to ask him twice if he had ordered more bran, or if he intended to send for that new belt for the gas engine in the milk house, before Stud was aware Gus was speaking.

He thought of it as he went down into the woods with Shep to bring home the cows, and he thought of it while he was topping the tobacco, breaking off the budding white flowers to keep the plants from spindling up and going to seed. He carried his troubles with him into the barns and the haymow, to the table and to bed. [106]

Was it likely that she was eighteen and not his daughter? Or was she, perhaps, twenty-one, and the child he had got on Tess Bedermier that moonlight night they had bathed in the lake and afterwards gone back among the willows?

He did not know where Tess had gone that autumn. She had quarreled with him and moved away from Brailsford Junction. He wondered if she had ever married, and if she were living now. He thought he would never be satisfied until he found her and asked about Early Ann.

But to find her would be a job of clever sleuthing for which Stud felt too big and clumsy. He called on his friend Timothy Halleck in whom he placed utmost faith. Halleck went to Madison to look for a marriage certificate. He came back puzzled and no wiser.

He wrote to the only Bedermier he knew, a second cousin of Tess's living in Chicago, but found that this distant relative had not heard of Tess in more than twenty years.

Then he went to Old Mrs. Crandall who seemed inclined to confide a secret, but changed her mind and shut her mouth like a clam. At last, having had a real inspiration, he visited Mrs. Marsden, Early Ann's erstwhile landlady, and asked about the girl's mail. [107]

"Don't you dare insinuate I look in other people's envelopes," squeaked Mrs. Marsden. "But I did notice the three letters she got were postmarked from Horicon, Wisconsin."

This was the only clew which Halleck could offer his friend, but it was sufficient.

As Stud followed the Rock River toward its source he watched the stream grow smaller and smaller. He passed through Jefferson and Watertown, neat towns in the midst of prosperous country. On every side were the white-washed milk houses and bright red barns of thrifty German farmers. The corn rustled, windmills whirred, and bob-o-links scattered their liquid notes. He passed busy creameries, a brewery, and a cross-road store, and still his chariot wheeled on.

But as he climbed a hill giving a view of the rich valley and miles of winding river, a tire expired with a long, soft sigh; and it was an hour later after a mortal struggle with tire irons, pump, jack, and obstinate valve-stems, that he was on his way again. Soon after the engine coughed and died. He was out of gas.

Courteous drivers of that all but forgotten era when a Ford was a fraternal emblem more binding than a Masonic button drew up with boiling radiators and shrieking brakes to shout, "Need a lift, friend?" It was one of these cheerful fellow motorists who drove him three miles and back for a gallon of gasoline. [108]

He stopped over night at a farm where the big German farmer and his apple-dumpling wife would have been ashamed to even think of charging for their hospitality. He was impressed by the clean barns and white-washed trees, and spent several hours with the genial farmer examining his Holsteins.

The next day he drove on to Horicon.

He came at last to the desolate marshes which seem to stretch interminably across the wide valley of the upper reaches of the Rock,—endless channels and pools, acres of billowing swamp grass, millions of yellow pond lilies, red-wing blackbirds chattering in hordes upon the swaying cat-tails.

Asking for Sherman, for Bedermier, and for Sherman again and hearing this and that disturbing bit of their history until at last he knew the whole sordid tale, he made his way along one of the most desolate roads he had ever traversed. Huts among the gravel hills bordering the marsh were over-run with chickens, pigs, and dirty children. Pot-bellied women came to the door [109]

to see him pass.

He lost his way during the afternoon and had to retrace his path over ruts and ditches which threatened at every moment to break a spring. Toward sunset he arrived at the deserted Sherman place and drove in through the stumps of a once generous orchard where wheel-less wagons, overturned plows, and rusty cultivators vied with sagging fences to make the spot as uninviting as can be imagined.

There was scarcely an unbroken window left in the ramshackle farmhouse; the windmill was down. Plantain and burrs had crept into the barnyard, and the fields were giving way on every hand to brambles, sumac and willows.

So this was where Tess Bedermier had come, pregnant with his child, to live with the only man who would take her in, to bury that first child in an unmarked grave, and to bear Bung Sherman three children out of wedlock, of whom Early Ann alone had survived. Here was the desolate farm on which Early Ann—no child of Stud's—had grown and blossomed, and it was here that Bung Sherman had died in a drunken brawl with a duck hunter.

After Bung's death Tess had gone off with a man who stopped at the farm for a drink of water, a man whose name was unknown to the neighbors and whose only distinguishing characteristic was that he carried in the crook of his arm a large black cat. Two weeks later Early Ann had gone to join them. [110]

As Stud watched the sun setting over the vast marshes he thought he felt a cold wind blow across the barn lot, and the hair stood up on the nape of his neck. The kildeers called that a storm was at hand. Clouds rolled up from the horizon and distant thunder rattled like wheels on a far bridge. Then, suddenly, the sky was black and over-cast. The lightning flashed close at hand, —jagged blue, reflected on the dark pools and the channels. The trees bowed low, the dust whirled, and rain came down over countless miles of marsh land.

[111]

CHAPTER VII

1

When Stud returned from Horicon there was little time to think of Tess, Early Ann, Sarah, or any other woman for the farm was up to its ears in preparation for the Rock County Fair. Three magnificent stud animals were to be entered: Napoleon, the bull; Teddy Roosevelt, the stallion; and Ulysses S. Grant, the boar.

Napoleon, the dark and silky black Jersey bull, whose pedigree covered several pages and included such ancestors as Imperial Delight, sired by Royal Edward out of Queen of the Channel Islands, looked every bit an aristocrat. National and international prize-winning blood ran in his veins. Mothers and grandmothers with amazing udders were listed on his family tree, and two or three of his bovine ancestors had sailed from the Isle of Jersey on a cattle boat named the *Mayflower*. With massive head and fiery eyes, he seemed to challenge the whole world to battle. In reality he was as gentle as a lamb and loved to be scratched behind the ears with a corn cob. [112]

As for Teddy Roosevelt, the Percheron stallion, with arching neck and melodramatic proportions, undoubtedly the blood of medieval chargers ran in his veins. Sired by the pride of Normandy, and himself the sire of scores of the finest Percherons in Southern Wisconsin, he walked as though a golden armored youth were on his back and plumes behind his ears.

Finally there was Ulysses S. Grant, the mettlesome and vicious Poland China boar, who was growing more temperamental daily about his highly commercial amours. Stud often threatened to turn this valuable piece of breeding machinery into second rate ham and bacon, for as sure as some admiring farmer came ten miles with a seductive and highly amenable sow, Ulysses would sulk in his private bath of mud, capricious as a Roman emperor. There was no accounting for his taste which was usually plebeian.

But to the judges at the county fair, Ulysses was annually the sweetest thing on cloven hooves. Manicured and groomed as he always was, his pink snout pointed at a most entrancing angle, his tightly curled tail and glowing bristles the picture of health and good breeding, this porcine Apollo usually won in a walk. [113]

"All personality and no character," was the way Stud fondly put it.

Although a cholera epidemic was rampant that summer, and Gus with pardonable pessimism predicted that Ulysses would contract the disease from sheer pig-headedness, no such thing occurred. He did acquire a singular case of temperament, however.

Like the other animals which were to be entered Ulysses was brushed, beautified and pampered for days preceding the fair, and in former years he had seemed to enjoy not only the extra corn but the effortless scratching. This year, however, he squealed with rage whenever Stud entered the pen, gleamed wickedly at his trainers out of small, blood-shot eyes, and more than once tried to annihilate his owner.

The boar's private quarters were closed off from the main pig pen by a stout, narrow gate through which one entered at his own risk. One day when Stud brought Sarah down to observe

how beautifully the boar was pointing up, he started into the inner pen and was charged by the infuriated animal. Brailsford took one step backward, tripped over a trough, and falling struck his head on a stone. The next moment the boar was upon him. [114]

Sarah seized a five-pronged manure fork which was leaning against the fence and drove it with all her strength into the shoulder of the boar, turning him at the crucial moment.

Stud leapt to his feet, one arm bleeding, and despite Sarah's cry of warning plunged barehanded into the fight. He kicked the great ringed nose again and again with his heavy boot, grabbed a large hind leg for a brief but titanic struggle to drag the beast back into his pen, at last drove him through the gate with a piece of two-by-four.

Gus and Early Ann came running. Sarah managed to use the pitch fork effectively from the top of the fence. But Stud motioned them all away. This was now his fight and he wanted to handle it alone.

To their cries that he come away Stud turned a deaf ear. Years of pent up fury went into the struggle. The boar was blind with rage yet respectful of the giant with his heavy stick. The man was filled with righteous anger against this stubborn beast and ready for a showdown. They fought and maneuvered, charged and leapt aside, the man shouting incoherently, the big animal squealing and tearing up the earth. [115]

"I'll fix the bastard," Stud cried. His shirt was ripped. His muscles knotted and gleaming.

Again and again the boar charged and went crashing into the fence as Stud scrambled to safety. And time after time Stud brought the two-by-four crashing down between the maddened animal's eyes.

At last they were both too tired to fight. The boar lay squealing and panting in impotent rage across the pen, while Stud, proud that he could walk from the arena, smiled as he climbed the fence.

"Well, there's one blue ribbon gone to holy blazes," said Gus. "But by golly it was worth it."

2

The fight with the boar had two immediate consequences: Sarah suffered a nervous collapse, and Ulysses S. Grant, although carefully tended, proved conclusively that he would not be prize-winning material for the fall of 1913.

It was the veterinarian who was called first and later the family doctor.

"Now don't you worry about me," Sarah said. "I'm all right. You just take care of Ulysses and go on getting ready for the fair. I don't need to go this year." [116]

"Why, I couldn't go without you, Mother," Stud said, "and ... and without Ulysses."

Old Doc Carlyle, the vet who had tended Ulysses ever since he was a small, squealing red suckling, shook his head sadly. He had a genuine fondness for the vicious old boar and had always claimed that he would make blue ribbon material.

"You hadn't ought to beat no dumb animal like you beat Ulysses," he told Stud. "It ain't Christian."

The less efficient and far more callous general practitioner, Doctor Whitehead, who came to see Sarah, took her pulse with his inch-thick stem-winder and as usual lost count at eleven. He took her temperature with a thermometer which had not been properly sterilized in three years, and looked down her throat with a spoon.

He pooh-poohed her fear that she had been internally injured during the fight with the boar.

"Probably some female ailment," he insisted, shaking several harmless pink powders onto papers which he folded deftly and left upon the dresser. "You ain't bad off. You'll be up and around in no time."

Sarah watched a spider making his web in the corner of the ceiling. She continued to watch him long after the doctor's Ford could no longer be heard down the road. [117]

"Spin your pretty web," she told him. "I won't brush it down. I'm just going to let myself be sick. I reckon I got a right to lie back and be sick one time in my life."

3

Stud tried to straighten his back at the end of the row. The sweat poured from his temples and the grizzled creases of his stubbled cheeks. The pain went in wide, flat bands down the heavy muscles on either side of his spine.

It was weakness to show this pain. One must laugh, throw down the shining tobacco hatchet beside the shagbark hickory, snatch up the heavy, brown-earthenware jug, tip it deftly over the shoulder and slosh long, cool swigs of cider down one's parched and dusty throat.

"Uuufff, Uuuggg," said the big tobacco harvester, wiping his mouth with the back of his sleeve and spitting into the dust. "Sure tastes good, don't it?"

"Fair to middling," said Gus.

"It's darn good cider," said Ansel Ottermann, "even iffen it is full of rotten apples and worms and such." [118]

"Don't need to drink no more than you like," said Stud, holding the jug just out of Ansel's reach. "Is it good cider or ain't it?"

"It's good cider," Ansel said.

The almanac had predicted early frost that year, and although the entire family scoffed at almanac predictions Stud had cleaned and sharpened his tobacco axes, suckered his tobacco plants, cleaned out the sheds and gathered together a crew.

On the stroke of six one hazy blue Indian summer morning the noisy crowd of farmers and men from Brailsford Junction began the backbreaking labor. Up one row and down the next went the sweating workers. The left hand grasped the stalk, the right sent the tobacco hatchet cleanly through the heavy-fibered stem. Flash, flash went the bright steel in the sunlight.

"Great crop this year," said Vern Barton. "Just heft them stalks."

"Too darned good a crop," growled Gus. "I got a crick in my back like a he-dog in April."

"That's what you get gallivantin' around nights," said Stud. The men laughed.

"How you do talk," said Gus. "You know I ain't took a girl into a haymow for twenty years." [119]

"How about a cornfield?" Stud asked.

Laths tipped with steel were spudded through the butt ends of the stalks—five or six plants to each lath. The tobacco was then loaded upon wagons and hauled to the sheds. Men climbed nimbly among the poles hanging the heavily laden laths, tier upon tier. The hot, suffocating air was pungent with the smell of green tobacco.

The thick, moss-green leaves were soft and heavy as velvet to the touch. Later they would be brown and brittle. Still later, when to the vast excitement of the countryside "case" weather began, they would be fine and pliable as thin brown leather.

The swallows had gathered long weeks before, and, as though at some invisible signal sent along the thousands of miles of wire on which they were mobilized, had left over night for the south. The fields were strewn with yellowing pumpkins and swelling hubbard squashes, knobbed, burly, and deep green. The first ducks were dropping in from the north. Soon it would be time for the Rock County Fair.

As fair week approached, however, Stud announced his decision to remain at home. He declared that since Ulysses and Sarah were both laid up, Peter still thrashing, and Early Ann of necessity tied to the housework, he too would pass up the event of the year. [120]

He looked over the fence into the pen of Ulysses S. Grant and shook his head sadly.

"We're just a couple of darned old fools!"

"Oink," said the boar.

"First fair you and me have missed in five years."

The boar sighed gustily and lay down in his consoling bath of mud.

Stud helped Gus give the bull and stallion their final beauty treatments, loaded the big bull into the wagon, and hitched the Percheron on behind. Early Ann gave the bow of blue ribbon on the stallion's tail a final twist and pat. Stud slipped Gus a twenty dollar bill. And off went the shining green wagon, its bright yellow wheels looking like huge sunflowers as they flashed in the sunlight. The tug links played a merry tune, the stallion whinnied gently, while Stud and Early Ann cheered the debonair farm hand on his way.

"You better bring home some cups and ribbons," Early Ann called after the retreating cavalcade.

"Trust me," shouted Gus, waving his derby.

The girl and man stood as if entranced until they could no longer hear the rattle of the wagon, and until the dust had settled on the roadway. [121]

4

Sarah continued to feel ailing despite pink powders, herb tea, and a highly advertised variety of vegetable compound.

The work was thrown completely upon the shoulders of Early Ann. Stud would have been blind not to have noticed how well she bore up under this burden and how gladly she cared for Sarah. The girl could cook as fine a meal as he had ever tasted, and be as gay and fresh after hours over the cook stove as when she came clicking down the stairs with the chamber pots at four in the morning.

She never asked Stud to kill chickens for her. She went to the chicken house herself, chased down a pair of plump friers, and chopped off their heads without more ado. These she scalded, plucked, singed, drew, washed in cold well water, rolled in egg and flour, and fried to a crisp golden brown. It made Stud's mouth fairly water to think of those chicken dinners: hot biscuits, mashed potatoes, lots of chicken gravy, coffee with Jersey cream, and hot mince pie for dessert. [122]

Such roasts, fries and stews! Such homemade bread, dumplings, pies and cakes! Her cooking was better than hotel dinners, Stud averred. There was a tang to everything she cooked and everything she did.

Stud had never before been completely aware of the work a woman must do around a farm. He had rather thought that Sarah was having the best of the bargain all these years. Now, perversely, he was conscious of every task a farm-wife must perform.

He noticed how from Monday morning when she started pumping cistern water for the week's washing, until Saturday night when she put over water for baths Early Ann never sat down to rest. He noticed particularly how clean she kept the house and milk house; how shining and sweet-smelling were the milk pails and separator; how the meals were always on the dot and the

dishes cleared away promptly after the meal. She canned, churned, carried in cords of wood.

Stud found himself wondering if there were not some way to heat flatirons save over a roaring cook stove. Somehow the mountains of dishes seemed unnecessary.

But Early Ann did not complain. She sang as she worked.

[123]

Watching her now, as with hair and dress blowing she fed five hundred snowy chickens, Stud told himself she was a "darned good hired girl and would make some lucky fellow a good wife."

The phone rang two longs and three shorts the following Saturday. It was Gus calling jubilantly from Janesville. He had squandered a quarter to inform the family that Napoleon was not only the greatest *Jersey* bull in the county, but, according to the judges who awarded him a silver loving cup, the greatest bull of *any* variety. Teddy, the stallion, had won a blue ribbon, while Sarah's raspberry preserves had been judged the best in their class. Peter's pumpkin was three pounds and four ounces heavier than its nearest rival, and Gus had won a kewpie doll for Early Ann by hitting a nigger baby with a baseball.

Stud could hear the subdued exclamations from every kitchen on the party line.

"But I didn't get nothing in the wood-chopping contest," Gus complained. "I got licked seven-ways-for-Sunday by a lady from East Fulton."

The family celebrated with homemade ice cream eaten in Sarah's bedroom.

[124]

That evening at dusk a storm arose. Lightning quivered along the horizon, and a wind sprang up. Early Ann, throwing her apron over her head to protect it from the spattering drops, hurried down to the old mill to get in a late brood of chicks raised by the fierce old one-legged hen who every summer stole her nest.

As she reached the doorway of the mill Joe Valentine grabbed her around the waist and put a large, hairy hand over her mouth. He pulled her into the dark building and began talking to her in a hoarse whisper.

"You're my step daughter," he said. "You're coming with me."

She bit his fingers in fury and cried out for help, but the moaning of the wind and the rush of the rain muffled her words. She forgot all the nice ways and pretty talk she had learned from Sarah Brailsford and kicked and fought and swore.

"I'll scratch your eyes out, Joe!"

"You're my girl. You ran away from me." He nursed his bitten hand.

"I'll tell everybody how you treated Maw."

"Come along now." He tried to pull her toward the door, then stopped. "I was good to your maw," he said.

[125]

"You killed her," the girl cried. "You made her take in washings, and ... and worse."

"You can't teach an old cat new tricks."

"You killed her," Early Ann shouted.

"Shut your mouth, you little bastard," Joe said.

He tried to kiss her and she began to fight again. He slapped her face methodically a dozen times.

"You're my girl," Joe said. "You're my step daughter, and you ain't eighteen yet."

"I am eighteen," she panted. "Let me go, Joe." She sunk her teeth into his arm while he screamed.

"Now you're going to get it," he said. He ripped her dress and bent her backward until she thought he would break her back. Then she went limp and did not fight any more, but nothing happened. A moment later he flung her away.

"You ain't any good to me, either," he said with a great, wistful sigh. She saw his face in a flash of lightning. There was no lust there nor anger. A cat rubbed against her leg purring loudly.

She went out past the man who did not try to stop her. She hurried through the rain toward the hollow of lantern light which was approaching.

[126]

"Are you all right, Early Ann?" Stud cried. He came running and held up the lantern to look at her. He saw the torn dress and disheveled hair.

"Who was it?" he cried. "Where is he?"

She shook her head.

"You know, but you won't tell."

"Yes."

He pushed past her angrily and went into the mill holding the lantern high. He snatched up a piece of iron pipe and plunged through the dark rooms shouting. A cat rubbed against him, a big black fellow. Stud heard laughter out in the storm, hurried out into the rain, but could find no one.

In the kitchen once more he threw off his wet jacket, hung up the lantern, took Early Ann by the shoulders and tried to make her meet his eyes.

"You're not my daughter," he said. "I ... I could...."

"No, Mr. Brailsford, please!" She was crying quietly.

He let his hands drop from her shoulders, turned and looked out through the black, dripping window toward the lake. He could hear the waves rushing up on the shore and breaking, the wind soughing through the elms and maples. He thought of Sarah lying pale and weak on her bed, and he thought of the robust girl standing in the lamp light behind him.

[127]

Very deliberately he left the kitchen and climbed the narrow, dark stairs to his bed.

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER VIII

1

In the early autumn of 1913 a French flyer looped the loop to the amazement of an incredulous world. More troops were ordered to the Mexican border. In Chicago the Bon Ton girls were the last word in burlesque. Smart horses wore bobbed tails and well-cropped manes. Forty-four thousand eight hundred tons of dynamite tore away the barrier at the Pacific end of the Panama Canal while Shriners cheered. Prime favorites on the piano rolls were "Good-bye Boys," "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine" and "You're a Great Big Blue-Eyed Baby." Wheat sold at around ninety cents in Chicago with hogs close to nine dollars. Aunt Martha of the Needle Notes column found that one could cut whalebone to any desired length by warming it first before the fire. German and American yachts raced off Marblehead, and Lieutenant Governor Thomas Morris of Wisconsin told an attentive audience that never again would his fair state become a coaling station for Wall Street, nor a water tank for the Rockefeller and Morgan interests.

[132]

But to Peter Brailsford, impatient with his youth; torn with fear of God, of hell, and of sex; romantic, inexperienced, wistful; anxious to get ahead in the world, yet essentially unworldly; intolerant, rebellious, headstrong; filled with hatreds, jealousies, and a morbid interest in death; saddled with concepts of duty, patriotism, and courage which were fatal to millions of his generation; big, clumsy, lovable; obsessed with the idea that he was only a country boy; almost as supersensitive as Sarah and nearly as lusty as Stud; fine, intelligent, mechanically minded, and above all a considerate and good hearted young fellow....

To this healthy but unhappy product of English ancestry, Methodist theology, and the American public school system the tumult of the outer world meant little compared to the tumult within his brain.

Now, striding along Main Street in greasy coveralls, glowering at the Saturday afternoon sun through eyes dark with anger, kicking defiantly through drifts of yellow elm leaves, flaunting rebellion and stubborn pride at every step, he was just a kid coming home from work at the "Trailer" to those he met; but to himself, Peter was quite naturally the center of the Universe.

[133]

He would show the world and particularly Mike O'Casey and the front office gang what sort of a boy they had greasing their trailers. He would invent some new and world-revolutionizing trailer which would make them pop-eyed with amazement. And when he had been made vice-president of the company he would call Bud Spillman into his office and dismiss him with great dignity.

Peter told himself that he was talking nonsense and acting like an unbroken yearling. He knew that he should be the happiest boy in the world and should thank God for his good fortune. Nevertheless as he elbowed his way through clots of gossiping farmers whose rigs and Fords lined Main Street he knew that he was far from being happy.

Maybe life in town wasn't so perfect after all. Perhaps after he had taken a crack at this trailer job.... But no. He would never go back to the farm. Not even if he could be thrashing boss every year with twenty men under him. He would stick it out greasing trailers until the day he died. Bud Spillman or anyone else couldn't whip Peter Brailsford.

[134]

He stopped before the Bentley Brothers' Hardware store, irrepressibly drawn by the beautiful stag and pearl-handled jack-knives in the window, and remembered the jack-knife he had stolen from a boy at country school and how he had known that God had seen him steal the knife, and how for days he went in constant dread that God would strike him dead for his sin. He still had an overwhelming desire for pearl-handled jack-knives. He remembered how he had thought that eternal damnation was not too great a price to pay for that shining knife, which was as cool and smooth as slippery elm between his fingers.

Looking in at the hardware store window cluttered with milk pails, muskrat traps, fish poles, pitchforks and spades he suddenly caught sight of his own offensive image in the glass: ears that stuck out on either side of his head like sails, a thatch of dark, unruly curls which would never stay combed, big brown calf's eyes which might have graced a Jersey heifer, and pouting lips.

He wondered how anyone could look so ugly. "What you need," he said irrelevantly, "is a good swift kick in the pants." Undoubtedly, with a face like that, he was getting more than he deserved from a most generous world.

[135]

He began to count his blessings, unconvinced but hopeful. He was away from the farm at last, had freedom, a job, and a room in town. His third weekly paycheck of twenty-two dollars and fifty cents was in his pocket. He had a girl who some day might give him a kiss, and a dapper little employer, Mike O'Casey, whom he admired beyond all power of expression.

Still he was miserable.

The very eminence of O'Casey was deflating to Peter. How could a country lout with big feet and clumsy red hands ever hope to reach such pinnacles of success? The president of O'Casey Trailers was not only a man of the world, a fine mechanic, an inventor of proven genius, a baritone soloist, and a buck and wing dancer. He was also the most popular and best dressed man in town. Peter bet that nobody in New York's Four Hundred was better looking or a classier dresser.

The boy leaned against the hitching rail and sighed as his hero went roaring past in his big red car with cutout open. Peter wished that Mr. O'Casey would turn and nod, but no such miracle occurred.

Peter asked himself what he was mooning about. But he knew all too well. Bud Spillman, out of all the hundreds of thousands of possible men, had been made his straw-boss at the "Trailer." Peter remembered once when he was going to kill Bud Spillman. He had waited for hours behind the Methodist church with a piece of pipe. He had stood all that he could possibly stand from the bully, had been kicked in the stomach when he was down, had been insulted in the showers before all the other boys, had had his clothes tied in knots in the locker room, and his tennis shoes filled with tacks.

[136]

He had stood in the cold behind the Methodist church waiting for Spillman who usually took that short cut home. He had envisioned just how the bully would look when he lay there pale and dead, and he had planned all his own actions: what he would do if he were chased, and where he would jump the freight which was to take him from Brailsford Junction forever. A wishful little song from childhood echoed and re-echoed in his brain:

*"Moonlight, starlight,
I guess the bears ain't out tonight."*

But Bud had gone home another way.

And now, out of all the possible fellows in Brailsford Junction, Bud Spillman had been made his straw-boss. Bud, his rival for Maxine, and his instinctive enemy since childhood.

[137]

Ruthaford S. Spillman, Bud's father, and owner of the biggest livery stable in Brailsford Junction had been one of the twenty backers who had put up money with which O'Casey had built his factory. It had been a snap for Bud to get the job.

Peter's adventure had started so auspiciously that he could scarcely believe this new turn of events. He had come steaming into town sixty miles an hour on his motorcycle, dressed in his best serge suit and wearing his brightest tie. After an hour of agony and anticipation he had been ushered into the awe-inspiring offices of president Mike O'Casey.

"Know anything about trailers?" asked O'Casey.

"No, but I could learn."

"Is that your motorcycle out in front?"

"Yes sir."

"Can you take'er apart and put'er together?"

"You're darned right I can ... I mean, yes sir. And I know all about Fords and thrashing machines."

Mr. O'Casey smiled at the serious, eager young man before him.

[138]

"I'm seventeen going on eighteen," Peter said.

"I guess you'll do, Kid."

Peter walked out, floating on air.

He started work the next morning and was temporarily assigned to the paint shop where a shipment of the crude semi-trailers of that day, based on the early Martin patents, were being painted a snowy white for a Chicago milk company. He was clever with a brush and soon acquired the knack of enameling and varnishing without leaving a sag or a brush mark. All went well until the second week when Bud Spillman came to work at the "Trailer." From that moment on Peter was miserable.

"So you wanted a job as a mechanic?" asked Bud. "I'll see what I can do."

Several days later Peter was transferred to the assembly plant where from morning until night he greased trailers and plant machinery. Bud promised to have him cleaning out toilets and spittoons by the end of the month.

To hell with all of them! Some day Brailsford Junction would wake up to the fact that Peter was a genius. They would go around telling anecdotes of his youth, and laugh about the time he quit school, told "Indian Face" Bolton where he could go, and tossed his school books into the creek. He would invent an "equalizer" to take the "whip" out of the action between car and trailer. He would make a half a million dollars and would live in a large house on Shannon's Hill with Maxine Larabee and their many children.

[139]

The day began to brighten all about him as he dreamed. The farmers and their wives looked more kindly, the girls more handsome and the men more noble. By the time Peter had reached the Brailsford Junction National Bank he was noticing how blue the sky seemed overhead, how bright the leaves, how keen the wood-smoke in the air. Not even the appearance of the prissy Mr. Clarence Bolton, principal of the Brailsford Junction high school of recent and unpleasant memory could take the sunshine out of this newly discovered Saturday afternoon.

Peter stopped to admire a brace of mallards which Hank Vetter the butcher was just taking from his Ford roadster. Hank said that in his opinion Mike O'Casey was a card and highly worthy

of the admiration of every young man in town. In front of the pool hall, men sat on the hitching rail watching the farm girls go by. Cats dreamed happily on piles of fresh vegetables in the grocery store windows. The loafers sitting on the steps of the cigar store spat idly at the wooden Indian.

[140]

In Peter's new frame of mind even Old Man Mulroy who was teaching his bow-legged grandson to say "God damn" before a highly appreciative male audience in front of the livery stable, was mildly amusing on this day.

"Dod damn," said the toddler.

The men slapped their thighs and guffawed.

Old Man Mulroy, drooling tobacco juice at the corners of his toothless mouth, grinned slyly.

A job in town. A paycheck in his pocket. The boy whistled gayly as he marched along.

He looked in over the swinging half-doors of the Red Moon Bar and felt that the time would never come when he would be twenty-one and could stand with one foot on the brass rail and drink with the rest of the men. A new and brilliant bock-beer billy goat was charging out of a sign on the back wall. A large red bull, and a superior cowboy rolling a cigarette with one hand advertised a well-known brand of cigarette tobacco.

Peter wished that he dared to smoke on the street. He wished quite violently that he could roll a cigarette with one hand like the superior cowboy in the picture.

[141]

He paused before the Palace theater where he examined the bright billboards displaying a serial queen poised in midair between precipice and precipice, another view of the same harassed young woman to whom the villain was touching a torch, while the hero of the affair looked on calmly from his rearing mount.

Life was very full and romantic, thought Peter Brailsford. He realized that he could see every movie that came to Brailsford Junction without making the least impression upon his nearly inexhaustible weekly stipend. He could even buy himself a new suit and some dazzling new ties.

A room of his own, no school work. He could skip church and Sunday School if he wished.

But no, he could not. A momentary cloud passed over his sunny landscape as Peter came abreast of the Dingle Brothers' General Store into which Temperance Crandall was just disappearing. He really liked the fussy creature even if she did make him go to church, knit him wristlets which he dared not wear and equally dared not refuse, brought him soapstones on chilly autumn nights, and saw that his flannel nightgown was warmed before the base burner before he went to bed. But he did wish that she would be a little less curious as to where he went evenings and what time he got in.

[142]

Rooms were scarce in Brailsford Junction with the "Trailer" booming. Peter had taken what he could get. He could abide the games of Authors and Flinch played with Temperance and her mother in the latter's upstairs bedroom, with the oil heater making weird patterns of light and shadow on the ceiling, and the kerosene lamp spluttering. But he did not like to be crossquestioned about Maxine Larabee.

"Maxine Larabee!" He rolled the syllables over his tongue and felt the excitement that even her name produced. How delicate and fine and unattainable she was. He felt like a great clumsy oaf beside her. He felt as awkward and shy as the boys in the milling stag corner at the Firemen's Ball.

He only asked to be allowed to watch her from a distance, to wait outside the library hoping that she would speak to him, or to wander disconsolately back and forth before her house, wondering which room was hers, wishing that some marauder might attempt to break in so that he could prove his love by cracking the fellow over the head.

Love-sick and divinely miserable he walked the streets at night listening to the wind in the trees, holding imaginary conversations with his beloved, devising tests and trials for his devotion. Sometimes the sweet pain of his affliction seemed more than he could bear. But when he had a chance to speak to her there was nothing of this he could express. He was apt to be rough and boisterous, or merely shy and dumb.

[143]

His emotions could scarcely have been phrased by Shakespeare nor captured in music by Beethoven, yet the most that found utterance was:

"Gee, you look swell tonight."

Coming upon her as he rounded the corner at Main Street and Albion he managed a loud and joyous greeting. But Maxine had no answering shout. She took one look at his greasy coveralls, his blackened hands and face, then turned away. She did not speak as she passed.

2

At the iron sink in the Crandall kitchen Peter Brailsford labored to remove the dirt and grease so offensive to the eyes of Maxine Larabee. He scoured with violence, grimly pleased by the stinging of his outraged skin and the smart of the soap in his eyes. He scowled at himself in the broken mirror, scrubbed his ears until they burned, wiped the last trace of his recent shame on Temperance Crandall's roller towel and was running a comb through his wet curls when Early Ann burst radiantly through the kitchen door followed by the less impulsive Gus.

[144]

"Early Ann! Gus!" cried the young fellow.

"Peter! Peter!" cried the girl. "I've inherited a farm. We'll all go to the movies."

"Not really?" said the astonished Peter as Early Ann danced him in mad circles about the kitchen.

"Really," said Early Ann. "And it's been sold, and I've got the three hundred dollars above the mortgage."

"Look out," cried the hired man. But his warning came too late. They had jarred the lamp from its shelf, and it fell with a crash scattering glass all over the kitchen floor.

At this inopportune moment Temperance Crandall returned from shopping. She had been cheated two cents on eggs, sniggered at by the pool hall gang, and despite two trips the length of Main Street had not caught so much as a glimpse of Timothy Halleck. Now she discovered her kitchen strewn with glass. Early Ann had her hat over one eye, Peter's shirt tail was out, and Gus was studying the floor. [145]

"I didn't mean to," said Gus. "I was just hunting for some matches for my pipe."

"Didn't mean to," mimicked Temperance. "Didn't mean to. Well you'd just better get busy and clean up that mess."

"Yes, mam," said Gus, looking around for broom and dustpan.

Early Ann giggled. Peter tucked in his shirt tail. Temperance Crandall whisked off shawl and bonnet, donned an apron, clattered the griddles and stoked the fire preparatory to getting supper.

"You're Sarah's hired girl, ain't you?" she asked over her shoulder.

"I'm Early Ann Sherman."

"When your maw used to work for us...." Temperance began. Then catching a murderous look in the kitchen mirror she changed her tune. "Well now, you and Gus had better stay for supper," she said. "There's plenty for all."

"No," said Early Ann. "We're eating at the Ritz Royal this evening. I've inherited a farm." She pulled her coat about her in an Anna Held gesture, adjusted her hat, tilted her lovely chin and started for the door. "Come along, Gus."

"Oh, stay," said Peter.

"A farm!" said Temperance. [146]

"Yes, a farm," said Gus, bent double with the dustpan and feeling surly.

"Nevertheless," said Temperance, "you'd just better stay for supper. What would Sarah ever think if I didn't feed you? Take off your coat, Miss Sherman. And Gus, you can dump that busted glass out on the ash pile."

Smiling again, Early Ann tossed her hat and coat over a chair, tied an apron about her waist, and with the uncanny instinct of one woman in another woman's kitchen began to set the table and to help get supper.

Watching the girl, Temperance sighed. She felt old and tired today. She had never inherited a farm, and never in her life had she had such a peaches-and-cream complexion as Early Ann's. She wished she might have a girl like this one to help her about the house. She supposed that Miss Sherman wouldn't be working any more now that she had come into property, and she put the question to the newly made heiress.

"You bet I'll go on working," said Early Ann. "I'm going to save my money. Except enough for some dresses and maybe a two-week trip to Chicago."

"Are you going to Chicago all by yourself?" asked the horrified Temperance. But Early Ann had made up her mind that she had told the town gossip more than enough. [147]

Gus returned from the ash pile and settled himself in the kitchen rocker with a copy of the "Modern Priscilla" replete with corset advertisements, while Peter loudly announced that if he were taking Early Ann to the movies he would have to shave.

"Shave," scoffed Early Ann. "Let's see...." She ran her fingers over the soft down which covered his cheeks.

"Pin feathers," she said.

Peter ignored her. He dipped hot water from the reservoir at the end of the stove, examined his beard critically in the mirror, and began to lather in a business-like manner. He wished that Maxine might see him now.

Upstairs, Old Mrs. Crandall lay in her bed wondering what it was that had shaken the house a few minutes before. After a time she smelled coffee and knew that there must be company. Temperance and Peter always drank tea for supper.

Deaf and bed-ridden, the old woman still kept in touch with the world with her other senses. Through a rift in the trees she could see the front of the Methodist Episcopal church and in through one of the basement windows. She knew what went on in the elderberry bushes to the south of the church, and she had seen a flash of Kate Barton's red dress through the blinds of the belfry last Thursday and had seen the pigeons and sparrows come out in dreadful fright. You couldn't tell Mrs. Crandall that Kate was practicing and Joe Whalen pumping the organ that afternoon. [148]

Mrs. Pat O'Toole looked to be about five months along with her ninth. Peter Brailsford, from the way he was mooning around, was certainly in love, probably with Maxine Larabee.

Unlike Temperance, Old Mrs. Crandall had no desire to reform mankind. She liked to hum popular music and feel the vibration. She enjoyed love-making, fights, and all the other delightful and rowdy actions of mortals. She lay in a world of almost complete silence, looking out wistfully at the young people going by, and the blowing autumn leaves; feeling the wind pushing against the house. She did not want to die. She wanted passionately to be alive next spring when the lilacs bloomed in her front yard.

The odor of frying meat came up to her from the kitchen, and finally the vibration of her daughter's feet on the stairs. She hastily brushed aside two big tears.

[149]

"Temperance," she scolded, "you're late with my victuals."

Supper that evening was of sufficient social importance so that Temperance covered the kitchen oil cloth with her red and white gingham table cloth, but not of a caliber which demanded the use of the gloomy dining room adorned with chromos of dead ducks, fruit, and fish; it was a function worthy of the Crandall cut-glass teaspoon tumbler, but scarcely a feast which necessitated the crocheted and paraffined napkin rings. Temperance brought out her tureen which she herself had painted with blue birds and daisies, but she used the bone-handled knives and forks rather than the silver plate.

"I hear there's been a man snooping around out your way," Temperance began after a hasty blessing, followed by a pan to plate service of fried potatoes, liver and bacon.

"No one you'd be interested in," said Early Ann, as saucily as she dared.

"Don't try to be funny," said Temperance.

Temperance had little luck in eliciting any information about the prowler or about Early Ann's farm. The conversation turned to the latest antics of Ulysses, and of his son Ulysses Jr., who was proving to be a chip off the old block, to Sarah's convalescence, the fall plowing, the hickory nut crop and the plans for a new silo. Not until the dishes had been cleared away and Gus had gone his chaste and solitary way did Early Ann begin to feel confidential.

[150]

On the way to the movies she was surprised to find herself telling Peter all about how she had inherited the farm at Horicon, about her mother, and a comic version of the latest Joe Valentine business. She claimed that she had beaten off Joe with a stick of stove wood and she had run him off the place.

"You don't need to worry about me," said Early Ann. "I can certainly take care of myself. I'll bet I can even lick you in a wrestle."

"I'll bet you can't," said Peter indignantly. "Any old day!"

3

Stud Brailsford and Timothy Halleck had been instrumental in getting Early Ann her small inheritance. Now Stud wondered whether he had been wise. Not that Early Ann had been spoiled by her riches. She was still the same rosy-cheeked, hardworking, saucy spitfire she had always been. She was still devoted to Sarah, Peter, Gus and Stud, and she announced quite passionately that she intended to live with the Brailsfords and do their work until the day she died. But now, added to all the other barriers which kept Stud from the girl, there was the fact that she was independently wealthy.

[151]

Three hundred dollars was not to be sneezed at in 1913. True, automobiles and mushroom-brimmed velvet hats smothered in ostrich plumes were rather expensive, but the lisle stockings worn by all the virtuous women of the period were priced at six pairs for a dollar; high buttoned shoes usually described as classy, nobby, or natty sold for two dollars a pair; and no woman dreamed of squandering more than fifty-nine cents on a pair of drawers, a corset cover, or a princess slip.

Free, white, eighteen, full of mustard and vinegar, and with three hundred dollars in the bank, the Brailsfords' hired girl was distinctly a person to be reckoned with. Her new clothes from Sears Roebuck were the talk of the party line.

And now, to increase Stud's worries, Early Ann was insisting on a two weeks' trip to Chicago. It was unheard of that a girl should make such an excursion unchaperoned.

[152]

It took less than six hours on the C., M. & St. P. to reach the sinful, brightly lighted metropolis on Lake Michigan; nevertheless Chicago was fifty years and a half a world from the muddy village of Brailsford Junction.

Chicago might rag; make fortunes in wheat, hogs, and steel; discuss atheism, Freud, and the early H. L. Mencken. But Brailsford Junction still attended barn dances and revival meetings. It lived by the laws of Solomon and Moses only slightly conditioned by the paganism of Omar and the invasion of the Ford.

These Junctionites lived by the crude practical joke, the rough and ready generosity of their pioneer grandparents, by gossip and by Jesus. They lived in a world of lamp light and lantern light, of full corn cribs and Sunday School picnics. Chicago was almost as remote as Mars.

Even Stud would have made the journey to Chicago with misgivings; and for an unmarried young woman to make such a trip was unthinkable. They all pleaded with her to be sensible.

"I'd never forgive myself," said Sarah. "It's up to me to keep you safe from harm. I'd worry myself sick every day you were gone."

"Never heard of a girl going off to Chicago alone," said Stud. "It ain't right."

[153]

"It's a big, wicked city," said Gus, knowingly. "I went to Chicago once for the Columbian Exposition. And by golly, the way little Egypt shook her ..."

"Sh-h-h," said Sarah.

"Well, I'm going," said Early Ann, "and that's that. But, Mrs. Brailsford, you mustn't worry for a minute. I grew up as wild as a chipmunk and I guess I can take care of myself."

"But why do you want to go?" Stud asked the bright-eyed girl, whose ripe young breasts under

her middy rose and fell with her breathing, and whose well-turned ankles under her sailor skirt were a treat to the eye.

"I've been wanting all my life to see Chicago," Early Ann said. "I never seen a tall building, or rich ladies riding in limousines, or the silver dollars in the Palmer House floor. I never seen Irene Castle dance, or heard Grand Opera, or had people wait on me like they do in a hotel."

"Yes, Early Ann, I know, I know," said Sarah, earnestly. "You got a right to have one good time like that in your life. Everybody has got a right to be happy just once."

"But I won't budge out of this house if you ain't well enough yet," said Early Ann. "You've only been up and around for six days, Mrs. Brailsford." [154]

"No, no, Early Ann. You mustn't stay on my account. I'm fit as a fiddle. It's only for your own good I want you to stay."

"Then I'm going tomorrow on the ten o'clock train," said Early Ann. She began to pack in the parlor while the family showered advice and ran errands.

Sarah kissed her goodbye tearfully. Gus was suspiciously misty-eyed as he carried her telescope suitcase out to the Ford, and Stud drove her recklessly to the station where he insisted on paying for her round-trip ticket and for a chair on the parlor car—a luxury he had never allowed himself.

"You hang on to your money, young lady," he said. "And don't make up to any city fellows."

He stood watching the train until it had passed out of sight around the curve, then leaping into his Ford roared back to the farm where he began two weeks of mad labor. He worked on the fences, set posts, strung shining lines of new barbed wire, pruned several trees and filled a small ravine with boulders. He trapped a weasel that had been getting his chickens, put barrels around his young fruit trees to save them from the rabbits. He sent for a new stump-puller, seductively described in the mail order catalogue, hoping to clean out the brush lot in the slack months which were ahead. [155]

One morning he noticed that the barns needed painting. He called in Mack Curren, who had finally given up hope of being a great portrait painter. Mack and his crew gave the buildings a new red coat visible for miles.

"Might as well be fancy and add white trimmings," Stud told the willing Mr. Curren.

Stud himself was hard at work on the new silo. He drove himself happily these days, and he drove Gus who was not so happy concerning his employer's sudden desire to move the world, to paint the farm from end to end, and to add a wing to the milk house.

Stud remembered to bring in frosty asters and goldenrod to Sarah. He told her that what she needed was a wild duck dinner, and he fixed himself a blind beside the lake and waited, watching his decoys.

The shotgun shells were heavy and cool in his hand. The long, clean barrels of his gun shone like blue fire when he looked through them at the sun. Not a speck of dust! Every part oiled and working like a seventeen-jewel watch. The carved walnut stock was as smooth as satin to his fingers, and the gun balanced perfectly as he threw it to his shoulder. [156]

He had carved the decoys himself from white pine and had painted the intricate markings from memory. He knew the glossy green head and bold coloration of the drake mallard, as well as the more modest hues of his mate. He was familiar to the last tail feather with the tones and patterns which distinguish canvasback, redhead, bluebill, widgeon, goldeneye, and black mallard. He could imitate the quack of a duck or the honk of a Canadian goose almost too well for his own safety.

Bright water bugs skimmed the quietly heaving surface of the lake. A muskrat with reeds in his mouth, his nose barely above the water, his tail trailing for a rudder, swam past the blind. Stud's live decoys anchored in the shallow water, preened, tipped for food, gossiped of the days when they themselves were free to skim southward ahead of the storms, bound for southern bayous.

Stud lay back looking up at the immensity of sky, never more deeply blue, he thought, than above Wisconsin in the autumn. He watched a flight of coots but let them pass; followed a wood duck with his gun but did not shoot. A hell-diver was playing among his decoys, and a couple of green-winged teal went by just out of gunshot, their wings whirring like toy windmills in a cyclone. [157]

"Nothing but a ruddy can outfly them," Stud observed, "and the ruddies fly so darned fast it's a wonder they don't catch fire."

Toward sunset the flight began in earnest, and for about ten minutes Stud banged away like the Federal gunboats before Vicksburg. He shot his bag limit without crippling a bird, waded out in hip boots to bring them ashore, and went singing home, loaded down with rice-fattened mallards.

One morning he crossed the field of wheat stubble stretching yellow and frosty on either hand and went into the brown woods to choose his trees for winter cutting. It would be good to swing an axe again, to take big white chips out of a tree, to hear it crash to the ground and settle with a sigh. It would be good to get on one end of a cross-cut saw again, to make Gus cry out for mercy as they sliced through three feet of oak. His big muscles yearned for the sixteen pound mall he used for driving wedges, a sledge which made the average man pant like a one-cylinder gas engine, but which was a plaything for Stud. [158]

At night he came in tired, soaked with sweat, but almost happy. Sarah noticed and was glad.

Fall, with the red of sumac and of hard maple, the leathery brown of hickory leaves, and the pale yellow of elm was upon the land. The leaves drifted in the brisk winds, and the wind sighed

through the pines of the front yard. The marshes turned to brown and almost overnight the muskrat houses sprang up in rough brown piles along the deeper channels through the grass. The orchard was a wilderness of ripening, fragrant fruit, yellow, scarlet and deep red. The house was banked about with shocks of corn. Five cords of wood were already sawed and split, and more would come out of the woods as the days grew colder.

Gus came running in from the mail box one morning with a postcard from Early Ann. It had a picture of a huge hotel where Early Ann was staying and in a large, girlish hand:

"Having a good time. Wish you were here!"

[159]

CHAPTER IX

1

In the Brailsford Junction Public Library where the youth of the town came to make love, look at classic nudes, peruse the stimulating success stories to be found in the Alger books, explore the jungles with Livingstone and Stanley, sigh and weep with the Victorian poets, wallow in Cooper, Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott and General Lew Wallace, and if special favorites of the Librarian to visit the restricted shelves where such infamous authors as Lord Byron, Walt Whitman, Anatole France and Theodore Dreiser languished in sin....

In this den of vicarious iniquity Peter Brailsford found companions more in harmony with his spirit than in the town itself, which just now was banking around its houses with manure, putting up storm doors, and getting out long underwear, fur caps, and mackinaws.

Here were Hamlets who wandered brooding and mourning even as Peter brooded and mourned. Here were flaming young women who spoke in well-rounded phrases to dashing, intelligent young men who really got somewhere in life. Here were Poetic heroes off on their tremendous Odysseys through wine-dark seas. Soldiers of Fortune easily subduing whole South American Republics.

[160]

Reading had been something of a chore while he was still in high school. Now he read for the joy of reading, everything he could get his hands on from Dumas to Ibsen and from Rider Haggard to Shakespeare.

Haggard's terrific tales curdled his blood and started him off on the chain of episodes in his own life which bothered his dreams. The great men who had stood beside his bed at night bringing their huge faces closer and closer until he awoke in a cold sweat; the fear of God which had made his childhood miserable, the early fear of railroad trains which during his fourth and fifth years had sent him terrified into the cellar whenever he heard the distant whistle and the clanging of the bell; night fears as when he had gone down into the woods to find a calf and had heard the stealthy whisper of some unseen thing passing through the deep grass; the fear of death and the absolute finality of damnation.

Other authors started other trains of thought in his mind: nostalgic, wistful, lonely thoughts of the time when he had been lost and his mother and father had come hunting him with a lantern. He had heard them calling far off through the rain-wet woods. They had wrapped him in a blanket and they had driven for miles in the horse and buggy until at last they were at home again; thoughts of his mother coming to tuck him in at night and how desperately he wanted her to come and how fearful he was that she might forget; thoughts of the picnic to which he was not invited and how he had lain beneath the lilac bush watching the other children going by with their picnic baskets. (Often he was homesick for the farm.)

[161]

But some of the things he read made him fighting mad, and others made him ambitious. This evening, waiting for Maxine Larabee, he had picked up a book on the Gypsies. A young Gypsy woman stepping from her van had given him what he thought was a tremendous idea....

Why not a camp trailer fitted up with every convenience for a traveling home? If Gypsies could live in vans so could a world of roving motorists. Here was the idea which would make him famous and which would cinch his progressive rise at the "Trailer." He wanted to shout his discovery to everyone in the room. He wanted most desperately to find Maxine Larabee and pour out his hopes and plans.

[162]

He could see just how the camp trailer would look. It would be mounted on a one-ton chassis. There would be two small windows on each side and one at the front end fitted out with screens and bright curtains. There would be a door at the back with steps which would let down. Inside there would be one bunk on either side which would fold up against the wall; a folding table; built-in, narrow cupboards and clothes press; a small coal-oil stove for cooking. He felt somewhat at a loss in designing the tiny kitchen. He would have to ask Maxine to help him with that.

It suddenly came over him that after he and Maxine were married they could take their honeymoon in one of his own camp trailers. He was sure that she would be an awfully good sport. He could see her helping to catch their dinner and cooking it over the camp fire. He took a pencil and paper from his pocket, began to sketch rapidly. Despite two years of mechanical drawing at the high school his fingers lagged behind his racing mind.

And now the sketch was finished. But where was Maxine? He was afraid that she would not come.

[163]

At eight forty-seven, however, there was a stir near the door. In a new fall ensemble with a hobble skirt that not one of the girls in the room had seen before, and which must have been purchased at some exclusive shop like Bostwick's in Janesville, the Belle of Brailsford Junction made her majestic entry. Cleopatra, or Helen of Troy, or Marie Antoinette could not have slain them more effectively. And, *mirabile dictu*, she was headed for Peter's table. She sat down directly across from the boy, who, despite his delight, experienced as always an empty feeling in his solar plexus, blurred vision, and cold sweat in the palms of his hands.

"Whatcha reading?" asked Maxine, sticking her gum on the under surface of the library table already plastered with dried chicle in geological strata running back half a decade.

"Uh ... uh ... a book on Gypsies."

"The dirty things," squealed Maxine. "Ee-magine going out in the woods like that with spiders and snakes and everything. They steal and have things in their hair."

"Aw, you're always spoiling everything," said Peter.

"Well, if I'm spoiling everything I'll just run along," said the girl.

[164]

"No, don't. Please stay," said Peter.

"You can walk me home," the girl said, smiling archly, "if you don't talk about Gypsies and horrid things like that."

"Can I walk you home?" Peter asked, his disappointment forgotten, his whole being an ecstasy of expectation.

"Sure, you can walk me home," Maxine said. "Walking a girl home don't mean anything. I let lots of fellows walk me home."

"Gee, Maxine. Gee, you're beautiful tonight."

"Did you notice the hobble skirt?"

"Did I notice it! How could I help but notice it?"

"I just coaxed and teased till Mamma had to get it for me."

"Gee, Maxine. You sure look swell in it. I guess you're the prettiest girl in Rock County."

"In Rock County?" asked Maxine, regarding him through large, offended eyes from beneath her coyly-tilted hat brim.

"In the world, I mean," said Peter, feeling his Adam's apple pressing uncomfortably against his high, stiff collar.

"Well, it's nine o'clock," said the girl, as the Librarian began banging Webster's Dictionary on her desk,—the usual signal for closing time.

[165]

They walked home together through the fall evening talking of everything except what was near their hearts. She took his arm at the crossing, and the small place where her hand rested was burning hot beneath his coat. There was a big harvest moon rising out of the elm trees from which the leaves were drifting down like large yellow petals. Their breath was white on the frosty air. Far overhead they could hear the honk of the wild geese flying south and the whistle of wings cutting the air.

They stood for a long time at the gate of the Larabee home whose windows gleamed invitingly. A smell of wood-smoke came from the chimney of the fireplace. The wind stirred in the trees.

"Well, ain't you going to kiss me goodnight," Maxine pouted, putting up her lips.

He thought she couldn't have said it. Nothing so wonderful could happen to a country boy. He hesitated, looking down at her loveliness, her lips a trifle apart, her eyes closed, waiting. His blood was singing a chorus through his temples and his ears rang with a strange music.

"Well," she said.

But he had waited too long. From the front door of the Larabee domicile came the booming voice of Mr. Larabee:

[166]

"Maxine! You come right in the house, young lady. It's after nine o'clock."

The clock had struck eleven before Peter Brailsford, tossing on his bed, remembered the camp trailer which was to revolutionize motoring, the beautiful little green vans, complete with running water, small kitchens, electric lights run from storage batteries, even curtains at the windows. He went to sleep dreaming of Maxine, of sweet revenge, and of his trailers.

2

A Hallowe'en party at the Methodist Episcopal church in Brailsford Junction was a social event of the first magnitude. The Epworth Leaguers excelled Salem witch-burners in striking terror into one another's hearts and upsetting usually sturdy stomachs. They put skinned grapes in one another's hands in lieu of cats' eyes, poured thick red fluid down each other's necks after having realistically cut the jugular vein with rubber daggers, they removed boards on the dark stairs to the organ loft so that one fell ten feet into a pile of leaves in the woodshed, burned each other with red hot poker which were in reality slivers of ice, and in general proved themselves worthy disciples of Torquemada. Unholy shrieks from belfry, organ loft, and song-book cupboard kept the girls mildly hysterical. No good young Methodist would have thought of missing the fun.

[167]

For days the entertainment committee had been decorating and ripping up the church. Half a

cornfield and a wagon load of pumpkins had been transported to the basement and arranged realistically around the pillars and in the corners. Red leaves, jack-o'-lanterns, miles of orange tissue paper, black cats, witches, and tubs for apple bobbing completed the effect in the dimly lit cavern where early on Hallowe'en the young people began to gather.

Peter arrived at seven-thirty wearing a cardboard pumpkin head but otherwise uncostumed. He wanted to parade his stylish new green suit, his tie which would have enraged a bull, and his oxfords with exaggerated bows. Young Brailsford was celebrating his two-dollar-and-a-half raise at the "Trailer" where he had gained the ear of Mike O'Casey with his invention and had been promoted to the role of super office boy in charge of making blue prints for the draftsmen.

Radiating pride and self-assurance he strode across the room toward the knot of Epworth Leaguers in the far corner. But as he approached he felt an electric discharge of uncordiality which could mean but one thing. Bud Spillman, who was holding forth to his coterie of pretty girls and local scions, had been jeering at his expense. Peter was a farm boy and definitely an outsider.

[168]

"My, my! Ain't you stylish!" said the erstwhile football hero, dressed for the occasion in Roman toga and laurel wreath.

"Take that back or I'll give you a poke," warned Peter, forgetting that he stood on sacred ground.

"All right, hayseed. You look like you was all dressed up for greasing trailers."

"Come on out in back and I'll show you."

"You might get your new pants all dirty," said Bud.

The crowd sniggered.

"What about your nightshirt?"

"Don't get funny or I'll make you laugh out of the other side of your mouth."

"I'll give you a leave," Peter said.

"I wouldn't dirty my hands fighting a clodhopper. Go clean your cowbarns."

"What about you?" Peter said. "Your old man runs a livery stable."

"Kick in his box car," the boys shouted to Bud, "poke him in the breadbasket."

[169]

"Anybody busted in your new shoes?" Bud asked, stamping on one of Peter's toes and spitting on the crushed leather.

Unwanted tears were welling up in Peter's eyes but his voice was brave and scornful. "I dare you. I double-dare you. You yellow Brailsford Junction smart Aleck!"

Then a minor miracle occurred. Maxine Larabee squealed, "Punch him in the nose, Peter. Knock his block off."

That was all the encouragement Peter needed. Dumbfounded but deliriously happy and filled with a soul-satisfying desire to beat Bud Spillman to a pulp he waded into the big fellow while the girls scattered screeching to view the fight from piano-top or chair, and the boys formed a yelling circle about the young battlers.

"Knock him for a gool ... cave in his shanty ... kick him in the belly," advised Bud Spillman's supporters. They also suggested that he beat Peter's ears off, flatten his beezzer and knock all his teeth down his throat. Forgetting the fact that they were in the presence of ladies and the Methodist Deity, these same young Christians remembered and used effectively all the forbidden four-letter Anglo-Saxon words.

[170]

More agile than his big opponent, lighter on his feet and faster with his punches, Peter slipped in and out with sharp slashing blows which bruised and cut the big football player but did not stop him. Bud's haymakers seldom connected, but when they did they carried the weight of a pile driver behind them.

They clinched, broke apart, flayed the air, drew a little blood, maneuvered about the basement knocking over shocks of corn and stumbling on pumpkins. Bud began to tire while Peter was still as fresh as a daisy. This change in probabilities did not go unnoticed by the ringside who one by one shifted their loyalties to the farm boy. Maxine in particular was cheering for Peter. Now they were all engrossed in telling their new hero just how to mutilate the winded Spillman.

Peter was slipping through the guard of the big fellow time after time. He gave him a final clip to the chin followed by a clout which sent Bud spinning and by accident landed him squarely in a tub filled with water for apple bobbing....

"Boys, boys! In the House of God?" cried the Reverend Mr. Tooton, who had entered at that moment. "Is that Christian? Is that the way Jesus teaches us to treat one another?"

"He started it," blubbered Bud Spillman who was struggling to get out of the icy water.

[171]

"Yes, and I finished it," said Peter. He walked over to where the Bully stood crestfallen and dripping, and added in an undertone, "Any more funny stuff at the 'Trailer' and I'll give you a real licking."

"I'm your friend," said Bud. "I always was your friend."

With the ice very thoroughly broken, and everyone at his hilarious ease, the fun began. Peter, a somewhat disheveled but happy ringleader, promoted charades, Blind Man's Bluff, Drop the Handkerchief, Skip-Come-a-Lou, and a version of the Virginia Reel which included elements of the Tango and the Bunny Hug. They splashed and shrieked while bobbing for apples, giggled as they stole kisses in the Den of Horrors and behind the piano, sang at the top of their lungs while playing Four in a Boat and Going to Jerusalem, and ended a perfectly wonderful evening with pumpkin pie and coffee.

Bud Spillman left early.

And that night, for the second time in their lives, Peter and Maxine walked together under the bright autumn stars. They watched, with the superior amusement of teen-age individuals the Hallowe'en antics of the younger hellions who were taking out a year's grievances on Old Man Ottoson who always spoiled the ice on his hill by spreading ashes, Aunt Nellie Fitch who was stingy with her apples, and Grandpa Green who had once peppered with rock salt a boy who was stealing one of his watermelons. It was only tit for tat if the kids now ripped up their board sidewalks, pulled down their gates, and tipped over their backhouses.

[172]

Peter lent a hand hoisting a particularly obstreperous billy goat onto the porch roof of Old Lady Perkins' general store, then, with his girl on his arm, strolled leisurely to the Tobacco City Ice Cream Parlor, where beneath pink and green lights reflected in gilt-framed mirrors they lingered long over a concoction known as "Lover's Delight" while the nickel-in-the-slot piano played "Everybody's Doing It."

Feeling deliciously extravagant, he bought her a three pound box of bon bons adorned with large red roses, and they made their way through the crisp cold to Maxine's home on the hill where the girl discovered with joy that her parents were not yet home from their evening of bridge in Janesville, wherefore Peter must come in for a cup of hot cocoa.

Unbelievable delight! To be invited into her house. To be near her, allowed to touch her, and perhaps even to kiss her if he chose.

[173]

The very air seemed different in the house where his love ate and slept and bathed and dressed. He was sure that never before had he seen anything so exquisite as the sofa pillows she had made out of cigarette flags, or the pictures she had burned on wood.

She had a little alcove off the sitting room which was all her own hung with school pennants and drawings of the Charles Dana Gibson variety. She had a cupboard full of bon bon boxes, dance programs, comic postcards inscribed with "Oh, You Girl!" and a whole album of snapshots.

Peter was awed. He had never before seen an alcohol burner nor a chafing dish. He watched the glowing girl as she prepared cocoa and Welsh rarebit, was delighted with every movement she made and every word she spoke.

"I got a raise," Peter said. "I'm a draftsman's assistant now. Mike O'Casey says he might build one of my camp trailers when I get it designed."

"Gee, could I meet Mr. O'Casey sometime?" Maxine asked.

"Well, gosh, Maxine. I dunno. That's pretty hard to arrange."

"Oh, all right, smarty. You think he's too good for a little girl like me."

[174]

"But, darling...." He could have bitten his tongue for having said a thing like that. Calling her "darling"! Who did he think he was? She stood perfectly still, waiting.

"You're an awful pretty girl," he said at last. He watched her as she turned to the chafing dish again. Her movements were deft and very feminine.

"I ... I wish you would let me kiss you like you said that night."

"Why not?" said Maxine. She turned up her face for the first kiss Peter had given a girl in his life.

To Peter the world was non-existent for that moment. Maxine broke away to keep the cocoa from boiling over.

Afterwards she turned out the lights and they sat on the sofa looking out into the starlight. They could see across the creek and across mysterious miles of frozen brown marshland beyond the town to where lights twinkled in distant farmhouses. She put his hand down the neck of her dress and he was surprised and almost frightened by the soft delicacy of her breasts.

"Well," said Maxine from the depths of her pillows. "Are you just going to sit there all night?"

[175]

She put her arms around him and kissed him again and again. She drew him down toward her and he found himself strangely wishing to be free.

"No, no, Maxine," he said humbly. "I couldn't. Why, Maxine, you're just an angel to me. I never even thought of you like that."

3

Throughout the rest of her days Temperance Crandall measured time as before or after 1913. Often in later Novembers when the leaves hurried across her lawn and the hickory nuts tumbled down from the shagbark hickory she dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

It was of little interest to her that Mrs. Sean McGinty died of cancer of the uterus after bearing thirteen children in eighteen years, or that Father O'Malley in laying her away spoke of her as an outstanding example of motherhood. She scarcely bothered to learn the details of the scandalous conduct of the Reverend Charles MacArthur of the Congregational church who had been caught in a compromising situation with his soprano soloist, thus confirming the worst suspicions of the Methodists. And although Gerty MacDougal, 18, entered the bonds of holy matrimony with Cornelius Vandenheim, 82, just in time to inherit a Civil War pension for life, Temperance all but forgot to pass on the information to Sister Dickenson.

[176]

For Temperance Crandall was discovering that when tragedy and scandal touch one's own household the salt has lost its savor.

In the first place her mother was definitely sinking. Doctor Whitehead doubted that the old heart could stand the strain of another winter. Secondly Temperance's own Peter Brailsford was being seen so often with that wanton hussy Maxine Larabee that Temperance could have wept. Now, as she waited for Peter to come to breakfast, the harsh whisper of calloused fingers on hard

knuckles filled the room.

Peter Brailsford, awaking from a sound sleep, was instantly aware that this was no usual day. He jumped out of bed with a shout, threw his flannel nightgown into a corner, dashed half a pitcher of icy water into the wash bowl, and with chattering teeth sponged his warm skin with a washcloth and rubbed dry with a rough towel. He danced around on his toes throwing a flurry of effective punches into some large, tough adversary, burst into a baritone solo which suddenly went soprano, pulled on long scratchy underwear, corduroy trousers, stiff cowhide boots, and a rough woolen shirt and hurried to the kitchen.

"Um! Pancakes!"

"Put on plenty of butter and maple syrup," said Temperance. "I ain't going to let any boy starve under my roof."

It was a bright, cold Saturday morning. Peter had begged the day off. Now he ran shouting with exuberance to join the crowd gathered on the Library steps. Maxine, the English teacher for chaperon, and nearly a dozen others were headed for Lake Koshkonong and a day in the woods.

They piled into an ancient Ford three deep and several on the running boards, chugged and steamed up hills and through valleys bright with maple and sumac until at last they came to Charley's Bluff where they unloaded and built a fire of driftwood on the beach between huge granite boulders. They raced, wrestled and shot at targets with a twenty-two, buried each other in the leaves and shook down hickory nuts.

At noon they gathered about the fire to roast wieners on sticks and to drink black coffee.

All went well until the couples paired off and Maxine decided to sing songs to the accompaniment of Thomas Carlyle's five-string banjo. Who did that half-witted son of a horse-doctor think he was, Peter wondered. They were making outrageous love, Peter thought. Starting off with such comparatively innocuous ditties as "Moonlight Bay" and "You're a Great Big Blue-Eyed Baby," they were soon harmonizing on "Cuddle Up a Little Closer, Lovey Mine," and "Every Little Movement Has a Meaning All Its Own." Peter began to wonder what sort of a girl Maxine was.

Then he was remorseful.

He was ashamed that he had let himself question Maxine's character. Certainly she had never let another boy kiss her or touch her breasts. She was sitting beside Thomas Carlyle singing songs because he had a banjo; but very soon now she would come over to Peter and they would wander off together. He mustn't let himself be jealous like this. Peter didn't think that he could trust himself if he should find that Maxine was in any way unfaithful. He thought that he would kill her and then himself, and that people would find them locked in each other's arms.

He would write a verse for their common gravestone which would be inscribed beneath twin turtle doves on pure white marble.

He told himself that he was talking nonsense, that no boy should keep his girl from singing songs and flirting a little. But he lay among the leaves, looking up at the sky and brooding over the loss of this precious day which was to mean so much to them. He had intended to ask her to marry him and had thought out just what he was going to say. He had intended to tell her that first love like theirs was always true love, and how their marriage wouldn't turn out like so many marriages. Their life together was going to be different.

He had envisioned the whole scene over and over. They would be cozily sitting in deep leaves in some protected ravine with nothing but the trees and sky to hear what they were saying. He would pour out his heart, and she would listen with rapt attention and turn up her lips for kisses.

He would tell her of his progress at the factory, and of the house they would have on Shannon's hill. They would talk about their children, and about life together after they were married. It was to have been an idyllic day. And now, a gaunt, freckle-faced, banjo-strumming young fool had spoiled it all. Peter felt like going over and pushing the boy in the face and picking up Maxine as he might a child and carrying her away. It would be easy to do. She was as light as a feather and always tripped along as though she were made of thistle down. Her flesh was like thistle down too. It made his head whirr to think of her soft flesh.

Always, always something came between Peter and happiness. He had been brooding and miserable for as long as he could remember, with only now and then a moment of intense happiness to repay him for his misery.

All his life he had worried about good and evil, about God and hell, about his features, his clothes, what people were thinking of him, and whether he would ever amount to anything. And now that he was in love he was experiencing a deeper and more exquisite misery than he could have imagined possible.

Maxine! Maxine!

But here she came at last, all radiant and smiling, her cheeks as red as apples. His heart leapt up in a moment and all his doubts left him. They walked along the beach, skipped stones on the thin ice and on the open stretches of water, dug a bird's nest out of the high, black banks of peat which skirt the beach to the south of Charley's Bluff. They discovered a little stream and followed its course back through the willows to a clearing where they explored a deserted cabin and a barn still filled with timothy and clover. From the wide door of the loft they could see across the lake to Lake House Point and to the Brailsford farm with its bright red barns and to the great cottonwood tree on Cottonwood Hill.

"You see that big tree," Peter said. "Not a man in the country can climb it, not even my father. But I'm going to climb it some day."

"Uh huh," said Maxine comfortably.

"I'm going to do lots of things in my life. Great things. I'm learning a heap about draftsmanship at the Trailer factory. I'm almost finished with my blue prints for that camp trailer. Maybe some day when I get to be famous...."

"Don't talk shop," Maxine said.

"Well, what shall we talk about?"

"Don't let's talk, beautiful boy."

She stopped his mouth with kisses and unashamed gave him his first lesson in love.

As was usual in Brailsford Junction death came before the doctor. Temperance was alone in the house when her mother died. She went up the stairs at six o'clock bringing the old lady a bite of supper and found her breathing heavily and rather chilled. She tried to reach Doctor Whitehead by telephone, but no one answered at the house or the office. She called out the upstairs window to a passing boy and told him to look for the doctor in front of the pool hall, then turned back to the stricken woman who opened her eyes once and smiled at Temperance feebly. [182]

Temperance thought that the poor old thing was humming a hymn but when she leaned closer she realized that it was "Daisy Bell," a great favorite of her mother's. Thinking about it later she realized that her mother had never been what Brailsford Junction usually termed a Christian.

Even before the death rattle began, the thin face turned blue and the small hands clutching the counterpane were as cold as ice.

Temperance did not break down until she had pulled the sheet up over the face of the dead. Then a great flood of loneliness and grief came over her and she ran down the street in her house dress with her hair stringing out behind. Hardly knowing what she was doing she hurried up the stairs leading to the offices of Timothy Halleck and incidentally to the fly-blown waiting-room of Doctor Whitehead.

Brailsford Junction's leading physician was hanging up his prevaricating gilt placard, "Back in Half an Hour." [183]

"Well, well, I was just heading for your home," he said. "I hope it ain't anything serious. How is your mother?"

"As well as could be expected with you on the case," cried Temperance, bitterly. "She died fifteen minutes ago."

"Now ain't that too bad," said Doctor Whitehead, squirting a stream of tobacco juice into a convenient corner. "I suppose you'll want a death certificate, eh?"

Temperance burst in upon Timothy Halleck who during that day had met a delegation of indignant mothers complaining about the oldest son of Crazy Jack Bailey, a young wife whose drunken husband beat her up every Saturday night with the stove poker, and the president of the bank who threatened to cut off his credit if he cancelled his mortgage against the Widow Morrison. For once his patience was tried beyond endurance.

"No, Miss Crandall, this time I will not listen to your gossip. I've heard all that I can stand for one day. Why can't you leave people alone? Let them live their lives and you live yours. For twenty years I've been wanting to tell you that you're a meddling, tale-bearing.... There, there now. Don't cry, Temperance. I realize I was a bit thoughtless. Why ... why, what is it?" [184]

"I didn't know who else to tell," Temperance said, hiding her face in her hands. "Mother's dead, Timothy."

Temperance Crandall was to remember to her dying day that Timothy Halleck came around the desk and put his arm across her shoulders and told her that he would take care of the funeral arrangements.

[185]

CHAPTER X

1

The eastbound train had gone shrieking through Brailsford Junction pulled by two engines to buck the drifts. Bundles of Madison papers were tossed from the baggage car as the train passed, and the engineer had waved at Nat Cumlien, the station master.

Now in a corner of the station half a dozen rosy-faced young rascals fought and laughed as they stuffed their paper sacks.

"Wish I had about ten kids," thought Stud, watching the boys while waiting for the long overdue four-thirty-nine from Chicago. "Six or eight sons and a batch of girls."

He sighed as he looked out at the unexpected November blizzard. The telephone wires sang a high monotonous tune. Snow drifted in rippled waves over the tracks and the cinder piles beyond. The station windows rattled in the forty mile gale and the telegraph instrument kept up its incessant, monotonous tattoo.

"Gol darn! There never was nothing in my life I wanted like a lot of youngsters. Big strapping [186]

boys to help me with the cows and crops. Good looking girls to help Sarah."

He spat reflectively at the roaring stove, shifted his position on the bench.

"Peter's a good boy, and he certainly ran that thrashing machine slicker than a greased pig. But now he's figuring on spending all his mortal days in a trailer factory."

He couldn't make the boy out, always mooning around and sighing. Not mean nor hard to handle, but with a head full of silly ideas. Maybe all he needed was to sow his wild oats.

Peter'd make a good enough farmer if he'd put his mind to it. He was smart enough, and strong enough, and a real good worker. But Stud doubted that he would ever see the boy back on the farm again.

He wished he had a dozen big sons, strapping fellows who could handle a quarter section at sixteen. He wished it were as easy to get human young ones as it was calves, colts and lambs.

Why, if a mare didn't foal you tried another mare. If a cow didn't calve you turned her into beef steak. And any stallion, bull or ram could serve half a hundred females of his species. [187]

"Wish I had a harem," thought Stud; "I'd get me all the children a man could want. We've got enough victuals to feed about forty on that farm. I'd breed 'em big and feed 'em plenty. It'd be a sight for sore eyes to see my litter."

Stud was awaiting Early Ann's train from the big city. She would be getting off the cars any time now all rosy and fresh and pert with her tongue running away with her and her feet fairly dancing. Young, healthy, and going to waste. What was the matter with young fellows these days, didn't they know a good thing when they saw it? Early Ann was just what Stud needed around the farm: a good little filly that'd make a good mare.

"Shoot, such a way to talk," thought Stud, spitting at the glowing stove. "Can't breed humans like you breed cattle. Got to think about marriage vows and morality and all that sort of business."

Nevertheless the thought stayed with him,—how he was getting along in his forties and how he wanted more boys. Often that winter he would stop work in the snowy fields where he was husking corn to look out across the frozen lake and sigh.

"Four-thirty-nine'll be another half hour late," said Nat Cumlien, coming out of his cage to throw half a hod of soft coal into the stove. "Got some big drifts down near Janesville." [188]

"Four-thirty-nine ain't been on time in ten years, drifts or no drifts," said Stud.

"Well, I do my best," said Nat.

He went out onto the platform and changed the lantern, threw a couple of bundles of hides and some milk cans onto the truck, came in blowing on his fingers and brushing off the snow.

"Whew, that'd freeze the ears off a brass monkey," said Nat. He retired to his cage and his game of solitaire.

After an eternity the big headlight cut through the snow and the muffled whistle shook the windows. Stud hurried out to the platform as the train wheezed in and ground to a stop. Early Ann jumped off, laughing and squealing. He carried her baggage to the cutter and they streaked home through the storm to the accompaniment of jingling sleigh-bells and creaking snow beneath the polished runners. Deeply covered with robes and sharing each other's warmth, they shouted to each other above the storm.

It was good to be home again, good to be turning in at the Brailsford gate with the windows of the farmhouse shining on the snow. Stud hurried off to unhitch while Gus helped Early Ann with her bundles. [189]

Sarah stood on the back stoop shivering and wiping her hands on her apron.

"Welcome home, Early Ann," she cried.

"Here I am safe and sound, Mrs. Brailsford. I had a wonderful time."

"Did you see the stock yards?" Gus wanted to know. "Or Sears, Roebuck's?"

"It'll take a year to tell all I saw," said Early Ann. She went into the warm, lamp-lit kitchen fragrant with the smells of pie and coffee and roasting meat. They had a surprise for Early Ann. Gus had caught a raccoon in one of his traps. They were having a raccoon supper with sweet potatoes and corn bread.

"Hope it tastes as good as it smells," said Early Ann. "Here, Mrs. Brailsford, let me help with everything."

"Change your dress first, child."

Throughout supper she regaled them with the wonders of Chicago: the room she had had six stories above the street with electric lights and a brass bed, and a private bathroom with hot and cold running water. She had lived like a queen. She had slept until eight o'clock every morning, and once she had taken her breakfast in bed. [190]

"And you should see the limousines and street cars, and boats on the river! They got bridges that lift up, and buildings five times as tall as the windmill," said Early Ann.

"Did you see the Board of Trade?" Stud wanted to know.

"No I didn't," the girl admitted, "but I saw a woman smoking a cigarette, and couples doing the tango on a glass dance floor. It was lovely the way they served food, with white napkins and pretty glass and silver."

"I'm so glad you went," Sarah said. "It'll be something to think about until the day you die."

"Such pretty dresses in the stores," said Early Ann. "I sure do wish you could have been along, Mrs. Brailsford. I bought myself a new corset and.... Oh, I shouldn't."

"Don't mind me," said Gus.

"There was a big parade for Emmeline Pankhurst who came all the way from London to talk about woman suffrage, and I was as close as across this room from her. She looked like a fighter all right."

"She's a criminal," said Gus, "she oughta be hanged."

"She's a great leader and a fine woman," said Sarah, quietly. "They'll treat her like a real saint before she dies." [191]

"And everybody was all aflutter about General Booth coming to town, and I went to a drama called 'Lead, Kindly Light.' It was awful uplifting."

When she couldn't think of another thing to tell them, Early Ann brought some packages to the table.

"This is for you, Mrs. Brailsford."

Sarah opened the pretty box with trembling fingers, saying, "You shouldn't have done it, Early Ann. I don't deserve a thing." And when she found silk stockings in the box she started to cry.

"Why, I never had a pair of silk stockings in my life," she said.

"I'll have to watch you, now you got silk stockings," said Stud. "You'll be running off with Vern Barton or somebody the first thing I know."

Sarah looked through the silk at the lamp and rubbed the smooth stuff against her cheek. She kept them treasured in her bureau drawer, but never wore them to the day she died.

The present Early Ann had bought for Gus was a set of arm garters and matching green tie. The hired man grinned like a Cheshire cat when he opened the box. [192]

Stud was given a magnificent, fancy white vest of imported bird's-eye weave with detachable pearl buttons.

"Never seen anything so classy in all my born days," said Stud, slipping into the vest. He put his watch in the watch pocket, draped his gold log-chain across his middle, and paraded in front of the kitchen mirror, holding up the lamp to get the full effect.

"That's mighty nice of you, girl," said Stud. "I reckon I ought to kiss you for that."

"Stanley," said Sarah, in laughing disapproval, "I reckon you better not."

Early Ann said she would keep Peter's present until she saw him. Meanwhile she had one more gift for the entire family. She unwrapped a small stereopticon on which she had squandered seven dollars. Sarah put up a sheet at one end of the kitchen, while Early Ann lighted the coal-oil lamp in the little black box and blew out all the other lights in the room. There in the warm, dark kitchen they spent two magic hours. Over and over again they called for "Rock of Ages," "Niagara Falls," "The Statue of Liberty," "The Sinking of the Maine" and "The Washington Monument." Altogether there were twenty-four slides in full color. [193]

"Next time you go to Chicago you got to take me," said Gus, pouring Early Ann another mug of cider.

It was not until Early Ann saw Peter, and gave him the gold watch she had bought him, that she told the other side of her trip to Chicago.

"I was scared half the time and so lonesome. I felt like coming home on the first train. I didn't know a single soul and the city was so big and noisy. You don't catch me going to Chicago all alone again."

"And I'll bet you spent all your money," Peter growled accusingly.

"I got two hundred and three dollars left," said Early Ann, averting her eyes. "I feel kind of wicked when I think how I've squandered ninety-seven dollars. But I ain't going to spend one more cent until the day I'm married. I've got to have something left to help set up housekeeping."

"Who you going to marry?" Peter asked.

"Oh, I got a fellow," lied Early Ann. She wanted to egg him on, and she was a trifle disappointed at the casual way in which he had taken it. [194]

2

One windy November afternoon when Stud and Gus were cutting firewood in the grove beside the lake, Stud looked across the bay and was surprised to see smoke streaming from the chimney of the old hunting lodge on Lake House Point. The blizzard, which had flung ten-foot waves against the crumbling cliff, had stripped the leaves from oak and elm and maple, sent them in cascades down every ravine and gully, left the old building naked to the eye.

"Looks like we got a neighbor," said Stud.

"Better not monkey with my mushrat traps."

"What'd you do?"

"Pepper his behind with rock salt from the old ten gauge."

"You talk big," Stud admitted. "Why don't you mosey over and see who it is?"

"Not me," said Gus. "It ain't healthy."

Stud grinned. He knew that Gus would rather sleep in a cemetery or break a looking-glass than set foot on Lake House Point.

Long ago the limestone bluff had been the stronghold of Indians. Later a small colony of Mormons, hated alike for their polygamy and their horse-thieving, had made the Point their hide-away until chased from the country by the indignant settlers. In the eighties a club of rich [195]

Chicago duck hunters had put up the present lodge where shortly before the turn of the century a bloody murder had occurred. No one went near the lodge now. The porches were drifted deep with leaves, the old boathouse was strewn in whitened planks the length of the beach. The bluff was overgrown with sumac, ivy and grapevines. Scrub oak extended from the edge of the cliff to the marsh behind the Point.

Old women, children and hired hands believed implicitly that ghosts could be seen at the broken windows of the lodge and in the rotting halls and paneled rooms. Stud scoffed at all these old-wives' tales, but admitted he would rather live on his own side of the bay than on that bluff with its unpleasant memories.

"Might be that feller," suggested Gus.

"The one prowling around here nights?"

"Might be."

"Might be, but probably ain't."

Possibly Gus was right. Stud had an uneasy feeling that a man by the name of Joe Valentine was living in the lodge, trapping perhaps, catching fish, stealing a few chickens.

Stud had heard of Joe Valentine from Timothy Halleck who in tracing Early Ann's claim to the Horicon farm had run across Joe's trail. Later Early Ann herself had admitted the existence of this stepfather, and had confessed to Stud that it was Joe who had been annoying her. She told Stud something of her early life, her days with Joe and her mother in the shack near Rockford, Illinois, her mother's death, and her flight from her stepfather. [196]

She said she had been ashamed of Joe, of his treatment of her mother, and of his attitude toward *her*. She had wanted to forget the past, to live where no one would know that she was the illegitimate child of Bung Sherman, or the stepdaughter of Joe Valentine.

Stud thought of Joe as more of a nuisance than a menace. Nevertheless he was determined to investigate his new neighbor on Lake House Point.

Other matters intervened. Ulysses S. Grant had acquired a taste for chicken, and almost every unlucky fowl who got into his pen was caught by the wily boar and eaten alive. Stud had to put chicken wire outside the planks of the boar's pen to save Sarah's flock from destruction.

Then there was the problem of Peter and Maxine Larabee. Stud was of the opinion that the boy would never be a man until he learned the facts of life first-hand, but Sarah was worrying herself into another nervous breakdown. Stud made a futile trip to town. Peter was belligerent and uncommunicative. Stud was outwardly bellicose but secretly sympathetic. The net result was a widened breach between father and son, although Stanley led Sarah to believe that he had put some sense into the boy's head. [197]

Brailsford had momentarily forgotten his plan to investigate the old hunting lodge when one morning—the day before Thanksgiving—he found a man setting a trap at the end of a hollow log just out of sight of the house over the crest of Cottonwood Hill.

"Trying to catch one of my 'coons?" Stud asked amiably.

The man whirled to face him, his hand on his sheath knife.

"Nothing to fight about," said Stud. "What's your name?"

"Joe Valentine."

"You ain't the fellow who's moved in over on the Point?"

"That's my business," said Joe.

"I'll make it my business. You been prowling around here quite a bit lately."

"I got a right to catch my living," said Joe. Every night he looked across the bay at the glowing windows of the Brailsford farm, thought of his stepdaughter over there, all the good things to eat. "I got a right," he said. [198]

"I got a right to run you off my land."

"You ain't got a right to Early Ann."

"Get off my place before I get mad," Stud said. He had his womenfolks and cattle to think about.

Joe whipped out his knife and prepared to spring. Like sticking a pig, he thought. Like the time his father killed his kitten with a butcher knife. He had buried the cat and put flowers on its grave. After a few days he dug it up to see if it had gone to heaven.

Joe leapt. Stud sidestepped, put out his foot. Joe tripped, fell into the bushes, turned a complete somersault and was up again, knife in hand.

"You're going to hurt yourself with that knife," Stud said. "We don't fight with knives in these parts."

Stud never gouged or bunted, but he could see that anything went with Joe Valentine.

Joe sprang again. His knife slashed empty air. Simultaneously something like a sledge hammer hit him behind the ear. He staggered, whirled. [199]

More careful now, the men feinted, maneuvered, circled for advantage.

Joe doubled over as though caught with pain. Stud rushed. Joe tossed a handful of snow and fine gravel into Stud's eyes. Half-blinded, Stud leapt back. He felt the knife rip into his right shoulder and the blood wet his shirt. Bright blood sprinkled the dirty snow.

Now Stud was fighting in earnest. As Joe came on, Stud aimed a kick at the knife arm, missed, fell. Joe tried to hamstring the fallen giant, was lifted bodily into the air by a great backward kick.

They were up again, feinting and charging. Stud grabbed the knife arm in a clinch, held it as in a vise, slugged with his other fist Joe's head and body. Joe brought up his knee. Sickness swept

over Stud in a great wave.

They were rolling on the ground now, panting and straining, tearing up the bloody snow and gravel. Stud caught Joe's arm in a hammer-lock. Joe screamed in pain, dropped his knife. Stud grabbed for a full Nelson, and Joe slipped out of his grasp like a snake.

Stud kicked the knife out of reach as they leapt to their feet. They slugged, sweat and panted. Two men on a hilltop overlooking the world. Murder in their hearts. [200]

Joe was quicker and more slippery, a tricky boxer, fast with rabbit punches, kidney punches, jabs below the belt. Stud had the power of a bull, was tireless and able to take almost limitless punishment. He sent haymakers crashing to Joe's lantern jaw, heart, and solar plexus. His shoulder was throbbing, but he battled on.

Joe made a crying sound through his torn lips. Suddenly he was afraid. He turned and ran down the hill through the hazel brush, sobbing, breathless.

Stud did not follow. He watched Joe Valentine bee-lining for Lake House Point. Slowly he doubled his right arm and felt the huge bicep.

"That's the last we'll see of Joe Valentine," he told the giant cottonwood. He chuckled as he strode back toward the house.

3

With silos full, full haymows, bins of grain; with sheds loaded to the last beam with tobacco; with the farm shipshape and bright with new paint they faced the coming winter.

The provision cellar was loaded with earthenware crocks of pickles, sauerkraut and preserves; glasses of jelly; mason jars of cherries, applesauce, plums, pears, raspberries, and strawberries. [201]

The smokehouse reeked of ham and pleasant hickory smoke from morning until night. Hams hung in the cellar beside the slabs of bacon, and the small white ears of popcorn. In a dry bin with a wooden floor were hickory nuts and walnuts by the bushel with a few pecks of butternuts and hazel nuts to furnish variety.

Apple cider in brown jugs, wild grape juice in tight bottles, with just a gallon or two of blackberry cordial in case of sickness lined the lower shelf of the can cupboard. There were bins of sand for carrots, beets and celery. Pie pumpkins in one corner, hubbard squashes in another.

And although Stanley Brailsford longed for more children, wished that Sarah could have better health, and mourned the rift which was slowly arising between himself and Peter, he had much to be thankful for as he said the blessing over his Thanksgiving dinner.

Above all he thanked God most devoutly that he was the strongest man in Southern Wisconsin and could provide for and protect his womenfolks and cattle.

[202]

CHAPTER XI

1

"Stop the team a minute," Peter told Gus. He looked down upon the white-roofed house and barns, the frozen creek, strawstacks like giant mushrooms capped with white, the drifted hedgerows interlaced with rabbit tracks, Lake Koshkonong like a floor of green glass surrounded by its gnarled forests of black, leafless oaks.

"What's the matter?" Gus asked. "Had a fight with your girl?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"Don't trust no woman farther'n you could throw a horse," counseled the hired man.

"I told her that if she went off to her Grandmother's in Madison over Christmas she could stay away for good."

"And so she went!"

"How'd you know?"

"Any woman would."

"Damn her," said Peter. "No, I don't mean that." He wondered why he was confiding in Gus. No one else to confide in, really.

"Just act like she doesn't exist," said Gus. "Go ahead and have a good time without her. She'll come crawling back on her belly." [203]

"You don't know this girl."

"Maybe not this one," Gus admitted, "but they're all cats out of the same litter."

* * *

"You home, boy?" Stud asked.

Early Ann helped Peter off with his coat and chucked him under the chin.

"Trailer factory's shut down, Dad. They're losing money."

"Shut down for good?"

"Start up again the first of the year more'n likely."

"What'd you do if the 'Trailer' shut down for good?"

"Don't know, Father."

"Might you come back to the farm?"

"I might," said the boy, averting his eyes.

Four days until Christmas. The house was already decorated with holly and red bells. There were frost flowers on the window panes and the base burner glowed brightly. His mother was sitting before the stove in her favorite rocker piecing a quilt.

"There's lots of rabbits this year," Sarah said. She thought: I don't want him to kill rabbits. I hate trapping, hunting, and slaughtering. It made me sick the time I saw Stanley castrating the little boars. [204]

"I'll have a good time, Mother," Peter said. He thought: why shouldn't I have a good time. Maxine probably lets half the boys in Brailsford Junction kiss her.

"We haven't had a good rabbit stew all season," Sarah said. She thought: I used to tell him stories about every piece in the quilt. What dress it came from and where I wore it. This piece is out of the brown silk I took along on my honeymoon. I wore it that night we rowed out on Lake Mendota and saw the dome of the capitol at Madison shining in the moonlight. I wonder if Stanley remembers.

"That's a pretty quilt," Peter said. He thought: she used to tell me stories about the pieces she was sewing. I wish she would again.

"See, it's a flower design," she said. She thought: he's grown up now. He wouldn't want to listen.

"I got the drawings for my camp trailer done, Ma," he said. He thought: I'll do something great for Mother when I'm rich.

"I'm sure Mr. O'Casey will build one," she said. She thought: then he'll be gone forever. [205]

"I'm not so sure," Peter said. He thought: if the "Trailer" shuts down I'll probably have to come back to the farm and be glad of the chance.

Sarah thought: I want to know every little thing about his life—how he gets on at the factory, how Temperance Crandall takes care of him, whether he smokes or drinks, whether he's a good boy and goes to church, or whether he hangs around the pool hall. I want to know about Maxine Larabee. But I don't dare ask. It would frighten him still farther away.

The needle clicked against the thimble. The silk rustled in Sarah's hands. Coal crackled in the stove and the wind whispered at the corners of the house. After a while the smell of roasting chicken drifted in from the kitchen.

"You're getting to be a big boy," she said. She thought: I wanted him to stay little forever. I wanted to keep him close to me, but he's grown so far away.

"I'm more than six feet," the boy said. He thought: it's beautiful with Maxine. I can't get along without her any more. I'm a man now and know all there is to know about women.

Sarah was startled looking into his face. She thought: why, he isn't my little boy. He's a stranger. [206]

2

That night at supper—chicken, dressing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, giblet gravy, hot mince pie and coffee—Stud waved a drumstick while orating just what he would do if Joe Valentine came across the Brailsford line again.

Still grasping the drumstick he assumed a fighting pose which would have startled John L. Sullivan, the strong boy from Boston.

"I can't sleep nights for thinking of that terrible man," Sarah confessed.

"Why don't we chase him off the Point?" Peter asked.

"Or have the law on him?" suggested Gus.

"I'll shoot him if I ever get a chance," Early Ann cried passionately.

"Leave him to me," Stud told the rest of the family. "He ain't harmful. He's got a right to live the same as we have. We ain't going to shoot him or have the law on him, or run him off the Point. But if he comes across our line again I'll give him a real licking."

"Give him a couple of extra punches for me," said Early Ann. "I wish I was a man. I'll bet I could lick him." [207]

"And meanwhile," said Stud, "it's almost Christmas day. We'll have to take him some victuals for his Christmas dinner,—something for the Olesons and the Widow Morrison, too. We'll do it tonight."

"Drive over to Lake House Point at night?" Gus asked in dismay.

"Scared cat," taunted Early Ann.

"I wasn't thinking of myself," said Gus, "I was just worrying about the womenfolks."

Early Ann tittered.

After supper they put on sheepskin coats and mufflers, filled a bob-sleigh with pecks of

potatoes, bags of apples, three small picnic hams, and some canned fruit. They sat in the deep straw covered with fur robes and went gayly down the road to the tumble-down Oleson shack.

"They're Svenskies," said Stud, "but they're better neighbors than some civilized people." He poked Gus in the ribs to emphasize the taunt.

"I'd rather be a Scandihoovian than a gol darn beef-eating Englishman," sniffed Gus.

It made Sarah sad to see how grateful Hilda Oleson was for the presents. Ole Oleson was sullen as usual.

"Ay t'ink next yar Ay vill gif you sometink to eat, ya?" He puffed vigorously at his corncob, and continued to carve his ship model. [208]

The rosy Hilda, all aflutter, began to apologize for the state of her house which was as spotless as a new pan. She led them in on tiptoe to see young Ole, who would be a year old in a few months now. He lay with his small, plump arms thrown above his head, his lips working busily as he dreamed of Hilda's breast. The lamp light made a halo of his blond fuzz, shone upon his pink cheeks and his long eyelashes. The soft spot on his head beat rhythmically with his pulse. He stirred, made a lusty sucking noise with his mouth, opened his big blue eyes, and began to cry for his evening nursing.

Sarah, as always in the presence of a baby, mourned her age. Stud was frankly envious; Gus, embarrassed.

"It seems like yesterday you were this size," Sarah told the discomfited Peter.

Hilda put the baby in Sarah's arms, and he began to nuzzle at her shrunken breasts. Quick tears sprang to her eyes.

"Ve yoost love little Ole," Hilda whispered to Sarah as they returned to the other room. "Ay t'ink anudder kom pretty soon."

Ole senior brightened, seeing the Brailsfords gathered around his son. He helped his wife to serve coffee cake and coffee, and when the visitors were leaving forced them to take a beautiful little full-rigged ship with a Norse figurehead at its prow. They had never seen such exquisite carving. He followed them to the door, and called after them, "Tack sa mycket ... thanks, thanks." [209]

They were only a few minutes at the Widow Morrison's, then went jingling through the snowy moonlight down the all but overgrown road to Lake House Point. They crossed the corduroy stretch bordered by leafless willow trees and climbed the rutted, precipitous lane which rose through scrub oak and hazel brush to the old hunting lodge. As they reached the kitchen door the light went out, and although Stud went boldly in and called Joe Valentine no one answered. They unloaded the food and carried it into the dark kitchen, then turned the horses toward home and went plunging down the hill,—sparks flying from the sharp-shod hooves.

One evening they went hunting rabbits in the moonlight to test out the new shotgun which Temperance had given Peter as a pre-dated Christmas present, and the next night all the young folks for miles gathered for a bob-sleigh party. [210]

Coming home at three in the morning through a white, silent world Early Ann rested her head on Peter's shoulder. The moon was going down in the west throwing long shadows from fenceposts and trees. The tired horses walked slowly, blowing steam from their frosty nostrils. Peter slipped his arm around Early Ann and she did not take it away. He kissed her as they turned in at the farm and she returned the kiss.

But he was happy that next morning she made no allusions to their love-making. Instead she challenged him to a skating race and they battled eagerly across the bay with the wind stinging their cheeks and their skates ringing.

3

On Christmas Eve the whole family helped to decorate the Christmas tree. They pinned their socks and stockings to the branches and each in turn played surreptitious Santa Claus. Such rare luxuries as oranges and English walnuts were stuffed into bags of red netting, and these in turn were shoved into the foot of each stocking. A very few inexpensive but thoughtful gifts were wrapped in tissue paper and tied with silver ribbons. Stud had the worst of it, trying to tie pretty bow knots with his large, blunt fingers. [211]

They gathered about the organ and sang Christmas carols while Sarah played. Beginning with such semi-frivolous songs as "Jingle Bells" and "Deck the Halls with Wreaths of Holly," they progressed to the more moving hymns such as "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," and "Silent Night, Holy Night." Sarah's sweet soprano, Stud's deep bass, Early Ann's husky alto, and Peter's clear baritone joined to praise the Mother and Child who one thousand nine hundred and thirteen years before had occupied a manger in Bethlehem.

On that same Christmas Eve, Joe Whalen and Kate Barton who had been respectively pumping and playing the Methodist pipe organ since their late teens decided to elope to Janesville. Kate had finally induced Joe to take the temperance pledge, but he felt that a quart of rye was imperative to celebrate his coming nuptials.

Temperance Crandall lit the candle in her front window. She could hear the children singing at the church, but she did not cross the street to attend the cantata. After a while she blew out the candle, stoked the fire, went up the cold, dark stairs to her bed.

On a Pullman sleeper roaring toward New York, Mike O'Casey awoke from a fretful sleep, pulled up the blind, and found he was in Cleveland. Christmas carollers were making an ungodly racket on the station platform. He made obscene remarks about the whole idea of Christmas as [212]

well as the fool notion of attempting to run a trailer factory in Brailsford Junction. His friend O'Hallohan, the New York banker, would have to sign his note for fifty thousand dollars, or he would tell Tammany what he knew about O'Hallohan.

To the tune of the "Junkman Rag" Maxine Larabee was dancing the night away in Madison, Wisconsin, with a Beta from the University of Wisconsin who would presently know the last word on legumes, rotation of crops, and soil analysis. She was very sleepy the next morning when her wealthy grandmother came into her bedroom crying "Merry Christmas."

From the windows where he sat brooding Joe Valentine could see the Brailsford home ablaze with Christmas. A plan began to take form in his slow mind. If Stud Brailsford thought that he could buy him with a few groceries he was badly mistaken. Joe never forgot. He hadn't forgotten that nigger who had knifed him in Rockford, Illinois. Some black woman was probably still hunting for that shine. [213]

And Stud Brailsford—when the others were in bed—went out with his lantern to take a last look at the barns. The ponies drowsed in their box stalls, the big bull's eyes glowed in the lantern light. Stud stopped to pet the stallion and the twin Percheron colts. One of those twins would some day make a great sire.

He noticed that the stars were very large and bright above his barn that night.

[214]
[215]

BOOK FOUR

[216]
[217]

CHAPTER XII

1

During 1913 the Palace of Peace at The Hague was dedicated. War and cholera swept the Balkans. The munition works prospered as Germany and France greatly increased their standing armies. Irish Home Rule agitators and militant suffragettes made life miserable for British statesmen. Forty million American church-goers gave four hundred million dollars to religious organizations. American junkers and the oil interests wanted armed intervention in Mexico. Pavlowa in a syndicated newspaper feature taught America the tango and other popular steps, while Aunt Prudence in her advice to the lovelorn sternly counseled "Anxious" against kissing any man but the one she intended to marry....

But to Peter Brailsford, enamored of woman, a trifle uncertain of his newly attained maturity, six feet tall, his muscles swelling toward the gigantic proportions of his father's, his chest deepening, and his mind exploring ever more distant horizons.... [218]

To this big healthy product of Southern Wisconsin the year's-end meant but one thing. He was invited to supper and a New Year's Eve celebration at Maxine Larabee's home, and he was determined to create the right impression in the household of Brailsford Junction's leading attorney.

There was little doubt that he was correctly attired, his table manners would pass muster—though he must remember not to tuck his napkin in his vest—and he had learned by rote what he was going to say when he spoke to Attorney Larabee about marrying Maxine.

Nevertheless the big fellow trembled as he was admitted into the magnificence of the Larabee home with its golden-oak mission furniture, its wilton carpets and its beaded portieres. Mrs. Larabee descended upon him plump, pink, and gushing. Maxine laughed musically as she gave him her hand, but Attorney Larabee merely grunted a hello from behind his paper and rolled his cigar into the other corner of his mouth.

Peter felt depressed.

Despite Maxine's rendition (at her mother's request) of "Too Much Mustard," and "I've Got a Pain in My Sawdust," with other instrumental and vocal numbers. Despite comic postcards showing vegetables the size of freight cars, Fords no larger than insects, and the romantic series by Harrison Fisher entitled "Six Periods in a Girl's Life." Despite such notable diversions as a Chinese puzzle and a set of views showing the Grand Cañon in its actual colors— [219]

Peter felt depressed.

Supper was served at last. After the blessing, soup was ladled from a tureen embossed with lilacs into soup bowls of the same design. And with the soup came the deluge:

"I understand you want to marry my daughter," boomed Mr. Larabee.

"Well, yes, sir," Peter admitted, looking into the green, viscous liquid in his bowl and feeling ill.

"Are you prepared to support her in the manner to which...."

"Now, Charles," said Mrs. Larabee, "you were as poor as a church mouse when you asked me."

"Mother!" said the stern head of the house, "I will take care of this."

Mrs. Larabee slipped back into the soft and matronly sea of pink chiffon from which she had momentarily arisen.

"I suppose you realize," said Attorney Larabee, "that Maxine comes from one of Brailsford Junction's first families...." [220]

"They named the town after a Brailsford," blurted Peter. "My dad's the biggest stock breeder in Rock County. And I've got the best chance in the world to be a great inventor or something.... And, well, anyhow I love her," he finished weakly.

"Hmmm, hmmm," said Mr. Larabee. "I shall have to think about it."

Fuming, and scarcely touching his supper, Peter managed somehow to last out the eternity between soup and pie. He wished violently that he might forget for a moment that Mr. Larabee was Maxine's father so that he could give him the beating he so richly deserved. He wondered how it was possible that anyone so delightful as Maxine could be the daughter of such a conceited, bigoted old thundercloud as Attorney Larabee and his addle-pated wife.

At last the meal was over. Mrs. Larabee was remorseful, but announced that she and Mr. Larabee could not stay for the young folks' party. They could scarcely turn down the Billings who had invited them over for the evening.

Peter waited until the old folks were gone, then with rapidly beating heart went up the stairs and slipped into Maxine's bedroom where the girl was dressing for the party. [221]

She was in bloomers and silk shirt and was pulling on her stockings.

"Go away, Peter," she said. "No, no ... I can't."

He sat on the edge of the bed watching her moodily as she dressed and primped before the mirror. She could turn his heart inside out with the least gesture of her lovely hands. The way she threw back her curls as she combed her hair, the way she tilted her chin as she looked at herself in the mirror! He was mad about her, and she was as cool as a cucumber.

It had been in this very room that they had been together that night. They had lain, listening to the wind scattering the leaves in a shower across the roof; hearing the distant clop, clop of horses' hooves. They had almost been caught when the Larabee automobile had turned in at the drive half an hour previous to their expectations. Peter had slipped out a side door not a minute too soon. He had been tying his tie when he was a block down the street.

"I guess you're getting tired of me," Peter said with a lump in his throat. "I guess you'll be making love to some other fellow one of these days." [222]

"How dare you, Peter Brailsford!" she cried, taking the hairpins out of her mouth and turning to glare at him. "Suggesting that it might be any boy like that. What kind of a girl do you think I am?"

"I'm beginning to wonder," Peter admitted, shocked at his frankness.

"Don't be tiresome," said the pretty girl, giving a final pat to her hair. "Do you think anybody will notice if I don't wear a corset? I simply loathe corsets."

"I suppose I am tiresome," said Peter, gloomily.

"Oh, shush!" said Maxine. "I asked you a question."

"Wear whatever you please," Peter said.

"Why, Peter Brailsford," cried Maxine. "You're simply horrid. Now do be a good boy and help me with these hooks and eyes. I never can get them by myself."

2

When he could no longer stand the uncertainty, Peter Brailsford made his excuses to Milly Vincent,—she of the silly lisp and carrot-colored hair. He stalked from the room while the piano and violin played Strauss, ascended the dark stairs, and stood at the landing watching the clouds scudding across the face of the moon. [223]

The sound of laughter and dancing feet floated up to the unhappy boy. He heard the Strauss waltz vaguely.

He said that he would go away to some other town where no one would know him. He would go to Chicago or even New York. He would go to the farthest ends of the earth and forget that there had ever been a town named Brailsford Junction or a girl named Maxine.

After a few moments he turned from the window and ascended quietly to the upper hall. Scarcely breathing, he put his ear to Maxine's bedroom door. All that he could hear was the throbbing of his own pulse in his ears.

Bud Spillman and Maxine had been drinking. He had seen them slip away together half an hour before, and they had not come back. If he found them together he knew that he would kill them and then himself.

There! The rustle of silk. And now their voices and quiet laughter.

Strangely, he was not angry now. All of his fury was suddenly drained away and he felt empty and shaken. He was amazed to find that the violin was still playing the Strauss waltz. [224]

CHAPTER XIII

1

On a steel-cold January morning with the frozen lake booming and the wind whining along the telephone wires—a morning so cold that the pump in the kitchen was frozen and three inches of ice capped the stock tanks—the Brailsfords rolled out at four to begin butchering. They left the deep warmth of their feather-beds, came down the narrow, precipitous back stairs worn in hollows by years of weary feet.

Early Ann thawed the pump with hot water from the tea kettle; Sarah started the oatmeal, ham and eggs, toast and coffee. Gus scratched a peep-hole in the hoar frost on the window pane and looked out into the ten-below moonlight.

"It's a cold day to butcher," Sarah said. "Mightn't we wait a few days, Stanley?"

"Hank Vetter says he ain't got a pork chop left in his shop."

"I suppose if we must, we must."

The men pulled on arctics, wrapped red mufflers about their necks, drew on their worn dogskin coats and fur caps, and taking milk pails and lanterns went out to the barns. They had no time this morning to carry water for the stock. They chopped holes in the ice on the tanks; drove the animals out to drink. The water froze as it streamed from the beasts' lips. Breath froze in white clouds about the horses' nostrils. The great bull, led by the nose, bellowed and snorted in the lantern light. The horses' hooves rang on the frozen mud of the barnyard.

[226]

"It's a rip snorter today," said Stud, coming in from the barns. He warmed his hands over the roaring stove.

Sarah dipped him hot water from the reservoir and poured it into the wash basin. She hung his coat toward the fire to keep it warm, and hastened to serve the breakfast. While they ate they argued the all-important problem of which animals were to die; and by five-thirty they were ready to begin the day's work.

Sarah, steeling herself for the ordeal; Early Ann, who pretended she did not mind slaughtering; Gus, who had a sentimental fondness for every animal on the place; and Stud, for whom this day was the climax of the hog-raising season, trooped down the hill to the slaughter house, started a fire in the stove, and carried water to fill the great iron kettle just outside the slaughter house door.

[227]

Stud began whetting his knives on his butcher's steel, making a sound which cut through Sarah's flesh like a blade. He liked to whet knives. And he could not deny it, he liked to slaughter. He had the finest butchering equipment of any farmer on Lake Koshkonong. Sticking, boning, and skinning knives in their rack—the steel blades and brass studs in the rosewood handles gleaming in the lantern light; the biggest butchering kettle in the township; the best pair of hand-wrought gambrels, hung from the finest reel on the strongest hickory axle.

Some farmers still carried away the blood in buckets, but Brailsford had built himself a slanting trough. His heavy cleavers with their hickory handles, his meat saws, hog hooks, scrapers, chopping block and sausage machine were the best that money could buy.

As always, Sarah felt an agony which she would not show. She could not understand that quality in Stanley which made him enjoy killing,—enjoy going out at night to knock the sparrows out of their nests in the straw to wring the necks of the drowsy, blinded birds. At haying time, too, he was careless of the rabbits and half-grown quail as he drove his mower through the timothy and clover. Sometimes when she lay beside him at night she thought of his God-like power to give life and to take it away.

[228]

Sarah's job on the farm was to feed, nurse and tenderly raise. She supposed that Stud must kill. And yet it frightened her to think that she and her family were no more secure from death than these animals. When the time came God would take them all as easily and with as little ceremony.

"Go get the hogs," Stud shouted to Gus. "And, Early Ann, you start the fire under the kettle."

Out of their warm hog house the pigs and sows were driven by the hired man's boots. They were herded across the pig yard, littered with thousands of corn cobs from the tons of corn they had eaten. They went in a complaining, squealing drove past the soul-satisfying mudholes (now frozen) where they had wallowed during the summer. They grunted and clambered over one another as they were shunted into the slaughter house.

Early Ann, meanwhile, was starting the great fire of hickory and oak under the black iron kettle mounted on its tripod. The red and yellow flames licked up around the kettle, made a scene in the darkness which might have accompanied an early witchburning on the wind-swept New England shore. Sarah was singing a hymn as she cleaned the sausage machine:

[229]

*"Sweet the Sabbath morning,
Cool and bright returning...."*

Then:

*"The lovely spring has come at last;
The rain is o'er, the winter past...."*

"Bring them on," cried Stud. He stripped off his mittens, picked up the big sledge, spit on his

hands and rubbed them on the smooth, yellow hickory handle. He tested his strength with a couple of preparatory swings, striking the sledge against the base of the twelve-by-twelve hickory upright in the center of the building. His blows shook the roof.

"Send me a big one, Gus."

The squealing of the pigs had by this time become terrific. The crackle of the flames in the fire under the kettle, the thud of Stanley's sledge, the shouts of Gus herding the pigs, the sweet, clear notes of Sarah's singing filled the great, old building. [230]

"Send me a big one, Gus. We'd better get going. It's lighting up in the east."

Just as the edge of the sun appeared, sparkling like red fire across five miles of frozen lake, Gus lifted the narrow sliding door and booted a sow through the opening. "Crack, crack" went the big sledge on the sow's skull. The pigs screamed and plunged about in their pens. Quickly, now, they hooked the gambrels through the tenons of her hind legs, heaved and sweat on the big pulley, lifted the sow clear of the floor and snubbed the rope around a post. Stud reached for his sticking knife, slit the sow's throat; the blood poured into the trough beneath. There were horrid sounds of breath gurgling through the slit throat.

All day they labored. They slaughtered six hogs and two young steers, cleaned sausage casings, ground and stuffed sausage, coiled it in tubs carefully. They scalded pigs and scraped them white and smooth, then hung them up to freeze. They set aside a pail of blood for blood pudding and blood gravy.

Stud sweat like a draft horse despite the chill of the building. His big muscles worked like fine, heavy machinery. He was as happy as a lark until they drove Ulysses S. Grant into the slaughtering pen. Then his heart misgave him. [231]

Ulysses, whom he had raised and tended so carefully. Ulysses whom he had displayed so proudly at fair after fair. The great boar whom he loved and hated, pampered and fought. But it could not be helped. His breeding days were over. He was fierce and dangerous. A menace to have about the farm. Ulysses Jr. would have to take his place.

The boar's eyes gleamed wickedly as he stood with feet apart, waiting. He smelled the blood, but he did not scream. He was ready for his last fight and unafraid.

Stud trembled as he spit on his hands and picked up the heavy mall.

"Let him come, Gus. Get out of the way, girls."

He raised the sledge high above his head and brought it down with every ounce of his strength squarely between the animal's eyes.

Then he dropped the sledge to the ground and cried like a baby.

2

Stud Brailsford paced the house like a caged bear. The family was snowbound, and the enforced idleness made the big man restless and moody. [232]

For three days the snow had fallen burdening the trees, drifting three feet deep against the parlor windows, making it necessary to light the lamps at two each afternoon. Day and night the wind and snow poured in torrents down the Rock River valley, lifted in hissing spirals to strike against the house.

Stud had tried reading. He had mended and oiled harness, shucked corn, shoveled snow for hours every day. He had played a dozen games of checkers with the hired man. Still he was restless.

Coming upon Early Ann in the back pantry he pulled her roughly to him and kissed her full on the mouth. She broke away but she did not cry out. She looked at him bewildered, hurt, and tearful.

Stud was ashamed. He hung his head and went through into the kitchen where Sarah helped him off with his boots and put on his slippers. He knew now what was troubling him. He lay on the sofa with his eyes closed, pretending to sleep, but in reality thinking of Early Ann.

What a picture the girl was, her eyes bright and cheeks glowing! Stud liked to watch her churning the cream (which they could not deliver because of the blizzard). He liked to watch her poring over the geography book to learn the state capitals and the principal rivers of the United States. Her fingers flew deftly as she tatted a yoke for a fancy nightgown. Stud wished he were still in his twenties. [233]

As Stud lay brooding on the sofa, Gus burst in with the exciting news that the mailman had broken through and had brought the new mail-order catalogue. Nothing short of this miracle could have brightened the sad day for Stanley.

The new Sears Roebuck catalogue! It was a gala event. Let the snow drift, stars fall, or nations vanish. The Brailsfords did not care. They gathered around Stud who hastily tore the wrapping from "The Farmer's Bible" and opened it on the kitchen table.

Stanley, as always, turned to the buggies, wagons and harnesses. He had a Ford, it was true, but his first love had been the buggy. He sighed deeply as he viewed the spanking new surreys, phaëtons, runabouts, Concords and buckboards. He especially coveted buggy number 11R720, a veritable dream in buggy manufacture illustrated in full color. This swank creation, which the catalogue disclosed had been especially designed for eastern customers, had drop axles, green cloth cushions, triple-braced shaft, and flashing red wheels. Even as steamboat captains must sometimes dream of smart clipper ships, so Stud Brailsford, owner of a Ford, exclaimed aloud over this beautiful mail order buggy—1914 model. [234]

He decided that his stallion, who had recently had a touch of colic, needed more exercise, and within ten minutes had filled out an order for a skeleton road cart of sturdy design. He lingered over the new cream separators, bright red gasoline engines, ornamental fences, milk cans, lanterns, and one of the most inspiring manure spreaders which ever spread manure. The 1914 catalogue was epochal in the life of this big farmer.

When Sarah and Early Ann were given a chance to look between the covers they devoured the sections on clothes, jewelry, silverware and kitchen equipment. With dreaming eyes they caressed the lavallières engraved with roses, doves, and hearts; the real diamond rings flashing blue fire; the Parisian toilet sets elaborately hand-painted, monogrammed, and including two sizes of what were politely known as combinets. Perfumes, soaps, conch shells, and "high-class, hand-painted pictures inset with mother-of-pearl" transported them to fairy land. [235]

Their senses starved with drab reality, they viewed with hungry eyes hats dangling red cherries, grapes, stuffed birds and ostrich plumes. They lusted for the dainty nightgowns, embroidered underwear, stylish coats and dresses, rococo silver, and exotic wall paper they might never own.

"I sure do wish I had one of them blue enamel coal-oil stoves," said Sarah. "It'd be a real blessing in hot weather."

"I'll make out the order right now," Stanley said, remembering guiltily how he had kissed Early Ann in the back pantry.

"You're too good to me, Stanley, I don't deserve it."

Early Ann said she was going to buy herself a pair of navy blue high-button velvet shoes with flexible cushion soles. They could be had for two dollars and twenty-five cents, only a quarter more than it would cost to buy a sensible pair.

"And I'm going to get the family a sugarbowl-with-teaspoon-rack for the center of the table, and some new sheet music for the organ."

"You save your money, young lady," Stanley warned.

Personally Gus wished he had a bulldog so that he might buy dog collar 6R6268, ablaze with brass and imitation topaz. Then with a college-shaped meerschaum pipe, a cane, a green suit and yellow gloves he would go calling upon the new school teacher. If that didn't impress her he didn't know what would. [236]

When no one else was around he hastily turned to the section displaying corsets and women's underwear. He had never seen anything like it. Montgomery Ward's didn't have half as many big, blooming girls in lace-trimmed drawers, union suits, princess slips, corsets, and corset covers. He had never seen so many stylish stouts with blossoming cheeks and magnificent buttocks. The moment he dared he would carefully cut out whole pages of those colorful girls, particularly the smiling matron whose union suit was described as "snug fitting with flaring umbrella bottom."

"Gee," said Gus, "I'd like to have one of everything in this catalogue."

Life could be lived in those days, as it can now, without stepping off the farm for so much as a length of ribbon. You could "laugh yourself to death" for fourteen cents by perusing "On a Slow Train Through Arkansas," "Through New Hampshire on a Buckboard," or "I'm From Texas, You Can't Steer Me." You could buy—and still can—hay forks, Wilton carpets adorned with large red roses, slide trombones, butter paddles, post card albums, cylinder records, or magic lanterns for a relatively trifling sum. [237]

And never before in the history of civilization was seen such a display of hammocks, guns, cuckoo clocks, home remedies, feather dusters, folding tubs, bust forms, pacifiers, bed pans, trusses, windmills, lard presses, hornless talking machines and morris chairs. Ben Hur's famous chariot race enlivened a full page in color, while the devout could purchase the Bible for as little as sixty-three cents.

They did not care if the storm was raging outside. They did not care that they were snowbound. They were living in the romantic world of the mail order catalogue where they were all as rich as kings, where every woman wore a beautiful new dress and every man was handsome and stylish, where there were bonbons and books and beautiful buggies.

"Well, now that we've got the new catalogue, we know where we can put the old one," said Gus, winking at Stud.

Sarah blushed and Early Ann giggled.

On the stairs that night, Stanley again caught Early Ann and kissed her. The girl fought silently but furiously to free herself, and it was during the struggle that Sarah came upon them. [238]

Stud's wife was suddenly overborne with her age, her fragility, and her helplessness. For a moment she was jealous, angry with them both, and bitter. The following moment she was thinking of Stanley and wondering if he weren't entitled to be faithless just once in his life. Sarah felt that she would be the last person in the world to keep another from happiness. Then she remembered Early Ann, and she was afraid for the girl as though she had been her own daughter. Heartsick, frightened, but determined to face the issue; lost, bewildered, so in love with Stanley that it hurt her in the pit of her stomach,—Sarah, in that long moment before she spoke experienced half a life-time of sorrow, and the despair of millions of women of her age, standing in lamplight on the worn stairs, looking a little older.

"You might at least think of Early Ann," she said.

CHAPTER XIV

1

Shortly after midnight Peter was awakened with lantern light in his eyes, and he sprang out of bed, smelling the fog and knowing that case weather had come.

He stumbled into his overalls and followed his father and Gus down the stairs and out into the yard where Vern Barton, Dutchy Bloom and others were waiting. The fog was so thick that a man might have lost his way in his own barnyard. The lanterns looked like fox fire at twenty feet.

Stud led the way and the others followed, Indian file, down the slushy lane to the tobacco sheds. The mist, which had rolled northward flooding the valley from hilltop to hilltop, enveloped them in a thick, white blanket, muffled their footsteps, and drowned their voices with its weight of silence. Once when the fog lifted momentarily Peter could see lights at other farm houses, other lanterns moving, the whole countryside astir.

Stud rolled back the doors of the tobacco shed on creaking rollers and the men flowed in through the wide, dark opening, went up among the beams, began methodically and rapidly to lower the heavily-laden laths of tobacco to the men below who piled them log-cabin fashion on the dirt floor. Not a moment could be lost. Tobacco leaves which had been as brittle as spun glass five hours before were now as pliable as brown satin. Before a cold wind could lift the fog, again freezing the leaves, the men must pile and protect tons of tobacco. Later it would be stripped from the stalk, bundled and hauled to the warehouses of the tobacco buyers in Brailsford Junction. [240]

There was a breath of false spring in the air. The huge shadows cast by the men sprang up the walls and fell noiselessly. And Peter, surefooted as a cat among the beams, was jousting with shadows while he worked. Would he come back to the farm if this ten day layoff were extended, or would he catch a train for Chicago? Where would he forget Maxine the more easily? Where would he find happiness again?

On this night of fog, smelling of oak woods, of thawing earth and maple sap; surrounded by men he had known since childhood; watching his father moving gigantically in lantern light, he wrestled with his problems. What if the "Trailer" shut down for good as it easily might? Would he come back to this farm where his father and grandfather had labored before him, inherit these woods and fields, and marshes? Hunt ducks in the fall, plow the land in the spring, help at the birthing of calves and lambs and foals? He would introduce new machinery, build a new house, perhaps, high on one of the hills. Almost he was resigned to the idea. He thought his fate could have been worse. [241]

Shortly before dawn, Early Ann came with black coffee and thick sausage sandwiches and slabs of buttered coffee cake. The men ate greedily after the hard night's work. They paid crude compliments to the girl who stood with graniteware coffeepot waiting to refill their cups.

Early Ann had brought something special for Peter. When none of the others were looking she slipped a little white hickorynut cake with white frosting into Peter's dirty hand.

"You take the first bite," he said, holding the cake to her lips.

* * *

When his ten days were up Peter almost wished that he did not have to go back to the factory again. He had been tinkering around with the thrashing machine, oiling the parts and tightening a nut here and there. He hoped that he might be thrashing boss again next summer. [242]

2

"You might at least think of Early Ann," Stud's wife had said. He *had* thought of her until his spirit was tired, argued the problem with himself, tossed in his sleep.

Now he was almost happy to have another grievance to occupy his mind. Momentarily Early Ann was forgotten.

The Percheron had been grained too heavily and had not been given sufficient exercise. What else might be the matter with the great beast, the Lord alone knew.

"You and me, both!" Stud said to the sick stallion. "I wish all I had the matter with me was a belly ache."

Doc Carlyle was out of town, so it was up to Brailsford to save the horse,—no easy task. Teddy Roosevelt's head drooped almost to the floor; his big, shining barrel was blown, and his eyes were dull and lifeless. As Stanley and Gus stood watching the unfortunate animal he suddenly jerked up his head, pawed the floor, and tried to climb into the manger with his front feet. [243]

"Poor old bastard," said Gus.

"Run get the pig bladder and elder shoot," Stanley said. "I'll fix some turpentine and linseed oil."

The turpentine made the stallion frantic. He broke into a cold sweat, plunged around and around his pen, threw himself down with a crash, rolled over and got up again, dashed headlong into the planks of his stall, stood on his hind legs pawing the air wildly, screamed and foamed at the mouth, fell to the floor—his gigantic muscles contracting spasmodically under his gleaming

black hide. There was a mad, frightened light in his eyes.

"It'd be like losing a member of the family," Gus said.

"We've got to save him," Brailsford cried. "Get Sarah to put over a boiler of water. And bring the cayenne pepper and baking soda and barbadoes aloes off the medicine shelf."

All night Stanley Brailsford worked over the Percheron, carried steaming blankets to cover the heaving body, forced whiskey down the terrified animal's throat, tried to soothe the brute by petting him and talking to him as he would a sick child. He fixed himself a bed on the feed box and tried to snatch a few winks of sleep. [244]

Shortly after midnight a cold wind made the lantern flicker. Stud Brailsford looked up to see Early Ann with coffee pot and sandwiches.

"I couldn't sleep," she said. "How's the stallion?"

"Ain't kicking around so bad."

Early Ann gazed thoughtfully at the horse for several moments.

"Probably stomach staggers," she said.

"How'd you know?"

"I've taken care of 'em before."

The man wolfed his sandwiches and drank his scalding black coffee. Early Ann went into the stall, dropped to her knees beside the stallion and began to pet his quivering shoulder. His coat was rumpled and full of straw, his heavy legs listless. The girl got the curry comb and began to curry very gently. She put a gunny-sack over the Percheron's head to shade his eyes from the lantern light.

"You're quite a hand with a sick stallion."

"Got to pamper 'em like you do all males."

"You'll make a great wife for some lucky farmer."

"I'm going to try," the girl said earnestly. "I'm sewing things against the day." [245]

"Wish I was twenty years younger."

"That'd be two years before I was born."

They were silent for several minutes, Early Ann currying the stallion, Stanley brooding and munching his sandwiches. Once the Percheron tried to get to his knees, then sank back wearily in the straw.

"You'll be all right," Stanley told the big animal. "You ain't going to die. You're a big husky critter that can stand all kinds of belly aches."

The girl picked up the coffee pot and started for the door.

"Wait," the man said. He came quickly to her side and put his arm around her. Trembling and frightened she tried to get away. The rasping breath of the stallion, the strange light, and the huge arm around her waist made her feel faint.

"I can't," she said.

"Why not?"

"I can't do anything like that to Sarah, and to you and me."

"No," the man said. "I suppose you can't."

After she had gone Stud tried to sleep, but could not. Mice ventured out into the ring of light and nibbled at kernels of corn. The wind shoved at the door and rattled the black window panes. The animals stirred in their sleep, sighed deeply, dreamed of lush green pastures. [246]

At half past three in the morning the stallion had another bad spell, and Stud thought he was going to die. He wished that he had a hypodermic needle so that he could puncture the gut at the spot where it had become the most distended. He felt helpless in the face of death. He pleaded with the stallion not to die.

Strange how big male things could die so easily. They were so strong and fiery and full of life one moment and dead the next. You could breed them to size, color, speed or endurance but you couldn't breed them against death. It made Stud Brailsford think of his own mortality watching the stallion hour by hour. He wished again that he could leave a dozen boys to propagate his kind.

"Don't die," he said. "Don't die, big fellow."

* * *

All day they tended the stallion, and the next night Stanley again insisted upon watching throughout the night. This time Early Ann brought coffee and sandwiches before the rest of the family went to bed. Stanley said nothing but pulled the girl roughly to him. [247]

"No, no," she whispered. "Don't, Mr. Brailsford, please. I ain't strong enough to fight you, Stanley, please."

She began to cry, so he let her go, unharmed. She did not leave immediately, but waited to pour him another cup of coffee.

She wondered if he were asking too much, if other girls were so virtuous. She wondered if she should be kind to this unhappy man. But before she could answer these questions they saw the first flames and caught the smell of burning hay.

Looking back upon that night of wind and gusty rain when the Brailsford barn burned like a pile of dry shavings in a forest fire, Sarah sometimes wondered what blind impulse had sent her through the smoke and flames to save the twin Percheron colts. She thought that perhaps it was her feeling of protection for young things. She couldn't bear to think of the colts being burned.

"Save yourself, Mother," Brailsford had cried above the roaring fire, struggling vainly to save the stallion; pleading, whipping and cajoling. At last he left the inert sire, rushed to the box stall of Napoleon and led the bull to safety. [248]

"Help Gus with the cows down at the other end," Stud shouted to his wife. "I'll get the horses."

He went in among the fire-crazed mares and geldings, old work horses who were faithful and quiet in the field but who were now leaping, terrified, wild animals, straining at their halter ropes, pawing the floor, and shying like unbroken yearlings at the thunder of the flames. Early Ann led the three ponies into the tobacco shed, then ran like the wind to the telephone in the kitchen.

"Hurry, it's the Brailsford barn," she cried. "Take the short cut over Barton's hill."

Vern Barton, Ole Oleson and Dutchy Bloom were carrying water from the stock tanks. Sarah and Gus were leading out the cows.

The big flames ran in sheets up the curving walls of the wooden silo, burst like a volcano through the peaked roof, cracked and thundered like a kettle drum in the half-empty cylinder. The resinous siding of the barn burned like a fire of pine knots, kindling the hand-hewn oak and hickory timbers cut from the forest with axe and adz fifty years before.

Cows bawled. Pigeons and sparrows shot out like flaming rockets and fell into the fields. Chickens squawked as they tumbled from the building, ran around in circles like fighting cocks, or flew back crazily into the scorching flames. A mother cat carrying a singed kitten in her mouth stalked out of the barn, her eyes gleaming like green coals. Ganders added their hiss to the hiss of the fire, men shouted and women screamed. [249]

In the hub-bub that went on about him Stud alone kept a clear head. He ordered the men to form a bucket line, sent others for the spray wagon which was used to throw a small stream on the adjoining buildings, rushed in again and again after horses. It was while he was leading out the last, maddened gelding that he was all but caught in the passageway by the rearing, screaming beast. He could hear Sarah calling him, beside herself with fear. He could see the flame licking at the edges of the doorway and eating at the lintel.

"Steady, boy. Steady."

He patted the nervous shoulder, talked quietly to the frantic animal. Slowly the horse subsided, seemed to listen, followed Stud in a dash through the door not a moment too soon as the flaming lintel came crashing down behind them.

When the fire reached the haymow there was a flare and flash almost like an explosion as the dust and loose hay ignited. All the colors from blue-white to crimson played across the surface of the hay. Then the fifty tons of timothy, alfalfa, and clover settled down to a forty-eight hour blaze. Flame and smoke sucked and twisted up the hay chutes like dust in a tornado. These blasts cut through the shingled roof like a dozen blow-torches and spurted their yellow pennants skyward. The flames licked and bellied in the wind, belched from the open door of the loft with the hollow intonation of a big gun. [250]

"Help pull the hayfork down," cried Gus. He said in after years that he had intended to fasten barrels of water to the fork, run them down the fork track, and dump them on the flame. Before he could attempt the impractical scheme the ropes had burned and the fork had fallen with a crash, imbedding itself in the snow and mud.

Finally the fire department arrived. The big dapple grays had run four miles dragging the heavy fire engine through the slushy snow. They galloped into the barnyard lathered and panting, the red wheels and brass mountings of their engine flashing in the fire-light, steam and smoke belching from the funnel.

"Unwind the hose, boys," shouted Hank Vetter. "Where's the water, Stud?" [251]

"We'll use the tanks and then the cistern," Stud roared. "I got the gasoline engine pumping from the well."

But all these sources were soon insufficient for the two inch hose through which the fire engine forced its stream. They led the hose to the creek, chopped a hole through the ice, and began to pump from the deep hole beside the mill. The water sprayed upon the burning roof, was shot in through the loft door; hissed into the inferno leaving scarcely a trace.

"Look out!" cried Stud. "There goes the roof!" It fell with a mighty crash throwing embers high into the air, shooting flames seventy-five feet above the barn: blue, yellow, and red against the inky sky; lighting up the countryside from Cottonwood Hill to Charley's Bluff. Another fire was burning on the frozen lake, the flames pointing downward toward the center of the earth.

Then the timbers holding up the hay collapsed and half-a-hundred tons of burning grass fell into the stables. The great stallion screamed once and then was still.

Sarah came over to comfort Stud.

"We've got each other and most of the stock," she said. [252]

"We'll make it somehow, Mother. We'll start all over."

"I'll go to the house now and fix something for the firemen."

"I guess you might as well."

Hank Vetter, chief of the volunteers, left his engine and came over to where Stud was listening to the condolences of his neighbors.

"How'd it start?" yelled Hank.

"Darned if I know," said Stud, scratching his singed head. "I was tending a sick stallion and...."

"Was you smoking?" asked Hank.

"Never smoked around the barns in my life."

"Didn't tip over the lantern?"

"Lantern was hanging from a peg. Never touched the lantern."

"Well, it couldn't have started by itself," said Hank. "Let's look around."

They had taken less than a dozen steps down the lane when a figure started up from behind a stump, jumped the fence, crashed down the hill toward the lake, and began to skirt the bay.

"It's Joe Valentine," shouted Early Ann.

"This is my job," Stud cried, dashing after the fleeing figure.

[253]

Hearing shouts, Joe Valentine decided to risk the shortest way to Lake House Point. He leaped onto the melting ice and ran and stumbled two hundred yards out from the shore. They saw him clearly in the light of the burning barn as he crashed through into the black water and went down; and although they watched the dark hole in the ice for twenty minutes he did not come up again.

[254]

[255]

BOOK FIVE

[256]

[257]

CHAPTER XV

1

During the spring of 1914 Edith Cavell was going quietly about her civilian duties of mercy in Brussels. A Bolshevik agitator by the name of Lenin was hiding in Galicia sending anonymous articles to Russian newspapers. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Navy, attended the ceremonies which began construction of battleship number 39, "the greatest fighting machine in the universe." Villa had the federals on the run south of the Rio Grande. The veteran Joffre deep in Plan 17 eyed the aging but wily von Moltke across the Rhine. Aunt Martha in her Household Hints suggested putting ordinary glass marbles in the tea-kettle to keep the lime from gathering.

But on the Brailsford farm they were building a new barn.

For twenty-four hours the Brailsfords had been stunned by the loss. They had gone about their duties in a daze. No one had seen Sarah crying, but her eyes were rimmed with red, and Stanley silently mourned the loss of his big Percheron and the Jersey heifers.

[258]

Then, while the last charred timbers were still smouldering they turned to the more consoling thought of reconstruction. They would have a magnificent new barn with arching roof and silver ventilators. They would have a barn which would house fifty head of cattle besides the horses, with a hayloft twice the size of the old one.

Peter came home every week-end to help with the work. He insisted that the barn be piped with drinking water for the cattle, that the steel stanchions and cement floor be of the latest design, and that whole banks of windows replace what had previously been almost windowless stone walls.

They worked with frantic haste for soon it would be spring, soon there would be a quarter section to plow and plant. Already the ice was breaking, the gulls were screaming overhead; great flights of wild ducks and geese were wedging their way northward.

Stripped to his shirt sleeves even in the early March winds Stud Brailsford worked early and late. He helped the carpenters to lift the big four-by-eights and two-by-twelves into their places, drove thirty-penny spikes as though they were finishing nails. He helped to build the forms and pour the cement; wheeled big barrows of sand, gravel and concrete; brought stone-boat loads of hard heads to fill the sloping ramp.

[259]

Saws ripped through clean-smelling wood; hammers rang from dawn until dark; wagonloads of lumber, shingles, barn-equipment and paint came out daily from Brailsford Junction; and by the twentieth of March the cows and horses were in their new, luxurious home.

It took all the insurance money on the old barn and nearly every cent Stud Brailsford had in the bank. The big man was weary, hard-hit financially, and definitely older. But he looked up proudly at his great new barn and smiled.

Before Stud put a fork of hay in the mow they had a barn dance. Corn meal was strewn over the wide pine boards and a four-piece orchestra from Brailsford Junction was hired for the occasion. The old folks danced the square dances to the squeaking of the fiddle, and Stud who had not called the figures in fifteen years called them that night as was his privilege since he owned the barn. Neither he nor Sarah had gone to a dance in ten years, nevertheless he led her

proudly in the grand march and the Virginia Reel.

Later the young folks, to the scandalization of their elders, danced the tango and the turkey trot, and they all ended the evening with "Home, Sweet Home" and plenty of apple cider. [260]

"I guess we can still kick up our heels," said Stanley, escorting his wife from the barn to the kitchen door.

"Gee, you sure can rag," Early Ann told the glowing Peter.

"Maybe I can't dance so good," Gus confessed to the new school teacher, "but I know where there's another jug of apple jack."

Almost before the paint was dry on the barn it was lambing time, and night and day for more than a week the Brailsfords helped the bleating ewes and their small dependents, warmed chilled lambs in the "hospital" at the corner of the shed and gave the weakened mothers encouraging shots of brandy. Four times there were twins and once triplets. To Stud's dismay one little black lamb made its appearance—a disgrace to his exceptionally pure flock of Shropshires. As chance would have it the little black fellow was orphaned and no ewe could be made to adopt it, so Early Ann raised him a pet on a baby bottle.

The great old ram was kept securely locked in his pen through all these proceedings. He looked on indifferently through the bars, his thick white wool glowing and healthy; his massive, wide head, broad shoulders and low-slung chassis the very essence of masculinity. [261]

"He's got a leg on each corner," said Stanley admiringly, stopping to pet the father of sixty-four new sons and daughters.

The pony mare and one of the Percherons dropped foals within the next two weeks, and fawn-eyed Jersey calves arrived almost daily. At the Oleson farm another little Swede entered the world. Sarah and Temperance Crandall were on hand to help the midwife, but Early Ann was strictly forbidden to go near the place until the baby was born, washed, and placed in his hand-carved cradle. The arrival of three small billy goats, and twelve litters of Poland China pigs increased the blessed events on the west shore of Lake Koshkonong to a staggering figure.

Stud Brailsford, deep in the spring plowing, had no time to think of any woman. He bought a brooder and an incubator for Sarah, and evenings he went into the cellar to tinker with the new contraptions. In due time flotillas of fluffy ducklings, eight hundred scrambling, peeping chicks, and a dozen long-necked, awkward, yellow-green goslings were in evidence on every hand. [262]

One night the orchard was taken in a single onslaught by the rush of spring. The fragrant white billow swept over apple, cherry, plum, and Sarah's flowering crab. Underneath the laden trees the dandelions bloomed, and the bees came to plunder.

Once again spring was upon the land.

2

It might have occurred to Stanley—but never did—that throughout the spring the boy had seemed curiously devoted to the farm, unwilling to miss a single week-end in the country. It should have seemed strange to Brailsford that when the "Trailer" went bankrupt in May, Peter took the loss of his job so philosophically. But all that Stud thought, when he thought about the matter at all, was now his boy was back at last, that he had sown his wild oats and was ready to settle down, and that during the coming season he would make him thrashing boss again.

3

On the morning of June 28, 1914—the day that Gavro Princip shot the Archduke Ferdinand at Serajevo—Stud Brailsford awoke just before dawn. Ducks were quacking, geese hissing in the barnyard. Roosters were heralding the dawn, answered across the lake by other roosters. A cow bawled at her calf, the wind rustled in the corn. Ten miles away a train whistled, and rumbled across the river bridge. To Stud's simple mind the world had never seemed more peaceful. The smell of coffee, toast and sausage drifted up from the kitchen. The first streaks of color were showing in the east, reflected on the surface of the lake. [263]

Stud did not know that Europe was an armed camp, that civilization was about to be blown to bits, that Wisconsin farm boys, whistling as they went to the barns that morning, would soon be lying in the mud of Flanders. Stud had never heard of the Archduke Ferdinand nor of Serajevo. You could not have convinced him that a shot fired by a Serb in remote Bosnia could affect his prosperous dairy farm on Crabapple Point in the Fertile Rock River valley of Southern Wisconsin.

It was Sunday. Peter and Gus were already up and doing the chores. Stud could lie abed for another half hour if he wished. He could go swimming in the lake, or merely lie in the hammock under the trees, listening to the birds and taking life easy. Such indolence was all but unbelievable to the big farmer who for the past three and one-half months had been working sixteen hours a day, laboring evenings and holidays, even breaking God's commandment by plowing on Sunday. But at last the crops were planted; the corn was knee-high, and the twenty acres of tobacco were a rich, healthy green. [264]

Stud yawned, stretched like a big cat, rolled out of bed and donned clean blue shirt and overalls. Carrying his shoes and socks in his hand he padded down the stairs, enjoying the feeling of the cool, smooth wood under his bare feet. Sarah and Early Ann were busy over the kitchen stove, the spot where they spent many a Sabbath.

"Sleepy-head," taunted Early Ann. "Chores are most done."

For the first time since the burning of the barn Stud really noticed the girl. My, she was pretty! After breakfast he saw her take sunbonnet and milkpail and start up the path toward the strawberry patch beyond the hill. Ten minutes after she was out of sight, he followed.

Sarah Brailsford guessed where he was going, and why, but she did not raise a finger to stop him. Gus Gunderson knew by second nature what was up. Stud, chewing a stem of Timothy, climbed the hill, skirted the orchard, and there he found them.

[265]

For a moment Stanley Brailsford was dumbfounded. Then a slow smile spread over his face. Briefly he stayed to watch Early Ann and Peter sitting on the grassy bank with their arms around each other, looking off across the lake.

Slowly old Brailsford retraced his steps, saying to no one in particular, "Grandchildren. Ho, ho! I never thought of grandchildren. Wonder what it'll be like to be a grandfather?"

He was still chuckling when he sat down beside Sarah on the front porch.

"You know, when Peter and Early Ann get married, I'm going to build them a house on Cottonwood Hill."

"I think that would be real nice," said Sarah. "It's the prettiest view in southern Wisconsin."

"I hope they have a dozen children, Mother. I'd like about seven boys and five girls. They'll be blue-ribbon babies if that pair breeds 'em."

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES

—Obvious print and punctuation errors fixed.

—A Table of Contents was not in the original work; one has been produced and added by Transcriber.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PLOWING ON SUNDAY ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C

below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.