

THERE'S ALWAYS ANOTHER YEAR

MARTHA OSTENSO



W.N.U. SERVICE

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CHAPTER I

ORDINARILY, when the Heron River band—an eight-man institution which included a twelve-year-old snare-drummer and a bass-drummer of sixty—played, of a summer night, "Hall, Hall, The Gang's All Here," and proceeded with proper solemnity into "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," old Shad Finney looked at old Nils Ulevik and said, "Wa-al, she's finished, mate. We better get along." And Nils, sucking on his pipe, would nod his head in grave accord.

But this was no ordinary band-concert in July. The telegraph operator, Albert Symes, had let fall the information that the express was going to stop at the Heron River depot this evening. It was not only going to slow down as was its wont, to drop off the incoming mail and to snatch up the outgoing, but it was going to come to a definite standstill. To let off a passenger. And who hadn't read in today's Maynard Times about the shooting, over a gambling table in Chicago, of Gentleman Jim Grenoble—Gentleman Jim who still owned half of the Grenoble farm, fancily called Ydrasil by a fancy wife now long dead; and who had a daughter who must now be nineteen or twenty? Albert Symes, being a man of honor in his profession, hadn't said that there had been a wire to Sophronia Willard, Jim's married sister, about Jim's daughter, stating that she would arrive on the evening train. But Tillie Fink, of the telephone office, had conscientiously listened in while Albert had conveyed the message to Phronie Willard at eight o'clock that morning. So that it had been unnecessary for Albert Symes to betray his trust.

Another interesting angle in the situation was that Roddy Willard, step-son of Sophronia, had mysteriously disappeared in his car yesterday. "Just a little trip," Roddy had said. In view of the fact that Elisabeth Fink, the postmistress and sister of Tillie, knew that four letters had been placed in Roddy's rural mail box during the past ten days, all in the same feminine handwriting, the circumstances were intriguing indeed.

All in all, conditions certainly warranted a change of procedure on the part of those two old cronies, Shad Finney and Nils Ulevik. They stamped heartily enough upon the advent of "Hall, Hall," but after that they glanced at their watches. And immediately those others who possessed watches drew them out from snug pockets, looked at them, gave a thoughtful wind to the stems and replaced them.

There was a general movement toward the depot, a block away, across from the lumber yard. Eighteen or twenty grown persons and a scattering of children.

"D'you s'pose Phronie'll be here?" Shad whispered to Nils. "Taint likely she'll send Jason to meet her. The looks o' him's enough to scare the old Nick himself!"

Nils shrugged. "She could do worse," he remarked. "Yase yust so good so his brudder Roderick."

Shad spied Duke Melbank standing amid four or five men on the depot platform. Duke—whose real name was Earl—was bareheaded as usual, and his flaming red hair, shaven close about the ears and neck, could have been seen a quarter mile away.

Duke was tall, narrow-shouldered, tubular. His body suggested a length of sponge. He had a loud, almost incessant laugh which was peculiarly devoid of mirth and meaning. He was an only son, and lived with his mother on a shambles of a farm fringing Heron River. Since farming had become unprofitable, Jess Melbank and her son supplied homebrew to the neighborhood and to the campers on the lakes to the north at twenty-five cents a quart. Jess, in coloring, appeared to have been the inspiration of Duke. She was as broad, however, as she was long.

Soon after Shad Finney and Nils Ulevik had gained the steps of the platform, Jesse Melbank could be seen waddling forward from the shadowed extreme end of it. The evening being oppressive, Jess sank with audible relief down upon a bench against the depot wall, still some distance from the group of idlers who surrounded her son Duke. Shad and Nils with a certain feeling of distaste, it must be admitted, edged nearer the group.

The two old men may not have been listening to the utterances of Duke Melbank—those utterances so punctuated by his own snickers and

guffaws that it took an alert ear to gather their meaning. They may not have been listening, exactly—because they were nice old men, not given to busy interest in scandal. But they could, nevertheless, not help overhearing.

Some weeks ago, Duke Melbank, on his thirty-fourth birthday, had discovered Chicago. And Chicago, Ned Burgess, editor of the Heron River Sentinel, had established, would never be the same again. Duke had read the news item at first sight with a slightly sour look, because Ned considered himself above everybody in the county except the Willards. But whatever Ned's intent had been, it was something to have your name in the paper, and at length the clipping nestled in Duke's vest pocket, along with certain photographs he had got from a traveling man who had been in France.

Everybody in Heron River knew, by now, what had happened on Duke's visit to Chicago, and tonight was an occasion which called for the retelling of the event.

"You was in the Grenobles' suit, wasn't you, Duke?" somebody prompted.

"They don't call it a 'suit,'" Duke disclosed loftily. "They call it an 'apartment.' You bet your punkins I was in it. I wouldn't 'a' got in, neither, except I met o' Jim himself in a speak-easy, and I come right home with him, bein' from his home town. He was worried like, and he didn't seem to know I was along. There was a gang to his place, all right, all right! Say, boy! Maybe I didn't smile like a wooden fox after seven or eight o' them drinks they give me! And then"—Duke drew himself up and hooked his thumbs into his green-and-orange striped suspenders—"In she comes! Silver pajamas, by hickory! They was all playin' roulette—you know, like they play over to Gale's Point. Up gets this guy from the table and she goes with him into another room and shuts the door! She never even seen me. Wouldn't 'a' known me, anyhow. Somebody says it's her, so I know. I get up pretty soon and goes and opens the door, easy like. And there she is with her back to me and this guy bendin' over her like he's gonna kiss her!" Duke croaked joyously, his head thrown back with the relish of reminiscence.

Somebody prodded him. "Here comes Phronie Willard, Duke! Shut up!"

Duke glanced about him truculently. "What do I care?" he swaggered. "I seen Lucas—"

"He's a big gambler, ain't he, Duke?" A spindly youth, who had heard the story before, put the question in an awed and avid whisper.

"I'll tell the world!" said Duke loudly, straitening his arm and tapping cigarette ash in the direction of Sophronia Willard, the tall, gaunt, dark-faced woman who was at that moment ascending the steps of the platform.

Nils Ulevik and Shad Finney glanced anxiously at Sophronia as she passed them. They hoped she had not overheard any of Duke's talk, for they were law-abiding citizens, and had a distaste for public violence.

But Sophronia Willard, straight and strong as a pine, and as awe-inspiring as one, ignored Duke Melbank's little group just as such a majestic tree might ignore the whisperings of scrub growth in a forest.

Black-gloved, black-hatted, black-crocheted reticule on her arm, she took up her stand on the middle of the platform and remained oblivious of the eyes that were fixed upon her. She stood, composed and stern, looking neither to right nor to left.

Sophronia had had since eight o'clock this morning to prepare for her meeting with her brother's daughter, Anna—"Silver," her mother had frivolously called her, because of the pallor of her hair and skin. Sophronia was washing the separator in the milk house when Jason had shouted to her that she was wanted on the telephone.

Albert Symes, the telegraph operator, had read the telegram to her. He had said first, clearing his throat: "I have bad news for you, Mrs. Willard." Phronie had said, "Go on, go on, man! Read it." Then Albert had proceeded with the message: "As attorney to your brother James Grenoble I assume the painful duty of informing you that your brother was shot fatally early this morning by one Lewis Rawson. Rawson was killed by police as he was trying to make his escape. Your niece Silver Grenoble will arrive Heron River tonight's train. Take care of her. Benjamin Hubbard"

Sophronia had made no outcry. She had given Albert Symes a curt "Thank you." Then she had seated herself on the chair beside the telephone and had looked up at it, there on the wall, for a long time. Jason had stood near by, fumbling with a piece of harness, or something—she forgot just what. Her eyes had moved to him slowly, and it seemed to her suddenly that this



Then She Had Seated Herself on the Chair Beside the Telephone.

step-son of hers was more hunch-backed than usual. She could see that pitiful excrescence of bone and flesh mounting from behind the line of his shoulder. She saw his mournful, deep eyes—like the eyes of a dog that had been run over and begged to be removed from its pain.

"Jim is dead," she told him, as she might tell him that the clock needed winding.

Jason turned the bit of leather about in his powerful hands—hands that could bend a horseshoe inside out without trouble.

"How?" he asked. His voice was husky and soft as wind moving over tall grass. "How did he die?"

"He was shot."

"Was he in Chicago still?"

"Yes."

"It would be a gambler shot him," Jason said, and his glance fell.

"I guess," Phronie said. "His daughter is coming on tonight's train. It was Jim's lawyer telegraphed."

"Too bad Roddy isn't here," Jason said laboriously. "He could meet her, Phronie."

The angry red sprang into Sophronia's cheeks. "You're good enough to meet her, Jason," she said sharply. "You're good enough to meet anybody, and don't you think different!"

Jason smiled with great gentleness, as though it were Phronie who was ill-formed. "You know I ain't," he said. "You've got to drive in."

"All right, Jase," she replied, to have it done with. "Now I've got to finish the separator."

The shining metal of the separator made whirling disks before her eyes. Jim—Gentleman Jim! Her only brother, younger than herself, handsome and wild as their grandfather had been. Not made for this land their grandfather had homesteaded on, though. Going off the deep end when his wife, Anna Egstrom, that lovely Swede, had died without asking your leave! Jim had gone away then, leaving her, Sophronia, in possession of half this farm that had belonged to their father and their grandfather—leaving her with the responsibility of the entire farm, his own half as well as hers! Going off after his wife's death, with his seven-year-old daughter, as though the earth had swallowed them up. What had there been for Sophronia to do but to marry Roderick Willard, the widower on a farm in the next county? He had built this new house on the ridge, not more than a stone's throw above the little old place in which the Grenobles had lived for three generations, in which Silver Grenoble had been born and Anna Egstrom had died.

Roderick Willard had been kind. Sophronia had loved him, she supposed, so far as she knew anything of love. And his two sons, in their early teens then, had responded to her mothering, but affectionately accepted her. But Roderick, who had sold his own farm before his marriage to Sophronia, had wanted to secure complete possession of the Grenoble farm. Jim Grenoble, for some romantic reason, had refused to sell his section, although Roderick and his sons had worked it through all the years.

Two years after her marriage to Roderick Willard, when her stepsons were in high school at Heron River, Sophronia had had her first news of Jim. He and Silver were in Alaska. Jim did not say what he was doing, but Silver was being looked after in a convent school. Jim sent two thousand dollars, that time, for Phronie to carry on the work of the farm—and no questions asked. The farm was paying its way then, and more. Phronie thought Jim had probably gone crazy.

Next year Jim was in Nevada. And later in Mexico. Mining, he said. His daughter was also in Mexico, in the care of nuns, and was learning Spanish and German and French, Sophronia, remembering the fair child of seven, who was so much like that dreamy, foreign mother of hers, wondered. Sophronia wrote Jim then that her husband, Roderick Willard, wanted to buy him out. But Jim had some sentimental attachment for the place, because of his wife Anna, who had called it Ydrasil. That word, in Norse mythology, Anna had said, meant the Tree of Life. There was a huge oak in front of the old Grenoble farm house.

They couldn't budge Jim. He refused to sell. Why did he want to hang on to a farm that he never meant to visit again? He was gambling for a living. Sophronia would have guessed that, even though Newt Fisher, who had run into him in Nevada, hadn't brought the news back. But his wife Anna had curiously loved her Ydrasil—silly name, silly woman! Sophronia always grew uncomfortable when she thought of Anna. Well, who hadn't loved her? She was gentle as spring rain.

And what would this daughter of hers be like? Sophronia wondered with misgiving. Product of convents (of all things—and Jim raised a Presbyterian!) and boarding schools from Nome to Nicaragua—daughter of a fairy mother who had died at twenty-eight, and a father madder than his own grandfather, who would lay bets with the moon as to the color of its back-hair—what would the daughter be like? She had been born on this farm, it was true, but would she remember anything of it that was sane and sound?

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Little Lights on LIVING

By MARIA LEONARD
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PROGRESSIVE LIVING

THE word progressive comes to us from the Latin word "pro-gredior," meaning to move forward. Progressive living means forward, not faster living. One scientist believes that we, in America, have lived about 100 normal years in the last 25.

There is no doubt about the speed of our modern living when airplanes, through blizzards, carry mail 220 miles per hour, when 1,000 cigarettes are made by one machine in one minute (and consumed as rapidly), when great turbines equal in strength 900,000 man power, and the Century of Progress was lighted by a star forty light years distant. Magic it seems when we, sitting in our homes, can hear the President's voice from the White House in Washington, or listen to the Christmas mass at midnight broadcast from La-Madeleine in Paris. What an amazing, intriguing old world! We are going fast, but where?

In Indianapolis there is a great speedway. Automobiles have sped around its track at 120 miles an hour, but when they finished they were where they began, for they had been racing in circles. In the hurry-scurry we call modern life do we ever stop to ascertain whether we are racing in circles or going forward to higher planes of living, and thinking? Civilization means intellectual, moral and spiritual progress. With all due attention paid to diets and physical exercise over the radio daily, one would think we were living physically in a health age on the planet, but when we see the large number of general hospitals, filled almost to capacity and also the increase in the psychopathic wards in America, 75,000 beds for new patients a year, we question it. Is this faster or forward?

In our home life in America today are we, as a nation, going faster or forward? The home is the economic, moral and spiritual unit of our country, said one of our recent statesmen.

Also statistics have revealed that more money has been spent for automobiles in the last three and one-half years than has been spent for homes in the last 150 years. Where is the security of childhood if mortgaged by pleasure-seeking parents?

THE FAR-VIEW

PERSPECTIVE is getting the right slant on things whether they be pictures or circumstances. Any work of art or situation in life is not clear if out of perspective. To an artist perspective is the key to success—without it he is no artist. So with us, in this art of living, if we lose perspective, we lose the true purpose of life.

The far-view, or perspective, is a good habit to cultivate every day. When looking out of the window of a fast moving train, the near view causes the fence posts and corn stalks to dance by in one dizzy whirl, which ceases when we take the far-view to the calm hills and peaceful horizon. Just so, with our petty problems and worries, which will be gone in a week from now.

For the want of the far-view, many persons of our own day have lost their perspective in money matters. I remember as a child my father telling of a miserly old man—a veritable Silas Marner—who got his dollars so close to his eyes, he shut out the sunlight. Even yet do I mentally see two silver dollars where his spectacles were. Poor old man—he lost his perspective.

Some business men are working harder and faster as the years roll on, hoping to accumulate enough to "lay off" sometime in large luxurious homes and say within themselves, "my soul, take thine ease." What happens? About that time health breaks and their savings go largely to the hospital.

From a Chicago office on the twenty-fifth floor, the view of Lake Michigan was superb. A rising young editor sat with his back to the view, facing day in and day out, a flat tan-painted wall. "Look what's behind you," I said to him one day, looking out of the window. "I haven't time," he said gruffly. "You've lost your perspective at far too young an age," I remarked.

Many students come for counsel asking: "What course shall I pursue? Shall I take a job now, if offered, or finish my last year of university work?" My answer is: "Get the far-view. Do now what ten years from now you will wish you had done. Be willing to sacrifice any immediate end for the larger future good." Perhaps in our student days we too were mentally near-sighted, failing to fit each day's task into our life's plan, perhaps emphasizing credits rather than knowledge, and knowledge more than wisdom. In later years, perhaps spiritually near-sighted, we still forget the far-view of how we are daily growing old.

Fish Out of Water

By DONALD S. ATKIN
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WNU Service.

THERE was an inscription on the back of the gold watch. Presented to Henry Smithers in recognition of 35 years of loyal service

Jones, Ward & Co.
"It's beautiful, Henry!" Mrs. Smithers said.

Mr. Smithers was slumped in an armchair, hands dug deep in trouser pockets. "Well," he said, "I suppose it's a pretty swell way of telling a man that he's no good any more."

Tears floated in Mrs. Smithers' kindly brown eyes. She forced them back, put one arm around her husband's shoulder and stroked his gray head.

"Don't take it that way, Henry. You ought to be very thankful. They've given you a generous pension. Now you can enjoy a rest."

Mrs. Smithers did her best to smile, but in her heart she was afraid. Men retired against their will from jobs held almost a lifetime, forced into inactivity, went to pieces quickly.

Next morning, in spite of protests from his wife, Mr. Smithers rose as usual at seven. He shaved, dressed and was the first down at breakfast.

He was moodily munching a piece of dry toast when the click-clack of feminine heels sounded on the stairs. Doris took her place at the table.

"Good morning, Daddy!" Unfolding a napkin, she turned her plump little face with its bubbling blue eyes in the direction of her mother. "Gee, Daddy's lucky, isn't he?" she said. "No more rushing off with me to catch the 8:15 in the morning. All day to read his paper and do as he likes."

George, tall and glowing from his morning shower, slipped into his seat in time to echo the sentiment.

"Yes, Dad," he said. "Wish I had a little of the spare time you're going to have. I haven't even had time to try out my new fishing rod."

All morning Mrs. Smithers' patience was sorely tried. Henry just moped around.

After lunch Mrs. Smithers decided that something must be done. She was afraid of what might happen if this went on. Resolutely, she dried her hands and went to find him. Henry was nowhere in the house. The old brown hat he sometimes wore was missing from its accustomed place in the hall. He must have gone off somewhere for a stroll. Mrs. Smithers went to the telephone and put a call through to the office of Jones, Ward and Co.

Mr. Ward, the president, listened with astonishment. Then he said, "But, my dear Mrs. Smithers, we can't take your husband back! He's earned his retirement. If you think the pension's not adequate, perhaps we could—"

Mrs. Smithers had to begin all over again.

"It isn't a question of money. Don't you understand? Henry's whole life was in his job. Now you've taken it away! I'm afraid. So afraid! Can't you find a place for him, somewhere, anywhere? Oh, please, please!"

Gradually the president came around. Yes, he began to see. If she'd tell Mr. Smithers to come down in the morning they'd talk things over.

When George came home from work she was almost frantic. They drove down to the village to make inquiries. The butcher put them on the track. His little boy had seen Mr. Smithers heading down towards the river where high banks overlooked the most dangerous part. Mrs. Smithers, white-faced, exchanged glances with her son.

George drove grimly, sending the car bouncing and bucking along the deep-rutted lane. The last fifty yards had to be covered on foot, through trees. As they came out close to the river bank, Mrs. Smithers uttered a little weak cry of distress. Halfway up the slope lay a crumpled brown object. It was Henry's battered old hat!

George gripped his mother's arm and steadied her. They climbed to the top and looked down. Immediately below them, at the water's edge, sat Mr. Smithers on a large rock—fishing! Mrs. Smithers' eyes closed and a little prayer of thankfulness went up. Then she looked down again and cried out: "Goodness gracious, Henry! Don't you know it's getting dark?" The scolding tone in her voice was to hide her relief. "Come on up. We've got good news. They phoned from the office. They want you to go back!"

Mr. Smithers raised the fishing rod, swung the baited hook to another part of the stream and let it fall in again with a little plop. He looked up at the bank. "Me—go back to that stuffy old office?" he exclaimed. "Not on your life! Look—" He laid the rod aside and held up an insignificant little fish about four inches long. "I just landed it," he said, with eyes that shone proudly. "Tomorrow I'm going after the big ones. This new rod of yours is a dandy, George. Say—I'm just starting to live!"

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PATTERN 2335



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Smiles

CHICKEN FEED

"I need a holiday," said the very pretty cashier. "I'm not looking my best."

"Nonsense!" replied the manager. "It isn't nonsense," she replied; "the men are beginning to count their change."—Answers Magazine.

How Unfortunate

First Hobo—What yer reading in that book that's worrying yer so?
Second Hobo—I've just found a recipe for home-made beer and I ain't got no home.

No Bargain

Deacon Smith—Yes, sir, I hate to say it but my wife married me for money.
Elder Brown—Well, all I've got to say is that she earned it.

Observed

Poetically Inclined Young Man—The night has a thousand eyes—
The Object of His Adoration (interrupting)—My gracious, let me see if my nose is powdered and if my hat is on correctly.

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THE PERFECT GUM

Did you ever meet a gangster's moll?

You never met one like Silver. Daughter of a gambler, she gave her heart—and more—to the big shot of a Chicago "mob." Yet, something new, more exciting and more important, she discovered in the wind-swept beauty of the Dakota prairies.

But—

"To think," she cried, "to think that when the real thing came, it had to be wrong, too!"

THERE'S ALWAYS ANOTHER YEAR

by Martha Ostenso

This is the first installment. BEGIN NOW!