

# THERE'S ALWAYS ANOTHER YEAR

MARTHA OSTENSO



W.N.U. SERVICE

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## SYNOPSIS

Anna ("Silver") Grenoble, daughter of "Gentleman Jim," formerly of the community, but known as a gambler, news of whose recent murder in Chicago has reached the town, comes to Heron River to live with Sophronia Willard, Jim Grenoble's sister, who is at the depot to meet her. Sophronia's household consists of her husband, and stepsons, Roderick and Jason. The Willards own only half of the farm on which they live, the other half being owned by Anna Grenoble's. On Silver's arrival Duke Melbank, shiftless youth, makes himself obnoxious. Roderick is on the eve of marriage to Corinne Meader, daughter of a failed banker. Silver says she wants to live on the farm, and has no intention of selling her half, which the Willards had feared. She meets Roddy that night. Silver tells Sophronia ("Phronie," by request) something—but by no means all—of her relations with Gerald Lucas, gambler friend of her father. Roddy marries Corinne, and brings his bride home. Corinne has a maid, Paula, who seems to attract Jason. Silver again meets Gerald Lucas, who has established a gambling resort near town. She introduces him to Corinne Willard, much against her will.

## CHAPTER VI—Continued

"Harry and his sister will come for me—if you won't take me," Corinne replied distantly. "Corrie!" Her name, as he uttered it, was a vehement plea. But she did not answer. She had already left the room and gone into the hall to telephone.

Roddy sat for a minute where he was and listened to Corinne's voice as she talked to Harry Richter and made her own elaborate excuses for her husband. Then he got up and went to the kitchen.

He was sitting there a half hour later when Corinne came and stood in the kitchen doorway. She was dressed for the party. Roddy looked up.

"Give my regards to Harry," he said, "and tell him to bring you home early."

Corinne frowned. "I didn't think you could be so stubborn."

Roddy got up and put his arm about her. "It isn't stubbornness, dear," he said, quietly. "Lord, can't you tell when a man is dog-tired?"

"You're not too tired to go, if you really wanted to," she persisted. "It's just that you don't like the people who are going to be there."

"Well—they're not my idea of a steady diet, exactly," he admitted.

She drew her lips tight as she returned his look. "You are very funny sometimes," she said coldly. "I simply can't understand you."

"Don't try, kid," he said, and patted her on the shoulder. "Go ahead and have a good time. I'll put in a couple of hours checking up on the new corn."

"You're not too tired for that," she retorted.

"But that has to be done," he told her. "There's Harry now."

There was the sound of a car coming to a stop before the door. Corinne turned away immediately and was gone. Roddy went to the window and watched until the car was out of sight.

Silver gathered her tweed jacket about her and seated herself beside a clump of Juneberry bushes on the hill. It was quite late, but she had been unable to go to bed on such a night as this.

There was a sound of some one moving out of the brush to the left. Silver glanced up and saw Roddy standing a few feet away, looking down at her.

"Why, Roddy?" she exclaimed. "I thought you and Corinne had gone to the party."

For a moment he hesitated. "Corinne went," he told her. "The Richters came for her." He sat down near by. "I took a night off and spent it bringing some of my records up to date."

"I wish," said Silver wistfully, "that I had studied plant pathology and those things instead of languages. Every time I go into your laboratory I feel so darned inferior!"

He laughed indulgently. "Well, you're certainly young enough to learn," he remarked, "if you're still bent on being a farmer. And it's beginning to look as though you are." He got his pipe from his overall pocket, packed and lighted it. "Except that you ought to be in bed at this hour. You worked pretty hard today, Phronie told me."

"This is lots better than sleeping," Silver said, and waved her hand toward the clouds of mist that were drifting low under the waning moon.

"And not such a waste of time," he declared. "When I saw you walking up here I was leaving the

ening contraction of her throat. Roddy pressed his lips together and drew a deep breath, as though some profound unease had settled within him.

Together they walked down into the yard, and their simple good night was taken coolly into the silence.

Harry Richter and his sister Evelyn, Corinne reflected with a secret flipp of contempt, were still—and perhaps always would be, in spite of their advantages of money and travel—just a pair of noisy and slightly vulgar cubs. But of course their father owned most of the town of Maynard, and the family mansion there was the pride of the district.

Corinne sat in a deep chair in the shadowed corner of the sprawling room, and as she gave a side-long glance at the amused profile of Gerald Lucas, who stood beside her in an indolent, provocative attitude, smoking a cigarette, it seemed to her that Harry's friends were a little pathetic, even rustic. Corinne was coolly excited by the realization that never before in her life had she met anyone so polished, so cynically debonair as Gerald Lucas. She felt, with merely the least thrill of danger, their mutual understanding.

A robuscent young grain broker from the city came from across the room with an enormous silver cocktail shaker in his hands.

"One more little drink on the house—for the prettiest little girl in the party!" he announced.

"Thanks, no," she demurred. "I'm much too warm already. I think I'll stroll out for a little air."

She had not turned, even a little way, toward Gerald as she spoke, but a few minutes afterward, when she sauntered slowly among the moonlit trees above the shore, she was not surprised that he met her there. She had known that he would follow her.

They stood together for a little while, in a piquant conspiracy of

silence, and looked out upon the shining lake.

"I must be very stupid," Gerald said, in a puzzled voice. "Otherwise, I would be able to figure out just how you come to be living on a farm."

Corinne laughed and felt her heart quicken. "It's very simple," she said. "I fell in love with a farmer—and married him."

"Did you?" Gerald looked at her as though in surprise.

They laughed in unison. Everything seemed delightfully absurd. Gerald picked up her hand and bent her little finger inward toward the palm. But immediately, almost absentmindedly, he let it go.

"Have a cigarette?" he suggested, and offered her his onyx and gold case.

"Thanks." He held the match for her. Corinne, seeing his shapely, well-kempt fingers, thought suddenly of Rodney's hands, large and powerful and bronzed. All at once she felt uncomfortable and vaguely ashamed.

"Shall we go back?" she suggested lightly.

"If you wish," Gerald agreed. "I think I shall ask Harry to drive me home," she said as they mounted the steps to the porch.

"My own opinion, if I were asked for it," Gerald said casually, "is that Harry has had too much to drink to drive anyone home safely."

It was long past midnight when Silver, preparing for bed, heard a car enter the driveway. She heard a voice that was sharply familiar to her, although it was low and pleasantly modulated. She glanced from her window. In the moonlight, the chromium trimmings of Gerald Lucas' car shone unmistakably.

"This is downright spying!" Silver said to herself, and buried her face in her pillows.

But a sudden fright took possession of her. Corinne—and Gerald Lucas! Such a thing could never be. It simply could not!

Silver and Sophronia, in Roddy's car, were on their way to Maynard with two bushels of tomatoes and a basketful of yellow string beans

they had gathered that day in the garden. The harvest dance was but a week away now, and there were things to be bought and cooking to be done and the old barn to be decorated for the event.

"I suppose if we get a dollar for this truck we ought to be thankful," Sophronia said. "Upon my soul, it's enough to discourage anyone—if it wasn't for the satisfaction of seeing the things grow. And with Roddy talkin' of storin' his grain it doesn't look like an easy winter for any of us."

"It's hard to understand," Silver said, "with so many people going hungry—and farmers talking of using their grain for fuel."

"It's past me," Sophronia admitted. "I wouldn't be surprised if Roddy gave up the whole business, one of these days and moved to the city. Though there wouldn't be much sense in that, either. I thought he'd feel better the other day when he got first prize for his corn at the fair. But it didn't change him any so far as I could make out."

Silver had sat and listened, her hands clasped before her, gazing straight ahead at the winding highway. There was something she wanted to say, but the words seemed too clumsy, too unutterably crude. These people had become her people—the thought forming in her mind flowed on in a radiance—the gloomy and faraway radiance of the legend of Ruth.

All at once she felt a tide of warmth move up over her throat and face.

"I wanted to say something last night—when Roddy was talking to you and Jason about things," she said. "But—I didn't know just how to put it."

"What was that?" Sophronia asked.

"It's just that I feel I have a right to help—and I want to. I have a little money left—plenty to do me for a year or even more—and I don't need the rent Roddy is paying for that east section. I don't see why I—"

"Land sakes, child!" Sophronia interrupted. "Don't ever mention such a thing to Roddy. He'd take your head off. I'm glad you didn't say anything about it last night. No—he'll get along and pay his way—or he'll make a change of some kind. He already thinks you're doing far more than enough to pay your board, if it comes to that!"

Silver was silent for a long time. It was just as she had expected. Roddy's pride would never permit him to take any assistance she might have to offer him.

From Maynard, Sophronia and Silver, with the car windows up, drove home through dissolving distances of rain. "Think of gettin' only ninety cents for all our work yesterday," Phronie mused aloud, "not countin' the cost of seed and the bother of plantin'. Darn it! I could almost wish every city swell might starve to death!"

## CHAPTER VII

THE mow of the new barn was full of hay, so that it could not be used for the harvest dance. Consequently, the loft of the old barn below the hill, which had latterly been used for surplus storage, came into its own again.

Jason stood with Silver at one end of the loft, where the orchestra was getting ready to play for another square dance.

"I think I'll ask Paula for this one," Jason said.

"If some one isn't ahead of you," Silver said. "She seems to be very popular tonight. Paula is a handsome girl. She would make a fine model for some painter," but Jason hurried away as old Steve, acting master of ceremonies, called for the next dance.

Silver moved down to where Roddy and Corinne were standing together.

"I wonder what has happened to Gerald Lucas," Corinne said as Silver joined them. "I sent him a special invitation urging him to come, and here it's midnight—"

Silver smiled. "He may be staying away on my account, Corinne. I told him once that I didn't want him to come here. He probably took me at my word."

Corinne made no effort to conceal her amazement. "You told him that?"

"Silver may have her own reasons for not wanting him around," Roddy put in.

"I have," Silver said lightly. "Well—as I have said before—it's no affair of mine, after all," Corinne observed pointedly. "But I do think—when I take the trouble to invite someone specially—"

"Forget it, Corrie," Roddy interrupted. "There goes the next dance."

He led her upon the floor as Phil, the eldest of the Michener boys, came for Silver.

As they moved together into the dance, neither of them noticed Duke Melbank and a companion stagger up from the top rung of the loft ladder and make their way into the crowd. Uppermost in Silver's mind was the thought that she was being received by the country people here as if she were one of them.

Old Steve called out in his high thin voice: "All join hands!" Silver left Phil and joined the girls who moved in a gay circle past the men.

"All swing!" old Steve shouted suddenly.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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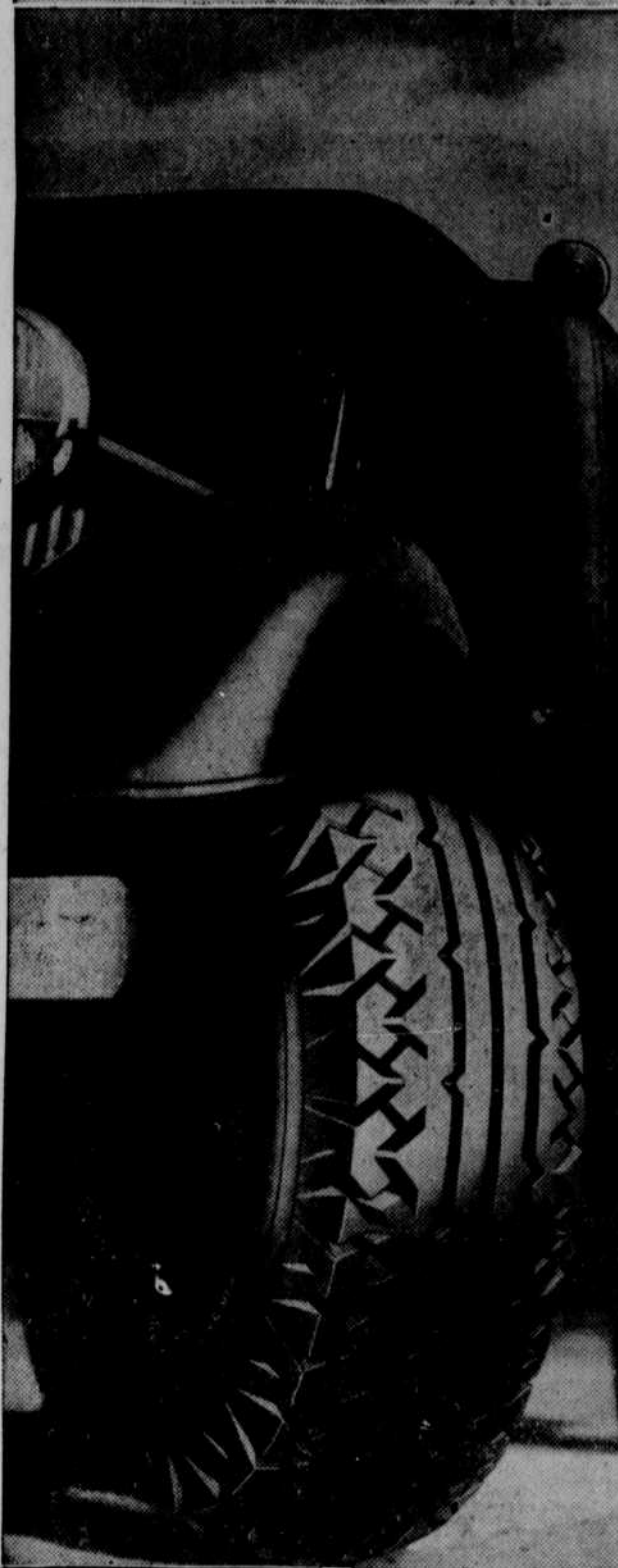
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