

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. Sophronia's household consists of her husband, and stepsons, Roderick and Jason. The Willards own only half of the farm, the other half being Anna's. On Silver's arrival Duke Melbank, shiftless youth, makes himself obnoxious. Roderick is on the eve of marriage to Corinne Meader. Silver says she wants to live on the farm, and has no intention of selling her half, which the Willards had feared. 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. She has a maid, Paula, who seems to attract Jason. Silver again meets Lucas, who has established a gambling resort near town. She introduces him to Corinne, though against her will. Friendship between the two develops, to Silver's dismay. At a dance Duke Melbank insults Silver. Roddy's solicitude brings Silver to the realization that she loves him. Roddy is offered a position at the University farm, but, to Corinne's dismay, he declines it, declaring he is a farmer, not a "white collar man." Determined to break up the growing intimacy between Silver and Corinne, Silver tells Roddy she has decided to sell her portion of the farm. Not understanding, he reproaches her for her "treachery." Jason and Paula become engaged. Roddy finds he is falling in love with Silver, and is dismayed. Silver warns Corinne against Lucas. Despite herself, her love for Roddy grows, but she determines to save Corinne from disaster.

CHAPTER IX—Continued

He slowed down as he saw a horse and rider. It was Silver Grenoble.

"Where do you think you're going, all by yourself?" he laughed.

"If you really must know," she replied, "I'm going down to get some dogweed near the lake."

"Why don't you come up to the house some evening when I'm around? Gosh, I haven't seen anything of you since Christmas!"

"I've been busy," Silver retorted simply.

Roddy smiled. "Busy giving lessons in good cheer to my adorable wife, eh? Well, you've made a good job of it."

The sudden flags of color flew in Silver's cheeks, and Roddy suffered an acute pang of dismay.

"Run along and get your dogweed, then," he said hurriedly, and started his car.

As he continued on his way, Roddy found that he could not dismiss from his mind that swift, baffling blush his sally had won from her. Her face had had the delicate, flushed color of a spring flower. She was not of the land in the same sense that Paula Gobel was. Paula was like a field of ripe wheat. But Silver Grenoble had an earthy quality all her own; she was like young grass in a pale spring sun, or sheet lightning in a summer dusk, or the shadow of a bird's wing over water. Roddy was glad that he could regard her so disinterestedly now, for her own fine values.



"But, Lord! How Am I Going to Explain it to the Folks?"

In a dappled enclosure of birches where new leaves were like a sunny green rain, Corinne Willard leaned against a tree. Gerald Lucas was looking down at her with a contemplative, a masterful smile, that thrilled and frightened her, and made her feel at the same time triumphant.

"Haven't we been playing tag long enough, darling?" he asked softly.

"Why don't you admit that I love you?"

Corinne laughed throatily. "What a sweet new way you have of putting it, Jerry," she said, and lifting her hand she ran her fingers through his hair.

Beyond her shoulders, at the top of a grassy crest where the trees opened, Gerald saw Silver Grenoble seated on her horse and staring at them with wide eyes.

CHAPTER X

PREPARATIONS for the wedding of Paula and Jason stressed rather than relieved Silver's sense of loneliness. Here were two, at least, who were going forward with their lives unaware of the defeat and helplessness that were stalking about them.

After supper on the evening before the wedding day, Roddy and Jason were at work in the sitting room of the stone house on a wooden lattice which when decked with chockecherry and plum blossoms, would form a bower about the bride and groom for the ceremony.

Paula was watching the progress of Roddy's and Jason's work when

Corinne entered in her green tweed riding habit.

"You're back early," Roddy said. "Didn't the Richters give you a nice dinner party?"

She seated herself. "Oh, it was all right. They had a lot of dull people up from town—rather tiresome."

Corinne pulled off her gauntlets. "I'm going to miss Paula terribly," she said, and made a sweet, dejected little moue at the big German girl, who was still standing with her hands pressed nervously against the back of a chair.

A few moments later Roddy and Corinne left for the big house. As soon as they were outside Corinne took his arm and drew herself close to him.

"I want you to do something for me, darling," she said in her sweetest manner. "I simply can't be at the wedding tomorrow. And I want you to explain it to the family. I know it sounds terrible to you, darling," she went on. "But Evelyn Richter told me tonight that Harrison's are having a big sale tomorrow in the city—just for one day. It's an awfully exclusive shop, you know, and I'll be saving money if I take advantage of the sale. I can stay over night at the Lombards' and it won't mean any extra expense."

"It'll cost you six dollars in gas to go there and back in the car—and more if you take the bus," Roddy said.

"Evelyn is going down first thing in the morning and she has promised to call for me and bring me back."

"But, Lord! How am I going to explain it to the folks? Paula will feel hurt no matter what I say to—"

"I'll speak to Paula tonight. I might fib a little if necessary, and tell her I have to go to mother."

"Why not tell her the truth—if you have to tell her anything?"

"After all, Roddy, there's no need of hurting the girl's feelings any more than necessary."

"It seems to me you aren't giving much consideration to her feelings as it is."

Corinne drew away from him. "I have done far more for her than lots of women would for their maids. You seem to forget that I've suffered no end of embarrassment ever since I knew that Jason was going to marry her. Having a maid working for you every day—and knowing that she is going to marry one of the family—I've never said anything about it, but—"

"What's wrong with it?" Roddy demanded.

Corinne shrugged her shoulders. "Well—I don't expect you to see it from my point of view, of course. After all, it's none of my business. What I think—or feel—doesn't seem to matter much anyhow."

Anger flamed suddenly within Roddy. He checked the retort that sprang to his lips. They had arrived before the door of the big house. He turned away abruptly and started for the barnyard.

"Aren't you coming in?" Corinne asked in surprise.

"I have some work to do first," he told her.

She paused with her hand on the door. "But—what shall I do about tomorrow? Evelyn is coming immediately after breakfast."

"Do whatever you like about it," he said. "I don't give a d—n!"

In the afternoon of the next day, Jason and Paula departed. It had been a fine wedding, Sophronia thought with a swelling heart, as fine as any farmer could afford these days.

Under the big oak a number of the farm boys had seated themselves and were tuning up on guitar, accordion, harmonica and violin. Presently a lively melody was lilting upward through the rugged branches of the trees.

"Come on, Phronie!" old Roderick called, his eyes wistfully following Silver and the older Michener boy as they exhibited an intricate and amusing fox-trot step.

"Oh, go on with you!" Phronie expostulated, blushing, and was forthwith swept into Roderick's old-fashioned and courtly embrace.

Twice, three times around the circle of the great oak's shade they waltzed, old Roderick adapting his knowledge of dance figures resolutely and gallantly to the outlandish new tempo amidst cheers and clapping of hands. At last, breathless and bridling rosy as a girl, Sophronia stopped in front of the door. Old Roderick bowed low over her hand, and the applause and laughter whirled about them.

"Go on with you, silly!" Sophronia said, and gave Roderick a little push. "I'm thinkin' the cider pitchers need fillin'."

In the kitchen she found Roddy alone.

"Why don't you go out and join in the fun?" she asked.

"I guess I'm not in the mood," he replied.

Phronie gave him a sharp glance. "Small wonder!" she remarked. "When do you expect Corinne back?"

"Tomorrow night," Roddy said, without looking around.

"Well—I don't understand what got into her to go off—"

"I'd rather not talk about it," Roddy interrupted.

"No—I suppose the least said about it the better," Phronie agreed. "I don't know what to think about it, but I wouldn't go moonin' about the house for anyone. I never did—and I never would. Why don't you get out and dance with the rest of them? No one will ever thank you for bein' a soft-hearted fool over any woman, even if she is your wife."

Roddy began impatiently rolling a cigarette. "A devil of a lot you know about it!" he exploded.

Phronie looked at him in surprise. "I know you've never talked like that to me in your life before," she said.

Roddy got to his feet and put an arm about her. "I don't mean it like that, ma," he said affectionately. "You know I don't. But there's more to this than I want to talk about. Now that Paula's gone I don't know how we're going to get along up at the house. I can't afford another girl, and Corinne doesn't know a darn thing about housework. Even if she did—she isn't strong enough to do it."

"Have you told Corinne about that?" Sophronia asked.

"Yes," he said darkly, "I told her."

"Well, there's no use borrowin' trouble. Corinne will swing into it when she knows she has to, like anyone else. I'll come up now and then to help her get started—and Silver will be glad to give a hand when it's needed. I don't know how I'd do without that girl."

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS already dark before Corinne returned home on the following evening. Roddy had heard the muffled approach of Evelyn Richter's automobile. He went out of the back door just as the car came to a stop in the yard.

Corinne stepped down and Roddy put his arms about her.

"Corrie!" he cried. "What has kept you so late? I've been imagining all sorts of things—accidents—"

Corinne laughed and released herself. "Nonsense! Help me get these parcels out. Evelyn has to hurry."

"Take this box, Roddy, darling, but be careful with it. That's my precious new hat!"

In a moment Roddy's arms were full and Evelyn called her hasty good night and drove away.

In the living room, Corinne's purchases were placed on the couch.

"I have some coffee percolating for you, Corrie," Roddy said. "While you unwrap those things I'll go and get it."

"Sweet of you, Roddy," Corinne said absently, while she untied a string that bound her hat-box.

When he returned with the two cups of coffee and set them on the small table in the corner of the room, Corinne came in from the hall where she had put on her new hat in front of the mirror in the bathroom.

"Isn't it darling!" she exclaimed, resting her head sideways toward her shoulder as she smiled up at him.

"Very fetching," Roddy laughed.

"And, Roddy!" Corinne drew a deep breath. "Only eight-fifty—reduced from twenty-one dollars! And it will do me until fall. Roddy! Don't you adore it?"

"Sure! It looks great, but—"

"Of course, it's exclusive. You've got to pay for models like this unless—"

"What else did you get?" he asked her, seating himself. "You'd better drink your coffee before it gets cold."

Corinne unwrapped a box containing a pair of high-heeled, blue-kid pumps. "These were on sale, too. Eighteen dollars—reduced to eleven-fifty. Aren't they sweet? Cut steel buckles—the buckles are expensive, you know, but they'll do on other shoes later. I'll take the other things upstairs to unpack them. You wouldn't be interested in them. Stockings—gloves—underwear—and I simply had to have a bottle of toilet water and some face cream and powder. Those things look small, but they count up when you come to buy them." She laughed. "I have only forty-five cents left out of what you gave me, Roddy."

Roddy regarded her with dull wonder. "Didn't you get yourself a dress, or a coat, or anything—anything substantial?" he asked her, and felt immediately that what he had said was somewhat incoherent.

Corinne laughed, but Roddy thought there was a hard little edge to her laugh. "How could I—with what you gave me? There's no economy in buying cheap things that will look like rags in a week. I can wait until—"

"You'll probably have to wait for quite a while," he observed somberly. "Can't you see that we'll need every penny just to keep going?"

"Well—after all, I don't know anything about such things," she protested negligently. "And I hate discussing money matters."

"I guess there must be something the matter with me," he muttered, and as he heard his own voice he was struck with the utter strangeness of it. "I have done my best to explain our position to you, Corinne. I told you I had overdrawn my account at the bank before we sold the grain. You either can't understand—or you don't care. I wish to God you'd tell me which it is!"

Corinne faced Roddy with blazing eyes.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

"Flowage Rights"

The expression "flowage rights" refers to the right of overflowing land when a dam is built for the purpose of furnishing irrigation or power. The person whose land is overflowed has a right to compensation for any loss. When the right of overflowing a person's land is purchased, this is referred to as flowage rights.

occurred to Sophronia that Silver, too, appeared lost in her own thoughts. Once she caught Silver staring at Roddy with a stricken expression in her eyes. Something, Phronie concluded, was amiss, and unless she was a dundering idiot, she knew what it was.

The meal over, Roddy left the table immediately and started for the fields.

"That corn of his is just an excuse," Sophronia declared. "He's workin' his head off these days to keep from goin' crazy with worry. It ain't fair!"

"Well, it won't do much good if you add your worry to his," old Roderick remarked. "Whatever is to be will be," he said finally, "and there's no preventing either mildew or a good harvest."

Like a striking of cymbals, old Roderick's words smote a dark music into Silver's mind. "There's no preventing either mildew or a good harvest."

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