

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. 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. Determined to break up the growing intimacy between Lucas and Corinne, Silver tells Roddy she has decided to sell her portion of the farm. Not understanding, he reproaches her for her "treachery." 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. Corinne returns, with purchases little suitable for farm life, and having spent all the money Roddy has given her. He tells Silver he is sure Lucas and Corinne met in the city. While Silver is alone Duke Melbank comes in, in a drunken condition. Roddy's arrival frightens him away, and in her perturbation Silver unwittingly reveals her love for Roddy. He responds, ending all doubt as to their mutual feelings.

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Silver's brow puckered into a little frown of laughing denial. "Certainly not! And you stop looking for trouble. You're ever so much better this morning. This sun is doing wonders for you."

"Yes," Phronie sighed, "wonders for me—but what is it doing to the crops? It hasn't really rained since I got sick, has it?"

"Now, there you go," Silver rebuked her. "If it isn't one thing, it's another. Roddy says there's no real danger yet, so get your mind—"

"I've seen it go like this before, my girl. I know what I'm talking about."

Sophronia shifted herself to a more comfortable position in her chair. "I wish one of you would take a run up and see how Paula is," she said uneasily. "We haven't had a word from them in a week."

Silver looked at her and put her hands on her hips. "Will you stop talking and worrying about things! I have to go and fix up the house. I'll look out on you in fifteen minutes—and if you're not asleep, I'll call Doctor Woodward."

"Oh, dear!" Sophronia sighed, settling herself finally.

Silver stood with a hamper containing a coffee pot and a dish of buttered rolls, and listened at the screen door of Roddy's house. She was hoping that Corinne might go along with her down to the field where the men were at work, as she had done before. But there was no sound from within. Corinne was probably not yet awake. It was only a little after seven, and she had been at a dance last night at the Richter cottage on the lake.

Roddy was working alone at the upper end of the plot. Silver came quietly up to the old wooden fence that surrounded it, stepping carefully over the ripe strawberries Sophronia craved, and stood watching him, scarcely drawing a breath.

Carefully, intently, Roddy exposed the silk of the vivid green sheath beneath the transparent sack in which it had been enclosed, and poured upon it the pollen from the tassel which had been painstakingly collected in a similar sack to prevent its scattering elsewhere on the wind.

The corn plot, in the motionless blue and gold atmosphere of early morning, was fixed in the clean dark of earth and the glistening, vertical green stain of the stalks, viable and proud. It was almost as though some great emerald stood between the small field and the sun, shedding a lovely, calm, and vertiginous dew upon the fresh curve of the young leaves, upon the purplish gloom of the furrow. But it was actually a dew of earth, before hot winds rose. Silver, standing in the rough meadow outside the field, felt the dew about her ankles and saw it sparkling on the ribboned leaves beneath Roddy's hands.

In the pure, jeweled light, the fragile, white-gold silks of the slim young ears revealed the yellow poi-

len as Roddy dusted it out of the tassel-bag. Suddenly, from the pasture near-by, a meadow-lark flung up into the silence a fountain of liquid notes. Roddy glanced around and saw Silver leaning over the fence watching him.

He reddened dully and pushed his wide straw hat back from his brow. Then, with a quizzical, perplexed smile he came and stood looking down at her.

"I've been watching you," she said, nodding toward the corn. "I wish I could help."

"Why don't you?" he replied. "You'd get a real kick out of it."

She raised the hamper toward him. "I brought some fresh buttered rolls," she said.

"I suppose Corrie isn't up yet," he remarked, taking the hamper from her.

"I listened at the door," Silver told him, "but I didn't hear any stir, so I came on alone."

He set the hamper on the grass at his feet, then spoke in a low, vehement voice that became thrilling agony in her heart. "These weeks have been hell, Silver. I don't know how I've stood it. I don't know how I'm going to go on standing it—"

"Oh—Roddy," she pleaded breathlessly.

He stepped closer to her and the yearning and despair in his bronzed face drew from her an involuntary, broken cry. She thrust her hands across the fence toward him. Roddy took them and pressed them to his lips and eyes.

"I'm no good, Silver," he muttered. "I can't go through with this farce. I've got to tell her—"

Swiftly Silver leaned forward and brushed his blue shirt-sleeve with her cheek. "Roddy—Roddy," she whispered in a stifled voice. "You can't tell her—you can't ever tell her! It would be too terrible!"

"It wouldn't," he protested. "She doesn't love me—I don't think she ever did."

"You mustn't say that," Silver argued. "You mustn't do anything—you can't! And it won't be for long, Roddy. As soon as Phronie is well again—"

He swept his hat from his head and ran his fingers through his thick hair in a gesture of mortified anguish. "G—d, what a spectacle I am—standing here, talking like this! I have no right—" He broke off suddenly. "Of course—you must go away."

"As soon as Phronie gets a little stronger, I'll tell her. And we—you and I must not talk like this again, Roddy. It's too hard on us. I—I can't stand it."

"I know," he said flatly. "It's terrible! But I want you to know that I never had any idea what love was like—until this happened."

"Nobody will ever mean anything to me again, Roddy—after you," she told him. "You—"

She could not go on. Tears seemed to be running backward, down into her throat, choking her words. With a smothered oath, Roddy flung his arm across the fence, strained her desperately to him for a moment, then released her and turned abruptly away, swept up the hamper and strode down the edge of the fields as though he were half blind.

Silver moved back into the grass pasture, knelt down and began picking berries for Sophronia, gathering leaves and flowers indiscriminately with hands that shook.

CHAPTER XIII

DAY followed day, and the sky over the parched and livid became like a dome of colorless metal, all the blue beaten out of it by the intense heat. Fears that had smoldered separately throughout the district, stole out, linked, and became flaming panic. But the drought was only a fore-runner of a graver holocaust.

In Ejelstad's feed and implement store, Roddy Willard talked with Sven Erickson and John Michener. He struggled to conceal the alarm he felt as he spoke.

"The county agent can't be expected to do it all by himself," he said sharply. "It takes just one day for a good army of grasshoppers to eat the chimney off your house!"

"I was talking with the agent yesterday," Roddy continued. "Poison bran has been distributed to all the farmers west of here, right to the state line. But some of them don't give a d—n, the shiftless hohunks! Their farms are going to be seized for taxes anyhow, so they can't be bothered about saving their crops."

"Joe Fisher came through from

Brookings yesterday," Michener observed, "and he had to put chains on his tires. That sounds like a tall one, but Joe swears it's the God's truth! He stopped at a place where a fellow said the hoppers ate the harness off a horse's back—for the salt in the leather. You can take that or leave it."

Roddy thoughtfully rolled a cigarette. "Well, I wouldn't believe Joe even if I knew he was telling the truth. But it's bad enough, anyhow. I disked and harrowed last fall, and made a thorough inspection of my land this spring for locust eggs. My land is clean. But even poison bait won't keep them from doing a lot of damage before they die—if they begin coming in clouds."

John Michener and Roddy fell to talking then of the comparative danger of the differential and the lesser migratory grasshoppers, and Sven, to whom a locust was merely a locust and a pest, listened eagerly.

"Darn it, anyhow," Michener said at last, his expulsive rather humorous in his deep voice, "if it would only rain! It gathered up fine yesterday, and then sailed off again to the north. A couple more days like this and there won't be enough left for a grasshopper's lunch."

"Well—I spose dey starve to death, den," Sven observed.

The searing heat continued and in a few days the earth, from the top of the Willard hill, looked like one great mottled leaf curled up at the edges, the dry atmosphere giving the horizon a scalloped effect. Silver, who had gone in the afternoon to the brushwood above the farmstead in quest of a breath of air, gazed down into the shallow valley below with a sinking heart.

The door of the stone house opened and Sophronia came out, walking slowly, unsteadily still, up the slope toward the barns. Yesterday she had ventured as far as the chicken-house for the first time. Silver had made an effort to tell her, only last night, that she had written to Benjamin Hubbard in Chicago and that he had secured a position for her. But just at the moment when she might have spoken, Sophronia's head had dropped forward over her crocheting and the gray exhaustion of her face had filled Silver with an alarm that prevented her uttering a word of her plans.

The leaves of the poplars above her rustled sharply, but the breeze that moved them was like a gust

from an oven. Silver got to her feet and saw in the cornfield to the east the gray-white wave of air moving over the pale, brittle tassels. The heat licked over the field like horrid little tongues of dull fire.

Silver paused in the dry grass half way down to the yard. Suddenly every fiber of her being was alert to a sound in the air that was more than the burning flow of the wind. She knew at once that the sound had been present from the moment when she had gone up the hill, that her preoccupation with her own thoughts had shut it out. It was a brisk drone, muffled and yet somehow sharp, as a keen sound might strike on the ear of a person partly deaf. Silver glanced apprehensively about her, then upward at the sun. It seemed now that the hot chatter in the air was increasing in volume with every second.

She saw Roddy and Steve drive in from the highway in the truck and stop in the shadow of the barns. She hurried back down the hill and into the yard. On the hard, level ground in front of the barn, where a tarpaulin had been spread, Roddy and Steve had dumped a quantity of bran. In a large tin container, old Roderick was mixing the water, arsenic and molasses. Sophronia was standing to one side watching the men.

"Phronie!" Silver cried. "What are you doing out here?"

"Bein' out here won't do me as much harm as sittin' in the house and worryin'." Sophronia retorted. "Steve, you old galoot, you're lettin' that bran run off on the ground, there."

Silver stepped forward and lifted the edge of the tarpaulin and shook the bran back into place. Then old Roderick poured the ar-

senic mixture over the pile of bran while Roddy and Steve turned the mass over and over with scoop shovels.

Each then took a corner of the tarpaulin and lifted it into the truck. Roddy climbed up and seated himself at the wheel.

"You get into the house and lie down, Phronie," Silver commanded severely. "I'm going out and help spread it."

They bumped along for some distance in silence.

"Is there something I have to learn—about scattering the bran?" Silver ventured finally.

"There's a right way and a wrong way," Roddy told her. "Scatter it in flakes—not in lumps. We don't want the cattle to get a dose of it. They might uncover it in the fall and cattle don't thrive on poison, as a usual thing. Just watch the way Steve does it."

The air had become infested as though by a swift, green-brown hall which swept horizontally along the earth. The hysterical sound of the advancing hordes of insects individualized itself hideously on the senses, and in the scorching heat seemed, to Silver, to be burrowing into her brain. The grasshoppers, in their insane, head-long flight, battered themselves against the sides of the truck, dashed with the sting of pebbles into the very faces of the riders.

And constantly, up and down the succulent stalks of corn, the appalling myriads moved with small, ferocious alacrity, incredible greed.

From time to time, Roddy swore softly under his breath or burst out anew in futile wrath at the lackadaisical farmers to the westward who had not done their share in helping to stop the advance of the plague.

Roddy glanced up at Silver and saw that her face was white and drawn under the superficial flush caused by the heat.

"Here, kid! You look about ready to drop!" he cried with dismay. He turned the truck about and started more rapidly in the direction of the pasture below the hill.

"You get out here, now," he said, "and run home. I don't know what I've been thinking about! Beat it!"

Silver got down unsteadily and started off.

"Look in on Corinne," Roddy called after her. "She wasn't feeling so well when I left the house."

Silver found Corinne in her room upstairs, in a pitiful huddle on her bed, the counterpane drawn over her head and shoulders.

"Corrie!" Silver said gently as she seated herself on the side of the bed. "You'll die here, in this heat."

There was no response save for the muffled sound of the girl's sobbing. Silver's patience suddenly left her.

"Here—pull yourself together!" she said severely. "It's no worse for you than it is for the rest of us."

The counterpane was flung violently aside and Corinne sat up. Her tear-stained face worked spasmodically.

"Listen to me, Corinne," Silver said firmly. "You get out of bed and take a cold shower and come down to the other house. You can't go on like this. Everybody feels crazy enough without your carrying on like a two-year-old."

But Corinne recoiled in sullen obstinacy. "I'll not stir out of this house today. Go away and leave me alone."

After a moment, Silver got up from the bed and started toward the door.

Corinne sprang suddenly to her feet. "What do you mean by going to Gerald Lucas and talking to him about me?" she demanded. "I know you did."

Silver paused and turned to look at her. "Did Gerald tell you that?" she asked.

"Why shouldn't he tell me?" "I thought he'd have more sense, that's all," Silver replied.

Corinne laughed contemptuously. "I should think you'd have more sense than to interfere in my affairs. It's really funny—you and Roddy—the salt of the earth—trying to reform me." Her mood changed abruptly. "I'll not have it. I'll live my own life—as I want to live it—and I don't want any missionary work on my behalf—by you or anyone else. From now on, please remember—"

"Corinne!" Silver interrupted agitatedly, and stepped toward her. "I'm not trying to reform you. I was simply trying to appeal to Gerald's decency."

"Decency! What does anyone in this place know about decency? Roddy had his chance to be decent. He could have taken me out of this hole last January—if he could have thought of anyone but himself."

Silver stared at her incredulously. "Corinne," she stammered, "does Roddy's love for this land mean nothing to you?"

Corinne, her eyes glinting, looked shrewdly at Silver. "How much does it mean to you?" she asked.

Silver's cheeks burned suddenly. "So much—that I have changed my mind about selling my land this summer," she said quietly. "Roddy can stay on as long as he likes, so far as I am concerned. I'm going back to Chicago as soon as Phronie is strong enough to let me go."

A lightning change came over Corinne's face. "Well!" she breathed. "So that's the next thing. That means—we'll be here next winter and—for the rest of our lives, then. What made you change your mind?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Why and for What Are We Living?

Historian Advises We Stop and Ponder on What It's All About.

"Perhaps it would be a good idea, fantastic as it sounds, to muffle every telephone, stop every motor and halt all activity for an hour some day, to give people a chance to ponder for a few minutes on what it is all about, why they are living, and what they really want."

The historian, James Truslow Adams, is the author of those words. I believe they are great words, which should be passed on to every one who can read them. So says a woman writer of note.

To ponder on what it's all about, why we are living, and what we really want!

If every one of us periodically had an opportunity, or were led by circumstances, such as a complete stopping for a certain time of all activity, to stop and give thought of that kind, what might not be the result?

It might solve all our problems—it might bring us happiness.

Are not all our problems questions of human relationships of one kind or another—of our standing with other people on the road we are so tactically traveling? If we were to stop and think then on what it is all

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about, wouldn't that larger view inevitably take in the other person's side as well as ours—and so help to solve those problems in personal relationship? If we were to stop and think on why or for what we are living—wouldn't that inevitably make many big things seem too small to bother us, many neglected but easily salvaged things important enough to cherish and be grateful for? If we were to stop and think on what we really want, where we are going, wouldn't we inevitably stop short in the hectic chase and try skipping for as much as possible of the way?

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Dogs for War Blind

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In Which Politician and Economist Are Defined

An economist is a man who knows a great deal about a very little, and who goes on knowing more and more about less and less until he finally knows everything about practically nothing.

A politician is a man who knows a very little about a great deal and who goes on knowing less and less about more and more, until finally he knows practically nothing about everything.—Tit-Bits.

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