

AURORA COMES HOME

A Story

BY MARJORIE WORTHINGTON

THERE was no one left on the estate who could drive the 1924 Daimler, and that was why no one had come to the Rivertown station to meet Aurora Loomis. This was what she told herself as she waited for a taxi to drive over from the village and pick her up.

But how had they expected her to get to the house? There was no satisfaction to be had from the young man in the ticket-office who had kindly phoned for a taxi. He was a complete stranger. She resented this somehow. She had been half expecting old Mr. Collins to say, with just that shade of deference all the villagers used when they addressed one of the river people, "Well, well, nice to see you again, Mrs. Loomis." But there was no Mr. Collins. After all, the man had to die some time and five years was long enough.

She wished there was a buffet in the station, the way they had them in France, a place she could dive in and out of, restoring herself with a quick drink of cognac or rum . . . or anything. But that was over. She wasn't drinking any more . . . not drinking . . . anything. She lifted her round chin suddenly. It was a little gesture of Aurora's that had once been charming. Now it was less charming. Aurora's face had faded, her hair, once golden, was now straw-colored from long use of bleaches, her make-up, hastily applied and now literally peeling off, did not make her look less tired. Her lovely body, once so beau-

tiful on a horse, or in a pool, or on a dance floor, was now rather thick. The clothes she wore were a queer mixture of quality and tinsel. Her hat had come from the skilled fingers of the great Agnes herself; the coat from a serve-yourself rack in Klein's (a beige-colored fuzzy silk mixture that fitted badly); her handbag from a Bond Street shop, and her blunt-toed slippers with wide bows and short vamps from a shop in West Thirty-fourth Street.

The taxi arrived and Aurora handed over her small bag, deciding to send some one later with the trunk checks. She stepped into the car and said, with a manner, "Longacres."

"What's that?"

"The Loomis estate," Aurora said icily. The taxi started, down the back road that led to the river places. Aurora lighted a cigarette, took one or two quick puffs, and threw the thing away. No smoking, either. She folded her hands and looked out the window.

And there was the bronze plaque on the gray rock, telling everyone who passed that the Loomis estate was an historical spot, giving seven lines about General Abraham Loomis, who had fought in the Revolution and signed many famous documents, and was, incidentally, one of the founders of Rivertown. Aurora blinked as she passed the landmark. How she had once hated that old ancestor Loomis, hated his beaked nose in the por-

trait by West that hung in the entrance hall, hated all the talk, the endless talk in mincing voices, about him, and how he had brought this piece of furniture from England, and that bit of scrofulous china from France! But today, as she passed the tablet, she only blinked and tightened her grip on her handbag.

The taxi came to the end of a handsome avenue of trees and stopped before the big house that faced the Hudson. Like all these magnificent river houses, it was hidden from view, like a precious jewel in a casket. Aurora paid the driver, lifted her chin again, and walked up the broad steps to the front door. She rang the bell and waited. She fumed as she waited. Someone must have heard the taxi approach. The door should have been open, with someone waiting to greet her. Was this any way to treat a mistress returning to her home?

The brass knob turned, and the door opened, and a female housekeeper, with white hair and starched apron, said, stiffly, "How-do-you-do, Mrs. Loomis."

All the things Aurora was going to say to Mrs. Carpenter died away. She looked into a pair of calm, cold, gray eyes, and said, "How-do-you-do, Mrs. Carpenter."

"Will you go straight to your room?" the woman asked.

"Yes," Aurora replied, and walked through the so-clean, so-stately entrance hall, with the Chippendale console tables and the family portraits, up the broad white stairway, to turn at the second landing and enter a vast darkened room containing a double bed, freshly made, many overstuffed chairs, and tables and dressers . . . and a vase of funereal purple irises set on a white cloth.

Mrs. Carpenter, who had followed softly behind her, opened the door to the bathroom and said, apologetically, "The boil-

ers need repairing, as I wrote you, Mrs. Loomis. But I can send John up with several cans of hot water if you want a bath."

Aurora stared at her and said, "Never mind."

The door closed. There was the soft padding of the housekeeper's feet, and then silence.

"A tomb," Aurora said fiercely. "Just what it always was, a god-damned tomb."

II

She sank down suddenly in a mahogany rocker and commenced rocking furiously. She wanted very much to cry, but instead she pounded the arms of the chair with her fists until she felt better.

Ten years ago she had married the Loomis boy. She herself had been a small town grocer's child, from Arsdale, farther up the Hudson. She had met Robert Loomis at a dance. Precocious and pretty, Aurora knew why Robert had fallen so hard for her. Certainly it wasn't for her mind. He had wanted her awfully, and it hadn't occurred to him that he needn't have offered her quite so much . . . the Loomis name. There had been something childish, always, about Robert Loomis. It used to drive her wild, impotently wild, because you couldn't do anything with plain childishness.

She might have managed her married life well enough, she often thought, if she hadn't been so bored. She just couldn't stand being bored like that, week in and week out. She just had to do something crazy, like running off that way in the middle of the night with one of their house guests, a man she really didn't give a damn about, going off forever, she thought, with only a few things thrown in a bag, and a trifling amount of jewelry.

Oh, of course, if she had it to do all

over again, she guessed she might have behaved differently. If, anyhow, she'd known that Robert would die two years later (without divorcing her; she never could understand why he hadn't divorced her, except, perhaps, because the Loomises believed that marriages went on forever, even into the grave . . . rows and rows of tombstones in pairs. . . . "Aurora, beloved wife of Robert Loomis. . ."). She shivered. Mrs. Carpenter would be up soon to tell her dinner was ready. She rose heavily and went into the bathroom.

She had been living in Paris, very hard up, when the letter came from the Loomis lawyer, saying that both the old people had died, and that the estate had been left to her. Longacres, and about ten thousand dollars a year income. It had seemed a lot. But since then she had found out that the taxes on Longacres amounted to six thousand a year, and it cost at least fifteen hundred to keep the place running with the minimum amount of help.

She knew vaguely that most of the people along the River were in the same predicament. It cost so much money just to keep these estates from being swallowed up by the woodlands, and the houses from falling into decay, that for the most part the owners were forced either to remain here in penurious dignity, and do the work formerly left to farm managers and housekeepers, or to close up the places in the hands of a married caretaker, and live abroad, or in New York, in small furnished rooms. It never seemed to occur to any of them that they could liquidate their property and live in comfort somewhere else. They went on feeding the ancestral dragons and starving themselves. This tradition was so strong along the River that Aurora herself had accepted it, so that, hard-up as she was, it hadn't yet occurred to her to liquidate.

She had tried to live on what was left, after the River place went on being fed nine-tenths of the income that was rightfully hers, since it had been willed to her. She went on living on what was left, living here and there, in small shabby rooms in second-rate hotels. She hadn't really thought that she might come to Longacres to live. That is, it hadn't occurred to her for several years, and then, gradually, she began dreaming about Longacres. It happened usually when she felt ill or lonely, or disgusted with the life she led. Then she would begin dreaming of the Loomis place, of the house with the enormous rooms and the Hudson River views, of the family silver and the portraits, of the gardens at the back of the house, as formal in their arrangement as the gardens of Versailles . . . with vistas, ending in little white statues (rain-streaked with rusty lines). "My place on the Hudson. . . ." She began thinking of it rather humorously that way, living as she did in little second-rate hotel bedrooms. And then she began thinking of it as "home".

"Some day when I get thoroughly fed up, I'm going home!" She would say that on a morning after a bad night. She would tell people that in the night places that came after the speakeasies went. She would say, perhaps thickly, if she had already well begun the night, "When I get good and fed up with all this, I'm going home. It's a beautiful place—did I ever tell you about it?" She never said, however, to any of her friends that they must come to see her there. She knew that when she grew fed up it would be with all these strangely assorted companions. Going home would mean to her going Loomis, in as thorough a fashion as she could manage. It was a consoling thing to think about, on some of her mornings. Some of them were pretty awful. It was a

good thing, after looking in a cheap mirror and seeing the end of prettiness, the end of youth, to be able to say: "Some day I'll go home." Especially if that home were the sort of place that Longacres was, something enduring, something timeless.

She gave herself a summary cleaning-up, put a fresh dab of rouge on each cheek, and toned up her eyes and lips. She ran a comb through her thick faded hair. Tomorrow she would have her trunks to unpack, and she would begin dressing for dinner. She could see herself, every evening now, dining alone, in candlelight, getting maybe, in time, used to it. Her large blue eyes grew a bit misty as she thought of those solitary evenings. Poor lonely Mrs. Loomis! She left the room, and went down the white stairs slowly, as though she were trailing a yard of train behind her.

III

The next morning Aurora wondered what had awakened her so early. The stillness that went with the early light, the song of many birds, perhaps; or that other sound which came through the half-opened doors of the French windows—Sunday morning church bells. She drew a deep breath. How well she remembered that sound! She turned over, dove deeper into the linen sheets and the light wool blanket (carefully darned at one end), and would have fallen asleep again, but the church bells persisted and she began waiting for them.

Slowly the idea took possession of her, spreading over her pleasantly, until she sat up and put the first foot out of bed. Mrs. Loomis would go to church this morning. The Loomis pew, once filled from end to end with members of the family, would know a tenant again. This

morning, heads would turn, a slight murmur would pass through the church, mingled with the flutter of pages in the hymnals and the rolling organ tones. The Loomis name was on the wall of the church, on that other plaque that told of two of Robert's brothers, great-great-grandsons of General Loomis, killed in action, one at Gallipoli in 1915, one in Flanders in 1918. The candle that burned under the small figure of John the Baptist might burn more brightly this morning, because a Loomis had given him to the little Rivertown Episcopal church, way back at the time of its founding.

The Church of St. John was the church of the River families. It had, sometimes, the atmosphere of a family chapel. It was as if the Hameltons, the Stuyvensants, the Loomises, and the other five partners who had settled here with their fortunes, to live like landed noblemen along the River, had erected this little Episcopal church exclusively for themselves and their retainers. Of course, any Episcopalian was welcome, but only in the manner of exclusive restaurants that tolerate strangers. The church was maintained by the donations of the River families, and it was to these that the fat pink-faced daughter of the rector was taught to curtsy.

Aurora had known the stir at the entrance of the Loomises, had known it for each Sunday morning of the years she had lived at Longacres as the wife of Robert Loomis. It had given her some malicious amusement then. But this morning, as she drove the ancient Daimler out of the garage and turned its nose toward the town, she felt neither malicious nor amused, but quite serious. She felt scrubbed and shiny from soap, and clean in her plainest clothes. She had cheerfully taken all the impudence out of the Agnes hat by flattening its brim and wearing it

straight over her forehead. She had dressed with the firm conviction that everyone whose head discreetly turned at her entrance, whose elbow gently pressed a neighbor, would see that Aurora Loomis, despite the scandal and the justified gossip, had returned to take up the position in the community to which a real Loomis was entitled. She realized, she told herself, that what would probably follow was a series of visits from all the horrible old bores, the ones she had laughed at when first they came to visit Robert's bride. She would be nicer to them now, she decided. She would serve tea when they called, and ask about their cousins, and even take an active part in their small recreations. After all, if she was going to be a Loomis she might as well go the whole way.

She parked the Daimler carefully behind the brougham in which Mrs. Stuyvesant, Senior, always drove to church. She wondered if the old coachman was inside, praying at the rear of the church, and remembered the morning he had so far forgotten himself as to fall asleep and snore. The organ was playing as she walked slowly up the steps of St. John's. She realized she was a few minutes late, but was satisfied, because that meant she would have a fuller audience at her entrance, and childishly, she wanted her entrance to be a real success.

Now she was inside. The sudden lavender gloom after the bright morning sunshine blinded her slightly, and she moved with a little less assurance than she would have liked, down the center aisle. An usher (was it the Van Rensseler boy grown so tall, with a little mustache on his short upper lip?) came toward her as she stepped into the Loomis pew, down at the left, near the altar. She nodded to him, and he bowed politely and walked back.

The congregation rose immediately and

the Credo began: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth." Aurora's lips began to move, too . . . "Very God of Very God," she said, devoutly, while she put out a hand to search for a prayer book that should have been in the rack.

A hand from the rear tapped her shoulder. She turned slightly and a white kid glove held out a prayer book opened at the right place. She started to say something, for surely the gesture came from one of the Stuyvensants. Was it Belinda? She couldn't remember. But the nod she got for her thanks was that of a total stranger to another, a kind nod, but an unaware one.

The service went on, with kneeling and rising and nodding and saying Amen at the right place. Aurora followed it all, like an adult remembering a child's nursery rhyme, sometimes stumbling, sometimes closing the book over a finger and proudly carrying on without it. And then the congregation settled back in its seats, and the rector began his sermon, and there was the usual turning of heads to see who was in church this morning. Aurora, with a touch of stage fright now, sat erect in her pew, her chin high, her blue eyes moving about nervously, waiting for the recognition and the polite moving of lips that carries words to neighbors without carrying farther.

There was something she couldn't understand. Glances swept over her, she could see that from the corners of her eyes, but they were not what she expected. She couldn't understand what was wrong about them. Certainly there was in these glances none of the things she had expected, not contempt, not shock, not approval or disapproval . . . but something else that she was puzzled to define . . . until, finally, with the end of the

sermon, with the rector's voice and eyes including her along with the rest of the congregation, the truth suddenly broke upon Aurora. The simple truth was that nobody knew her, nobody remembered her, nobody recognized her at all!

It was not intentional, for she knew those looks, too. It was simple and honest non-recognition, non-remembering . . . and Aurora was pushed outside. It was as forcible as if the usher (surely it *was* the Van Rensseler whelp) had taken her by the elbows and pushed her out the door.

She stood up with the rest, and with her lips dry and pale she chanted, "Our Father Who art in heaven . . ." and then slowly a kind of terror swept over her at the thought of the service's end, and the walking out with all these people who would perhaps smile kindly, and step aside, ignoring her with gentleness because she was inside their church. Before there was a sitting down again, Aurora had dropped the prayer book stamped with the name of Stuyvensant, and fled down the aisle of the church, and out onto the broad steps, worn and polished by generations of the devout.

She began by laughing shrilly as her short-vamped slippers stumbled to the old car. "Not so hot, my dear," she kept on laughing at herself. "Aurora Loomis makes a dramatic entrance in church, shocking the congregation, causing a great commotion, while from all those throats (held up with black ribbons) rises a spontaneous hallelujah for the repentant sinner. . . . Like hell!" She started the car with a jerk, and raced down the main highway. But then her hands grew cold on the steering wheel and the pressure of her toe on the gas relaxed.

The truth was that no one remembered her, or was going to remember her. She

had walked out on them once, and she would never get back. The Loomis name was there, on the wall of their church, on a rock in their soil . . . but for them the last of the Loomises had gone to his fathers.

"I'll show them," she said, and tried to laugh again, but she couldn't. She repeated instead, to herself and the windshield, "I'll show them what I can do! Why, if I want to I can sell the whole place to a boys' camp, or cut it up into suburban lots. I'll do it! I'll make a Coney Island of my place. It's mine, now, I can do as I like with it."

She had arrived at the center of the sleepy old town, with its beautiful and historic old inn, where both Washington and Lafayette had been entertained. Aurora wanted a drink badly. She knew there was a taproom in the rear of the inn, but she didn't want to go there. She looked down Main Street and saw a sign reading:

"Jim Tracy's Bar: Liquor License."

She parked her car in front and went through the door. The room was dim and stuffy, with a bar at one end and several brown tables around the sides. On the walls themselves were movie posters in cut-outs, Mae West, Jean Harlow, Shirley Temple, and an old one of Clara Bow.

"Well, well," Aurora said, sidling up to the bar, "if this isn't nice and cozy. Give me a whisky and soda—and use the good Scotch."

IV

While the bartender was pouring her drink, Aurora took out her mirror and lipstick and dressed up her face. She snapped her bag closed and picked up her glass. "Your health," she said, and drank. She asked for a package of cigarettes and

lighted one. Then she pushed her glass forward and said, "How about another?"

From twelve to one o'clock there were intermittent customers at the bar, men who came for a glass of beer, or a pony of whisky. The bartender was pretty busy, and Aurora stood at one end of the bar, not saying much except, "How about another, old dear?"

Between one and two there wasn't much business, and the bartender fixed Aurora a plate of crackers and cheese. She began to feel that he was an old friend, and called him Maxie. She was sorry when he left the place at two and was relieved by the owner of the bar, Jim Tracy. But she decided Jim was all right, and insisted on his drinking with her. He took a glass of beer, talked very politely with her, and then picked up the Sunday paper and began to read.

By three o'clock she found it a little hard to keep standing and Jim drew a stool up to the end of the bar where she could sit down and lean her elbows on something. She was getting very chummy now with Jim, telling him who she was, and what she'd been doing for the last five years. He was very respectful, saying once or twice, "We've got a pretty good restaurant inside, Mrs. Loomis. Wouldn't you like me to order you a steak or a chop?"

And that made Aurora laugh. She thought of the Sunday dinner that Mrs. Carpenter must have prepared for her, roast chicken and mashed potatoes, served on the famous Loomis Wedgwood. She could see John clearing the table, and wondered what the two of them were saying about her. Maybe they wouldn't say anything at all. They would have waited until half past three, perhaps, and then Mrs. Carpenter would have given John orders to clear the dining room and put the silver away, carefully. She was sure that Mrs.

Carpenter did not discuss a member of the family with the only servant left, even if John was her nephew.

The bar began to get livelier around four o'clock. There was hardly elbow room. Aurora sat at her end and watched everyone who came in, sometimes recognizing a face: the country doctor, the son of the Rivertown lawyer, a few others. She began to insert a few words in their private conversations, insisting on being noticed. She was aware of the winks that passed, of the jokes at her expense, but she didn't care. She was feeling very good, even expansive. She loved Jim, and all his little friends. Once or twice she bought a round of drinks for everybody, insisting over protests that they accept. By six o'clock, she was everybody's pal.

Everybody's, that is, except one tall thin man with a bronzed skin, who stood at the opposite end of the bar from Aurora and quietly drank whisky. He talked from time to time with various men who came in, talked about baseball and about politics. Aurora had called out to him several times, but he had paid no attention to her at all.

"Say, who is that stuffed shirt, anyway?" Aurora asked her friend Jim in a loud stage whisper.

"Fellow just opened a garage south of the village," Jim answered, with the amazing patience he had shown all afternoon. "Been here about six months. He's a good guy."

"Introduce me," Aurora said grandly. "Go ahead, introduce me."

Jim went over to the other end of the bar and whispered for a few minutes. Looking very bored, the bronzed man came and stood next to Aurora.

"Mrs. Loomis, allow me to present Mr. Farley," Jim said.

"Delighted." Aurora nodded her head

like a queen and extended the tips of her fingers. They had a drink together.

There were only six men at the bar now, and four others playing bridge at a corner table. It was getting near the supper hour.

"I tell you what," Aurora suddenly suggested, "suppose you all come up to my house for supper. Come on, I invite you all . . . cold chicken and all the drinks you want. Jim, here, you bring along a case of your best Scotch—I'll pay for it. Come on, all of you . . . we'll have a real party. Out in the garden, maybe . . . come on, get your hats, gentlemen . . . I'm inviting you to a party, do you understand—at Longacres. Come on!"

Her face was flushed, she was in that state of intoxication which clings to an idea and can't let it drop. She passed up and down the bar, coaxing; she walked over to the table of bridge and messed the cards. "Come on!" she cried, her eyes glittering. "You're all my friends, and I want to show you a good time. Jim is going to close up shop, we're all moving over to my house."

The man named Farley pulled his hat farther down his nose and started to walk out. Aurora ran after him and clung to his arm. "Get in your cars, and follow us. Mr. Farley is going to drive for me." She led the way, and the others followed. The spirit of the thing caught hold, somehow, and as the three cars, led by the Daimler, drove through the town and then down to the back River road, there were shouts and singing and ribaldry, while Aurora nestled close to the man who was driving her.

V

When they reached the big white house on the terrace over the River, Aurora ran up the steps ahead of the rest. She threw open the stately door and called loudly,

"Mrs. Carpenter, I've brought home some friends! Get busy and rustle up tons of sandwiches and cold chicken and whatever you got. . . . Buffet supper in the south room, and make it snappy. But first bring in a dozen glasses . . . big ones . . . and ice and soda. . . . Come on, boys!"

She stood, unsteadily, in the entrance hall, leaning against one of the console tables that was finer than anything in the Metropolitan's American wing. She stood there, greeting her guests as though they had just arrived. "Well, well, this *is* nice," she kept repeating, between gales of hysterical laughter. "I'm *so* glad you could come."

They piled in noisily, full of bright remarks, of wisecracks, and they threw down their hats on the Duncan Phyfe chairs, and then Aurora led them in a procession through the lower rooms, out to the large white room with the crystal chandeliers and the inlaid cabinets and the little white piano that Liszt had played.

"Make yourselves at home, boys," Aurora cried. "The Loomises have always prided themselves on their hospitality, and I'm for carrying on the grand old tradition." Then she stood in the hall and stamped her foot and cried, "Glasses, at once, and ice!"

Nervously she moved among them, trying to break the sudden awkwardness of little groups who stood beneath the West portraits and the crystal chandeliers. She was explaining the portraits when Mrs. Carpenter came in quietly with a tray and a dozen crystal goblets, and a silver bowl filled with cracked ice. The housekeeper placed the tray on one of the smaller tables, and went out silently.

There was some shyness while the first drinks were being poured. Aurora danced about, trying to keep up the mood in

which they had arrived, but these village boys who had played on the grounds of all the River places, fished in the coves, who knew, all of them, somebody who worked on the place, either as farm manager or houseworker, felt uncomfortable now, inside these doors. It was not that they had any feeling of inferiority, but rather as if the gates of Valhalla had suddenly opened to them and they had found themselves inside. They were uncomfortable and ill at ease, and a little defiant, because they'd never wanted to get inside. Even Jim, who had run a respectable bar all through Prohibition and had served the fathers and sons of the River places politely and not servilely for years, stood uncomfortably about and moved his feet as though he wished he had worn spats.

The party looked like a wash-out, and Aurora redoubled her energy, brandishing a bottle of Scotch, filling up glasses as soon as they had been touched by nervous lips. She was like a frantic little figure in a girls' school morality play, representing "Joy" as opposed to "Sadness".

When Mrs. Carpenter, followed by silent John, appeared with platters of sandwiches, Aurora had the bright idea of picnicking in the garden. "Come on, everybody outside!" she shouted.

The gardens of Longacres were formal and immaculate: there were no fountains, but there was a main vista through which one caught a sight of the Hudson, flanked by a stately hedge. Between the house and the vista ran little paths around gardens of peonies and roses and lupines, and along the sides were the white stone figures of Pan and Psyche. The sun was setting behind the distant blue shadows of the mountains across the Hudson. There were a few birds singing, and a frog that croaked in a distant pool.

Aurora, with her pale blonde hair stand-

ing out like a stiff brush around her flushed face, ran about thrusting sandwiches at her guests and begging them to be merry. And suddenly, there was a lessening of tension, and the garden became full of drunken men singing at the tops of their voices, walking over the flower beds, or sinking to rest with bottles against the bases of cold stone figures dappled with moss.

Aurora stood watching them, and even she knew that there was something too much like a stage orgy in this to ring true. Her guests were obliging her, but they were not happy. She sat down on a bench from which the white paint had peeled, and lighted a cigarette. She heard a voice beside her say, "Where's the owner of this place?"

It was the man that Jim had called Farley. Aurora was feeling tired now, awfully tired. She had been keyed up to fun, and there wasn't any fun. "What do you mean?" she asked, throwing her cigarette into the pansy border and getting a queer little stab as she did so.

"I mean where are the people who own this place, the family . . . the Loomises?"

Aurora stared at him. "That's me," she said. "I'm the Loomises. This is my place. Didn't you know?"

He looked down at her and laughed. "Sure," he said. "And I'm King George."

Aurora tried to laugh. It was funny, but it was as if she were all laughed out, as if she couldn't laugh to save her life. "Honestly," she said, "strange as it may seem, I'm Mrs. Loomis, and this is my place. . . . I own it, don't you understand?" She rose rather shakily to her feet and stretched out her arm to sweep over the gardens and then the house behind her. "All this . . . it's mine . . . I'm the last of the Loomises."

The bronzed man took out a packet of

cigarettes, selected one, and lighted it coolly.

"You little tart," he said softly. "You miserable little tart, do you honestly think you're kidding me? Who are you anyway — Mrs. Loomis' maid? Or is the family so poor now they had to take in cheap boarders? You belong here about as much as I belong in a Turkish harem. In fact, just seeing you in this place makes me feel sick. Good night."

VI

They were all gone now. Mechanically Aurora walked about the gardens, picking up crumpled cigarette packages, picking up smoking stubs and broken glass. She started toward the house with her hands full of things. From the pantry window

she heard the sound of glasses being washed, the clink of silver being cleaned, but not a spoken word. The house was lighted now, for the sun had gone, darkness had come, and there was a low crescent moon above the hedge.

She turned when she reached the first step of the porch and looked back over the gardens. It was very quiet, except for the frog that croaked in a distant pond. She felt cold, so cold that she shivered. She dropped the things she was holding into a receptacle, and walked slowly upstairs to her room.

She had better do her packing now, she told herself, because tomorrow she would feel awful. She would wake up, she knew, with one of the old headaches, and the first train left early — at eight o'clock.



PASTORAL

BY HELENE MAGARET

THIS is my Christmas Eve of love. I know
 The old years are concluded, and I follow,
 Swinging my lantern on the crusted snow,
 The setter tracks that trail across the hollow.
 Lantern and starlight and the light within
 Shall shine upon sharp clumps of leafless plum,
 The river darken where the ice is thin.
 It matters not. My Christmas Eve has come.
 Safe from the cold, Love, lean upon my breast.
 The ox is warm within his weathered stall.
 The sheep are drowsing like white flowers pressed
 Bloom against bloom along the creviced wall.
 Be quiet, Love, and never waken lest
 We hear some lost and lonely creature call.