

Atmosphere

A PHILOSOPHIC TALE OF COUNTRY JOYS AND CITY COMFORTS

By Elmer Brown Mason

PERWYN SMITH removed his velvet jacket with a final wriggle of his shoulders, like a snake shedding a skin of which it has become extremely tired. He looked across the studio to where his wife was separating teacups and saucers into neat piles. Seeing that her back was turned, he swiftly and silently rolled the velvet jacket into a ball and kicked it deftly through the bedroom door beyond.

"That is a convenient mirror," Berry remarked, without turning around. "Why the childish peeve, Pen?"

Smith tried to think of an appropriate answer, failed, and, in true masculine fashion, took refuge in complaint.

"I've never seen a duller lot of people," he grumbled; "and that Hyde person was the dullest of the lot."

Berry regarded her husband with wide-eyed astonishment.

"Didn't he buy a picture, and give you a perfectly good check for it? Certainly he did. *You* should rave!"

"He didn't take the one I wanted him to," the artist answered resentfully. "Said my 'Psyche' reminded him of a girl who had turned him down in Peoria, Illinois, only that she was better dressed—the Peoria girl, I mean."

"Good for Peoria!" Berry laughed.

At the sound her husband's face relaxed, and he crossed over to her. She looked up at him, smiling, but her eyes were very tired.

"I'm a brute," he exclaimed remorsefully. "Here, let me put those things away."

He reached for the teacups, upsetting the pile of saucers as he did so.

"Never mind, dear," she said, in reply to his look of consternation. "You can—you can—" She searched her mind for

some task that *might* not result in breakage. "You may sweep. No, better not. I'll tell you what to do—go out and buy a steak."

"Fine!" he agreed enthusiastically. "Where shall I get it?"

"Oh, anywhere," she answered vaguely. "There's plenty of time. Meanwhile sit down and tell me what every one said to you."

"They didn't say anything—that is, anything that I can remember. Oh, yes—Mrs. Wrightson said that it took a big man to paint a big picture. She isn't at all stupid, is she?"

"Not about men."

The artist's face took on a slightly puzzled expression.

"I thought you liked her. You kissed her," he said accusingly.

"Pen, dear—"

The telephone jangled sharply.

"Darn that thing! I'm going to have it taken out to-morrow," the artist exclaimed, getting to his feet.

"Let me answer it." His wife laid a restraining hand on his arm. "I think it's Fanny Carruthers calling from Avalon. Get a pencil and paper, will you? She's sure to want a lot of things."

Crossing to the telephone, she took down the receiver.

"Hello, Fanny! Yes, this is Berry. I thought it must be you."

"Yes, splendidly, both of us. How are you?"

"I should think there would be thousands of people."

"No, I can't think of any one just this minute."

"Every one will be going away for the summer. You shouldn't have the slightest trouble."

"Got your pencil, dear?" Berry said to Pen, over her shoulder. "Go ahead, Fanny!"

"Five cans of asparagus; a crate of peaches; a dozen sheets of carbon paper; a package of No. 10 envelopes; a dollar's worth of stamps; three yeast cakes; a package of pancake flour; three bunches of young onions; a small bottle of glycerine and rose water; two typewriter ribbons—black; a package of dog biscuit; and any copies of this month's magazines that have Bill's stories in. Oh, my dear, I don't mind a *particle*! I love shopping."

"Yes, I'll let you know the minute I think of any one. I'll watch out for an apartment, too."

"Of course he does. Every one says New York is the only place for authors. Look at O. Henry!"

"Good-by, dear. Yes, I'll send everything parcel post."

"Well, what do you think of that?" exclaimed Berry, hanging up the receiver and turning to her husband. "The snapshots of it were too dear for words!"

"Think of what? Snapshots of what?" demanded Pen.

"Why, Fanny Carruthers's bungalow at Avalon, of course," his wife explained a trifle impatiently; "and to think of her wanting to come into town now!"

"I gather, my dear," suggested Perwyn cautiously, "I deduce, I should say, having a *Sherlock Holmes* type of mind, that Bill Carruthers is dissatisfied with the writing game, wants to rent his bungalow, and is starting a general store, the preliminary stock for which I have just noted down for you to purchase. Furthermore, from the evidence, it is easy to conclude that Fanny Carruthers, *née* Fanny Carter of Virginia, is so humiliated at the prospect of her husband going into trade that she is leaving him to reside in a New York apartment, which you are to find for her."

"Oh, Pen, how ridiculous! They want to rent their bungalow for the summer and come into town, so that Bill can be near the editors and talk with them occasionally. Fanny wants me to look for a furnished apartment for them, and to try to rent their place at Avalon to some nice people who can afford to pay them what the apartment will cost. Then they'll go back to the country next winter, of course."

"Think of any one staying in the city who didn't have to!" the artist exclaimed.

"Bill must be crazy. I only wish we had a chance to spend a summer in the country—though of course we can go up to Maine for a couple of months, especially now that we've sold that picture."

He paused and looked over at his wife, but it was apparent that she had not heard him.

"No people to bother one! Plenty of fresh vegetables, and fruit, and milk. Country air. No telephone." He was speaking more to himself than to her. "All outdoors to paint—"

"Pen! Oh, Pen!" Berry Smith turned to her husband, her eyes shining. "Why shouldn't *we* go to Avalon and let Fanny and Bill come here?"

II

"BRRRRRR!" went the telephone.

Fanny Carruthers sprang to her feet, and then sat down again, at the reproachful look in her husband's eyes.

"Yes, it is your turn to answer it, Bill," she admitted regretfully.

Carruthers took down the receiver, spoke briefly into the transmitter, and hung up again.

"Wrong number," he explained to his wife. "They make that mistake rather often, seems to me."

"Yes, they do; but when you think of it, Bill, it's a wonder they ever get anything straight, with the millions of calls they have."

"It's a great convenience, of course," he admitted. "Saves you no end of steps, doesn't it?"

"It saves me *miles*," his wife answered enthusiastically. "Just think of ordering vegetables over the wire, instead of walking a mile and a half to Mrs. Kelly's, only to find that she's sent everything to the city but some tough rhubarb!"

"It certainly is splendid here," agreed her husband. "The bathtub alone is worth the whole show, even though the water isn't so awfully cold in the morning. The spring pool spoiled us for that."

"The spring pool is lovely," Fanny said, with just a shade of regret in her voice. "I know Berry and Pen will love it."

"Isn't it odd that things worked out this way?" Bill continued. "Pen gets exactly what an artist should have—all outdoors, country freedom, and quiet; and we get just the atmosphere I need to finish that series. I can actually go down town and

look at Jefferson Market, then come home and write about it. You've got to give me credit, though, Fan, for selling two intensely cosmopolitan tales written entirely in the country."

"I do, dear," she agreed. "Now that you're in exactly the right atmosphere, the rest of the series ought to be even better. I do hope the Smiths won't overfeed Teddy," she concluded irrelevantly.

"He's the one thing I regret," Bill said, his face clouding. "I certainly do miss that pup!"

III

"Isn't this simply glorious?" Berry exclaimed, pushing the Smith hammock into rapid oscillation by means of a toe pressed against the Smith porch. "Isn't it simply glorious?"

"I'll say it is," Pen answered happily. "It's getting cool, too—so cool I think I'll slip on a sweater. Shall I bring you a rug, dear?"

"Yes, do. I don't want to move from this hammock till the sun sets. I haven't seen a country sunset since I was a little girl. Pen, wouldn't that vista down our own path between the hollyhocks make a lovely picture?"

Smith got to his feet, opened the door of the screened porch, to let out an unhappy Airedale that had been moving about restlessly, and squinted down the path.

"It is pretty," he agreed; "but there's no background—or, rather, there's too much background. It should look out into sky over water, into immensity. Those scrubby trees beyond simply kill it. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," she agreed, after a moment's contemplation. "You've a wonderful sense of composition, haven't you, dear?"

Pen grinned happily, leaned over the hammock, and kissed his wife. Then he went to let in the Airedale, who was scratching at the screen door. Back in his rocking chair, he filled his pipe and watched appreciatively while his brother artist, the sun, painted the western sky in crimson and gold.

Dusk closed down softly. From the scrubby woods in front of the bungalow came the staccato call of a whippoorwill, to be answered by its mate with a reiteration almost like that of a machine gun.

"What's that?" Pen asked, a trifle star-

tled, and rose to let the Airedale outdoors again.

"A whippoorwill, poor child of the pavements," his wife answered. "One of the most beautiful sounds in all nature!"

"Yes, of course, but a trifle insistent," the artist agreed, and rose to let the dog in.

"Pen, do let that dog stop outdoors! You've done nothing all evening but wait on him. It's getting chilly. Let's go inside and read over that list Bill gave you. He's an orderly soul. I caught a glimpse of it—the list, I mean—and it was all type-written."

"I put it down somewhere—I can't remember exactly where," the artist said vaguely.

"I have it!" his wife answered briskly. "I took it out of your paint box, where you put it."

She rose from the hammock.

Within the pretty bungalow, the man touched a match to the shavings under the wood in the great fireplace, and drew up two chairs to the cheerful blaze. Mrs. Smith produced a long envelope, from which she extracted a closely written sheet of foolscap, and read aloud:

The telephone is in Wallace's store, where the post office is. There are two mails a day—9.15 in the morning, and 7 in the evening. The 8.22 is the best train, if you want to go to town. You can come back on the 5.12.

Ted has only two meals a day, but as many dog biscuit as he will eat during the afternoon. Give him milk and bread in the morning, and meat and vegetables in the evening. He is not allowed in the dining room during meals.

Mrs. Kelly leaves the milk at Wallace's, so you can get it when you go for the first mail.

The spring pool back of the house can't be seen from the road, so you can bathe in it in the morning *au naturel*. This should delight Pen's artistic soul. It is always cool. The big frog there is a pet; don't frighten him.

You get vegetables from Mrs. Kelly, who lives about a mile beyond the store. Turn off at Winston's farm, and go through the gap in the fence over the hill. It saves about half a mile.

The old chewed-up paintbrush on the porch is Teddy's plaything. Watch out he doesn't dig up the flower beds and bury it, because he forgets where it is, and is unhappy.

The meat man comes Tuesdays and Fridays. Make him give you a bone for Ted free. His prices are outrageous, anyway.

Mrs. Kelly's daughter, Matty, does the washing. She is very lazy, and will try to make you fetch it, but don't stand for that. She comes Mondays, if you make her.

Ted is allowed to sleep on the red cushion in the cane chair, but no other place in the house. Put him outdoors at night. He's a peach of a watchdog.

The flowers only have to be watered every other day, no matter how dry it gets.

Wallace will cash your checks.

Don't let Ted go to the store with you. He doesn't like Wallace, and always gets into a fight with the collie there.

You can get chickens from Mrs. Kelly.

Mrs. Kelly's married daughter, Mary Detwiller, will come in by the day (a dollar and fifty cents—don't pay her any more). She's good, but you have to watch her, or she won't clean the windows on both sides.

I think this is everything you ought to know. Hope you enjoy yourselves. Ted should be brushed each morning as soon as he begins to shed.

"Bill seems to have put everything down," the artist exclaimed admiringly. "Typed it, too. There seems to be quite a bit about the dog."

"There is indeed," said Berry. "Also that list is a purely man-made product. There isn't one thing that I want to know. He just tells the man side of the house."

"That pool will be great," Pen said hastily. "You'll go in, too, in the morning, won't you, dear?"

"Well, not to-morrow morning. I want to get the stove running well, and I must see where things are in the kitchen. I wonder if you get butter from Kelly's or at Wallace's store? You get bread there, of course. I'll make a list of things for you in the morning, when you go for the mail, Pen."

"Gosh, those whip-poor-what-do-you-call-'ems make an awful racket!" the artist said. "Let's go to bed. I'm tired."

"So am I," his wife agreed. "I wonder if Fanny has a percolator!"

It was deliciously cool. The call of the whippoorwills was as limpidly sweet as the sound of running water. Outside, Teddy was moving restlessly about, occasionally whimpering.

Gradually all the night sounds blended together and drew farther and farther away. An enormous round moon glided theatrically up from behind the horizon, and lit the world beneath with the clearness of a calcium light. A little breeze sprang up from nowhere, whispered a moment among the trees, then slipped quietly away.

Avalon slept.

IV

BERRY SMITH woke with a start. Realizing that her husband was no longer by her side, she sat up in bed.

"What is it?" she called sharply. "Is the house on fire?"

"No, it's only the moon. He scratched at our door, and then he went round to the porch and scratched. He's been doing it for hours," came Pen's voice.

"The moon scratched?" interrogated Berry, only half awake.

"No, the dog," her husband answered. "I'm going to let him in. I'm tired of being kept awake."

"Perwyn Smith, you'll do no such thing! Don't you remember that Bill said in his list that he stayed out all night? Besides, what would we do if burglars came around? He couldn't hear them."

"If I wanted to be funny, I could say that it was unwise of Bill to put down on paper that he was in the habit of staying out all night," Pen grumbled, as he got back into bed; "but I don't believe in humor at three o'clock in the morning. I believe in sleep!"

"Why, it's just a quarter past eleven!" exclaimed Berry, glancing at the illuminated dial of the traveling clock on the dresser. "I could have sworn that we had been asleep for hours. Oh, Pen!"

She clutched her husband in momentary alarm as a howl of unutterable woe rose just outside their door.

"Shu-t-t-t up, dar-r-n you!" Pen commanded, addressing the door.

There was instant silence. Then came the sound of Teddy trotting to the porch, where he scratched lustily.

"Poor thing!" Berry said commiseratingly. "He doesn't know whether Fanny and Bill will come back. He has no means of knowing that they ever will be back, that he'll ever see them again. Suppose, for instance, that—"

"Berry dear," the artist said firmly, "I sympathize with the dog as much as you do, but I refuse to engage in a philosophical discussion at this hour. I'm sleepy!"

"Well, I'm wide awake," his wife returned reproachfully.

"Try counting sheep jumping over a stile," he suggested.

Silence.

Again Teddy came to the door and scratched, then went back to the porch.

"Pen!" Berry spoke sharply. "Pen!"

"Yes, dear, what is it—the dog again?"

"Pen, you never telephoned the laundry to send our things out here."

"Good Lord, what if I didn't? I'll send 'em a wire in the morning. I'm tired, dear. Do let me sleep!"

Again there was silence. Teddy trotted back from the porch, and sniffed disconsolately at the bedroom door. It was no use. These new people, whom he recognized as friends of his own particular gods, wouldn't let him into the house. His gods had gone away, but inside there were things which smelled of them, and which would comfort a deserted puppy so that he might sleep.

He whimpered again. Again it was no use. He had to tell himself sternly that a well bred dog simply does not howl. It wasn't done, even though one's throat ached and throbbed with woe.

An idea popped into his wise Airedale head. He turned purposefully and trotted to the rear of the garden. There he began to bark furiously.

"Berry, are you awake?" whispered the artist.

"Heavens, yes! You needn't whisper," she answered crossly. "Bill said he was a peach of a watch dog. Do you suppose it's tramps, or real burglars?"

"I don't know. I'll go and see. Where's that electric torch?"

"Perwyn Smith, don't you dare go out of this house with a torch! Why, they could shoot you as easy as anything!"

"All right, all right," he grumbled, getting out of bed. "It's almost as light as day, anyway."

He opened the door. Instantly Teddy slipped inside, wagging his tail, and making little placating noises of pleasure.

"Let him stay, and get back into bed yourself," Berry said wearily. "I'm dead sleepy."

Pen lay listening, in the partial darkness, while the dog went painstakingly over the house. His wife was breathing regularly by his side now. There was silence at last.

"Teddy has probably gone to sleep in that cane chair of his," Pen assured himself drowsily.

Then he jumped. A soft muzzle had touched his face. He reached out a hand, and a wet tongue caressed it.

"Poor puppy!" he whispered.

There was the swish of a wagging tail, and a tentative paw came up on the bed. Pen moved over carefully, to avoid disturbing his wife. Another paw came up, then a whole dog. Teddy gave a long sigh of content, turned around twice, and lay down, his shaggy muzzle pressed against the man's shoulder.

The whippoorwills were calling from far away now. The moon slipped behind a cloud. A little brown rabbit hopped to the screen door, to peer in curiously where the artist, his wife, and Teddy were peacefully sleeping all in the same bed, and then hopped off quickly down the path between the hollyhocks.

V

"BRRRRRRRR!" went the telephone.

Bill Carruthers looked up impatiently from his typewriter, hesitated, then turned back to his work.

"Brrrrr! Brrrrrrrr!" the telephone noisily insisted.

"You'll have to answer it, dear," came a muffled voice from the kitchenette. "I've got to cut this piece of ice down to fit the box. *Why* will they leave such queer-shaped pieces?"

Bill got up and crossed to the telephone, where he stood for a moment regarding it with a stare of fixed malignity. Then, with deliberate purpose, he removed the receiver and let it hang down by the length of its cord.

"Guess that 'll fix you!" he said half aloud.

He went back to his chair and sat down. He read over the last paragraph on the sheet in his machine, typed a sentence, then obliterated it with a solid line of x's.

A tinkle of breaking ice came from the kitchenette. The man got up from the typewriter and sauntered to the door of the little cubby-hole, which held a miniature gas stove, several shelves, and a tabloid ice box.

"There!" Fanny triumphantly slammed down the top of the tiny ice box and turned to her husband. "Now I can start to get our lunch."

"I don't see how you cook so many things at the same time with only two places on the stove," Bill said curiously.

"Neither do I," his wife admitted frankly. "It drives me nearly frantic, sometimes, trying to prepare a decent dinner. A good deal of the time I just stand and hold things and—wonder. Now in the bungalow—"

She sighed, but did not otherwise finish the sentence.

"I'm getting off this great city myself," Bill said suddenly.

"Still, it has its good points," Fanny reminded him. "I've bought all my winter

clothes much cheaper than I could have made them myself, and I've learned to run that darned stove, and you've seen all your editors and have orders for three more stories."

"Yes, I know," Bill interrupted; "but I haven't written any one of the three. I haven't written two thousand words since we got here. I haven't—"

"But think of the wonderful atmosphere for your work! And you know, Bill, I leave you alone in the studio all morning. I never disturb you, now do I?"

"No, you never do," he agreed moodily; "but just when I've made a good start, the telephone rings, or some one comes to the door. A book agent, the man to read the meter, and a queer-looking guy who claims he furnished Pen Smith with cigarettes, all called yesterday morning."

"Well, isn't this exactly the atmosphere you want for what you are working on now?" she challenged. "How are you going to write stories about the city if you don't observe its inhabitants? You needn't answer the doorbell."

"Oh, I'm not reproaching you, dear. I'm just trying to find out what the trouble is. It isn't the disturbance exactly. It can't be, because Teddy is always moving around when I'm working in Avalon, and he doesn't bother me a bit. I don't know what it is."

"Berry wrote that Ted chewed up a lot of Pen's brushes, and gave me a list of new ones to get him," Fanny broke in irrelevantly. "I do hope there was no paint on them! Still, they would have telephoned us if he had been sick. Pen shouldn't have left his brushes around. You told him in your list that Ted's pet plaything was that old paintbrush, didn't you?"

"Of course I did. Think I'd forget an important thing like that? I wonder if they are making Ted sleep outdoors!" he concluded, his voice wistful.

"You told them he did, in that marvelous list," Fanny said accusingly.

"Yes, I know," Carruthers agreed. "Hope they don't scare the bullfrog away from the spring pool. Gosh, I'd like to feel that cool water again! The cold water faucet here runs hot half the time."

"Berry caught cold from going into the pool—so she wrote," Fanny commented.

"No one ever caught cold from spring water. She got it some other way—from city dust, most likely."

"Dust! Oh, Bill, it's simply frightful! Why, every time I open a window—"

There was a knock on the door. The janitor entered as Mrs. Carruthers called: "Come in!"

"Youse left de telephone down again," he announced accusingly. "De telephone company jus' give me a ring to tell you. I had to walk all the way up—the elevator ain't runnin'."

He stood in the door, apparently waiting for something. Bill gave him a quarter and a look of withering scorn.

"Don't trouble yourself the next time," he said. "While you're up here, you might as well unlock that door to the roof and leave it unlocked. I need air."

VI

"PEN! Oh, Pen!"

"Yes, dear. Anything wrong?"

"Where are you?"

"Down by the spring pool, working."

"Well, *what* have you done with the teakettle?"

The artist got up from his camp chair and walked to the bungalow, where his wife was standing in the kitchen door.

"I remember that kettle distinctly," he mused, in the tone of one imparting a confidence. "Yes, I remember it quite well. I can't seem to recall what I did with it, though. Have you looked on the front porch? I leave a lot of things there from time to time, you know."

"Yes, I have. Now, Pen, after we had washed the dishes, I asked you to fill the kettle. What did you do then?"

"Oh, I have it! I knew I'd remember. Why, I took it out to the well, where the water is, of course. Then I heard Teddy barking, and I went to see what he was doing. I'll go and get it."

He disappeared rapidly in the direction of the pump, to reappear presently with the teakettle.

"This place is so big I don't blame you for losing things," Berry said, in reply to his downcast look. "It's wonderful atmosphere for you to paint in, though, isn't it, dear?"

"Yes," he agreed, albeit a trifle slowly. "Yes, it is, though I really think I'm better on seascapes. Somehow, whenever I concentrate on a bit of that pool, the blamed bullfrog swims right into the picture and throws me off. I guess I'm through for the day."

"I tell you what to do, then," Berry suggested brightly. "Walk over to Mrs. Kelly's and get a chicken—a small one. See if you can get some really good asparagus, and any other vegetables she may have. If she hasn't any, stop in at Wallace's and telephone to town for some. Oh, yes—bring a pound of butter, a loaf of bread, a jar of marshmallow cream, and some matches back from Wallace's. You'd better take the oil can along. Can you remember all that, dear?"

"No," said Pen positively, "I can't, not half of it. Write it down while I call Teddy."

Mrs. Smith went into the kitchen and made a list of her wants. She handed it to her husband, around whom the dog was joyously gyrating, and smiled after them as they went down the walk between the tall hollyhocks.

The smile changed as she picked up the kettle. She tested its weight by raising it up and down, and gazed wrathfully in the direction from which there came the sound of a man's voice speaking to a happily barking dog. Then she went to the well and filled the kettle from the pump.

Meanwhile Perwyn, the artist, went whistling down the road, swinging his basket like a small boy, while Teddy explored the fields on either side. The day was all sunshine, tempered by a steady breeze that the man sniffed appreciatively, then interrogatively. It was a perfectly good breeze, but there was something wanting in it. He missed the ozoniferous breath of the sea on the Maine coast, where he had spent many summers.

He stopped and gazed meditatively at a large shrub covered with white snowballs that stood in front of the first cottage in Avalon. They reminded him of the edge of foam that marked an incoming tide. He had looked forward to getting that effect down on canvas—smooth water with a rocky inlet, a crinkled tide surface beyond, with slanting sun rays catching the white ribbon of its advance.

"I'm better at seascapes than anything else," he told himself aloud. "But it's bully here," he added loyally. "That spring pool is a gem. Darn the frog, though!"

He whistled to the dog, who came obediently to heel. Then, having fulfilled his obligations as a well bred Airedale, Teddy ranged ahead once more.

Wallace's store came into view. The col-lie was sitting on the porch. Teddy advanced, stiff-legged. The other dog stepped forward with ominously lowered head and a deep throaty growl. They came together and rose on their hind legs, battling furiously with their paws, and emitting sounds of awful wrath.

Pen hastily dropped his basket and ran toward the combatants. They separated with mutual willingness and well simulated reluctance.

"Gosh! If Teddy had been hurt, Bill Carruthers would never have forgiven me!" Smith muttered.

Mopping his forehead, he went back and picked up the basket. He looked inside anxiously for the list. It was gone.

"Oh, well!" he reassured himself optimistically. "Guess I can remember most of what was on it. Let's see—get a chicken and some vegetables, and—and wire the laundry. I'll walk on to Mrs. Kelly's, and then go to the station and send the telegram. It's only half a mile out of the way."

There were new peas to be had at the Kelly farm, and Matty Kelly, in the absence of her mother, caught a rooster, tied its legs together, and slipped it into the basket on top of them. The telegram was dispatched from the station, and, serene in the consciousness of work well done, Pen came happily back to the bungalow.

"Got peas!" he called from afar off. "Oodles of 'em, Berry, all in their Lincoln green jackets!"

"Splendid! Did you get the marshmallow cream?"

"Well, no, I didn't. You see—"

"Or the butter, and the matches, and the kerosene?"

"No—you see, I lost the list; but I wired the laundry. *You* forgot that. I have a chicken, too."

Berry sighed.

"The laundry came by parcel post yesterday, dear—don't you remember? It was clever, of course, that you thought of wiring for it," she relented. "I didn't tell you I had written. Bring the chicken into the kitchen, dear."

Pen swung the rooster out of the basket by its tethered legs, then put it back again, realizing that the peas had to go in, too. He opened the door and proudly held out his booty.

"Perwyn Smith!" Berry exclaimed. "I wanted a *dressed* chicken—with its feathers

off—plucked! Now you listen to me. You take that chicken right out and cut its head off, then hang it up in a tree at the very end of the garden till it stops bleeding. Meanwhile you may take a pan and shell every last one of those peas.”

“Where’s the ax?” Pen asked in a crushed tone.

“In the woodshed.”

“I haven’t got a pan.”

“There is one right back of you. No, not that one—it’s the dish pan. Now run along—you and Teddy, too. I’ve simply got to find out what ails this stove!”

Berry turned back to her work as Pen and Teddy went silently through the door. She was making jelly, and the stove would either get so hot that everything boiled over, or the fire would die down so that things wouldn’t even simmer. Regretfully she visualized the gas stove that could always be regulated, the telephone that brought supplies as if by magic, back in the studio in New York.

It was very hot in the kitchen. How *did* Fanny keep that stove at the right temperature? The wood, too—you’d think that a *few* of the sticks might be straight! Well, Fanny didn’t have to worry in a comfortable studio in town, with plenty of vegetables within telephone call. You could always keep it cool, too, by opening all the windows. Of course, the dust was something awful in summer. The walls had to be recalcimined every year—

Berry dropped her spoon with a gasp of dismay at what flashed into her mind. Switching the kettle of fruit from the stove into the sink, she opened the door and ran down into the garden. At the far end, beyond the spring pool, she paused in amazement at what she saw.

The basket was half overturned. Beside it lay the pan, with a handful of shelled peas scattered over its shining bottom. Pen squatted by the pan, holding the end of a string that was attached to the leg of a large, untidy rooster, to whom he was rapidly feeding the shelled peas. Teddy, tongue lolling out and head cocked intelligently, looked on with judicial interest.

“Perwyn Smith, *what* are you doing?”

The artist looked up, a rebellious expression on his face.

“I couldn’t find the ax,” he announced challengingly. “If I had, I shouldn’t have killed old Solomon here. I’m feeding him peas. He likes ’em.”

Berry made a sound between a laugh and a sob.

“Oh, Pen, what shall I do with you?” she managed to gasp. “I’m simply worn out, the stove won’t work, and, Pen, I’ve just remembered that we arranged to have the studio entirely done over while we were away in Maine. It will take days! What *will* Bill and Fanny do?”

Smith whistled, then abstractedly fed Solomon another pea.

“My Lord, this is serious!” he exclaimed. “Bill won’t be able to work at all. I say, Berry”—he brightened up as a possible solution popped into his mind—“why don’t we ask ’em to come up here while the calcimining is being done? Just the thing, wouldn’t it be?”

He collected the rest of the shelled peas and held them out in the direction of the rooster, while he smiled at his wife.

“I wish—I wish we’d never come here at all!” she answered, her voice breaking. “I wish we’d gone up to Maine, as we planned! I wish Fanny and Bill had stayed where they belonged, with that fiendish old stove!”

She burst into tears. Pen got to his feet and put his arms around her. The rooster, seeing that no more shelled peas were forthcoming, philosophically began to peck open pods for himself. Teddy suddenly barked. A small boy came around the corner of the house.

“Long distance call for Mr. Smith,” he announced. “Pa says they said through the telephone that you was to come quick, no matter what you was doing.” He delivered his message, and added the gratuitous information: “Pa says you city folks is more trouble than you is worth.”

Pen was back from Wallace’s store within the half hour.

“It’s all right, dear,” he announced, as he entered the porch. “I had a hard time explaining, though. I’m sure Fanny can’t be very well. She was kind of hysterical over the phone. They went out for a walk this morning, and when they came back the calciminers were at work, and the janitor wouldn’t make them go away because they—I mean Bill and Fanny—left the telephone off the hook all the time.”

Berry opened her mouth to ask a question, then shut it again, and motioned her husband to continue.

“So I asked them to come and stay here

till the studio was in shape again. I said we'd be glad to have 'em. Fanny replied that I could safely bet that they were coming out, and that they were going to stay. So you see," he concluded comfortably, "everything is all right. We'll all stay out here all summer. Fanny will be good company for you, and she can show you how that stove works."

"Oh, we will, will we?" Berry answered. Her voice was pitched two octaves above normal. "We will, will we? You listen to me, Perwyn Smith. We are going to start to pack this minute. We are going into town to-night and up to Maine tomorrow. *I've* had enough of Avalon!"

"I *would* like to do a seascape," Pen acknowledged, as the idea slowly percolated through his brain. "I've wanted to do a seascape all summer. Look here, Berry," he added anxiously, "I'm going to insist on one thing, though. They've got to keep Solomon—the rooster, I mean. I won't have him killed. I found him down by the spring pool just now, as I came in by the back way. He had chased that darned bullfrog into the middle, and wouldn't let him come to land!"

VII

"Isn't this simply glorious?" Fanny Carruthers exclaimed, pushing her own hammock into swifter motion by the pressure of her toe on her own porch. "Isn't it simply glorious!"

"I'll say it is," Bill agreed, getting up to let Teddy outdoors. "No more city in ours! Why, I've written more this evening than I did all the time we were in town."

"I'm afraid I wasn't especially nice to Berry," Fanny said remorsefully. "I apologized afterward, though."

"Do you know"—the man spoke in the hushed undertone of confidences—"do you know, Fan, I believe they were *glad* to go away from Avalon? I believe they *wanted* to go up to Maine all the time."

He paused, to let the astonishing significance of this statement sink in.

"I hope they were," Fanny said doubtfully. "Anyway, we're back in our own home," she added happily.

"Yes— isn't it great?" Bill said, rising from his rocking chair to let Teddy into the house again. "Let's go to bed, Fan. My, isn't it wonderful to hear those whippoorwills again?"

Down at the spring pool an especially bright moonbeam slipped to the surface of the water. The bullfrog ceased its contented croaking for a moment. On a branch near by, a big rooster opened one eye to the radiance, wondered if it could be day already, and then, just to be on the safe side, crowed lustily.

The moonbeam danced away. The bullfrog resumed his contented croaking. Inside the bungalow, Teddy rubbed his head closer to his master's shoulder.

Avalon slept.

BROADCASTING

H-O-L-E is the station
From which I'm broadcasting,
Sending out to all the nation
Love that's everlasting.

But the instruments erected
In such great profusion
Do not catch my love projected,
Or 'twould cause confusion.

For, you see, it is intended
Just for *her* exclusive,
With the watts and voltage blended
In a style elusive.

She alone hears plainly stated,
Gets my words' true kernel—
Station letters mean, translated:
"Home of Love Eternal."

Gifford Green