The..... Prairie Mother

By Arthur Stringer

(CONTINUED.)

"But we have the glory of doing things," I contended, "and somebody, I believe, has summed up your Marcus Aurelius by saying he left behind him a couple of beautiful books, an execrable son, and a decaying nation. And we don't intend to decay! We don't live for the moment, it's true. But we live for Tomorrow. We write epics in railway lines, and intsead of working out sonnets we build new cities, and instead of sitting down under a palm-tree and twiddling our thumbs we turn a wilderness into a new nation, and grow grain and give bread to the hungry world where the gipsies don't seem quite able to make both ends meet!"

I had my say out, and Lady Alicia sat looking at me with a sort of mild and impersonal surprise. But she declined to argue about it at all. And it was just as well she didn't, I suppose, for I had my Irish up and didn't intend to sit back and see my country maligned.

But on the way home to the Harris Ranch last night, with Dinky-Dunk silent and thoughtful, and a cold star or two in the high-arching heavens over us, I found that my little fire of enthusiasm had burnt itself out and those crazy lines of John Davidson kept returning to my mind

"After the end of all things,
After the years are spent,
After the loom is broken,
After the robe is rent,
While there be hearts a-beating,
Will friend converse with friend,
Will men and women be lovers,
After the end?"

I felt very much alone in the world, and about as cheerful as a moonstruck coyote, after those lines had rattled in my empty brain like a skeleton in the wind. It wasn't until I saw the light in our wickiup window and heard Bobs' bay of welcome through the crystal-clear twilight that the leaden weight of desolation slipped off the ledge of my heart. But as I heard that deep-noted bark of gladness, that friendly intimation of guardianship unrelaxed and untiring, I remembered that I had one faithful and unexacting friend, even though it was nothing better than a dog.

SUNDAY THE TWELFTH.

Dinky-Dunk rather surprised me today by asking why I was so stand-offish with his Cousin Allie. I told him that I wasn't in the habit of curling up like a kitten on a slab of Polar ice.

"But she really likes you, Tabbie," my husband protested. "She wants to know you and understand you. Only you keep intimidating her, and placing her at a disadvantage."

This was news to me. Lady Alicia, I'd imagined, stood in awe of nothing on the earth beneath nor the heavens above. She can speak very sharply, I've already noticed, to Struthers, when the occasion arises. And she's been very calm and deliberate, as I've already observed, in her manner of taking over Casa Grande. For she *has* formally taken it over, Dinky-Dunk tells me, and in a day or two we all have to trek to town for the signing of the papers. She is, apparently, going to run the ranch on her own hook, and in her own way. It will be well worth watching.

I was rather anxious to hear the particulars of the transfer to Lady Allie, but Dinky-Dunk seemed a little reluctant to go into details, and I didn't intend to make a parade of my curiosity. I can bide my time.

Yesterday I put on my old riding-suit, saddled Paddy, fed the Twins to their last mouthful, and went galloping off through th mud to help bring the cattle over to the Harris Ranch. I was a sight, in that weather-stained old suit and ragged toppers, even before I got freckled and splashed with prairie-mud. I was standing up in the stirrups laughing at Francois, who'd had a bad slip and fallen in a puddle just back of our corral, when her Ladyship came out. She must have taken me for a drunken cowboy who'd rolled into a sheep-dip, for my nose was red and my old Stetson sombrero was crooked on the back of my head and even my hair was caked with mud. She called to me, rather imperiously, so I went stampeding up to her, and let Paddy indulge in that theatrical stop-slide of his, on his haunches, so that it wasn't until his nose was within two feet of her own that she could be quite sure she wasn't about to be run down.

Her eyes popped a little when she saw it was a woman on Paddy, though she'd refused to show a trace of fear when we went avalanching down on her. Then she studied my get-up.

"I should rather like to ride that way," she coolly announced.

"It's the only way," I told her, making Paddy pirouette by pressing a heel against his short-ribs. She meant, of course, riding astride, which must have struck her as the final word in audacity.

"I like your pony," next remarked Lady Alicia, with a somewhat wistful intonation in her voice.

He's a brick," I acknowledged. Then I swung about to help Francois head off a bunch of rampaging steers. "Come and see us," I called back over my shoulder. If Lady Alicia answered, I didn't have time to catch what she said.

But that romp on Paddy has done me. I've just decided that I'm not going to surrender to this middle-age Sit-by-the-Fire stuff before my time. I'm going to refuse to grow old gracefully. I'm going to keep the spark alive, the sacred spark of youth, even though folks write me down as the biggest loon west of the Dirt Hills. So dear Lord—this is my prayer—whatever you do to me, keep me *alive*. O God, don't let me, in Thy divine mercy, be a Dead One. Don't let me be a soured woman with a self-murderd soul. Keep the wine of youth in my body and the hope of happiness in my heart. Yea, permit me deeply to live and love and laugh, so that youth may abide in my bones, even as it did in that once-renowned Duchess of Leinster,

Who lived to the age of a hundred and ten,
To die of a fall from a cherry-tree then!

My poor old Dinky-Dunk, by the way, meanders about these days so moody and morose it's beginning to disturb me. He's at the end of his string, and picked clean to the bone, and I'm beginning to see that its my duty to buoy that man up, to nurse him back into a respectable belief in himself. His nerves are a bit raw, and he's not always responsible for his manners. The other night he came in tired, and tried to read, when Poppsy and Pee-Wee were both going it like the Russian Balalaika. To tell the truth, their little tummies were a bit upset, because the food purveyor had had too strenuous a day to be regular in her rounds.

"Can't you keep those squalling brats quiet?" Dinky-Dunk called out to me. It came, like a thunderclap. It left me gasping, to think that he could call his own flesh and blood "squalling brats." And I was shocked and hurt, but I decided not to show it.

"Will somebody kindly page Lord Chesterfield?" I quietly remarked as I went to the Twins and wheeled them out to the kitchen, where I gave them hot peppermint and rubbed their backs and quieted them down again.

I suppose there's no such thing as a perfect husband. That's a lesson we've all got to learn, the same as all children, apparently, have to findout that acorns and horse-chestnuts aren't edible. For the nap wears off men the same as it does off clothes. I dread to have to write it down, but I begin to detect thinnesses in Dinky-Dunk, and a disturbing little run or two in the even web of his character. But he knows when he's played Indian and attempts oblique and rather shamefaced efforts to make amends, later on, when it won't be too noticeable. Last night, as I sat sewing, our little Dinkie must have had a bad dream, for he wakened from a sound sleep with a scream of terror. Dinky-Dunk went to him first, and took him up and sang to him, and when I glanced in I saw a rumply and tumbly and sleepy-eyed tot with his kinky head against his father's shoulder. As I took up my sewing again and heard Dinky-Dunk singing to his son, it seemed a proud and happy and contented sort of voice. It rose and fell in that next room, in a sort of droning bass, and for the life of me I can't tell why, but as I stopped my sewing and sat listening to that father singing to his sleepy-eyed first-born, it brought the sudden tears to my eyes. It has been a considerable length of time, *en passant*, since I found myself sitting down and pumping the brine. I must be getting hardened in my old age.

TUESDAY THE FOURTEENTH

Lady Allie sent over for Dinky-Dunk yesterday morning, to fix the windmill at Casa Grande. They'd put it out of commission in the first week, and emptied the pressure-tank, and were without water, and were as helpless as a couple of canaries. We have a broken windmill of our own, right here at home, but Diddums went meekly enough, although he was in the midst of his morning work—and work is about to loom big over this ranch, for we're at last able to get on the land. And the sooner you get on the land, in this latitude, the surer you are of your crop. We daren't shave down any margins of chance. We need that crop.

I am really beginning to despair of Iroquois Annie. She is the only thing I can get in the way of hired help out here, and yet she is hopeless. She is sullen and wasteful, and she has never yet learned to be patient with the children. I try to soften and placate her with the gift of trinkets, for there is enough Redskin in her to make her inordinately proud of anything with a bit of flash and glitter to it. But she is about as responsive to actual kindness as a diamondback rattler would be, and some day, if she drives me too far, I'm going off at half-cock and blow that breed into mince-meat.

By the way, I can see myself writ small in little Dinkie, my moods and waywardnesses and wicked impulses, and sudden chinooks of tenderness alternating with a perverse sort of shrinking away from love itself, even when I'm hungering for it. I can also catch signs of his pater's masterfulness cropping out in him. Small as he is, he disturbs me by that combative stare of his. It's almost a silent challenge I see in his eyes as he coolly studies me, after a proclamation that he will be spanked if he repeats a given misdeed.

I'm beginning to understand the meaning of that very old phrase about one's chickens coming home to roost. I can even detect sudden impulses of cruelty in little Dinkie, when, young and tender as he appears to the casual eye, a quick and wilful passion to hurt something takes possession of him. Yesterday I watched him catch up his one-eyed Teddy Bear, which he loves, and beat its head against the shack floor. Sometimes, too, he'll take possession of a plate and fling it to the floor with all his force, even though he knows such an act is surely followed by punishment. It's the same with Poppsy and Pee-Wee, with whom he is apt to be overrough, though his offenses in that direction may still be touched with just a coloring of childish jealousy, long and arduously as I struggle to implant some trace of fraternal feeling in his anarchistic little breast. There are even times, after he's been hugging my knees or perhaps stroking my cheek with his little velvet hands and murmuring "Maaa-maa!" in his small and bird-like coo, when he will suddenly turn savage and try to bite my patella or pull my ear out by the root.

Most of this cruelty, I think, is born of a sheer excess of animal spirits. But not all of it. Some of it is based on downright wilfulness. I have seen him do without things he really wanted, rather than unbend and say the necessary "Ta-ts" which stands for both "please" and "thanks" in his still limited vocabulary. The little Hun will also fall on his picture-books, at times, and do his best to tear the linen pages apart, flailing them about in the air with genuine Berserker madness. But along with this, as I've already said, he has equally sudden impulses of affection, especially when he first wakens in the morning and his little body seems to be singing with the pure joy of living. He'll smooth my hair, after I've lifted him from the crib into my bed, and bury his face in the hollow of my neck and kiss my cheek nad pat my forehead and coo over me until I squeeze him so hard he has to grunt. Then he'll probably do his best to pick my eyes out, if I pretend to be asleep, or experiment with the end of my nose, to see why it doesn't lift up like a door-knocker. Then he'll snuggle down in the crook of my arm, perfectly still except for the wriggling of his toes against my hip, and croon there with happiness and contentment, like a ring-neck dove.

FRIDAY THE SEVENTEENTH.

Lady Allie couldn't have been picked quite clean to the bone by the McKails, for she's announced her intention of buying a touring car and a gasoline-engine and has had a conference with Dinky-Dunk on the matter. She also sent to Montreal for the nittiest little English sailor suit, for Dinkie, together with a sailor hat that has "Agamenon" printed in gold letters on the band.

I ought to be enthusiastic about it, but I can't. Dinkie himself, however, who calls it his "new nailor nuit"—not being yet able to manage the sibilants—struts about in it proud as a peacock, and refuses to sit down in his supper-chair until Ikkie has carefully wiped off the seat of the same, to the end that the beloved nailor might remain immaculate. He'll lose his reverence for it, of course, when he knows it better. It's a habit men have, big or little.

Lady Alice has confessed that she is succumbing to the charm of prairie life. It ought to make her more of a woman and less of a silk-lined idler. Dinky-Dunk still nurses the illusion that she is delicate, and manages to get a lot of glory out of that clinging-vine pose of hers, big oak that he is! But it is simply absurd the way he falls for her flattery. She's making him believe that he's a twentieth-century St. Augustine and a Saint Christopher all rolled into one. Poor old Dinky-Dunk, I'll have to keep an eye on him or they'll be turning his head, for all its gray hairs. He is wax in the hand of a designing beauty, as are most of the race of man. And the fair Allie, I must acknowledge, is dangerously appealing to the eye. It's no wonder poor old Dinky-Dunk nearly broke his neck trying to teach her to ride astride. But I intend to give her ladyship an inkling, before long, that I'm not quite so stupid as I seem to be. She mustn't imagine she can "vamp" my Kaikobad with impunity. It's a case of any port in a storm, I suppose, for she has to practise on somebody. But I must say she looks well on horseback and can lay claim to a poise that always exacts its toll of respect. She rides hard, though I imagine she would be unwittingly cruel to her mount. Yet she has been more offhanded and friendly, the last two or three times she has dropped over to the shack, and she is kind to the kiddies, especially Dinkie. She seems genuinely and unaffectedly fond of him. As for me, she thinks I'm hard, I feel sure, and is secretly studying me—trying to decipher, I suppose, what her sainted cousin could ever see in me to kick up a dust about!

Lady Allie's London togs, by the way, make me feel rather shoddy and slattern. I intend to swing in a little stronger for personal adornment, as soon as we get things going again. When a woman gives up, in that respect, she's surely a goner. And I may be a hard-handed and slabsided prairie huzzy, but there was a time when I stood beside the big palms by the fountain in the conservatory of Prince Ernest de Ligne's Brussels house in the *Rue Montoyer* and the Marquis of What-Ever-His-Name-Was bowed and set all the orders on his chest shaking when he kissed my hand and proclaimed that I was the most beautiful woman in Belgium!

Yes, there was such a time. But it was a long, long time ago, and I never thought then I'd be a rancher's wife with a barrel-churn to scald out once a week and a wheezy old pump to prime in the morning and a little hanging garden of Babylon full of babies to keep warm and to keep fed and to keep from falling on their boneless little cocos! I might even have married Theobald Gustav von Brockdorff and turned into an embassy ball lizard and ascended into the old family landau of his aunt the baroness, to disport along the boulevards therein very much like an oyster on the half-shell. I might have done all that, and I might not. But it's all for the best, as the greatest pessimist who ever drew the breath of life once tried to teach in his *Candide*. And in my career, as I have already written, there shall be no jeremiads.

SUNDAY THE NINETEENTH.

I've been trying to keep tab on the Twins' weight, for it's important that they should gain according to schedule. But I've only Dinky-Dunk's bulky grain-scales, and it's impossible to figure down to anything as fine as ounces or even quarter-pounds on such a balancer. Yet my babies, I'm afraid, are not gaining as they ought. Poppsy is especially fretful of late. Why can't somebody invent children without colic, anyway? I have a feeling that I ought to run on low gear for a while. But that's a luxury I can't quite afford.

Last night, when I was dead-tired and trying to give the last licks to my day's work without doing a Keystone fall over the kitchen table, Dinky-Dunk said: "Why haven't you ever given a name to this new place? They tell me you have a genius for naming things—and here we are still dubbing our home the Harris shack."

"I suppose it ought to be an Indian name, in honor of Ikkie?" I suggested, doing my best to maintain an unruffled front. And Duncan Argyll absently agreed that it might just as well.

"Then what's the matter with calling it Alabama?" I mordantly suggested. "For as I remember it, that means 'Here we rest.' And I can give nothing more appropriate."

I was half-sorry I said it, for the Lord deliver me always from a sarcastic woman. But I've a feeling that the name is going to stick, whether we want it or not. At any rate, Alabama Ranch has rather a musical turn to it. . . .

I wonder if there are any really perfect children in the world? Or do the good little boys and girls only belong to that sentimentalized mid-Victorian fiction which tried so hard to make the world like a cross between an old maid's herb-garden and a Sunday afternoon in a London suburb? I have tried talking with little Dinkie, and reasoning with him. I have striven long and patiently to blow his little spark of conscience into the active flame of self-judgment. And adverse as I am to cruelty and hardness, much as I hate the humiliation of physical punishment, my poor kiddie and I can't get along without the slipper. I have to spank him, and spank him soundly about once a week. I'm driven to this, or there'd be no sleep nor rest nor roof about our heads at Alabama Ranch. I don't give a rip what Barrie may have written about the bringing up of children—for he never had any of his own! He never had an imperious young autocrat to democratize. He never had a family to de-barbarize, even though he did write very pretty books about the subject. It's just another case, I suppose, where fiction is too cowardly or too finicky to be truthful. I had theories about this child-business myself, at one time, but my pipe of illusion has plumb gone out. It wasn't so many years ago that I imagined about all a mother had to do was to dress in clinging negigees, such as you see in the toilet-soap advertisements, and hold a spotless little saint on her knee, or have a miraculously docile nurse in cap and apron carry in a little paragon all done up in dotted Swiss and rose-pink, and pose for family groups, not unlike popular prints of the royal family in full evening dress, on *Louis Quinze* settees. And later on, of course, one could ride out with a row of sedate little princelings at one's side, so that one could murmur, when the world marvelled at their manners, "It's blood, my dears merely blood!"

But fled, and fled forever, are all such dreams. Dinkie prefers treading on his bread-and-butter before consuming it, and does his best to consume the workings of my sewing-machine, and pokes the spoons down through the crack in the kitchen floor, and betrays a weakness for yard-mud and dust in preference to the well-scrubbed boards of the sleeping porch, which I've tried to turn into a sort of nursery by day. Most fiction, I find, glides lightly over this eternal Waterloo between wirt and water—for no active and healthy child is easy to keep clean. That is something which you never, never, really succeed at. All that you can do is to keep up the struggle, consoling yourself with the memory that cleanness, even surgical cleanness, is only an approximation. The plain everyday sort of cleanness promptly resolves itself into a sort of neck and neck race with dirt and disorder, a neck and neck race with the soap-bar habitually running second. Sometimes it seems hopeless. For it's incredible what can happen to an active-bodied boy of two or three years in one brief but crowded afternoon. It's equally amazing what can happen to a respectably furnished room after a healthy and high-spirited young Turk has been turned loose in it for an hour or two.

It's a battle, all right. But it has its compensations. It *has* to, or the race would wither up like an unwatered cucumber-vine. Who doesn't really love to tub a plump and dimpled little body like my Dinkie's? I'm no petticoated Paul Peel, but I can see enough beauty in the curves of that velvety body to lift it up and bite it on its promptly protesting little flank. And there's unclouded glory in occasionally togging him out in spotless white, and beholding him as immaculat as a cherub, if only for one brief half-hour. It's the transiency of that spotlessness, I suppose, which crowns it with glory. If he was forever in that condition, we'd be as indifferent to it as we are to immortelles and wax flowers. If he was always cherubic and perfect, I suppose, we'd never appreciate that perfection or know the joy of triumphing over the mother earth that has an affinity for the finest of us.

But I *do* miss a real nursery, in more ways than one. The absence of one gives Dinkie the range of the whole shack, and when on the range he's a timber-wolf for trouble, and can annoy his father even more than he can me by his depredations. Last night after supper I heard an icy voice speaking from the end of the dining-room where Dinky-Dunk has installed his desk.

"Will you kindly come and see what your son has done?" my husband demanded, with a sort of in-the-way-madness-lies tone.

I stepped in through the kitchen door, ignoring the quite unconscious humor of "*my* son" under the circumstances, and found that Dinkie had provided a novel flavor for his dad by emptying the bottle of ink into his brand-new tin of pipe-tobacco. There was nothing to be done, of course, except to wash as much of the ink as I could off Dinkie's face. Nor did I reveal to his father that three days before I had carefully compiled a list of his son and heir's misdeeds for one round of the clock. They were, I find, as follows:

Overturning a newly opened tin of raspberries; putting bread-dough in his ears; breaking my nail-buffer, which, however, I haven't used for a month and more; paring the bark, with the bread-knife, off the lonely little scrub poplar near the kitchen door, our one and only shad; breaking a drinking-glass, which was accident; cutting holes with scissors in Ikkie's new service-apron; removing the covers from two of his father's engineering books; severing the wire joint in my sewing-machine belt (expeditiously and secretly mended by Whinnie, however, when he came in with the milk-pails); emptying what was left of my bottle of vanilla into the bread mixer; and last but not least, trying to swallow and nearly choking on my silver thimble, in which he seems to find never-ending disappointment because it will not remain fixed on the point of his nose.

It may sound like a busy day, but it was, on the whole, merely an average one. Yet I'll wager a bushel of number one Northern winter wheat to a doughnut ring that if Ibsen had written an epilogue for *The Doll's House*, Nora would have come crawling back to her home and her kiddies, in the end.

WEDNESDAY THE TWENTY-SECOND.

Lady Allie is either dunderheaded or designing. She has calmly suggested that her rural phone-line be extended from Casa Grande to Alabama Ranch so that she can get in touch with Dinky-Dunk when she needs his help and guidance. Even as it is, he's called on about five times a week, to run to the help of that she-remittance-man in corduroy and dog-skin gauntlets and leggings.

She seems thunderstruck to find that she can't get the hired help she wants, at a moment's notice. Dinky-Dunk says she's sure to be imposed on, and that although she's as green as grass, she's really anxious to learn. He feels that it's his duty to stand between her and the outsiders who'd be only too ready to impose on her ignorance.

She rode over to see the Twins yesterday, who were sleeping out under the fly-netting I'd draped over them, the pink-tinted kind they put over fruit-baskets in the city markets and shops. Poppsy and Pee-Wee looked exactly like two peaches, rosy and warm and round.

Lady Allie stared at them with rather an abstracted eye, and then, idiot that she is, announced that sh'd like to have twelve. But talk is cheap. The modern woman who's had even half that number has pretty well given up her life to her family. It's remarkable, by the way, the silent and fathomless pity I've come to have for childless women. The thought of a fat spinster fussing over a French poodle or a faded blond forlornly mothering a Pekinese chow gives me a feeling that is at least first cousin to sea-sickness.

Lady Allie, I find, has very fixed and definite theories on the rearing of children. They should never be rocked or patted, or be given a "comfort," and they should be in bed for the night at sundown. There was a time I had a few theories of my own, but I've pretty well abandoned them. I've been taught, in this respect, to travel light, as the overland voyageurs of this country would express it, to travel light and leave the final resort to instinct.

FRIDAY THE TWENTY-FOURTH

I was lazy last night, so both the ink-pot and its owner had a rest. Or perhaps it wasn't so much laziness as wilful revolt against the monotony of work, for, after all, it's not the 'unting as 'urts the 'osses, but the 'ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer on the 'ard old road! I loafed for a long time in a sort of sit-easy torpor, with Bobs' head between my knees while Dinky-Dunk pored over descriptive catalogues about farm-tractors, for by hook or by crook we've got to have a tractor for Alabama Ranch.

"Bobs," I said, after studying my collie's eyes for a good many minutes, "you are surely one grand old dog!"

Whereupon Bobs wagged his tail-stump with sleepy content. As I bent lower and stared closer into those humid eyes of his, it seemed as though I were staring down into a bottomless well, through a peep-hole into Infinity, so deep and wonderful was that eye, that dusky pool of love and trust. It was like seeing into the velvet-soft recesses of a soul. And I could stare into them without fear, just as Bobs could stare back without shame. That's where dogs are slightly different from men. If I looked into a man's eye like that he'd either rudely inquire just what the devil I was gaping at or he'd want to ask me out to supper in one of those Pompeian places where a bald-headed waiter serves lobsters in a *chambre particuliere*.

But all I could see in the eye of my sedate old Bobs was love, love infinite and inarticulate, love too big ever to be put into words.

"Dinky-Dunk," I said, interrupting my lord and master at his reading, "if God is really love, as the Good Book says, I don't see why they ever started talking about the Lamb of God."

"Why shouldn't they?" asked Diddums, not much interested.

"Because lambs may be artless and innocent little things, but when you've got their innocence you've got about everything. They're not the least bit intelligent, and they're self-centred and self-immured. Now, with dogs it's different. Dogs love you and guard you and ache to serve you." And I couldn't help stopping to think about the dogs I'd known and loved, the dogs who once meant so much in my life: Chinkie's Bingo, with his big baptizing tongue and his momentary rainbow as he emerged from the water and shook himself with my stick still in his mouth; Timmie with his ineradicable hatred for cats; Maxie with all his tricks and his sing-song of howls when the piano played; Schnider, with his mania for my slippers and undimes, which he carried into most unexpected quarters; and Gyp, God bless him, who was so homely of face and form but so true blue in temper and trust.

"Life, to a dog," I went on, "really means devotion to man, doesn't it?"

"What are you driving at, anyway?" asked Dinky-Dunk.

"I was just wondering," I said as I sat staring into Bobs' eyes, "how strange it would be if, after all, God was really a dog, the loving and faithful Watch-Dog of His universe!"

"Please don't be blasphemous," Dinky-Dunk coldly remarked.

"But I'm not blasphemous," I tried to tell him. "And I was never more serious in my life. There's even something sacred about it, once you look at it in the right way. Just think of the Shepherd-Dog of the Stars, the vigilant and affectionate Watcher who keeps the wandering worlds in their folds! That's not one bit worse than the lamb idea, only we've got so used to the lamb it doesn't shock us into attention any more. Why, just look at these eyes of Bobs right now. There's more nobility and devotion and trust and love in them than was ever in all the eyes of all the lambs that ever frisked about the fields and sheep-folds from Dan to Beersheba!"

"Your theory, I believe, is entertained by the Igorotes," remarked Dinky-Dunk as he made a pretense of turning back to his tractor-pamphlet. "The Igorrotes and other barbarians," he repeated, so as to be sure the screw was being turned in the proper direction.

"And now I know why she said the more she knew about men the better she liked dogs," I just as coldly remarked, remembering Madame de Stael. "And I believe you're jealous of poor old Bobs just because he loves me more than you do."

Dinky-Dunk put down his pamphlet. Then he called Bobs over to his side of the table. But Bobs, noticed, didn't go until I nodded approval. So Dinky-Dunk took his turn at sitting with Bobs' nose in his hand and staring down into the fathomless orbs that stared up at him.

"You'll never get a lady, me lud, to look up at you like that," I told him.

"Perhaps they have," retorted Dinky-Dunk, with his face slightly averted.

"And having done so in the past, there's the natural chance that they'll do so in the future," I retorted, making it half a question and half a statement. But he seemed none too pleased at that thrust, and he didn't even answer me when I told him I supposed I was his Airedale, because they say an Airedale is a one-man dog.

"Then don't at least get distemper," observed my Kaikobad, very quietly, over the top of his tractor-catalogue.

I made no sign that I had heard him. But Dinky-Dunk would never have spoken to me that way, three short years ago. And I imagine he knows it. For, after all, a change has been taking place, insubstantial and unseen and subterranean, a settling of the foundations of life which comes not only to a building as it grows older but also to the heart as it grows older. And I'm worried about the future.

MONDAY THE—MONDAY THE I-FORGET-WHAT.

It's Monday, blue Monday, that's all I remember, except that there's a rift in the lute at Alabama Ranch. Yesterday of course was Sunday. And out of that day of rest Dinky-Dunk spent just five hours over at Casa Grande. When he showed up, rather silent and constrained and an hour and a half late for dinner, I asked him what had happened.

He explained that he'd been adjusting the carburetor on Lady Alicia's new car.

"Don't you think, Duncan," I said, trying to speak calmly, though I was by no means calm inside, "that it's rather a sacrifice of dignity, holding yourself at that woman's beck and call?"

"We happen to be under a slight debt of obligation to *that woman*," my husband retorted, clearly more upset than I imagined he could be.

"But, Dinky-Dunk, you're not her hired man," I protested, wondering how, without hurting him, I could make him see the thing from my standpoint.

"No, but that's about what I'm going tobecome," was his altogether unexpected answer.

"I can't say that I quite understand you," I told him, with a sick feeling which I found it hard to keep under. Yet he must have noticed something amusingly tragic in my attitude, for he laughed, though it wasn't without a touch of bitterness. And laughter, under the circumstances, didn't altogether add to my happiness.

"I simply mean that Allie's made me an offer of a hundred and fifty dollars a month to become her ranch-manager," Dinky-Dun k announced with a casualness that was patently forced. "Aand as i can't wring that much out of this half-section, and as I'd only be four-flushing if I let outsiders come in and take everything away from a tenderfoot, I don't see—"

"And such a lovely tenderfoot," I interrupted.

"—I don't see why it isn't the decent and reasonable thing," concluded my husband, without stooping to acknowledge the interruption, "to accept that offer."

I understood, in a way, every word he was saying; yet it seemed several minutes before the real meaning of a somewhat startling situation seep through to my brain.

"But surely, if we get a crop," I began. It was, however, a lame beginning. And like most lame beginnings, it didn't go far.

"How are we going to get a crop when we can't even raise money enough to get a tractor?" was Dinky-Dunk's challenge. "When we haven't help, and we're short of seed-grain, and we can't even get a gang-plow on credit?"

It didn't sound like my Dinky-Dunk of old, for I knew that he was equivocating and making excuses, that he was engineering our ill luck into an apology for worse conduct. But I was afraid of myself, even more than I was afraid of Dinky-Dunk. And the voice of Instinct kept whispering to me to be patient.

"Why couldn't we sell off some of the steers?" I valiantly suggested.

"It's the wrong season for selling steers," Dinky-Dunk replied with a ponderous sort of patience. "And besides, those cattle don't belong to me."

"Then whose are they?" I demanded.

"They're yours," retorted Dinky-Dunk, and I found his hair-splitting, at such a time, singularly exasperating.

"I rather imagine they belong to the family, if you intend it to remain a family."

He winced at that, as I had proposed that he should.

"It seems to be getting a dangerously divided one," he flung back, with a quick and hostile glance in my direction.

I was ready to fly to pieces, like a barrel that's lost its hoops. But a thin and quavery and over-disturbing sound from the swing-box out on the sleeping-porch brought me up short. It was a pizzicato note which I promptly recognized as the gentle Pee-Wee's advertisement of wakefulness. So I beat a quick and involuntary retreat, knowing only too well what I'd have ahead of me if Poppsy joined in to make that solo a duet.

But Pee-Wee refused to be silenced, and what Dinky-Dunk had just said felt more and more like a branding-iron against my breast. So I carried my wailing infant back to the dinner-table where my husband still stood beside his empty chair. The hostile eye with which he regarded the bel-cantoing Pee-Wee reminded me of the time he'd spoken of his own offspring as "squalling brats." And the memory wasn't a tranquilizing one. It was still another spur rowelling me back to the ring of combat.

"Then you've decided to take that position?" I demanded as I surveyed the cooling roast-beef and the fallen Yorkshire pudding.

"As soon as they can fix up my sleeping-quarters in the bunk-house over at Casa Grande," was Dinky-Dunk's reply. He tried to say it casually, but didn't quite succeed, for I could see his color deepen a little. And this, in turn, led to a second only obvious gesture of self-defense.

"My monthly check, of course, will be delivered to you," he announced, with an averted eye.

"Why to me?" I coldly inquired.

"It wouldn't be of much use to me" he retorted. And I resented his basking thus openly in the fires of martyrdom.

"In that case," I asked, "what satisfaction are you getting out of your new position?"

That sent the color ebbing from his face again, and he looked at me as I'd never seen him look at me before. We'd both been mauled by the paw of Destiny, and we were both nursing ragged nerves and oversensitized spirits, ready to thump rocks with our head. More than once I'd heard Dinky-Dunk proclaim that the right sort of people never bickered and quarreled. And I remembered Theobald Gustav's pet aphorism to the effect that *Hassen machts nichts*. But life had its limits. And I wasn't one of those pink-eared shivery little white mice who could be intimidated into tears by a frown of disapproval from my imperial mate. And married life, after all, is only a sort of *guerre d'usure*.

"And you think you're doing the right thing?" I demanded of my husband, not with derision, confronting him with a challenge on my face and a bawling Pee-Wee on my hip.

Dinky-Dunk sniffed.

"That child seems to have its mother's disposition," he murmured, ignoring my question.

"The prospects of its acquiring anything better from its father seem rather remote," I retorted, striking blindly. For that over-deft adding of insult to injury had awakened every last one of my seven sleeping devils. It was an evidence of cruelty, cold and calculated cruelty. And by this time little waves of liquid fire were running through my tingling body.

"Then I can't be of much service to this family," announced Dinky-Dunk, with his maddening note of mockery.

"I fail to see how you can be a retriever for a flabby-minded idler and the head of this household at one and the same time," I said out of the seething crater-fogs of my indignation.

"She's never impressed me as being flabby," he ventured, with a quietness which only a person who knew him would or could recognize as dangerous.

"Well, I don't share your admiration for her," I retorted, letting the tide of vitrol carry me along in its sweep.

Dinky-Dunk's face hardened.

"Then what do you intend doing about it?" he demanded.

That was a poser all right. That was a poser which, I suppose, many a woman at some time in her life has been called on to face. What did I intend doing about it? I didn't care much. But I at least intended to save the bruised and broken hulk of my pride from utter annihilation.

"I intend," I cried out with a quaver in my voice, "since you're not able to fill the bill, to be head of this household myself."

"That sounds like an ultimatum," said Dinky-Dunk very slowly, his face the sickly color of a meerchaum-pipe bowl.

"You can take it any way you want to," I passionately proclaimed, compelled to raise my voice to the end that it might surmount Pee-Wee's swelling cries. "And while you're being lackey for Lady Alicia Newland I'll run this ranch. I'll run it in my own way, and I'll run it without hanging on to a woman's skirt!"

Dinky-Dunk stared at me as though he were looking at me through a leper-squint. But he had been brutal, was being brutal. And it was a case of fighting fire with fire.

"Then you're welcome to the job," I heard him proclaiming out of his blind white heat of rage. "After *that*, I'm through!"

"It won't be much of a loss," I shot back at him, feeling that he'd soured a bright and sunny life into eternal blight.

(To be continued.)

Grand Trunk Railway earnings for the week ending Nov. 14 were $1,988,955, a decrease of $534,508 over the same week of 1920.