



The sunset of your life will not be beautiful unless your home life was pleasant during your day of work.—Colonel Hunter.

## The Lure of the Old Farm\*

By EDWIN BAIRD

The Romance of a Boy and Girl Who Tried the City.

(Continued from last week)

HE came within sight of the house—and stopped. There was no sign of life in the yard, and none on the verandah. A light shone in a lower window, and that was all. To him, somehow, the whole place had a forbidding aspect.

He told himself, disgustedly, that Elmer, devoted as he was to flowers, would scarcely be setting out bulbs by moonlight; and his mother, he remembered, rarely sat on the verandah after dark unless she had guests. There were too many things to do inside the house. Nor could his father have been seen from the road, for those good-night looks were for the live stock and the kitchen garden. But Sandy?

He whistled and called the dog's name, walking briskly toward the house. A deep-chested bark answered, then a brown shape came rushing furiously across the yard, with savage barks of warning.

Quite suddenly Ben dropped his telescope in the middle of the road, and sat down on it and pressed his hand to his eyes. He was afraid to enter his own home.

A minute later, however, he was aware that Sandy was beside him in a paroxysm of apology for having failed to recognize him at first. Ben forgave him willingly. He understood dogs, and he knew exactly how Sandy felt about it. Having scratched both shaggy ears and nuzzled the back of the rapturously wriggling animal, he picked up his grip and started on toward the house, Sandy cowering around him with yelps of wild delight.

He had almost reached the front steps when a boy's young voice hailed him from the porch:

"Who's that?"

"Hello, Elmer!" joyfully shouted Ben. "Don't you know me?"

There was a moment's silence, and then he heard Elmer cry out in glad excitement: "Mama! Papa! Come quick! Here's Ben!"

Elmer came running down the steps to greet him, and there was no question about the genuineness of his welcome. Nor could he doubt that his parents were just as happy to see him; and their happiness was not the surface sort, but the kind that springs warmly from the heart and soul.

The evening meal was almost over, but another place was quickly laid for him, and when he sat down to a generous helping of the finest food he had known in three years he realized suddenly how hungry he was.

While he ate, his father and brother plied him with innumerable questions, until finally his mother,

watching him with fond eyes, adured them to "keep still and let the poor boy eat in peace."

There were two topics that Ben evaded. He did not tell them specifically his occupation in Chicago, merely mentioning that he had "worked in an office building," and he did not inquire about Alice Mitchell—and of the two this was far the most important. He remarked with fear, though, that none of the others

was a certain cooled hardness in their manner which was vaguely disturbing. The fact was, they were too polite to him.

They offered him a seat in the living-room, and they all sat down and talked in a stiff, perfunctory sort of way for perhaps five minutes. At last Ben, unable to contain himself longer, blurted out the question that had been uppermost in his mind since two o'clock that afternoon:

"Mr. Mitchell, where's Alice?"

The clock on the mantel ticked off three seconds. It was the only sound that broke the silence of the room. He saw the muscles around Mr. Mitchell's mouth tighten suddenly, saw his eyes flash and then narrow with anger. He half expected to see the man stare up violently, but when Mitchell spoke his voice was even and quiet. He was making an effort to hold himself in check.

"She's not here. She's—'ne away." "Gone away! Where?" questioned Ben was sitting forward on the edge of his chair, his fingers gripping the arms tensely.

"She went away a week after you left. She's living in Chicago. Working there—in a millinery store. She writes to us regularly enough, and we've been to see her several times. She's staying in a sort of working girls' home, a decent place, but—"

Mitchell shook his head sadly, staring at the floor.

"But why?" cried Ben, in an agony of suspense. "Why did she leave home?"

"She wasn't satisfied here, I guess. We didn't want her to go. We wanted

Mitchell's hard words raked within him, and yet deep in his heart he knew they were not unshared. He was sufficiently broad-minded to view the matter from the other man's standpoint.

As he unlatched the gate and started up the walk toward the house, Sandy came bounding joyously to meet him. For the first time in his life he failed to acknowledge the dog's affection. His mother was waiting for him on the steps, and when he drew near she rose and came toward him.

He tried to speak, but the muscles of his throat contracted and he remained silent. It was no accident, though, for him to explain what had happened. His mother understood perfectly.

"Try not to think about it, dear," she begged, and put her arms around his shoulders. "Your old room is all ready for you, and after a while you must go up and get a good night's sleep. Things will look different in the morning."

"I can't sleep until I've found her. Mother, I'll have to go back to Chicago—right away. I've got to find her! It's all my fault, just as Mr. Mitchell said I've been a blind fool for three years."

With motherly tact she contrived to turn his thoughts into other channels, and when, around ten o'clock, he went to the room up-stairs where he had slept as a boy, his grief and remorse were, in a measure, assuaged. But only temporarily. The night was paling into dawn before he fell into a troubled sleep.

### IV.

It seemed scarcely a minute before he was wide awake. A confusion of noises—strange and yet familiar—had awakened him. The crowing of cocks predominated, and he turned on his back and rubbed the sleep from his eyes he thought he had never listened to sweeter music. He was back in the country, back on the farm, and farm and country were home to him. Then he thought that he must return to the city to look for the girl he loved came back to harass him. He sighed as he climbed from bed and began drawing on his clothes. Fully dressed, he walked to the dormer window and stood looking out across the farm. Peace and plenty were everywhere.

In the barnyard he saw his father and Elmer. Elmer was throwing grain to the chickens and raising food, while his father fastened some turkeys in a pen against Thanksgiving Day.

He turned away and went downstairs, wondering how he could have been so foolish as to leave all this for the sordid artificiality of the city. And now he would have to go back to the city to look for the girl he loved; then he had expected to find her in the country.

He discovered his mother and the hired girl busily engaged with breakfast preparations, and the sleet of buckwheat-cake batter and pork sausage quickened his appetite.

Kissing his mother on both cheeks, he asked: "Will I have time to look around a bit outside before breakfast?"

"Yes, dear, but don't stay long. Breakfast will be ready in twenty minutes."

He promised to be back before then, and went on out to the barn. His father, seeing him approach, called to him in a friendly way.

"Hello, there! I didn't expect to see you out of bed before nine o'clock. Mr. City Man."

"The roosters wouldn't let us sleep," said Ben. "And I'm glad they didn't."

A sentimental fairy carried him into the cornfield, for it was there,



The Staff of Sunnyside Fruit Farm in the Busy Fruit Season

When Sunnyside Fruit Farm, Halton Co., Ont., was visited by an editor of Farm and Dairy, there were 65 people busy picking fruit. The staff here shown is not so large. Seated from the right is W. J. Hartley, the proprietor, next to him his son, and next in order Mrs. Hartley, who has taken an active part in the development of this, one of the largest fruit farms in Ontario.

spoke of her either. Was this mere kindness? Did it imply that Alice had quite forgotten him and that they would not tell him so for fear of wounding him? Apparently it did.

Apprehension preyed upon him to such an extent that, soon after dinner, he looked at his watch and said, trying to speak casually:

"I think I'll drop over and see the Mitchells. I'll be right back."

He saw his father and mother exchange significant glances, and his heart fell. Yes, it must be true: Alice was married.

But on the way to the Mitchells' home he met Jim Hart and Bob Clinton walking in the moonlight with two girls and, after greeting them cordially, he passed buoyantly on as if treasuring air. It never occurred to him that he might have a rival other than Jim Hart.

His relief, however, was short-lived. No sooner had he crossed the Mitchells' threshold than he knew something was wrong. In the first place, there was no sign of Alice; and though Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell received him courteously enough, there

was to stay. We tried to get her to stay! But she wouldn't." Abruptly the father rose from his seat. His face was very white. His wrath had broken restraint and overmastered him. "You're to blame," he blazed, and shook his fist at Ben. "You caused her to run away!"

"I?" Ben, too, had risen. He felt a little dazed.

"Yes, you! She was happy here till you left, but when you quarreled with her and ran off, like the cowardly wretch you are—"

"Steve! Don't!" Mrs. Mitchell, who had risen precipitately, stepped between her husband and their caller.

"Don't say anything you'll be sorry for, Steve." She placed her hands on his shoulders and, looking up into his ireful face, shook her head earnestly.

"Don't fret, Mother. I know what I'm doing." But he subsided and sat down, though still glaring threateningly at Ben.

After a distressingly awkward leave-taking, in which the host took no part, the young man started back home.

leaning on the fence, the Mitchell and Alice Mitchell had his wife. And on October day as the same Indian summer woods. The sun brushed pervaded to her father's side, and were pitching was the same novel morning through everything.

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