

The Wishing Tree

By Ruth E. Wilkin

APRIL had just unpacked her suitcase. The frogs in the old mill pond, back of Elm Street, were now announcing her arrival in coarse tickles of sound. In all her twenty-three years Maizie Eliot had never felt so achey in the region of her throat. The peach trees in the old garden that once was hers had put on the most delicate of pink georgettes and the maples were wearing a suggestion of green chiffon over their brown arms. That same morning Maizie had stopped Johnnie Sims in the middle of the conjugation of "amo" to pay respect to the blue-bird's solo outside the class-room window. If only she could be a part of all this gay springtime! She wanted to dance all evening in whirls of peach pink and maple green, and then again she wanted to float and drift along in the moonlight, neighbors with the clouds for a while, but she must cease this childish dreaming—what was the use!

"Miss Schoolma'am, you should have gone with Miss Caroline to hear the new rector if you are going to be so silly," she scolded.

Someone across the hedge began humming Annie Laurie. The little boy who used to live next door had sung that old song with her in a school play a long time ago. Dennis had built this seat, too, under the wishing tree. How firmly they had believed in fairies.

The moonlight seeped through the boughs of the old apple tree and splattered over the girl. She closed her eyes and remembered. There was Dennis, his black eyes sparkling, waving his hand out the side of the old carriage and calling, "If you want to see me real bad, just sit under the wishing tree and cross your feet and close your eyes and then say it three times and hold your breath and—then I'll come."

She remembered that he was still calling to her when Old Ned swished the carriage around the corner.

Where would Dennis O'Hara be now? Would he be happy—clean—strong? Again she closed her eyes, and this time she built air castles. Would that the wishing tree could draw him back! Whimsically, she repeated her little girl wish, held her breath and slowly opened her eyes.

"Maizie Eliot, you silly goose!" she murmured and involuntarily looked toward the gate in the hedge.

There was a white blur by the clump of lilacs—it was a man in white flannels.

With a stifled, "Oh," Maizie jumped from the wishing seat and hurried through the side door on up to her room. Turning on her light she faced her mirror.

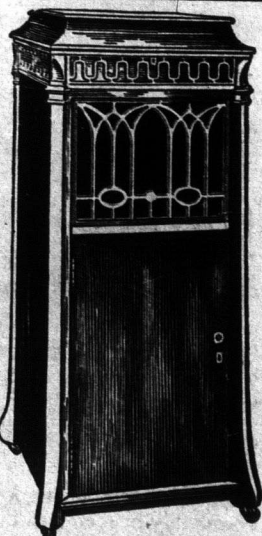
"Maizie Eliot, why did you run? You remind me of those freshman girls of yours. No doubt, the man who has Mrs. O'Flannigan's east room was taking a walk for his health." With a parting "I am ashamed of you," Maizie energetically began her evening task of brushing and making two long braids out of her mass of copper-colored hair. It was only nine o'clock, so she read The Evening Clarion as an antidote for white flannel thoughts until the sand man threw his whole bag full in her eyes.

The Fairview High School faculty had held a special meeting after school to discuss ways and means of making Caesar's wars and geometry theorems interesting at all times of the year, so it was past Mrs. O'Flannigan's dinner hour when Maizie dropped into the porch swing. Miss Caroline was taking the homesick little stenographer to the band concert that evening, but Maizie begged to stay at home to rest.

Dishes rattled in the kitchen. The white hyacinth that bloomed at the step threw up a handful of perfume. From the wishing tree a sleepy robin called, "cheer-up, cheer-up!" From somewhere a breeze off damp earth and growing things swept her cheek. In her dress box there was a pale green organdie with tiny ruffles. Fairview did not believe in ruffles in a school room.

Maizie Eliot went upstairs. Soon the old mirror reflected the merry blue eyes, the freckled nose and the copper braids, and the ruffles of the wishing tree days.

Once again she sat under the wishing tree. Once again (Continued on page 55)



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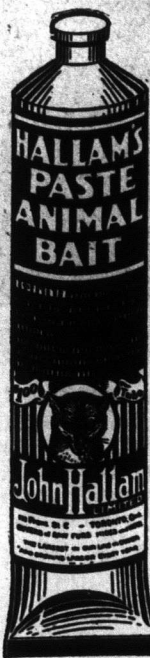
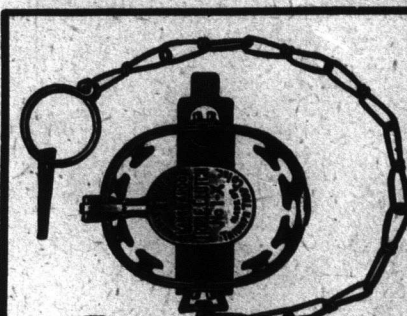
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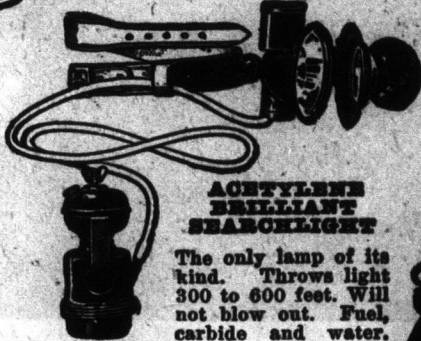
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