

The Little House By the Road

A New Year's Story

BY ANNIE HAMILTON DONNELL

Martha Lowe met Henry at the side door.

"Any news?"
Henry Lowe was thick and short, and clambered out from behind the wheel of his little car with difficulty. Everybody in East Lebanon, except Martha, his wife, called Henry fat, but Martha loved him. Her tender glance refused to linger on any of his suburbs, but went straight to the pleasant residence streets of his eyes, where Henry dwelt.

She always asked, "Any news?" when he came back from town, but to-day—if he had noted—there was a difference. You might say she was in a hurry for him to get through his news.

"M-m—why, they're paintin' the parsonage a primin' coat. Pliny Sleeper's got a new car—ticked to death! They're goin' to have the church social that was put off last week 'count o' the rain, this week—want you should carry a meat pie, Marthy. Lessee—oh, yes! an' butter's riz' again."

He was through now. Martha had barely waited.

"Well, I've got some news for you! Sophia Cox has been here. Angeline Perry's coming home, Henry."

"No! Not to the old Perry Place? There ain't much old Perry Place left to come to—"

"I know. That's the heartbreaking part. Henry, I've had a good cry! After Sophia Cox went, I slipped over there. I counted just three whole panes o' glass, Henry! An' every last thing that could sag, sags, an' the roof looks an'—every last thing's the matter. Poor old Miss Angeline's coming home to that!"

Henry's face, too, was grave.
"Angeline Perry won't find much sympathy in Lebanon," he said, simply.

"I know—oh, I know! That's another heartbreaking part. If she'd only been a little mite neighborlier, Henry—kind of kept in her feelings about being superior to the rest of us. If she'd only written just one letter back. She never did, never. An' she never even seemed to care anything about the old place, Henry."

"Let it run down somethin' terrible," nodded Henry, soberly. He had never approved of Miss Perry's airs.

"An' now to be driven to coming back. Against her will—you needn't tell me it ain't against her will, Henry! She hates it. An' there's the house, a wreck an' nobody to be sorry for her—you can't expect 'em to be sorry, Henry—"

Henry did not expect them to be. He shook his head over this dolorous news of Martha's. Curiously enough, these good people did not reflect on their own sorrow for poor Angeline. It did not occur to them as anything remarkable. They were thinking of the rest of East Lebanon.

"Suppose folks know about it, generally, Marthy? I mean that the news has got round?"

Adorable little crinkles spread round Martha's eyes. Martha Lowe's smile was a lovely thing to watch coming on.

"Sophia Cox—" She advanced merrily. Just that.

"Then everybody knows," laughed Henry. Sophia Cox was the East Lebanon News.

"Your dinner's ready, dear. Parsnip stew! While you eat, I'll tell you all Sophia told me. I guess she got it straight enough. Here, dear. You haven't kissed me yet!"

All Lebanon lovers were lovers. Young Lebanon knewers took lessons of them.

"Sophia says Angeline's lost all that money—every last cent, Henry! Just got her original little mite of income left. Had to sell her nice city house she was so set up over an' her car an' every last thing. The proceeds all go to her creditors. Sophia didn't know just what it was that happened."

"If she had, she'd told you!"

"Yes, she would. But Miss Angeline's got to come home—she knew that. Henry, don't you wish she'd done one little thing for Lebanon with some o' her money, like a—watering trough? Or, anyway, wrote just one letter back? So folks'd be sorry for her now. You can't really blame folks, Henry—"

Henry did not blame folks.

"It's hard to be old an' lose everything an' nobody care," still beautifully unconscious of her own and Henry's caring. "I tell you I had a good cry over it, dear. If nobody loved me—"

Henry's big laugh rang through the cozy room, but ceased as abruptly as it had begun. It was more than funny—Marthy's saying that. He stumbled in his eagerness to get out of his chair quickly and to get Marthy into his arms.

"The world'll stop goin' round when it stops lovin' you, dearheart! All of it loves you." He strove for sweeter

words but those were all that came. And suddenly, in his own great love for his wife, there was born a greater pity for that old, unlovely woman who was coming home.

"Poor Angeline!"

"Oh, yes; poor Angeline, Henry!"
The Perry Place had once been, although small, smart and "kept up." In Lebanon, keeping things up was ranked as a duty, and the opposite as a sin. Day by day and month by month, the disintegration of the Perry Place had offended the sight and principles of Lebanon. Old Miss Angeline had "come into" her money six years ago and gone away to more luxurious living in the city. In six years, much may happen to a little house beside the road. Especially, to a little house on the way to a school. The curious, innate fascination of snapping, breaking window panes had not escaped the youth of Lebanon.

Angeline Perry, plunged in utter melancholy, bereft suddenly of all her beloved luxuries—driven back to a loveless, empty home—remembered many things. She hated—she hated so to remember! She hated so to go back!

"They'll all of 'em crow over me behind my back. They'll hate me worse than ever—I hate them! 'Look! they'll point, 'there goes Angeline Perry—poor as a rat. Let her put on airs, now!' For that was one of the things she hated to remember—that she had put on airs."

She had a mental picture of what the "Perry Place" must be now. Angeline was of a quick intelligence. Oh, she knew—she knew! It would stand there beside the road, a bleak horror—a wreck as pitiable as her own wrecked life. Yet she must go back there to it. Fate drove her back with things that cut into her bleeding pride.

And no one cared.
"How could they care? I never cared," she thought in her sorry musings. The world was a cruel place.

Martha Lowe, on the evening of her talk with Henry about Angeline, might have been seen slipping quietly down the frozen roadway, curiously encumbered. She had taken advantage of Henry's absence, almost as if she did not want Henry to see her go. He had done his chores and gone down to the "stores," as he often did.

It was very near to the tip-end of December, but the snow had held off so far. The roads were crisp with frost and a keen wind buffeted Martha as she walked. The moonlight was nearly as bright as day.

"I could almost've got along without the candles," she thought. "I never saw brighter moonshine!"

She was glad that she met no one and particularly glad that the back door of the little forlorn house by the road, farther down, was so easily forced. Inside, she lit her candles and set to work. Martha was a quick worker.

"Queer how sweeping—just sweeping—takes the edge off o' desolation!" she smiled to herself. "To-morrow night I'll bring some paste an' stick all the wall paper up that's hanging loose. That'll take another edge off! I'm glad the kitchen stove ain't all rust. Blacking'll go a long ways. I'll put some nice white papers on the pantry shel—hark!" She stiffened, listening hard.

Tap—tappy-tap. She heard it distinctly now. It seemed to be in the front part of the house. There it was again: Tap—tappy-tap! Tap—tappy-tap!

"Well, good thing I ain't scared o' ghosts! If there's anybody but a noise there I'll find out!"

She went carefully, inwardly laughing at her own sleuthiness. It was growing into a good, able-bodied noise. Then she saw it.

"Henry!"

"My goodness, Marthy! How you scairt me!"

"Well, you didn't scare me! Henry Lowe, you're setting glass!"

"Caught!" he chuckled. "But honest, Marthy, there was all those extra panes in our barn chamber an' I always was an A-one glazier. I'm goin' to finish up the front windows hand runnin'. To-morrow night—"

"To-morrow night we'll make things hum! I've got the most plans. Oh, Henry, you're a dear an' I'm going to kiss you if there's no putty on your nose! There's nobody looking but the man in the moon!"

She went back to her sweeping. At nine they went home together.

"Henry," Marthy whispered, snuggling close, "isn't it a beautiful moonshiny world? Isn't it nice that you love me an' I love you? Old lovers are best! Oh—oh, Henry, think of being all alone like the Miss Angelines. An' nobody to be sorry for you! I've just thought of something this minute. Sophia Cox said she was coming back the first day o' the year! Henry, the first day o' the year is Happy New Year!"

A home like that to come back to on Happy New Year's day!

"I'm going to cry again," whispered Marthy, jerkily. "It's coming on."

The next evening they went again to the Perry Place. They were a little belated, having made rather elaborate preparations, and traveling slowly under their loads. The moon was under clouds. Martha extricated a hand with difficulty from her bundles and nudged Henry, in soft mirth.

"Ghosts!" she murmured. "See 'em? There, just gliding away from the house! I can see 'em, anyhow. I've got good—ghost-sight!"

But, although they laughed, they wondered. Prowlers around the Perry Place were unusual. They did not remember that they themselves were prowlers.

Martha had been in the kitchen but a moment before she made her discovery. She went rushing away to Henry.

"What do you suppose I've found, Henry? Glasses of jelly on the pantry shelves! Ghost jelly! An' there is a crock of butter, too—"

"There's a new plank in this porch floor, an' I've found a saw," contributed Henry, excitedly. "An' look a-here, will you, Marthy—quick, before the moon goes under again! See that corner post that holds the porch roof up? Well, sir, that post was all lean over last night! Straight enough now!"

"Hullo—hullo!" a voice called from the front path. A figure loomed into faint sight. "My hat, if 'tain't my folks! I'm constable o' this town—I arrest all suspicious prowlers!"

"What you doin' here, Pliny Sleeper—prowlin'?" demanded the laughing voice of Marthy.

"Me? Oh, I had my new car out, exercisin' it. Just kind of brought along a few little things on the back seat—aful lot o' room in that car! Say, you folks—" Pliny's voice sobered. "Lebanon's kind o' worked up over Miss Angeline's comin' back. It's all over town. My wife's worked up. I've got some fixin's—paint cans an' things. I don't know what's the use of being a painter if you don't paint somethin'! An' I brought one o' my ladders along, on the runnin' board—"

"You're going to paint this house!" cried Marthy, joyously.

"'Twon't take so terrible long. It's a little house, an' the boys'll help. Well, start right in, in the mornin'."

"Henry! Henry, do you hear?"

Henry had heard.

"An', say, they's a lot o' little carpenterin' jobs—Ern Libby wants to know what's the use o' bein' a carpenter—"

"Henry! Henry!"

It was a good kind world, Lebanon was sorry—listen to what Pliny was saying now!

"Everybody's worked up. I tell you it's hard lines on the o' lady. Losin' out like that, an' the old place not fit to come to—"

"We'll make it fit! Henry, Pliny—listen! Let's have a 'bee—a Busy Bee! Everybody that's sorry come to

it an' do somethin'! The children, too, to help clear up an' run errands—"

"Sure—the children. Make 'em sorry they smashed the windows—good thing!"
They were all excited now; Marthy had company. Another neighbor had mysteriously appeared, mysteriously laden. They all talked at once. The Busy Bee was launched on a vigorous flight before they separated and went their ways.

"I can hear its wings buzzing a' ready!" laughed Marthy with that jerky, soft little laugh that moved them like tears. The heart of Marthy was deeply touched. She was ashamed a little, too, that she and Henry had had so little faith in Lebanon—in human sympathies. What had they been thinking of? Who were they to say that no one would be sorry?

"All the world's sorry!" Marthy cried and snuggled up to her Henry.

There were five more days to Happy New Year. In five days, a Busy Bee may accomplish a great deal. And when nature herself takes a hand and helps along—oh, the beautiful "drying" days nature sent to Pliny Sleeper! Not gradually, but speedily, the Perry Place put on orderliness and cleanliness and actual beauty. Even in the bleak winter month, unsoftened by the artistry of snow, the old place, the little old house, blossomed into humanness and became something pleasant to come back to. More than pleasant—friendly.

Martha loved it all. Henry said it fed her like nourishing food. She grew plump and rosy on it. Love had widened for Marthy and taken in all Lebanon.

Then, because there was no more excuse for staying, December ended and the new year was born at midnight under the stars. And at midday of its coming, old Angeline came home. Feeble, lonely, unhappy old Angeline, with nothing very worth while behind her and nothing worth living for ahead. She sat upright and rigid on the car seat and dreaded hearing the brakeman call out, "East Lebanon!" The very soul of old Angeline was rigid with dread.

"If just Peter was there to meet me—just Peter!" she thought wistfully. But she had not cared very much for Peter when she had him, or she would not have left him behind, at the call of wealth and luxury. Peter had been her cat—her only companion—and she had left him behind with one of the neighbors. That was how much she had thought of Peter! But now, she thought of him—now she longed for Peter.

"He'd purr," she sighed. "He'd love me enough for that." No one else in all the world would purr. But, of course, in six years, Peter would be dead.

"East Lebanon! East Lebanon!" the brakeman was intoning, and old Angeline had got home. Someone on the little station platform was shouting "Happy New Year!" to someone who was getting off the train. It must be pleasant to hear that shouted to you. Miss Angeline caught sight of the answering face. A young girl was springing down into the arms of a youth. So there was love in the world—Miss Angeline had forgotten.

The rattling little station car received her and her few belongings—all she had retrieved from the wreck of her life. Sitting rigid and straight here, as on the train, she was rattled away. She would not look on either side of her. There was nothing—there was nobody—she wanted to see. Thus she lost the pleasant nods and greetings of a few on her way. She went on solitarily to the Perry Place by the side of the road.

Then she looked.

It was early twilight only, but a light glistened dim in the remaining daylight—in one of her windows. A light! She saw a spiral of smoke curling out of her chimney—her chimney! She saw a painted and a straight and comely little house.

She saw Peter.

He greeted her with a soft, purring rumble against his furry sides. He was glad to see her! He was there—Peter was not dead.

The station car had rattled away and left her. She went almost shyly into her warm, little shining house. It was cleared and beautiful. On the polished stove the teakettle was singing its welcome-song—on the immaculate little white table, supper was ready!

It could not be—but it was! The homely cheer and warmth and friendliness were there. She could not rub the lovely vision out of her eyes. When she rubbed the tears away it was still there. The very heart of her went out to that sweet friendliness. She caught up Peter and talked to him for very need of talking.

"Peter! Peter! do you see? Look, Peter, all around! Everywhere—look at the jelly on the shelves, and the supper! And how swept and—and shined up it is, and geraniums!"

Someone had done it all. Many someones—for her! Then—there was love in the world for her! Nothing but love could have worked this sweet and

Don't let your past spoil your future. Don't let the old year spoil the new. No matter how many mistakes or failures you have made, or what misfortunes have overtaken you, even though you have lost everything you had in the world—family, money, friends, property, make a new start. Success does not depend upon the distance you have traveled, but the way you are headed no matter how discouraging the outlook, keep headed toward your goal. A stout heart, an indomitable will and unwavering faith in the power that sustains you will win out in spite of the most unfortunate and discouraging conditions.—O. S. Marden.

gracious miracle, for pity was love. They had been sorry—

"Oh, Peter, look!"
For now she saw the loveliest miracle of all, and it caught her and swirled her in a little old heap onto the nearest chair. All her bitterness and dreads seemed to slide from her round old shoulders like Christian's pack.

"Happy New Year!"
Painted in clear letters, it hung there before her. It made its cheery appeal to her—it smiled at her—shook hands with her. And sitting there with Peter rubbing at her skirts, old Angeline began her happy new year.—New Success.

A Year's Pennies.

Hi penny, ho penny, dollar and dime!
What shall we buy in the breezy spring time?

Buy us a kite to fly up to the sky.
Over the steeples and ever so high;
A beautiful kite that will fly like a bird.

With a green-and-red body that's simply absurd.

Hi penny, ho penny, dollar and dime!
We'll buy us a kite in the breezy spring time.

Hi penny, ho penny, dollar and dime!
What shall we buy in the warm summer time?

Buy us a hammock to hang by the brook.

Buy us a sunbonnet, buy us a book.
Buy us some lemonade, buy us an ice
Buy us a fan with a funny device.

Hi penny, ho penny, dollar and dime!
We'll keep ourselves cool in the warm summer time.

Hi penny, ho penny, dollar and dime!
What shall we buy in the brown autumn time?

Buy us a basket—away to the woods,
Where the chestnuts are breaking
their bristly brown hoods;

Buy us a line and buy us a hook
(We know where the minnows have
found a dark nook).

Hi penny, ho penny, dollar and dime!
We're off to our sports in the brown autumn time.

Hi penny, ho penny, dollar and dime!
What shall we buy in the gay winter time?

Rosy red apples and gay-colored toys;
Dolls for the little girls, knives for the boys;

Candies and cookies and trumpets and tops—
All the bright things in the Christ-massy shops.

Hi penny, ho penny, dollar and dime!
We'll spend all our pennies in gay winter time.

—E. P. Morrison in Youth's Companion.

The New Calendar.

Days three hundred sixty-four,
Like fair, uncut pages are
In the volume, yet unread.

Of my New Year's calendar—
One continued chapter they,
Starting in afresh to-day!

Though this selfsame calendar
Serves us all throughout the years,
Hours which make your joy, for me
May be fraught with grief and tears

Those my happiness which bring,
Will find others sorrowing.

Days that stretch on far ahead,
I must live them one by one,
Bearing what may be in store
Till the year's long tale is spun.

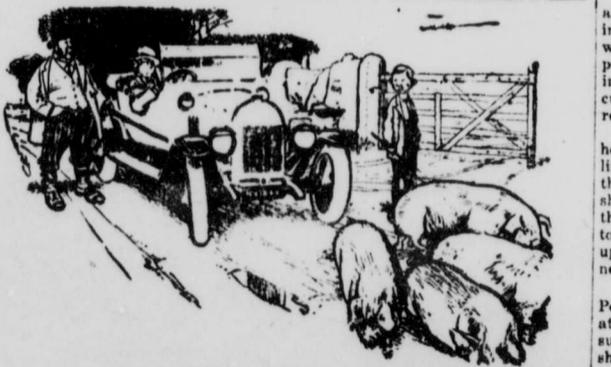
What is written there? I turn
One page at a time—and learn!

Falls my lot in pleasant ways?
Will death interrupt my task?
All is hid from mortal eye.

But, Life, just one boon I ask:
Let me meet courageously
Whatever fate may be!

—Mazie V. Caruthers.

My hands have never been chapped or cracked in the winter time since I used a mop wringer. It seems as if I couldn't keep house without it now.—Mrs. E. V. V.



Doctor (on urgent call)—"Which is the nearest way to Stockton?"
Farmer—"Follow them pigs; they be goin' there!"
—From the Passing Show.