



By
PEGGY DERN

THE STORY THUS FAR: Megan MacTavish and her father, with Annie, the servant, live on a small farm at the edge of Pleasant Grove. Their living is made from chickens and a few cows, for MacTavish has been a ne'er-do-well for years. Into Pleasant Grove comes a woman who called herself Alicia Stevenson, and having inherited the old Brigham place, she is now a neighbor of Megan's. Alicia is a woman of about forty years old, well dressed, and something of a mystery. A stranger comes to the MacTavish place to buy milk and butter and eggs, and announces himself as Tom Fallon, the new high school principal, now living in the Westbrook place. He states that his wife is an invalid.

CHAPTER II

Megan and Tom sat quietly on the big flat rocks, saying little, their eyes following the antics of the dogs and cats galloping around in circles on the Ridge. She thought she had never seen the pines look so beautiful.

He asked for permission to fill his pipe and light it, and tentatively offered her a cigarette.

"Thanks, no," Megan answered lightly. "It's a habit I've avoided—I don't think I'd care much for it, and it is expensive."

Obviously Tom understood the logic of that, and for a moment they were both silent, until he got his pipe going well.

Megan said after a moment when the silence threatened to become awkward, "How is Mrs. Fallon? Does the climate seem to agree with her, as you'd hoped?"

Tom's brown hand tightened about the bowl of his pipe until the knuckles stood up in little white mounds. He tore his eyes from the landscape and gave her a look that was hard and cold and bitter, so much so that she was startled by the sudden, inexplicable hostility.

"Mrs. Fallon is—doing as well as could be expected, under the circumstances," he told her. His voice was harsh, and the very sound of the words told her that he had repeated these words until they had ceased to have any meaning; yet he had never ceased to resent the necessity for them.

"I'm sorry if I seemed—inquisitive or rude," Megan told him frankly, her face hot with color, her head up. "I had no such intention. You have made no secret of the fact that your wife is an invalid. Naturally, in a small town like this, people are interested and anxious to be of service, if they may—"

"The only service anyone can do my wife—or myself—is to leave my wife alone," stated Tom, and Megan's eyes blazed at his tone.

She was on her feet now, and she said swiftly, her voice shaking with anger. "You may be quite sure that in the future, I, at least, shall be happy to do so!"

She turned blindly to walk back through the pines, but before she had gone half a dozen steps, Tom was on his feet, laying a hand on her arm, in swift, abject apology.

"Please wait—please, forgive me," he apologized humbly. "That was unforgivable of me! It's just that—well, the subject is—an extremely painful one—"

"I'm sincerely sorry that I mentioned it," she told him stiffly, her face still hot.

He looked down at her gravely, his hand still on her arm, restraining her as she would have walked away.

"You may be quite sure that I shall reveal your secret to no one—why should I? What right or necessity—would I have?" she told him sharply.

Tom smiled at her, a white, faint smile that was somehow very tragic.

"I know you wouldn't. Forgive me. I'm clumsy and stupid, but not intentionally or wilfully so. Forgive me—for everything!"

Megan melted beneath the look in his eyes, and put her hand in his and let him draw her back to the flat stone, where she sat down once more. And as though the revelation of his tragic secret had cleared the air between them, as though they were friends now, they spoke of other things.

His mind was keen and alert; Megan read a great deal and used her mind to think with, and it was for both of them a pleasant experience to be able to talk of things that had nothing to do with Pleasant Grove. Megan liked her friends and her neighbors, but there were many times when she hungered for impersonal talk of matters far afield from Pleasant Grove, and she enjoyed this contact with a stimulating professor on the Ridge—

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"Of course, I'm terribly sorry," Alicia interrupted. "Please don't say any more. I never dreamed—I mean I wouldn't have mentioned it for the world—"

She was prettily confused, and Megan could feel the hint of tension, of curiosity, that crept about the room. —

The women who had been her friends and neighbors all her life looked at her and then quickly away, very carefully not meeting her eyes, trying not to meet each other's eyes, elaborately pretending to be very casual.

"This is ridiculous!" said Megan hotly. "You're trying to make people believe that I've been—sneaking off to meet Mr. Fallon—"

"Why, darling!" protested Alicia, wide-eyed, hurt, though secretly enjoying, as she always did, this by no means unusual result of her malicious dropping of bits of information here and there. He lifted his hat to her and bowed in a gay burlesque of a sweeping old-world gesture, and she went on, her heart a little lighter for him. She was terribly sorry for him, but she admired the gallantry with which he carried his burdens. And, looking across the fields toward the drab little five-room frame house that was the Westbrook place and that now held this pathetic woman, his wife, she

"Oh!" was all she could say, her tone shocked and rich with sympathy and touched with keen embarrassment that she must witness his moment of naked, burning revelation. "I'm—terribly sorry—"

Tom brushed aside the choked, inadequate words and said with a sort of forced quiet, "So you see why it has been necessary for us to—deny the well intentioned callers—"

"Of course," Megan told him steadily, sick with pity for him.

"She is—entirely harmless," he told her, and his face was wrenched with the pain and the shame of having to put that thought into words. "She is never left for a moment alone and she never leaves her bed. But if people here knew about her—mental condition—well, undoubtedly

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they would—well, feel that she should be locked away! Put in an institution—"

The pain of the thought silenced his words for a moment, and after he had got himself somewhat under control he managed a smile at her that was little more than a grimace and said, "So now you know. What are you going to do?"

Megan flinched from the look and from the words. She looked at him with wide, distressed eyes.

"What's it got to do with me? I mean, why should I do anything?" she protested swiftly. "I'm terribly sorry—I didn't mean to pry into your affairs—"

"I know," Tom brushed the words away with a gesture of the hand that held his pipe. "But I think, somehow, I wanted you to know. After all, you are my nearest neighbor. We see each other often—it's inevitable you should wonder. I—I hope you won't feel it necessary to—"

Megan's face flamed with hurt.

Through the scant leisure time of winter, most of Pleasant Grove's women pieced quilts, out of "scrap bags" and carefully hoarded bits of material; and then when the quilt top had been pieced and finished, the owner notified her friends that she was "putting up" a quilt and they were invited to come and help her quilt it.

A few days after her talk with Tom on the Ridge, Megan went over to Mrs. Stuart's, where there was a quilting. There were greetings, a breezy exchange of pleasantries, while Megan settled herself, brought her thimble out of her pocket, threaded her needle, and set to work.

There were perhaps a dozen women about the big frame, which was opened to its fullest width, the width and length of a double bed. Megan talked lightly and carelessly to her neighbor, the pretty little Whitaker girl whose sweetheart had just been reported injured in action in Italy and who was grateful for the chance to talk about him.

Suddenly Megan heard the name, "fessor Fallon" and looked up. Alicia Stevenson was watching her shrewdly, a little knowing look in her small, dark eyes that made Megan oddly and absurdly uneasy.

Mrs. Burns, who was president of the Parent-Teachers' association of the local school, was saying, "I think we're lucky to get a man like Professor Fallon here. The school board says his qualifications are excellent and his references are extremely good!"

Mrs. Stuart bit off a thread and patted her last stitches into place before threading the needle afresh.

"Sort of makes me wonder how come we could get a man like fessor Tom, in a little bitty place like this," she said, as she moistened the tip of the thread and squinted at the eye of the needle, trying to insert one through the other. "I don't reckon it's anything ag'n the man, though, if he wants to live in a little country town—"

"Maybe Megan could tell us more about that," said Alicia silkily.

"About what?" asked Megan, cravenly pretending not to understand.

"Why a man like Tom Fallon would be satisfied in a little hick town like Pleasant Grove," said Alicia, smiling. "After all, you know him so much better than any of the rest of us—"

"I sell him milk and butter and eggs, yes," Megan told her curtly. "I'd hardly say that made us old friends, though."

"But I thought during some of those long hours you've spent together on the Ridge, he might have told you something of himself," suggested Alicia, limpid-eyed, her voice soft as satin.

There was a startled gasp about the quilting frame, perhaps not so much a gasp, as a sense of movement that made Megan know they were all staring at her, startled, wondering—waiting.

Megan drew a long breath. "Just what do you mean by that?" she asked Alicia sharply.

Alicia's eyes were wide with surprise, but there was a trace of malice in their depths also.

"But, darling," she protested, her voice artificially gay and sweet, "what could I possibly mean except that I've seen you and the gallant professor on the Ridge—"

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IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL Lesson

By HAROLD L. LUNDQUIST, D. D.
Of The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago,
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Lesson for July 21

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JESUS AND TRUE WORSHIP

LESSON TEXT—Deuteronomy 8:11-14, 18;
20; Isaiah 43:20, 21; Mark 12:38-34.

MEMORY SELECTION—God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth—John 4:24.

The one true God is worthy of the wholehearted worship of all men. The second commandment, which we studied last week, forbids all and every idolatry and thus requires exclusive worship of god.

It really means something in the life of a man to worship God in sincerity and truth. It makes life worthwhile both here and hereafter.

I. Worship Balances Life (Deut. 8:11-14).

Prosperity is usually thought to be a blessing. We fear depression and poverty. The Lord through Moses warned his people that prosperity was dangerous. It still is, because material things have the power to so satisfy the natural desires of man as to make him forget his spiritual needs.

Is it not true that material prosperity usually brings with it a corresponding decrease in spirituality. Life values are weighed in gold, silver, wheat and iron instead of being viewed in the light of God's Word.

Worship of God will balance life for it will keep man from forgetting God and his laws. In the wilderness Israel had to call on God for daily bread. Now that they were to come into the promised land they would be apt to think they produced their own food.

II. Worship Protects Life (Deut. 8:18-20).

One of the most mischievous mistakes of life is the idea that man is the maker of his own money. Only God can give man the power of hand and heart, of muscle and mind, which brings forth wealth, and then he can only draw it out of God's resources in mine or field or sea.

This fallacy of man leads him astray, and he begins to worship the very powers he uses and finds pleasure in the gods of this world. That way leads only to eternal destruction.

How is man to be delivered from this awful destructive force? By a right relationship to God, by worship of and devotion to the Lord.

Israel had a covenant with God, and in the keeping of it they would find deliverance from all which would pull down and destroy—yes, and from the judgment of God (v. 20).

We who are believers in Christ are under the new covenant of grace. If we have been born again we have the promise of God that we have eternal life. But let us be clear that it is possible for a Christian to so forget God and his covenant with the Lord as to lose his fellowship and joy, and to be useless and fruitless.

III. Worship Strengthens Life (Isa. 40:30, 31).

The Christian life is not an easy one to live. After all, who wants it easy? These are, however, full provision by God for the power needed to live a life as victorious and exultant as that of the soaring eagle. That power is for those who "wait upon the Lord" (v. 31).

It is taken for granted that those who are old may become weary and faint, but the fact is that even the youth have this disappointing experience.

We, leaders in the church and parents, are apt to forget that youth is often a time of great struggle. The young man or woman must make the choices of purposes and ideals which will determine their future. Too often youth, left unguided and without the balance of a real faith in God, makes the wrong choices and winds up in bitter disappointment.

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Washington MERRY-GO-ROUND

DREW PEARSON

BIG BUSINESS AND TAXES

WASHINGTON.—Juciest gravy in the current tax legislation is the continuance of the carry-back of unused excess profits credit. The Senate finance committee, always friendly to big business, not only knocked out the excess profits tax last year, but retained carry-back refunds. This permits corporations whose current earnings do not proportionately match their 1936-1939 earnings, to claim adjustments in their 1946 tax payments.

This is one reason some firms didn't worry too much about prolonged strikes. General Motors alone will probably hit the treasury for a refund of \$8 million dollars. To head off this drain on the treasury, Rep. Cleveland Bailey of Clarksburg, W. Va., Democrat, introduced a bill last January to repeal the carry-back provisions. On January 23, the house ways and means committee asked the treasury for a report.

Recently impatient Rep. Wilbur Mills of Arkansas, Democrat, proposed that congress act independently, without waiting for the treasury report. He pointed out that large credits can be claimed by corporations which actually make more money this year than they did in any of the years from 1936 to 1939, simply because their capital investment is now larger.