

Princess of Gritzen

LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM

CHAPTER XIII

The Princess Meridel and cousins arrive in Canada to visit Baron Rudi de Morpin, her uncle. Madame Fabre, who had employed her, turned the estate over to the baron as his own. Roger Fabre, nephew of Madame Fabre CAF on furlough fell in love with the Princess. Her cousins found a photo of Roger's brother, whom they knew as a Nazi. When the Princess learned that the baron was not the owner of the castle, they all left. Roger soon found them and had them return to the castle. Michel, Roger's brother, escaped from a prison camp, came to the prison camp and in a fight with Roger, escaped in his car. Alarm was sounded. Michel returned and informed Madame Fabre that he was a captain in the British secret service and not a German spy. She had never lost faith in him and wanted him to stay—she knew the Princess and Michel were in love, even though his brother was to marry the Princess.

She saw the red temper rising in him and, knowing it of old, recalling many such encounters and their unhappy outcome, she fought to control her own not too gentle spirit.

"Maybe I didn't believe so much as I loved you in spite of anything that seemed to be against you."

"That is what I mean. But it was not so with her." But it was not so with her.

"Can you expect a girl to go on caring for a man she met for a few hours on a mountain or something, in some Ruritanian land, long long ago, even when that man seems beyond doubt to be a traitor and worse?"

"Yes," said Michel softly. "Yes, I can expect that. A mountain you say, madame—but you do not know what a magic mountain; a Ruritanian land, you say—but you cannot dream what a magic land it was; for a few hours, you say, but you—you must know that such things as this are no measured in hours. We knew each other always; we were to love each other always."

"It was so said?"

"It was so understood."

"But Meridel—I am now being a traitor to Roger—I know Meridel has never ceased to care for you."

"I watched her tonight in the lovely bridal gown. I saw my brother bend and kiss her. I knew then it was time for me to go."

"Because your pride was hurt. Because you expected her to believe in you, no matter what happened."

"Not entirely that," he said wearily. "Roger loves her. He's a great lad, Roger—one of the best, the salt of the earth and also one of the noblest of the noble breed with whom he flies. Well, suppose she still does care for me, can I come back now and—"

"You mean—you are stepping aside for Roger? You'd give up your—"

"The only great dream I ever had, madame," he said, and his voice was flat and toneless now. Like Oberlieutenant Faber's voice. "I'm going away tonight—now. You are not to tell anyone that I was here. That is understood. When—they are married, I shall return—"

"Why, you headstrong—"

"—stubborn, thick-headed mule. Yes, I know it all and maybe I'm every bit of it. But that's the way it is, Tante Mimi—and that is the way it will be. I don't flatter myself I can take her from Roger and steal his happiness, but I shall not even run the risk."

He stood up. He came to her and bent and kissed her. "It is goodbye for only a little while. I have some time in Canada before I have to report again; I may even get a post here. I don't know."

"Don't go, Michel! Don't go!"

"What! You're running out on ammunition. You're turning soft on me again. These are new tactics, and clever ones, but I have learned a trick or two myself and I will not fall for this. I shall go as I came—quietly. And you will not speak. Promise!"

The old eyes burned at him and there was no softness about her mouth, but that was only for a moment for suddenly it smiled—a rare, sweet smile.

"I promise, you mule—you lovable, splendid donkey. But I tell you, it's a very foolish thing you do."

"Neither the first nor, I think the last. Farewell, ma tante."

He retrieved the hat, turned at the door to smile at her, to show her the wild imp in his eye. "We always quarrel, don't we?" he called. "And always make up."

Meridel and Roger walked over the big hill that lies between Philibert and the village of St. Didier des Montagnes. It was a narrow path among the great spruces and cedars that grew so thickly on the mountainside. In winter the trail was usually closed by the drifted snow, but now one could easily walk over the crust. They were on the way to the house of Garard Chamberland, the government agent, to bring back Pol Martin and Rosine who had been invited there to have supper with the little Chamberlands.

The stars were dim, but the track lay clearly marked through

the darkness of the wood. From the time they left Philibert they had talked little. Both of them felt constraint, uneasiness. Roger, always ready with gay talk and laughter, was strangely silent. Meridel, walking along beside him, looked up at his shadowy profile and longed to say something that would break the tension. But she could find no words to say. And she thought, is my heart empty of things to tell him—so soon empty? This is not the way of love.

He said at last, "You cried tonight, Meridel. Your tears fell on the lovely gown that is being made ready for your wedding. You did not think I saw you. It was when you left the room after my aunt had gone upstairs. You first looked at yourself in the mirror and then you cried. Why did you cry?"

"I—I do not know, Roger. I really do not know. Do not girls who are about to marry often cry?"

"Not like that. It was a different thing." He was silent for a moment. Then he said what Madame had said that night after his departure: "Un qui aime; un qui se laisse aimer." One who loves; one who lets herself be loved. Is it so with us Meridel? I want to know."

"Oh Roger, why do you ask me a thing like that? How can one know? How can one be sure?"

"The answer is in your heart I think."

"I have looked there."

"And have you found it?"

She did not answer, but he knew from her silence that she had looked in vain.

"You told me once," said Roger, "that only one key could unlock your heart. You remember?"

"Yes." It was only a whisper. "I remember well."

"And I have not that key? You must answer me."

"I cannot. I tell you I cannot." She was crying a little, but if he felt any pity for her he showed none.

"But in a little while, in a few days, you intend to become my wife."

"You know that I accepted that long ago. Why do we have to talk about it now?"

"Because it is so near the waited and hoped constantly that I would find in you the answer to my love. The answer hasn't come."

"But in time—oh Roger, why must we talk like this?"

"We must," he said doggedly, "before it is too late. We must have this thing settled."

"I do not see how it ever can be settled. What would you have me do?"

"Michel is still in your heart, isn't he? You haven't given up your dream that you told me so long ago?"

"I could never give it up. I tried, Roger, believe me. But there was no use trying. It is part of me. It will be always there. Need it make a difference—for us?"

"Only a shadowy thing," he said. "A few hours against all my love; a few words—and they echo forever."

"He will not come back—not ever now."

"He does not need to. He never went away. I know what love is, Meridel, because I love. I saw you cry and the tears fell on your wedding dress—and I knew."

They had come to the Chamberland house. Pol Martin and Rosine, with Gerard and the two Chamberland girls and tiny David, came down the yard to meet them, Roger called to them, "Hola! It is late for infants to be abroad. You must run all the way home."

On the way back, he tried to talk; so did Meridel, but everything they said fell flat. It had no zest, no savor. There was a coldness, a heaviness in their hearts. Something that should have been splendid and shining had failed for them, and both felt that in some way the blame lay between them. He thought, I should not have always been questioning her love. I should not have been so exacting, so greedy. I should have taken the wondrous gift she offered me and thanked God for it. But I could not. I could not.

And Meridel thought, What is wrong with me that I cannot love him? Respect, liking, loyalty, admiration—all these things I have for him. But not love. Per-

haps in time it will come, but God help us if it does not. And Roger is wise enough to know that it is a grave risk we run. Why did I shed those foolish tears tonight? The dress is so lovely; it is made for one who gives herself to love—Roger.

Even the children, after chattering a while about the games they had played and the good time of the afternoon, noticed the silence of their elders, and gradually they ceased to talk and plodded along with Roger leading the way, Meridel close beside him. All about them was the vast stillness of the forests. Far off an owl hooted and from a farmyard over the hill a fox barked sharply. Those sounds died—and then in that great stillness they heard a deep voice singing, coming toward them around bend in the path. They froze in their tracks and the little ones clutched Meridel's hands. "Bonsoir, Nigaud! Bonsoir, Fricot!"

"It is he!" whispered Pol Martin. "It is Bonhomme Fricot!"

"What folly!" said Meridel, but a strange shiver, not of fear moved over her body. "How could it be?"

"Listen!" said Rosine. "Yes, yes! It is he! It is he!"

"Eh! Bonhomme Fricot!" called Pol Martin in his shrill soprano. "Bonhomme Fricot, what are you doing here?"

The song perished. They saw only a shadowy figure in the path before them, the glimmer of white at his throat. After a moment he spoke, reluctantly in his voice: "Are you sure, Pol Martin and Rosine, that it is Bonhomme Fricot you have here?"

"Yes, yes, we are sure indeed!" "It could not be the laughing soldier then?"

"The laughing soldier would not know our names," pointed out Rosine. "Why do you play this farce, Bonhomme Fricot? We know you."

"I was the laughing soldier," said he. "I gave the real soldier my old clothes and shaved off my beard and cut off my hair and now you know why I laughed—because the soldier tried to kill Bonhomme Fricot and himself was killed instead. You see, I work for the King of England and I must sometimes do strange things."

"But it is brave!" cried Pol Martin. "It is grand. Did you come here to visit us?"

"It's no use, Mike," said Roger stepping forward, finding his brother's hand in the starlight. "You were going the wrong way. You don't need to run, do you?"

"I talked with Tante Mimi. I—"

"You were not going because of me?" Meridel came forward now and reached for the hand Roger held, so that three hands were clasped together, hers so small between the two strong ones of those men who loved her.

"We can talk when we get home," said Roger, and he thanked God for the darkness, for the dim stars that let no one see his face. I'll go on ahead with these two fellows."

"A moment, Roger," said Michel.

"Please," said Meridel. He paid no attention to them. He sent Pol Martin and Rosine scampering down the trail and hurried after them. They heard his voice faintly, "You can pretend it's the road on the magic mountain if you need to."

But he knew, none better, that while road is a magic road if you have the right charm in your heart. And somewhere for him there would be such a road, one that no other foot had trod before and at the end of it someone who waited—for only him.

Behind him, under the stars, Meridel and Michel Fabre had stopped to gaze at each other in that strange light. "I was wrong," he said. "You did not forget our hour."

"You did not mean it when you said, as you left me then, that you would not return?"

"You knew I did not. It was written, all this—long ago. Nothing could ever change it."

(THE END)

haps in time it will come, but God help us if it does not. And Roger is wise enough to know that it is a grave risk we run. Why did I shed those foolish tears tonight? The dress is so lovely; it is made for one who gives herself to love—Roger.

Even the children, after chattering a while about the games they had played and the good time of the afternoon, noticed the silence of their elders, and gradually they ceased to talk and plodded along with Roger leading the way, Meridel close beside him. All about them was the vast stillness of the forests. Far off an owl hooted and from a farmyard over the hill a fox barked sharply. Those sounds died—and then in that great stillness they heard a deep voice singing, coming toward them around bend in the path. They froze in their tracks and the little ones clutched Meridel's hands. "Bonsoir, Nigaud! Bonsoir, Fricot!"

"It is he!" whispered Pol Martin. "It is Bonhomme Fricot!"

"What folly!" said Meridel, but a strange shiver, not of fear moved over her body. "How could it be?"

"Listen!" said Rosine. "Yes, yes! It is he! It is he!"

"Eh! Bonhomme Fricot!" called Pol Martin in his shrill soprano. "Bonhomme Fricot, what are you doing here?"

The song perished. They saw only a shadowy figure in the path before them, the glimmer of white at his throat. After a moment he spoke, reluctantly in his voice: "Are you sure, Pol Martin and Rosine, that it is Bonhomme Fricot you have here?"

"Yes, yes, we are sure indeed!" "It could not be the laughing soldier then?"

"The laughing soldier would not know our names," pointed out Rosine. "Why do you play this farce, Bonhomme Fricot? We know you."

"I was the laughing soldier," said he. "I gave the real soldier my old clothes and shaved off my beard and cut off my hair and now you know why I laughed—because the soldier tried to kill Bonhomme Fricot and himself was killed instead. You see, I work for the King of England and I must sometimes do strange things."

"But it is brave!" cried Pol Martin. "It is grand. Did you come here to visit us?"

"It's no use, Mike," said Roger stepping forward, finding his brother's hand in the starlight. "You were going the wrong way. You don't need to run, do you?"

"I talked with Tante Mimi. I—"

"You were not going because of me?" Meridel came forward now and reached for the hand Roger held, so that three hands were clasped together, hers so small between the two strong ones of those men who loved her.

"We can talk when we get home," said Roger, and he thanked God for the darkness, for the dim stars that let no one see his face. I'll go on ahead with these two fellows."

"A moment, Roger," said Michel.

"Please," said Meridel. He paid no attention to them. He sent Pol Martin and Rosine scampering down the trail and hurried after them. They heard his voice faintly, "You can pretend it's the road on the magic mountain if you need to."

But he knew, none better, that while road is a magic road if you have the right charm in your heart. And somewhere for him there would be such a road, one that no other foot had trod before and at the end of it someone who waited—for only him.

Behind him, under the stars, Meridel and Michel Fabre had stopped to gaze at each other in that strange light. "I was wrong," he said. "You did not forget our hour."

"You did not mean it when you said, as you left me then, that you would not return?"

"You knew I did not. It was written, all this—long ago. Nothing could ever change it."

(THE END)

haps in time it will come, but God help us if it does not. And Roger is wise enough to know that it is a grave risk we run. Why did I shed those foolish tears tonight? The dress is so lovely; it is made for one who gives herself to love—Roger.

Even the children, after chattering a while about the games they had played and the good time of the afternoon, noticed the silence of their elders, and gradually they ceased to talk and plodded along with Roger leading the way, Meridel close beside him. All about them was the vast stillness of the forests. Far off an owl hooted and from a farmyard over the hill a fox barked sharply. Those sounds died—and then in that great stillness they heard a deep voice singing, coming toward them around bend in the path. They froze in their tracks and the little ones clutched Meridel's hands. "Bonsoir, Nigaud! Bonsoir, Fricot!"

"It is he!" whispered Pol Martin. "It is Bonhomme Fricot!"

"What folly!" said Meridel, but a strange shiver, not of fear moved over her body. "How could it be?"

"Listen!" said Rosine. "Yes, yes! It is he! It is he!"

"Eh! Bonhomme Fricot!" called Pol Martin in his shrill soprano. "Bonhomme Fricot, what are you doing here?"

The song perished. They saw only a shadowy figure in the path before them, the glimmer of white at his throat. After a moment he spoke, reluctantly in his voice: "Are you sure, Pol Martin and Rosine, that it is Bonhomme Fricot you have here?"

"Yes, yes, we are sure indeed!" "It could not be the laughing soldier then?"

"The laughing soldier would not know our names," pointed out Rosine. "Why do you play this farce, Bonhomme Fricot? We know you."

"I was the laughing soldier," said he. "I gave the real soldier my old clothes and shaved off my beard and cut off my hair and now you know why I laughed—because the soldier tried to kill Bonhomme Fricot and himself was killed instead. You see, I work for the King of England and I must sometimes do strange things."

"But it is brave!" cried Pol Martin. "It is grand. Did you come here to visit us?"

"It's no use, Mike," said Roger stepping forward, finding his brother's hand in the starlight. "You were going the wrong way. You don't need to run, do you?"

"I talked with Tante Mimi. I—"

"You were not going because of me?" Meridel came forward now and reached for the hand Roger held, so that three hands were clasped together, hers so small between the two strong ones of those men who loved her.

"We can talk when we get home," said Roger, and he thanked God for the darkness, for the dim stars that let no one see his face. I'll go on ahead with these two fellows."

"A moment, Roger," said Michel.

"Please," said Meridel. He paid no attention to them. He sent Pol Martin and Rosine scampering down the trail and hurried after them. They heard his voice faintly, "You can pretend it's the road on the magic mountain if you need to."

But he knew, none better, that while road is a magic road if you have the right charm in your heart. And somewhere for him there would be such a road, one that no other foot had trod before and at the end of it someone who waited—for only him.

Behind him, under the stars, Meridel and Michel Fabre had stopped to gaze at each other in that strange light. "I was wrong," he said. "You did not forget our hour."

"You did not mean it when you said, as you left me then, that you would not return?"

"You knew I did not. It was written, all this—long ago. Nothing could ever change it."

(THE END)

haps in time it will come, but God help us if it does not. And Roger is wise enough to know that it is a grave risk we run. Why did I shed those foolish tears tonight? The dress is so lovely; it is made for one who gives herself to love—Roger.

Even the children, after chattering a while about the games they had played and the good time of the afternoon, noticed the silence of their elders, and gradually they ceased to talk and plodded along with Roger leading the way, Meridel close beside him. All about them was the vast stillness of the forests. Far off an owl hooted and from a farmyard over the hill a fox barked sharply. Those sounds died—and then in that great stillness they heard a deep voice singing, coming toward them around bend in the path. They froze in their tracks and the little ones clutched Meridel's hands. "Bonsoir, Nigaud! Bonsoir, Fricot!"

"It is he!" whispered Pol Martin. "It is Bonhomme Fricot!"

"What folly!" said Meridel, but a strange shiver, not of fear moved over her body. "How could it be?"

"Listen!" said Rosine. "Yes, yes! It is he! It is he!"

"Eh! Bonhomme Fricot!" called Pol Martin in his shrill soprano. "Bonhomme Fricot, what are you doing here?"

The song perished. They saw only a shadowy figure in the path before them, the glimmer of white at his throat. After a moment he spoke, reluctantly in his voice: "Are you sure, Pol Martin and Rosine, that it is Bonhomme Fricot you have here?"

"Yes, yes, we are sure indeed!" "It could not be the laughing soldier then?"

"The laughing soldier would not know our names," pointed out Rosine. "Why do you play this farce, Bonhomme Fricot? We know you."

"I was the laughing soldier," said he. "I gave the real soldier my old clothes and shaved off my beard and cut off my hair and now you know why I laughed—because the soldier tried to kill Bonhomme Fricot and himself was killed instead. You see, I work for the King of England and I must sometimes do strange things."

"But it is brave!" cried Pol Martin. "It is grand. Did you come here to visit us?"

"It's no use, Mike," said Roger stepping forward, finding his brother's hand in the starlight. "You were going the wrong way. You don't need to run, do you?"

"I talked with Tante Mimi. I—"

"You were not going because of me?" Meridel came forward now and reached for the hand Roger held, so that three hands were clasped together, hers so small between the two strong ones of those men who loved her.

"We can talk when we get home," said Roger, and he thanked God for the darkness, for the dim stars that let no one see his face. I'll go on ahead with these two fellows."

"A moment, Roger," said Michel.

"Please," said Meridel. He paid no attention to them. He sent Pol Martin and Rosine scampering down the trail and hurried after them. They heard his voice faintly, "You can pretend it's the road on the magic mountain if you need to."

But he knew, none better, that while road is a magic road if you have the right charm in your heart. And somewhere for him there would be such a road, one that no other foot had trod before and at the end of it someone who waited—for only him.

Behind him, under the stars, Meridel and Michel Fabre had stopped to gaze at each other in that strange light. "I was wrong," he said. "You did not forget our hour."

"You did not mean it when you said, as you left me then, that you would not return?"

"You knew I did not. It was written, all this—long ago. Nothing could ever change it."

(THE END)

haps in time it will come, but God help us if it does not. And Roger is wise enough to know that it is a grave risk we run. Why did I shed those foolish tears tonight? The dress is so lovely; it is made for one who gives herself to love—Roger.

Even the children, after chattering a while about the games they had played and the good time of the afternoon, noticed the silence of their elders, and gradually they ceased to talk and plodded along with Roger leading the way, Meridel close beside him. All about them was the vast stillness of the forests. Far off an owl hooted and from a farmyard over the hill a fox barked sharply. Those sounds died—and then in that great stillness they heard a deep voice singing, coming toward them around bend in the path. They froze in their tracks and the little ones clutched Meridel's hands. "Bonsoir, Nigaud! Bonsoir, Fricot!"

"It is he!" whispered Pol Martin. "It is Bonhomme Fricot!"

"What folly!" said Meridel, but a strange shiver, not of fear moved over her body. "How could it be?"

"Listen!" said Rosine. "Yes, yes! It is he! It is he!"

"Eh! Bonhomme Fricot!" called Pol Martin in his shrill soprano. "Bonhomme Fricot, what are you doing here?"

The song perished. They saw only a shadowy figure in the path before them, the glimmer of white at his throat. After a moment he spoke, reluctantly in his voice: "Are you sure, Pol Martin and Rosine, that it is Bonhomme Fricot you have here?"

"Yes, yes, we are sure indeed!" "It could not be the laughing soldier then?"

"The laughing soldier would not know our names," pointed out Rosine. "Why do you play this farce, Bonhomme Fricot? We know you."

"I was the laughing soldier," said he. "I gave the real soldier my old clothes and shaved off my beard and cut off my hair and now you know why I laughed—because the soldier tried to kill Bonhomme Fricot and himself was killed instead. You see, I work for the King of England and I must sometimes do strange things."

"But it is brave!" cried Pol Martin. "It is grand. Did you come here to visit us?"

"It's no use, Mike," said Roger stepping forward, finding his brother's hand in the starlight. "You were going the wrong way. You don't need to run, do you?"

"I talked with Tante Mimi. I—"

"You were not going because of me?" Meridel came forward now and reached for the hand Roger held, so that three hands were clasped together, hers so small between the two strong ones of those men who loved her.

"We can talk when we get home," said Roger, and he thanked God for the darkness, for the dim stars that let no one see his face. I'll go on ahead with these two fellows."

"A moment, Roger," said Michel.

"Please," said Meridel. He paid no attention to them. He sent Pol Martin and Rosine scampering down the trail and hurried after them. They heard his voice faintly, "You can pretend it's the road on the magic mountain if you need to."

But he knew, none better, that while road is a magic road if you have the right charm in your heart. And somewhere for him there would be such a road, one that no other foot had trod before and at the end of it someone who waited—for only him.

Behind him, under the stars, Meridel and Michel Fabre had stopped to gaze at each other in that strange light. "I was wrong," he said. "You did not forget our hour."

"You did not mean it when you said, as you left me then, that you would not return?"

"You knew I did not. It was written, all this—long ago. Nothing could ever change it."

(THE END)

haps in time it will come, but God help us if it does not. And Roger is wise enough to know that it is a grave risk we run. Why did I shed those foolish tears tonight? The dress is so lovely; it is made for one who gives herself to love—Roger.

Even the children, after chattering a while about the games they had played and the good time of the afternoon, noticed the silence of their elders, and gradually they ceased to talk and plodded along with Roger leading the way, Meridel close beside him. All about them was the vast stillness of the forests. Far off an owl hooted and from a farmyard over the hill a fox barked sharply. Those sounds died—and then in that great stillness they heard a deep voice singing, coming toward them around bend in the path. They froze in their tracks and the little ones clutched Meridel's hands. "Bonsoir, Nigaud! Bonsoir, Fricot!"

"It is he!" whispered Pol Martin. "It is Bonhomme Fricot!"

"What folly!" said Meridel, but a strange shiver, not of fear moved over her body. "How could it be?"

"Listen!" said Rosine. "Yes, yes! It is he! It is he!"

"Eh! Bonhomme Fricot!" called Pol Martin in his shrill soprano. "Bonhomme Fricot, what are you doing here?"

The song perished. They saw only a shadowy figure in the path before them, the glimmer of white at his throat. After a moment he spoke, reluctantly in his voice: "Are you sure, Pol Martin and Rosine, that it is Bonhomme Fricot you have here?"

"Yes, yes, we are sure indeed!" "It could not be the laughing soldier then?"

"The laughing soldier would not know our names," pointed out Rosine. "Why do you play this farce, Bonhomme Fricot? We know you."

"I was the laughing soldier," said he. "I gave the real soldier my old clothes and shaved off my beard and cut off my hair and now you know why I laughed—because the soldier tried to kill Bonhomme Fricot and himself was killed instead. You see, I work for the King of England and I must sometimes do strange things."

"But it is brave!" cried Pol Martin. "It is grand. Did you come here to visit us?"

"It's no use, Mike," said Roger stepping forward, finding his brother's hand in the starlight. "You were going the wrong way. You don't need to run, do you?"

"I talked with Tante Mimi. I—"

"You were not going because of me?" Meridel came forward now and reached for the hand Roger held, so that three hands were clasped together, hers so small between the two strong ones of those men who loved her.

"We can talk when we get home," said Roger, and he thanked God for the darkness, for the dim stars that let no one see his face. I'll go on ahead with these two fellows."

"A moment, Roger," said Michel.

"Please," said Meridel. He paid no attention to them. He sent Pol Martin and Rosine scampering down the trail and hurried after them. They heard his voice faintly, "You can pretend it's the road on the magic mountain if you need to."

But he knew, none better, that while road is a magic road if you have the right charm in your heart. And somewhere for him there would be such a road, one that no other foot had trod before and at the end of it someone who waited—for only him.

Behind him, under the stars, Meridel and Michel Fabre had stopped to gaze at each other in that strange light. "I was wrong," he said. "You did not forget our hour."

"You did not mean it when you said, as you left me then, that you would not return?"

"You knew I did not. It was written, all this—long ago. Nothing could ever change it."

(THE END)

haps in time it will come, but God help us if it does not. And Roger is wise enough to know that it is a grave risk we run. Why did I shed those foolish tears tonight? The dress is so lovely; it is made for one who gives herself to love—Roger.

Even the children, after chattering a while about the games they had played and the good time of the afternoon, noticed the silence of their elders, and gradually they ceased to talk and plodded along with Roger leading the way, Meridel close beside him. All about them was the vast stillness of the forests. Far off an owl hooted and from a farmyard over the hill a fox barked sharply. Those sounds died—and then in that great stillness they heard a deep voice singing, coming toward them around bend in the path. They froze in their tracks and the little ones clutched Meridel's hands. "Bonsoir, Nigaud! Bonsoir, Fricot!"

"It is he!" whispered Pol Martin. "It is Bonhomme Fricot!"

"What folly!" said Meridel, but a strange shiver, not of fear moved over her body. "How could it be?"

"Listen!" said Rosine. "Yes, yes! It is he! It is he!"

"Eh! Bonhomme Fricot!" called Pol Martin in his shrill soprano. "Bonhomme Fricot, what are you doing here?"

The song perished. They saw only a shadowy figure in the path before them, the glimmer of white at his throat. After a moment he spoke, reluctantly in his voice: "Are you sure, Pol Martin and Rosine, that it is Bonhomme Fricot you have here?"

"Yes, yes, we are sure indeed!" "It could not be the laughing soldier then?"

"The laughing soldier would not know our names," pointed out Rosine. "Why do you play this farce, Bonhomme Fricot? We know you."

"I was the laughing soldier," said he. "I gave the real soldier my old clothes and shaved off my beard and cut off my hair and now you know why I laughed—because the soldier tried to kill Bonhomme Fricot and himself was killed instead. You see, I work for the King of England and I must sometimes do strange things."

"But it is brave!" cried Pol Martin. "It is grand. Did you come here to visit us?"

"It's no use, Mike," said Roger stepping forward, finding his brother's hand in the starlight. "You were going the wrong way. You don't need to run, do you?"

"I talked with Tante Mimi. I—"

"You were not going because of me?" Meridel came forward now and reached for the hand Roger held, so that three hands were clasped together, hers so small between the two strong ones of those men who loved her.

"We can talk when we get home," said Roger, and he thanked God for the darkness, for the dim stars that let no one see his face. I'll go on ahead with these two fellows."

"A moment, Roger," said Michel.

"Please," said Meridel. He paid no attention to them. He sent Pol Martin and Rosine scampering down the trail and hurried after them. They heard his voice faintly, "You can pretend it's the road on the magic mountain if you need to."

But he knew, none better, that while road is a magic road if you have the right charm in your heart. And somewhere for him there would be such a road, one that no other foot had trod before and at the end of it someone who waited—for only him.

Behind him, under the stars, Meridel and Michel Fabre had stopped to gaze at each other in that strange light. "I was wrong," he said. "You did not forget our hour."

"You did not mean it when you said, as you left me then, that you would not return?"

"You knew I did not. It was written, all this—long ago. Nothing could ever change it."

(THE END)

haps in time it will come, but God help us if it does not. And Roger is wise enough to know that it is a grave risk we run. Why did I shed those foolish tears tonight? The dress is so lovely; it is made for one who gives herself to love—Roger.

Even the children, after chattering a while about the games they had played and the good time of the afternoon, noticed the silence of their elders, and gradually they ceased to talk and plodded along with Roger leading the way, Meridel close beside him. All about them was the vast stillness of the forests. Far off an owl hooted and from a farmyard over the hill a fox barked sharply. Those sounds died—and then in that great stillness they heard a deep voice singing, coming toward them around bend in the path. They froze in their tracks and the little ones clutched Meridel's hands. "Bonsoir, Nigaud! Bonsoir, Fricot!"

"It is he!" whispered Pol Martin. "It is Bonhomme Fricot!"

"What folly!" said Meridel, but a strange shiver, not of fear moved over her body. "How could it be?"

"Listen!" said Rosine. "Yes, yes! It is he! It is he!"

"Eh! Bonhomme Fricot!" called Pol Martin in his shrill soprano. "Bonhomme Fricot, what are you doing here?"

The song perished. They saw only a shadowy figure in the path before them, the glimmer of white at his throat. After a moment he spoke, reluctantly in his voice: "Are you sure, Pol Martin and Rosine, that it is Bonhomme Fricot you have here?"

"Yes, yes, we are sure indeed!" "It could not be the laughing soldier then?"

"The laughing soldier would not know our names," pointed out Rosine. "Why do you play this farce, Bonhomme Fricot? We know you."

"I was the laughing soldier," said he. "I gave the real soldier my old clothes and shaved off my beard and cut off my hair and now you know why I laughed—because the soldier tried to kill Bonhomme Fricot and himself was killed instead. You see, I work for the King of England and I must sometimes do strange things."

"But it is brave!" cried Pol Martin. "It is grand. Did you come here to visit us?"

"It's no use, Mike," said Roger stepping forward, finding his brother's hand in the starlight. "You were going the wrong way. You don't need to run, do you?"

"I talked with Tante Mimi. I—"

"You were not going because of me?" Meridel came forward now and reached for the hand Roger held, so that three hands were clasped together, hers so small between the two strong ones of those men who loved her.

"We can talk when we get home," said Roger, and he thanked God for the darkness, for the dim stars that let no one see his face. I'll go on ahead with these two fellows."

"A moment, Roger," said Michel.

"Please," said Meridel. He paid no attention to them. He sent Pol Martin and Rosine scampering down the trail and hurried after them. They heard his voice faintly, "You can pretend it's the road on the magic mountain if you need to."

But he knew, none better, that while road is a magic road if you have the right charm in your heart. And somewhere for him there would be such a road, one that no other foot had trod before and at the end of it someone who waited—for only him.

Behind him, under the stars, Meridel and Michel Fabre had stopped to gaze at each other in that strange light. "I was wrong," he said. "You did not forget our hour."

"You did not mean it when you said, as you left me then, that you would not return?"

"You knew I did not. It was written, all this—long ago. Nothing could ever change it."

(THE END)

haps in time it will come, but God help us if it does not. And Roger is wise enough to know that it is a grave risk we run. Why did I shed those foolish tears tonight? The dress is so lovely; it is made for one who gives herself to love—Roger.

Even the children, after chattering a while about the games they had played and the good time of the afternoon, noticed the silence of their elders, and gradually they ceased to talk and plodded along with Roger leading the way, Meridel close beside him. All about them was the vast stillness of the forests. Far off an owl hooted and from a farmyard over the hill a fox barked sharply. Those sounds died—and then in that great stillness they heard a deep voice singing, coming toward them around bend in the path. They froze in their tracks and the little ones clutched Meridel's hands. "Bonsoir, Nigaud! Bonsoir, Fricot!"

"It is he!" whispered Pol Martin. "It is Bonhomme Fricot!"

"What folly!" said Meridel, but a strange shiver, not of fear moved over her body. "How could it be?"

"Listen!" said Rosine. "Yes, yes! It is he! It is he!"

"Eh! Bonhomme Fricot!" called Pol Martin in his shrill soprano. "Bonhomme Fricot, what are you doing here?"

The song perished. They saw only a shadowy figure in the path before them, the glimmer of white at his throat. After a moment he spoke, reluctantly in his voice: "Are you sure, Pol Martin and Rosine, that it is Bonhomme Fricot you have here?"

"Yes, yes, we are sure indeed!" "It could not be the laughing soldier then?"

"The laughing soldier would not know our names," pointed out Rosine. "Why do you play this farce, Bonhomme Fricot? We know you."

"I was the laughing soldier," said he. "I gave the real soldier my old clothes and shaved off my beard and cut off my hair and now you know why I laughed—because the soldier tried to kill Bonhomme Fricot and himself was killed instead. You see, I work for the King of England and I must sometimes do strange things."

"But it is brave!" cried Pol Martin. "It is grand. Did you come here to visit us?"

"It's no use, Mike," said Roger stepping forward, finding his brother's hand in the starlight. "You were going the wrong way. You don't need to run, do you?"

"I talked with Tante Mimi. I—"

"You were not going because of me?" Meridel came forward now and reached for the hand Roger held, so that three hands were clasped together, hers so small between the two strong ones of those men who loved her.

"We can talk when we get home," said Roger, and he thanked God for the darkness, for the dim stars that let no one see his face. I'll go on ahead with these two fellows."

"A moment, Roger," said Michel.

"Please," said Meridel. He paid no attention to them. He sent Pol Martin and Rosine scampering down the trail and hurried after them. They heard his voice faintly, "You can pretend it's the road on the magic mountain if you need to."

But he knew, none better, that while road is a magic road if you have the right charm in your heart. And somewhere for him there would be such a road, one that no other foot had trod before and at the end of it someone who waited—for only him.

Behind him, under the stars, Meridel and Michel Fabre had stopped to gaze at each other in that strange light. "I was wrong," he said. "You did not forget our hour."

"You did not mean it when you said, as you left me then, that you would not return?"

"You knew I did not. It was written, all this—long ago. Nothing could ever change it."

(THE END)

TODAY
and
TOMORROW
By DON ROBINSON

PLANES—family How many families will buy private airplanes after the war? If anyone knows the answer to that question it should be the aviation experts in the large airplane companies, in the government and in aviation associations. But a review of statements made by these authorities indicates that your guess or mine is apt to be just about as accurate as theirs.

William Burden, assistant to the secretary of commerce for air, according to a study of "Aviation Predictions" published by Simonds Accessories, Inc., predicts that within five to ten years there will be 450,000 privately owned planes in this country, which is the high among predictions. S. Paul Johnston, Washington representative of the Curtiss Wright Corporation, gives the conservative low estimate of 20,000 planes. The National Resources Planning Board estimates 25,000 while Charles I. Stanton, civil aeronautics administrator, thinks there will be 300,000 private planes in active service within four years after the end of the war.

As for prices, the experts are a little more in agreement. Practically all those quoted expect private planes to be available in the \$1,000 to \$3,000 price range. Commenting on probable price reductions, Andrew Kucher, director of research of Bendix Aviation, said: "In 1940, automobiles cost \$152 per pound, whereas in 1940 the price of a much better and more complete auto was in the range of 35 to 60 cents per pound. As aircraft undergoes a similar evolution, its present cost of \$3 to \$5 per pound will inevitably come down, and the all-around airplane of the \$10,000 to \$15,000 class will begin to approach the ideal cost of \$2,000 to \$3,000."

SAFETY—proof The number of planes sold after the war will depend almost entirely on the public demand. There will certainly be little problem about quantity production of all the planes the people will buy with the plane-producing facilities we now have in this country.

But the public demand will be governed to a great extent by cost and safety—and that still is a production problem. Costs will undoubtedly come down rapidly; and all sorts of safety devices have been invented which will make private planes much safer than they were before the war. William Piper president of the Piper Aircraft corporation, one of the leading manufacturers of private planes, says: "The post-war private plane will be practically fool-proof, but not darn fool proof."

Perhaps we can never expect a plane which is "darn fool proof" but many people who are now timid about venturing into the air, will want to see a long demonstration of safe flying before buying a family plane.