

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PIPER PIPES

Rilla's first party was a triumph--or so it seemed at first. She had so many partners that she had to split her dances. Her silver slippers seemed verily to dance of themselves and though they continued to pinch her toes and blister her heels that did not interfere with her enjoyment in the least. Ethel Reese gave her a bad ten minutes by beckoning her mysteriously out of the pavilion and whispering, with a Reese-like smirk, that her dress gaped behind and that there was a stain on the flounce. Rilla rushed miserably to the room in the lighthouse which was fitted up for a temporary ladies' dressing-room, and discovered that the stain was merely a tiny grass smear and that the gap was equally tiny where a hook had pulled loose. Irene Howard fastened it up for her and gave her some over-sweet, condescending compliments. Rilla felt flattered by Irene's condescension. She was an Upper Glen girl of nineteen who seemed to like the society of the younger girls--spiteful friends said because she could queen it over them without rivalry. But Rilla thought Irene quite wonderful and loved her for her patronage. Irene was pretty and stylish; she sang divinely and spent every winter in Charlottetown taking music lessons. She had an aunt in Montreal who sent her wonderful things to wear; she was reported to have had a sad love affair--nobody knew just what, but its very mystery allured. Rilla felt that Irene's compliments crowned her evening. She ran gaily back to the pavilion and lingered for a moment

in the glow of the lanterns at the entrance looking at the dancers. A momentary break in the whirling throng gave her a glimpse of Kenneth Ford standing at the other side.

Rilla's heart skipped a beat--or, if that be a physiological impossibility, she thought it did. So he was here, after all. She had concluded he was not coming--not that it mattered in the least. Would he see her? Would he take any notice of her? Of course, he wouldn't ask her to dance--that couldn't be hoped for. He thought her just a mere child. He had called her "Spider" not three weeks ago when he had been at Ingleside one evening. She had cried about it upstairs afterwards and hated him. But her heart skipped a beat when she saw that he was edging his way round the side of the pavilion towards her. Was he coming to her--was he?--was he?--yes, he was! He was looking for her--he was here beside her--he was gazing down at her with something in his dark grey eyes that Rilla had never seen in them. Oh, it was almost too much to bear! and everything was going on as before--the dancers were spinning round, the boys who couldn't get partners were hanging about the pavilion, canoodling couples were sitting out on the rocks--nobody seemed to realize what a stupendous thing had happened.

Kenneth was a tall lad, very good looking, with a certain careless grace of bearing that somehow made all the other boys seem stiff and awkward by contrast. He was reported to be awesomely clever, with the glamour of a far-away city and a big university hanging around him. He had also the reputation of being a bit of a lady-killer. But that

probably accrued to him from his possession of a laughing, velvety voice which no girl could hear without a heartbeat, and a dangerous way of listening as if she were saying something that he had longed all his life to hear.

"Is this Rilla-my-Rilla?" he asked in a low tone.

"Yeth," said Rilla, and immediately wished she could throw herself headlong down the lighthouse rock or otherwise vanish from a jeering world.

Rilla had lisped in early childhood; but she had grown out of it. Only on occasions of stress and strain did the tendency re-assert itself. She hadn't lisped for a year; and now at this very moment, when she was so especially desirous of appearing grown up and sophisticated, she must go and lisp like a baby! It was too mortifying; she felt as if tears were going to come into her eyes; the next minute she would be--blubbering--yes, just blubbering--she wished Kenneth would go away--she wished he had never come. The party was spoiled. Everything had turned to dust and ashes.

And he had called her "Rilla-my-Rilla"--not "Spider" or "Kid" or "Puss," as he had been used to call her when he took any notice whatever of her. She did not at all resent his using Walter's pet name for her; it sounded beautifully in his low caressing tones, with just the faintest suggestion of emphasis on the "my." It would have been so

nice if she had not made a fool of herself. She dared not look up lest she should see laughter in his eyes. So she looked down; and as her lashes were very long and dark and her lids very thick and creamy, the effect was quite charming and provocative, and Kenneth reflected that Rilla Blythe was going to be the beauty of the Ingleside girls after all. He wanted to make her look up--to catch again that little, demure, questioning glance. She was the prettiest thing at the party, there was no doubt of that.

What was he saying? Rilla could hardly believe her ears.

"Can we have a dance?"

"Yes," said Rilla. She said it with such a fierce determination not to lisp that she fairly blurted the word out. Then she writhed in spirit again. It sounded so bold--so eager--as if she were fairly jumping at him! What would he think of her? Oh, why did dreadful things like this happen, just when a girl wanted to appear at her best?

Kenneth drew her in among the dancers.

"I think this game ankle of mine is good for one hop around, at least," he said.

"How is your ankle?" said Rilla. Oh, why couldn't she think of something else to say? She knew he was sick of inquiries about his

ankle. She had heard him say so at Ingleside--heard him tell Di he was going to wear a placard on his breast announcing to all and sundry that the ankle was improving, etc. And now she must go and ask this stale question again.

Kenneth was tired of inquiries about his ankle. But then he had not often been asked about it by lips with such an adorable kissable dent just above them. Perhaps that was why he answered very patiently that it was getting on well and didn't trouble him much, if he didn't walk or stand too long at a time.

"They tell me it will be as strong as ever in time, but I'll have to cut football out this fall."

They danced together and Rilla knew every girl in sight envied her. After the dance they went down the rock steps and Kenneth found a little flat and they rowed across the moonlit channel to the sand-shore; they walked on the sand till Kenneth's ankle made protest and then they sat down among the dunes. Kenneth talked to her as he had talked to Nan and Di. Rilla, overcome with a shyness she did not understand, could not talk much, and thought he would think her frightfully stupid; but in spite of this it was all very wonderful--the exquisite moonlit night, the shining sea, the tiny little wavelets swishing on the sand, the cool and freakish wind of night crooning in the stiff grasses on the crest of the dunes, the music sounding faintly and sweetly over the channel.

"A merry lilt o' moonlight for mermaiden revelry," quoted Kenneth softly from one of Walter's poems.

And just he and she alone together in the glamour of sound and sight!  
If only her slippers didn't bite so! and if only she could talk  
cleverly like Miss Oliver--nay, if she could only talk as she did  
herself to other boys! But words would not come, she could only listen  
and murmur little commonplace sentences now and again. But perhaps her  
dreamy eyes and her dented lip and her slender throat talked eloquently  
for her. At any rate Kenneth seemed in no hurry to suggest going back  
and when they did go back supper was in progress. He found a seat for  
her near the window of the lighthouse kitchen and sat on the sill  
beside her while she ate her ices and cake. Rilla looked about her and  
thought how lovely her first party had been. She would never forget it.  
The room re-echoed to laughter and jest. Beautiful young eyes sparkled  
and shone. From the pavilion outside came the lilt of the fiddle and  
the rhythmic steps of the dancers.

There was a little disturbance among a group of boys crowded about the  
door; a young fellow pushed through and halted on the threshold,  
looking about him rather sombrely. It was Jack Elliott from  
over-harbour--a McGill medical student, a quiet chap not much addicted  
to social doings. He had been invited to the party but had not been  
expected to come since he had to go to Charlottetown that day and could  
not be back until late. Yet here he was--and he carried a folded paper

in his hand.

Gertrude Oliver looked at him from her corner and shivered again. She had enjoyed the party herself, after all, for she had foregathered with a Charlottetown acquaintance who, being a stranger and much older than most of the guests, felt himself rather out of it, and had been glad to fall in with this clever girl who could talk of world doings and outside events with the zest and vigour of a man. In the pleasure of his society she had forgotten some of her misgivings of the day. Now they suddenly returned to her. What news did Jack Elliott bring? Lines from an old poem flashed unbidden into her mind--"there was a sound of revelry by night"--"Hush! Hark! A deep sound strikes like a rising knell"--why should she think of that now? Why didn't Jack Elliott speak--if he had anything to tell? Why did he just stand there, glowering importantly?

"Ask him--ask him," she said feverishly to Allan Daly. But somebody else had already asked him. The room grew very silent all at once. Outside the fiddler had stopped for a rest and there was silence there too. Afar off they heard the low moan of the gulf--the presage of a storm already on its way up the Atlantic. A girl's laugh drifted up from the rocks and died away as if frightened out of existence by the sudden stillness.

"England declared war on Germany today," said Jack Elliott slowly. "The news came by wire just as I left town."

"God help us," whispered Gertrude Oliver under her breath. "My dream--my dream! The first wave has broken." She looked at Allan Daly and tried to smile.

"Is this Armageddon?" she asked.

"I am afraid so," he said gravely.

A chorus of exclamations had arisen round them--light surprise and idle interest for the most part. Few there realized the import of the message--fewer still realized that it meant anything to them. Before long the dancing was on again and the hum of pleasure was as loud as ever. Gertrude and Allan Daly talked the news over in low, troubled tones. Walter Blythe had turned pale and left the room. Outside he met Jem, hurrying up the rock steps.

"Have you heard the news, Jem?"

"Yes. The Piper has come. Hurrah! I knew England wouldn't leave France in the lurch. I've been trying to get Captain Josiah to hoist the flag but he says it isn't the proper caper till sunrise. Jack says they'll be calling for volunteers tomorrow."

"What a fuss to make over nothing," said Mary Vance disdainfully as Jem dashed off. She was sitting out with Miller Douglas on a lobster trap



which was not only an unromantic but an uncomfortable seat. But Mary and Miller were both supremely happy on it. Miller Douglas was a big, strapping, uncouth lad, who thought Mary Vance's tongue uncommonly gifted and Mary Vance's white eyes stars of the first magnitude; and neither of them had the least inkling why Jem Blythe wanted to hoist the lighthouse flag. "What does it matter if there's going to be a war over there in Europe? I'm sure it doesn't concern us."

Walter looked at her and had one of his odd visitations of prophecy.

"Before this war is over," he said--or something said through his lips--"every man and woman and child in Canada will feel it--you, Mary, will feel it--feel it to your heart's core. You will weep tears of blood over it. The Piper has come--and he will pipe until every corner of the world has heard his awful and irresistible music. It will be years before the dance of death is over--years, Mary. And in those years millions of hearts will break."

"Fancy now!" said Mary who always said that when she couldn't think of anything else to say. She didn't know what Walter meant but she felt uncomfortable. Walter Blythe was always saying odd things. That old Piper of his--she hadn't heard anything about him since their playdays in Rainbow Valley--and now here he was bobbing up again. She didn't like it, and that was the long and short of it.

"Aren't you painting it rather strong, Walter?" asked Harvey Crawford,

coming up just then. "This war won't last for years--it'll be over in a month or two. England will just wipe Germany off the map in no time."

"Do you think a war for which Germany has been preparing for twenty years will be over in a few weeks?" said Walter passionately. "This isn't a paltry struggle in a Balkan corner, Harvey. It is a death grapple. Germany comes to conquer or to die. And do you know what will happen if she conquers? Canada will be a German colony."

"Well, I guess a few things will happen before that," said Harvey shrugging his shoulders. "The British navy would have to be licked for one; and for another, Miller here, now, and I, we'd raise a dust, wouldn't we, Miller? No Germans need apply for this old country, eh?"

Harvey ran down the steps laughing.

"I declare, I think all you boys talk the craziest stuff," said Mary Vance in disgust. She got up and dragged Miller off to the rock-shore. It didn't happen often that they had a chance for a talk together; Mary was determined that this one shouldn't be spoiled by Walter Blythe's silly blather about Pipers and Germans and such like absurd things. They left Walter standing alone on the rock steps, looking out over the beauty of Four Winds with brooding eyes that saw it not.

The best of the evening was over for Rilla, too. Ever since Jack Elliott's announcement, she had sensed that Kenneth was no longer

thinking about her. She felt suddenly lonely and unhappy. It was worse than if he had never noticed her at all. Was life like this--something delightful happening and then, just as you were revelling in it, slipping away from you? Rilla told herself pathetically that she felt years older than when she had left home that evening. Perhaps she did--perhaps she was. Who knows? It does not do to laugh at the pangs of youth. They are very terrible because youth has not yet learned that "this, too, will pass away." Rilla sighed and wished she were home, in bed, crying into her pillow.

"Tired?" said Kenneth, gently but absently--oh, so absently. He really didn't care a bit whether she were tired or not, she thought.

"Kenneth," she ventured timidly, "you don't think this war will matter much to us in Canada, do you?"

"Matter? Of course it will matter to the lucky fellows who will be able to take a hand. I won't--thanks to this confounded ankle. Rotten luck, I call it."

"I don't see why we should fight England's battles," cried Rilla.

"She's quite able to fight them herself."

"That isn't the point. We are part of the British Empire. It's a family affair. We've got to stand by each other. The worst of it is, it will be over before I can be of any use."

"Do you mean that you would really volunteer to go if it wasn't for your ankle? asked Rilla incredulously.

"Sure I would. You see they'll go by thousands. Jem'll be off, I'll bet a cent--Walter won't be strong enough yet, I suppose. And Jerry Meredith--he'll go! And I was worrying about being out of football this year!"

Rilla was too startled to say anything. Jem--and Jerry! Nonsense! Why father and Mr. Meredith wouldn't allow it. They weren't through college. Oh, why hadn't Jack Elliott kept his horrid news to himself?

Mark Warren came up and asked her to dance. Rilla went, knowing Kenneth didn't care whether she went or stayed. An hour ago on the sand-shore he had been looking at her as if she were the only being of any importance in the world. And now she was nobody. His thoughts were full of this Great Game which was to be played out on bloodstained fields with empires for stakes--a Game in which womenkind could have no part. Women, thought Rilla miserably, just had to sit and cry at home. But all this was foolishness. Kenneth couldn't go--he admitted that himself--and Walter couldn't--thank goodness for that--and Jem and Jerry would have more sense. She wouldn't worry--she would enjoy herself. But how awkward Mark Warren was! How he bungled his steps! Why, for mercy's sake, did boys try to dance who didn't know the first thing about dancing; and who had feet as big as boats? There, he had

bumped her into somebody! She would never dance with him again!

She danced with others, though the zest was gone out of the performance and she had begun to realize that her slippers hurt her badly. Kenneth seemed to have gone--at least nothing was to be seen of him. Her first party was spoiled, though it had seemed so beautiful at one time. Her head ached--her toes burned. And worse was yet to come. She had gone down with some over-harbour friends to the rock-shore where they all lingered as dance after dance went on above them. It was cool and pleasant and they were tired. Rilla sat silent, taking no part in the gay conversation. She was glad when someone called down that the over-harbour boats were leaving. A laughing scramble up the lighthouse rock followed. A few couples still whirled about in the pavilion but the crowd had thinned out. Rilla looked about her for the Glen group. She could not see one of them. She ran into the lighthouse. Still, no sign of anybody. In dismay she ran to the rock steps, down which the over-harbour guests were hurrying. She could see the boats below--where was Jem's--where was Joe's?

"Why, Rilla Blythe, I thought you'd be gone home long ago," said Mary Vance, who was waving her scarf at a boat skimming up the channel, skippered by Miller Douglas.

"Where are the rest?" gasped Rilla.

"Why, they're gone--Jem went an hour ago--Una had a headache. And the

rest went with Joe about fifteen minutes ago. See--they're just going around Birch Point. I didn't go because it's getting rough and I knew I'd be seasick. I don't mind walking home from here. It's only a mile and a half. I s'posed you'd gone. Where were you?"

"Down on the rocks with Jem and Mollie Crawford. Oh, why didn't they look for me?"

"They did--but you couldn't be found. Then they concluded you must have gone in the other boat. Don't worry. You can stay all night with me and we'll 'phone up to Ingleside where you are."

Rilla realized that there was nothing else to do. Her lips trembled and tears came into her eyes. She blinked savagely--she would not let Mary Vance see her crying. But to be forgotten like this! To think nobody had thought it worth while to make sure where she was--not even Walter. Then she had a sudden dismayed recollection.

"My shoes," she exclaimed. "I left them in the boat."

"Well, I never," said Mary. "You're the most thoughtless kid I ever saw. You'll have to ask Hazel Lewison to lend you a pair of shoes."

"I won't." cried Rilla, who didn't like the said Hazel. "I'll go barefoot first."

Mary shrugged her shoulders.

"Just as you like. Pride must suffer pain. It'll teach you to be more careful. Well, let's hike."

Accordingly they hiked. But to "hike" along a deep-rutted, pebbly lane in frail, silver-hued slippers with high French heels, is not an exhilarating performance. Rilla managed to limp and totter along until they reached the harbour road; but she could go no farther in those detestable slippers. She took them and her dear silk stockings off and started barefoot. That was not pleasant either; her feet were very tender and the pebbles and ruts of the road hurt them. Her blistered heels smarted. But physical pain was almost forgotten in the sting of humiliation. This was a nice predicament! If Kenneth Ford could see her now, limping along like a little girl with a stone bruise! Oh, what a horrid way for her lovely party to end! She just had to cry--it was too terrible. Nobody cared for her--nobody bothered about her at all. Well, if she caught cold from walking home barefoot on a dew-wet road and went into a decline perhaps they would be sorry. She furtively wiped her tears away with her scarf--handkerchiefs seemed to have vanished like shoes!--but she could not help sniffing. Worse and worse!

"You've got a cold, I see," said Mary. "You ought to have known you would, sitting down in the wind on those rocks. Your mother won't let you go out again in a hurry I can tell you. It's certainly been something of a party. The Lewisons know how to do things, I'll say that

for them, though Hazel Lewison is no choice of mine. My, how black she looked when she saw you dancing with Ken Ford. And so did that little hussy of an Ethel Reese. What a flirt he is!"

"I don't think he's a flirt," said Rilla as defiantly as two desperate sniffs would let her.

"You'll know more about men when you're as old as I am," said Mary patronizingly. "Mind you, it doesn't do to believe all they tell you. Don't let Ken Ford think that all he has to do to get you on a string is to drop his handkerchief. Have more spirit than that, child."

To be thus hectored and patronized by Mary Vance was unendurable! And it was unendurable to walk on stony roads with blistered heels and bare feet! And it was unendurable to be crying and have no handkerchief and not to be able to stop crying!

"I'm not thinking"--sniff--"about Kenneth"--sniff--"Ford"--two sniffs--"at all," cried tortured Rilla.

"There's no need to fly off the handle, child. You ought to be willing to take advice from older people. I saw how you slipped over to the sands with Ken and stayed there ever so long with him. Your mother wouldn't like it if she knew."

"I'll tell my mother all about it--and Miss Oliver--and Walter," Rilla



gasped between sniffs. "You sat for hours with Miller Douglas on that lobster trap, Mary Vance! What would Mrs. Elliott say to that if she knew?"

"Oh, I'm not going to quarrel with you," said Mary, suddenly retreating to high and lofty ground. "All I say is, you should wait until you're grown-up before you do things like that."

Rilla gave up trying to hide the fact that she was crying. Everything was spoiled--even that beautiful, dreamy, romantic, moonlit hour with Kenneth on the sands was vulgarized and cheapened. She loathed Mary Vance.

"Why, whatever's wrong?" cried mystified Mary. "What are you crying for?"

"My feet--hurt so--" sobbed Rilla clinging to the last shred of her pride. It was less humiliating to admit crying because of your feet than because--because somebody had been amusing himself with you, and your friends had forgotten you, and other people patronized you.

"I daresay they do," said Mary, not unkindly. "Never mind. I know where there's a pot of goose-grease in Cornelia's tidy pantry and it beats all the fancy cold creams in the world. I'll put some on your heels before you go to bed."

Goose-grease on your heels! So this was what your first party and your first beau and your first moonlit romance ended in!

Rilla gave over crying in sheer disgust at the futility of tears and went to sleep in Mary Vance's bed in the calm of despair. Outside, the dawn came greyly in on wings of storm; Captain Josiah, true to his word, ran up the Union Jack at the Four Winds Light and it streamed on the fierce wind against the clouded sky like a gallant unquenchable beacon.