

## CHAPTER V

### "THE SOUND OF A GOING"

Rilla ran down through the sunlit glory of the maple grove behind Ingleside, to her favourite nook in Rainbow Valley. She sat down on a green-mossed stone among the fern, propped her chin on her hands and stared unseeingly at the dazzling blue sky of the August afternoon--so blue, so peaceful, so unchanged, just as it had arched over the valley in the mellow days of late summer ever since she could remember.

She wanted to be alone--to think things out--to adjust herself, if it were possible, to the new world into which she seemed to have been transplanted with a suddenness and completeness that left her half bewildered as to her own identity. Was she--could she be--the same Rilla Blythe who had danced at Four Winds Light six days ago--only six days ago? It seemed to Rilla that she had lived as much in those six days as in all her previous life--and if it be true that we should count time by heart-throbs she had. That evening, with its hopes and fears and triumphs and humiliations, seemed like ancient history now. Could she really ever have cried just because she had been forgotten and had to walk home with Mary Vance? Ah, thought Rilla sadly, how trivial and absurd such a cause of tears now appeared to her. She could cry now with a right good will--but she would not--she must not. What was it mother had said, looking, with her white lips and stricken eyes, as Rilla had never seen her mother look before,

"When our women fail in courage,  
Shall our men be fearless still?"

Yes, that was it. She must be brave--like mother--and Nan--and Faith--Faith, who had cried with flashing eyes, "Oh, if I were only a man, to go too!" Only, when her eyes ached and her throat burned like this she had to hide herself in Rainbow Valley for a little, just to think things out and remember that she wasn't a child any longer--she was grown-up and women had to face things like this. But it was--nice--to get away alone now and then, where nobody could see her and where she needn't feel that people thought her a little coward if some tears came in spite of her.

How sweet and woodsey the ferns smelled! How softly the great feathery boughs of the firs waved and murmured over her! How elfinly rang the bells of the "Tree Lovers"--just a tinkle now and then as the breeze swept by! How purple and elusive the haze where incense was being offered on many an altar of the hills! How the maple leaves whitened in the wind until the grove seemed covered with pale silvery blossoms! Everything was just the same as she had seen it hundreds of times; and yet the whole face of the world seemed changed.

"How wicked I was to wish that something dramatic would happen!" she thought. "Oh, if we could only have those dear, monotonous, pleasant days back again! I would never, never grumble about them again."

Rilla's world had tumbled to pieces the very day after the party. As they lingered around the dinner table at Ingleside, talking of the war, the telephone had rung. It was a long-distance call from Charlottetown for Jem. When he had finished talking he hung up the receiver and turned around, with a flushed face and glowing eyes. Before he had said a word his mother and Nan and Di had turned pale. As for Rilla, for the first time in her life she felt that every one must hear her heart beating and that something had clutched at her throat.

"They are calling for volunteers in town, father," said Jem. "Scores have joined up already. I'm going in tonight to enlist."

"Oh--Little Jem," cried Mrs. Blythe brokenly. She had not called him that for many years--not since the day he had rebelled against it.

"Oh--no--no--Little Jem."

"I must, mother. I'm right--am I not, father?" said Jem.

Dr. Blythe had risen. He was very pale, too, and his voice was husky. But he did not hesitate.

"Yes, Jem, yes--if you feel that way, yes--"

Mrs. Blythe covered her face. Walter stared moodily at his plate. Nan and Di clasped each others' hands. Shirley tried to look unconcerned.

Susan sat as if paralysed, her piece of pie half-eaten on her plate. Susan never did finish that piece of pie--a fact which bore eloquent testimony to the upheaval in her inner woman for Susan considered it a cardinal offence against civilized society to begin to eat anything and not finish it. That was wilful waste, hence to the contrary notwithstanding.

Jem turned to the phone again. "I must ring the manse. Jerry will want to go, too."

At this Nan had cried out "Oh!" as if a knife had been thrust into her, and rushed from the room. Di followed her. Rilla turned to Walter for comfort but Walter was lost to her in some reverie she could not share.

"All right," Jem was saying, as coolly as if he were arranging the details of a picnic. "I thought you would--yes, tonight--the seven o'clock--meet me at the station. So long."

"Mrs. Dr. dear," said Susan. "I wish you would wake me up. Am I dreaming--or am I awake? Does that blessed boy realize what he is saying? Does he mean that he is going to enlist as a soldier? You do not mean to tell me that they want children like him! It is an outrage. Surely you and the doctor will not permit it."

"We can't stop him," said Mrs. Blythe, chokingly. "Oh, Gilbert!"

Dr. Blythe came up behind his wife and took her hand gently, looking down into the sweet grey eyes that he had only once before seen filled with such imploring anguish as now. They both thought of that other time--the day years ago in the House of Dreams when little Joyce had died.

"Would you have him stay, Anne--when the others are going--when he thinks it his duty--would you have him so selfish and small-souled?"

"No--no! But--oh--our first-born son--he's only a lad--Gilbert--I'll try to be brave after a while--just now I can't. It's all come so suddenly. Give me time."

The doctor and his wife went out of the room. Jem had gone--Walter had gone--Shirley got up to go. Rilla and Susan remained staring at each other across the deserted table. Rilla had not yet cried--she was too stunned for tears. Then she saw that Susan was crying--Susan, whom she had never seen shed a tear before.

"Oh, Susan, will he really go?" she asked.

"It--it--it is just ridiculous, that is what it is," said Susan.

She wiped away her tears, gulped resolutely and got up.

"I am going to wash the dishes. That has to be done, even if everybody

has gone crazy. There now, dearie, do not you cry. Jem will go, most likely--but the war will be over long before he gets anywhere near it. Let us take a brace and not worry your poor mother."

"In the Enterprise today it was reported that Lord Kitchener says the war will last three years," said Rilla dubiously.

"I am not acquainted with Lord Kitchener," said Susan, composedly, "but I dare say he makes mistakes as often as other people. Your father says it will be over in a few months and I have as much faith in his opinion as I have in Lord Anybody's. So just let us be calm and trust in the Almighty and get this place tidied up. I am done with crying which is a waste of time and discourages everybody."

Jem and Jerry went to Charlottetown that night and two days later they came back in khaki. The Glen hummed with excitement over it. Life at Ingleside had suddenly become a tense, strained, thrilling thing. Mrs. Blythe and Nan were brave and smiling and wonderful. Already Mrs. Blythe and Miss Cornelia were organizing a Red Cross. The doctor and Mr. Meredith were rounding up the men for a Patriotic Society. Rilla, after the first shock, reacted to the romance of it all, in spite of her heartache. Jem certainly looked magnificent in his uniform. It was splendid to think of the lads of Canada answering so speedily and fearlessly and uncalculatingly to the call of their country. Rilla carried her head high among the girls whose brothers had not so responded. In her diary she wrote:

"He goes to do what I had done  
Had Douglas's daughter been his son,"

and was sure she meant it. If she were a boy of course she would go,  
too! She hadn't the least doubt of that.

She wondered if it was very dreadful of her to feel glad that Walter  
hadn't got strong as soon as they had wished after the fever.

"I couldn't bear to have Walter go," she wrote. "I love Jem ever so  
much but Walter means more to me than anyone in the world and I would  
die if he had to go. He seems so changed these days. He hardly ever  
talks to me. I suppose he wants to go, too, and feels badly because he  
can't. He doesn't go about with Jem and Jerry at all. I shall never  
forget Susan's face when Jem came home in his khaki. It worked and  
twisted as if she were going to cry, but all she said was, 'You look  
almost like a man in that, Jem.' Jem laughed. He never minds because  
Susan thinks him just a child still. Everybody seems busy but me. I  
wish there was something I could do but there doesn't seem to be  
anything. Mother and Nan and Di are busy all the time and I just wander  
about like a lonely ghost. What hurts me terribly, though, is that  
mother's smiles, and Nan's, just seem put on from the outside. Mother's  
eyes never laugh now. It makes me feel that I shouldn't laugh  
either--that it's wicked to feel laughy. And it's so hard for me to  
keep from laughing, even if Jem is going to be a soldier. But when I

laugh I don't enjoy it either, as I used to do. There's something behind it all that keeps hurting me--especially when I wake up in the night. Then I cry because I am afraid that Kitchener of Khartoum is right and the war will last for years and Jem may be--but no, I won't write it. It would make me feel as if it were really going to happen. The other day Nan said, 'Nothing can ever be quite the same for any of us again.' It made me feel rebellious. Why shouldn't things be the same again--when everything is over and Jem and Jerry are back? We'll all be happy and jolly again and these days will seem just like a bad dream.

"The coming of the mail is the most exciting event of every day now. Father just snatches the paper--I never saw father snatch before--and the rest of us crowd round and look at the headlines over his shoulder. Susan vows she does not and will not believe a word the papers say but she always comes to the kitchen door, and listens and then goes back, shaking her head. She is terribly indignant all the time, but she cooks up all the things Jem likes especially, and she did not make a single bit of fuss when she found Monday asleep on the spare-room bed yesterday right on top of Mrs. Rachel Lynde's apple-leaf spread. 'The Almighty only knows where your master will be having to sleep before long, you poor dumb beast,' she said as she put him quite gently out. But she never relents towards Doc. She says the minute he saw Jem in khaki he turned into Mr. Hyde then and there and she thinks that ought to be proof enough of what he really is. Susan is funny, but she is an old dear. Shirley says she is one half angel and the other half good cook. But then Shirley is the only one of us she never scolds.



"Faith Meredith is wonderful. I think she and Jem are really engaged now. She goes about with a shining light in her eyes, but her smiles are a little stiff and starched, just like mother's. I wonder if I could be as brave as she is if I had a lover and he was going to the war. It is bad enough when it is your brother. Bruce Meredith cried all night, Mrs. Meredith says, when he heard Jem and Jerry were going. And he wanted to know if the 'K of K.' his father talked about was the King of Kings. He is the dearest kiddy. I just love him--though I don't really care much for children. I don't like babies one bit--though when I say so people look at me as if I had said something perfectly shocking. Well, I don't, and I've got to be honest about it. I don't mind looking at a nice clean baby if somebody else holds it--but I wouldn't touch it for anything and I don't feel a single real spark of interest in it. Gertrude Oliver says she just feels the same. (She is the most honest person I know. She never pretends anything.) She says babies bore her until they are old enough to talk and then she likes them--but still a good ways off. Mother and Nan and Di all adore babies and seem to think I'm unnatural because I don't.

"I haven't seen Kenneth since the night of the party. He was here one evening after Jem came back but I happened to be away. I don't think he mentioned me at all--at least nobody told me he did and I was determined I wouldn't ask--but I don't care in the least. All that matters absolutely nothing to me now. The only thing that does matter is that Jem has volunteered for active service and will be going to

Valcartier in a few more days--my big, splendid brother Jem. Oh, I'm so proud of him!

"I suppose Kenneth would enlist too if it weren't for his ankle. I think that is quite providential. He is his mother's only son and how dreadful she would feel if he went. Only sons should never think of going!"

Walter came wandering through the valley as Rilla sat there, with his head bent and his hands clasped behind him. When he saw Rilla he turned abruptly away; then as abruptly he turned and came back to her.

"Rilla-my-Rilla, what are you thinking of?"

"Everything is so changed, Walter," said Rilla wistfully. "Even you--you're changed. A week ago we were all so happy--and--and--now I just can't find myself at all. I'm lost."

Walter sat down on a neighbouring stone and took Rilla's little appealing hand.

"I'm afraid our old world has come to an end, Rilla. We've got to face that fact."

"It's so terrible to think of Jem," pleaded Rilla. "Sometimes I forget for a little while what it really means and feel excited and proud--and

then it comes over me again like a cold wind."

"I envy Jem!" said Walter moodily.

"Envy Jem! Oh, Walter you--you don't want to go too."

"No," said Walter, gazing straight before him down the emerald vistas of the valley, "no, I don't want to go. That's just the trouble. Rilla, I'm afraid to go. I'm a coward."

"You're not!" Rilla burst out angrily. "Why, anybody would be afraid to go. You might be--why, you might be killed."

"I wouldn't mind that if it didn't hurt," muttered Walter. "I don't think I'm afraid of death itself--it's of the pain that might come before death--it wouldn't be so bad to die and have it over--but to keep on dying! Rilla, I've always been afraid of pain--you know that. I can't help it--I shudder when I think of the possibility of being mangled or--or blinded. Rilla, I cannot face that thought. To be blind--never to see the beauty of the world again--moonlight on Four Winds--the stars twinkling through the fir-trees--mist on the gulf. I ought to go--I ought to want to go--but I don't--I hate the thought of it--I'm ashamed--ashamed."

"But, Walter, you couldn't go anyhow," said Rilla piteously. She was sick with a new terror that Walter would go after all. "You're not

strong enough."

"I am. I've felt as fit as ever I did this last month. I'd pass any examination--I know it. Everybody thinks I'm not strong yet--and I'm skulking behind that belief. I--I should have been a girl," Walter concluded in a burst of passionate bitterness.

"Even if you were strong enough, you oughtn't to go," sobbed Rilla.

"What would mother do? She's breaking her heart over Jem. It would kill her to see you both go."

"Oh, I'm not going--don't worry. I tell you I'm afraid to go--afraid. I don't mince the matter to myself. It's a relief to own up even to you, Rilla. I wouldn't confess it to anybody else--Nan and Di would despise me. But I hate the whole thing--the horror, the pain, the ugliness. War isn't a khaki uniform or a drill parade--everything I've read in old histories haunts me. I lie awake at night and see things that have happened--see the blood and filth and misery of it all. And a bayonet charge! If I could face the other things I could never face that. It turns me sick to think of it--sicker even to think of giving it than receiving it--to think of thrusting a bayonet through another man." Walter writhed and shuddered. "I think of these things all the time--and it doesn't seem to me that Jem and Jerry ever think of them. They laugh and talk about 'potting Huns'! But it maddens me to see them in the khaki. And they think I'm grumpy because I'm not fit to go."

Walter laughed bitterly. "It is not a nice thing to feel yourself a coward." But Rilla got her arms about him and cuddled her head on his shoulder. She was so glad he didn't want to go--for just one minute she had been horribly frightened. And it was so nice to have Walter confiding his troubles to her--to her, not Di. She didn't feel so lonely and superfluous any longer.

"Don't you despise me, Rilla-my-Rilla?" asked Walter wistfully. Somehow, it hurt him to think Rilla might despise him--hurt him as much as if it had been Di. He realized suddenly how very fond he was of this adoring kid sister with her appealing eyes and troubled, girlish face.

"No, I don't. Why, Walter, hundreds of people feel just as you do. You know what that verse of Shakespeare in the old Fifth Reader says--'the brave man is not he who feels no fear.'"

"No--but it is 'he whose noble soul its fear subdues.' I don't do that. We can't gloss it over, Rilla. I'm a coward."

"You're not. Think of how you fought Dan Reese long ago."

"One spurt of courage isn't enough for a lifetime."

"Walter, one time I heard father say that the trouble with you was a sensitive nature and a vivid imagination. You feel things before they really come--feel them all alone when there isn't anything to help you

bear them--to take away from them. It isn't anything to be ashamed of. When you and Jem got your hands burned when the grass was fired on the sand-hills two years ago Jem made twice the fuss over the pain that you did. As for this horrid old war, there'll be plenty to go without you. It won't last long."

"I wish I could believe it. Well, it's supper-time, Rilla. You'd better run. I don't want anything."

"Neither do I. I couldn't eat a mouthful. Let me stay here with you, Walter. It's such a comfort to talk things over with someone. The rest all think that I'm too much of a baby to understand."

So they two sat there in the old valley until the evening star shone through a pale-grey, gauzy cloud over the maple grove, and a fragrant dewy darkness filled their little sylvan dell. It was one of the evenings Rilla was to treasure in remembrance all her life--the first one on which Walter had ever talked to her as if she were a woman and not a child. They comforted and strengthened each other. Walter felt, for the time being at least, that it was not such a despicable thing after all to dread the horror of war; and Rilla was glad to be made the confidante of his struggles--to sympathize with and encourage him. She was of importance to somebody.

When they went back to Ingleside they found callers sitting on the veranda. Mr. and Mrs. Meredith had come over from the manse, and Mr.

and Mrs. Norman Douglas had come up from the farm. Cousin Sophia was there also, sitting with Susan in the shadowy background. Mrs. Blythe and Nan and Di were away, but Dr. Blythe was home and so was Dr. Jekyll, sitting in golden majesty on the top step. And of course they were all talking of the war, except Dr. Jekyll who kept his own counsel and looked contempt as only a cat can. When two people foregathered in those days they talked of the war; and old Highland Sandy of the Harbour Head talked of it when he was alone and hurled anathemas at the Kaiser across all the acres of his farm. Walter slipped away, not caring to see or be seen, but Rilla sat down on the steps, where the garden mint was dewy and pungent. It was a very calm evening with a dim, golden afterlight irradiating the glen. She felt happier than at any time in the dreadful week that had passed. She was no longer haunted by the fear that Walter would go.

"I'd go myself if I was twenty years younger," Norman Douglas was shouting. Norman always shouted when he was excited. "I'd show the Kaiser a thing or two! Did I ever say there wasn't a hell? Of course there's a hell--dozens of hells--hundreds of hells--where the Kaiser and all his brood are bound for."

"I knew this war was coming," said Mrs. Norman triumphantly. "I saw it coming right along. I could have told all those stupid Englishmen what was ahead of them. I told you, John Meredith, years ago what the Kaiser was up to but you wouldn't believe it. You said he would never plunge the world in war. Who was right about the Kaiser, John? You--or I? Tell

me that."

"You were, I admit," said Mr. Meredith.

"It's too late to admit it now," said Mrs. Norman, shaking her head, as if to intimate that if John Meredith had admitted it sooner there might have been no war.

"Thank God, England's navy is ready," said the doctor.

"Amen to that," nodded Mrs. Norman. "Bat-blind as most of them were somebody had foresight enough to see to that."

"Maybe England'll manage not to get into trouble over it," said Cousin Sophia plaintively. "I dunno. But I'm much afraid."

"One would suppose that England was in trouble over it already, up to her neck, Sophia Crawford," said Susan. "But your ways of thinking are beyond me and always were. It is my opinion that the British Navy will settle Germany in a jiffy and that we are all getting worked up over nothing."

Susan spat out the words as if she wanted to convince herself more than anybody else. She had her little store of homely philosophies to guide her through life, but she had nothing to buckler her against the thunderbolts of the week that had just passed. What had an honest,



hard-working, Presbyterian old maid of Glen St. Mary to do with a war thousands of miles away? Susan felt that it was indecent that she should have to be disturbed by it.

"The British army will settle Germany," shouted Norman. "Just wait till it gets into line and the Kaiser will find that real war is a different thing from parading round Berlin with your moustaches cocked up."

"Britain hasn't got an army," said Mrs. Norman emphatically. "You needn't glare at me, Norman. Glaring won't make soldiers out of timothy stalks. A hundred thousand men will just be a mouthful for Germany's millions."

"There'll be some tough chewing in the mouthful, I reckon," persisted Norman valiantly. "Germany'll break her teeth on it. Don't you tell me one Britisher isn't a match for ten foreigners. I could polish off a dozen of 'em myself with both hands tied behind my back!"

"I am told," said Susan, "that old Mr. Pryor does not believe in this war. I am told that he says England went into it just because she was jealous of Germany and that she did not really care in the least what happened to Belgium."

"I believe he's been talking some such rot," said Norman. "I haven't heard him. When I do, Whiskers-on-the-moon won't know what happened to him. That precious relative of mine, Kitty Alec, holds forth to the

same effect, I understand. Not before me, though--somehow, folks don't indulge in that kind of conversation in my presence. Lord love you, they've a kind of presentiment, so to speak, that it wouldn't be healthy for their complaint."

"I am much afraid that this war has been sent as a punishment for our sins," said Cousin Sophia, unclasping her pale hands from her lap and reclasping them solemnly over her stomach. "'The world is very evil--the times are waxing late.'"

"Parson here's got something of the same idea," chuckled Norman.

"Haven't you, Parson? That's why you preached t'other night on the text 'Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.' I didn't agree with you--wanted to get up in the pew and shout out that there wasn't a word of sense in what you were saying, but Ellen, here, she held me down. I never have any fun sassing parsons since I got married."

"Without shedding of blood there is no anything," said Mr. Meredith, in the gentle dreamy way which had an unexpected trick of convincing his hearers. "Everything, it seems to me, has to be purchased by self-sacrifice. Our race has marked every step of its painful ascent with blood. And now torrents of it must flow again. No, Mrs. Crawford, I don't think the war has been sent as a punishment for sin. I think it is the price humanity must pay for some blessing--some advance great enough to be worth the price--which we may not live to see but which our children's children will inherit."

"If Jerry is killed will you feel so fine about it?" demanded Norman, who had been saying things like that all his life and never could be made to see any reason why he shouldn't. "Now, never mind kicking me in the shins, Ellen. I want to see if Parson meant what he said or if it was just a pulpit frill."

Mr. Meredith's face quivered. He had had a terrible hour alone in his study on the night Jem and Jerry had gone to town. But he answered quietly.

"Whatever I felt, it could not alter my belief--my assurance that a country whose sons are ready to lay down their lives in her defence will win a new vision because of their sacrifice."

"You do mean it, Parson. I can always tell when people mean what they say. It's a gift that was born in me. Makes me a terror to most parsons, that! But I've never caught you yet saying anything you didn't mean. I'm always hoping I will--that's what reconciles me to going to church. It'd be such a comfort to me--such a weapon to batter Ellen here with when she tries to civilize me. Well, I'm off over the road to see Ab. Crawford a minute. The gods be good to you all."

"The old pagan!" muttered Susan, as Norman strode away. She did not care if Ellen Douglas did hear her. Susan could never understand why fire did not descend from heaven upon Norman Douglas when he insulted

ministers the way he did. But the astonishing thing was Mr. Meredith seemed really to like his brother-in-law.

Rilla wished they would talk of something besides war. She had heard nothing else for a week and she was really a little tired of it. Now that she was relieved from her haunting fear that Walter would want to go it made her quite impatient. But she supposed--with a sigh--that there would be three or four months of it yet.