

CHAPTER XXII

LITTLE DOG MONDAY KNOWS

"It is two years tonight since the dance at the light, when Jack Elliott brought us news of the war. Do you remember, Miss Oliver?"

Cousin Sophia answered for Miss Oliver. "Oh, indeed, Rilla, I remember that evening only too well, and you a-prancing down here to show off your party clothes. Didn't I warn you that we could not tell what was before us? Little did you think that night what was before you."

"Little did any of us think that," said Susan sharply, "not being gifted with the power of prophecy. It does not require any great foresight, Sophia Crawford, to tell a body that she will have some trouble before her life is over. I could do as much myself."

"We all thought the war would be over in a few months then," said Rilla wistfully. "When I look back it seems so ridiculous that we ever could have supposed it."

"And now, two years later, it is no nearer the end than it was then," said Miss Oliver gloomily.

Susan clicked her knitting-needles briskly.

"Now, Miss Oliver, dear, you know that is not a reasonable remark. You know we are just two years nearer the end, whenever the end is appointed to be."

"Albert read in a Montreal paper today that a war expert gives it as his opinion that it will last five years more," was Cousin Sophia's cheerful contribution.

"It can't," cried Rilla; then she added with a sigh, "Two years ago we would have said 'It can't last two years.' But five more years of this!"

"If Rumania comes in, as I have strong hopes now of her doing, you will see the end in five months instead of five years," said Susan.

"I've no faith in furriners," sighed Cousin Sophia.

"The French are foreigners," retorted Susan, "and look at Verdun. And think of all the Somme victories this blessed summer. The Big Push is on and the Russians are still going well. Why, General Haig says that the German officers he has captured admit that they have lost the war."

"You can't believe a word the Germans say," protested Cousin Sophia.

"There is no sense in believing a thing just because you'd like to believe it, Susan Baker. The British have lost millions of men at the Somme and how far have they got? Look facts in the face, Susan Baker, look facts in the face."

"They are wearing the Germans out and so long as that happens it does not matter whether it is done a few miles east or a few miles west. I am not," admitted Susan in tremendous humility, "I am not a military expert, Sophia Crawford, but even I can see that, and so could you if you were not determined to take a gloomy view of everything. The Huns have not got all the cleverness in the world. Have you not heard the story of Alistair MacCallum's son Roderick, from the Upper Glen? He is a prisoner in Germany and his mother got a letter from him last week. He wrote that he was being very kindly treated and that all the prisoners had plenty of food and so on, till you would have supposed everything was lovely. But when he signed his name, right in between Roderick and MacCallum, he wrote two Gaelic words that meant 'all lies' and the German censor did not understand Gaelic and thought it was all part of Roddy's name. So he let it pass, never dreaming how he was diddled. Well, I am going to leave the war to Haig for the rest of the day and make a frosting for my chocolate cake. And when it is made I shall put it on the top shelf. The last one I made I left it on the lower shelf and little Kitchener sneaked in and clawed all the icing off and ate it. We had company for tea that night and when I went to get my cake what a sight did I behold!"

"Has that pore orphan's father never been heerd from yet?" asked Cousin Sophia.

"Yes, I had a letter from him in July," said Rilla. "He said that when

he got word of his wife's death and of my taking the baby--Mr. Meredith wrote him, you know--he wrote right away, but as he never got any answer he had begun to think his letter must have been lost."

"It took him two years to begin to think it," said Susan scornfully.

"Some people think very slow. Jim Anderson has not got a scratch, for all he has been two years in the trenches. A fool for luck, as the old proverb says."

"He wrote very nicely about Jims and said he'd like to see him," said Rilla. "So I wrote and told him all about the wee man, and sent him snapshots. Jims will be two years old next week and he is a perfect duck."

"You didn't used to be very fond of babies," said Cousin Sophia.

"I'm not a bit fonder of babies in the abstract than ever I was," said Rilla, frankly. "But I do love Jims, and I'm afraid I wasn't really half as glad as I should have been when Jim Anderson's letter proved that he was safe and sound."

"You wasn't hoping the man would be killed!" cried Cousin Sophia in horrified accents.

"No--no--no! I just hoped he would go on forgetting about Jims, Mrs. Crawford."

"And then your pa would have the expense of raising him," said Cousin Sophia reprovingly. "You young creeturs are terrible thoughtless."

Jims himself ran in at this juncture, so rosy and curly and kissable, that he extorted a qualified compliment even from Cousin Sophia.

"He's a reel healthy-looking child now, though mebbe his colour is a mite too high--sorter consumptive looking, as you might say. I never thought you'd raise him when I saw him the day after you brung him home. I reely did not think it was in you and I told Albert's wife so when I got home. Albert's wife says, says she, 'There's more in Rilla Blythe than you'd think for, Aunt Sophia.' Them was her very words. 'More in Rilla Blythe than you'd think for.' Albert's wife always had a good opinion of you."

Cousin Sophia sighed, as if to imply that Albert's wife stood alone in this against the world. But Cousin Sophia really did not mean that. She was quite fond of Rilla in her own melancholy way; but young creeturs had to be kept down. If they were not kept down society would be demoralized.

"Do you remember your walk home from the light two years ago tonight?" whispered Gertrude Oliver to Rilla, teasingly.

"I should think I do," smiled Rilla; and then her smile grew dreamy and

absent; she was remembering something else--that hour with Kenneth on the sandshore. Where would Ken be tonight? And Jem and Jerry and Walter and all the other boys who had danced and moonlighted on the old Four Winds Point that evening of mirth and laughter--their last joyous unclouded evening. In the filthy trenches of the Somme front, with the roar of the guns and the groans of stricken men for the music of Ned Burr's violin, and the flash of star shells for the silver sparkles on the old blue gulf. Two of them were sleeping under the Flanders poppies--Alec Burr from the Upper Glen, and Clark Manley of Lowbridge. Others were wounded in the hospitals. But so far nothing had touched the manse and the Ingleside boys. They seemed to bear charmed lives. Yet the suspense never grew any easier to bear as the weeks and months of war went by.

"It isn't as if it were some sort of fever to which you might conclude they were immune when they hadn't taken it for two years," sighed Rilla. "The danger is just as great and just as real as it was the first day they went into the trenches. I know this, and it tortures me every day. And yet I can't help hoping that since they've come this far unhurt they'll come through. Oh, Miss Oliver, what would it be like not to wake up in the morning feeling afraid of the news the day would bring? I can't picture such a state of things somehow. And two years ago this morning I woke wondering what delightful gift the new day would give me. These are the two years I thought would be filled with fun."

"Would you exchange them--now--for two years filled with fun?"

"No," said Rilla slowly. "I wouldn't. It's strange--isn't it?--They have been two terrible years--and yet I have a queer feeling of thankfulness for them--as if they had brought me something very precious, with all their pain. I wouldn't want to go back and be the girl I was two years ago, not even if I could. Not that I think I've made any wonderful progress--but I'm not quite the selfish, frivolous little doll I was then. I suppose I had a soul then, Miss Oliver--but I didn't know it. I know it now--and that is worth a great deal--worth all the suffering of the past two years. And still"--Rilla gave a little apologetic laugh, "I don't want to suffer any more--not even for the sake of more soul growth. At the end of two more years I might look back and be thankful for the development they had brought me, too; but I don't want it now."

"We never do," said Miss Oliver. "That is why we are not left to choose our own means and measure of development, I suppose. No matter how much we value what our lessons have brought us we don't want to go on with the bitter schooling. Well, let us hope for the best, as Susan says; things are really going well now and if Rumania lines up, the end may come with a suddenness that will surprise us all."

Rumania did come in--and Susan remarked approvingly that its king and queen were the finest looking royal couple she had seen pictures of. So

the summer passed away. Early in September word came that the Canadians had been shifted to the Somme front and anxiety grew tenser and deeper. For the first time Mrs. Blythe's spirit failed her a little, and as the days of suspense wore on the doctor began to look gravely at her, and veto this or that special effort in Red Cross work.

"Oh, let me work--let me work, Gilbert," she entreated feverishly.

"While I'm working I don't think so much. If I'm idle I imagine everything--rest is only torture for me. My two boys are on the frightful Somme front--and Shirley pores day and night over aviation literature and says nothing. But I see the purpose growing in his eyes. No, I cannot rest--don't ask it of me, Gilbert."

But the doctor was inexorable.

"I can't let you kill yourself, Anne-girl," he said. "When the boys come back I want a mother here to welcome them. Why, you're getting transparent. It won't do--ask Susan there if it will do."

"Oh, if Susan and you are both banded together against me!" said Anne helplessly.

One day the glorious news came that the Canadians had taken Courcellette and Martenpuich, with many prisoners and guns. Susan ran up the flag and said it was plain to be seen that Haig knew what soldiers to pick

for a hard job. The others dared not feel exultant. Who knew what price had been paid?

Rilla woke that morning when the dawn was beginning to break and went to her window to look out, her thick creamy eyelids heavy with sleep. Just at dawn the world looks as it never looks at any other time. The air was cold with dew and the orchard and grove and Rainbow Valley were full of mystery and wonder. Over the eastern hill were golden deeps and silvery-pink shallows. There was no wind, and Rilla heard distinctly a dog howling in a melancholy way down in the direction of the station. Was it Dog Monday? And if it were, why was he howling like that? Rilla shivered; the sound had something boding and grievous in it. She remembered that Miss Oliver said once, when they were coming home in the darkness and heard a dog howl, "When a dog cries like that the Angel of Death is passing." Rilla listened with a curdling fear at her heart. It was Dog Monday--she felt sure of it. Whose dirge was he howling--to whose spirit was he sending that anguished greeting and farewell?

Rilla went back to bed but she could not sleep. All day she watched and waited in a dread of which she did not speak to anyone. She went down to see Dog Monday and the station-master said, "That dog of yours howled from midnight to sunrise something weird. I dunno what got into him. I got up once and went out and hollered at him but he paid no 'tention to me. He was sitting all alone in the moonlight out there at the end of the platform, and every few minutes the poor lonely little

beggar'd lift his nose and howl as if his heart was breaking. He never did it afore--always slept in his kennel real quiet and canny from train to train. But he sure had something on his mind last night."

Dog Monday was lying in his kennel. He wagged his tail and licked Rilla's hand. But he would not touch the food she brought for him.

"I'm afraid he's sick," she said anxiously. She hated to go away and leave him. But no bad news came that day--nor the next--nor the next. Rilla's fear lifted. Dog Monday howled no more and resumed his routine of train meeting and watching. When five days had passed the Ingleside people began to feel that they might be cheerful again. Rilla dashed about the kitchen helping Susan with the breakfast and singing so sweetly and clearly that Cousin Sophia across the road heard her and croaked out to Mrs. Albert,

"'Sing before eating, cry before sleeping,' I've always heard."

But Rilla Blythe shed no tears before the nightfall. When her father, his face grey and drawn and old, came to her that afternoon and told her that Walter had been killed in action at Courcellette she crumpled up in a pitiful little heap of merciful unconsciousness in his arms. Nor did she waken to her pain for many hours.