

## CHAPTER XXXIII

VICTORY!

"A day 'of chilling winds and gloomy skies,'" Rilla quoted one Sunday afternoon--the sixth of October to be exact. It was so cold that they had lighted a fire in the living-room and the merry little flames were doing their best to counteract the outside dourness. "It's more like November than October--November is such an ugly month."

Cousin Sophia was there, having again forgiven Susan, and Mrs. Martin Clow, who was not visiting on Sunday but had dropped in to borrow Susan's cure for rheumatism--that being cheaper than getting one from the doctor. "I'm afeared we're going to have an airly winter," foreboded Cousin Sophia. "The muskrats are building awful big houses round the pond, and that's a sign that never fails. Dear me, how that child has grown!" Cousin Sophia sighed again, as if it were an unhappy circumstance that a child should grow. "When do you expect his father?"

"Next week," said Rilla.

"Well, I hope the stepmother won't abuse the pore child," sighed Cousin Sophia, "but I have my doubts--I have my doubts. Anyhow, he'll be sure to feel the difference between his usage here and what he'll get anywhere else. You've spoiled him so, Rilla, waiting on him hand and foot the way you've always done."

Rilla smiled and pressed her cheek to Jims' curls. She knew sweet-tempered, sunny, little Jims was not spoiled. Nevertheless her heart was anxious behind her smile. She, too, thought much about the new Mrs. Anderson and wondered uneasily what she would be like.

"I can't give Jims up to a woman who won't love him," she thought rebelliously.

"I b'lieve it's going to rain," said Cousin Sophia. "We have had an awful lot of rain this fall already. It's going to make it awful hard for people to get their roots in. It wasn't so in my young days. We gin'rally had beautiful Octobers then. But the seasons is altogether different now from what they used to be." Clear across Cousin Sophia's doleful voice cut the telephone bell. Gertrude Oliver answered it.

"Yes--what? What? Is it true--is it official? Thank you--thank you."

Gertrude turned and faced the room dramatically, her dark eyes flashing, her dark face flushed with feeling. All at once the sun broke through the thick clouds and poured through the big crimson maple outside the window. Its reflected glow enveloped her in a weird immaterial flame. She looked like a priestess performing some mystic, splendid rite.

"Germany and Austria are suing for peace," she said.

Rilla went crazy for a few minutes. She sprang up and danced around the room, clapping her hands, laughing, crying.

"Sit down, child," said Mrs. Clow, who never got excited over anything, and so had missed a tremendous amount of trouble and delight in her journey through life.

"Oh," cried Rilla, "I have walked the floor for hours in despair and anxiety in these past four years. Now let me walk in joy. It was worth living long dreary years for this minute, and it would be worth living them again just to look back to it. Susan, let's run up the flag--and we must phone the news to every one in the Glen."

"Can we have as much sugar as we want to now?" asked Jims eagerly.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten afternoon. As the news spread excited people ran about the village and dashed up to Ingleside. The Merediths came over and stayed to supper and everybody talked and nobody listened. Cousin Sophia tried to protest that Germany and Austria were not to be trusted and it was all part of a plot, but nobody paid the least attention to her.

"This Sunday makes up for that one in March," said Susan.

"I wonder," said Gertrude dreamily, apart to Rilla, "if things won't seem rather flat and insipid when peace really comes. After being fed

for four years on horrors and fears, terrible reverses, amazing victories, won't anything less be tame and uninteresting? How strange--and blessed--and dull it will be not to dread the coming of the mail every day."

"We must dread it for a little while yet, I suppose," said Rilla.

"Peace won't come--can't come--for some weeks yet. And in those weeks dreadful things may happen. My excitement is over. We have won the victory--but oh, what a price we have paid!"

"Not too high a price for freedom," said Gertrude softly. "Do you think it was, Rilla?"

"No," said Rilla, under her breath. She was seeing a little white cross on a battlefield of France. "No--not if those of us who live will show ourselves worthy of it--if we 'keep faith.'"

"We will keep faith," said Gertrude. She rose suddenly. A silence fell around the table, and in the silence Gertrude repeated Walter's famous poem "The Piper." When she finished Mr. Meredith stood up and held up his glass. "Let us drink," he said, "to the silent army--to the boys who followed when the Piper summoned. 'For our tomorrow they gave their today'--theirs is the victory!"