

CHAPTER XVIII

JOURNEY'S END

DARKNESS was beginning to gather slowly and with almost an apologetic air, as if it regretted the painful duty of putting an end to the perfect summer day. Over to the west beyond the trees there still lingered a faint after-glow, and a new moon shone like a silver sickle above the big barn. Sally came out of the house and bowed gravely three times for luck. She stood on the gravel, outside the porch, drinking in the sweet evening scents, and found life good.

The darkness, having shown a certain reluctance at the start, was now buckling down to make a quick and thorough job of it. The sky turned to a uniform dark blue, picked out with quiet stars. The cement of the state road which led to Patchogue, Babylon, and other important centres ceased to be a pale blur and became invisible. Lights appeared in the windows of the houses across the meadows. From the direction of the kennels there came a single sleepy bark, and the small white woolly dog which had scampered out at Sally's heels stopped short and uttered a challenging squeak.

The evening was so still that Ginger's footsteps, as he pounded along the road on his way back from

the village; whither he had gone to buy provisions, evening papers, and wool for the sweater which Sally was knitting, were audible long before he turned in at the gate. Sally could not see him, but she looked in the direction of the sound and once again felt that pleasant, cosy thrill of happiness which had come to her every evening for the last year.

"Ginger," she called.

"What ho!"

The woolly dog, with another important squeak, scuttled down the drive to look into the matter, and was coldly greeted. Ginger, for all his love of dogs, had never been able to bring himself to regard Toto with affection. He had protested when Sally, a month before, finding Mrs. Meecher distraught on account of a dreadful lethargy which had seized her pet, had begged him to offer hospitality and country air to the invalid.

"It's wonderful what you've done for Toto, angel," said Sally, as he came up frigidly eluding that curious animal's leaps of welcome. "He's a different dog."

"Bit of luck for him," said Ginger.

"In all the years I was at Mrs. Meecher's I never knew him move at anything more rapid than a stately walk: Now he runs about all the time."

"The blighter had been overeating from birth," said Ginger sternly. "That was all that was wrong with him. A little judicious dieting put him right. We'll be able," said Ginger, brightening, "to ship him back next week."

"I shall quite miss him."

"I nearly missed him—this morning—with a shoe," said Ginger. "He was up on the kitchen table wolfing the bacon, and I took steps."

"My cave-man!" murmured Sally. "I always said you had a frightfully brutal streak in you. Ginger, what an evening!"

"Good Lord!" said Ginger suddenly, as they walked into the light of the open kitchen door.

"Now what?"

He stopped and eyed her intently.

"Do you know you're looking prettier than you were when I started down to the village!"

Sally gave his arm a little hug.

"Beloved!" she said. "Did you get the chops?"

Ginger froze in his tracks, horrified.

"Oh, my aunt! I clean forgot, them!"

"Oh, Ginger, you are an old chump. Well, you'll have to go in for a little judicious dieting, like Toto."

"I say, I'm most awfully sorry. I got the wool."

"If you think I'm going to eat wool . . ."

"Isn't there anything in the house?"

"Vegetables and fruit."

"Fine! But, of course, if you want chops . . ."

"Not at all. I'm spiritual. Besides, people say that vegetables are good for the blood-pressure or something. Of course you forgot to get the mail, too?"

"Absolutely not! I was on to it like a knife. Two letters from fellows wanting Airedale puppies."

"No! Ginger, we *are* getting on!"

"Pretty bloated," agreed Ginger complacently.

"Pretty bloated. We'll be able to get that two-seater if things go buzzing on like this. There was a letter for you. Here it is."

"It's from Fillmore," said Sally, examining the envelope as they went into the kitchen. "And about

time, too. I haven't had a word from him for months."

She sat down and opened the letter. Ginger, heaving himself on to the table, wriggled into a position of comfort and started to read his evening paper. But after he had skimmed over the sporting page he lowered it and allowed his gaze to rest on Sally's bent head with a feeling of utter contentment.

Although a married man of nearly a year's standing, Ginger was still moving about a magic world in a state of dazed incredulity, unable fully to realize that such bliss could be. Ginger in his time had seen many things that looked good from a distance, but not one that had borne the test of a closer acquaintance—except this business of marriage.

Marriage, with Sally for a partner, seemed to be one of the very few things in the world in which there was no catch. His honest eyes glowed as he watched her.

Sally broke into a little splutter of laughter.

"Ginger, look at this!"

He reached down and took the slip of paper which she held out to him. The following legend met his eye, printed in bold letters:

POPP'S
OUTSTANDING
PORK-PIES
SUCCULENT—APPETIZING—NUTRITIOUS.
(JUST SAY "POP!" A CHILD
CAN DO IT.)

Ginger regarded this cipher with a puzzled frown. "What is it?" he asked.

"It's Fillmore."

"How do you mean?"

Sally gurgled.

"Fillmore and Gladys have started a little restaurant in Pittsburg."

"A restaurant!" There was a shocked note in Ginger's voice. Although he knew that the managerial career of that modern Napoleon, his brother-in-law, had terminated in something of a smash, he had never quite lost his reverence for one whom he considered a bit of a master-mind. That Fillmore Nicholas, the Man of Destiny, should have descended to conducting a restaurant—and a little restaurant at that—struck him as almost indecent.

Sally, on the other hand—for sisters always seem to fail in proper reverence for the greatness of their brothers—was delighted.

"It's the most splendid idea," she said with enthusiasm. "It really does look as if Fillmore was going to amount to something at last. Apparently they started on quite a small scale, just making pork-pies . . ."

"Why Popp?" interrupted Ginger, ventilating a question which was perplexing him deeply.

"Just a trade name, silly. Gladys is a wonderful cook, you know, and she made the pies and Fillmore toddled round selling them. And they did so well that now they've started a regular restaurant, and that's a success, too. Listen to this." Sally gurgled again and turned over the letter. "Where is it? Oh yes! . . . sound financial footing. In fact, our success has been so instantaneous that I have decided to launch out on a really big scale. It is Big Ideas that lead to Big Business. I am contem-

plating a vast extension of this venture of ours, and in a very short time I shall organize branches in New York, Chicago, Detroit, and all the big cities, each in charge of a manager and each offering as a special feature, in addition to the usual restaurant cuisine these Popp's Outstanding Fork-pies of ours. That done, and having established all these branches as going concerns, I shall sail for England and introduce Popp's Pork-pies there . . . Isn't ne a little wonder!"

"Dashed brairy chap. Always said so."

"I must say I was rather uneasy when I read that. I've seen so many of Fillmore's Big Ideas. That's always the way with him. He gets something good and then goes and overdoes it and bursts. However, it's all right now that he's got Gladys to look after him. She has added a postscript. Just four words, but oh! how comforting to a sister's heart. 'Yes, I don't think!' is what she says, and I don't know when I've read anything more cheering. Thank heaven, she's got poor dear Fillmore well in hand."

"Pork-pies!" said Ginger, musingly, as the pangs of a healthy hunger began to assail his interior. "I wish he'd *sent* us one of the outstanding little chaps. I could do with it."

Sally got up and ruffled his red hair.

"Poor old Ginger! I knew you'd never be able to stick it. Come on, it's a lovely night, let's walk to the village and revel at the inn. We're going to be millionaires before we know where we are, so we can afford it."