

***LUCY MAUD  
MONTGOMERY***



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PAT***

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**Lucy Maud Montgomery**

# **Mistress Pat**

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# ***THE FIRST YEAR***

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# 1

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There were hundreds of trees, big and little, on the Silver Bush farm and every tree was a personal friend of Pat's. It was anguish to her when one of them, even some gnarled old spruce in the woods at the back, was cut down. Nobody had ever been able to convince Pat that it was not murder to cut a tree down . . . justifiable homicide perhaps, since there had to be fires and lumber, but homicide nevertheless.

And no tree was ever cut in the grove of white birches behind the house. *That* would have been sacrilege. Occasionally one blew down in an autumn storm and was mourned by Pat until time turned it into a beautiful mossy log with ferns growing thickly all along it.

Everybody at Silver Bush loved the birch grove, though to none of them did it mean what it meant to Pat. For her it *lived*. She not only knew the birches but they knew her: the fern-sweet solitudes, threaded with shadows, knew her: the wind in the boughs always made her a glad salutation. From the first beginnings of memory she had played in it and wandered in it and dreamed in it. She could not remember the time it had not held her imagination in thrall and dominated her life. In childhood it had been peopled by the leprechauns and green folk of Judy Plum's stories: and now that those dear and lovely beliefs had drifted away from her like faint and beckoning wraiths their old magic still haunted the silver bush. It could never be to Pat just the ordinary grove of white-skinned trees and ferny hollows it was to



other people. But then, Pat, so her family always said, was just a little different from other people, too. She had been different when she was a big-eyed child . . . different when she was a brown, skinny little imp in her early teens . . . and still different, now that she was twenty and ought, so Judy Plum felt, to be having beaus.

There *had* been a boy or two in Pat's past but Judy considered them mere experiments. Pat, however, did not seem to want beaus, in spite of Judy's sly hints. All she really wanted, or seemed to want, was to "run" Silver Bush and take care of mother . . . who was a bit of an invalid . . . and see that as few changes as possible came into existence there. If she could have been granted a fairy wish it would be that she might wave a wand and make everything remain exactly the same for at least a hundred years.

She loved her home with a passion. She was deeply loyal to it . . . to its faults as well as its virtues . . . though she would never admit it had any faults. Every small thing about it gave her the keenest joy. If she went away for a visit she was homesick until she could return to it.

"Silver Bush isn't her house . . . it's her religion," Uncle Brian had once said teasingly.

Every room in it meant something . . . had some vital message for her. It had the look that houses wear when they have been loved for years. It was a house where nobody ever seemed to be in a hurry . . . a house from which nobody ever went away without feeling better in some way . . . a house in which there was always laughter. There had been so much laughter at Silver Bush that the very walls

seemed soaked in it. It was a house where you felt welcome the moment you stepped into it. It took you in . . . rested you. The very chairs clamoured to be sat upon, so hospitable was it. And it was overrun by beautiful cats . . . fat, fluffy fellows basking on the window sills or huddles of silk-soft kittens sleeping on the warm sandstone slabs in the old family graveyard beyond the orchard. People came from all over the Island to get a Silver Bush cat. Pat hated to give them away but of course something had to be done, since the kitten crop never failed.

"Tom Baker was here for a kitten to-day," said Judy.

"'What brade is it?' sez he, solemn-like. That fam'ly av Bakers never did be having too much sinse. 'Oh, oh, no brade at all,' sez I. 'Our cats do be just common or garden cats,' sez I. 'But we give them a good home and talk to thim now and thin as inny self-respecting cat likes to be talked to,' sez I, 'wid a bit av a compliment thrown in once in a while. And so they do their bist for us in the matter av kittens as well as all ilse. Sure and I do be forgetting what a rat looks like,' sez I. I was faling a bit unwilling to give him the kitten. They'll trate it well, I'm having no manner av doubt, but they'll niver remimber to pass the time av day wid it."

"Our cats own us anyway," said Cuddles lazily. "Aunt Edith says it's absurd the way we spoil them. She says there are lots of poor Christians don't have the life our cats have and she thinks it awful that we let them sleep at the foot of our beds."

"Oh, oh, see there now, ye've sint Gintleman Tom off mad," said Judy reprovngly. "Cats always do be knowing

what ye're saying av thim. And Gintleman Tom's that sensitive."

Cuddles idly watched Gentleman Tom . . . Judy's lank, black cat who was so old that he had forgotten to die, Sid said . . . stalk indignantly off through the ferns of the path. She and Pat and Judy were spending the hours of the late summer afternoon in the silver bush. They had fallen into the habit of doing their odd jobs there, where bird music occasionally dripped through the leafy silence or a squirrel chattered or wood winds wove their murmurous spells. Pat went there to write her letters and Cuddles studied her lessons. Often mother brought her knitting and sewing. It was a lovely place to work in . . . though Cuddles seldom worked while there. She generally left that to Pat and Judy. The latter was sitting on a mossy log, stoning cherries for preserving and the former was making new apple-green curtains for the dining room. Cuddles, observing that it was a poor place that couldn't support one lady, put her hands on the grass behind her and leaned back on them, looking up at the opal-hued sky between the tree-tops.

"Bold-and-Bad won't leave us," she said. "*He* isn't so touchy."

"Oh, oh, ye cudn't be hurting that cat's falings, by rason that he hasn't got inny," said Judy, with a somewhat scornful glance at the big grey cat sitting on the log by Pat, blinking eyes of pale jade with a black line down their centre at a dog with a sleek, golden-brown back who was happily gnawing a rather malodorous bone behind the log, occasionally pausing to gaze up in Pat's face adoringly and wistfully. Then Pat would stroke his head and pull his pointed

ears, whereat Bold-and-Bad would look more remote than ever. Bold-and-Bad always considered "the dog McGinty," as Judy called him, an interloper. Hilary Gordon had left him with Pat nearly two years ago, when he went away to college in Toronto. At first McGinty had nearly broken his heart but he knew Pat loved him and eventually he perked up a bit and gave Bold-and-Bad as good as he sent. An armed truce existed between them, for Bold-and-Bad had not forgotten what Pat did to him the day he scratched McGinty's nose. McGinty would always have been friends but Bold-and-Bad was simply not having any.

"Oh, oh, what wid all these cherries to be stoned afore supper I do be wishing we had a ghost like they had at Castle McDermott in the ould days," said Judy, with an exaggerated sigh. "That was a ghost now . . . a rale useful, industrious cratur. The odd jobs he'd do ye wudn't be belaving . . . stirring the porridge and peeling the pittaties and scouring the brasses . . . he wasn't above turning his hand to innything. Sorra the day the ould lord lift a bit av money on the kitchen dresser for him, saying the labourer was worthy av his hire. He niver come again . . . his falings having been hurt be the same. Oh, oh, it cost the McDermott the kape av another maid. Ye niver know where ye are whin ye're dealing wid the craturs. Sure and that's the disadvantage av ghosts. Some wud have been offinded if they hadn't been thanked. But a ghost like that wud be rale handy once in a while at Silver Bush, wudn't it now, Cuddles, darlint?"

Luckily Judy did not see Pat and Cuddles exchanging smiles. They had begun to share with each other their

amused delight in Judy's stories, which had replaced the credulity of early childhood. There had been a time when both Pat and Cuddles would have believed implicitly in the industrious McDermott ghost.

"Judy, if that yarn is a gentle hint for me to get busy and help you stone those cherries I'm not going to take it," said Cuddles with a grin. "I hate sewing and preserving. Pat is the domestic type . . . I'm not. When I'm here I just like to squat on the grass and listen to you talking. I've got my blue dress on and cherry juice stains. Besides, I've got pains in my stomach . . . I really have . . . every now and then."

"If ye *will* ate liddle grane apples ye must put up wid pains in yer stomach," said Judy, as remorselessly as cause and effect. "Though whin I was a girleen it wasn't thought rale good manners to talk av yer insides so plain, Cuddles."

"You keep on calling me Cuddles," said Cuddles sulkily. "I've asked you all to stop it and not one of you will. Away from home I'm Rae . . . I like that, but here at Silver Bush everybody 'Cuddles' me. It's so . . . so babyish . . . now that I'm thirteen."

"So it is, Cuddles dear," agreed Judy. "But I'm too old to be larning new names. I'm guessing ye'll always be Cuddles to me. And such a tommyshaw as we had finding a name for ye at that! Do ye be minding, Pat? And how upset ye was bekase I wint hunting in the parsley bed for a new baby the night Cuddles was born? Oh, oh, that was the tarrible night at Silver Bush! We niver thought yer mother wud live through it, Patsy dear. To think it do be thirteen years ago!"

"I remember how big and red the moon was that night, rising over the Hill of the Mist," said Pat dreamily. "Oh, Judy,

did you know that the lightning struck the middle lombardy on the Hill of the Mist last week? It killed it and it has to be cut down. I don't see how I can stand it. I've always loved those three trees so. They've been there ever since I can remember. Now, McGinty, don't do it. I know it's a temptation when his tail hangs down so . . . that's right, Bold-and-Bad, tuck it up. And while I think about it, Bold-and-Bad, you needn't . . . you really needn't . . . bring any more mice to my bedside in the early morning hours, I'll take your word for it that you caught them."

"The yells av him whin he's carrying one upstairs!" said Judy. "It'd break his heart if he cudn't be showing it off to somebody."

"I thought you said a moment ago he hadn't any feelings," giggled Cuddles.

Judy ignored her and turned to Pat.

"Will we be having a cherry pudding to-morrow, Patsy?"

"Yes, I think so. Oh, do you remember how Joe loved cherry puddings?"

"Oh, oh, there's not much I do be forgetting about Joe, Patsy dear. Was it Shanghai his last letter was from? I'm not belaving thim yellow Chinese know innything about making cherry puddings. Or plum puddings ather. We'll have one av thim for Christmas when Joe will be home."

"I wonder if he really will," sighed Pat. "He has never been home for Christmas since he went away. He's always planned to come but something always prevents."

"Trix Binnie says Joe has had his nose tattooed and that's the reason he doesn't come home," said Cuddles. "She says Captain Dave Binnie saw him last year in Buenos Ayres and



didn't know him, he looked so awful. Do you think there's any truth in it?"

"Not if a Binnie do be telling it," said Judy contemptuously. "Don't be worrying, Cuddles."

"Oh, I'm not. I rather hoped it was. It would be so interesting. If he *is* tattooed I'm going to get him to do me when he comes home."

There was simply nothing to be said to this. Judy turned again to Pat.

"He's to be captain by Christmas, didn't he say? Oh, oh, but that b'y has got on! He'll be a year younger than yer Uncle Horace was whin he got his ship. I do be minding the time *he* come home that summer and brought his monkey wid him."

"A monkey?"

"I'm telling ye. The baste took possession. Yer liddle grandmother was nearly out av her wits. And poor ould Jim Appleby . . . he was niver known to be sober . . . just a bit less drunk than common was all ye cud be saying at the bist av times . . . he come down to Silver Bush to buy some pigs and yer Uncle Horace's monkey was skipping along the top av the pig-pen fince quite careless-like. Yer grandfather said ould Jim turned white . . . all but his nose . . . and he sez, sez he, 'I've got 'em! Ma always said I'd git 'em and I have. But I'll niver be touching a drop again.' He kipt his word for two months but he was that cross and cantankerous his family were rale glad whin he forgot about the monkey. Mrs. Jim did be saying she wished Horace Gardiner wud kape his minagerie widin bounds. If Jim comes it's a rale reunion we'll have, Patsy."

"Yes. Winnie and Frank will be over and we'll all be together again. We must plan it all out some of these days. I do love planning things."

"Aunt Edith says it's no use making plans because something always happens to upset them," said Cuddles gloomily.

"Niver ye be belaving it, me jewel. And innyhaw what if they do be upset? Ye've had the fun av planning. Don't be letting yer Aunt Edith make a . . . a . . . what did Siddey be calling it now?"

"A pessimist."

"Oh, oh, doesn't that sound just like her! Innyway, don't be letting her make ye that. Aven if Joe doesn't get home, the darlint, there'll be Winnie and Frank and yer Aunt Hazel's liddle gang, and the turkeys we'll be having for dinner are roosting on the fence behind the church barn this blessed minute growing as hard as they kin. And Pat there is saving up all the resates and menoos in the magazines. Oh, oh, there'll be the great preparations I'm thinking and me fine Edith won't be spiling it wid her sighs and sorrows. She do be having a grudge at life, that one. Patsy, do ye be minding the time ye were dancing naked here by the light av the moon and me lady Edith nabbed ye?"

"Dancing naked? And you won't even let me wear shorts round home," moaned Cuddles.

"And they broke my heart by sending me to Coventry," went on Pat, as if Cuddles had not spoken. "They never knew how cruel they were. And the night you came home, Judy, and I smelt the ham frying!"

"Sure, minny's the good liddle bite we've had in the ould days, Patsy. But there's as minny ahead as behind I'm hoping. And maybe, Miss Cuddles . . . as I shud be after calling Rachel . . . if ye won't be stoning inny cherries will ye be above making some blueberry muffins for supper? Patsy is wanting to finish her hemstitching and Siddy's that fond av thim."

"I'll do that," agreed Cuddles. "I like blueberry things. Oh, and I'm going up to the Bay Shore next week to pick blueberries with Winnie. She says I can sleep out in a tent right down by the shore. I want to sleep out some night here in Silver Bush. We could have a hammock swung between those two big trees there. It would be heavenly. Judy, did Uncle Tom ever have any love affairs when he was young?"

"Oh, oh, the way ye do be jumping from one thing to another!" protested Judy. "No doubt he had his fun girling like the rest av the b'ys. I'm not knowing why it niver turned serious. What put him into yer head?"

"He's asked me to mail a letter for him at Silverbridge three times this summer. He said they were too nosy at the North Glen post office. It was addressed to a lady."

Pat and Judy exchanged knowing glances. Judy repressed her excitement and spoke with careful carelessness.

"Did ye be noticing the name av the lady, Cuddles darlint?"

"Oh, Mrs. Something-or-other," said Cuddles with a yawn. "I forget the name. Uncle Tom looked so red and sheepish when he asked me I just wondered what he was up to."

"Yer Uncle Tom must be close on sixty," reflected Judy. "It do be the time some min take a second silly spell about the

wimmen. But wid Edith to kape him straight he can't go far. Sure and I do be minding how crazy he was to go to the Klondike whin the big gold rush was on . . . nather to hold nor bind. But me lady Edith nipped that in the bud and I'm thinking he's niver ralely forgiven her for it. Oh, oh, we've all had our bits av drames that niver come true. If I cud just have a run over to the Ould Country now and see if Castle McDermott is as grand as it used to be. But it'll niver come to pass."

"'Each mortal has his Carcassonne,'" quoted Pat dreamily, recalling a poem Hilary Gordon had marked for her once.

But Cuddles, always the more practical, said coolly, "And why can't it, Judy? You could take a couple of months off any summer, now that I'm old enough to help Pat. The fare second class wouldn't be too much and you could see all your relatives there and have a gorgeous time."

Judy blinked as if somebody had struck her. "Oh, oh, Cuddles darlint, it sounds rale reasonable whin ye put it that way. It's a wonder I niver thought av it. But I'm not so young as I once was . . . I do be getting a bit ould for gallivanting round."

"You're not too old, Judy. Just you go next summer. All you have to do is to make up your mind."

"Oh, oh, make up yer mind, sez she. That takes a bit av doing, Cuddles dear . . . as well as a bit av thinking av."

"Don't think about it . . . just go," said Cuddles, rolling over on her stomach and pulling McGinty's ears. "If you think too much about it you'll never do it."

"Oh, oh, whin I was thirteen I was be way av being nearly as wise as you are. I've larned foolishness since," said Judy sarcastically. "It's not running off to Ireland I'll be as if it was a jaunt to Silverbridge. And me frinds there have grown ould . . . I doubt if they'd know me, grey as an owl that I am. There do be a new McDermott at the castle, I'm ixpicting, talking rale English. The ould lord had a brogue so thick ye cud stir it."

"It's perfectly thrilling to think you ever lived in a castle, Judy . . . and waited on a lord. It's even more exciting than remembering that mother's fourth cousin married into the English nobility. I wonder if we'll ever see her. Pat, let's you and I go over some day and call on our titled friend."

"I'm afraid she's not even aware of our existence," grinned Pat. "A fourth cousin is pretty far removed and she went to England to live with her aunt when she was a little girl. Mother saw her once, though."

"Oh, oh, that she did," said Judy. "She visited at the Bay Shore whin she was tin and they all come over here one day to play wid the young fry here. They had a day av it. She's a barrownite's wife now . . . Sir Charles Gresham . . . and his aunt do be married to an earl."

"Is he a belted earl?" demanded Cuddles. "A belted earl sounds so much more earlish than an unbelted one."

"Oh, oh, he's iverything an earl shud be. I do be forgetting what he was earl of but it was a rale aristocratic name. It was all in the papers whin yer cousin was married. Lady Gresham wasn't young but she made a good market be waiting. Oh, oh, niver shall I be forgetting the aunts at the Bay Shore whin the news come. They cudn't be inny

prouder than they always were, so they got rale humble. 'It's nothing to us av coorse,' sez yer Great-aunt Frances. 'She's a great leddy now and she wudn't be acknowledging inny kin to common people like us.' Oh, oh, to be hearing Frances Selby calling herself common people!"

"Trix Binnie says she doesn't believe that Lady Gresham is any relation at all to us," said Cuddles, picking up a yellow kitten, with a face like a golden pansy, that came skittering through the ferns, and tucking it under her chin.

"She wudn't! But yer fourth cousin she is and it was her uncle the Bishop they did be blaming for staling the silver at the Bay Shore the night he slipt there."

"Stealing the silver, Judy?" Pat had never heard of this though Judy had been recounting her family legends to her all her life.

"I'm telling ye. Ye know that illigant silver hair-brush and comb in the spare room at the Bay Shore, to say nothing av the liddle looking glass and the two scent bottles. That proud av it they was. They niver did be putting it out for common people but a Bishop was a Bishop and whin he wint up to bed there it was all spread out gorgeous-like on the bury top. Oh, oh, but it wasn't there the nixt morning, though. Yer Great-great-Aunt Hannah was on the hoof thin . . . it was long afore she got bed-rid . . . and she was just about wild. She just set down and wrote and asked the Bishop what he'd done wid it. Back he wrote, 'I am poor but honest. The silver is in the box av blankets. It was too luxurious for a humble praste like meself to use and I was afraid some av me medicine might fall on it.' Oh, oh, the silver was on top av the blankets all right enough and yer



poor Great-great-Aunt was niver the same agin, after as much as accusing the Bishop av staling it. Patsy darlint, spaking av letters, was there innny news in the one ye got from Jingle this morning if a body may ask?"

"A very special bit of news," said Pat. "I saved it to tell you this afternoon when we'd be out here. Hilary sent in the design for a window to some big competition . . . and it won the prize. Against a hundred and sixty competitors."

"It's the cliver lad Jingle is . . . and it'll be the lucky girl that do be getting him."

Pat ignored this. She didn't want Hilary Gordon for anything but a friend but she did not exactly warm to the idea of that "lucky girl" whoever she was.

"Hilary always had a liking for windows. Whenever he saw one that stood out from the ordinary run he went into raptures over it. That little dormer one in old Mary McClenahan's house . . . Judy, do you remember the time you sent us to her to witch McGinty back?"

"And she did, didn't she now?"

"She knew where he was to be found anyhow," Pat sighed. "Judy, life was really more fun when I believed she was a witch."

"I'm telling ye." Judy nodded her clipped grey head mysteriously. "The less ye do be belaving the colder life do be. This bush now . . . it was nicer whin it was packed full av fairies, wasn't it?"

"Yes . . . in a way. But their magic still hangs round it, though the fairies are gone."

"Oh, oh, ye belaved in thim once, that's why. If ye don't belave in fairies they can't exist. That do be why grown folks

can niver be seeing thim," said Judy sagely. "It's pitying the children I am that niver have the chanct to belave in fairies. They'll be the poorer all their lives bekase av it."

"I remember one story you told me . . . of the little girl who was playing in a bush like this and was lured away to fairyland by exquisite music. I used to tiptoe through here in the 'dim' and listen for it. But I don't think I really wanted to hear it . . . I was afraid that if I went to fairyland I'd never come back. And no fairy country could ever satisfy me after Silver Bush."

The look came into Pat's brook-brown eyes which always made people feel she was remembering something very lovely. Pat was not the beauty of the Gardiner family but there was magic in her face when that look came. She rose and folded up her sewing and went down to the house, followed by McGinty. The robins were beginning to whistle and the clouds over the bush were turning to a faint rose. The ferns and long grasses of the path were gold in the light of the westering sun. Away to the right long shadows were creeping over the hill pasture. And down beyond the low fields was the blue mist that was an August sea.

Sid was in the yard trying to make an obstinate calf drink. Cuddles' two pet white ducks were lying by the well. They were to be offered up for Thanksgiving dinner but Judy had not dared to hint this to Cuddles as yet. Father was mowing the early oats. Mother, her nap over, was down in the garden among the velvety Sweet Williams. A squirrel was running saucily over the kitchen roof. It was going to be a dear quiet evening, such as she loved best, with every one and everything at Silver Bush happy. Pat loved to see things

and people happy; and she herself had the gift, than which there is none more enviable, of finding great pleasure in little things. The bats would be coming out at the rising of the moon and the great, green spaciousness of the farm would be all around the house that always seemed to her more a person than a house.

"Pat's just as crazy as ever about Silver Bush, isn't she?" said Cuddles. "I think she'd die if she had to leave it. I don't believe she'll ever get married, Judy, just because of that. I love Silver Bush, too, but I don't want to live here *all* my life. I want to go away . . . and have adventures . . . and see the world."

"Sure and it wudn't do if iverybody wanted to stay at home," agreed Judy. "But Patsy has always had Silver Bush in her heart . . . right at the very core av it. Whin she was no more than five she was asking yer mother one fine day where God was. And yer mother sez gentle-like, 'He is iverywhere, Patsy.' 'Iverywhere?' sez Pat, her eyes that pitiful. 'Hasn't He got inny home? Oh, mother, I'm so sorry for Him.' Did ye iver hear av such a thing as being sorry for God! Well, that was me liddle Pat. Cuddles dear" . . . Judy lowered her voice like a conspirator, although Pat was well out of sight and hearing . . . "Jem Robinson has been hanging round a bit, hasn't he now? He's a rale nice lad and only one year more to go at college. Do ye be thinking Pat has inny notion av him?"

"I'm sure she hasn't, Judy. Though she says the only thing she has against him is that his face needs side-whiskers and he was born a generation too late. I heard her say that to Sid. What did she mean, Judy?"

"The Good Man Above do alone be knowing," groaned Judy. "Sure, Cuddles darling, it's all right to be a bit particular-like. The Silver Bush girls have niver been like the Binnies. 'Olive has a beau for ivery night in the wake,' sez Mrs. Binnie to me onct, boastful-like. 'So she do be for going in for quantity afore quality,' sez I. But what if ye're too particular? I'm asking ye."

"I'm not old enough to have beaus yet," said Cuddles, "but just you wait till I am. It must be thrilling, Judy, to have some one tell you he loves you."

"Ould Tom Drinkwine did be telling me that onct upon a time but niver a thrill did I be faling," said Judy reflectively.

## 2

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"All the months are friends of mine but apple month is the dearest," chanted Pat.

It was October at Silver Bush and she and Cuddles and Judy picked apples in the New Part of the orchard every afternoon . . . which wasn't so very new now, since it was all of twenty years old. But the Old Part was very much older and the apples in it were mostly sweet and fed to the pigs. Sometimes Long Alec Gardiner thought it would be far better to cut it down and get some real good out of the land but Pat couldn't be made to hear reason about it. She loved the Old Part far better than the New. It had been planted by Great-grandfather Gardiner and was shadowy and mysterious, with as many old spruce trees as apple trees in it, and one special corner where generations of beloved cats and kittens had been buried. Besides, as Pat pointed out, if you cleared away the Old Part it would leave the graveyard open to all the world, since the Old Part surrounded it on three sides. This argument had weight with Long Alec. He was proud, in his way, of the old family burial plot, where nobody was ever buried now but where so many greats and grands of every degree slept . . . for the Gardiners of Silver Bush came of old P.E. Island pioneer stock. So the Old Part was spared and in spring it was as beautiful as the New Part, when the gnarled trees were young and bridal again for a brief space in the sweet spring days and the cool spring nights.

It was such a mellow and dreamy afternoon and Silver Bush seemed mellow and dreamy, too. Pat thought the old farm had a mood for every day in the year and every hour in the day. Now it would be gay . . . now melancholy . . . now friendly . . . now austere . . . now grey . . . now golden. To-day it was golden. The Hill of the Mist had wrapped a scarf of blue haze about its brown shoulders and was mysteriously lovely still, in spite of the missing Lombardy. Behind it a great castle of white cloud, with mauve shadows, towered up. There had been a delicate, ghostly rain the night before and the scent of the little hollow in the graveyard, full of frosted ferns, was distilled on the air. How green the pastures were for autumn! The kitchen yard was full of the pale gold of aspens and the turkey house was almost lost in a blaze of crimson sumacs. The white birches which some forgotten bride had planted along the Whispering Lane, that led from Silver Bush to Swallowfield, were amber, and the huge maple over the well was a flame. When Pat paused every few minutes just to look at it she whispered,

"The scarlet of the maples can shake me like a  
cry  
Of bugles going by."

"What might ye be whispering to yersilf, Patsy? Sure and ye might be telling us if it's inny joke. It seems to be delighting ye."

Pat lifted eyebrows like little slender wings.

"It was just a bit of poetry, Judy, and you don't care much for poetry."



"Oh, oh, po'try do be all right in its place but it won't be kaping the apples if there's a hard frost some av these nights. We're a bit behind wid the picking as it is. And more work than iver to look forward to, now that yer dad has bought the ould Adams place for pasture and going into the live stock business."

"But he's going to have a hired man to help him, Judy."

"Oh, oh, and who will be looking after the hired man I'm asking ye. He'll be nading a bite to ate, I'm thinking, and mebbe a bit av washing and minding done. Not that I'm complaining av the work, mind ye. But ye can niver tell about an outsider. It's been minny a long day since we had inny av the brade at Silver Bush and it'll be a bit av a change, as ye say yersilf."

"I don't mind changes that mean things *coming* as much as changes that means things *going*," said Pat, pausing to aim a wormy apple at two kittens who were chasing each other up the tree trunks. "And I'm so glad dad has bought the old Adams place. The little stone bridge Hilary and I built over Jordan and the Haunted Spring will belong to us now . . . and Happiness."

"Oh, oh, to think av buying happiness now!" chuckled Judy. "I wasn't after thinking it cud be done, Patsy."

"Judy, don't you remember that Hilary and I called the little hill by the Haunted Spring Happiness? We used to have such lovely times there."

"Oh, I'm minding. It was just me liddle joke, Patsy dear. Sure and it tickled me ribs to think av inny one being able to buy happiness. Oh, oh, there do be a few things God kapes

to Himsilf and that do be one av thim. Though I did be knowing a man in ould Ireland that tried to buy off Death."

"He couldn't do that, Judy," sighed Pat, recalling with a shiver the dark day when Bets, the lovely and beloved friend of her childhood, had died and left a blank in her life that had never been filled.

"But he *did*. And thin, whin he wanted death and prayed for him Death wudn't come. 'No, no,' sez Death, 'a bargain is a bargain.' But this hired man now . . . where is he going to slape? That's been bothering me a bit. Wud yer dad be wanting me to give up me snug kitchen chamber for him and moving somewhere up the front stairs?"

Judy couldn't keep the anxiety out of her voice. Pat shook her slim brown hands, that talked quite as eloquently as her lips, at Judy reassuringly.

"No, indeed, Judy. Dad knows that kitchen chamber is your kingdom. He's going to fit up that nice little loft over the granary for him. Put a stove and a bed and a bit of furniture in it and it will be very comfortable. He can spend his evenings there when he's home, don't you think? What's been worrying *me*, Judy, was that he might want to hang around the kitchen and spoil our jolly evenings."

"Oh, oh, we'll manage." Judy was suddenly in good cheer. She would have surrendered her kitchen chamber without a word of protest had Long Alec so decreed but the thought had lain heavy on her heart. She had slept so cosily in that chamber for over forty years. "All I'm hoping is that yer dad won't be hiring Sim Ledbury. He's been after the place I hear."

"Oh, surely dad wouldn't want a Ledbury round," said Cuddles.

"Ye can't pick and choose, Cuddles dear. That do be the trouble. Hired hilp is be way av being scarce and yer dad must be having a man that understands cows. Sim do be thinking he does. But a Ledbury wid the freedom av me kitchen will be a hard pill to swallow and him wid a face like a tombstone and born hating cats. Gintleman Tom took just the one look at him the day he was here and thin made himsilf scarce. If we can be getting a man who'll be good company for the cats ye'll niver hear a word av complaint from me about him, as long as he's willing to do a bit av work for his wages. Yer dad has got his name up for niver being put out at innynthing so he cud be imposed upon something shameful. But we'll all be seeing what we'll see and now we've finished wid this tree I'm going in to bake me damsons."

"I'm going to stay out till the sunshine fails me. I think, Judy, when I grow *very* old I'll just sit and bask in the sunshine all the time . . . I love it so. Cuddles, what about a run back to the Secret Field before sunset?"

Cuddles shook a golden-brown head.

"I'd love to go but you know I twisted my foot this morning and it hurts me yet. I'm going over to sit on Weeping Willy's slab in the graveyard for a while and just dream. I feel shimmery to-day . . . as if I was made of sunbeams."

When Cuddles said things like that Pat had a vague feeling that Cuddles was clever and ought to be educated if it could be managed. But it had to be admitted that so far

Cuddles seemed to share the family indifference to education. She went in unashamedly for "a good time" and pounced on life like a cat on a mouse.

Pat slipped away for one of her dear pilgrimages to the Secret Field . . . that little tree-encircled spot at the very back of the farm, which she and Sid had discovered so long ago and which she, at least, had loved ever since. Almost every Sunday evening, when they walked over the farm, talking and planning . . . for Sid was developing into an enthusiastic farmer . . . they ended up with the Secret Field, which was always in grass and always bore a wonderful crop of wild strawberries. Sid had promised her he would never plough it up. It was really too small to be worthwhile cultivating anyhow. And if it were ploughed up there might never be any more of Judy's famous wild strawberry shortcakes or those still more delicious things Pat made and which she called strawberry cream pies.

It was nice to go there with Sid but it was even nicer to go alone. There was nothing then to come between her and the silent, rapt communion she seemed to hold with it. It was the loneliest and loveliest spot on the farm. Its very silence was friendly and seemed to come out of the woods around it like a real presence. No wind ever blew there and rain and snow fell lightly. In summer it was a pool of sunlight, in winter a pool of frost . . . now in autumn a pool of colour. Musky, spicy shadows seemed to hover around its grey old fences. Pat always felt that the field knew it was beautiful and was happy in its knowledge. She lingered in it until the sun set and then went slowly back home, savouring every moment of the gathering dusk. What a lovely phrase