

(continued from previous page)

gathering honey, but the bees flew to and fro in steady lines from the paddocks to the hives and back again, and their humming mingled with the sighing of the winds in the pines, the creaking of boughs, the rustle of grasses. Crickets and grasshoppers chirped and trilled on the Road, thrushes sang, rabbits sat in the feathery grass on the edges of the track, nibbled, brushed their whiskers with busy paws, listened with ears alert, and hopped, bob-tail-flick, into the bushes.

The Road was a lovely place. No one scarcely ever visited it, cattle never used it. It was a blind alley along the top of the hills, ending in a ditch in the swamp. It was undisturbed and secret. It was Ray's place.

When first they came to the farm, Ray, exploring, had found the Road on the back boundary. She had sought out a particular pine tree by the fence to be her very own—a young, pointed pine, with evenly spaced branches and not too high a reach from the ground, a pine that, except for a difficult space near the top, where you had to stretch up and cling to two boughs while you wriggled your legs and behind up the trunk, was fairly easy to climb. Ray would perch right near the top where the branches came out, red-brown, goose-fleshed, pliant, in even spokes round the trunk, where the wind swayed the tree like a mast of a ship, where bees hummed past, and softly sharp needles brushed your face and arms and legs, where you could see the Lake through the plantation, and all the farm behind you.

That was the Pine Tree. And in the plantation was the wattle.

It was a real hiding place, a real retreat. You had to force through the bracken six to eight feet high, and carefully hide the track you had made behind you. You had to clamber through the fence, and pick the blackberry climbers from your hair. Then you were in the Glade, with pines all around, a soft, deep carpet of brown needles, tall, exotic, scarlet-topped toadstools under the pines, and the wattle in the middle. In the spring the wattle tossed gold—rich, but-tery gold—and the tiny white-eyes flicked to and fro, sipping honey, and seeming no bigger than a shilling. No one could possibly find the Glade. Anyone chancing along the Road might see you up the Pine—but no one could know about the Glade. You couldn't see the Glade from the track, and the plantation fell away in a steep, wild slope on the other side. This was the retreat of retreats, the place to come to when you were too miserable or lonely to feel you could bear it any longer, or when you were so happy, or so at peace, it was just bursting your heart with beauty. The Road was the holy place.

ARTHUR helped her through the fence, and they sat in the yellow, feathered grasses near the entrance to the Glade. Arthur knew Ray's places. She had shown him the other time he had been out. But they didn't feel like climbing the pine this evening, nor like the solitude of the Glade. So they just sat by the track and were silent.

The sun was very low now, and the road was nearly all in shadow, except where long strips of sunlight cut through the trees. It was in one of these that

they sat. The grasshoppers clicked gently as they jumped away into the black-berries. It was very still.

Arthur sat close to Ray. Her heart shivered and jumped. His was thudding against her side through his thin shirt. Feeling united them, potent and silent, yet seeming to thunder. Each knew, as clearly as if told aloud, the tumult in the other. Arthur's arm came round her shoulders, and his fingers gripped her tightly. As she turned her face towards him their eyes met, brown to brown, and held, hypnotised. Then he bent his head, his lips softly pressing on her closed ones.

She felt his hard thin little chest press against her side, and the fluttering of his heart.

Then it was over. And it would never be again, because after the first time, no matter how sweet it was, it could never be quite as wonderful, because for each of them, it was the first love, and the first kiss.

\* \* \*

THEY sat there quietly, hand in hand, while the sunlight came more softly and goldily and the shadows longer and cooler.

Then they wandered slowly back to the farmhouse, round the bottom of the hill paddocks, by the swamp, on the shadowed eastern side of the farm. The trance and magic still held them, the beauty and the wonder of it. Oh God, sang their hearts, how lovely it all is, how lovely, lovely, lovely.

"I'll see you to-morrow at school," said Arthur at the gate. "Gee, Ray, you're corker. I don't like any other girl but you. I mean that, Ray. I've never felt like this about a girl before."

"Oh Arthur—"

\* \* \*

INSIDE, her mother clattered impatiently in the kitchen. She eyed her child suspiciously as she came in, flushed and eager and rapt.

"Where've you been all this time? Where's Arthur?"

"He's gone home."

"Why didn't he come and say good-bye and thank you? He's got no manners. Your father and I both say that. Why can't you pick a nicer boy for a friend? And where've you been all this time out in the paddocks? Eh? What've you been up to?"

"We haven't been up to anything. We've been shooting."

"Well, it's too late for you to be out, just the two of you away out there like that. I don't like it. I don't know what you want to stay out like that for. Set the table now. The men'll be in soon."

Sullenly the child put out the plates, forks, spoons, dishes. She longed to clatter them about, to slam the cupboard door—but she daren't. Hate surged in her and beat and beat to be free, while she tried to stifle it. The bright bird that had been in her heart sank dead. Dread of the suspicion, and humiliation at the horrible, unknown things suggested in her mother's tone and questions wrecked her joy, and crushed her spirit. She felt she had done a shameful thing, that they would all scorn her if they knew. That it was terrible, terrible, and she must never never let anyone know.

But it did not occur to her not to do it again.



## Refreshing CHARM



The delicate flower fragrance of Cashmere Bouquet stays with you day-long after your bath. Its creamy, gentle lather keeps your skin soft, flawlessly clear. Adopt Cashmere Bouquet as your personal every-day soap.

Listen-in every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 2 p.m. to The Cashmere Bouquet Radio Programme "Editor's Daughter"—all ZB Stations.

215

## Cashmere Bouquet

THE ARISTOCRAT OF FINE TOILET SOAPS

COLGATE-PALMOLIVE LTD. PETONE.

For your  
post-war  
Shopping List

## CROSSE & BLACKWELL'S

Famous Food Products,  
Condiments & Delicacies

Unexcelled since 1706

