

# The Cyclone by Rose L. Ellerbe

## How Lon Baxter, Pioneer, Confronted the Fate of Lovers Who Wait Too Long.

THE sun, dwarfed to a hard red ball, in a blue sky behind the level, sharp-cut line where sky and prairie stopped. Grain fields lay spread out, a dark, flat monotone under a sheet of cold, gray cloud. Close reed poplars shivered sibilantly in a chill breeze. Yet the boy and girl, merged into one dim blot on the steps of the shallow porch, in front of a big, square, mud tinted house, were caught into a romance world as soft and warm and entrancingly beautiful as love ever finds.

But, presently, Lon Baxter broke its spell. "I can't ask you to marry me, yet, Edna—not until I have a home ready. If you will wait—?"

"Oh, Lon," Edna came back to Grindon, Ia., with protest in her luminous face. "Why should we wait for that? Why should I do my share in making the home?"

"Because I will never let my wife go through what my mother did. I can never get away from that—"

The boy's face, already shadowed by pain-breeding experience, set in hard lines. "I can't live under the same roof with the little bedroom off the kitchen like an oven—she'd cooked for thrashers all day—and her gasping and fighting for breath! And my father bending over, twisting his hands and moaning, 'It's the cursed mortgage that's killed her!'"

Biting tears stood in the boy's eyes. Not even the clasp of Edna's tender hands, the brush of her fresh cheek, could take the sting from that memory. The rasping chant of frogs filled their ears; moonless dark wrapped them close; for the first time, Lon's brooding passion found speech:

"I hated that mortgage as if it was a living thing! I wanted to tear it to tatters like a cat does a mouse. I hated my father, too. He always worked like a horse—you know, Edna—and he expected me and my mother—sometimes I felt that he was downright cruel."

The wisdom of womanhood was strong in Edna, though she was but 15. She knew words would draw out buried bitterness. Gently she led him on to speak.

"Only the year after ma died he came home one night and showed us children a long, dirty paper, covered with figures and numbers and words. He said, 'This is the mortgage. The last cent was paid. He lifted the stove lid and dropped it on to the coals and we all stood by and watched it burn. Then he almost whispered, 'I wish mother could see that! I wish she was in town. I tell you, I'd never mortgage anything of mine—I'd die first. And the old man sat down and spoke quiet—almost as if he was apologizing to me—said he borrowed money first when ma was sick and had to have a doctor, and medicine, and nourishing food. Then the grasshoppers come three years runnin', and he had to borrow to keep us all from starv'ng and freezing, and after that, little Emmy died and that meant another loan. I could see he was never going to do anything else for me to do. I hadn't ought to have blamed him so—and I did feel different after that—but—"

His voice was hard with determination. "But I made up my mind right then that I'd never let myself be trapped that way. I'd never have a wife and children until I was fixed so I'd never need to borrow—or mortgage—"

With the sweet, clear sense that was hers Edna spoke:

"Yes, but that can't be you know. Things happen, good and bad, and married folks just have to take the chances together."

"A man ought to have his farm clear and a comfortable house before he asks a woman to begin to take chances," Lon, boy sure, pronounced.

"That will take a long time—years, perhaps," Edna's voice had lost some of its joy trill.

"No, I am young and strong, and I can work. God, how I'll work for you, Edna!"

"I know. I understand how you feel," she admitted. "But, shyly, 'I am young and strong, too, Lon. And I am not afraid of work, either—with you."

His arms tight about her, hope and gladness pulsing high in the swift rebound of youth, he told her confidently:

"There'll be work enough for you when I have the farm and the house ready—that won't be long."

Brave words—easily said.

But how were those words to be made good? That was the question which young Baxter wrestled all through the rushing days of harvesting and threshing the crops of Edna's father—he was only a hired man on the Goodrich place. How was he to secure a farm of his own? How was he to prepare a home fit for Edna Goodrich—he, with only his two hands and the great urge of love in his heart? The problem was in his mind when he dropped into the deep sleep, compelled by long days of hard work, and it was with him when he tumbled into his clothes in the pale light of early dawn. In their snatches of talk at noontime and after the chores were done he and Edna discussed it.

They knew well that "ol' man Goodrich," who was popularly called "the richest, the nicest, and the meanest man in four counties," would never give his consent to Lon as a son-in-law. As children in the little white schoolhouse on the corner of "4," Lon and Edna had spelled one another down and figured the same sums on their scratched slates. As a boy and girl, Lon had seen Edna home from evening services, escorted her to the skating rink and church socials. Only the girl's own tact, with friendly condescension on the part of "ma Goodrich," had kept "na" from discovering what every one else knew—that "Lon Baxter was goin' with Edna Goodrich."

It was in sheer bravado that the boy had offered his services to Goodrich. His own father, to the amazement



"It's gone over." His voice was wavery. "It's gone toward home!" she questioned anxiously.

of his son, his neighbors, and very possibly, of himself, had suddenly married the "Widow Graves," who came in occasionally to "re-up" and do the family mending. Lon, though he saw that his father and the younger children were sorely in need of a woman's hand, resented the presence of the new wife as a desecration of his mother's memory. With a taciturn understanding, Sam Baxter spoke:

"Ye worked well for me, Lon, in the days when I needed help the most. Ye shall have your time from now on—an' this'll give ye a start," he put a hundred dollars into the boy's hands. "Don't throw it away!"

Lon had worked his way through high school—Edna was attending it, too. Then he had hunted a job. The unsuspecting Goodrich, blind through selfishness, thinking only of the sturdy brawn of the lad who had done a man's work since his tenth year, hired the young man at once. Twenty-five dollars a month seemed, at first, a fortune to Lon, who had worked so many years at home for his "keeps." Yet it was such a joy to live under the same roof with Edna that he would gladly have labored for that alone—had the "ol' man" but known it. And now, before the summer had fairly begun, Lon had spoken his love and Edna confessed hers.

"We won't say anything to any one but mother," Edna decided. "Of course, pa'll object."

"Yes, I s'pose he will," Lon agreed. "But he'll have to give in, when he sees that I am going to give you a good home and living."

Still, as the months slipped by, Lon began to realize that it would take years as a hired man to save money enough to buy a good farm in their own neighborhood. "And I won't buy on time—that would mean a mortgage," he declared. "And renting is just putting money in the other fellow's pockets," he finished with a sober face.

"Yes," Edna answered. "Still, if crops were good, we'd save something, too, wouldn't we?"

"I tell you, Edna," Lon spoke with sudden decision. "I've about made up my mind that I'll have to go to a new country—where's good government, land, yet, in Dakotas and Nebraska—I'll just have to do what our fathers did, strike out and pioneer."

"And I'll go along—"

"Our mothers pioneered, too," she reminded him, thinking of her own strong, brave-spirited mother.

His face darkened. "Yes, they did. And it killed my mother. No, Edna, you must stay here and wait until I see a good start."

All through the long winter months they studied the possibilities and made plans. Lon was buoyantly confident now. He would locate a good homestead—a crop, or at most two crops, would build the house—then—And Edna, with wistful eyes, listened and suggested, and gave him the encouragement of her love and faith.

One Sunday afternoon, when he found his father alone, feet upon the stove-hearth, paper and pipe finished, Lon—with a yearning for the sympathy of his own—haltingly flung out his purpose and its reason.

The response was a surprise—a revelation, indeed. "So ye've picked ol' man Goodrich for a father-in-law?" Sam Baxter chuckled under his tongue. "Well, ye must think a heap 'o' the girl! But, ye're right. Ye'll have to go out to Dakoty an' take your turn at pioneerin' in a new country. There'll be hardships—but there's advantages, too. I can't do what I'd like for ye, Lonnie," his rough voice softened. "But the roan colts is yours, ye know, an' they ain't a finer span in the country—"

Lon's chair dropped to four feet. He had thought his father had forgotten a promise made long ago to his mother.

"Then, there's the Toledo wagon—'taint new, but it's in good condition. When your year is up, come home, Lon, and ye shan't start out empty-handed."

"I should say not," the youth exclaimed. "And when I sell my pigs, I'll have nigh \$400 cash, too. I ought to make it all right!"

"Yes," the older man assented. "Ye'll have a fair start, an' ye've got a head on your shoulders. With the help of a good girl like Edna, ye'll make it all right—if the hand 'o' God don't fall on ye, like it done on us in 'nupper times."

In the fullness of untried courage the youngster asserted:

"I'll not take Edna's help until I have a good house ready for her—and I'll be ready for the 'hoppers,' too."

"Ye don't know much about wimmen, then—an'—ye can't forestall natur', my boy," his father commented dryly.

But Lon was still certain of his own wisdom and ready to defy nature herself.

When Goodrich, as spring approached, proposed a renewal of their

contract for another year, Lon told him:

"I have decided to go out to Dakoty, Mr. Goodrich, and locate a homestead."

"Ye have? Well, that may be a good move," grudgingly, "for a young fellow like you. Still there's lots 'o' chances in farming, ye know. Ye'd probably have more money at the end o' the year stayin' right here at good wages and found. I'll hire ye, if ye want to stay—ye ain't so dum triflin' as most o' the help nowadays."

Lon's tanned face reddened with pleasure. Even this acknowledgment from "ol' man Goodrich" was encouraging. "On the strength of it he ventured:

"And, Mr. Goodrich, when I've got my land and a comfortable house on it I am coming back for Edna."

"Like hell ye are!" The father's anger to his feet in a rage. "So—that's it! That's the foolishness that's been going on right under my nose! Put it right out o' your heads. I tell ye—Do you think I'll let my girl go out to Dakoty to live in a sod hut and wash overalls? What do ye reckon I paid her school and murr bills for? She will stay right here with her parents until she marries a man that can give her a good livin' in a civilized country!"

"I'm not asking her to marry me until I can give her a good living," Lon spoke proudly.

"Ye'll both be gray headed before that time!"

"Pa'll never consent," Ma Goodrich said when Lon reported this interview. "Not that he has a thing agains ye, Lonny, except that ye're poor. But as fer me," with a consoling smile, "I never knew a finer woman than your mother was—an' you are like her in ways—'f ye are a boy."

When the time for the parting came it was harder than Lon had counted on. Now, at the last, he had to argue against his own heart, as well as Edna's wistful eyes and unspoken plea.

"I couldn't bear to see you working too hard and, maybe breaking down," he told her as he took her into the last embrace. "You know it's because I love you so much, Edna, that I can't—"

"Yes. But it seems wrong to me," she protested. "I'm ready—I want to help you get started, Lon. Our parents and our grandparents started out in life together, with nothing. Ye'll have to go out to Dakoty an' take your turn at pioneerin' in a new country. There'll be hardships—but there's advantages, too. I can't do what I'd like for ye, Lonnie," his rough voice softened. "But the roan colts is yours, ye know, an' they ain't a finer span in the country—"

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laden windows dimmed daylight to thick fog.

"It's come," Lon thought as he started a fire in his little cookstove. "I did hope it would hold off until I got to town again—I'm short on provisions and coal, too."

He had seen blizzards back home, but he had never before been alone in one. Now, as his dugout walls trembled and the wind howling of the wind encompassed him, he was homesick and lonely.

"Sounds like all the wind in the world was trying to bust in that door," he muttered as he swallowed his coffee and assured himself that it could not last long.

For three days he huddled over the stove and listened and waited, while the storm raged on with no signs of a let-up. To the lonesome, heart-sick boy it seemed as though all the furies of hell had been turned loose upon that defenseless little sod hut. Over and over again he assured himself that he was glad Edna was not here—that he would not have her pass through such an experience. And still, a long winter of storms here alone—how was he to stick it out?

On the fourth morning when he opened his door he looked upward to depth upon a depth of blue stillness; he looked outward over billows of frost-crested snow, blinding in its glittering brilliance; and then he turned and saw a thread of smoke rising above the nearest cabin, two miles away, and his heart thrilled to the feel of the philosophic good cheer of the storm, "with the covers over my head to keep out the roaring. Daniel, sitting in a nice warm den, with a few lions around, wasn't a circumstance to a Dakoty blizzard!" she announced.

When the men had excavated the track Molly joined them. The air was still sharp and the snowdrifts treacherous; yet the three turned the hay hauling into a frolic that Lon wished Edna might have shared. As he looked about at the homelike comfort Molly had created in the rough floored, mud walled room and remembered the awful loneliness of his own shack, resolution wavered. Another year of waiting alone seemed unbearable; perhaps his father and Edna were right, after all.

There were no more such fierce ordeals but Lon spent many days shut in by cold and storm, thinking, as he twisted prairie hay into knots that burned fiercely—while they lasted—many thoughts. He knew that Edna would come to him if he but spoke the word. She, too, could make a home out of a dugout; she was better fitted for frontier life than Molly Prosser. Yet—visions of his mother's folded, toil-worn hands and recollections of her father's whiplash tongue mingled and jarred in his mind. And the terror of debt obsessed him. He needed nearly 100 acres of ground. He and his team were alike hollow ribbed and jaded. With exultant anticipation he watched his corn and wheat push through the soil and begin to count the returns they would bring. Once more he figured the cost of lumber, then sent the plans he had drawn to Edna, writing, "I'll come for you by next Christmas—be ready."

But as the season advanced cold, dry winds retarded growth; then, shrieking of the wind drowned his senses; swirling snow and frost-

that building a house this year was out of the question. After he had paid for necessary implements and provisions and bought a cow and brood sow there was nothing left—even a trip home was not to be thought of.

Edna's disappointment when she learned that he would not be at home for Christmas tempted young Baxter, for the first time, to consider asking for a loan. He was half way to the railroad station, 20 miles away, with the letter to his father, before he tore it up and turned back, telling himself sharply:

"I won't begin borrowing, even with pa—first thing I know I'll be asking ol' man Goodrich to help me out—or mortgage my team."

And he hugged the belief that he was suffering in a righteous cause, in spite of Edna's wounded plea: "I believe I'd sooner give you the money, if you won't borrow it, rather than not to have you come home at all."

His Christmas box and the Prosser's turkey did not wipe out his keen sense of failure over the year's results. Yet the sturdy, boyish spirit could not be long depressed. Soon, sure that the coming year would bring better luck, Lon was making plans for tilling all his acreage except the stoupe at home, in a good fortune came through Saul Prewitt, an old neighbor, who was now the chief merchant and stock buyer at the railway station. He offered transportation to Chicago, with a few days' stopover at home, in return for piloting a carload of hogs to the stockyards. Lon jumped at this chance.

He had never before seen a large city—but no sights could hold him when his business was ended. He crawled impatiently until the train crawled into the station names more familiar. Two stops from Grindon the banker's wife from home—he had known her all his life—entered the car. As he started to speak to her he caught sight of his bare, chapped wrists. He was wearing the same suit of clothes he had worn away from Grindon, now shabby and outgrown. A glance told him his hat still bore marks of his freight car journey; his overcoat was soiled and frayed. He sat hunched in his seat, pulling at his coat sleeves, awkward, miserable. Edna might well be ashamed of him! She was meeting well dressed men—men who could give her comforts and pleasures; while he, after two years, was coming back to her with nothing but unfulfilled promises. Panic stricken, he was the last to leave the car when the train pulled into his station.

As he came slowly down the steps, he vaguely saw familiar faces. Then, Edna was in front of him, her arms were about his neck, her lips on his. Doubt and misery were spanged out in a great, throbbing heartbeat as he gathered her close.

When he let her go, his father gripped his hand: "A welcome like that is with comin' home to, eh, son?" "You bet your sweet life!" It was the spontaneous outburst of a full heart. Edna laughed in sheer joy at the words.

Later, as she dabbed at the lines above his eyes, she said tenderly, "You're growing old too fast, Lon. You work too hard. It isn't fair—I ought to be out there, looking after you. Let me go back with you."

"If only I could—if I dared," he groaned, looking at her with hungry longing. She was round and supple, his Edna, with flashing lights in her eyes and flushing color in her face. Yet there was a suggestion of fragility about her that reminded him of his mother. He shook his head. "No, Edna, I can't take you out there to that dug-out."

"You don't think I am as brave as Molly Prosser and Annie Lane?"

He had written her of Molly's gay expeditions and of Nick Lane's bride—who had brought her piano with her. It so filled their single room that Nick swore he slept doubled up, and Annie boasted that she could sit on the stool and play "Little Buttercup" and fry potatoes at the same time.

"I know you'd stand fire better than any of 'em," he cried. "It's me that's the coward! You see, you see how it might end—and they don't, yet."

"Oh, she broke out, "If only my father were like other men! He could just as well give us the money to build a house now, as let it all wait until the next year. He could say, 'Yes. But I'd rather build my own house. I don't want to give him any show for thinking I'm marrying you for his money! And if things go right this year, I'll be ready to come over again by New Year's,' he promised once again."

At home, Sam Baxter led the way to the little cubicle off the kitchen and opened the old black trunk where the family treasures had always been kept. Lon watched him lift out a dress and a shawl his mother had worn, and take out some heavy sheets.

"Give these to Edna," his father said, "and tell her your ma gave 'em with her own hands—and this," he took a small, worn, leather-bound book, his earliest recollections. Then he took up a daguerreotype and opened its embossed case. The two men looked together at the clean-cut, girlish face with smooth bands of hair laid over her brows.

"Ye're the eldest, son," Baxter said in a hushed voice. "Sometime this'll come to ye—but I can't spare it, yet."

With new comprehension, the son laid his hand upon his father's shoulder. "I guess mother'd be glad if she knew I was going to marry Edna."

"Yes," the older man agreed, as he shut the trunk. "Edna's a fine woman, in spite of her relationship to the old man." Then, clutching his son's arm, he spoke out: "What are ye waitin' so long fer, Lon? Why'd ye take her back with ye now? Is she afraid o' bein' a poor man's wife?"

"It's me that's afraid—not her," Lon acknowledged. "She was ready to go with me, and she's ready now. But, I ain't ready for her, yet."

"Mebbe ye're right—mebbe ye won't have so much to regret—"

Baxter's voice was unsteady. "But—it's a mighty hard thing to know when we're ready to go."

"I don't guess I'll have any trouble telling when I'm ready," Lon stated fervently, still blind to the wisdom of age. "Only—I'm not going into debt for it."

As though Edna, once more putting reserve aside, urged, pleaded even, that she was ready to go back with him, he refused to listen and left her with a renewed promise.

"I'll have the house done and ready for you by New Year's."

Another year came and Sam and Lon, with high hopes in his heart, again walked step by step, hour after hour, day succeeding day, week in and week out, over his fields, ploughing, harrowing, seeding—going through all the usual motions of a farmer, with blind faith in forces beyond human control, that makes up the gigantic game called farming.

Again he saw the gentle mist of green creeping over black loam; the delicate curling fingers of corn reached upward; the ethereal hues of flax blossoms, bending and blending in the breeze. And later on he saw the sun rise higher and higher, shining each day with a pitiless heat that melted the snow, and ploughed going while the parched soil burned his soles and clouds of dust choked his lungs. But the dry winds and the blazing grain, the half-grown corn blades wilted and the flax stalks became dry, straw.

Lon watched it all, at times with a heavy, dead feeling of despair and again in a blaze of resentment. "It's tough," he cried out to Jim Prosser, "it's damned tough—after all the rest of the year's work—water without end—you know how it nearly got away with me before I could get the curb in. If I—"

"Yes," Prosser nodded, "that's it. We must have irrigation in this country. There is plenty of water underground—wells to get it on top where we can use it when we need it. But you can't do anything this year. We'll just have to lose this crop."

"I wonder—"

Lon began. With a sudden desperate hope he set himself to rigging up a crude pump and opening up furrows. Then he began pumping water by hand on to his cornfield. The greedy sun and thirsty soil snatched up the little streams almost before they reached the field. After pumping steadily for two days he went now through wet furrows and decided: "I'll pump at night—the sun won't eat it up so fast then."

"It's no use, Lon," Prosser objected. "You can't beat the drought this year. But we'll go at the thing right away and be ready for next year."

"I can't wait, man," Lon burst out. "I've got to have a crop, or at least part of a crop, this year!"

Despite the protests of his friends he started in to pump at sunset. Hour after hour he worked, the pump moving the pump handle up and down with dogged persistence from which all spring of youth and faith had been drained. He kept on pumping until it seemed as though his very heart would be torn out by the strain. Prosser, Lane and other neighbors came to watch, to offer to spell him, to admonish and to ridicule; but Lon kept on pumping, first with one hand, then with the other, until at moonset he crept away with bleeding hands and aching muscles for a few hours of exhausted sleep.

He succeeded in saving a portion of his corn before he sank down one night, unknowing, uncaring. The cool morning air brought him to consciousness of aching pains and burning heat. He managed to crawl into the house and to bed. There Prosser found him tossing with fever. For three weeks he lay helpless with a low fever that left him weak and despondent. But through it all he would not permit the Prossers to write to his father or Edna. Molly rebelliously asserted that she would take the responsibility on her own shoulders and write Edna a long letter. But her husband refused to mail it without Lon's consent.

"But he's too sick to know what is right," Molly scolded. "He's weak as a baby in mind as well as in body." "Forget it!" Jim scoffed. "Lon Baxter may be as wobbly as a kitten on his legs, but his head's all right. He knows what's what—talks irrigation plant all the time."

And still no rain came. Lon was

up and about. As he saw months of hard labor—for man and for beast—turned into useless wisps of straw and all his carefully matured plans changed into idle dreams, the subtle hardening of character and softening of judgment that turns the boy into the man went on within him.

It was the man who sat down one Sunday afternoon before the rough board table of his shack and wrote:

"I made a big mistake when I picked out my homestead. It seems there is liable to be one dry year out of three in this section of the country. I'll have to put in a windmill and an irrigation plant before I can build the home I can't ask you to wait any longer, Edna. I s'pose your father was right—I hadn't ought to have asked you to marry me. And you ought to have said 'No' first off. So, dear girl, you are free. Try to forget me, and forgive me for being so much out of your life—you know how it has been with me—"

He sent the letter and, as he picked his stunted corn he brooded despairingly over his failure. When Prosser asked:

"Here, old man! Your girl hasn't forgotten you—it's a fat one!" he took the envelope in a hand that shook.

Alone he read: "Unless you made a mistake in picking me out, too, Lon, we will keep on waiting together—if you insist on waiting."

In spite of her loyalty he looked ahead that dismal winter with determination rather than the confidence that had carried him forward thus far. He was a man who had the courage that had counted each hindrance simply as a delay almost went out of him.

"Perhaps I have been wrong from the start—maybe I'd ought to have borrowed the money and married Edna this winter," he thought. "I might not have made such a flat failure that way, though everything was against me."

He had taken out his final papers now and could easily place a mortgage on his land. Edna, knowing this, wrote:

"The way is open now, Lon. By borrowing \$500 you can build a house that will be plenty good to start with, and I am sure I can save you \$500 in a year or two. Everybody borrows in order to make. I know how you feel—but be reasonable."

Yet, though Lon acknowledged that he was unreasonable; though he knew in his own soul that his fear was cowardly; though he felt that his desire for happiness matched Edna's own, the dread of debt and the obstinacy bred of the long struggle were so unyielding that he could not bring himself to act upon her counsel.

Spring came with a diffidence that. No complaints, no reproaches appeared in Edna's letters; but there was less of the cheerful expectation and of details of her daily living. And Lon, toiling winter and summer now, from day-walk and the streak of light, was too engrossed in his fight to give much heed to anything not present and tangible. Sometimes weeks elapsed between their letters.

A new year's crop was promising well, but the weather, threatening and marketing all went through without disaster. Lon would be able to set up his windmill and be ready for the next dry season. It was now harvest time. By exchanging work with Prosser and Lane, Baxter had had his old cutting and stacking his wheat. He was driving the mowing machine one scorching August forenoon. As he looked back over the even rifts of stubble he was thinking:

"If nothing happens, I'll come out ahead at last this season. Edna'll be glad."

And then he began to think. When had Edna's last letter come? "Why," in sudden realization, "that letter was spoken by water without end—my last letter—it wasn't really worth answering—just a note, I—maybe she's got tired at last. I couldn't blame her."

He drove on, conscious now of the heat, the dust, the stink of chaff and perspiration. What was the use of all this grinding work if it were not for Edna? He tried to think of life without Edna—what would happen if she had really changed her mind? All last he thought of this and fear no longer. He was ready to give up. He left his team standing and went to the house. He found her last letter and read it over. It was brief. It answered none of the questions in his mind.

"Edna darling," he wrote, "it's a long time since your last letter; you haven't answered my last note. I know you can't be sick or my father would let me know. I am afraid—maybe you have made up your mind not to wait any longer. I can't blame you for that. I know I haven't done right—keeping you waiting for me so long. And I haven't even written to you like I ought. Somehow I couldn't tell you how hard things were. Sometimes it has seemed as if it was no use. I'd have to give up and go back to hiring out. It looks like a fair view this year, and then—but I don't dare make any more promises. I have broken so many—I want you to be happy, Edna. More than anything else I want that. If you have found some other man who can make you happier than I can I won't say a word. Only, I shall always love you—I'll try to stand it—but I can't think about it."

That night, when the last chore was done, Lon Baxter started for the nearest postoffice, nine miles away. He would not put this added burden on his faithful horses. Wearily he plodded on through soft darkness, thinking messages of love and longing which he had not put on the paper—perhaps they reached Edna's heart just the same.

The long years of waiting had not been easy for Edna. Her father had never ceased his reviling of Lon and his angry comments upon her foolishness. As time went on, the Prossers became constant and harassing. A first Edna, living in her own world of happy dreams, heard him indifferently. She spent her spare hours in preparing against her bridal days the dainty things she had not put on the paper. She saved quilts, sewed carpet sags, she saved feathers for her pillows and bed, with her mother's aid she accumulated bed and table linen. Gradually her trunk and box were filled to overflowing with things she would give up.

After the third year her father insisted that he would have no more of