

THE MAPLE TREE

by Ruth H. Hey

I awoke to find the sun shining brightly through the east windows, but the south ones were completely covered with branches and leaves. I ran downstairs. The living room windows were walled in with green also.

Short branches and leaves were strewn helter-skelter on front lawn, but the morning paper lay nicely folded on the door step.



My watch said six-thirty. I tried the telephone, not a sound. I wanted to call my daughter. Surely, the hospital across the street would have telephone service.

I flipped the light switch on, no electricity either. Well, I could make coffee on the gas plate in the recreation room.

The porch where I usually ate breakfast was a tunnel of green. I pushed at the west screen door, but the weight of the branches held it firmly. I tried the north door, and by stooping low, I could squeeze through and under the branches covering the breakfast room windows. Once outside, I skirted the edge of the lawn trying to reach the garage. Everything seemed unusually quiet--even the dog knew something was amiss. Then my neighbor's welcome and cheery voice interrupted my thoughts.

"Good morning, Ruth, how are you over there? I can hear you but can't see you."

"Oh, hi, Jim. I came out the north porch door. Could you come out the back?"

"No, had to come 'round the front. Isn't this something?"

"It sure is. I feel like I've lost part of the family. Just look at how much of it is gone!"

"Were you home when it struck?"

"Yes, I'd just gone upstairs. The boys had been over to watch the All-Star game."

"Joyce and I were up to Dixon. Her sister is here from California. We had just walked in the door. Have you been out back to see what it did to the rest of your trees?"

We edged ourselves along the garage wall to the back lot where the paddocks used to be. The apple trees were loaded with fruit this summer. Now one lay twisted on the ground. We marveled that the others had hardly dropped an apple.

"Well, it looks as if you really got it this time!" Dean had managed to get his car part way up the drive. "There were trees down and uprooted all the way in. Road's covered with branches."

All Steve and Mike said was, "Man!" There are times when even a high schooler has a limited vocabulary.

They started chopping while we older ones just stood trying to assess the damage. The sun was getting hotter. How I was going to miss the shade from those magnificent limbs of the old tree!

"I'd like to get this off my roof and see what's happened up there. If there's much of this over town, it'll be hard to get someone without paying a big price."

"Well, I was thinking on the way in; there's a farmer I know who's got everything--tractor, end loader, power saws--and his boy, Bill, works as good as my two. Maybe he'd do it."



"Will you try to get him?"

"Sure."

"Call me at the office then. Our phone's out here."

"I'll call him as soon as I get to the shop."

I went to the basement and put on my coffee.

It was eleven when the farmer came. Bill, Steve, and Mike--each did a man's work. By twelve-thirty there was a full load of branches and small limbs on the truck ready to be taken to the farm and burned. By two o'clock they were ready to cut the big limbs on the roof of Jim's house. The two tall sections of the maple had divided with one falling on Jim's elm tree. As the branches of the elm broke under its weight, it settled on his roof. When the tree was finally down, we saw it had loosened only a few shingles, but all of the

gutter had been damaged. The other tall section had fallen between the two houses flattening the hedge but doing no damage to either place.

It seemed that even in its last hours the old maple had wanted to be kind to us. It had sheltered my children in their play; my husband and I had walked together in the evening under its branches, the squirrels had tantalized our dogs by running up and down its trunk; and now, as I looked up at the remaining tall limb, I felt a part of each of us was gone.



Its limbs had spread and completely shaded our back lawn and the big porch. Here the children had passed their sand box days. Later there were birthday parties under its shade, open house after high school proms, then a wedding on a beautiful day in July.

Even during the brilliant flashes of the storm's lightning, as I had watched the old tree twisting and bending in the wind, it had seemed loath to fall on our house. It seemed to shift; then it folded its limbs around the house and settled slowly, even softly. It took over two days to clean all the branches from the yard. By the time all the wood was cut for the fireplace almost three days had passed. We divided the wood between us and estimated that there would be enough for the fireplaces to last us about five years.

Every burning log will bring back memories.

