

# Oh, Pudgy!

PEGGY O'DONNELL

Well, Pudgy, here we are on top of Maple Ridge. Isn't this the most splendid day? I can just lie here basking in the sun (as the Florida travel folders say), and you can sniff around and explore everything to your canine heart's content.

Yes, a spring day up here is wonderful, but I guess it will always be fall on the Ridge for me. Fall, with the maples all gold and red, and the sky all blue, you and me and . . . and Bill.

'Member Bill, Pudgy? You used to love it when he rubbed your ears. He taught you to bring in the paper and the mail. Of course, Mother never quite liked the way her mail was always partly masticated by the time you could be persuaded to give it up, but Dad was tickled pink the time you chewed up the butcher's bill so he didn't have to pay it for a whole month.

I was so excited the first time Bill asked me to a dance — it was the big Senior Prom. I had my hair done up, and wore Mother's gold ear rings and Aunt Lily's black taffeta and lace, because all my formals were so — well, so girlish and I was *sixteen* in April and I simply had to be grown up and sophisticated for Bill.

And the dance! I couldn't believe it was true. There I was, floating along in Bill's arms in all my finery (borrowed finery if you will, but gorgeous finery you must admit). Katy and the girls were positively green with envy.

The prom was at graduation time. All last summer we were together. It was Janey and Bill; and Pudgy—it was heaven! It wasn't just kid stuff as it had always been with Joe and Tommy and Sam and . . . oh, you know, all the other boys who

used to hang around on the front porch. We both knew it was different, but we didn't talk about it. We just swam, played tennis, and loafed around with the gang.

I used to sit in Vic's and play "Just Plain Bill" over and over on the juke box. Do songs do something to that doggy heart of yours, Pudgy? Do they make you all happy and glad inside but kind of sad, too?

We had a whole summer of being carefree, happy and secure. Then, out of a clear sky — Bill decided to enlist. Of course, I knew there was a war going on; I at least read the newspapers. I never dreamed that any of our crowd would be going. It seemed so sort of remote from us. And then Bill was leaving.

We came up on the Ridge that last day. The fallen leaves were blowing in the path and we scuffled through them on the way up. We sat down on the rock by the old maple tree and tried to keep from talking about it. The sun was on Bill's crisp black hair. He looked so young to be going off to war. I said what a wonderful marine he'd make and tried to laugh about how he'd probably have a girl in every port. He told me to study hard at school and not to let you forget how to bring in the paper. Then it was time for him to go, and we hadn't said what we wanted to, and Bill looked so brave, and I was afraid I'd cry. He put his hand under my chin and lifted it so I'd have to look up at him and said, "Keep your chin up, Freckle Face — we'll show 'em." And then — Oh, Pudgy, then— he kissed me! I'll never forget it. I could hear my heart beating. It sounded just like your tail does thumping against the floor when you're excited. It beat so loud that I was sure Bill must hear it, too.

Then Bill was gone.

That was last fall. This is spring, and I haven't heard from him for ages. He's probably been sent away and we'll never see him again. This horrid war will keep on and on forever. He'll marry some native girl in the South Seas and I'll become a cross old maid with only a toothless old dog (that'll be you, Pudgy) to keep me company. Why, Pudgy — Pudgy, where are you? Come here this instant!—Pudgy.

Now isn't that just like life — in your greatest moments of sorrow even your own dog leave you to suffer alone. Oh, well, I

might as well get used to leading a lonely, solitary life all — oh! Pudgy, you scared me. What do you have in your mouth? Why, it's a letter, a special delivery letter— from Bill! Oh, Pudgy, you darling, darling dog! I'll give you my very best fuzzy slippers to chew on tonight. He says — oh, it's too wonderful for words — he's coming home on leave tomorrow night.

Hurry, Pudgy, I'll have to go home and get an appointment for my hair, and see if my yellow sweater is back from the cleaner's and . . . . oh, Pudgy, I'll bet he's awfully handsome in his uniform!

## Our Christmas Tree

LESTER HUNT

We, like many other families, have our own special customs. We have our holiday customs, our dinner customs, our own way of making beds, and our own brand of humour. There is one holiday custom, however, that I especially treasure because I had a share in its initiation. It is the custom of getting our own Christmas tree.

As I remember this first experience, it took place about a week before Christmas, but we still hadn't found a Christmas tree that we liked. It was then that we "men-folks" decided to get our own tree. I was eight years old at the time and Sarge was ten. As we started out — the three of us— for Dad was to chaperon the adventure — it was decided that Sarge, since he was the older, should carry the axe, while I might carry the rusty and almost toothless saw. Dad, of course, would carry nothing — the head of the family shouldn't be so weighted down.

The day was clear and a gusty breeze

came in from Puget Sound. We started the climb up Gatewood Hill — Dad, Sarge, and I, with my chubby legs doing double-time. At last we reached the top of the hill, a little breathless, but exhilarated because we were getting our very own Christmas tree. Sarge and I pranced onward until we reached a cull growth of small firs. I was so excited that I rushed upon a scraggly little tree about three feet tall and started to scrape at it with my saw, while Sarge, who had taken a fancy to a fir about fourteen feet high, struggled valiantly to chip the bark with the axe. Dad called his two "bloodhounds" off, and told us that we wanted a tree about seven feet high that was both bushy and straight. So on we tramped over the path, making little forays into damp bushes to inspect every likely tree. We had at last reached a bluff when, there on the very edge, we saw *our* tree. It was nestled among the larger ones, but still was bushy, and as straight as a