

SUMMER ON THE NORTH STAR

by Elsa Pedersen



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BY ELSA PEDERSEN

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I. BROKEN DREAMS

Mary and Bruce were at the airstrip when their father returned from Anchorage. Mary's thin, expressive face was drawn in somber lines, and her dark eyes were shadowed with worry. Her mother had been sick for a long time but had hidden the fact from all of them. It was not until she awakened one night with an agonizing pain from her back to her knee that she had admitted anything was wrong.

Mr. McLain had rushed her to the hospital at Anchorage, and in a few days he telegraphed his family that an operation was necessary. That was all Mary and Bruce had heard until a second wire came saying when he would return.

The distant mutter of an engine brought Mary's head up. She shook her head impatiently to sweep her dark, shoulder-length hair away from her ears. When she saw a tiny speck

over the hills that grew rapidly into the recognizable lines of a plane, she leaped to her feet and shouted.

“Bruce! The plane! It’s coming!”

It landed gracefully and came toward them in a cloud of dust. Bruce would have run forward, but Mary clutched his arm and held it tightly. Not until the propeller stopped turning, and the door of the plane flew open, did she let him run while she followed more slowly.

When Dad clambered out of the little plane, Mary forgot her dignity and ran after Bruce. The man enveloped them in a gigantic hug, and Mary rubbed her face against his tweed jacket, happy that his return relieved her of responsibility for Bruce.

“How’s Mom?” she demanded eagerly. “Was the operation a success?”

The laughter vanished from Alec McLain’s face, replaced by grooves of worry on his forehead and dark, weather-beaten cheeks.

“The operation was a success,” he began slowly. “But she will have to be at the hospital for at least three months and take things easy for a year.”

“Oh, thank goodness,” Mary sighed. “I was so scared that night she got sick.”

Mary’s thoughts were interrupted by a shout from the pilot. He had unloaded the plane and was now climbing into his jeep for the mile drive to town.

“Let’s walk home,” Bruce proposed.

“Good idea,” Dad said with a tug at the sport shirt buttoned to his throat. “I haven’t stretched my legs since we left here. I’d like to get that city air out of my lungs.”

He pulled off the tweed jacket that made him look like a stranger and unbuttoned the neck of his shirt. While they



II. *NORTH STAR*

A vaporous white mist hung over Seldovia Bay, and the surrounding hills were still shadowed with night when Alec McLain and Bruce set out for the crab fishing grounds the next morning. Mary walked to the boat float and saw them off. Then, when the *North Star* rounded the red buoy that marked the harbor entrance, she hurried home to her own task.

Back in the warm kitchen, Mary sipped a cup of hot chocolate as she planned what she had to do. Everything would have to be divided in two lots—one to be stored in Dad's gear room at the cold storage plant, the other to be taken aboard the boat. Remembering the cramped quarters aboard the *North Star*, Mary knew she would have to eliminate everything but the barest essentials.

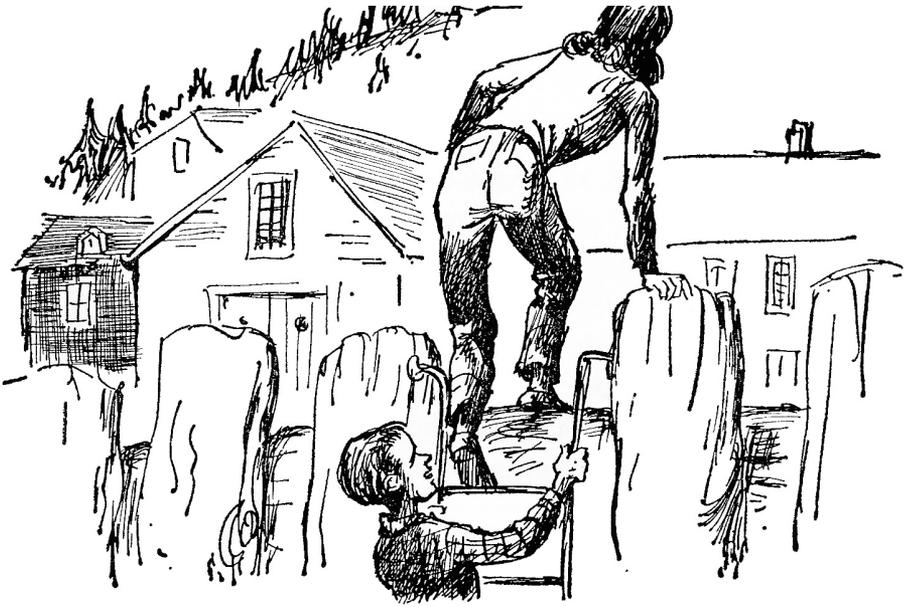
"Might as well get to work," she said aloud.



III. A CRABBING CREW

While the diesel engine cooled at idling speed and Dad checked the bilge and did other boat chores, Mary made up her bed in the pilothouse. The chart table lifted up and fastened against the wall, exposing a snug bunk in the rear of the pilothouse. Mary shook out her sleeping bag and made sure it was not damp with the moisture that always crept through a boat. It would be cooler up here than in the galley bunks. Nevertheless, Mary was glad for the privacy and had jumped at the chance when Dad offered her the pilothouse for her own.

When her bed was arranged, Mary peered inquiringly down the companionway into the galley below. Bruce was already tucked into his bunk, with his towhead buried in his pillow. Dad, too, had crawled into his sleeping bag. He looked up when he saw Mary's face in the doorway.



IV. FRIENDS AND STRANGERS

With the fishing boats on a quota of one hundred crabs a day, and the cold storage plants operating six days a week, the fishermen delivered three hundred crabs twice a week.

When the *North Star* headed for town on Saturday, she carried her quota. Mary looked forward to a few hours in town. She had not given Annette much thought in the past few days. Now she was eager to see her friend and erase any cold feelings there might be between them.

Eagerly she gazed ashore as they approached the cold storage dock. The *Sunrise*, the *Marlene*, and the *Trixie* were tied to the dock. While the cold storage crew unloaded the catch of the *Trixie*, the other two boats waited to deliver.

“We’ll have a long wait,” Dad remarked as he eased the *North Star* into the remaining empty berth beside the dock.



V. NEW DISCOVERIES

As Tom Brooks had predicted, the crab fishing held up. The McLains worked hard, casting off from their mooring every day in the gray dawn. They had found that the weather was better early in the morning, when the sea was flat and calm and they could hoist up the crab pots without rolling in the wind and tide. Although the other fishermen left town early in the day, the *North Star* was invariably the first boat on the fishing grounds.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays, they lifted three hundred crabs out of the livebox with a long hook that grasped the spiny crab legs and loaded them aboard to be delivered to the cold storage plant. On these days they started earlier than usual, working at the livebox by the light of the spotlight fixed to the top of the pilothouse. They steamed out of Hair