

'Swordfish'

Ann Maley

The landgirl cried hup! and the big grey mare heaved between the shafts and, with a great creaking of harness, she 'hupped' too far, as usual. Chrissie resumed her task of throwing turnips into the cart, from a considerable distance this time. As she turned to go back to the steading with the load, which was an important item in the feeding of the milk cows while they wintered in the byre, she heard the drone of the Swordfish, at least that is what the evacuee said it was. He had an avid interest in planes. They flew over regularly and dipped their wings to wave to the toilers in the fields. Young learner flyers from the nearby aerodrome. She waved and they swooped away seawards. Soon they would be on the big planes, flying over enemy territory. The landgirl sighed, war was a senseless rotten thing, Dad was a soldier in the first world war, never talked of his experiences, till this war started. Will they never learn? he said. Remembering the sad waste of life, the mud of the trenches. dead comrades no one had time to bury. Supposed to be the war to end wars, some hope! Now this, she was glad that her only brother, still at school, was too young to be taken to war, but there was the evacuee the same age hoping to wear the airforce blue when he came of age. Surely this war would be over before then. Her thoughts were interrupted by a great shouting and commotion from the shore end of the of the field. It was the farmer, waving his stick, swearing in the Gaelic, the sheep had found a break in the fence and were playing follow my leader, skipping through in single file. Spot the collie darted here and there, encouraged by the boss's voluble comments, and he soon had them back on the shore field. The sheep belonged to the hill farmer, they had an arrangement that Glenburn took some of his sheep in winter and he let them bring their young cattle to graze on the hill leaving more grass for the milk cows. It was an agreement that suited both farmers, but the sheep gave the boss a bit of bother sometimes. Chrissie watched this with amusement. She led the patient mare towards the steading. Now they had to cross the big ditch, more like a raging river today, after yesterday's torrential rain. Chrissie was having a conversation with the old mare. Why, she asked, do farmers make gates and bridges almost the exact width of carts? She always breathed a sigh of relief when they had negotiated the wooden bridge without mishap, thanks to steady old Fanny, floundery feet and all. The landgirl patted her pal and they rested, heads together for a moment.