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THERE WERE THIRTEEN

A Novel

being

A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of
The Fort Hays Kansas State College in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for
the Degree
of
Master of Science

by

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THERE WERE THIRTEEN

(A Pioneer Novel of Western Kansas)

Author

Sept. 1941

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(A Pioneer Novel of Western Kansas)

In my thesis, I wish to present the story of my maternal grandmother as it is revealed in the lives of her thirteen children. I have been interested in the story since I can remember. My earliest memories are of sitting on Grandma's lap and listening to tales of Indians on the warpath, of Kansas prairie sod houses and rattlesnakes, and of what my aunts, uncles, and my mother used to do when they were small.

To avoid any possible embarrassment to living persons, I have fictionized the names of my characters. I have, however, retained all actual dates and have faithfully recorded the true childhood mishaps and anecdotes.

I have been greatly aided in my research by the fact that there are eleven of the thirteen children now available for interviews. Although my grandmother is not living, she has left a vivid memory in the minds of the people in the community, and a few of her friends are still here to talk eagerly of her.

Through the cooperation of these people and through my own work, memory, and imagination, I hope to portray characters you would like to know, and scenes and incidents which will make you chuckle or will bring a thoughtful mood of reminiscence.

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The weary oxen and the lone covered wagon seemed to crouch against the protective earth. The flattened canvas cracked and popped in defiant protest. Elizabeth pulled David's sleeping, relaxed little body closer to her wildly beating heart in a vain effort to reassure herself. She could feel the wagon side at her back and hear Jim's heavy breathing on the other side of David, but it was not enough. Quickly she reached across and shook her husband's shoulder--

"Jim, Jim--oh, please wake up," she moaned frantically.

"What is it--what's the matter, Lizzie?"

"I'm so scared--I'm so scared."

"Here, here--. Don't be crying that way." The man sat up in order to reach the shaking figure of his wife. "Come on up here where I can get my arms around you without waking Davie boy."

"There now--there now," he murmured as he gently stroked her bent head. "There ain't nothin' to be scared of," he continued as her sobs began to quiet. "There's nothin' out there but stars and moon and grass and wind--" Jim broke off abruptly as a fresh storm of weeping burst. He swayed back and forth, rocking her gently as he sat silent in troubled thought. Now and then he patted her helplessly on the shoulder. Lizzie struggled for words.

"It's just that, Jim--what you said--" and she cried wet tears that tickled as they slid down his neck and made his shoulder a damp pad for her face. "It's--it's the wind. It blows and blows--even when there aren't any trees." And again she buried her tear-stained face. "I can't stand it. I can't stand it!"

"Why, honey, you'll get so you like it. Course you're not used to it now, but it's not anything to be afraid of."

She continued to cry.

"The wind, this wind that's blowing is part of this country. He struggled with his own thoughts. "It's strong like this prairie land. It brings good things. See how much cooler it is now. And it probably brings rain for the wheat to grow."

"No, it isn't that at all, Jim," protested the partially recovered Lizzie. "It's evil--it talks to me. I can hear it laugh and sneer at me. It's like the land, all right. But I hate it--I hate it, you hear me--I hate Kansas!"

I

LIZZIE AND JIM

Lizzie felt more cheerful in the bright sunlight. As she gazed at the scene before her, she was forced to admit its beauty. The land, their land, was good river bottom. The stream itself was a scant quarter of a mile away. The trees bordering its banks flaunted every hue of autumn. Many were a mingled confusion of reddish brown. Here and there a single tree of bright yellow appeared to stand alone. Occasionally a few still clothed in the conventional green seemed to cling together. Nature had outdone herself--she had gathered together a riot of color that the human eye and brain could only gradually accept.

And the long journey was over--Illinois, Missouri, and three hundred miles of Kansas were behind them. They had all they needed now, since Jim had bought the horses and a milk cow at Kirwin. She smiled. The tiresome miles, the cramped living quarters, and her fears of the Indians and the unknown were nothing when she saw not only the beauty of the new land, but also Jim's joy and contentment. Smilingly she watched the broad back of her husband as he methodically deposited spadeful after spadeful of black soil in a heap beside the growing excavation. He stopped to wipe away the sweat and grinned at her.

"We'll have a home yet, Lizzie. It won't be fancy but it will be warm."

"What will it look like, Jim? It seems like we'll feel like gophers or something, living in the ground." She glanced dubiously at his work.

"Why, Lizzie, you know what it'll be like--we talked it over before when we saw them from the trail."

"I know, but it seems so different now."

"Well, the one I looked at had one room like the one we'll have here, just as we planned. After I get it deep enough--about five or six feet--then I'll cut out some sod in strips--. Hello, Will," he broke off as a grinning youth of about sixteen appeared. "I was so busy tellin' Lizzie how her new house'll look that I didn't see you comin'."

Lizzie smiled at the way Jim dropped his final letters whenever he talked with the men. She often teased him by saying that he would slip sometime and get himself mixed up. He never did, though.

"What are you makin', Uncle Jim?" Will asked. "Dad said he guessed he had enough boys so's he could spare one for you, but he said I was to help you build a dugout and this don't look like ours." He waved a hand vaguely toward the east where Jim's brother's land lay. "Ours is in a hill--we're just tunnelin' in--but you ain't nowheres near any hill." The puzzled youth scratched his head as he walked over to look down at little Dave

where he lay on his mother's lap.

"It was just like John to send Will to help," Lizzie thought gratefully. "And having Jim's older brother and his wife so close was going to make it easier to live in this uncivilized place, too."

"I'll have to tell both o' you together then," Jim interrupted her thoughts in answer to Will's query. "As I was tellin' Mother here, we're gonna have one room. I wanta dig 'bout five or six feet down and 'bout twenty feet square."

"Whatta you gonna do then?"

"Then we'll cut sod. That is, if I can--the stuff's so hard for me to handle. I don't see how some of the fellas do it. I'd never git a whole house built of them strips."

"I kin help with that," Will broke in.

"Well, then we'll lay that around the edge--'bout two layers or maybe three. That's where Mother's glass windows that I promised her are gonna fit in. By that time we're 'most through. We have to go over to the river and cut some trees and haul 'em back. We lay 'em across the top and seal 'em up with more sod. There's your roof and there's your house."

"How you gonna get in that there fine house?" Will grinned broadly.

"By a door of course. We have to cut steps down and we've gotta make the door like the roof."

"But, Jim," Lizzie interrupted, "how are you going to make dirt stick on the door?"

"Look, Lizzie," Jim answered patiently, "Didn't your folks have a cellar back in Ohio? And didn't the door lay so you could put dirt on it?"

"Yes, but that doesn't mean it would stay on when you opened it."

Sheepishly Jim scratched his head. "I was bein' so smart with you, Mother, and I never even thought a that."

"Dad says we're gonna use buffalo hide," Will advised. "That's the way old man Tuttle does."

Jim hesitated a moment, looking at Lizzie. "A buffalo skin it'll have to be," he declared. "Let's get this house dug, Will." And he began shoveling dirt.

The digging would have been slow work, however, if the scattered families already settled along the river hadn't willingly offered their aid. Each day some came, and quite often their wives came with them. Lizzie ruefully thought how her English mother with her white tablecloth and china teapot would react to the surroundings of her daughter. The women cooked the meals over a camp fire. The steaming food was heaped on metal plates and passed around the circle. The men squatted on their heels and ate, while the women served themselves and the children, and then sat upon a blanket spread on the ground or even on the grass itself.

But everyone would have been proud of Jim. Lizzie had guiltily opened her eyes and watched him as he stood in the center of the group and with bowed head thanked the Lord for their meal.

He was so tall and fair, and his broad shoulders were so willing to carry any load. Here her thoughts had been broken off abruptly by the close of the prayer and the immediate demand for dinner.

The house progressed rapidly, even though the time seemed long to Lizzie. After some discussion among the men, the sod strips for the sides had been abandoned, and it was decided that rocks from the not too distant hills could be used for that purpose. With only a little working down, they could be placed in layers, and they would also be good to line the fireplace. So gradually, their home took shape almost as Jim had described it to her. The men had dug down six feet and about twenty feet each way. In the west side they made an indentation which was to be the fireplace. This they lined with the soft native rock, using water as their only cement. They then placed layers of rock around the edge of the house. Fitting in the two glass windows was something of an event. The small four-paned glass frames had been carefully packed in the wagon all the way from St. Joseph, Missouri. They were Jim's gift to Lizzie. The men carefully placed one in the south side and one in the north. Then Jim and Will brought home trees that they had trimmed into long slender poles, and they laid these at intervals across the top. They were ready now for the sod, and Will cut long strips which were held in a solid mass by the numerous roots of the thick prairie grass.

Lizzie's house was almost finished. The steps had long ago

been cut in the east side and the necessary buffalo hide was ready. It was finally fastened across the doorway, and Jim smilingly thanked his neighbors and the faithful Will for their friendly aid. They were at last settled in their new prairie home.

Jim now turned eagerly to the land. It was too late to do much to his fields, but he could cut some of the prairie grass for his winter hay and for his barn. He didn't have a mower yet, but he had a scythe that would serve his purpose.

One evening Lizzie stood on the top step of her new home. The breeze came to her from the river and the prairie. It stirred the short curls on her forehead and blew her long shoulder length curls into careless confusion. Her brown eyes gazed long at the scene before her. The sumac in the east draw was a splash of scarlet against the fading carpet of buffalo grass.

But Lizzie was not interested in the prairie--the western sky held her spellbound. The half ball of sun was a brilliant reddish-orange fairy throne. The royal guard, short banks of clouds of the same hue, spread out on either side. The gowns of the ladies as they gathered were shades of pink, yellow, and violet higher in the sky. All the world seemed watching--and waiting. Waiting for the ruler of this splendid domain. The faint and far off echo of tiny trumpets foretold her coming. Lizzie stood eagerly on tip toe, only to see the still vacant throne vanish beyond the horizon--the completed court was not

for mortal view. She stood a moment with the dream still in her eyes, and then turned back to the reality of getting supper.

As the days grew shorter and colder, Jim gave his attention to a shelter for his livestock. His nephews helped him trim the necessary trees to make a double row of poles on the north, east, and west sides. This foot-wide space they filled in with prairie grass. The roof was finished with sod just as they had done with the house. Here his oxen, the family cow, and his team of horses could find protection from the winter weather which was rapidly approaching.

The first snow came the week of Thanksgiving. And with the first drifting flakes came the Indians Lizzie had fearfully awaited. They had seen small groups of them in the distance but had not been molested. The neighbors had advised them how to act in case they did come--

"Never show 'em you're scared," one settler had advised.

"Yes, but don't cross 'em, either," another added.

Now they were here--two braves and a squaw. Silently they walked in. Jim had seen them coming and was busily mending the rude cradle which he had just finished mending yesterday. The baby was in the rocking chair beside him. Lizzie was pretending to be busy with dinner preparations. Their visitors lined up against the wall just inside the door. The younger of the men came toward the fireplace. Jim waited tensely, conscious of a thrill of pride in Lizzie's successful composure. She moved a little to one side as the man examined the food. He uncovered

her baking bread and gave a satisfied exclamation. To the whites' astonishment, he drew out the half raw bread, passing it rapidly from one hand to the other to keep from burning. In the meantime, the squaw had moved toward a barrel in the corner of the room. She cautiously removed the cover and poked a tentative finger into the sticky brown syrup. With a satisfied grunt, she said something to her companions and they all gathered round the barrel. Lizzie and Jim watched with amazement while the still doughy bread was dipped into the molasses barrel and then crammed into three eager mouths. When the last crumb had vanished, the three filed out the door, stopping only to take a cold haunch of buffalo from the table. Thus the young pioneers saw their first savage visitors depart, having deprived them of nothing more serious than a meal. Lizzie dropped her spoon and grabbed little David while Jim placed the cradle on the floor with trembling hands. He pulled his son and wife within the circle of his arms and thanked God for His care and protection.

Jim had laboriously cleared the snow for a narrow path to the barn and away from the windows so that the sun could shine in. Lizzie stood looking out. She often stood this way, lost in the changing aspects of the prairie. Now the trees along the river were bare and the view was not enticing. But from this window she could see the hills and these always held Lizzie's attention. They were beautiful this morning in their winter wardrobe. Their whiteness reflected the sun until it hurt her eyes. The glare was as bad as that photographer's lights back home. Jim

had looked--she shut her eyes to help bring him back--sitting there in his new suit, his hair waving crisply back from the short bangs which made such a straight line across his forehead--Jim had looked handsome. She had worn her wedding dress and her father's gift--the little golden locket and the tiny matching earrings. A smile lifted the corners of her mouth as she remembered. She hadn't worn them since--why, she had never worn them in Kansas.

Suddenly she bestirred herself. It was a grand idea. Jim was with John cutting wood. He'd be home about four. She thought for a moment of asking Sarah and John to come, but discarded the idea when she thought of the snow. It would just be she and Jim--and David of course. She glanced smilingly at her sleeping son.

She couldn't have much party food, she thought ruefully. The usual meal would do if she could just think of something a little special. Lizzie sat in deep thought. Apple turnovers! Jim loved them.

Everything was about ready. She'd better dress. Carefully she pulled her wedding dress over her freshly brushed curls. And then from the little green velvet box with its yellowed satin lining --her only inheritance from Grandfather Partington. Lord Partington from England! Dear papa had smiled sadly when he brought them to her. They were the only thing he had of his mother's fine possessions. And his father had died without relenting. All of his money and the family possessions had gone to a stranger. Only these--her wedding jewelry--were left to

him. Swiftly she fastened the dainty locket and deftly screwed the ear drops into the holes in the lobes of her ears. She hastily donned an apron and went to make sure the turnovers were beginning to brown.

Jim smilingly donned his good suit, though laughing good-naturedly at his wife's party. He clasped her waist as she brought the apple turnovers, pulling her down on his lap.

"This is thank you for a very nice party, Mrs. Knot." He gravely kissed her on the forehead and then on her upturned mouth.

The firm lips quivered, "Oh, Jim, let's please not forget to have parties."

"No, little girl. You remind me if I seem to." He passed his hand lingeringly over her brown curls.

"Everybody ought to have a party sometime. Haven't you seen people that you know have forgotten how?"

"That's right, honey. The Lord meant men and women to be happy. And happiness is inside yourself. Your party spirit is a desire for beauty," he gently touched the golden locket, "and the idea is the blessed spirit of living." He nodded his head toward the pastry. "Those things aren't wrong and never can be, darling, so we'll invite ourselves to be our guests every once in a while."

The days went swiftly, even though the sky was overcast day after day and the snow piled ever deeper around the dugout. Lizzie loved the long days with Jim and the baby. Occasionally Jim's brother and his family would come over. John's boys were

old enough to have the responsibility of chores and Sarah blithely wrapped her two small daughters and came "for a spell a visitin'." Her plump little figure and cheerful laugh always meant a happy time. Things were never dull with Sarah--she simply carried everyone with her, whether it was her purpose to bake turnovers, sweep the floor, or cut out a dress. The men talked much about their plans for spring planting while Sarah told Lizzie the scanty bits of gossip which she somehow always knew.

"Henry Turner went to Hays City that last spell a good weather we had and he ain't come back yet. Harriet sez his cousin thinks maybe he ain't ever goin' to. He's been sick a homesteadin' since 'fore they started. Sez it's too lonesome. He wants some company."

"What will Abe do without him?"

"He don't know. Henry took his team an' wagon with him, so Abe'll have to get along with his oxen, I reckon. Here, you younguns, get the table ready and we'll eat."

Without mishap and with hopeful planning, their first Kansas winter began to vanish. The prairie donned her maiden dress of spring. The settler with his plow and oxen started early and worked late. When the sun was warm and the weather particularly pleasant, Jim fastened little David in a shawl hammock on the plow and Lizzie stayed beside him as he first broke their sod. This practise was discontinued, however, after the day when Lizzie came out of the house with David, only to see Jim vainly shouting at the oxen in an attempt to stop them. The team was thirsty

and simply walked into the water of the nearby ravine, unconcernedly dragging both the plow and its furious owner with them. Lizzie couldn't help laughing at Jim even while she agreed with his angry mutterings against Buck, the stubborn and unmanageable ox. Bright was a dependable beast, but his mate accepted only a minimum of control and discipline.

The wheat became a green carpet of reality and the settlers felt justified in their choice of new homes. Sarah brought the one momentous item of news which occurred in their section of the valley.

"Remember me tellin' you 'bout Henry Turner leavin' home and goin' to Hays City? Well, Abe went there ta see what anybody might know about him and found a man who'd bought his team. Abe thought it was kinda funny that this fella said he'd bought 'em from a woman, though. He finally came on home without findin' anything a Henry."

Sarah paused to pin up her falling hair.

"Now he thinks maybe Henry's dead. They come after John awhile ago. Seems they found a dead man down the river an' off the trail a ways. He must a been there most all winter. And Abe thinks from somethin' that's left of his clothes that it's his cousin. He feels mighty bad, but I say it's a good thing he ain't got no wife or little ones. It's them folks that'd be helpless out here. Abe can get along and he most always fought with Henry while they was tryin' ta live together, anyhow."

Lizzie heard the rest of the story when she took David and

went for an afternoon of quilting. Most of the women from up and down the valley were there and the talk flew thick and fast. She listened with dismay as the gruesome truth was finally revealed.

"They found out Henry Turner was shot when they got a good look at that corpse," one little woman earnestly explained.

"And that woman that was tryin' ta hire out for housekeepin' done it," another inserted.

"She left 'bout the same time. Henry must a picked her up ta take her into Hays City. She killed him and sold his team and wagon like Abe heard."

"Then they found some a his things when they searched her house. She was a livin' down at Kirwin big as y^e please. Thought nobody'd know 'cause it's been so long."

"She 'bout didn't get caught, but she ain't got a chance now."

Lizzie told Jim on the way home, but their thoughts couldn't linger long on the dark passions of men when the prairie spread its beauty invitingly around them.

"I never saw any prettier place, Jim," Lizzie shyly confessed.

"You're not hating it now? The wind isn't bothering you like it did at first?" His face showed just a hint of anxiety as he looked at her gravely.

"Well, it wasn't very nice for a while, but no one could hate all this. Kansas is beautiful, Jim. But somehow--I'm afraid of it." She looked appealingly at him.

His laugh rang out. "Look at that wheat--it's ours, honey. And it'll take care of us fine. When the summer work's all done,

we'll send back for you a new party dress."

But their dreams of harvest were not to be realized.

Destruction covered the sun with wings. Jim and Lizzie watched in awed amazement which changed with the hours to fear, realization and finally despair. The grasshoppers were everywhere--and everywhere they ate. It seemed to Lizzie that they might have been satisfied with the crop and left to her her cherished curtains. But even this thought flared only momentarily. She became dully indifferent to the squashy crunching every time she stepped. She could pick them out of the bread dough without a qualm. There was left in her only a stubborn vicious hate for the all-penetrating, ravenous insects. Only when she looked at Jim did she feel like crying. Words of comfort were of no use, she knew. And she couldn't even use her old standby of cooking things he liked. They'd be grasshopper turnovers before she started!

The settlers came painfully awake from their dazed bewilderment as the bulk of the horde moved on. Some packed at once and started east with nothing but curses on the land which had seemed so fair to them the year before. Others waited only for money from home folks to buy the necessary supplies for the return trip. Jim and his brother hung on to their faith in the land, although their necessities for the winter were alarmingly low. As the dark came earlier, hearts sank lower.

All of Lizzie's fears returned. She studied the bare, brown hills with bitter eyes. They seemed to actually threaten her. Many times she had noted their aloofness, as though they withdrew

their snow-covered skirts from the contamination of the valley. Not so now. They were attempting to overwhelm--to crush her. Panic entered Lizzie's soul as she gazed wildly at the lowering landscape. Why had they ever come to this place? Man was helpless to combat such forces of nature. Even the silence was alive with evil. She turned and started to run. Her firm, small chin came up defiantly and she stopped abruptly.

"Laugh and mock--someday we'll beat you--we'll crack your rotten shells and plow up your uneasy bones. I hate you--I hate you!" Her breath caught in a dry sob.

"Don't hate them, Lizzie." Jim had come quietly within hearing distance. "Love them! Respect them for that very savagery you see. They're old and impenetrable, Lizzie--but not evil. They're the brooding protectors of this land--they are strong and they demand strength in return. We've got to grow big enough for them--we've got to fight. But not against them, Lizzie--we're going to fight with them."

The long awaited help finally came from home. Jim had charge of the settlers' barrels, gathered and sent by kind-hearted friends and relatives. Carefully, he apportioned the contents to each needy family that had had the courage of their convictions and remained with their homesteads. There was much confusion and muffled laughter when Lizzie fell heir to a corset, packed in the very top of one barrel and with her name on the package.

"It's a wonder Aunt Susan even wrapped it up," she snorted indignantly to Sarah and the other delighted women. "Whatever

did she think I'd do with that?" She held up the dainty party garment. "If it were just for everyday--but I haven't even one dress to do justice to it."

Jim shouted with delight when he found the apples.

"I'll bet Granny Rill put these in just for me. Now you can bake again, Lizzie."

"As though I never did anyway," she sniffed.

With much joking, the gathering began to break up. Cheerful good-nights rang in the frosty air as each family left with replenished larders and wardrobes.

Relieved from some of his worry, Jim began to be his old self again. He went after his brother to go the river to cut wood, and returned with Sarah and the girls.

"John and I were just starvin' for apple turnovers," he told her twinklingly as he left again.

"They'll not be cuttin' late tonight," Sarah laughed. "Them boys are so anxious for turnovers, they won't wait any longer'n they have to."

They came early as Sarah had predicted, with sheepish boy grins at their wives' laughter. Their merriment was short lived, however, when John said soberly, "Is that Indians, Jim?"

His brother looked in the direction he nodded and said abruptly.

"Get in the house, all of you. They're probably friendly enough, but you never know."

"Yeh--and they'll be hungry, too," said John dryly. "Here,

quick, give me those turnovers. I'm not gonna let 'em eat what I been hungerin' for all day."

Swiftly he turned down the coverlet of the bed. He spread dozens of turnovers evenly across the bed and pulled the cover over it again.

The Indians arrived and seemed bent upon no mischief except securing food. After they left, there was not a scrap of food on the table or the fire.

"But," as John said triumphantly, "We've got a bedful of turnovers!"

II

DAVID AND TOM

"Jim, what are we going to do with him?" Lizzie had to raise her voice to be heard above David's wailing.

"Well, Lizzie, he'll just have to cry it out, I guess. The oxen are a quarter of a mile away."

Jim looked at his offspring with troubled eyes and began walking up and down the floor. David continued his pleading.

"Wanna see Bwight, wanna see Bwight."

Lizzie sat back and waited for the inevitable.

"What'll we do, honey?" he stopped his pacing to inquire.

"Let him cry it out," she mocked him.

"Well, maybe we'd better take him."

"But you said Buck and Bright were staked out a quarter of a mile away."

"Oh--they are. Hush up, David! Here, son," he placed the little boy on his lap. "I'll tell you a story. Once upon a time--"

"Wanna see Bwight," David bawled stubbornly.

Jim set him down and resumed his pacing.

"I wanna see Bwight, Daddy."

"Yes, Davie, I know." He squatted before his son and spoke earnestly. "The oxen are a long ways away and its dark outside. Oh, what's the use? Get his coat, mother."

"But Jim, you aren't going to take that baby clear over there," she protested, secretly enjoying the plagued look on her husband's face.

"Well, Lizzie, think how you'd feel if the Indians came tomorrow. If something happened to him we'd always be sorry we didn't humor him."

"Jim! you'd do anything but admit you're spoiling your son," she laughingly accused as she got into her own coat.

"Something might happen," was all he would answer as he picked up David and went out the door.

A week later, Jim went to Hays City but the gift he brought Lizzie almost made up for his absence. She had long wished for a store bought broom. Her home-made ones aroused her disgust every time she used one. When Jim unloaded the precious green-handled appliance, she had to try it at once.

She used it happily the next day and then settled down to read the Bible, as was her daily practice. Absorbed in her reading, she failed to notice that David was busily attempting to sweep the floor with her new possession. He soon lost interest in his task but not in the plaything. He straddled it and contentedly urged, "Giddup, horsie. Giddup."

This ceased to amuse him and he wandered over to the fireplace and poked tentatively. He stirred more vigorously and watched intently as the broom corn began to burn. When the blaze died, he wandered away, looking for his rag doll.

Not until Jim came in did Lizzie rouse from her reading

with a guilty realization that his meal was not ready. She carried a kettle to the fire.

"Jim! my broom!--Oh, my broom!"

She knelt and hastily pulled the useless charred handle from the fire.

"Davie, you've ruined mamma's broom!"

"Easy now, Lizzie," her husband admonished.

The baby came near and looked at her face with troubled features. "Mamma cy?"

"Sweetheart, how could you?" She pulled him close.

"Mamma cy?" he repeated, wiping her face worriedly.

"Darlin', darlin'-- you've spoiled it."

"Here, you two, Get up off the floor. Davie, kiss your mother and, Lizzie, don't take on so. I'll get you another new broom the next time I go to Hays. Besides, I'm hungry."

The promise and the reminder of duty restored some order, but it was many weeks before Jim dared to tease her laughingly.

"It serves you right for paying more attention to your book than to your child."

The settlers worried for a time about the young 'hoppers that were bound to emerge in the spring. The unpredictable land took charge of this duty herself and quite efficiently did away with the coming generation. She became glowing and vivacious in the early spring, encouraging latent life to stir from her sheltering garments. She then decided to sulk and retired with a protective covering of ice, leaving her offspring to effectually freeze.

Jim's plowing was late but he was philosophical about it.

"Things'll be slow comin' up, but they won't be eaten as soon as they start."

Lizzie watched the prairie take off her coat of snows with thoughtful eyes. The swift sunny smile, blustering wind, and unexpected storms were the actions of an imperious child attempting to have her way with adult winter. When pleasing blandishments and voiced threats failed to move her parent, she shed raindrops wherever she might be at the moment. And the child was growing into her own with the passing of each month. Soon she would emerge as a blushing young maiden listening to the songs of her lover.

In midsummer Lizzie was jarred from her fantasy that the prairie had now become a mature woman when Jim approached her with a plan that he and his brother were considering. They had made their decision, but now he found it hard to broach the subject to Lizzie. He finally asked diffidently, "Lizzie, would you be afraid to stay alone?" He hurried on without waiting for her answer. "Will and Earnest would be near if you had any trouble."

"What do you mean, Jim?"

"Well, John and I think there'd be money in freighting. We could use my team of horses and his wagon."

"Where would you go?"

"Probably to Fort Kearney--sometimes to Hays City."

"Wouldn't you be gone a long time? What about the crops?"

"We figured the boys could do what work there is and be with you women."

"But, how long would it be?"

"With good luck we'd make it to Fort Kearney and back in about ten days. We'd not be gone more'n two weeks at a time."

Lizzie was silent and Jim waited. He had known his wife would have a struggle to give her assent to his absences but had had no doubt of her final answer. Now, however, her expected hesitation lengthened into a prolonged silence. She had turned her head away so that he was unable to see her face.

"What is it, sweetheart?"

She made no answer or movement.

Gently he turned her face toward him, and was surprised to see it a flushed crimson.

"Why, honey--I thought you were angry and you're blushing!" he laughed in relief.

More color flowed into her face as she raised troubled eyes to his face.

"Don't laugh at me. I--" she stopped again.

"I won't if you'll tell me what's bothering you. Look up here now," he added tenderly. "I asked you if I could leave home, and you get all rosy and shy. How about letting your husband know the reason for such behavior?"

"Well, Jim--I wasn't thinking about you leaving me now." Her troubled eyes avoided him.

"I know it'll be hard on you, darling, but you can be brave for me, can't you?"

"I don't think I ought to be too much alone--so far from people, I mean," she faltered.

"But I told you I'd arrange for Will to do the work," he answered patiently.

"I mean--I might faint--or something."

"Lizzie, what are you trying to say? You're not sick, are you?" he asked in sudden alarm.

"I'm trying to tell you--to--well, that I think we're going to have a baby."

He stared at her speechlessly.

"Well of all things," was all he finally managed to get out.

After an earnest and lengthy two-family discussion, it was finally arranged that Will would stay with his aunt during Jim's absence. Jim was troubled about going at all, but Lizzie had recovered enough to laugh at him and insist that she would be all right.

"Will will be coming in for meals and he'll always be here at night. Besides, you'll quit freighting and be home long before I'll need you," she reassured him.

She even managed to wave a smiling goodbye before she went inside to cry.

The summer days passed swiftly as Lizzie worked and dreamed of the baby, and dragged endlessly as she waited for Jim's short

days at home. Sarah helped in both cases. She and Lizzie worked happily on tiny garments, and her busy tongue kept Lizzie from counting the hours until Jim might arrive.

Her joy was so great when the hauling ceased in the early fall that Jim felt guilty about having left her so much. This unvoiced feeling was lessened somewhat when he saw her pleasure in the dry goods he had brought her. They had gotten a fair yield from their planting and the freighting had proved a better financial success than they had hoped. The larder would be comfortably full for the winter, so that anxiety was over.

Jim had little farm work to do except to cut more of the prairie grass which grew so thickly in the nearby ravine. Lizzie was doubly content to have him so near home. She could stand with David on the edge of the draw once in a while and watch him work. He couldn't progress very rapidly, for in places the grass was as tall as his head. Occasionally, though, Lizzie and David got to see the frightened quail scurry from under Jim's very feet. David jabbered excitedly over the little brown birds and watched wistfully as they disappeared again.

One evening Lizzie went to call Jim to dinner. As they walked back to the house, they passed her patch of citrons.

"You'd better preserve these, Lizzie, before somebody steals them, thinking they're watermelons." He leaned over and thumped one or two. They gave back the hollow sound of a pumpkin.

"They're ready anytime now."

"I know they are. I should have started before. The days

have been so beautiful it seems I can't make myself settle down and work inside."

"Well, if you never get 'em done, it won't be anything to fret about."

"I haven't enough jars to put up very much. I will try to get at that right away, though."

"Don't do it if you don't feel like it, honey."

"I feel all right. I think I'll just do them this afternoon."

"Whoa, now--I didn't know you'd start off like a skittish horse. There's no such great rush as all that," he protested.

But that afternoon Lizzie got out her precious store of canning equipment. She handled her half dozen brownstone jars carefully and smiled at the oddly shaped lump of red sealing wax that she had saved from previous years. She had just placed a kettle of water on the fire when Jim came in. He answered her questioning glance with one word, "Indians."

"Where, Jim?"

"You can see from this window, only keep back a ways so they won't see you."

"What do you think they want?"

"I don't know, darling. Probably just something to eat." He put his arm around her and they stood watching the red men approach. Suddenly Lizzie ran back to the cupboard.

"I'm going to hide this meat." She wrapped it hastily in a tea towel and stuck it under the bed.

While she was still on her knees, Jim began to laugh. He

bent double and he sputtered with the effort of staying his roar of merriment.

"Come here," he choked.

He pointed a trembling finger. "You can put away your jars, Lizzie. Look at 'em--look." And again he doubled up.

"Why--why, they're stealing my citrons."

"Not your citrons, Lizzie--your watermelons. They think they're getting watermelons."

Tears of mirth ran down his cheeks.

"Well, Jim Knot, I can't see why that's so funny. They just come take whatever they want and now there goes my preserves."

"But honey, think how their faces are going to look when they open those things up. I'd give a pretty penny to see that. Think of it--they'll have their mouths all set for watermelon and then have nothing but citrons."

The picture was an amusing one and as Lizzie saw it, her anger melted into laughter too.

"Just the same I hope--I hope they get laughed at," she vehemently declared.

"We're laughing. And they're leaving now, so you can get the meat off the floor," he added.

But Lizzie muttered darkly until after the canning things were safely put away again.

"What are you saying, Lizzie?" Jim finally asked.

"I wish they'd have left one--and I could throw it at them!"
Three years. Three years of nothing but sun and grasshoppers,

drought and wind. Not much to be bringing a baby into, thought Lizzie. But she hugged the thought contentedly. It would be a girl--she knew it would. She busily thought of and rejected feminine names one after another. She interrupted her thoughts long enough to call, "David, come away from the barn. Buck and Bright are in there and you'll have Buck on a tear if he catches sight of you!"

Slowly he turned his steps back toward her.

"I don't wanna see Buck--wanna see Bwight," he protested.

"You can't see one without the other and that ox is too mean for anyone to get close to. Don't you go near them now."

He grumbly returned to his mud pies near her, but she watched him distrustfully as she spread her freshly washed clothes on the thick prairie grass.

That night she spoke softly into the darkness. "I know what her name is--we'll call her Ida. She'll like a short name. Then they won't call her something ugly like mine. I always did hate Lizzie. Ida's nice." She settled herself comfortably for sleep. "Grow fast, little Ida," she whispered.

Jim was troubled as her time grew near.

"But Lizzie, we might not even get the doctor. The way the snow's comin' we can't go far."

"Now, Jim," she comforted him serenely, "we'll get along. Sarah's not far away and she'll come help. Besides, maybe the snow won't be so deep."

But the snow was deep and the low hanging gray sky threatened

to pour out more at any time when Jim hurried for Sarah. Will volunteered to go to Logan for the doctor, so the worried Jim returned with his sister-in-law.

They were a welcome sight to Lizzie, who had not been able to admit her fears to Jim. Sarah smiled as she stamped her snow-laden feet and asked cheerily, "Is it a girl or a boy you're havin', Mrs. Knot?"

Lizzie answered unhesitatingly, "A girl."

"Well, now you're mighty sure of yourself. I always thought there was some doubt about these things." Sarah made light talk as she changed into dry shoes and put the kettle on the fire. "Jim, stop that walkin' and lay down with David there so he'll go to sleep." She nodded her head reassuringly. "It'll be a while yet."

Later she softly called Jim. "I don't know whether the doctor will be in time or not. Maybe you'll have to help."

He was on his feet at once. Lizzie was breathing heavily and drawing her knees toward her chest in convulsive jerks of pain.

"Help me hold her," Sarah directed. "She mustn't throw herself--"

The door burst open, bringing in a cloud of snow and a short stocky figure. He glanced only once at the bed, and stripped his coat and cap as he bent above her.

To Lizzie, it was years afterward that she saw his face.

"Well, young woman, you about did it that time," he said in mock sternness. "You barely gave me time to get my hat off."

"You don't wear a hat," she managed with a weak grin, for all the prairie folk from miles around knew his ancient black fur cap with the attached earmuffs that he wore up or down according to the weather.

"Where's Ida?" she wanted to know.

"Well now, Lizzie, they tell me you set great store by this girl of yours."

She only nodded while her eyes found the small bundle in Sarah's arms.

"Lizzie," something in his voice brought her eyes sharply to his face.

"What's the matter?"

"Now don't go jumping at me like that. There's nothing wrong. I was just wondering what you'd call that son of yours?"

"You mean--she's a boy?" Lizzie struggled with the idea.

"He is."

She was silent until she became aware that they were watching her. She looked up into Jim's anxious questioning face and at once buried her disappointment.

"Jim, you'll have to name him. Ida would sound queer." She laughed weakly and then they were all laughing.

The next day Jim disclaimed any thought that he knew a boy's name, and finally Sarah said, "There ain't no better place to go than His book. Who would you like, Lizzie?"

"But we have David already."

"We can't have too many from the Lord, Mother," her husband

he left her without help was that she had to go near the surly-tempered animal.

After Lizzie had made sure that the soap did not need her immediate attention, she pumped a bucket of water. As soon as Buck caught sight of her, he deliberately came forward as far as his rope would permit and stood pawing the ground and throwing up bits of earth from his horns as he belligerently tossed his head. Lizzie never needed to remember Jim's warning not to get too close. She was always tremblingly fearful whenever he was in sight. Jim said the sight of her skirts always seemed to infuriate the animal. Now Lizzie hesitated a moment, but managed to go on. Today the other ox would get no water. Sometimes she could get within the rope's length and set the bucket down without Buck becoming aroused, but today she'd just have to throw it and let them drink the spilled water as best they could. After seeing the bucket overturn near Buck, she fled swiftly back to the house.

Lizzie read for an hour and again went to see about the soap. She wanted to finish it before the children woke. Suddenly she was startled by Buck's familiar bellow. She stood transfixed as she saw him top the ravine.

"He's loose! Buck's loose!" she thought crazily.

She started desperately to run even as she heard the thunder of his hoofs behind her. "I can't outrun him," was her instant despairing thought. Immediately Jim's voice seemed to ring louder than the sound behind her.

"They can't turn quickly!" As if her feet heard, they took her around the corner of the raised dugout. She risked a fearful glance as she rounded the second corner and saw that the clumsy beast was not gaining. On the third turn, however, he was closer. As she came near the steps, she knew despairingly that she couldn't get down in time but must try to go around again. The second time was no better. She must manage to get down the steps the next time or her tiring body would not be able to keep ahead. What could she do? Her desperate glance took in the soap barrel and bucket. If she could pick it up in her flight--with a hurried lunge she secured the desired bucket, but Buck was so close that his horn ripped her dress. She sped around the corner in one last frenzied spurt. "Make it go straight," she prayed, as she sent the bucket flying with a backward throw. In almost the same movement, she unhesitatingly jumped. She landed at the bottom of the steps in a bruised, breathless heap and opened her eyes to the din which she knew was the death cry of the lifesaving bucket as Buck trampled it. Instead of her, she thought shudderingly as she crawled weakly to a chair and laid her head on it and cried exhausted tears.

Lizzie was now forced to remain inside. Jim had planned to be gone three days and there was little hope of rescue before then. However, the next afternoon she heard with unbelieving joy the unmistakable sound of his voice. Soon he came into the dugout, followed closely by his nephew, Will.

"You're not hurt?"

She was in his arms in a laughing, crying heap. He held her tightly for a few minutes, and then lightly joked her back to composure.

"Is this anyway to act when I come home? You'd better put another pin in your hair there. Such a red nose!" He shook his head in mock reproof.

"It's just that I'm so glad you're home," she gulped.

"Well, I didn't get any dinner, because I came in now. You might make us some biscuits. You'll stay, won't you, Will?"

"I hadn't oughta but I kinda gotta hankerin' for them biscuits like Lizzie makes," the boy grinned.

Nothing more was said about the ox until after Will had gone. Lizzie was even then unable to keep from shuddering as she told Jim the story in detail. He said nothing until she showed him her torn dress. His face whitened as he took it. He was silent for so long that she tentatively touched his shoulder to rouse him.

"I'm going to sell him!"

"Now, Jim, you can't do that. You know you need him."

"I need you, too." He swept her convulsively into his arms and held her there. His hands ran over and over her hair.

"I'd like to kill him," he gritted. "Oh, I won't. But I am going to sell him."

A few days later he brought her some calico from Logan and laid it on the table without comment. Lizzie knew then, with a guilty feeling of relief, that Buck was gone.

"Did you sell Bright, too?" she asked, and Jim nodded.

However, the final incident concerning the oxen came months later when Jim brought a package for Lizzie. She stared unbelievably at its contents.

"Jim--Jim, it's--it's mohair!" She felt the material wonderingly. "It's like my wedding dress, only a different color. Where did it come from?" She turned to him questioningly.

He grinned sheepishly. "Your mother sent it. I couldn't remember the name of that goods, but I told her to get something nice."

"You told her. Jim Knot, what have you been doing?"

"Well, I got a good price for the oxen and--"

"Jim--Buck. You used the money-- Oh you--you big bully." She buried her face on his shoulder.

"I wanted something nice," he said helplessly as he held her tightly.

"It's--it's the nicest thing you could have done."

"Well, then, what are you cryin' about?" he asked in blank amazement.

"These are happy tears," she laughed blinkingly. "Can't you tell the difference by now?"

"Sure, of course. These drops have got laugh wrinkles in 'em. The real things are just smooth round balls."

"Oh--oh--!"

He went out the door and left her with the dress goods and the echoes of his laughter.

Lizzie had dreaded the time when Jim would leave again on his freighting trips. She knew he was wanting to go but hesitating because of her, so she brought up the subject herself.

"When are you and John going to start hauling again?"

"Anytime now," he answered casually as he studied her face intently.

"I think you should leave soon," she agreed easily. She was rewarded by seeing a certain tenseness pass from his face. That afternoon he asked her if she'd like to go see Sarah, so she got the children ready with a little secret smile at his subterfuge. He couldn't wait to talk to John and he thought he was hiding it. But she'd been wanting to see Sarah about a pattern for her new dresses anyway.

She found that she didn't miss Jim so much as she had thought. She had the sewing to do and the baby took more time, and the two of them were lots of company, too. There was one time she could have used him, she thought ruefully as she sat musing over the past weeks.

She had put the baby and David to bed and was contentedly reading. Suddenly between her eyes and the page there was a squirming bull snake. She slid back her chair and dropped her book. The snake was in her lap! She jumped to her feet flapping her apron frantically. The snake fell to the floor and slithered across the room. Jim! She'd have to kill it herself, she realized despairingly. Her eyes sought for a weapon and she hastily grabbed a poker from the fireplace. Lizzie shuddered as she

recalled the chase until she had it cornered. She struck at the head and blindly hit again and again until the thing was a bloody, lifeless mess. She managed to carry it outside and throw it away. Then she stood and vomited.

That very afternoon Lizzie had fixed fresh cloth across the ceiling. She wanted no more snakes falling out of the roof. If it had been a rattler-- Her musings vanished at the sound of wagon wheels. Jim was home from Kearney and her feet were winged as she sped up the stairs.

The summer seemed to go as rapidly. Unmistakable signs of autumn began to show themselves. Lizzie greeted these with mixed feelings, for they meant that Jim would be at home for good, but they also warned of the long winter approaching.

Now, however, she was happy. Her dugout might be small but it was warm. The tea kettle was purring like a contented cat and the nice smell of her baking bread was gradually filling the room. David was busy with his precious string of thread spools which she had laboriously saved up before they came from Illinois. She hadn't added many since, she thought ruefully. But then she smiled again as she looked at the baby. He was getting so roly poly she'd have to watch him closer. A fresh gust of wind momentarily over-rode the sound of the tea kettle. It was damp and raw outside. She had hurried her usual trip to the barn to milk the cow, because it was so unpleasant. Then too, she always worried a little about leaving the baby with just little David. After all, he was still a baby himself at four. A slight frown

crossed her face as she pushed these unwelcome thoughts away. She and the children were snug and comfortable--and Jim was coming home tomorrow. She hugged that thought contentedly.

"Jim is coming--Jim is coming," purred the teakettle.

"Jim is coming--Jim is coming home," clicked little David's spools.

And Lizzie listened and smiled.

She turned from the stove, and looked into the face of an Indian standing just inside the door. As she realized his presence, echoes of tales of scalped women and murdered children whispered in her brain. The moments that she stood there lengthened into whirling hours. David had not yet noticed, and the clicking of his spools seemed ominously loud. She had been drilled on the maxim "Never show fear before an Indian" for so long that her first actions were automatic. She turned to the cupboard for dishes to set the table while terror became a living shape whose breath sent a murky film across her eyes. Blindly she groped for courage and control. The babies were across the room. David had discovered the Indian. He stood up and for a moment Lizzie thought he was going to try to come to her. He backed up a step or two, however, without moving his eyes from the visitor. Then he stood quietly beside his baby brother and looked questioningly at his mother. Lizzie knew that she must pass the Indian to get to them and also set the table. She must be natural.

Slowly she started toward him. He had not moved or spoken since he entered. As she approached him, however, his hand slid

down to his belt. She followed the movement and her eyes became glued to the knife for which he was reaching. He was pulling it out! She almost stopped but thought of Tom and David pushed her on. The hand with the knife started upward. She followed its course with growing horror. As she came almost in front of him, he casually drew out a plug of tobacco and carved himself a chew as she went on to the table. The relief was almost too much for her. Somehow she managed to get through supper. She prepared a plate of food for her unwelcome guest and he took it with a noncommittal grunt. After he had eaten he left as abruptly as he had entered. She watched from the window and could see in the gathering dusk that he was taking care of his pony. He was putting him in the barn! He'd be here all night and Jim couldn't possibly get home before tomorrow. Determinedly, she hurried David into wraps and wrapped the baby in blankets. Dragging on her coat, she took a child in each arm and hurried up the steps. She slid away from the house on the far side from the barn. After she had walked a short distance, watching behind her all the way, she began to run. To add to her troubles, it began to rain. She sped on until her breath became a stifled, tearing beast within her, and then she stopped fearfully to rest. When she finally reached Sarah's, she was almost too exhausted to tell her story. Sarah took charge at once and gave Lizzie dry clothes and something hot to drink. The babies were put to bed and Lizzie followed soon after. Her sleep was troubled by grim visions of knives and war-painted Indians, and she was white and drawn-faced in the morning.

Will had already gone to gather some of the neighbor men to go with him to the Knot homestead. When he returned, he wore a puzzled expression.

"Lizzie, that Indian seems to be all right. We finally got him to talk and he say he's waitin' to see Jim."

"To see Jim?"

"That's all we could get out a him. He's settin' over there by the chimney where it's warm. If you wanta stay here till Uncle Jim comes home, you can, but I don't think that red man's gonna hurt you none."

"I'll stay here," she answered promptly.

When the men drove in from Hays City, Lizzie ran out and was sobbing wildly in Jim's arms almost before he realized that she was there. He looked questioningly at the others.

"Lizzie's just a little upset," said Sarah. "You've got an Indian over to your house that Will says is friendly, but he scared Lizzie kinda bad last night."

"Look up here, Lizbeth Knot. You're surely not afraid of just one Indian."

"One's enough to k-kill you."

"Who's talking about killing?" Again he looked over her head at the others.

"Well, you see, Jim, that Indian had a butcher knife he used to cut his chewin' tobacco and Lizzie thought--"

"I see," Jim said quietly and his arms tightened around his wife. "Maybe we could stay here for dinner, Sarah, before we go

home?"

"A course ya can. We've always got enough for you folks," she answered heartily.

"Thanks. We'll be glad to stay. Lizzie and I will go for a little walk, and then she'll be in to help."

"Don't be in no hurry. I can do all that's needin'."

It was almost an hour before Lizzie was calm again, but then she went in and ate her food with enjoyment.

On the way home Lizzie sat quietly beside Jim, listening contentedly to David's busy chatter. The first thing they saw when they neared the homestead was a bright red blanket drying on a bush.

"Looks like our guest was still there, Lizzie," said Jim cheerfully, watching her face intently.

"I don't mind now you're here," she answered simply.

"I'll be here from now on, sweetheart. This is the last trip this year."

"I'm glad, Jim. I'm glad." She brushed a hand across her eyes.

"Your happiness and safety mean so much to me, Lizbeth. I'm sorry I wasn't here when you needed me."

"You most always are. It's all turned out fine now. Only you'd better see what he wants," she added as she climbed down.

Jim found the Indian near the barn and talked to him for some time. Then with immeasurable relief Lizzie watched the spotted pony depart.

"What did he want, Jim?"

"Well, you'd hardly guess. He wanted to sell me some horses. Someone had told him I sold my oxen."

"If he'd just have told me, he'd have saved himself and me a lot of trouble."

Winter boisterously snatched the wand of power from the tired hand of Autumn, and the King of Snows immediately inaugurated new and severe laws for his tyrannical reign. His flaky messengers scurried incessantly across the sky. They perched upon the windows of the dugout until the panes were completely covered and masses of them held a council on the steps. If they were bent upon keeping the humans in seclusion, they were eminently successful. Jim fought his way out once a day and was otherwise content to submit to their decree.

The long days were happy ones. Jim and Lizzie laughed together over Tom's first efforts to walk and took turns telling stories to David.

"Jim!" Lizzie protested one day, "you're telling him whoppers!"

"Now, those aren't whoppers." He assumed an injured air. "They're just--just little ones."

"Any time an antelope talks to a buffalo--"

"All right, then. Son, I'll have to tell you a different story. Your mother objects to this one. There was once a boy who lived a long time ago. His name was Joseph--"

The wheel of months turned the cold season into another

spring.

"Davie--Davie--" Lizzie called.

"What?" he answered her from the nearby ravine.

"I want you to go to Sarah's after some bluing. I'm out and I'm almost ready to rinse the clothes."

"All right, Mother."

As he cheerfully set out, he skipped a few steps because he felt so good, but he stopped and stepped more carefully, remembering the never ceasing warning, "Be careful. Watch out for rattlesnakes." Walking more slowly, he looked for the meadow lark he could hear close by. He finally discovered the yellow-breasted singer perched on the edge of a stone. Davie circled round it, "So's I won't scare him so he'll quit singin'," he thought.

When he was over half way, he found that the daisies were in bloom. On the brow of the hill the grass was nearly hidden by the blue and white flowers that Lizzie loved.

"I can take Mother lots of them." He paused thoughtfully. "I'd better go on and pick 'em comin' back."

He hurried on, asked his Aunt Sarah for some soda, and came back to the flowers. Watching for snakes as carefully as he could, he soon gathered as many as he could carry. As soon as he saw his mother he began to run. Pushing them breathlessly into her arms, he said, "I got lots of these for you."

"Oh, David! They're lovely, sweetheart, but you shouldn't have brought so many."

"There's lots more, Mother. I didn't hurt 'em."

"I'll go put these in water. Did you get the bluing?"

"Yes, here it is. I--" A blank look replaced the animation on his face.

"What's the matter?"

"Well--well, I guess if bluin' isn't white, this must be tody."

It was only a week later when Lizzie was again busy outside with her washing that she was startled by David's quick cry from the dugout. "Mamma! Mamma, oh, come quick."

"What's the matter?" By now she was inside and could see nothing wrong. "What is it?"

"Tom--oh, Tom! He swallowed it."

"Swallowed what?"

"He swallowed a bullet."

She had the baby in her arms now and he added to the explanation by opening his mouth and then serenely saying, "Gone."

David began to cry while she stood debating what to do. Tom wasn't choking. Maybe she should try to make him throw it up. Irresolutely, she started up the steps and sent a high trill across the field to Jim. She quieted David and watched Tom closely while she waited for Jim, who was hurrying toward her. Tom seemed all right. He wriggled in her arms and wanted down. When his father arrived and Lizzie and David started talking, Tom added his bit again pointing into his empty mouth and repeating "Gone, gone!"

"I think it's all right, Lizzie," Jim finally decided. "I

certainly shouldn't have been so careless. . He must have picked it up by the fireplace where I was working this morning. Let's see if nature won't just take its course."

That summer Jim and his brother again set out on their freighting trips. Jim comforted Lizzie with the statement that this would be the last season when the business would be profitable enough to warrant their time. The heat seemed worse than ever before. The children could play outdoors only in the early morning, and the rest of the day they kept within the dugout, where it remained comfortably cool. Lizzie enjoyed the quiet afternoons, which meant time to read, and she loved the evenings when the earth came out of the baking pan and was laid to cool on the window ledge of the breezes.

A few days after the men left, Sarah and her two children came to stay "a spell." Sewing was usually the accepted pastime when they got together, and both their needles and tongues worked without intermission.

Lizzie had to go out twice to see why Tom was crying. The second time she went, he came back with her and moped about the house. Sarah looked at him critically and announced, "Lizzie, I don't think that youngun' feels good. He don't act natural to me."

"He has been cross. I think he might need some medicine, but I haven't got any right now."

"I got some Castoria to home. I'll send Davie and Harriet after it. She knows where't is."

The children willingly set out for the other homestead. The time for them to return, however, passed with no sight of them. The mothers were really beginning to worry. Sarah made another trip out to see if she could spy them and came back with a sigh of relief to announce that they were coming over the hill. Another hour went by before the truants arrived.

"Harriet Knot, where have you been and what do you mean stayin' so long? We was scared the Indians had you or a rattler had bit you!"

"David, you made us worry."

"Well, Harriet was huntin' a ribbon."

"A ribbon! Land sakes, child, what was you wantin' with a ribbon?"

"We needed one to tie around the bottle."

Lizzie and Sarah stared.

"Why does a bottle of Castoria need a ribbon?" Sarah demanded.

"And where is the Castoria?" added Lizzie.

For the first time Harriet hesitated.

David volunteered, "We used it all up in the christenin'."

"In the what?"

"In the christenin'. You know, like the preacher did to Tom. We named it--" He stopped to point. "We named it Castoria Hill."

Harriet eagerly interrupted. "We sprinkled it just like they do it in church and we wanted a ribbon so it'd be pretty, and after it was all gone, then I said just as loud as I could,

"I now christen thee Castoria Hill!"

"Harriet! Your pa'll give you a beatin' when he gets home and I tell him you been a mockin' the Lord."

"Oh no, Sarah. They didn't mean it like that. But David, Harriet--what are we going to do with little Tom now? You've used the medicine that was to make him feel better and now he'll still be sick."

Both the children looked shame-faced. "We never thought a that," Harriet muttered. David looked at his mother's face and started hastily for the barn, where he could cry in solitude.

"I think that's enough, Sarah," Lizzie said quietly as she turned back to the house. "I've got some prunes we can stew for Tom," she continued.

"I know I oughta' stay mad at them," Sarah chuckled, "but it is kinda' funny." And she laughed merrily. "I bet Castoria Hill'll be a landmark for a long time around here."

The day after Sarah had gathered her children and belongings and returned home, Lizzie was peacefully reading while the children slept when she heard the sound of a horse approaching. Before she could climb the steps, she heard someone shouting her name.

"Yes, I'm coming. What is it?"

"Isn't Jim home?" She recognized the speaker as one of their neighbors from up the valley.

"No, he isn't. I'm expecting him soon, though. He might come today."

"There's no time to wait. The Indians are comin' and they're

killin' all the Whites they can find."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes. You get your things together and we'll come by fer you. We're gonna try to get everybody to the fort. Ain't this the God damnedest counrty, anyway?"

"It certainly is!" Lizzie agreed heartily.

Lizzie turned to the house and the messenger galloped away. He had gone about a mile when he met Jim coming home.

"You're a man I'm glad to see. The Indians are on the war-path and we gotta git to the fort." He started on but called back over his shoulder. "Your wife says this is the God damndest country!"

Jim stared after him in blank amazement. He had never heard Lizzie swear in her life. He started his horses on the run. Lizzie saying this was the God damnedest country! She must have been so frightened she'd lost her mind. He had visions of her in crazed terror, mouthing foul curses she would have blushed to overhear from some man. And the Indians were coming--he must get there to save the children, for Lizzie would probably be little or no help. There was a bushel basket of food at the top of the steps, however, and Lizzie appeared with the children by the time he had pulled up and climbed down. One look at her and he realized his foolishness. He should have known his Lizzie was too level-headed to fly off when danger threatened.

She was delighted to see him and together, they loaded the wagon with the bushel basket, some cloths that could be made

into bandages, as Lizzie explained, and all the quilts and comforters they had. It was weeks after the soldiers from Hays *City* had come to stop the Indians and after they had returned home before he finally told an amused Lizzie of the visions he had conjured because he had heard she was "cussin' the country."

In August she told Jim her secret. He was pleased.

"This one will surely be a girl and we can call her Ida this time. Are you sure another won't seem too much?" he added anxiously.

"Of course not," she laughed. "There isn't anything we can do about it, anyway. But I'm glad, and I do so hope it will be a girl. I'm never too busy to take care of babies, Jim, and I won't ever be." She looked dreamily into the distance. "There isn't anything nicer and they're so sweet and pretty."

"Lizbeth, did a man ever have such a wonderful woman as I have?"

"Why, of course. Most women feel that way, Jim."

He shook his head. "I've known some that would think they had a hard lot if they lived out here and had three babies to take care of."

"Mercy me, those are fine thoughts. You get your chores finished and come to supper. You'd better get to bed, for you'll be needing what sleep you get if you're going to leave so early in the morning."

"This may be the last trip, Lizzie. I didn't tell you before because I didn't want to get your hopes up for nothing. John wants to be home and it's getting late in the season anyway."

Lizzie looked smilingly at him and sang all the time while she was getting supper.

She was to remember afterward that that was the last time she sang for many weeks. They brought Jim home a day before she had expected him. It was a weary, pain-ridden face which greeted her from the wagon bed. John explained what had happened while Will and his brother carried him in.

"The load slipped. Some of the lumber came down on his leg, and it snapped like a twig under a horse's hoof. I just stopped at the house to get the boys and I'm goin' on to Logan now for the Doc. Get some hot water ready and whatever you think he'll need."

Lizzie's face was whiter than Jim's as she hurried about. He grimaced a smile at her, but she had to turn away to hide the tears that wouldn't stay in her eyes. She mentally squared her shoulders, and was ready to help when the doctor arrived. It took a long time and the lines in Lizzie's face were as deep as Jim's before they were through. Doc finally straightened and rolled down his cuffs.

"It's a bad break," he said soberly to Lizzie. "It'll take lots of time to mend. He can feel lucky he was so close to home when it happened or we never woulda' got the swelling down enough to do any good. You can thank John for that temporary splint, too. A day of ridin' without that might've made a different story now."

Lizzie turned baffling eyes on John, but he only shook

his head before she could say any thanks to him.

"Will can stay here with you an' Sarah will be here this evenin'. I better be goin' now so she can come. She was over to Gurdy's when we came by, so she don't know about it yet."

In the following days, Sarah and John were frequent visitors and Will was always near. He was busy working on the barn, taking out the rotten hay in the walls and replacing it with part of the fall cutting. As August drew to its close with no sign of fall in the air, he became less talkative. Lizzie first noticed that something was wrong, but Jim soon began to wonder, too. To his first questionings, Will only answered, "Tain't nothin'--don't be worrin' your head about it."

Finally, however, he told them both. "It's this sure a shinin' every day. There ain't no sign a rain and this country's burnin' up."

"Is that all?" Lizzie's relief was evident in her voice. "It'll rain in September and the crops won't suffer any now."

"I don't think Will finished, Mother," Jim said quietly. "What were you thinkin' about?"

"Fire," Will answered somberly. "The prairie's enough fuel right now to keep the devil's fires a goin' fer quite some spell. I don't like it none. The wind's a blowin' every day and all this grass needs is one little spark to make it the best bakin' oven you ever see'd."

"I'm sure you're right, Will," Jim answered slowly. "But I guess there's no use looking for trouble before it comes. We can't

have rain unless the Lord intends us to. All we can do is the best we can. You'd better plow a fire guard for me and you might make it a little wider than we have before."

"I'm doin' that, but if we get a head fire down this valley, there'll be no savin' it."

"We'll hope for the best." But Lizzie saw the new lines deepen in Jim's face even as he spoke.

Looking back, it didn't seem possible to Lizzie that Will's ominous forebodings could so rapidly be fulfilled. Their first warning came with the man on the foam-flecked horse. Not for long did they have to depend on his word that "the whole valley up river's afire and its comin' down fast. We've given up fightin' it except on the sides till it gets down beyond you folks where the valley narrows."

They held a hurried conference. "We can't move Jim out. If it's comin' fast, our best chance is in the dugout."

"You'd better go help fight it, Will. We can manage."

"I'm needed here, I guess. Lizzie, wet everything you can find. We'll put wet blankets over the windows and doors when the air gets bad, and you'll need plenty."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm gonna try ta git the stock into the river. That's the closest place. That barn'll be gone in one puff."

"Hurry, Will."

"I'll be right back. If I get 'em started, they'll go by themselves."

David and Tom were catching the contagion of excitement. Lizzie knew Jim was restless because he could do nothing, so she sent the children to his bedside with demands for a story. As the day grew darker and the air became ever more tainted with smoke, Jim's firm voice echoed through the room telling the rapt children of Daniel in the lion's den. Will returned and helped Lizzie cover the windows and door with the blankets. She lit the lamp and the story came to an abrupt end. The roar of the flame monster was close and the heat of his breath was drying the coverings. They hung more and more blankets and each of them placed wet cloths about their faces for extra protection. The thunder of the hoofs of the fire army passed directly over the dugout and gradually receded in the distance.

David and Tom were almost nude and the men wore no shirts, while Lizzie's hair clung in damp curls, but otherwise they were as safe as before the visitant's arrival. They removed the blankets and looked at a murky world through smoke-stained, heat-cracked windows.

Lizzie got supper while Will paced the floor in his restless desire to be gone to do what he could in the night down river. He went out to see if the earth was cool enough for travel and came back to report that the team and cow were safely in the middle of the river and that "you wouldn't know there was ever any barn around here."

He ate hurriedly and departed. Silently Lizzie put the children to bed. She went outside only a moment and came back to

stare moodily out the windows. Gazing at the hills, she said with a dulled weariness, "They seem lonely, Jim. I think they bent above this valley when the grass and trees were young and glowing. Now they sit and brood, like a mother when the cradle has been suddenly made empty."

III

NETTIE AND LETTIE--HENRY AND IDA

Jim's leg was healed. Lizzie was happily content to have him walking about the house for the first few days that he was up. When he finally decided to talk to John, she waved a cheerful goodbye as he drove away. Her mind wandered from the routine task of making bread to picture again his eagerness to be out and his youthful grin. Things would be all right, now that he was able to take care of them. She'd felt helpless and defeated seeing him lying there day after day without complaining, but with that look of strain growing more pronounced all the time.

She finished the bread making and started to work on the little nightgown she'd started. She smiled as she looked at Tom, who was playing across the room. She'd been so disappointed because he wasn't Ida. She was trying not to count so much on her this time but maybe--. "Now Lizzie, you stop that kind of thinking," she sternly admonished herself. "You'll be glad for either kind."

She laid down her work as she heard the wagon returning. "Jim must have forgotten something," she thought.

She saw the doctor first. It can't be--it can't be. She tried to understand. That surely wasn't Jim with that dangling,

broken leg. "Not Jim--he's well now."

"No, Lizzie." She hadn't realized she'd spoken but the doctor was answering her. "He had a runaway and he's really broken it this time. A compound fracture. I was just coming back from down the valley. You'll have to be brave--he's needing you."

The next weeks were a time which neither Jim or Lizzie ever wished to remember. Each morning she started with determined cheerfulness which Jim tried valiantly to match, but by evening each was worn out by the pretense. The leg was not getting well. The doctor came but simply shook his head. Finally he said, "I'm afraid it will never be as good as it was. The bone seems to be knitting, but that leg will always bother you."

"You mean he can't walk?" asked Lizzie.

"He'll probably walk," he answered slowly, "but he may need some help."

"You mean I'll be crippled," Jim stated rather than questioned.

"I'm afraid so. I'm sorry. I did all I could, but with one break following so closely upon the other----." He shook his head as he picked up his satchel.

"I'm sure you have, Lem. I'll never feel that this is at all your fault," Jim answered steadily. "We'll get along," he smiled at Lizzie. "We know the worst and it's easier to bear than the uncertainty."

But that night Lizzie stood outside in the darkness while the tears ran down her cheeks and despair filled her heart. "Jim--oh, Jim," she sobbed aloud. "I can't stand to have him crippled," she addressed the night. "I can't stand it!"

When she went in, however, Jim gently reproved her. "You mustn't let yourself be so upset over this. It isn't fair to the little one that's coming--or to the other children either," he added. "This is real trouble, honey, but not as bad as some things that could happen to us. I've been wrong in feeling so bad about this, I know, and for all our sakes, we've got to quit feelin' sorry for ourselves. Come on now, sweetheart. Wipe those tears away and let's have no more." He kissed her hair, her swollen eyelids, and then her mouth.

On a blustery March day, Sarah and the doctor arrived simultaneously. Lizzie's last and first picture was Jim standing by, smilingly leaning on the walnut cane that Will had made for him. When he realized that she was looking at him, he smiled broadly and asked, "Well, Lizzie, is it Ida this time?"

"I don't know," she answered weakly. "Is it?"

"Sure it is," Sarah interrupted from near the fireplace.

"I'm glad," she whispered to Jim.

"Yes, but Lizzie---"

"What, Jim?"

"Well, its--here, can I show h-r?"

"Ya can if you're able," Sarah answered.

Jim walked out of her sight but soon returned. He carefully placed the baby beside her and turned away. Lizzie was too absorbed to notice until he stood before her again and spoke her name. She stared unbelievably.

"Jim!"

"Yes, honey--there's two."

"What'll we do with them?" She looked bewildered. The others shouted with laughter and Lizzie finally smiled too.

"Well, I'm not going to name them. I've tried twice to call one Ida and I give up."

"I think I can name them, Lizzie, if you really don't want to," the doctor said slowly.

"I'd be glad for you to, Lem. That is, if it's all right with Jim."

"I'm no good at that sort of thing. Let's hear what you have in mind."

"Well, my mother's name was Nettie and my wife's was Lettie. They match for twins and I'd be mighty proud."

"I like 'em," said Sarah.

"They're lovely, Lem. The oldest one should be Nettie--only which one is?"

"This one, I think. But they're so much alike you'll have to watch or you'll be getting them mixed," he laughed.

"I wish I had two such fine younguns," Sarah said wistfully.

"Seems like my girls ain't babies atall anymore."

"Maybe you will, Sarah--maybe you will," Lem chuckled.

"Get on with you now. Here's some coffee if you're a wantin' it," she answered tartly.

The twins proved to have healthy appetites and lusty lungs, and Jim was often pressed into service by a flustered Lizzie. Any leisure time for brooding over their troubles was gone.

With the early summer days, however, shades of horror began to stalk the homesteads all along the river valley. Epidemic walked with giant stride, carrying typhoid into almost every home and taking away a pitiful burden as often as he entered.

He failed to visit Jim and Lizzie, but John came with a haggard, weary face. "Sarah wants Lizzie to come if she's not afraid. We wouldn't ask you folks only we're so tired out and the girls are pretty bad."

"I'll go with you. You and Sarah have been here helping us so often that you needn't apologize for coming. Besides, what good are kin folks if they're not to be helping each other?"

"We didn't know the girls were sick, John," Jim said, as Lizzie gathered her things.

"It looks like we might lose one or both, Jim." His face worked convulsively.

"They're surely not that bad. You're just worn out now. Ready Lizzie?"

"Yes, I've got what I'll need now. I'll have to come back and then you can take my place."

"All right. Don't worry about the children. I'll see to them."

"Let's go, John."

When Lizzie arrived, she found that John had not exaggerated. Sarah was exhausted but refused to rest. They did what they could through the afternoon and evening. Little Mary died before midnight and her sister Harriet outlived her only three hours.

As they washed the little bodies and dressed them in their Sunday dresses, Sarah spoke only once. "If we hadn't been 'way out here where we couldn't get a doctor--. 'We're goin' to leave this country that has nothin' for humans but hurtin' and dyin'!"

Lizzie wept as she told Jim, and each day as she bathed her strong, lively twins, her heart ached anew for the emptiness and bitterness in Sarah's. She felt again the unfriendly loneliness of her first night on the prairie as she waved goodbye to this brother and sister who had been such close and helpful neighbors. For true to her vow, Sarah and John left for Illinois within a week after they had covered the two wooden boxes with earth.

The feeling of emptiness grew, for they had little time or wish to visit in the same way with the homesteaders who lived on down the valley. Jim missed Will's help with the outside

work, which now placed extra strain on his lame leg. He returned one day from Logan in a thoughtful mood.

"Lizzie, do you like it here?"

She hesitated. "I'm rather mixed up," she confessed.

"It's pretty-- but it demands so much and takes away so many pleasant things."

"Could you want to leave?"

"Leave?"

"Yes. Go away from here."

"Where would we go?"

"There's a man in Logan who wants a homestead. He has a farm back in Rice County he'd trade."

"My cousins live in Rice County."

"I know. And it's seemed different out here lately."

"Would you like to, Jim?"

"It's going to be pretty hard to manage." He glanced involuntarily at his cane beside the chair. She followed his look.

"If you think the trade would be all right, I think I'd like to go. I guess maybe I'd be glad."

Jim picked up his hat and cane. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Lizzie followed him up the steps and still stood there after he had gone. She couldn't quite think how it would be

not to look at the prairie each day. After five years, she'd gotten used to watching it. She'd probably miss it, but maybe it wasn't so different back in Rice County. That wasn't so far, really, when you thought about Illinois. But she looked lingeringly at the hills and listened to the wind as she turned away.

It was settled. Lizzie had packed in a whirl of haste. They were following the trail east almost before she could believe it. Her last sight of their dugout made her feel almost sick. Maybe she'd never see this valley again. She turned quietly to her husband.

"I'm going to miss it, Jim. I find I don't hate it at all."

He placed his arm around her as he nodded understandingly.

"It's a great land, Lizzie--a great land for the future. Maybe we'll come back some day--or maybe it'll be one of our boys."

On the eighth day Jim spoke quietly to Lizzie. "I think we're coming to Bashton. The farm is four miles from there."

"We'd better get a few groceries if we can." She smiled wearily.

"You're tired, aren't you? We'll soon be home, though."

"Yes, but the house won't be fit to move in."

"Well, we won't try to do much this afternoon but rest. We can spend one more night in the open."

"It's all right with me," she agreed. "Will the house be much larger?"

"Some," he answered. "The rooms are probably smaller."

"I can't think what it'll be like to live in three rooms again." She sighed happily.

"It's still just a sod house though, honey. Don't build too many air castles. I wouldn't want you to be disappointed."

When Jim came back with the groceries, he was smiling broadly. "You can sleep in comfort tonight after all, Lizzie. I found out for certain where Ed's live and it's only a couple of miles from our place. I think we'll go directly there and let the farm wait until tomorrow."

"Won't Jennie be surprised? I haven't seen her since before we were married."

"I knew Ed before I knew your cousin--before I knew you, in fact," he added laughingly.

"It seems a long time ago, doesn't it?"

"Yes, we're really getting to be old folks," he teased.

When they drove up and were recognized, the reunion was a happy one and the Fartingtons were delighted beyond measure when they heard the plans of Lizzie and Jim.

"We'll go over with you in the morning and help you get settled," Jennie said. "The house is in pretty good shape, I think."

"What's it like?" Lizzie questioned eagerly.

"It has three rooms--"

"Yes, we know that much about it."

"Most of the floor is wood and there's at least one window in each room,"

"Is it a regular soddie?" Jim asked.

"Oh, yes. That's all we have around here. There's been some new frames built in the last year, though. I'd like to have one, only I'm not sure I want to stay here."

"You won't have any more steps to climb, Lizzie," Jim smiled.

"It sounds wonderful to me."

They found it to be a great improvement over their homestead and Lizzie soon settled down in it "like a settin' hen," as Ed put it.

As fall drew near, the problem of schooling for David became the subject of family discussion.

"We can teach him some, Lizzie, but he should go even though it won't be for so very long."

"Yes, I know he should. He's so shy, though, I wonder how he'll get along." Her brows puckered in a worried frown.

"School's the best place for him to get over that."

The sod schoolhouse was two miles from the farm, and there were no children near them. David set out alone, and Lizzie watched him go with great misgiving. She knew only too well what troubles he might encounter. He'd always been a good child,

and had already often taken the responsibility of caring for and watching over Tom. But he never talked much when they had company and stayed outside as much as he could while they were there. And Tom was going to be just as bad. She sighed as she went to bathe the twins. These were David's problems now, and it would do her no good to worry. He'd surely get along all right. She was probably just imagining most of this, anyway.

David came slowly across the field that afternoon and Tom ran joyously to meet him, for he had been moping about the house on this first day without his brother's company. Lizzie cut bread and spread it thickly with butter. Then she poured two glasses of milk while she watched them approach. The children weren't allowed to piece, ordinarily, but David had taken his luncheon, and walked quite a distance besides. He smiled when he saw the food.

"It's pretty hot," he said simply as he wiped his sleeve across his brow.

"You go to school?" Tom eagerly wanted to know.

"Yes. To school," he answered gently, and took a big drink of milk. Lizzie waited to see if he was going to say any more. When he remained silent, she finally asked,

"How did you get along, David?"

"Well," he hesitated thoughtfully, "some of 'em talk together a lot, and I talked to one boy."

"Who was he? What did you say?"

"His name is Charlie and he's got a jackknife." He finished his bread and butter in silence and Lizzie didn't want to question him any more. He turned back, however, as he went out the door, and said with one of his brief, sweet smiles, "I can read better than he can."

Lizzie was so relieved that her knees felt weak. She told Jim that night. The next morning she prepared David's lunch and watched him go with a smile, for she could contentedly hear him say "His name is Charlie. I can read better than he can."

When the first snow began to fall, Lizzie watched it constantly. She'd been so busy getting settled that she hadn't thought much about the river valley and the sod dugout they had left behind. But when the world began to draw her white comforter over herself, she became conscious of an increasing restlessness and emptiness. She'd always watched the hills as they began to fade into snow-flaked vagueness, and now they were gone. She shut her eyes to remember. They had meant so many things to her. Their moods had varied: there had been the time when they were strangers and had seemed to forbid settlers to intrude: and there had been the spring when they had cast off their cares, and dressed to enhance the beauty of their valley. Again, there had been weeks when they turned brown and stood in stoical endurance against the shimmering heat waves; and then in winter, they assumed their crowns of ice and robes of snow and withdrew in haughty aloofness to reign

with the distant gods. But the most vivid picture to Lizzie was their black, stripped nakedness as they bent in grief over the desolate land. And she had deserted them just when they needed help most, she thought with deepening sorrow. They shouldn't have left. The landscape before her returned within her vision. Jim came in to supper and she turned to look at him. He smilingly limped across the room and her face cleared of trouble. It had been right for her to leave, for Jim had needed her even more--and he never withdrew to an unknown region where her help wasn't needed.

"Why so quiet in here, sweetheart?"

"I was just a little homesick for the hills, but I'm over it now," she smiled.

Spring came suddenly, without warning. Lizzie hadn't been conscious of the gradual awakening of the fields as she had been of the prairie. It had been much more comfortable, however, for a family of six to spend the winter in a three-room house with wooden flooring than it would have been to live in the one-room sod dugout. She had to admit that life on the farm was easier than the life of the homesteader.

"Besides, Lizzie, you never liked the homestead. You hated the wind and the hills," Jim teased her when she had admitted her thoughts to him.

"I don't know why I ever said that. I certainly feel differently about it now."

The wind of the prairie blew swiftly across Lizzie's face on a hot June day, however, when a wagon pulled up before the house. Sarah said, "Ain't ya gonna even ask us in, Lizzie Knot?"

"Sarah! Oh Sarah!" Lizzie flung her arms around her sister-in-law, laughing and crying at once.

"Is this the way ya'd greet a person, now?" Sarah mocked reprovingly, in spite of her own moist eyes.

"John, I'm so glad to see you both." Lizzie was laughing eagerly now, but suddenly paused as she noticed another couple in the wagon.

"Ya might say howdy ta me, too, Lizzie," Will grinned, as he turned to help the woman down. "And here's my wife," he added awkwardly but with an air of pride.

"You're married! She's pretty, too, Will. Come on in, all of you. I'm going to ring the bell and get Jim in from the field. I know he'll be as pleased as I am."

In the midst of the eager questions and answers, and the happy surprise when Jim came in, Lizzie leaned over Sarah's chair and squeezed her hand happily.

"I hope it'll be twins, Sarah dear."

"We'll be happy with even one," Sarah blushing smiled.

After the first excitement had subsided, Jim voiced the question which Lizzie had been wanting to ask. "Where are you folks bound for? What are your plans?"

John looked at Sarah, but she shook her head and said,

"You tell 'em."

"Well," he started slowly, "Will and I talked things over and decided to come west again. We all missed it after a while--even Sarah." He smiled across at his wife. "We heard of a chance to homestead up close to where we were before--."

"Oh, I did hope you were going to be close, again," Lizzie interrupted with a disappointed cry.

"Just wait a bit now, Lizzie," her brother-in-law answered, and she settled back with new hope. "We got some land in Phillips County and we've come this way to see you folks."

"But you are going to stay a while, aren't you?" asked Lizzie.

"I guess the team'll be rested enough to go on tomorrow," he answered, smiling at the way Lizzie drooped at his words.

"John, you just quit bein' so ornery," Sarah intervened.

"Lizzie, if it's all right with you and Jim, we're going to stay here and it's just Will and his wife that's goin' to Phillipsburg."

"Stay! Of course we want you to stay," Lizzie beamed.

"I've never been so glad to see anybody in my life before as I am you folks, and I just didn't see how I could stand to see you leave again."

"Well, we're here, and we'll be here for a while, anyway," answered John.

And Lizzie was content.

Fate seemed to favor her desires. Ed had been dissatisfied in his present location and now saw a chance to change. Will and John were glad to make arrangements with him. So Lizzie and Jim lost neighbors even as they gained them.

Ed and Jennie departed with the newly wedded pair and Sarah and John took over their farm in Rice County.

The world seemed good to Lizzie. But it was soon darkened by the fact that Sarah wasn't feeling well. Jim and Lizzie were as interested in the arrival of the infant as though it were their own. John came after Lizzie a month ahead of time. She had been afraid the baby would be premature. She thought hastily about the saying that an eight-months baby didn't have as much chance to live as a seven-months infant. She didn't dare think that this baby might not live. If just had to--and she squared her jaw as she went in to Sarah. It seemed to her that Sarah's pain would never end. The time dragged. The baby should have arrived at least three hours ago, she figured wearily. The doctor was doing everything he could and so was Sarah, but the infant had still not put in an appearance by midnight.

At last he said, "It's going to be a boy."

"How can you tell?"

"The heart beat," he answered briefly. "I don't know what to do about her, though. I guess you'd better get the instruments ready. She's getting too worn out to keep this up much longer."

While Lizzie was busy at the stove, he leaned over Sarah. Suddenly he called,

"Come here! Help me, like this."

It was over, and the doctor held a crying baby boy. Lizzie felt weak. She took him eagerly and bathed and dressed him. Then tears rolled down Sarah's cheeks as she looked at the boy in John's arms.

"We've got a baby now. We've got a baby, John."

Lizzie was quiet when she went home and Jim was silent, too, as she told her experience.

"I hope you don't ever have anything like that, Lizzie." He looked troubled.

"I won't, sweetheart. I never do, you know."

She remembered his words some months later, however, when she knew that she was pregnant again. She knew Jim remembered too, for he was worried. One day he said,

"I've been wondering if we should hire a girl to help you, Lizzie. Five children will be quite a few for you to take care of by yourself."

"Just so it isn't twins, again," she laughed. "I can still manage with one more. Many women take care of eight or nine."

"Many women work in the fields, too," he answered snortly. "But you're never going to."

"All right, darling. Only don't worry about me. I wouldn't like having someone else around trying to do my work. I know just how I want it done--and I'd probably have to do it over again because I didn't like it."

Jim did hire help during that harvest, for in the following August, Lizzie's third son was born. After some discussion, he was named Henry, since Ida still didn't fit, much to the merriment of all concerned. Even Lizzie enjoyed the joke.

"I've tried for four years to call a baby by that name, and Sarah wouldn't even help me out. She had Earnest instead."

That fall, Jim brought up the question which had been tentatively discussed before. The family was outgrowing the house, and the problem of a new one was one which needed much thought.

"I think size is the most important thing," Lizzie said.

"Yes, but I want you to have some of the things you've wanted, too."

"I just want enough bedrooms for the children so that we can have one of our own." She stopped to think a moment. "I would like to have plenty of windows, too."

"I think you can have both of those without any trouble."

"Yes, but Jim, we mustn't spend too much money."

"We'll have enough," he answered confidently. "Would you rather have it one story and spread out, or in two stories with stairs to climb?"

"Two stories! Jim that's too much. We can't afford it."

"You let me handle the money side of this. Just answer my question and tell me what you want."

"I think I'd rather have it in two, then."

"All right. Now where do you want the kitchen to be?"

"I've always wanted one built on the east side so it'd be light in the mornings when I'm doing the baking."

"What about the parlor?"

"To the north, I guess."

"I plan to have the front door on the south," he said slowly. "How do you think a hall running through to the parlor would be?"

"All right, if it wouldn't be too dark. We need a place near

the kitchen for the children's wraps, too."

"I'd never have thought of that. You do know some things you've wanted, when you start thinking," he said triumphantly.

"Yes, I suppose I do. But it all seems to me to be too much of a dream yet to really plan for it."

"It's a dream now, but it won't be in the spring, honey," he said gently.

The winter passed with speculation and planning. The older children enthusiastically greeted the first load of lumber and begged over and over again "to help pound." Lizzie was both appalled and delighted at the size of it, for after living in a three-room soddie, her moderate-sized two-story frame house seemed a mansion.

"It's quite a change from the old prairie home, isn't it, mother?" said Jim one evening as they stood looking at the nearly completed building.

"It doesn't seem like it was ours, even now," she confessed laughingly. "We had some happy days in those times," she continued musingly.

"Yes. Remember Castoria Hill?" he laughed.

"I remember that Inidan with the butcher knife," she answered vehemently.

"I'm glad you don't have to be alone here, Lizbeth."

"So am I, Jim. I hated that part of it. It seems that part of me is gone and I'm so lost when you're not close."

"The Lord is always close, dear. And I am too. I'll never

really leave you. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes I do. But let's don't talk about you going away. I can think of much pleasanter things."

"We'd better go in and get to bed. I want to get up a little earlier in the morning."

"You're like a little boy with this house," she said dreamily. "You're enjoying every board and nail that goes into it."

They moved into the new house while it was still glaringly new. The stairway was as yet only board steps, but Jim and Lizzie both thought they could finish them later. Besides they wanted to "try it out," as David said.

Lizzie had a chance to try out her new parlor almost immediately. The small community church had a new preacher. Lizzie was patching Jim's pants when Tom came running in.

"Mamma, the preacher's comin' down the road. Do you think he's comin' here?"

"I expect he is." She rose in startled haste. "Have I got time to get the twins into clean dresses?"

"If you hurry up, I think you can. He was quite a ways away, but I'm pretty sure it was him."

Lizzie hurriedly dressed the three-year-olds and told them to play on the north side of the house.

"Don't get dirty," she admonished.

She had just time enough to tidy herself up a bit and to open up the parlor before he arrived. They sat and talked for an hour. Suddenly Lettie appeared in the doorway.

"Come in, dear," said her mother when she saw her. "This is my daughter," she said smilingly to her guest.

"How do you do," said Lettie obediently. Then she turned to her mother. "I want a spoon to dig with."

"I gave you one this morning. What did you do with it?"

"I guess it must be lost." Lizzie ordinarily wouldn't have acceded so easily, but there was company present, so she excused herself and got the desired implement. In about fifteen minutes Nettie came running down the hall.

"Mamma, I want a spoon."

"Daughter, we have company."

"Howd' you do," she answered perfunctorily, not waiting for any formal introduction. Lizzie again excused herself.

It was now getting late and since the minister made no movement to leave, Lizzie asked him to stay for supper. He accepted. She rang the bell for Jim to come in early. As soon as he arrived and had washed up, Lizzie left the men talking and went to prepare the meal.

When the twins came in, the face of their guest suddenly reddened, and he abruptly began to laugh. Jim and Lizzie looked at each other wonderingly. After he had sputtered into his handkerchief and had become calm again, the minister explained.

"I'm sorry. You must pardon me. But I thought you certainly had about the most spoiled child I had seen lately. You gave your spoons away so freely and without protest. I counted three you had given to that child. One this morning and two this afternoon." He laughed again.

Lizzie's face cleared. "The twins," she explained to Jim. "He didn't know there were two."

A few weeks later, they had another visitor. Jim went out and asked him to come in when he recognized him as one of the neighbors who lived a mile down the road. He gravely accepted and they went into the kitchen.

"It's not just a friendly call I'm makin', I'm sorry to say, Jim."

"What is it you've come for then? You're not in trouble, I hope?"

"Well, I'm not now," he answered slowly. "But I was this afternoon. You see, I've had some calves penned up, up at my place." He paused and Jim waited patiently. "I thought--I'm not sure it was your boys." He looked troubled and stared intently at the toes of his shoes.

"My boys? What have my boys been doing?"

"Somebody turned my calves loose this afternoon, and I've been all this time gettin' 'em back in," he said simply. "I just about caught 'em doin' it but they was too quick for me."

"You mean my sons did such a thing as that?" Jim rose from his chair and started toward the door.

"Wait a little now, Jim. I'm not sure it was them, but I thought I recognized the oldest one. Even if they did do it, I don't want 'em punished. It was just a youngun's joke, I guess, but it made me quite a spell a work. I thought maybe we'd just scare 'em enough so's they'd know better next time."

"David! Tom!"

The boys were slow in answering and he called again. They came in slowly and stood before their father.

"Mr. Johnson has a disgraceful story to tell me about me sons. Were you on his farm today?"

Neither answered.

"David, answer me," said Jim sternly.

"Yes, Papa, we were."

"What did you do?"

"We turned his calves loose." He reddened and Tom began to cry.

"Why did you do such a wicked thing as that?"

Again neither boy spoke. Finally David muttered, "We thought it would be fun to watch him chase 'em."

"Mr. Johnson spent two hours getting them back in. Do you think that was funny?"

"I guess not," David mumbled.

"Do you, Tom?"

"No, Papa. And I wish we hadn't done it."

"I'm very much ashamed that any boys of mine would do such a thing. I shall have to punish you."

Tom's sobbing grew louder, and the neighbor attempted to intercede. "Easy now, Jim. I think they feel bad enough now."

"They must be punished. David, you will go work for Mr. Johnson for a week, and obey everything he tells you. Tom, you will have David's usual work to do here. And both of you had

better pray tonight to be forgiven for such a wicked deed."

"Yes, sir," they answered together, and hurried from the room.

"I'm sorry I've caused all this," said the owner of the calves.

"I'm glad you came. They might do something much worse with the same careless idea. Now I think they'll think twice."

He would have been not quite so sure, and much more ireful, if he could have heard the prayer which was being said upstairs by an anxious-faced Tom.

"---And dear Lord, don't let Papa find out that we let the calves out 'cause we knew Mr. Johnson would have to go catch 'em, and then we could reach through the window and get some sugar to eat. Amen."

The following Monday, Lizzie straightened up after hanging out the last basket of clothes. She was tired, but the bread was ready to make into loaves. She hurried back into the house, intent on her list of tasks she must finish. Thank goodness the baby was asleep. Maybe she could rest a little after dinner when the twins were in bed, too.

When her bread was about done, she suddenly noticed that the sun had gone under a cloud. She hoped it wouldn't rain before the clothes were dry. She called to the twins, "Nettie! Lettie! You'd better come inside. It looks like it's going to storm."

She went upstairs to shut the windows, thinking that she'd leave the clothes out as long as she could.

"Lizzie! Lizzie!" Jim's voice came up to her.

"I'm up here. What do you want?" She started down the stairs as she spoke.

"It looks like a cyclone's coming. We'd better get in the storm cellar."

"A cyclone! Are you sure? I just thought it was going to storm." She picked up the baby as she spoke.

"You haven't looked out then. Hurry!"

"Where's the boys?"

"David's been getting the clothes. Tom's in the cave." He took the baby and hurried the twins before him.

"Come on, Lizzie! Don't try to do any more."

"I'm coming."

When they got outdoors, the huge, funnel shaped cloud seemed to fill one side of the sky. The wind had risen above their voices, and they ran to the storm cellar, carrying the twins the last few steps. David joined them, leaving a few clothes tugging frantically against their imprisoning pins.

"All here?" asked Jim as he still held the door open a crack.

"Yes, we're ready," answered Lizzie and the door closed tightly.

David had lighted the candles they always kept there and the small group clung to each other within their dim light. The noise of the wind was increasing to an impassioned, throaty roar and Lizzie identified the cracking of tree limbs as the high staccato notes. The baby stared solemnly at the nearest

candle, but the twins began to whimper. She drew them close to her, but said nothing. She couldn't. Her imagination strained to interpret each new sound, but the whole became such a crashing symphony that the smaller instruments became impossible to distinguish. "What was happening?" She glanced at Jim but he only shook his head. She couldn't have heard him now, anyway. "What if the house, her new house, was being blown away? And all their furniture and clothes? Why, it might take everything they owned!" She no longer thought of the wind as sound. It was the raging breath of some huge, angered beast. She began to tremble and Lettie, sensing her mother's fright, began to cry in earnest. Jim had Lettie in his arms, and she nodded for him to take Lettie, too. She clasped the baby more firmly and put her arm around Tom, who had drawn closer to her. David stood near him, and stared musingly into the shadowy corner. Apparently he felt little fear and Lizzie was suddenly ashamed.

When Jim finally opened the door and they came into the daylight again, Lizzie looked first at the house. Then she stared in silent awe. The yard was littered with small, broken tree limbs and directly in their path was the fallen trunk of the large tree which had stood near the corner of the house.

"The barn's gone."

Lizzie looked. The horses were there, tied to the manger. The rest of the barn had vanished.

"There's a wagon wheel," David pointed solemnly. It was standing upright on the rim without any visible support only a

few yards from them.

"Look at the bird. It's dead," said Tom.

"Let's get to the house, children. We can look afterward," said Jim, and they picked their way through the debris to the kitchen door. Lizzie went through the kitchen but stopped abruptly in the hall.

"Jim!"

"Better get back in the kitchen. I'll go 'round outside and see what's happened."

He came back in about fifteen minutes and said briefly, "The whole west wall's blown in. We can't even get to the stairs."

"What shall we do?"

"I guess you'd better get us something to eat. David, you come with me, and the rest of you stay here. We'll look around and see what other damage there is."

When Lizzie called them in, Jim's face was somber. David did most of the talking. "The horses are all right and the buckboard's still here. The house fell in and we can see your rocking chair's smashed. We can't tell, but Papa says it must have broken the bureau all up. I found a straw goin' right through a tree. And Tom, you oughta see the chickens!"

"Are they gone?"

"Nope--they're bare. They haven't a single feather left."

"What are we going to do, Jim?" Lizzie asked her silent husband.

"I guess we'd better see if we can get to John's," he answered. "If they're still there," he added.

"Will we go in the buckboard?"

"We couldn't." He shook his head. "The road's too full of trees and furniture. There's a stove just a little way down. I thought we'd try it on horseback--you can take the twins, and the boys can ride the other horse. I'll walk."

Their progress was slow, even then. They wouldn't have gotten a quarter of a mile with the buckboard, as Jim had predicted. When they were a short distance from their destination, Jim asked,

"Do you notice anything, Lizzie?"

She looked around and then at him. "It's stopped."

"Yes, it looks like John and Sarah may have missed it entirely--or rather, it missed them."

They were eagerly welcomed when they arrived.

"We was worried about that cyclone cloud."

"Did it hurt you folks," John asked.

"Took the barn and blew in one side of the house," Jim answered briefly.

"Land sakes, you folks just come right in. I'll get you somethin' to eat."

"We've eaten, Sarah. We need some beds for the children. The twins are asleep now."

The men went over the next day and reported when they came back to dinner. "The stairway's down and most of the furniture's broken. It looks like you'd better stay with us a spell while we're gettin' it built again."

They spent most of the winter away from home because the snow came early that year and the weather was too bad for the men to make the necessary repairs. Lizzie knew Jim was beginning to worry about the money, too. He hadn't planned on anything like this. One day in early spring, however, he announced,

"I think we'll go home today, Lizzie. We can make out now with what's already been done."

Lizzie was glad to be back. Your own home was better than living with other people, no matter how kind they were. Then too, she was going to have another baby. She'd have to get some sewing done soon.

The days passed uneventfully for Lizzie, except that Jim was so worried. If the crops were good this summer, they'd be all right. He failed to respond to her reassurances, until she finally began to cry. From then on, he'd been different. She smiled to herself, remembering how her tears had always bothered Jim. Sometimes they served a good purpose, though.

"Mamma!"

She sensed the urgency in Tom's cry and started for the kitchen.

"Henry was thirsty and he drank out'a the can."

"You mean he drank the coal-oil?" She picked up the screaming baby in horrified haste.

"Tom, go ring the bell for Papa. Quick!"

What should she do with him? He'd have to get it up or something. Just then Sarah called.

"Lizzie! Where are ya?" She came into the kitchen. "Seems

like ya might answer the--. What's the matter with him?"

"He drank coal-oil. What'll I do?"

"Give 'im some milk." She was pouring a cupful as she spoke. "Here, Henry, quit cryin' now--this'll make you feel better--drink it all up. Nope, now--don't stop. Take a bigger drink'n that--. That's fine. Set 'im down, Lizzie, and get some more."

Jim arrived in time to see Sarah's dosing taking effect. The coal-oil was coming up along with the milk. Sarah wiped the baby's face with the gentle admonition,

"Ya better be more careful what you're drinkin'. There now, you'll be feelin' better." She set him on his feet again and said to Lizzie, "Ya oushta know better'n to leave things a settin' around after all the younguns you've had. Now tain't no use ta cary. He's all right."

Ida was born that fall. Sarah couldn't believe that she was really here at last.

"This one was named as soon as it got here," Jim laughed.

"She's pretty, too, isn't she?"

"Well, she's not quite as red as Tom was, and she's bigger than the twins were--"

"Jim! She's not red at all!"

"She looks about like the others to me," he answered cheerfully. But he leaned over and whispered to her, "I'm glad you finally got your girl."

As Christmas time drew near, Lizzie consulted Jim about a

party.

"I think we could have one," he agreed. "I suppose you'll want some greenery for the house. I guess John and I can take care of that--we might even manage a tree."

"Mr. Lonechester has so many on his land, he might let you have one."

"I'll arrange for that. You get some of you baking and cooking done. I won't let you have this party if you try to work too hard all at once," he warned.

"I can make the fruit cake right away."

Lizzie hummed happily as she drew the pine branches together. The wreaths would be rather lop-sided and oddly shaped, but they'd be satisfactory. She smiled as she heard Jim muttering in the other room.

"What's the matter?" she called to him.

"Come see if this is the way you want these things. I can't tell whether they're even or not." He was putting some "greenery," as he called it, over the parlor windows.

"It looks pretty, dear. I think that's fine. Now all you need is a little here--" She stopped as Jim groaned.

"I should have known better than to say you could have a party. Couldn't we just eat some pie or cake and some chicken without all this fuss?"

"Jim, shame on you! You know you don't really mind all this. Do you, now?"

"Well, it's a lot of work."

"Do you mind doing it." He didn't answer and she stood before him with her hands on her hips. "You don't object. Come on--say it."

"All right, I don't. And it is prettier." He hurried outside while she stood and laughed.

She made pumpkin pies and guiltily got out the mince-meat her Aunt Fannie had sent her. She was sure it had brandy in it, but she hadn't said anything to Jim. Surely it wasn't too wicked--and it did taste good.

Finally everything was ready except the stockings. The tree was waiting in the woodshed. Jim had made a stand for it, but they weren't going to bring it into the house until late that night. John and his family arrived in a snow-covered sleigh. The ceremony of hanging the stockings was a serious one, but at last they hung in a limp row of descending lengths with David's at the top and little Ida's at the bottom. Lizzie sang while she watched the children's eager faces in the candle light.

"Away in a manger,
No crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus
Laid down his sweet head--."

Each little head bowed obediently as Jim quietly closed their Christmas eve with a prayer.

After the children were in bed, the adults assumed a lighter mood of festivity. Sarah and Lizzie started the popcorn while the men brought in the tree. Soon there were long ropes of the white corn ready for the tree, and the sugar was boiling in preparation for the popcorn balls. Sarah exclaimed over the small

candles Lizzie had made.

"There won't be many folks havin' a Christmas like this. Land Sakes! A tree and candles is more'n I ever dreamed of havin'."

"That isn't all we've got, Sarah." Lizzie grinned mysteriously. "Wait until you see what we're going to put in the stockings."

"We'll have to be careful with these," John said.

"Yes, they're not very safe, but Lizzie wants this to be an extra-special party, as she calls it, and they are pretty."

"Look, Lizzie." Sarah showed her the cranberries. "This is a surprise for you. Granny Rill sent 'em and I been savin' 'em just for this. I think we oughta use most of 'em on the tree. Let's string 'em."

Finally the small cedar tree stood ready. Jim brought out the special treat for the stockings--oranges. John and Sarah had brought apples and rock candy. Lizzie produced wintergreen and peppermint stick candy, and each family had a hoarded store of nuts sent from Illinois--they were mostly hickory nuts and butter-nuts. These they supplemented with their own black walnuts. The stockings changed from shapeless, shadowy things to mysteriously bulging little legs.

When all the preparation was finished and each small gift placed round the tree, the grown-ups went quietly to bed, for the children would be up early in the morning.

Lizzie was the first to rise, however. The stockings would be investigated before breakfast, but the tree would come afterward. She wanted it to be at its prettiest when the children first saw it. She had the meal nearly ready before she heard the others begin to stir. Then she hurried in to light the candles. She stepped back to look at the result of their work, and Jim spoke just behind her.

"Why didn't you wake me?"

"There was no need. I liked doing it. Isn't the room beautiful?"

"It looks like a picture I once saw. I never thought I'd really see such a scene, though."

They stood quietly watching for a moment, and then Lizzie whispered,

"Say a little prayer, Jim. It's so perfect."

Their peaceful moment soon passed in the rush of excited little feet and laughing voices.

That night Lizzie's Christmas was completed when David said soberly,

"It was a good day, mamma--one to always mean home to me."

The next spring, Lizzie and Sarah had an argument.

"You'll never get any potatoes that way, Lizzie Knot,"

Sarah declared vehemently.

"Why in the world not?"

"You oughta know better'n' ta expect ta get anything ceptin'

vines when you're a plantin' 'em now."

"What are you talking about? We've had good rains."

"I'm a talkin' 'bout you plantin' them potatoes in the light of the moon!"

"Now, Sarah, don't tell me you think the moon takes over the sun's job."

"I don't know 'bout the sun, but I do know the moon ain't right and you won't get nothin' for your trouble."

"But the sun's what makes the plants grow."

"Yes, but the light a the moon'll make all vines and no potatoes, and the dark a the moon'll make things grow underneath the ground."

Lizzie began to laugh.

"All right, if ya think it's so funny." Sarah stalked away, and called over her shoulder, "Ya just wait an' see."

"Don't go away angry, Sarah. Let's go in the house, and I'll wait until you say it's right to plant the rest."

And Sarah was mollified.

Lizzie sewed through the summer. School was about to start again and the twins must have some school dresses made. They had nearly grown out of all their clothes. She made their dresses just alike. On the first day of school, they wore the brown checked gingham dresses she had just finished. She carefully braided Nettie's hair and pinned a huge, pink ribbon on the top of her head. She did the same with Lettie, except that her hair ribbon was blue, because that was Lettie's favorite color.

The twins came triumphantly home, talking eagerly about the

new teacher. But Lizzie was dismayed when she saw the teacher drive up an hour later. She took him into the parlor and asked anxiously,

"Have the girls done something wrong?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Knot," he hastened to reassure her. "It's-- I feel rather foolish about this, but you see--well, I can't tell them apart." He grinned sheepishly as she began to laugh. "I wondered if you could tell me some way so I'd know."

"I can tell you an easy way, and you don't need to feel bad, because other people don't know which is which, either. I hardly do myself."

"I don't see how you can," he answered in relief.

"There's one way for you. Lettie likes blue, so she most always wears a blue hair ribbon and Nettie wears a pink one. I'll make sure they do that, or if they wear other colors, I'll let you know. It won't be hard for you to see their ribbons."

"Thank you, Mrs. Knot. I'll remember--Lettie wears blue--Nettie wears pink."

The next night after school Nettie said thoughtfully,

"The teacher called us by our right names, today. He knows where we sit now. Let's trade places tomorrow and get him mixed up again."

"I don't think we should," Lettie hesitated. "He mightn't like it."

"There's nothing bad about that," her sister vigorously declared. "Come on. I don't see why you're always scared."

She was sitting in Nettie's place the next morning. She was startled, however, when the teacher spoke to her. "Lettie, I think you girls are in each other's places. Perhaps you'd better change back as you were."

Nettie was silent and well behaved the rest of the week and Lettie was content to have her so. Neither had mentioned the fact that the teacher could tell them apart. Nettie didn't seem to want to talk about it and Lettie didn't wish to anger her sister.

One morning, Lettie saw Nettie watching intently as she was having her hair combed and knew with despairing certainty that Nettie was planning something again. It was not until two days later, however, that Nettie said casually,

"Let me wear your hair ribbon today, Lettie."

"You know I don't like your pink ones," Lettie answered in surprise.

"I'm pretty tired of 'em too," Nettie confessed. "Please, Lettie. Just trade with me today."

"All right, this once," she finally conceded.

Lettie was already in her seat when the bell rang.

"Nettie."

She raised her eyes in surprise to see the teacher standing before her.

"I've asked you girls to stay in your own places. If you persist in disobeying me, I shall have to punish you. Take your own seat, please."

Wonderingly, she moved as he spoke. She saw Nettie smiling

broadly. And all that day, teacher called her Nettie. He was getting them mixed up again. That night she asked Nettie about it. "Why do you s'pose he thought I ~~was~~ you today?"

"I don't know," Nettie answered casually. "Here's your hair ribbon back again. I still think pink's prettier. Stand still, and I'll pin yours and then you can do mine."

Lettie was relieved to find that the teacher seemed to have them straightened out again the next day. After Nettie had traded hair ribbons three times in the next two weeks, however, Lettie learned what her sister had already discovered.

"He never knows our right names when I wear your pink ribbon. He can't tell us apart except by the colors we wear."

"That's right. Mamma must have told him that day when he first came to see her," Nettie answered with a superior air.

"If you knew it all the time, Nettie Knot, why didn't you tell me?"

"I was waiting for you to find out. And I've been afraid you'd tell we traded, even after I told you not to. I'm going to wear your ribbon, tomorrow, too." She skipped a few steps and laughed gleefully.

"Oh, Nettie, don't do it. I know we'll get in trouble."

"You're such a baby," Nettie answered scornfully, and Lettie was subdued.

A few days later, Lettie watched Nettie in fascinated fear. Nettie was busily absorbed in watching Esther, the girl who sat in front of her. But Lettie could see that Nettie's hands were occupied in dipping Eshter's braids in the ink well. She was thankfully glad that Nettie hadn't carried out her threat of trading ribbons today.

But when recess came, Nettie cornered her sister and insisted that they trade. Lettie tearfully gave in, as she always had since she could remember. When Esther discovered her stained braids, Mr. Branwell called Lettie up before the class. She flung one terrified glance and went. She stood in the corner the rest of the afternoon and was kept in an hour after class. She was hurrying home, when she saw Nettie waiting for her.

"What did he do?"

"He said I was wicked--and you know I'm not. It's you--it's always been you. You're ^amean, bad girl!"

"Don't you talk to me that way, you little--you little--" Lettie cowered before her threatening twin. "Here's your old ribbon. And don't you go cryin' to Mamma, either."

From then on, Lettie hated to go to school. She lived every day in fear and shame. Nettie continued to play one trick after another and Lettie was always punished. She could never get up courage enough to expose her sister to either her parents or the teacher.

The months passed by and Lettie endured in tearful silence. One day, in nervous irritation, Mr. Branwell called her up to his desk and spoke to the school, as well as to her.

"Nettie, you're getting to be such a bad, wicked child that I don't think even God will want you; I'm going to whip you now, for everyone to see."

"I didn't--I'm not!" Lettie screamed hysterically. "I didn't do any of those things. I'm not even Nettie. You let me alone! Leave me be! This isn't my hair ribbon. I'm Lettie--I'm Lettie!" She sank in a crumpled, sobbing heap at his feet.

IV

NETTIE AND LETTIE--HENRY AND IDA

(CONTINUED)

The twins were watching the rainbow. Friendly relations were again established between them, after Lettie had been out of school for a week because of nervous exhaustion. Mr. Branwell was especially nice to Lettie, and Nettie was on good behavior. The other children had showed a tendency to shun Nettie, but Lettie had put a stop to that as soon as she noticed. She would hear no bad word of her sister and defended her more vigorously than she ever had herself. Now Lettie said dreamily,

"I wonder if anybody ever did."

"Ever did what?"

"Find the gold."

"What gold? What are you talking about, Lettie?"

"Well, I heard Aunt Sarah say that there was a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."

Nettie stared with new interest at the colored arch. "Are you sure that's what she was talkin' about?"

"She said, 'Well, why don't some a ya find the end a that thing and get that there pot a gold that's there,' and she pointed right at that rainbow. It couldn't have been anything else," Lettie stoutly asserted.

Nettie stared thoughtfully at the sky. She turned to her sister with a gathering light in her eyes. "Lettie, let's us go find it!"

Lettie stared in her turn. "How could we?"

"Let's go get something to eat. The folks are round front. Think how 'sprised and happy they'll be when we bring back the gold." She was on her feet, eagerly pulling Lettie up.

"Mamma could have a new dress, couldn't she?" Lettie's eyes began to sparkle, too.

"She can have three new dresses--and so can we. Let's hurry."

Nettie was the captain, but Lettie was an eager orderly.

"Get some sticks--those long ones we had yesterday, Lettie."

"Here they are. What're we going to do with 'em?"

"I've fixed our lunch. Wrap yours in the cloth like this. Then we'll tie 'em on the sticks so they won't be no trouble to carry."

"Do you think we'll really find it?"

"We can if we hurry. You better put on a bonnet so's you won't get the earache."

"Say, Jim, isn't that your girls goin' down the road?" asked John.

"Yes, it is. Look Lizzie."

"Where are they going? And what's that they've got?" Lizzie stared intently.

"It looks to me like they're bein' tramps," John chuckled.

"Maybe they've decided ta run away." Sarah glanced at Lizzie.

"It couldn't be that. Jim, you'd better go after them before they get clear gone."

"Let 'em go. It'll teach 'em a lesson ta get good and scared."

"Yes, but it'll be dark soon."

"That'll bring 'em back," said Sarah comfortably.

But Lizzie couldn't wait on them long, and Jim soon set out after them. Lizzie was thoroughly nervous by the time they finally returned.

"Nettie! Lettie! What makes you such naughty children, and why would you want to run away from home?"

"We didn't run away, Mamma." Lettie was about to cry. "We thought you'd be glad when we brought you the gold."

"The gold?" Lizzie looked puzzled.

"Don't scold them any, Mother," said Jim. "They heard Sarah talking about the pot of gold that's hidden at the end of the rainbow, and they were going to find it so you could have a new dress."

"Oh, you sweet innocents." Lizzie put her arms around them. "I'm sorry you couldn't find the gold," she said seriously, "but I wouldn't feel bad about it. You were being unselfish, and you've made Mamma and Papa happy, anyway. Besides, I don't really need a new dress. You'd better get to bed now. Good night." She kissed each of them and watched smilingly as they climbed the stairs

"Lizzie."

"Yes, Jim?"

"You do need a new dress, and I hadn't noticed."

"It's all right. I've been meaning to get some material, but it seems like there's so many other things to buy."

"Yes, but the twins knew it and I didn't. I'm sorry I've been so inattentive. I don't want you doing without, darling. We'll go to town tomorrow and get you two dresses. And I don't want to hear anything said about what the children need. We're going shopping for you."

"Oh, Jim, you're not inattentive. You're as good a husband as a woman could ever want."

"I'm trying to be, honey. You're the best wife I've ever had."

She rumbled his hair in vigorous protest but the tenderness in her eyes denied the seeming roughness.

"Since you've had so many, that's a fine compliment."

The next morning Tom was talking to Henry. After a short discussion, he called to the twins who were playing on the other side of the yard. "Come here, you girls."

"What do ya want?" Nettie called back.

"We want you to play with us," he answered.

They came with alacrity, for Tom rarely condescended to have them around, since he always professed a great scorn for girls.

"What're we going to play?" Lettie inquired eagerly.

"Let's go down to the barn, and I'll show you."

"We're s'posed to play in the yard," Lettie hesitated.

"Oh, come on. Mamma won't care if we're all together."

"Here it is."

"I don't see anything."

"Can't you see that plow?" Tom pointed loftily to the implement which stood nearby. Jim had placed some small pieces of wood under the plow to keep it from rusting. It thus stood upright, and Tom now walked over and took hold of the handles. "We're going to play like we're plowin'. Henry, you can help me guide it."

"Yes, but what do we get to do?"

"Wait. I'll get some rope. I know where it is."

"What does he want with that? I don't think this game's much fun. Let's go back and play, Lettie."

"Here, wait, you girls! You said you'd play with us."

"We don't see anything to play."

"Look, I got the rope. Now we'll harness you up and then we'll plow."

"You mean we're to be the horses?" asked Nettie indignantly.

"No, you're gonna be the oxen. You know, like those Papa used to have."

The twins looked at each other and Nettie spoke for both.

"We don't want to."

"Aw, you girls!. I knew you weren't any good to play with."

"We are too," Lettie flared. "Go ahead and harness me up. I'll be the mean one--what was his name?"

"Buck," answered Tom as he slipped the rope around Lettie. "Stand here, Nettie. You lost your chance to have the most fun now, cause Bright never bucked or anything."

"I can though," Lettie triumphed. "Just wait till you say

'Giddup'. I'll turn like this and I'll buck and I'll balk, too. Just watch me." She kicked her feet back in pretended imitation of a balky animal.

"Be careful, Lettie!"

Tom's warning cry came too late, however, for Lettie's foot had struck directly against the sharp edge of the share. All of the children except Tom started screaming at the sight of the streaming blood. He hastily took the rope off Lettie, who hindered him in her dancing fright.

"Quit crying, Lettie," he said in a stern voice, although his own face was white. "You'll scare Mamma. Henry, you hurry ahead and tell her. Nettie, help me get her to the house. Mamma can stop the bleedin'."

Lizzie met them before they got very far. She hastily picked the child up, and hurried into the house, disregarding the steadily growing blood stains on her own apron.

"Tom, go tell Papa to go for the doctor. He can take one of the horses and you can ride the other one back here. Nettie, go get me some of those cloths in the bureau drawer. Don't cry now, Lettie. It's just a cut and we'll soon have it tied up."

Lizzie worked quickly to stem the flow of blood. She made a tourniquet and finally had it cleansed enough to see that there was a deep cut at the back of the heel. She was relieved to find that it wasn't a blood vessel, but was sure the gash was going to have to be sewed. The doctor confirmed her opinion when he arrived.

"It just missed the tendon. She can feel that she's a very

lucky little girl. She might have been crippled. As it is now, she may always have a scar but she'll be perfectly all right."

Tom was subdued about the accident and assumed all the blame. Lizzie and Jim accepted his confession gravely and did not think of punishing any of them.

"Tom has his lesson, and I think the girls will stick close to the yard after this," Jim said.

Before Lettie's foot had healed, Lizzie became ill. She had a cold, but refused to go to bed.

"I don't know who'd watch after Henry and Ida and see that the others had their lunches and clothes ready for school. I'll be all right in a day or two," she told Jim.

Her cold got worse, however, and a few mornings later she only smiled weakly and stayed in bed as Jim firmly commanded. He stayed in the house all day and by evening was thoroughly worried. He saw that the younger children went to bed and then called David into the kitchen.

"I'm afraid your mother is seriously ill, son. I'm going after the doctor. You stay in the room with her, but don't make any noise. Get her a drink if she wants one--and take good care of her, David. I'll send Sarah over right away, but it's up to you to watch over her till she gets here." He smiled tensely and patted his son's shoulder, then went out.

Lizzie grew steadily worse. The doctor came often and stayed long. Sarah went back and forth, doing all she could. Jim hired a neighbor girl to stay all the time, for Sarah was too heavy with child to do the actual work.

"You've done too much already," he told her firmly. "Lizzie wouldn't want it and I don't expect you to."

The doctor told a grave-faced Jim that Lizzie had double pneumonia. They stood together over her bed, night after night, grimly fighting to keep her from slipping from them. Jim's face became heavy with fatigue and the children came and went in tearful silence. The hired girl gave them no supper and they went to their cold beds, hungry and filled with a new, strange fear. David took care of them as best he could, and, unknown to his father, took them down to the barn and told them stories. He didn't feel like going to school, either.

They had a few days of diversion when their new neighbors moved in across the road. David found out that their name was Peterson, but none of them were interested in anything except Lizzie. Henry didn't even get acquainted with Edgar, the little boy of his own age.

"Mamma won't die, Lettie." David tried to comfort his sister. "Don't think about it. She's awful sick but she's going to get well. See, you're making Henry cry now. You've got to be a big girl now, so Mamma will be proud of you when she gets well and I can tell her how you acted." But all the time he was wondering, too, and knew that Tom felt the same way.

"Whatever would they do if Mamma died?" The world was suddenly a lonely, terrifying place to all of them.

But one day Jim interrupted the story telling.

"Sarah told me you were down here. I wanted to tell you,"

he looked around at each frightened face and sat down, "here, come, sit close all of you." He smiled with wet eyes as they gathered round him. "Your mamma is going to get well. We've got to be careful with her, but she's past the worst part. Here, it's no time to be crying, Tom." He smoothed the boy's hair gently. "You go on with your story telling, David. I've got to get back to Mother."

Lizzie slowly grew better. Jim now felt that he could return to his own work. He retained the hired girl and strictly cautioned the children not to worry their mother--not even to go in unless he himself was there to supervise. But keeping quiet was a harder job now that the damper of fear had been raised from them. They managed fairly well until they were again sent to bed without any supper.

"Mamma always gets us supper," Nettie protested stormily.

"We're hungry!" added Tom.

"You get along to bed, now." The girl glowered at them.

"We need something to eat," David objected firmly.

"You'll not be needin' nothin' tonight and if you don't quit your talkin', you'll make your mother sick again. There, ya see." She started for the bedroom from which they could hear Lizzie weakly calling.

"We'd better do as she says, I guess," said David soberly. "Maybe I can tell Papa in the morning. We'll get to eat plenty when he finds out about this," he comforted his brothers and sisters.

Nettie waited until she was sure the hired girl had gone to bed. Then she asked,

"Are you asleep, Lettie?"

"No, I guess I'm too hungry."

"Let's go wake Tom."

"What for? He can't do any good about our stummicks."

"Maybe we all can, though. And don't say stum dicks. You know it isn't right."

"Sarah says it," Lettie defended herself.

"Come on, and stop talking. They might hear us."

They tip-toed into the other bedroom. Tom whispered "Who's there?" before Nettie had a chance to shake him.

"It's just us. We're hungry."

"So'm I. But what we gonna do about it?"

Nettie whispered urgently while Lettie stood first on one cold foot and then the other.

"I dunno," Tom muttered doubtfully. "We could try it, though." He climbed out of bed while Lettie woke David. Together they bent over Henry's bed and roused him as quietly as they could. They hurried back into the twins room and carefully explained in eager whispers to both Lettie and Henry.

"I'll try," the little fellow finally nodded. "You'll hold me tight, won't you, Dave?"

"I won't let you fall," his brother reassured him. "And Tom will hold you, too."

All five of them went to the head of the stairs and the girls

waited there while the boys went down a few steps.

"I'm afraid, Tom," Henry whispered.

"Reach through now and see if you can touch the edge. I'll hold you," Dave urged.

Henry obediently squirmed between the steps until his arms hung out in space, while Tom and David hung on to his heels. His reaching fingers found the big crock on the pantry shelf beneath the stairs.

"Just get one handful Henry, so you can help us get you back," Tom whispered.

"Pull me up," answered the little boy.

He was hauled safely back on the stairway and triumphantly passed three doughnuts to the twins.

"Will you do it again, Henry?"

"Yes, only you be sure and hold me."

"We will. And don't you girls eat those yet."

Henry again wriggled through the steps and was lowered to the crock by his brothers. This time he recklessly filled both hands and getting him back was a harder job. He scraped his face on the edge of the step, but smilingly stood up with both hands still full. They retreated to the bedroom and divided the food, giving Henry an extra half doughnut. David shepherded them back into bed. At least three of the sleeping faces still had a few crumbs on them, and they were all smiling.

The next morning David talked to his father and Jim called the hired girl out in the yard while the children were eating

breakfast. She was crying when they left for school. That night their father came in early and ate supper with them. He followed them upstairs afterward.

"I'm sorry I didn't know about this," he told them quietly. "I'm proud of every one of you for not complaining. I'm only keeping her, because I can't find anybody else. You'll get your suppers from now on though," and he smiled at them as he went out the door.

Their troubles were not over, however. The hired girl did her work sullenly and the children were all afraid of her. A few nights later, Lizzie felt so much better that Jim decided to go to prayer meeting. He left the baby asleep, the children upstairs, and the hired girl in the kitchen. She was to sit up until he returned. The children upstairs were not all asleep, however. Tom got out of bed with firm determination. Henry joined him at the window.

"You can't," Tom whispered protestingly. "You're too little."

"I'm not! I can climb down that tree," he answered stoutly.

Before Tom could say any more, Henry was sliding down the big limb which touched their window. He made his way slowly but safely to the ground and Tom hurried after.

"Now remember. Yell and holler loud as you can when we bang on the door."

Henry nodded his head. "We'll make her sorry she wouldn't give us somethin' to eat!"

"Well, I hope we scare her so bad she'll be good and sorry."

Lizzie roused from her slumber at the first ear-splitting shriek. There was a thunderous pounding on the door and more screams. The hired girl came running into the room in panic-stricken terror.

"Mercy me! Whatever is it--what's the matter?" Lizzie's face was an ashy gray.

"It's burglars, ma'am! They'll be a smashin' the door any minute. What'll we do--oh, what'll we do?" She ran to the farthest corner of the room and crouched futilely behind a chair.

Lizzie fell back on the pillow. In a moment, however, she pulled herself up again and listened intently. The girl was crying noisily now.

"Get up!" Lizzie commanded. "That's not burglars. It's the children. Go see what's the matter."

When Jim arrived, he found two shame-faced boys in the kitchen. He started to question them, but Tom said,

"Go on into Mamma."

He hurried into the bedroom and knew at once that Lizzie was worse. He felt of her feverish face and she opened her eyes. She spoke at once. "Don't punish them, Jim. Please don't punish them. They just didn't think." He kissed her and quietly went back to the kitchen.

After the tale had been laboriously told, he studied their faces intently. "Didn't you know that you'd scare Mamma, too?" he asked.

"We were just thinkin'--we weren't thinkin'--"

"All right, Thomas. You boys return to bed. I'll see about you in the morning. I'd better take care of Mother, now."

"She's not very sick, is she?" Henry's face was deeply troubled.

"We'll have to wait and see," his father answered gravely.

Lizzie was no worse the next day, though she had not rested as well as usual. Tom and Henry appeared so chastened that Jim administered no punishment.

The hired girl was finally dismissed and Lizzie resumed the management of her household.

Several months later Lettie came home from school alone.

"Nettie has to stay in every night for a week cause she was imper-ti-nent, teacher says."

Lizzie was not surprised, for it had seemed to her that Nettie had been good too long. After Lettie had broken down, the school teacher had visited Lizzie. Her good sense and advice had helped him to go on teaching the twins, and had made him feel less guilty about punishing the wrong child. She had also given him a trick-proof method by which the twins would be identified. "If you'll call them close to you, Nettie has a little pox mark just at the corner of her eyebrow. She's ordinarily the most mischievous child I have, and she'll probably cause most of your difficulty. She's as often a leader in good as bad, though; that's the idea you'll need to help her develop--the good, I mean. She does get things done. I suppose you know that by now," she laughed.

"I'll certainly see that she pays for her own tricks from

now on," he answered vigorously.

"What has Nettie done this time?" she now asked her daughter.

"She pulled Esther's braids. Right in school time, too. She just went on hankin' until Mr. Branwell took her hands away himself."

"Mercy me! That child! What made her do such a thing?"

"That's not all she did though." Lettie ignored her question.

"Mr. Branwell put her under his desk so he'd know she wasn't in mischief. Pretty soon she asked to leave the room and teacher had to let her go."

"Lettie!"

"Well, she didn't really have to, ^{Mamma}; she just said she did, cause while she was outdoors, she gathered some cockle burrs and she stuck 'em on the inside of her dress--on here," and Lettie raised the hem of her own dress and pantomined the process of sticking the burrs at intervals along the hem. "Then when she came back in, teacher made her get back under the desk again. Then do you know what she did?"

"Of course I don't, Lettie. Hurry up and tell the rest of it."

"Well," said Lettie, obviously enjoying her tale, "while Mr. Branwell was standing there talking to us, Nettie took these burrs and stuck 'em on his coat--and he sat down on 'em!" Lettie's virtuous expression changed to one of mirth, and she giggled as she recalled the way teacher had stood up again.

"What a wicked thing to do. I hope you'll never be that

bad, Lettie, and I'm ashamed of any child of mine that would!" said Lizzie severely. But that night she and Jim chuckled together over the episode.

"I had to try so hard not to laugh in front of Lettie, but I knew I just didn't dare. Nettie'd hear of it right away--and this is one time that that young lady must feel her disgrace!"

Nettie was made to feel that she was in complete disfavor both at home and at school, and it took even her rubber-ball disposition fully six weeks to recover its bouncy quality. After she was allowed to return to normal, sensational events centering about Lizzie were lacking for some time. She now felt better than she had for many months. The children had been remarkably well, too. She counted her blessings on her fingers, while Jim watched smilingly. She checked the last two fingers slowly, "And Jim's leg hasn't bothered him--and," in a voice just above a whisper, "he loves me."

"And," Jim held up his thumb, "I've a brave sweetheart and a cheerful wife."

"I'm not brave, Jim. I couldn't do anything without you." She smiled up at him with wet eyes.

"Yes you could, Lizbeth. You're a dreamer, but you have the backbone to fight to make those dreams come true. You'll always stand on your own feet and nothing can whip you when you're that way."

"Mamma." It was Henry calling.

"What?"

He came to the kitchen door and they saw that he had been crying. "mamma, I--I cut him!" He buried his face in her apron and began to cry again.

"You must have counted that first blessing too soon, Lizzie," Jim said.

"Henry, who did you cut? I can't hear you," she said as Henry sobbed something without raising his head. "Stop crying and tell us."

"We were playin' with the corn knife--over at Edgar's."

"What were you doing over there? Never mind. Go on."

"Well, we was cuttin' corn and--my knife slipped--and I cut right into his leg, and it was bleedin' terrible bad."

"Jim, you'd better go see. We'd both better go see."

She picked Ida up out of the yard and they hurried across the road. There they found Mrs. Peterson calmly bandaging the leg.

"It wasn't so bad," she smiled at tear-stained Henry. "He cut it in the flesh--not on the bone. But the knife, it was dull." She looked sternly at Edgar. "Papa told you not to play with the knives. I'm sorry--very sorry. It might have been your boy instead of mine."

"Henry knew better than to play with them, too," answered Jim. "If there is anything we can do--"

"There is nothing." She shook her head emphatically. "It is just a little cut. But corn knives are not for little boys!" she added vigorously, looking at each of them.

"That's right. I think Henry's learned his lesson now-- and Edgar, too," Jim added.

"If there's nothing we can do, we'd better go," said Lizzie.

"You folks have some coffee with me," interrupted Mrs. Peterson. She poured three cups as she spoke. "You boys go on out--here's some milk for you--and don't be playing with knives." She shepherded them out the door. "Are you feelin' good now, rs. Knot?" she asked as she settled down at the table.

"She'll be a good close neighbor," Lizzie commented afterwards. "I'm glad that cut wasn't serious. I was afraid--"

"I was too. It could have been worse. I wonder what they'll do next. Life isn't dull with youngsters around, is it?"

"No, and Jim--we're going to have another."

"Are you sure, Lizzie?"

She nodded. He smiled and said quietly,

"We're taking quite a chance, Lizzie. This'll make seven and you know what they say."

"No. What?"

"Why, Sarah will tell you that the seventh child is always a silly one."

"Jim! Does she really believe that?"

"Well, that's what she says."

"She surely doesn't think so, though. I'm still put out with her anyway."

"Now Lizzie, just 'cause you didn't help with that baby--"

Jim teased.

"Yes, but I was well enough, if she'd only have let me know."

"Sarah was right, dear. You weren't well enough to stand the emotional strain."

"I know, but I wanted to be there. Ella is pretty, isn't she?"

"You women! I've told you before that they all look alike to me."

"Never mind, I guess you can't help it cause you're just a man." And she laughed as Jim went away muttering in mock exasperation.

"Just a man--just a man!"

The calm, once broken, was not allowed to return. Only a week later, Ida was lost. Lizzie found that she wasn't in the yard and began calling her. Soon she sent the boys to the neighbors to ask if they had seen her. Jim searched the barn and Lizzie had gone at once to the horse tank. Mrs. Peterson joined the search, but an hour later, she was still missing. Jim had gone on horse-back, although he insisted that she couldn't have gone far. "She's too little, Lizzie. She couldn't have walked far."

"But we can't find her here." Lizzie began to cry.

"Now, Lizzie, she's just wandered away somewhere and probably gone to sleep."

"I suppose so." She wiped her eyes. "But where can she be?"

"I don't know. I'll go look but I still think she must be here, someplace. You keep calling."

"I'll go look upstairs under the beds."

But when Sarah came, the baby was not yet found. "Did ya look everyplace--in the house, the horsetank, the barn?"

"David even looked in the pig pen and the chicken house," Lizzie answered despairingly.

"Don't give up now. She's such a little mite, she could be in lots of places and we'd a missed her."

"Mites is right," David announced, coming around the corner with Ida in his arms. After the baby had been thoroughly kissed and was safely in her mother's arms, he continued. "I didn't find her in the chicken house, so I finally looked in that coop that Papa built for the settin' hens. There she sat as quiet as she could be, and she had that tame red hen of yours right in her lap. That's why she wasn't moving. You better wash her good."

"Ida, why didn't you answer Mamma?" Lizzie scolded.

"Pretty chickie," she answered. "Mine!" She nodded her head vigorously.

"That explains everything," said David dryly.

After this experience, Lizzie watched more frequently for Ida's red head and the sound of the little tot's voice as she played. The red hen was now her inseparable companion and Lizzie invariably had an argument at meal time to keep from having the chicken present.

One day when Ida's protests had become most voluble, Mr. Levant drove into the yard. Lizzie knew that he wanted to speak to Jim; so she called to him and then went into the house. It wasn't until he called Henry and Tom outside that she realized

it was not a farm matter that he had come to discuss. When they came back into the house, Jim's face was so grave that she became really alarmed. "What is it?" She looked first at him and then at the boys' troubled faces.

"It seems that the boys and Edgar Peterson gathered pigweed yesterday afternoon to feed to Peterson's hog."

"I told them they could. What has that to do with Mr. Levant?"

"Well, they gathered more than the Peterson hog could eat, so they took some over to Levant's hog pen."

Lizzie waited as he paused a moment.

"There's a difference in hogs, Lizzie. Some are used to pigweed as food and some aren't. It killed Levant's hogs."

"Both of them?"

"Yes, both of them. I guess I'd better go see Peterson."

"What did you tell Mr. Levant?"

"I said we'd pay for them. I'll see if Peterson will help."

He walked heavily to the door and went out. The rest of the meal was consumed in silence and both boys left their dinner, only staying long enough to drink their milk. Lizzie had nothing to say to them, for she knew that they felt as heart-sick as she did. When Jim came back, they were nowhere in evidence. At Lizzie's questioning look, he said,

"Mr. Peterson will pay for one, I'll pay for the other."

In the following weeks Lizzie noticed that Jim had something on his mind. Finally, she asked him,

"What are you thinking about, Jim?"

"Why, nothing--that is--there's no use trying to fool you. I want to get off the farm, Lizzie."

She was silent a moment. "Where would we go?"

"I don't know. I think I'll go to town."

Lizzie hadn't thought about moving again, but if Jim wanted it--.

When Jim came home he had nothing to say about his own errand, but brought other news. "The bank at Lyons went broke," he told Lizzie. Nettie, who had been just about to come into the house, turned and went rapidly in search of Lettie.

"Now we can really get some gold," she told her sister in an excited voice. "Papa just said the bank broke, and if it did, there must be money all over the street."

"We'd be too late," Lettie objected. "Other people would be picking it up before we'd get there."

"Yes, but this is a bank, Lettie. There'd be plenty for all of us, cause banks have big piles of money."

Nettie's wisdom prevailed, and the twins again set out in search of wealth.

V

MARY AND JANE

Lizzie began to pack. They were going to Lyons. Jim had sold the farm and bought a livery stable.

"I'll still be at home with the horses," he had laughingly told Lizzie.

"The work won't be so hard for you, either," she had answered, and with that thought in mind, she willingly consented to give up their present home. It was easier to go, because Sarah and John were leavin' in August.

"We're going out to visit Will, and if we like it, we're going to stay," John said. "Besides, Sarah can't wait to see her grandchildren, and to show Will his baby brother and sister," he grinned.

Shortly after the Knots were settled in Lyons, their seventh child was born.

"Let's give this one a good name, so she won't be too handicapped by being silly," Jim joked.

But Lizzie named her seriously. "I can't think of a name that would give a girl a better start than Mary.

A month later, Jim said carefully,

"Lizzie, this baby doesn't look like all the others. I don't want to frighten you, but don't you think she's too little?"

"All babies are little, Jim."

"Yes, but Mary, she's--she's puny--too thin."

"I know it, Jim." Lizzie allowed her concern to show. "I've been worried about her, but she's so good I thought maybe it was just me."

"We'll have to fatten her up. If we watch her close, she'll get along all right," Jim said heartily, wishing that he hadn't spoken.

The twins and Ida were eagerly interested in their new sister. Lizzie had to shoo them away from her a dozen times a day. Nettie begged to hold her, but Lizzie said, "No," so firmly that she finally gave up--or appeared to do so. She waited patiently for her mother to leave the baby alone. A month later, her opportunity came one day while Lizzie was washing. When Nettie saw her mother go out to hang up the clothes, she slipped into the house and went with a purposeful air straight to the baby. She dragged up a chair and then carefully picked up the baby. At first she held Mary tightly, but after a while her grip relaxed. The baby wasn't nearly as hard to hold as she'd thought. But suddenly, Nettie never knew quite how it happened, Mary rolled off her lap and landed with a soft thud in under the bed. Nettie was on her knees trying to pick her up when Lizzie found them. That night Nettie cried when Jim whipped Nettie.

That October, Henry wanted a jack-o-lantern. He eyed their neighbor's pumpkins wistfully for days. Halloween would soon be here. Finally, his wistfulness turned to determination. The next day, Henry contentedly cut a horrible grin and was carefully

shaping the teeth when Lizzie said,

"Henry, where did you get that pumpkin?"

His eyes wandered involuntarily, and Lizzie followed his glance to the neighbor's patch. "Henry, did you steal it? Answer me."

"I wanted a jack-o-lantern," he answered evasively.

When his father came home that noon, Lizzie had Henry show his new possession. When Jim learned where he had secured it, his orders were instant and clear.

"You go to town and buy a pumpkin, take it to Mr. Young, and tell him that it's to pay for the one you stole."

Henry sulkily bought the pumpkin, but as he approached Mr. Young's, he rebelled,

"I'm not gonna say I stole it. I just took it!"

He marched up to the door and opened it without knocking. The family were at dinner and they stared at the small boy in surprise. He set the pumpkin on the floor and gave it a vigorous push so that it rolled toward the table.

"There's your old punkin," he announced, and stalked away.

In the spring, Lizzie went to Colorado on a visit to her aunt and uncle, who had recently moved there from Illinois. Mary and Ida went with her. Her uncle Charles insisted that she'd been starving Mary. He was so sure that she was hungry that he fed her some peaches while Lizzie and his wife were out shopping. He was more frantic than they were when Mary became so ill that they had to call the doctor. "That's the last time I'll try to

feed a child," he declared.

When Lizzie arrived home again, she found that David was working in the livery barn. "I had to spend so much time watching the twins and Henry that I decided I could use some help," Jim said. Later, they talked seriously about their eldest child. "He's excellent help, Lizzie. I can use him all the time. That would be better than having him hire out to someone."

"I suppose it would, Jim." Lizzie sighed. "He seems so young to be starting to work for hire at all, though."

"Dave's all right. He's good, and a dependable boy," Jim answered, and Lizzie smiled at the pride in his voice.

That summer Lizzie began preparations for another baby. Jim said little, except that he did remark,

"See if you can make it a boy this time, Lizbeth. It seems like we're getting enough girls on hand."

Lizzie sent her youngest son to school that fall. She had few fears that he wouldn't get along all right. She smiled to herself. Henry had had to take care of himself in competition with his two brothers and the turbulent twins. He couldn't meet any stronger personalities in the schoolroom than he had met at home.

She was worried about Tom, though. Jim wanted him to help in the barn after he came home from school. Tom was flatly refusing. This was the first time that any of their children had openly rebelled against Jim's authority. Lizzie was worn out trying to keep the two apart. First she talked with Jim and urged him to be patient with the boy. Then she reproved Tom and scolded him mildly. Finally, she asked him,

"Tom, why won't you work in the barn as Papa wants you to? Don't you know he wouldn't want you to work if he didn't need you?"

"I know, Mamma. But--you won't tell on me if I tell you, will you?" He looked anxiously into her face.

"Not if you don't wish me to, son," she answered gently.

"I'm afraid, Mamma. I'm just so afraid of the horses I can't do anything." He hid his face in her lap as he used to do when he was small. "And it smells. It makes me sick." He was crying now. It had been a long time since Lizzie had heard or seen him do that. She silently reproached herself for not having thought of this before, as she held him close to her. She had known Tom wasn't like David. He had always been a sensitive, rather solitary child. Now she said gently,

"Never mind, Tom. Don't worry any more about it."

"I didn't want Papa to be angry with me."

"No, of course you didn't. Everything's going to be all right, now, though. I'll see that Papa doesn't bother you any more. You can help me with the water and the fires."

"You won't tell him--" his eyes fell and his face reddened.

"No, I won't tell him, Tom."

That night Lizzie said quietly to Jim, "I've learned why Tom won't work in the barn."

"Did you persuade him to?"

"No, I didn't. And Jim, I want you to promise me something."

"If it's about him going to work--"

"Jim, I'm asking you--"

"Oh, all right, Lizzie, but why won't he--"

"I know why, Jim--and he has his reasons. I want you to respect them and not say another word about this."

"I won't then," he promised grumblingly.

On March first, another girl was born. Lizzie said slowly, "I tried to give you a son, Jim. I'm sorry."

"Here, here, Lizbeth, what are you apologizing about? I don't care whether it's a boy or girl. She's a fine one, too, Lizzie. She weighs nine pounds."

They called the new baby Jane, and Lizzie was so busy taking care of her and the two-year-old Mary that she soon decided that she'd send Ida to school the next fall.

That summer David quit working in the livery barn and started carrying the mail from Lyons to Bushton.

"Jim, he's too young for so much responsibility. He's only fourteen."

"He's young in years, Lizzie, but he's got a good head on him. What I'm worried about now is somebody to help me. Tom will just have to help now."

"Jim, you promised me."

"But Lizzie, I need help. Do you want me to go hire somebody when Tom could do it?"

"Oh, Jim, I don't know. All I know is that Tom must not be forced to work in the livery barn."

"You're just babying him," Jim was angry now.

"Well, Jim, I haven't had time to baby any of them except David. And remember that you took him to see the oxen."

"I'm sorry, Lizzie. It's all right. I won't say any more. I might see if I could use Henry to help some. Maybe I could manage that way."

"Henry would be better help to you than Tom," she answered. "He's pretty little, though."

"He's a good worker," answered Jim thoughtfully. "We'll try it that way." He smiled and kissed her before he went out.

Henry was elated over his sudden rise in importance and Lizzie was rewarded by the silent gratitude in Tom's eyes.

Although Ida was only five that fall, Lizzie allowed her to go to school. She charged Lettie to take care of her, but it soon developed that Ida was only interested in her lessons. By the end of the term, her young daughter was honored at the school exercises for standing at the head of her class. The teacher wanted her to take two grades the next year, but after Jim and Lizzie had talked it over, they vetoed the suggestion.

"She's too young. I want her to stay in school as long as she can. We'll appreciate anything extra you wish to teach her, but keep her in her own grade."

That spring, the children acquired a pet. One morning when Jim went out, he found that his sow had ten pigs. He examined them, and found nine healthy ones and one runt. He walked in at breakfast time with the runt in his arms. The children crowded around him with excited exclamations. "We'll have to baby this

one a little, Mother. Better put him in a box by the stove. You children eat your breakfast and then you can go down and see the others--there's nine down in the pen."

The runty pig grew slowly under its artificial care. The children, however, unanimously refused to allow it to be placed in the pen. It became a great nuisance to Lizzie for it ran from the yard into the house at any time, but especially, it seemed to her, just after she had finished mopping.

One day the pig came in and tow-headed Jane, who was crawling across the kitchen floor, made an ecstatic grab for it. The pig nipped her viciously and Lizzie turned to see the pig scuttling out the door, leaving a screaming, bloody baby on the floor. The doctor came at once. The teeth had left deep gashes just at the corner of the left eye.

"If it had been any closer, she'd never have been able to see out of that eye again. That's a dangerous animal you have, Mrs. Knot. I advise killing it at once."

It was that summer that Henry had fits. He was out hoeing when Tom told his mother.

"What do you mean, Tom?" She started for the garden as she questioned. "What kind of fits?"

"He's rolling and throwing himself on the ground."

"It must be the heat." As she saw Henry, she began to run. They brought him into the house and he rested the rest of the day, while Tom continued to hoe. The next time that Henry was supposed

to hoe, he had another fit, as Tom called it. But it was a cool, cloudy day and Lizzie was puzzled. After a third fit, she called a doctor. He examined Henry carefully and then called Lizzie into the other room. She failed to notice the twinkle in his eye.

"Does Henry like to work?"

"Why," she looked surprised, "as well as most boys of his age, I guess. He likes the work in the livery barn."

"But does he dislike his work in the garden?"

"Yes, he does," Lizzie admitted. "He never has wanted to hoe."

"I thought as much. That explains the fits."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the fits are a clever way to evade the hoe."

Lizzie began to smile. "Have you a particularly bad tasting tonic you would recommend?"

Chuckling heartily, the doctor left.

Lizzie was beginning to wonder if the children were always going to be in trouble or have something the matter with them, but that winter passed with little sickness and no extraordinary escapades. Ida was out of school several weeks with a cold and sore throat, but they developed into nothing more serious.

One spring day, Lizzie went shopping. When she returned home, she found that something terrible had happened to Jane.

"Mercy me, darlin'! Whatever's happened to your hair? Nettie! Lettie!"

"What's the matter, Mama? You sounded like there was a fire or something," Nettie answered casually from the doorway.

"Nettie, what have you been doing?"

"Why--"

"Lettie," she addressed the other twin who had just arrived, "what have you girls done to Jane's hair?"

Lettie looked hesitatingly at Nettie, then she said,

"We dyed it, Mamma."

"We thought most any color'd be prettier than that white," Nettie added. "The blue didn't go on so very well, though, did it?"

Lizzie stared speechlessly at the twins and then at Jane's peculiarly colored blue-green hair. "It won't wash out but I'd better try right away. I'll let Papa attend to you girls."

The dye did not wash out. Lizzie waited several months and finally cut Jane's hair as short as she could, but even then Jane was a tow head with a blue-fringed edging.

One day in late summer, Jim came home with a letter from John and Sarah.

"I waited to open this. I thought we'd enjoy it more if we read it together."

"I wish we could see them again," Lizzie said wistfully as she tore the envelope open.

Lizzie started to read it aloud, but after a first glance, she moved her chair around the table so Jim could read, too. They became so absorbed that Lizzie failed to notice that Ida had started to dry the dishes which Lizzie had left. Ida glanced at her mother and then at the steaming tea kettle. She hesitated,

but finally lifted the tea kettle off the stove, using both hands and biting her lip in her earnest effort to keep it steady. Just as she started toward the dishes, however, Mary ran in front of her. Ida attempted to stop and the tea kettle slipped out of her hand. She grabbed at Mary and both children fell. The tea-kettle rolled ahead of them, spilling scalding water as it went. Both Jim and Lizzie jumped to rescue the screaming girls. Lizzie felt sick as she picked up Mary. Jim was already anxiously examining Ida.

"These burns aren't serious, Lizzie," he said in a moment.

"I guess Mary isn't hurt much, either. It just looks like a few drops splashed on her."

They spent the next hour comforting Ida and Mary, and didn't return to their interrupted letter reading until after they had put them in bed. When they had finished the letter, they sat and looked at each other in silence.

"Would you want to?" Jim asked.

"I can't quite think yet," she answered. "Would you?"

"I don't know--I feel something like you do. It's so unexpected."

"What would we do with everything? I mean--we have so much--"

"We'd better leave this until morning. Let's go to bed and sleep on it."

"Jim, are you really going to consider it?"

"I might, honey--yes, I think we might."

The next few weeks Jim and Lizzie were in constant consultation.

They made most of their plans before they told the children anything. At last, Jim called a family meeting. He looked at each face in turn. The eight children were all interested, sensing that their father had something unusual to say. Jim paused as he surveyed them--David was now sixteen and Jane was two. They were a group any man could be proud of, he thought smilingly. He heard Ida whisper to Lizzie,

"Mamma, why doesn't Papa hurry up and say something?"

"I'm going to right now, Ida. David, Tom--all of you--Mamma and I have decided that we're going to move. Wait now until I finish. We're going to see Aunt Sarah and Uncle John--out in Phillips County. They've written us and we've almost finished our arrangements so that we can move in a few weeks. Now, Lizzie, you tell them some more and answer some of their questions. I think I'll sell the livery barn this morning."

Lizzie answered several eager questions, and then she quieted them and said gravely,

"Papa and I have hesitated about making such a long trip with so many children. We've only decided because we know that we can depend upon you to help us as much as you possibly can. It won't all be fun, you know, for we'll have to go a long way in the wagons and there won't be much room, and maybe you'll be so tired you'll all want to cry. But we feel sure that we'll be proud of every one of you."

VI

MARGARET AND AGNES--FLORENCE AND RICHARD

"Mamma, where did my canary go?" Lettie asked.

She had repeated that question at least once every mile, Lizzie thought wearily. "I don't know where he is, but he must be around somewhere," she answered patiently.

"I know he's lost, Oh"--She started to cry, but Lizzie checked her.

"Lettie, you'll have to forget your bird for now. He may be in one of the other wagons and if he isn't it won't help any of us, or you either, to be crying now."

"He never got out of his cage before. He must have flown away." Tears came to her eyes, but she said nothing more.

"When will we get to Phillipsburg, Mamma?" Ida wanted to know.

"Papa said at dinner time that we'd be there before dark, so it can't be very much farther," said Mary.

Lizzie looked back at David, who was driving the wagon just behind them, and he waved smilingly at her. They made quite a procession, she thought as she looked on behind him. Jim was taking all the equipment from the livery barn, since he planned to continue in that business in Phillipsburg. Jim, David, and Tom were driving the wagons and the lighter weight rigs were hooked behind.

As they crossed the North Solomon, the vivid memories of her first home beside this stream came vividly back to her. There were farms along the river valley now where before there had been only scattered homesteads such as theirs had been. But the hills were still there, and Lizzie was filled with a sudden content. She hadn't realized how really glad she would be to see them again. And Phillipsburg would be within easy driving distance of Logan.

"What are you smiling about, Mamma?" Ida asked wonderingly.

"I've come home, darlin'," she answered, still watching the hills.

Jim signaled for a halt. Then he stood up and called back, "Phillipsburg must be on top that hill." He pointed. "It's about five miles now, I think."

They started on with a new air of expectancy as they approached the end of the journey. It seemed no time at all to Lizzie before she saw John come running out to meet them as they drew up at the house.

"We were hoping you'd get here today," he said, beaming. "Sarah's been watching for you since before you left Rice County. Here she comes now. Will's with her."

Sarah came hurrying up, red in the face from her exertion. "You would come just as soon as I left a minute. How are ya, Lizzie, and which is which in these younguns?"

They started to unload, and Will lifted Ida down.

"Are your feet cold, honey?" he asked her.

"No," she answered shyly, "but my shoes are."

Nettie had jumped down by herself and gone back to one of the surreys. She came back carrying a sugar bowl and climbed back into the wagon where Lettie still sat. She handed the sugar bowl to her sister and said casually,

"Here's your old canary. If I'd known you were going to make such a fuss I wouldn't have hid him. I've been feeding him and he's all right. Don't you tell Mamma or Papa, either."

She had started to leave when Lettie said despairingly, "Where will I say I found him then?"

"In the sugar bowl, of course," Nettie retorted.

By spring, the Knot family were definitely established in their home, three-quarters of a mile west of town. The livery barn was proving a successful financial venture before Lizzie was sure that she was going to have her ninth child. She looked forward to another baby with equanimity. "It seems like they're growing up so fast I can't keep any babies around if I don't keep having one pretty often," she told Sarah.

"I don't see how you keep your finger," Sarah said admiringly. "Most women git heavy like me after havin' one or two, but you don't look much older'n ya did after ya had Dave. I don't see how ya do it."

In June, David went to a dance. Lizzie didn't approve, but Jim persuaded her.

"Dave's old enough to think for himself now, Mother, and he's a good boy. He hasn't gone much for pleasure. It's time he

started if he wants to."

The dance was at Kirwin, so David was late getting home. In the morning, he said,

"I guess you were ri ht, Mother. Somebody stole all our hats last night. I don't know what good that many will do the thief, but he took them--some of the girls had light cloaks and they disappeared too."

"David, that was a new hat."

"I know it," he answered gloomily.

"What was the dance like?" Nettie asked eagerly.

"It was just a dance. They had a fiddle and a banjo for music. I'm not going to go again unless I take a girl, though."

"You can take me," she answered promptly.

"You girls are not going to any dances," Lizzie stated firmly. "It's no place for decent people and you're too young, anyway."

Margaret was born in October.

"We've got twice as many girls as boys now, Mother. Maybe they can manage their brothers by the advantage of numbers."

"At least they can wear the same clothes," Lizzie smiled.

"They grow out of their dresses before they're worn out."

One day when Tom came home in the middle of the morning, he found Ida holding the baby. She was sitting out in the yard with Margaret in her lap.

"Ida, turn your chair around. You're letting the sun shine right in her eyes."

"Of course I am," she answered serenely. "I'm puttin' her

to sleep."

"Yes, but you'll hurt her eyes," he protested.

"Well, then she'll shut 'em, and if she has her eyes shut, she'll go to sleep quicker and I can go play."

When Margaret was nine months old, Lizzie packed again. They were going to move closer to the livery barn. She was glad in a way that they'd be in town, but the children would be harder to keep track of.

Tom was finally free of the shadow of the livery barn that summer, for he began to carry the mail from Phillipsburg to Logan. Henry willingly helped his father, and the twins were Lizzie's chief aids in both the work and the care of the smaller children.

Mary started to school that fall. She was so shy that she didn't like to go, and Lizzie carefully encouraged any friendships that she could. She saw that Id helped Mary with her lessons so that she need not be afraid because she didn't know them, but even so, the mother could see that school was no pleasure for this particular daughter.

After Thanksgiving, Lizzie started to sew on baby clothes again, for she was expecting another child in mid-summer.

Mary was supposed to attend a picnic with the rest of her class, just before the school term was over. She didn't protest, for she knew that it would do no good, but she watched her mother pack the lunch with despair.

"I don't want to go," she thought over and over again.

When the day arrived and Lizzie handed her the lunch basket, she set out with lagging steps. As she neared the school, she could see the teacher and the other children gathering in front of the building. Instead of joining them, she squatted down in a convenient patch of weeds and watched anxiously.

The group waited quite a while before setting out, waiting, as she rightly guessed, for one Mary Knot who had no intention of going with them. Finally, they departed with gay chatter, and she watched them wistfully as she crouched in her hiding place. She cried quietly and then took a napkin from her lunch and wiped her face.

Lizzie saw her coming back and went out at once.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked. "Why aren't you at the picnic?"

"They went off and left me," answered Mary slowly. "Teacher didn't wait for me at all and she didn't tell us where we were goin' so I could follow 'em."

Lizzie looked closely at Mary and silently noted the traces of tears. "You can go out in the yard and share your lunch with Jane and Margaret," she said comfortingly, but she decided that she'd better go see the teacher before next fall.

On the twentieth of June, Jim said, "What shall we call another girl, Lizzie?"

She opened her eyes and smiled at him. "Dear Jim," she thought thankfully. Bless the comforting twinkle hidden deep in his blue eyes. He was glad--glad even though it was a girl

again.

"She's got brown eyes," she said.

"Yes, she's no daughter of mine. You'll have to name her. Margaret was mine, you know."

"Well--I was thinking Agnes might be kind of pretty," she offered hesitantly.

"Agnes it is," the big man laughed. "And Lizbeth, she's got the snappiest black eyes--almost as bad as yours."

"Go on to your work," she retorted, feeling a warm glow down inside--Jim seldom called her Lizbeth--only when he particularly loved her or was unusually content with the world.

"Just the same, Mother, you wait and see--she'll have a worse temper than any of the rest." And a little smile hovered on his lips as he walked to the barn.

Tom stood looking down at the new baby. "Agnes! Agnes isn't any name for a baby!"

"Well, Thomas, what would you call her?" his mother asked gently.

"Something pretty, mother--something different." Then after a moment, "Trella, mother. Trella--Trella." He repeated it, slowly, nodding his head slightly. "That's soft, like the wind sometimes. You know how it is in the evening when things seem so still. And then along comes a breeze in the grass--just seems to dance on tip-toe. It moves the leaves when it throws 'em a kiss so they dance too--and then everything's still cause it's alone." He turned away quickly.

Lizzie lay back on the pillows and tried it over again. "Trella." Yes, it was pretty. And of course Tom would think of it. But he wouldn't have told it--he just said his thoughts without thinking. Lizzie went peacefully to sleep thinking of Trella and Tom--Tom and Trella.

But Henry wasn't pleased with Agnes. Jim told Lizzie that he was crying, so she called him in.

"Don't you like your new sister, Henry?"

"No--yes--I guess so," he answered without meeting her eyes.

"Henry," Lizzie said gently, "look at me. Tell Mamma what's the matter."

"Oh, she's all right, Mamma, only I wanted her to be a boy!"

"What difference does it make, darlin'?"

"Well, if she was a boy, she--I mean--he could hoe in the garden so I wouldn't have to do it all."

Lizzie laughed and then explained to him, "You'll probably be through hoeing before this baby'd be big enough to help anyway."

And Agnes was then unanimously accepted, although Tom never called her anything but Trella.

Margaret was learning to say a piece. Lizzie heard her repeat it each night and Ida helped her each morning. The little girl was going to represent her Sunday School Class on the regular childrens' program.

Lizzie was sure Margaret knew her poem, but she waited anxiously when the minister announced,

"Margaret Knot."

Margaret hesitated and then started toward the platform. When she got to the steps, however, she started to speak. She said three words while she stood before the audience and started back to her seat, still reciting. She finished the last word as she sat down.

"She said it on the way up and all the way back," Ida summarized afterwards.

Lizzie was worried about the baby. She seemed to be losing weight and she cried most of the time. Lizzie had put her on a bottle and she had seemed at first to thrive upon it. Now, however, she didn't know what to think.

One day Lizzie heard Agnes crying, just when she should have been contentedly eating, and she went in to pick her up. She suddenly noticed that the baby's bottle was gone. At almost the same time she heard Margaret's voice from behind the door saying,

"It won't suck."

She swung the door wide to reveal the two-year-old culprit, who held the bottle out to her and repeated in a disgusted voice, "It won't suck."

Jane was struck by lightning in the spring of 1893. She was knocked to the ground and was unconscious for several hours. The doctor was out of town, and Lizzie wondered desperately what one did to revive a person struck by lightning. Jane recovered, however, with nothing more serious than a headache.

That summer Ida, Mary, Jane and Margaret had whooping cough, catching it one after the other, so that it was fall by the time they had all recovered.

Jane started to school, and Lizzie saw with relief that Mary's difficulties were lessened by the presence of the sister. Mary's second year had been no easier than her first, but now she didn't seem to have her old shrinking dread of school. Jane was showing her that it could be fun. They hurried home one day, looking anxiously at the storm clouds. "We'd better run," Mary suggested.

"I don't think it's going to storm very much."

"We'd better hurry, though, or the folks'll worry."

They found Jim standing at the cave door when they arrived. "Hurry and get in. Your mother's been wondering where you were. Ida! Ida! Come on! It's going to cyclone."

Ida came running out of the house. "I just went back to get my money, Papa."

"To thunder with money when it's cyclonin'," he roared hastily as he closed the storm-cave door.

Sarah came visiting on a bright spring morning. "I can't be stayin' but it seems like I never git over ta see ya. I been so busy quiltin', I ain't gone any place."

"We've been busy, too, Sarah, but I'm glad you're here. It seems like we just don't go anywhere except to church. Jim's been busy, and his leg's been bothering him so much that he just wants to go to bed when he comes home from the barn."

"Did ya hear 'bout Charley Holt's wife?"

"Yes. What could she have been thinking of?"

"More 'bout that railroad man than her own man and her younguns," answered Sarah vehemently. "She just packed up an' went without no goodbyes or nothin'."

Lizzie shook her head as she looked to see if her bread was ready.

"Say, Lizzie Knot, why didn't you tell me?" Sarah asked suddenly.

"Tell you what?"

"Don't be tryin' ta fool me. You may not look like you're goin' to have a baby to most folks, but I can tell."

"All right," laughed Lizzie. "It'll be sometime in September. I wasn't really trying to hide anything. You just said yourself that you hadn't seen me much."

"But my goodness, Lizzie, this'll make 'leven."

"There's nothing so unusual about that, is there, Sarah?"

"I s'pose not. Only it only seems a little time ago when ya just had David and Tom. And I had Harriet and Mary," she added wistfully.

"You have two now to take their place," Lizzie said quickly.

"Not ta take their place," Sarah shook her head, "but we'd be lonely without 'em and they've made their own places, now."

"Of course. I spoke thoughtlessly."

"You've been real lucky with so many, Lizzie."

"Yes--I've been real lucky," Lizzie agreed.

And when little Florence was born, she looked smilingly at Jim and repeated,

"I've been real lucky."

One evening, Tom had a long talk with Lizzie. She quietly approved his plans. He wished to quit carrying mail and start to work in the small broom factory which had been started that spring in Phillipsburg.

"I won't make as much money but I think I'd like it better, Mamma."

Lizzie smiled affectionately at the tall, blond man who spoke so much like the small boy who had begged not to be forced to work in the livery barn.

"Do as you wish about it, Tom. I don't think Papa will object, so you have only yourself to please. I'm already satisfied with you."

Jane had gone to work. Her eight-year-old pride made Jim and Lizzie chuckle privately.

"I watched the baby so carefully that Mrs. Manley said next time she'd pay me something," she told Mary condescendingly.

The next time Jane kept the baby, Mrs. Manley did give her a new brown and yellow ribbon. Jane asked her to fasten it in her braids, and then proudly set out for home, planning just what she would say when she arrived. She finally decided that it would be quite effective to simply turn her head and say, "See." She practiced saying that one word. The family were all at supper when she made her entrance.

"See!"

Everyone was silent a moment and she waited for exclamations.

"See what?" Henry wanted to know.

"We've seen your back before," Ida added.

"You're just jealous." Jane tossed her head. "Isn't it pretty, ~~mamma~~?"

"What did you want us to see, dear?" asked Lizzie.

Jane whirled around. "My new hair ribbon. Isn't it there?"

"No, there isn't any ribbon. You must have lost it."

Jane never quite recovered from her loss of that first hair bow even though she earned several more during the summer, before she had to go back to school.

In the following months, the children often speculated about Lizzie's sewing. Jane told Margaret that she was making clothes for someone's baby, but Margaret thought the little things might be for her doll. The argument was not settled and neither thought to ask Lizzie.

Jane was doing well in school. She knew how to diagram sentences better than Mary, even though she wasn't supposed to study about that yet. She helped Mary until one eventful day.

The teacher called Mary to the board to diagram an especially hard sentence. Jane watched from behind her book. She smiled when teacher said,

"Why, Mary, that's very good."

Her expression changed, however, when Mary was silent instead

of explaining it as Mrs. Denham had asked. After a severe cross-examination, Mary confessed.

"Jane did it--I don't know how."

Mrs. Denham looked surprised and then called Jane before the class. "Will you explain this sentence, please?"

Jane looked at Mary and then began. Mary ran out of the room and was at home when Jane came at noon.

"I'm not going to school any more," Mary insisted stubbornly.

Lizzie listened to their story and made no decision until after dinner. Then she said,

"Neither of you will go back this afternoon. We'll spend the time showing Mary how to diagram so that she can explain the sentences. Jane, get the book and you girls start. I'll help if you find any too hard. It isn't so clever of you to know how to do it, Jane. The real test of your knowledge is to be able to make others understand. Ida will take a note to the teacher."

"Do I have to go back?" Mary pleaded.

"Yes, Mary. You wouldn't want to be a quitter, would you?"

"No. But diagrammin' doesn't matter, anyway."

"It will matter sometime, dear. If you learn it today, you can go back and not be ashamed. You'd better get started now."

But Jane had a grievance against school, too. "I wouldn't mind," she protested, "if you'd make Margaret and Agnes leave our things alone. They just mess our playhouse and our dolls all the time!"

Agnes was standing nearby and she started immediately for

the playhouse. "Dolls" was all she said, but that was more than sufficient. Lizzie finally restored peace by promising to keep the younger children out of the playhouse for the few remaining weeks of school.

In July, Jane and Margaret's curiosity about the baby clothes was finally satisfied.

"I never thought about them being for our own baby," Jane exclaimed. "I thought they'd be for some poor folks."

Margaret was at first displeased because they weren't for the dolls, but after she watched the new baby for a while, she decided he was "most as good."

Lizzie was delighted that the baby was a boy. "Not that I mind having girls," she told Jim defensively, "but I do like a change--and besides, you wanted a boy a long time ago."

"I'm satisfied with the girls. And Margaret and Agnes are as good as boys, anyway," he grinned

"They do show tendencies, don't they?"

"Have you decided what to call him, Lizzie?"

"I've about run out of names," she confessed. "You'd better find one."

The twelfth child and the fourth son of James and Elizabeth Knot was finally christened Richard on July 23, 1896.

VII
MARGARET AND LONES--FLORENCE AND RICHARD

(CONTINUED)

Mary arrived home at nine o'clock at night. They'd been playin' "blind man's buff" and she hadn't thought about the time. Papa would be angry. She slipped furtively up the stairs and into her room. She had started to undress in the dark when she heard her father's voice.

"Mary!"

"Yes, Papa," she answered as she slid into bed.

"Are you in bed?" His voice sounded grim.

"Yes, Papa."

She waited a breathless moment while he hesitated. Then she heard his footsteps going back into the kitchen. As soon as he started talking to Lizzie, Jane said bitingly,

"You can take your shoes off my feet. And next time come home in time to take your clothes off before you get in bed with me."

A few weeks later, it was school time again. This fall, Lizzie watched the girls leave. She had no boys now to send. Dave, Tom, and Henry were all working. Ida was especially gay this morning, and Lizzie's mood matched her daughter's. Ida was going

to high school. Lizzie thought with regret of her sons who had not all finished eight years of school. They'd been good boys-- and they were fine sons--steady, dependable David; shy, sensitive Tom; and hard-working Henry. But she was thankful that Ida could go on, for she was the one of all her children who had shown the greatest love of books.

And Margaret was starting this year. She had only the three little ones at home now. And Lettie--she frowned as she thought of her. Then she turned eagerly to her tasks. She and Sarah must get Lettie's dress made today. Lettie was already washing and Nettie had gone to the hotel.

Lizzie frowned again. There should be some way for Lettie to have more money and more good times. But one of the twins had to help at home, and Nettie wasn't much good at home, so she had just naturally been the one to work at the hotel. But Lizzie still didn't like it.

Her musing was interrupted by Sarah's arrival. "You ready to sew?" she asked cheerily.

"Yes, let's get started. I'm anxious to get it done."

"We'll get it done all right. Is Lettie's beau gonna come get her? "

"I think he's going to meet her in Logan. Lettie plans to go that far with the Thurmonds."

"This is sure pretty material." She admiringly fingered the rust colored cloth. "I think we can 'bout get this skirt done to-day, don't you?"

"If we aren't interrupted," Lizzie agreed.

Later, they called Lettie in to be fitted. She said little, but Lizzie's heart ached at the deep happiness in her daughter's eyes. All for a new dress and a picnic at Nicodemus. It was a shame. Lizzie sighed at her own helplessness.

They finished the dress the night before the picnic and Lettie tried it on for the family. The waist was of white silk with large green polka dots and the skirt was rust.

"You look fine," Jim approved.

"Pretty enough to catch a beau," Henry added, and they all laughed at Lettie's blushes.

Nettie came home from work in time to admire the new dress, but she had little to say.

The family rose early the next morning and all were interested in Lettie's departure. The lively pre-breakfast chatter was stilled, however, as soon as she entered the room. Lizzie looked once into her daughter's face and hurriedly put her arms around her.

"What's happened?" Jim asked.

Lettie stared dully at him. "It's gone."

"What--?" Lizzie silenced Jim with an imperative gesture.

"You mean that your dress is gone." she stated rather than asked.

Lettie nodded. "So's Nettie," she said tonelessly.

Jim rose to his feet while rage darkened his face as he understood.

"Do you mean that Nettie has worn your dress and gone?"

"She probably went with Mildred," she told her mother.

"They were going earlier than the rest." She turned back to the bedroom. "You can tell Thurmonds I'm not going."

Lizzie watched her go and looked helplessly at Jim. They could hear Lettie crying now and no one felt like eating. Ida started picking up the dishes and the other girls went outside. Jim and Lizzie went silently into the living room.

"Isn't there anything else she could wear?" Jim asked.

Lizzie shook her head. "She hasn't anything. And she wouldn't wear any of Nettie's even if I had time to mend and wash one--which I'd have to do. There just isn't another dress in the house--it's all she had. Both of the girls need clothes, but I've neglected getting them made for Lettie and Nettie's been saving her money. Besides, Lettie gave up her turn so Ida could have a new one for the church social. Oh, Jim, she's been so good to help me--and she was planning so much on this--." Lizzie blinked back tears.

"Nettie will pay for several new dresses for Lettie," Jim promised grimly.

"But even that won't make up for this."

"I know." Jim sat back in his chair and stared at nothing with troubled eyes.

They were roused by the arrival of the Thurmonds and Lizzie

went out to explain that Lettie was not feeling well enough to go. She stood outside watching them go and knew that Jim was looking from the living room and that Lettie was gazing from her window.

"I feel so sorry for Lettie and so angry with Nettie that I--I--" she paused and shook her head hopelessly.

"I guess I'd better go to work, Lizzie. There doesn't seem to be anything I can do--yet." His face set as he added the last word. "I'll be here to meet Nettie."

Sarah came in as he was leaving. "Did Lettie get off to meet that beau a hers?" she asked smilingly. "What's happened?" she added quickly as she looked from one face to the other.

Jim went out and they could hear his cane thumping the sidewalk with emphasis. Sarah looked questioningly at Lizzie.

"Nettie took the dress and went to the picnic. Lettie's crying in her room," Lizzie answered briefly.

Sarah sputtered. "Nettie! Lizzie Knot, if I was you--" Rage choked her.

"I know." Lizzie wearily agreed.

"I'm goin' ta take Lettie home with me," said Sarah thoughtfully, after a pause. "You send ta town and get some dress goods. I'll keep Lettie sewin' on her clothes for a week or two. She won't be bothered with workin' here and she'll be busy doin' somethin' for herself. She won't have ta see that mean sister a hers, either."

"Do see if she'll go." Lizzie eagerly stood up. "Move her down with you and Ida and I will go to town right now. You can persuade her better than any of us."

Lettie at first refused to go, but when she thought of sleeping with Nettie, she agreed to pack at once.

When Henry brought the package Lizzie had sent, she stared at its contents in wonder. "There's enough for four dresses! I can't remember when I've ever had four new dresses at once."

She began to smile and Sarah held the materials up before her, one after the other. "Your mother sez you're ta stay here till we've made em all."

"Mamma's sweet, isn't she, Sarah?"

"Your mother's the salt a the earth," Sarah answered vigorously.

Lettie never did know what her parents had to say to Nettie when she returned. When Mary told Lettie that Nettie had poison ivy as a result of the picnic, she said simply,

"I'm glad."

Nettie found that her sister had changed. Never before had she been unable to make Lettie forgive her, but this time she met with an unyielding bitterness.

"You've always done things and let me suffer the consequences. And I've always let you. I'm through, Nettie. You can do what you please, and I'll do what I wish, but I'm not going to let you treat me that way any more." There was finality in Lettie's voice

and there was a slow wonder in Nettie's face as she realized it.

It was six months before the girls were friends again, but their relationship after that was closer than it had been before, for Nettie at last accepted her sister as her equal.

Henry took over most of the work at the livery barn that summer, for Jim became deputy sheriff. Lizzie found it hard to get used to seeing him wearing a gun, but she was glad that he knew how to use it. She'd seen him shoot enough buffalo to know that, she thought smilingly.

Lizzie was pregnant again the next spring. Sarah shook her head and muttered, "Thirteen's bad luck ta most, but you may be all right."

"Don't be so pessimistic, Sarah," Lizzie laughed. "You know I'll be fine."

"I s'pose so--I s'pose so." Sarah looked lugubrious.

The family were excited that summer over Tom's announcement that he was leaving Phillipsburg.

"I've got a job in the Deaf and Blind School in Colorado Springs," he told his parents.

"When will you go, Tom?" Lizzie wanted to know.

"In a week or two."

"I'll get your things ready."

He was the first one to go so far away and Lizzie found it hard to say goodbye to him.

Agnes saw him start up town and understood vaguely that he

was not coming back at once. She hurriedly wrapped some crackers in a paper and ran after him.

"Tom! Tom, wait for me!"

He stopped. When she caught up with him, he bent down to her. "Trella, you can't go. You're too little."

"I wasn't goin'. I jus' bringed you some lunch so's you won't be hungry before supper."

She smiled up at him and proffered her package. Tom took it and hugged her. "Trella, you make me want to stay." He hid his face against her for a moment and she wonderingly patted his hair.

He straightened up and spoke earnestly.

"You go back now, so Mamma won't worry. Goodbye, Trella. You take good care of the family."

"You eat your lunch," she admonished.

"I will. Goodbye."

"Bye." She waved cheerfully as she ran, and Tom walked slowly away.

Agnes missed Tom and often asked when he was coming back. Lizzie was glad that she could start to school.

Agnes, however, didn't like school. "I have to sit still so long," she complained. "I want to go out doors, and teacher won't let me!"

"You can play at recess, and you must try hard to learn your lessons so Mamma will be proud of you."

But Agnes was too restless to settle down. One day the teacher

said, "Agnes, you'd better study your lesson."

"I don't want to," she objected.

"You go into the broom closet and stay there until I tell you to come out."

Agnes went sulkily. She stayed a long time. When she heard the others leave she sobbed quietly. It began to grow dark and she wondered why teacher didn't let her out. She began to cry harder.

At last, the door opened. The old colored janitor stared at her.

"Chile, what is you doin' here? Ah thought ah heard somepin' in here but ah didn' expec' ta find nothin' like youx."

Agnes continued to cry.

"Come on outa there, honey. You better git home. Your mamma'll be worryin' 'bout you."

"I can't. Teacher said I couldn't come out till she said to."

"She's done forgot you. Come on out now."

Agnes shook her head and he picked her up gently. "Here, get your wraps now and go on home."

He watched her go running down the road and locked the building.

Carl was born in December. Lizzie laughed again at Sarah as she held her baby close.

"You see, Sarah. Here he is."

"I'm glad it's over, anyway," was all that she answered.

One day when Lettie was getting dinner, she asked Margaret to set the table.

"I'm going out and play," Margaret answered.

"No, you're not, young lady. Here's the table cloth and you get busy. I'll help you put the leaves in."

"I won't do it!" Margaret grasped a table leaf and swung it clumsily at Lettie. It hit her in the side of the face and she almost fell. Lizzie arrived in time to spank Margaret and Lettie went to lie down.

"Maggie's going to be as mean as I was," observed Nettie when she heard about it.

The next day, Margaret was slow in getting ready for school. Agnes waited anxiously. "Hurry up, Maggie, or we'll be late."

"If we are, we'll just come back home, and Mamma can say we're sick," Margaret answered casually.

They were almost to the school house when the bell rang. "I knew you'd make us late," Agnes wailed. "Now we'll have to go back home."

She turned and started to run. She'd gone half a block before she realized that her sister wasn't with her. She looked back just in time to see Maggie going into the building.

"She said she wouldn't go in. Now what'll I do?" Agnes thought desperately.

She finally decided to go home, but when she arrived, she

listened in terror to her mother's command.

"You go right back to school."

"Now?" Agnes felt sick as she thought of the way teacher would look.

"Of course now. Go on to school," Lizzie ordered.

Agnes went. She spent the rest of the morning standing in the corner for tardiness. Her brown eyes darkened with rage as she listened to teacher praise Margaret for her recitation.

"She's a cheat--she's--she's a liar!" Agnes thought bitterly.

But her anger had little effect on Margaret, who only said,

"You could have come on in with me. I knew Mamma'd make us come back."

Florence wasn't old enough to go to school. She had been delighted when Papa had asked her to go to town with him. On their way home at noon, they met the negro janitor who had found Agnes in the broom closet. The community liked this colored family, which was the only one in town, and Jim stopped to talk to him.

The janitor smiled at Florence and held out a bag of candy. She shrank back from him and clung to Jim's leg.

"Take a piece of candy, Flo," Jim told her smilingly.

She shook her head silently.

"Flo!" Jim admonished, grinning now.

"I don't like candy, thank you," she gulped.

"Ah, come on, honey," the negro smiled understandingly, "this is white folks' candy."

The little girl only shook her head, and the men finished their conversation. Jim chuckled the rest of the way home and told Lizzie laughingly that Florence didn't like candy.

One day Agnes went over to the neighbors'. She arrived just as they were eating dinner. She knew she should go outside until they finished eating, but her eyes went eagerly to a huge platter of fried chicken. Mrs. Cumberland noticed, and asked with a smile,

"Have you had dinner, Agnes?"

"No ma'am," said Agnes unhesitatingly.

"Come sit down and eat with us then. We've plenty of chicken to go around."

Agnes was finishing her third piece when Margaret knocked and came in. Margaret stopped in amazement when she saw her sister. "Why, Agnes Knot, what are you doing eating over here when you just got through dinner?"

Agnes stared at her plate while her face reddened. "We didn't have any chicken," she finally confessed, and the Cumberlands laughed heartily.

A few weeks later, Lizzie sent Margaret and Agnes to town to get some weiners. They were on their way home when they met Ada, a girl of about their own age with whom they were continually fighting. This morning was no exception. The argument started

over who was taller--Ada or Agnes. Margaret took Agnes' side and Ada slapped her. Margaret dropped the meat and defended herself so sturdily that Ada withdrew, but followed them closely.

Margaret picked up her package and hurried Agnes ahead of her.

"We don't want to have trouble with her or else her mother'll be over with some big lie."

They walked along with great dignity while Ada followed, laughing.

"What's she think is so funny?" Agnes wanted to know.

"Never mind. Let's get this meat home."

"Yah!" Ada jeered, "if you have any left!"

Margaret looked at the ~~wifeners~~ and was mortified to see that the package had broken open and that she had walked several blocks with ~~wifeners~~ dragging along behind.

The children were playing in the yard the next morning when Agnes noticed a large worm on Florence's dress. Florence saw it too and began to scream. She jumped up and down and wriggled so that Agnes was forced to hold her until she quieted. She finally removed the worm with a decisive flip of her hand.

"You little silly. If you'd a stood still, I could've had it off a long time ago."

"I'm scared of worms," her sister defended herself.

"Nobody'd a known that," Agnes mocked scornfully. "You're such a baby, Flo," she added affectionately. "She's all right,

← Mamma. It was just a worm on her," and Lizzie went back in the house, smiling at Agnes' self-possession.

Tom came home. He'd been gone a year and all of them were eagerly delighted to see him. Agnes hung about him at every step. He talked to Lizzie for an hour and suddenly asked,

"Where's Florence? I've seen the baby and Richard and Trella here."

"I don't know." Lizzie looked around. "Go find her, Agnes."

Agnes came back in a few minutes. "She's in the bedroom," she announced. "She won't come out."

"Why won't she?" Tom got up from his chair and went in. Florence was huddled back in the corner of the bed.

"She's afraid of you," Agnes explained.

"Why, Flo, you're not afraid of me, are you?" He stretched out his hand but she shrank away.

Lizzie, who had followed them in, said quietly,

"You're strange now, Tom. Wait a while and she'll be all right. She's pretty shy until she gets acquainted."

"I guess it's time I came home. My little sister scared of me!"

"It is time you came. We're glad you're here, Tom," Lizzie answered him earnestly.

"I'm glad, Tom." Agnes squeezed his arm.

"Yes, Trella, I thought you'd be." He hugged her and looked longingly at Florence.

The next afternoon Tom was coming home from the livery barn when he saw Trella at a distance. He hurried home and asked Lizzie,

"Since when are you in the habit of allowing your children to go without clothes?"

Lizzie looked puzzled. He went on to explain. "I saw Trella dodging through the weeds out there. From what I could see, she was stark naked."

"Mercy me!" Lizzie started for the door.

Just then Agnes ran through the kitchen and into her bedroom. Lizzie followed. Tears of rage and shame were running down Agnes' cheeks as she struggled into her clothes.

"I went over to Ada's to take a shower bath. We were just startin' to dress when she grabbed all my clothes and threw 'em down the toilet hole. I waited and waited but she didn't ever come back. She went some place with her mother and I had to get home."

"Well, that's the last time you're going to play with her," Lizzie said with a tone of finality.

"That's the last time I want to play with her," Agnes added vehemently. "Tom would have to be the one to see me."

"I hope he was the only one," Lizzie answered.

Ada was not through with Agnes yet, however. She met Margaret and Agnes when they were taking Lettie's wash back to the hotel. They had a big clothes basket on Richard's wagon and were going to pass Ada without speaking.

"Come on and play with me, Agnes." She stood blocking their way.

"I don't want to play with you. And Mamma says I'm not allowed to any more, anyway."

"Oh, you're Miss nicey-nice now."

"Maybe she is," Margaret interceded, "now would you please get out of our way?"

"Sure I will--but not before I pay you smarties back. If you won't play I'll kick your clothes over."

She passed them and gave the clothes basket a push. The basket upset and the clean clothes spilled out on the ground.

Margaret cried out and slapped Ada. "You nasty girl! You better get away from here before I knock you down!"

Ada retreated hastily and the girls gathered up the clothes. On their way home, Agnes said anxiously,

"Ada's mother will be at our house with some big lie Ada's told."

"Don't you be afraid. I'm not afraid. I never did anything I shouldn't have and I'll tell her so!"

Ada's mother was there and Lizzie's face was grave.

"Mrs. Brady says that you hit Ada in the stomach with a rock," she told Margaret.

"Well, I didn't. I slapped her. And I'd do it again, too. She knocked over our clothes on purpose because we wouldn't play with her. And now Lettie has to do some of 'em over again and that's hard work." Margaret's voice was firm and indignant.

Lizzie turned to her neighbor. "I was sure there must be something wrong. I'm sorry, Mrs. Brady, but I prefer to believe Margaret. And I will see that my children do not play with Ada anymore. I hope you'll do the same."

After the enraged woman had left, the children danced round their mother in glee.

"You sure told her, Mamma."

"You were grand, Mamma. You sounded so proud."

"I hope we don't have any more unpleasantness. I dislike not to get along with my neighbors, but I can't have you children on the defensive all of the time, either, because of Ada's tricks."

The family had been delighted with the hammocks that Tom had brought them from Colorado. Florence and Richard played in them for hours at a time. This morning there was only one hammock up. The other one was folded on a bench close at hand. Florence was contentedly swinging when Richard came out.

"You're in my hammock," he protested.

"Mine isn't up," she answered serenely.

"Well, you can just get out of mine." He dumped her unceremoniously on the ground as he tipped the hammock.

She picked herself up and her eyes fell on the folded hammock. She grabbed it and threw it at him.

"You can have both hammocks!"

Then she began to scream, for the iron ring in the folded hammock had struck Richard's head. She saw the cut start to bleed

and ran to him.

"Richard! Richard! Mamma, Mamma! Come quick." She shook him but he didn't answer.

"Mamma--oh, I've killed him--I've killed him!"

Lizzie arrived at the frantic child's side and saw that Richard was unconscious. She had no time for Florence, but Ida tried to calm her.

The blow was not serious, but Florence was subdued and down-cast for several months. She gave in to Richard in all their arguments.

"I can't get used to the quiet when they're out playing." Lizzie told Sarah. "I go to see about them oftener than I had to before."

"Florence'll stay outa mischief for a spell anyway," Sarah said comfortably.

But Florence didn't. Lizzie and Jim had gone to the Old Settler's Reunion. Mary and Jane were left in charge of the children. Florence, supposed to be playing in the yard, carefully slipped away. She ran eagerly towards town. She arrived just as the band was coming down the street.

She suddenly saw her mother across the street and started to run to her. At the same time, a horse became frightened by the blaring music and broke the reins by which he was tied. He ran directly toward Florence.

People began to scream and Lizzie screamed at Jim, as she saw Florence for the first time. Jim had already seen her and had started out in the road in a hopeless effort, for he couldn't possibly reach her in time.

The horse stumbled and fell almost on top of the child. Jim had her in his arms by the time the horse recovered its footing. A dozen men were in the street by then, and the animal was caught.

Lizzie sat down on the nearest bench. Her knees were too wobbly to do anything else.

"Florence, how did you get here?"

"I jus' walked away."

"Well, I guess we'll just walk back again."

"Oh, let her stay, Lizzie."

"Isn't she sweet?"

Florence stayed for a while and then was taken home. Mary had missed her, but Lizzie had sent a messenger.

The family were getting ready for Sunday School the next morning. Florence was wearing a black taffeta skirt and white silk blouse. Agnes stopped her as she went by. "Look at you. Pull in that stomach!"

She jerked the skirt down and it ripped off the waist band. Florence began to cry and Jane finally stayed at home with her. The dress was ruined.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union met at Lizzie's home that week. The ladies were enjoying lunch on the lawn when Richard came around the corner. Lizzie's horrified eyes took in

his wagon load of whiskey bottles even as she heard several shocked gasps.

"Richard, take those things back in the alley where you found them," she said sharply, but she could feel her face reddening.

Jim chuckled when she told him. "Mrs. Lonnan probably thinks I drank that much whiskey."

"She'll tell it, anyway." Lizzie looked resigned.

There was excitement in the Knot household. Jane was going to take Agnes to the opera house to see "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Agnes was so excited she couldn't eat. She talked excitedly on the way and sat enthralled during the performance.

The next day she thought of a brilliant scheme. She would be Mr. Hyde. Carefully she began to assemble her costume. She took her mother's black shawl and hid it in the woodshed. She casually took one of Nettie's rats and Lettie's red tie. Then she studied her assortment. That would be enough if she could get a sofa pillow.

That evening she began to dress. First she tied the pillow on her back to give her the desired hunchbacked look. She wound the red tie around her head in turban style, and fashioned herself a mustache from the rat Nettie generally used to make her pompadour. She took the powder she had made by grinding a soft rock and covered her face. Pulling on black gloves, she placed the finishing touch--the wishbone of a goose went into her mouth and the curved, pointed ends made realistic fangs or tusks for teeth.

Now to scare Jane.

She went into the house and was disappointed to find no one at home on whom to test her costume. She hesitated for a moment about scaring Jane when there was no one around. But she was dressed now; so she went to the door to see if she was coming.

When Jane was a little way from the house, Agnes went into their bedroom and climbed up on the bureau. There was just enough light to outline her figure as she stood poised with outstretched arms, hunched back, and fanged face.

Jane took one look at the grunting thing on her bureau and ran screaming out the door. The road was muddy, but she went across it, still screaming. Agnes went after her, laughing so hard she couldn't run.

She didn't think it was so amusing after Jim finished talking to her.

"You scared your sister into hysterics. Sometimes people go crazy from being scared too much. You mustn't ever do such a thing again."

But Jim was guilty of the same fault. Lizzie and Agnes had gone out after dark to gather the clothes off the line. Jim had been out to a dinner and he came down the alley. He tapped on the woodshed.

Lizzie stared at the noise and could see nothing but the blur of his white shirt front.

"Who's there?" she called sharply.

Jim didn't answer.

"Who's there? Make yourself known. I've got a pistol. "

At that, Jim broke down and roared with laughter.

"Where'd you get a pistol, Lizzie?"

"Jim ! You should be ashamed to frighten us."

"You told me not to do that, Papa," Agnes accused.

Jim was apologetic to both of them. He helped them with the rest of the clothes and carried them inside. But that night in bed he laughed again. "You sounded so stern when you said, 'I've got a pistol'. You're still my brave sweetheart, even though you don't have to be afraid of Indians." He kissed her tenderly.

Agnes had to quit school in the third grade. The doctor called it arthritis. She became so crippled that she couldn't walk for weeks at a time. The other girls tried to teach her and Lizzie spent much time with her, but the child was generally in too much pain to think of study.

As the weather grew warmer, Agnes was able to walk about again. The children's favorite place to play was the lumber yard which was just across the alley from their house. One evening they noticed a stranger coming down the path and held a hasty consultation. They agreed to "tin can" him. As the unsuspecting man came opposite their hiding place, Margaret, Agnes, and Florence threw tin cans at him. One knocked off his hat and most of them hit him. He surprised them by chasing them. He caught Florence.

"What do you mean by doing such a thing?"

"I--I don't know."

He looked closely at her and when he saw what a child she was,

he modified his tone of voice. "What's your name?"

"Florence."

"Florence what?"

"Just Florence."

"You must have another name."

"I have--but you'd tell Mamma," she said with a sudden flash of courage.

He laughed. "All right, Florence. I'll let you go if you'll promise not to do a trick like that again."

"I won't."

He let her go and she disappeared into the lumber yard.

When they got home, they found that they had company. Lizzie introduced the girls and when the new preacher met Florence, he said with a whimsical smile,

"I've met this daughter before. I talked to her down the street."

"What about?" Lizzie looked surprised.

Florence waited for the exposure. Her eyes flew to his face in beaming, surprised gratitude when he said casually,

"She told me where you lived."

Florence and the preacher were firm friends after that.

One day at school Florence was jumping rope with the others. She said to the girl next to her,

"You lost your pants."

Her neighbor looked down and retorted,

"I did not. You lost your own pants."

Florence was sure she hadn't, and had only meant to be helpful. She was taken aback at the suggestion. The recess bell rang and both girls marched into the schoolroom. The pants were left behind and caused much whispered laughter. The next day the whispers told that the sister of the other girl had gone back and retrieved the pants. Florence was relieved that the school knew now that they didn't belong to her.

The next Saturday, Agnes was supposed to be ironing handkerchiefs. She made Florence do it for her. Florence put on Agnes' apron rebelliously and started to iron. Agnes went outside.

Later, Florence joined her. "You didn't know what you had in your apron pocket, did you?" she said insinuatingly, standing a safe distance away.

Agnes looked at her and noticed the bulging pocket. She made a lunge but Florence was prepared. She ran round and round the house. When Agnes got too close, she ran inside. The chase came to an end in the living room. Florence's grasp on the pocket was too firm, so Agnes grabbed a pair of scissors from the table.

"You let me see or I'll cut the pocket out!"

Florence only laughed and held tighter. Agnes cut. When she held the pocket in her hand, she opened it eagerly--only to find clean, ironed handkerchiefs. Florence was out the door and close to her mother before she said,

"Ha, ha! You cut your own apron up." Agnes stood in helpless rage.

The girls played with a group of children. When Agnes suggested that they have communion and baptism, they all agreed. Agnes superintended the preparations. They used two saw horses and an old door from the storm cellar for their table. The round, wooden horse tank would do for the immersions. Agnes read from the Bible while Margaret and Richard saw to it that each new member went completely under the water in the tank. Eight dripping children were ready to sit down at the communion table when Lizzie appeared. She called an abrupt halt in the proceedings and Agnes was particularly in disgrace.

"You can play at shower baths or having picnics, but you must not use the Bible or pray. It's wicked and I'm ashamed of all of you."

That Christmas of 1900 the family were all at home. On Christmas Eve, Ida sat at the organ and they all sang the familiar carols. They were interrupted by a knock on the door. Several railroad men stood there. One said huskily,

"We heard you folks singin', Jim, and wondered if you'd mind if we came in and listened."

"Come in--all of you," Jim answered heartily.

The men stood there watching the group as they sang--from two-year-old Carl to David, who was now twenty-seven.

They went out quietly. The speaker thanked Jim with moist eyes. "Those children of yours singin' them songs is the purtiest thing we've seen or heard."

VIII

CARL

Lizzie's youngest son was fair like his father. She combed his hair in long shoulder-length curls in spite of Jim's protest that he looked like a girl. She only answered,

"He's my baby, Jim. I don't want to cut his hair yet-it's too pretty."

By the time he was three, most of the people in town knew him, for the girls begged to take him with them and one of them was always buying him clothes to "dress him up."

Carl was too independent to be spoiled by attention. He held his own with Richard in disputes and more than once came in with torn shirts and muddy shoes.

"I guess as long as he acts that way, I don't need to worry about his looks," Jim laughed.

Lizzie sent the boys to town one day to get some soap. Ida was ill and there was no one else to go. The grocery store was only a block from home, so Lizzie thought it safe to entrust her errand to them. Richard stopped to play in the lumber yard, but Carl went on to the store.

When he returned, he went directly to Ida's bedroom. Lizzie came to the door and asked,

"Where's the soap, Carl?"

"I didn't get none. I got oranges for Ida 'stead of soap-- she needs 'em worse'n you, cause she's sick."

Lizzie prepared orangeade and left her washing until after dinner, smiling as she did so.

Carl's logic was sometimes unanswerable. The neighbors had a dog that howled whenever the church bell rang. The little boy accidentally learned that the dog was going to be killed. He went to his father in tears, and looking up in his face, asked directly,

"How would like to be shot just 'cause you cried when you was sad?"

Lizzie and Jim were far too sensible to allow their young son too much freedom. He came home one day and Lizzie noticed stains on his face. She guessed what they were at once, but questioned him carefully.

"Carl, what's that on your mouth?"

"Oh--it's jus' berries."

"Where did you get any berries?"

He hesitated and then said casually,

"Out of a box."

Lizzie took him on her lap and spoke seriously,

"Carl, I think you stole those berries. I'm going to give you some money and I want you to go buy that box. You tell Mr. Warren just what you did and show him which box it is. Here, let's wash your face first."

Carl set out for the store. He stopped in front and selected a box of berries. Then he went in to talk to Mr. Warren.

"Mamma said to tell you I stole three berries out of this

box and here's the money to pay for the whole box. I'm sorry I stole 'em but they tasted good and I won't take any no more."

But Lizzie had more to worry about than the children. Jim was ill. The family doctor advised rest and suggested a trip to Colorado.

Jim argued, but Lizzie was firm in her decision. "We've got to go, Jim. What would we do if something happened to you? We just can't consider such a thing and if the doctor says rest, that's what you're going to do, and you know you can't rest here. There'd be too much noise and too many things you'd think you had to do."

"But what about the children?"

"I'm planning to take Carl and Lettie can look after the others."

But Richard refused to agree. "I want to go with you, too, Mamma. I'm not going to stay home."

"But Richard, I can't take more than one of you. I have to take care of Papa, now."

"I wantta go," was all he would say, and started to cry.

Carl had been listening in silence. Now he spoke up,

"All right, cry baby. Go on with Mamma. I can stay home-- I'm no baby like you."

Lizzie finally decided to accept Carl's offer. She took Richard. She cried, however, when she kissed her small son goodbye.

"I can hardly bear to leave him, Jim." She turned to wave again. "He's such a little independent."

"He'll be better than Richard would have," Jim comforted.

When they came home, she looked eagerly for him. Carl saw

her coming and started down the street away from her.

"Carl! Carl!" She ran after him.

"Carl, why did you run away from Mamma when she was so anxious to see you?" She held him close in her arms.

He looked straight into her face and said firmly,

"You ran away from me and didn't care."

Lizzie never quite recovered from his remark. She explained carefully about Papa and how she was so proud of her brave little boy, but it was several days before Carl forgave her.

In August, Carl went across the road to the elevator. Jim was talking to a friend in front of the scales. He didn't notice that Carl had climbed up on the wheel of a wagon which stood there full of wheat.

The driver didn't notice, either. He drove away and the heavy wheel crushed the little boy as it turned.

Jim picked him up. There was no need for a doctor. Lizzie sat dry eyed, holding her dead.

"Sarah said I'd been lucky, but he was the thirteenth, Jim."

"Steady, sweetheart."

"Yes--steady. I must remember."

She sat looking at the distant hills. She managed a little smile as she stroked the golden curls.

"There were thirteen--there were thirteen. I'm glad I had him, Jim--and I've twelve left."

She slowly nodded her head. Her eyes were still on the hills.

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