

The Home Front

A Novel by Margaret Dennis Owen

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

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Winnipeg

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For Barbara and Roger

And in Memory of Victor and Lucy Dennis



Margaret Owen
January 28, 2008

Thesis Statement

The Home Front is set in Winnipeg during World War II, between 1941 and 1945. It is the story of a young girl, the eldest of three siblings, whose father, a member of The Winnipeg Grenadiers, is a prisoner of war in Hong Kong. The Grenadiers were sent in the autumn of 1941 to take part in the defense of the British colony of Hong Kong. Insufficiently trained and under strength, the Grenadiers were ill prepared for battle. Their commander, Brigadier Lawson, was confident that with a few more months of training they would be fit for combat, but this was not to be. War with Japan was imminent, and it broke out on December 7 with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The next day the Japanese attacked Hong Kong. Although the troops fought valiantly, they were forced to surrender on Christmas Day. Many of the men died in battle, and many more died during the four years of incarceration during which they were treated brutally and forced to perform hard labour while barely surviving on a starvation diet. The prison camps lacked sanitation, and many of the deaths were due to diseases such as beriberi, dysentery, diphtheria and typhoid. Their hardships ended with the end of the war in August 1945. *The Home Front* does not particularly concern itself with that narrative, but it does locate there Victor Dennis, the young protagonist's father, and one of the lucky ones—he returned to his family in September 1945.

The protagonist, Moira, is the eldest of three children. She is seven years old in the beginning, her sister Barbara is five and their brother Roger just two. Their mother Lucy, who

had been a schoolteacher before her marriage, was faced with the daunting task of raising the three children on a small allowance from the federal government. She did not know whether her husband was dead or alive, although she did receive word from Ottawa in the spring of 1943 that he had been taken prisoner of war. Letters were scarce and took months, if not years, to reach their destination. Lucy, however, managed to keep up a brave front for the sake of the children. From time to time word filtered out of the camp through Red Cross volunteers, or through a few prisoners who managed to escape and make their way back to Canada. One of these was Benjamin Proulx, who escaped from the camp through the sewer and later visited the Dennis family. An account of his visit from Moira's point of view is given in Chapter 6 (News From Hong Kong). Mr. Proulx detailed the story of the attack on Hong Kong and his subsequent escape in a book entitled *Underground From Hong Kong*, which was published in 1943.

My novel, as a type of Bildungsroman, describes Moira's gradual transformation from a shy, fearful seven-year-old to an insightful and confident eleven-year-old during the four years of her father's absence. The events of the period are shown through her eyes. Serious and sensitive, she listens intently to her mother's conversations with other adults, and to the newscasts on the radio, auditing with varying degrees of apprehension and incomprehension what is happening.

The constant talk of war and death infiltrates her vivid imagination, which magnifies the horrors. However, this same lively imagination allows her a child's enjoyment of such things as Christmas and birthdays. The Home Front is Moira's story, one of confusion and pain blended with childhood delight. During the course of the novel, Moira progresses from a state of nervous immaturity to that of a prematurely adult understanding of herself and those around her. As a result, the adults in her life tend to think of her as precocious.

While the material in this story is drawn from my personal memory, and while the narrative might point toward memoir, I have chosen to fictionalize it in order to gain greater freedom in my writing. The novel is written in the third person in order to remove myself as author from my own story as I turn it into discourse. I have centred the narrative in the young girl's consciousness by drawing out her innermost thoughts and feelings, in part by the use of free indirect discourse, as in the incident on the beach where Moira discovers that her sister is missing, and when she wonders what her mentally challenged cousin Charlie is thinking as he gazes into space. Some other examples of the use of free indirect discourse are the description of Lucy's angst while waiting for her husband to come to the boarding house, and her tears of frustration when he leaves her alone with the children on the train back to Winnipeg. Also, through the use of free indirect discourse I have depicted Moira's fear and confusion over the possibility of catching scarlet fever.

There is throughout the novel a blending of the omniscient narrator's voice with the girl's in order to centre in the girl's point of view without surrendering to first-person narrative. I have utilized diary entries, which I have structured using a child's language in order to get inside Moira's mind and convey her point of view. The first-person narration in these excerpts allows me to show events and feelings as Moira experiences them. I have also used a "child's" font in order to suggest the chirography of the young girl.

Another way in which I have tried to get inside the child's mind is the employment of Victor Shklovsky's method of describing objects rather than naming them. For example, I have done this in describing the contents of the doctor's black bag. Moira is intimately familiar with this bag, as the doctor has paid visits to her in the past and she has experienced the discomfort of having her tongue depressed and her ears probed, and felt the cold of the stethoscope on her bare

chest. While she does not know the correct medical names for the bag's contents, she knows what they look like and for what they are used. Describing the items rather than naming them not only emphasizes Moira's innocence, but also brings freshness to the text, moving it past the most obvious expression. My strategy in "making strange" seeks to convey the young girl's unadulterated response to the things of the world.

Moira's imagination also conjures up images such as her mother being taken off the train on a stretcher, germs crawling over her hands, God giving her a bicycle and God watching her from the rafters in the church. Like Pandora, Moira often feels misunderstood by other children as well as the adults in her life.

In preparation for writing this novel, I studied several works that are written from a child's point of view. The authors of these works have probed the minds of their protagonists in order to present the world from the perspective of a growing mind. There is often much humour in the child's perception of things, as well as a poignancy and freshness that can be found only in the innocence of childhood. For example, the misunderstanding of the adults of Molly Fawcett in Jean Stafford's *The Mountain Lion*, in which Molly and her brother Ralph challenge the adult world, is gripping in its intensity and yet at times brings a smile to the face of the reader. Sylvia Fraser in *Pandora* creates a vivid picture of a young girl who is very much at odds with the world around her. Pandora is misunderstood by her parents, hostile toward her siblings, and in constant turmoil as she attempts to assert herself. Margaret Atwood in *Lady Oracle* describes the life of her overweight protagonist who is also misunderstood by her mother. Alice Munro's story "Royal Beatings" is told from the point of view of the young girl Rose, whose misunderstanding of the adults around her is both humorous and poignant. Rose constantly mulls over the meaning of comments made by her father and stepmother, and in her imagination

she conjures up vivid images of what she thinks they mean, such as a purple-robed royal personage spurting blood as the result of a vicious beating.

My narrative focuses on life in Winnipeg during the tense years of the war, when those whose relatives were overseas spent their lives listening to the news and waiting for word of the fate of their loved ones. Because of the war, patriotism was strong, and loyalty to the British Empire was uppermost in the minds of everyone, especially the schoolteachers who made it their mission to enforce standards of Victorian morality and patriotism in the children entrusted to their care. I have conveyed this through the inclusion, directly or indirectly, of imperial signs such as the singing of "Rule Britannia," "God Save the King," and "The Maple Leaf Forever." Canada at the time was part of the British Empire, and it was because of Britain that Canadians were fighting in the war. Miss Windsor, the school principal, was a staunch believer in all things imperial and she was determined to instill a love of Britain in her pupils.

What Althusser would have called apparatuses of repression were very evident in the 1940's, and I seek to draw some attention to them. One such institution was the army, of which Victor Dennis was a member, and the government, which sent him to war. I have shaped my novel more fully around the apparatuses on the home front, especially the family, the schools, the church and the media in order to bring to life society during World War II. Moira and her family are entangled within this society, and one purpose in telling this story is (by implication rather than any overt demonstration) to illuminate the vast differences in a child's life between that time and the present.

The incidents of harassment by schoolteachers are another point of confusion. Moira is never allowed to forget that her father is a military man, and she is expected by others, and indeed she expects herself, to behave accordingly. I have used military language such as

“marching orders”, “snappy salute”, and “left, right, about turn” to portray the ambience of the times. My title is an apt description of the atmosphere of wartime: everyone here at home was engaged in fighting the war, and a militaristic attitude pervaded all of society. While Moira is proud of her father, she does not fully understand why he has gone away and left them. Gradually she begins to accept this, and to understand why her teachers behave the way they do. In the end she appears nonplussed by Miss Windsor’s insensitive treatment in making her stay after school to finish her work. Moira has matured to the point of realizing what is really important in her life.

Listening to the grown-ups talk is often puzzling and frightening to Moira who does not really understand the upheaval that the war is causing in her life. The emotions of the adults are often strong, as when Jimmie interferes between his mother and Moira in the peanut butter incident, and when Roger and Barbara come down with scarlet fever and have to be hospitalized. This was a time in history when children were expected to be seen and not heard. Schools were places of rigidity and misunderstanding, while the churches preached hell and damnation and the need to evangelize the heathens in other parts of the world. All this, and much more, is told from the perspective of the child protagonist with her recurring sense of bewilderment.

I have drawn out the child’s confusion by various means. A major device is that of adult dialogue. An example is the mother’s warning that toilet seats are covered with germs. The girl does not understand what germs are and her imagination leaps into action, picturing the germs as slimy red wiggling worms crawling all over her hands. The incident of the molester on the beach being discussed by her parents is another example. She knows that something is wrong, but is unable to understand what it is. Why does her father want to call the police? Has she done something bad? There are instances of the mother talking to her friends over the phone,

discussing the fate of their husbands in the prison camp, and talk of the death of one of them particularly disturbs Moira. Death is a recurring theme in the novel: in order to control Moira's illness, the mother tells her of the death of another child her age from the same malady. Moira's mother also warns her against going downstairs where Aunt Betty sits in mourning during Tommy's funeral. These messages make Moira acutely afraid of the concept of death, which she does not have the maturity to understand.

In order to better describe the time of the novel, I have made use of newspaper clippings, letters, telegrams, advertisements, photographs and war memoirs. I have copied the originals of these in order to create a more realistic document. I believe this is more effective than setting them in the same font as the rest of the text. At times I have inserted them without any particular lead-in, as this is the way of Moira's world, confused and eclectic. Margaret Laurence does something similar in *The Fire Dwellers*: she inserts news items and dialogue from television ("The Ever-Open Eye") at random to portray the turmoil of Stacey MacAindra's life. Another form of realism in my manuscript is the 1940's typewriter font that I have utilized for Moira's letters home from Medicine Hat. Again, I think this adds freshness and vitality to the text.

I believe that one of the strengths of my novel is the use of concrete images such as the sense of smell, taste, sight and sound and touch. The roughness of the blanket and the stiffness of the sheets on the train trip to Ontario, Barbara's singsong voice, the porter's snow white jacket contrasted with his black face, the pink fingernails on his black hands and the glitter of the dining car all serve to illuminate the train experience. The bathroom in the boarding house reeks of urine and stale tobacco. The dining room smells of onions, boiled beef, sweat and dust. Barbara says that the stew tastes like throw-up. I have tried to convey a realistic sense of the taste of

different foods, the smells of houses and rooms and the sights that Moira encounters. She has an intense awareness of all these things, and I think that her perceptions bring the manuscript to life.

Robert Kroetsch, in his memoir "D-Day and After", writes of creating a scrapbook about the war. This, in part, is what I have done. However, I believe that this novel is much more than a collection of memories. Through the use of sensory images and the creation of a sensitive, intuitive protagonist, I have brought to life the psychological impact of the war not only on Moira but also on the general population of Winnipeg during the 1940's.

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THE HOME FRONT

By Margaret Dennis Owen

ONE

On the Train

Moira Dennis lay wide-eyed, jostling against her sister Barbara in an upper berth, as the train sped through the northern Ontario wilderness, belching smoke into the star-studded sky. The wheels clackety clacked along the tracks, steel on steel. Ta da, ta DA, ta da, ta DA, they chanted mile after mile, repeating their endless percussion. Although it was late, the girls were not at all sleepy. There was no sound from the lower berth where two-year-old Roger had drifted off to sleep. Their mother was in the washroom, vomiting. She'd told the children this would happen.

"I always get sick when I travel," she said, "but I'll put up with anything to be with your father again."

Lieutenant Victor Dennis was in Brockville, Ontario. His regiment, the Winnipeg Grenadiers, had been sent there for combat training, and his wife Lucy, fearing that he would soon be going overseas, had decided to pack up and follow him. She'd rented the house for the summer and put the old Graham sedan up on blocks in the garage. Well, she didn't actually put the car up by herself; Ivan from the Grosvenor Service Station came and did it for her.

"This will be a long summer holiday," Lucy had promised the children, and she had taken Moira out of her grade one class in Grosvenor School a month before the end

of the school year. Now they were on a train lurching loudly eastward across the Canadian Shield, and Moira had a brand new bright red scribbler and six new red pencils, all carefully sharpened by her teacher, Miss Belyea, who had given them to Moira in a Donald Duck pencil case along with a tiny red pencil sharpener and a pink eraser.

‘You must keep a diary, Moira,’ said Miss Belyea. ‘When you come back to school in September we’d like to read all about your journey. Be sure to write every day.’

Moira couldn’t get comfortable in the strange bed. The starched sheets felt stiff and slippery, and the wool blanket scratched her face. She lay there, thinking about what would happen if her mother didn’t get better. Would ambulance men come and put her on a stretcher and take her off the train to a hospital in a strange place? Last year Grandpa Cooper was taken away in an ambulance, and the next day he died. If Mama dies, thought Moira, how will Daddy ever know where we are? But Moira couldn’t ask her mother these questions. Mama would be cross, call Moira a silly worrywart and tell her to be quiet.

“I wonder what time it is?” Barbara rolled over and poked her blonde head out between the curtains.

“I see Mama. She’s coming back from the *Ladies’ Room*.” Barbara said “Ladies’ Room” in a singsong voice. It was a new word to her, and she liked the sound of it. At the age of five, she found all of life to be a great adventure.

Moira leaned over and stuck her head out too. Mama, in dressing gown and slippers, was walking unsteadily back from the washroom. Her auburn hair, usually so shiny and neatly combed, hung in limp wisps around her ears, and her hazel eyes were red-rimmed and glassy with unshed tears.

“Aren’t you girls asleep yet?” Mama sounded tired and cross.

“No. I can’t get to sleep,” said Barbara. “The train is too bumpy. Can I have a drink of water?”

“*May I, please.*” Lucy had been a schoolteacher, and always insisted on correct manners and grammar. “All right, just one more, and then you *must* settle down. It’s almost midnight,” she said in a tired voice.

The girls watched their mother lurch along the aisle between the rows of dark green curtains on her way to the water cooler at the end of the coach. Suddenly the porter appeared, immaculate in his snow-white jacket. His step was rhythmic and graceful.

“Is something wrong, Ma’am?” he asked.

“No. Only my daughter wants a drink of water.”

“I’ll get it,” he said cheerfully, and disappeared around the corner. He returned carrying a little cone-shaped paper cup filled to the brim with ice-cold water that Barbara knew would have a metallic taste. Reaching for the cup, she stared at the porter’s hands.

“Why are your hands black and your nails pink?” she asked.

“Hush!” said Lucy, flushing.

“That’s just the way God made ‘em, Miss. Now you go to sleep.”

He turned to Lucy. "Don't you worry, now, Ma'am. If you need anything, just ring the bell." He paused for a moment, looking at her worried face, and added in a new voice, "I'm here to look after you." Then he stepped briskly away.

"Are you still sick?" Moira asked.

"No, I'm feeling better. The porter gave me some pills. Now you girls go to sleep right away. You'll be worn out tomorrow."

Mama parted the curtains and climbed into the lower berth beside Roger. Moira and Barbara fell back into their small space and in a few minutes dozed off, lulled by the motion of the wheels singing their rhythmic lullaby that sounded to Moira like rocks and trees, rocks and trees, rocks and trees.

At dawn they were jolted awake as the train pulled into a station, the bell ringing and the brakes squealing and hissing. Sleep was now impossible. People were embarking and disembarking, calling hellos and good-byes and all-aboards, and dragging luggage in and out of the sleeping car. There were whistles and loud voices and doors rattling and banging. Mama and Roger were awake too. Then the train chugged into motion again, alive with morning activity.

"First call for breakfast!" called a man in a white coat as he made his way through the coaches ringing a little silver bell.

"Who's that?" Moira asked her mother.

"The steward from the dining car," answered Mama. "We'll go there for breakfast as soon as we're dressed."

She shepherded the three children to the ladies' room where half-dressed women were performing their morning ablutions, splashing about in silver-coloured washbasins.

The water sloshed from side to side with the motion of the train, and the women stepped forward and back, forward and back, as if engaged in a ritual dance, lathering and rinsing, brushing and combing, scrubbing and spitting. The children got dressed, and Mama let Moira go to the toilet by herself.

“But don’t touch the seat,” she warned. “Remember, toilet seats are covered with germs.” Mama said this whenever they had to use a strange bathroom. Moira always looked for the germs but never saw any. She imagined them, red and slimy and wiggling, crawling all over each other in their haste to climb onto her hands and make her sick.

The train was going really fast, and it was hard not to fall off the toilet seat, but Moira grabbed hold of the window ledge with one hand and planted her feet firmly on the floor. When she finished, she stepped on the pedal to flush and watched the tracks rush by, catching her pee as they went. Mama was waiting with Barbara and Roger when she came out, and they made their way through the coaches to the dining car for breakfast.

The dining car gleamed, all white and silver. Monogrammed flatware and silver coffeepots and teapots shone against the crisp white linen tablecloths and the napkins that were so big they covered Moira from her chin all the way down to her knees. Toast and butter and cereal and jam appeared as if by magic in silver-covered dishes. The stewards, all in white, stepped gracefully between the tables, balancing their trays like acrobats against the motion of the train.

“If only I could do that,” thought Moira. It looked so easy, but Moira knew that it wasn’t. One time when her parents had guests for dinner, Moira had begged to be allowed to carry the dessert to the table. It was an angel cake topped with strawberries

and whipped cream. Moira had tipped the heavy plate, and the cake would have landed on the floor if her mother hadn't caught it in time.

An older man and woman were seated across the aisle. They smiled, and Mama smiled back. Moira glanced at them shyly. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed that the man had no hair at all. Barbara noticed too.

"What happened to that man's hair?" Barbara asked.

"That's not polite!" said Mama. But the man laughed.

"I washed it with Lifebuoy Soap and it just disappeared," he said. "Don't ever wash your hair with Lifebuoy Soap!"

"Lifebuoy! From head to toe it stops BO," Barbara chanted. She loved to sing radio jingles.

"Barbara, don't be silly," said Mama, blushing.

When the family returned to the sleeping car after breakfast, their beds had disappeared.

"Oh look, Mama! Seats! They're so soft," Moira said, sitting down and running her hands over the smooth green velvet cushions. "But what happened to the beds?"

"The porter folds them up during the day."

"Where are the blankets and pillows?"

"Stored away in the top berth." Mama smiled. "We're having lots of new experiences, aren't we?"

"I have to write them all in my diary," said Moira. "Can I do it now?"

"You can try," said Mama. "It might be hard to write with the train jiggling so much."

Moira found her diary in her little suitcase. She chose one of the new pencils and started to write, the diary balanced on the seat beside her.

Dear Diary,
We are on the tr...

Suddenly the train gave a lurch and Moira's pencil made a jagged streak across the page. She started to cry.

"Oh, now I've messed up the first page of my diary! The train is too bumpy!"

"Never mind," said Mama. "You can erase that mark. But I think you'll have to wait until we get off the train before you can write. Just be sure to remember everything until then."

They spent the morning watching the forests fly past in a blur of long green scarves. From time to time when the train pulled into a station, they watched people coming and going on the platform, hugging and kissing each other hello or good-bye. Luggage was being loaded onto huge wheeled carts pulled by men in red caps. When the girls got tired of looking out the window, they played with their Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy dolls while Roger toddled up and down the aisle or lined up his dinky cars on the window ledge. Raggedy Ann and Andy, very excited to be having a new adventure, jumped up and down on the seats and talked to each other in such loud voices that Moira and Barbara had to be cross with them.

"Ann, you have to be quiet," said Moira. "If you don't behave you'll get us thrown off the train!"

"But this is fun, isn't it Andy?" said Raggedy Ann, grinning from ear to ear.

"Yep, sure is!" answered Andy, his grin matching Ann's.

"I think we'd better put them down for a nap," said Moira.

Barbara agreed. "They're being much too silly," she said, wrapping Andy in a blue doll blanket and laying him on the seat beside her. Moira laid Anne down too, and covered her with a pink doll blanket. The two Raggedys kept giggling for a while, but their mommies would not let them get up, and after a while they fell asleep.

For lunch Mama unpacked cheese sandwiches and oranges that she had brought from home.

"It's too expensive to eat every meal in the dining car," she said.

In the afternoon they visited the parlour car, which smelled of cigar smoke and soot. Passengers sat reading and smoking in the big soft chairs and sofas. Roger took his afternoon nap on the seat beside Mama, who read to the girls from *Alice in Wonderland* while he slept.

The train was full of soldiers, most of them very young. They were very friendly, patting Roger on the head and laughing at Barbara. They had pet names for her: Sweetheart, Honey, and Bright Eyes.

"Hey, Bright Eyes, want a treat?" they asked, reaching into their pockets and pulling out Lifesavers and Wrigley's Spearmint Gum.

"Thank you," said Barbara, smiling.

"You're welcome, Sweetheart."


They paid little attention to Moira, a scrawny, shy seven-year-old with two enormous, newly erupted teeth protruding over her lower lip.

As evening approached the family went to the dining car for supper. Then they returned to the sleeping car where once again the seats had been transformed into beds.

That night they all fell asleep right away. They were becoming travel-weary. On the morning of the second day Mama received a telegram:

CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
Full-Rate Message	
Day Letter	DL
Night Message	NM
Night Letter	NL

If any of these three symbols appears after the check (number of words) this is a full-rate message. Otherwise its character is indicated by the symbol appearing after the check.



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C.N.T. 6123.

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STANDARD TIME

41 R JO 22 DL DL

BROCKVILLE QNT 757AM MAY 30/41

MRS VICTOR DENNIS
ENROUTE BROCKVILLE POOL TRAIN
OSHAWA ONT # 14

FOR EFFICIENT USE
CANADIAN NATIONAL TELEGRAPHS
TELEPHONE 712

CANNOT GET AWAY TO MEET YOU TAKE TAXI TO 162 KING ST EAST
WILL SEE YOU THERE ABOUT FIVE THIRTY

VIC

8:14AM

Help Finish the Job — Buy Victory Bonds

They arrived in Brockville early in the afternoon and a redcap helped them to load all their luggage into a taxi. There was a lot of it, as Lucy was planning to stay there with the children all summer long.

TWO

The Boarding House

As the taxi pulled up in front of number 162, they could see a woman's face at the parlor window, her nostrils flattened against the glass. She looks like a pig, Moira thought as she watched the face disappear from view. Slowly the windowless green-painted door creaked open, and the woman stepped outside. There was no front yard; the boarding house stood right at the edge of the public sidewalk.

"I'm Mrs. Walsh," she said. "This here's my boarding house. I'm not used ta childrun stayin' here, but yer husband said ya had nowheres else ta go."

She was short and stout, with wispy grey hair pulled back into an untidy bun, held in place by a nest of hairpins. Her glasses were so smeared with kitchen grease and sweat that Moira could barely see the color of her eyes, which were brown. Two buttons were missing from the front of her worn cotton dress, causing it to gape open over her stomach. Moira could see Mrs. Walsh's faded pink slip through the gap. It looks dirty, she thought.

The taxi driver was unloading the luggage onto the front sidewalk.

"Ya want me ta carry this in for ya?" he asked.

"Leave it here. My husband will take it up ta the room," said Mrs. Walsh.

"Come on in," she said to Lucy and the children.

As Mrs. Walsh shuffled up the stairs ahead of them in her worn pink slippers, Moira noticed that her bare legs were streaked and knotted with red and blue veins. Mrs. Walsh stopped outside a room on the second floor.

“This is where y’all sleep,” she said. “Bathroom’s down the hall ta the right. Dinner’s at six. Make yerselves at home. If ya need anythin’, I’ll be in the kitchen.”

Moira gazed about the room. The furniture was sparse: two double beds covered with musty-smelling pink-flowered spreads, a once-white wooden dresser whose paint had long since chipped away, and a rickety crib. The only light came from a single bare bulb, which dangled from the centre of the ceiling on a long, twisted yellow cord.

Moira’s mind flew back to their Winnipeg home. Strangers were living there now, sleeping in their beds and eating from their dishes. She thought about her bedroom with its pink and white striped wallpaper, and her pink bedspread covered with white daisies that Mama had made for her. Barbara’s bedspread was the same; only it was white, covered with pink daisies. Was the mantel clock still keeping time, or had the new people forgotten to wind it? She could see the sunbeams in the early morning streaming through the living room window, and the attic where all their toys and books were stored for the summer. She wondered if the house missed them, and she blinked back the tears. She didn’t want to make her Mama feel bad.

Parting the dingy pink cotton curtains, which covered the room’s lone window, Moira peered through the smudged glass at the weed-infested back yard. Rusted bicycle parts and water-filled car tires surrounded the decaying hulk of an old Model T Ford. Here and there, as if striving to add a touch of glory to the gloom, a few persistent dandelions poked their heads through the rubble.

“Are we going to stay here all summer?” Moira asked. She tried to hide her fear, but she knew that her words came out sounding whiny.

“It depends on your father. Now let’s go out for a walk.”

“First I have to go to the bathroom,” said Barbara.

“Let’s all go.” Mama said.

They gasped as they entered the bathroom, which reeked of urine and stale tobacco. A long narrow claw-footed tub took up most of the space, leaving room only for a rust-streaked pedestal washbasin and a grime-coated toilet. The shabby brown linoleum that covered the old pine floor had worn away in spots. Moira could see the floorboards underneath. She noticed that they were black and greasy. Two grubby-looking grey towels hung from the single towel rack.

“Ugh!” Mama shuddered. “Don’t touch anything in here! It’s a good thing I brought some towels from home. I’ll unpack them after our walk.”

She showed Barbara and Moira how to squat over the toilet so their bottoms wouldn’t touch the seat. “Remember, toilet seats are covered in germs,” she said, “especially *this* one!”

They held their hands under the running water in the sink, washed them well with the cracked, blackened bar of Lifebuoy soap that sat in a pool of slime in a glass soap dish.

“At least there’s Lifebuoy soap,” said Mama, “even if it’s dirty, Lifebuoy is supposed to kill germs. I hope it works!”

They waved their hands in the air to dry, and then Mama led them down the creaking staircase and out into the sunny street. She pushed Roger in his go-cart and the girls followed close behind, holding hands and trying not to step on the cracks in the sidewalk. Step on a crack, break your mother’s back.

They passed a grocery store at the corner of the street. CHESTERS FOODS announced the faded red and white sign hanging from the eaves.

“What does that sign say?” asked Barbara.

“Chester’s Foods, but it’s spelled wrong,” said Mama. “There should be an apostrophe after the ‘r’.”

“What’s an aposafee?”

“*Apostrophe*. You’ll learn about it when you’re old enough to go to school.” Mama usually took great pains to explain things. She must be too tired now, Moira thought.

Through a hole in the ragged screen door they saw two men in overalls leaning against the counter. They were drinking orange crush from brown corrugated bottles.

“I’m thirsty,” Barbara said. But Mama said the place didn’t look very clean.

“Let’s go back to the house,” she said. “Daddy should be there soon.”

Lucy was very quiet as they retraced their steps along the shaded street back to the boarding house. Exhaustion almost overwhelmed her, but she felt she had to be strong for the children’s sake. It was so difficult looking after them all by herself. Why couldn’t Victor have met them at the station? He was always under military orders. She wished sometimes that he could just say no, but of course he couldn’t.

“Are you sad?” asked Barbara.

“Oh no. Only I do wish your father could have met us at the station.”

“Why didn’t he?”

“He’s a soldier so he has to follow orders. He can’t do just as he pleases.”

Victor arrived in a taxi in time for supper. Lucy flew into his arms and burst into tears. The children hung back, somewhat unsure. Why was Mama crying? Wasn't she happy to see Daddy? The children gazed at him shyly. They hadn't seen him at all for almost a month, and for the past year he had spent most of his time at Camp Shilo, a two-hour drive from Winnipeg. All decisions affecting his life, and those of his wife and children, were made by the War Department of the federal government. Lucy was told very little.

"Don't cry, Darling. We're together now."

"I'm sorry. I guess I'm just tired from the trip. I'll be all right. Let's go in to dinner—Mrs. Walsh is waiting for us."

The dining room was small and crowded. Moira could smell onions and boiled beef, dust and the stale sweat of the other boarders.

"I see yer husband came," said Mrs. Walsh. "Ya can all sit over there." She pointed to four chairs on the far side of an oval table that was covered with a piece of faded blue oilcloth spattered with barely discernible pink roses.

"Do you have a high chair for the baby?" Lucy asked.

Mrs. Walsh showed little patience.

"Nope," she said. "He'll hafta sit on yer lap. I told ya I'm not used ta children stayin' here. I already had ta borrow a crib from the folks next door. Good thing their little fella don't need it no more."

Four middle-aged men in shirtsleeves and suspenders all sat on one side of the table. They stopped talking and stared as the Dennis family scrambled to find their places. At each end of the table was a large white enameled bowl filled with watery beef

stew, a platter of dry buns and a jug of tepid water. There was no butter. On the sideboard was another bowl full of home-canned peaches for dessert. After she had brought in the food, Mrs. Walsh retreated to the kitchen to eat with Mr. Walsh.

“What’s this stuff?” asked Barbara as Mama ladled stew onto her plate.

“It’s beef. It will put meat on your bones,” said Mama.

Barbara cautiously took a bite.

“It tastes like throw-up.”

“Mind your manners,” said Mama.

Everyone was hot, and nobody felt like eating, but Moira dutifully swallowed a few bites of the stew before her throat began to swell with the effort of holding back her tears. I mustn’t cry, she told herself, gritting her teeth and swallowing the coppery taste in her mouth.

Daddy held Roger on his lap and fed him a bit of the meat, but Roger quickly spat it out and began to wail. Mama looked ready to wail too.

Daddy stood up quickly.

“Let’s go for a walk,” he said. “Maybe we’ll find some ice cream.”

Moira shyly placed her hand in her Daddy’s as they left the boarding house, and he gave it a squeeze and winked at her. He looked so big and strong and handsome in his uniform, with his blue eyes and curly red hair. Maybe he would make things better, and then Mama wouldn’t look so tired and sad.

Soon they came to a small park across the street from a drug store. At the soda fountain in the drug store Daddy bought ice cream cones, and the children ate them as they played in the park. Moira and Barbara took turns pushing each other on the swings,

and tried to see who could go fastest down the slide. Then the sun began to set, and Mama said they'd better go back to the boarding house.

"We haven't even unpacked yet," she said.

Back in the room, Mama dug into the suitcases for pajamas and toothbrushes, and a couple of clean towels. After using the toilet, again taking care not to touch the seat, the children washed their hands and faces and brushed their teeth. Then the girls climbed into bed together, and Daddy tucked Roger into the crib. Mama lay down with a sigh.

"I'll never be able to sleep on this mattress," she said. "It's as hard as a rock!"

"So is this one," giggled Barbara, wriggling her body like a playful puppy.

"Well, we must try to get some rest," Daddy said. "You've all had a long, tiring journey. Tomorrow we'll try to find another place to live."

He reached up and pulled the light cord, plunging the room into darkness. The hot air smelled dusty and stale. They all tossed and turned, fitfully dozing and waking until sunrise. Then, exhausted, they struggled into the clothes they had worn the day before and went down to the dining room for breakfast. Once again the other boarders stopped talking as the family found their places at the table. Mrs. Walsh was pouring coffee into chipped cups.

"Mama," chirped Barbara into the silence. "Was your bed really as hard as a rock?"

"Hush!" said Mama, looking down at her plate.

On the table was a box of corn flakes, a jug of powdered milk mixed with water, a plate of cold toast, and a jar of gluey homemade jam.

"Can't I have a boiled egg?" asked Barbara.

“We have to eat what’s here,” said Mama.

“But I don’t like corn flakes,” whined Barbara.

“Just have a piece of toast then.” Mama sounded exasperated. “We’ll get something else to eat later.”

After breakfast Daddy went out, and the rest of them went back upstairs to wait for his return.

“He’s gone to try to find us somewhere else to live,” Mama explained, “but it won’t be easy. The town is full of soldiers’ families.”

An hour later Daddy returned with good news. He’d found tourist cabins on the bank of the St. Lawrence River, and the owner had agreed to rent one out for the summer. Mrs. Walsh hovered by the door as they loaded their belongings into a taxi.

“Sorry yer not stayin’. I done the best I could fer ya.”

“We appreciate your kindness,” Mama said, “but if we’re going to be in Brockville all summer, the children need space to run about.”

“Okey doke. I’ll maybe see ya sometime.”

“Wave good-bye,” said Mama as they drove away.

THREE

By the River

The cabin reminded the girls of the Lake Winnipeg beach cottages they rented for their summer holidays. The two tiny bedrooms were each just large enough for a double bed. The small living room held two overstuffed chairs and a matching sofa, and a green-painted wooden table surrounded by four straight-backed green wooden chairs. In the kitchenette there was a hot plate and an icebox, and a set of blue willow china dishes stacked on shelves behind a green and white gingham curtain. A wooden swing took up most of the screened porch. On a stand outside the back door sat a rain barrel with a spigot, and nestled among trees a few feet behind the cabin was a surprisingly clean outhouse. A pump for drinking water stood at the end of the road.

“Come with me and I’ll show you how to use the pump,” Daddy said, taking a white enamel pail from the kitchenette. The children raced up the road ahead of him. He hung the pail under the spout, and the pump’s wooden handle squeaked as he moved it up and down, up and down. Suddenly a gush of water splashed into the bucket.

“It’s good,” Daddy said, pumping some water into his free hand and sucking it up with his lips. Then the children held their hands under the spout and he pumped some for them too. It was very cold, so cold their mouths felt numb, and their teeth hurt, just like in the winter when they tasted snow.

“Why is it so cold?” Barbara asked.

“It comes from a well deep in the ground,” Daddy explained. “It’s always cold down there because it never gets any sun.”

When they got back to the cabin with the water, Mama said she needed to buy some food for lunch.

“There’s a store just down the street,” she said. “Let’s go and see what they have.”

As they entered the store the screen door creaked a welcome. A smell of floor wax and oranges tickled their noses. Behind the counter stood a man with only one arm.

“What happened to your arm?” asked Barbara.

“Oh, Barbara!” said Mama. “It’s none of your business!” Why was this child so outspoken? She always asked such embarrassing questions.

“Aw, that’s okay. All the young ‘uns ask me that. I got run over by a train when I was ten. Name’s Frank. You folks stayin’ in the cabins?”

Frank seemed happy to have a new audience for his stories. He was fishing off the trestle bridge over Borden’s Creek, he said, and didn’t hear the train coming. He managed to jump off the tracks but he slipped and fell and his right arm hit the rail just as the train passed by. His arm was severed above the elbow and he spent most of the next year in the hospital. His parents owned the store, and Frank started working there when he recovered from his accident.

“I didn’t go back ta school on account of I couldn’t write no more,” he said.

After his parents died, Frank became the sole proprietor.

“This place has been here just about forever,” he said, “right on this here corner.”

Moira was fascinated by the brass cash register with its intricate scrollwork, and the bell that tinkled loudly each time the drawer opened. The items on the shelves were arranged in no particular order, but Frank seemed to know where everything was.

“If ya want anythin’, just ask.”

There was an array of sewing supplies-- pins, needles and dozens of spools of brightly colored thread. Bolts of printed fabric shared shelf space with multi-hued skeins of yarn, knitting needles and crochet hooks. A basket on the counter held packages of hooks and eyes, snap fasteners and buttons of all sizes. Tins of Campbell’s soup with their red and white labels stood next to blue and silver packages of Gillette razor blades and orange boxes of Oxydol. There were jars of peanut butter and jam and tins of vegetables, fruits, tuna, salmon and Klik. Loaves of bread stood next to packages of cookies. In an icebox at the back of the store were bottles of milk and cream, blocks of butter and cheese, cartons of eggs and packages of bacon. Crates of oranges, apples and bananas stood on the floor beneath the front window. On the back wall hung an assortment of carpentry tools, nails and screws. Best of all were the glass jars filled with jellybeans, gum drops and lollipops that sat on the counter beside the cash register. The girls couldn’t take their eyes off these as Mama paid for a loaf of bread, a pound of butter and a can of salmon.

“Can we get some candy?” asked Barbara.

“*May we.*”

“May we?”

“All right. I’ll buy each of you a small bag of jelly beans, but you mustn’t eat them until after lunch.”

Frank set two tiny brown paper bags open on the counter and scooped jellybeans into them. The girls stared in amazement as he did all this with only one arm.

“What about the little fella?” he asked.

“Roger’s too young to eat candy,” said Mama.

“Well now, he’s gotta have a treat too!” Frank held a box of arrowroot biscuits under the stump of his arm and tore it open. He dropped two of them into a bag.

“There, this is for him,” he said.

“Thank you, you’re very kind,” said Mama.

“No trouble. Nice ta see new folks in here. Be sure ta come back!”

For lunch Mama made salmon sandwiches, Moira’s favorite. Then Daddy went back to camp and Mama lay down to rest while Roger napped.

“You girls may go and play on the shore,” she said, “but don’t go near the water. And Moira, I trust you to look after Barbara.”

On the beach they dug in the gravel with spoons from the cabin, and filled their pockets with stones. Moira liked the ones that were shaped like arrowheads, and those with pink wiggly lines through them. After a while they climbed into a leaky old rowboat at the water’s edge and pretended to be sailors. Out in the river a freighter steamed by, smoke billowing from its red-ringed twin stacks. Moira gazed at it, fascinated. She had never seen a real ship before. It looked exactly like the ones in her picture books, packed away in the attic of their Winnipeg house. As the ship disappeared around a bend in the river, she turned to Barbara.

“I wonder where it’s going?”

But Barbara wasn’t there. Oh oh! Fear poked at the pit of Moira’s stomach. Where is she? Mama told me to look after her, and I’m older. Maybe she drowned while I was daydreaming.

“Barbara!” she called. “Where are you?”

“Over here!” Barbara sounded excited.

She was sitting high up on the beach on a large rock. Beside her sat a man in black pants and a fuzzy red and black sweater. A shapeless black fedora was pulled over his forehead, shadowing his face. Moira climbed over the prow of the boat, carefully, because it was sitting in the mud, and she didn't want to soil her new striped running shoes. Barbara had jumped without looking. Moira could tell, because there were footprints in the mud. Mama would be cross.

“Come here!” Barbara called.

Moira ran up the beach to where they were sitting.

“Show her,” Barbara said to the man.

“No!” He shook his head and grinned. His teeth were uneven and yellow.

“Oh, please!”

“Well, okay.” He pushed his gray fingers into a hole in the front of his pants and pulled it out. It was sort of shimmery pink, like the skin on Moira's stomach when she'd been sitting in the bath for too long.

“Feel it!” said Barbara. “It's nice and soft.” She reached out a chubby hand and touched it gently.

“No!” Moira cried.

“Do it to her,” Barbara said.

“Do what?” Moira was afraid, but she wanted to know too.

His sweater felt rough against her face. His crab-like fingers stretched the waist of her slacks and felt their way inside. She screamed, and he jerked his hand out of her pants and stumbled away down the beach, his dusty black boots scattering sand and

stones, his black pants flapping about his legs. Moira ran crying back to the cabin, Barbara following close behind.

“What’s wrong?” Mama looked anxiously into their flushed faces. Moira blurted out the story.

“Now tell me again,” Mama said. “Exactly what happened?”

Moira told her again, more slowly.

“Well, you’ll both have to have a good wash.”

Mama heated water on the hot plate and filled an old galvanized laundry tub that hung on the back wall of the cabin. She found a bottle of Lysol in the cupboard and poured it into the water, and the girls took baths, first Moira and then Barbara, who giggled as she immersed herself in the pungent warm suds.

Daddy came later, after the children were in bed. Mama had sent him a telegram. Hearing the jeep drive up, Moira knelt on the bed and looked out the window. A soldier sat behind the wheel, waiting to drive Daddy back to camp. His cigarette made glowing circles in the dark. Barbara and Roger were asleep, but Moira lay down and listened to the hushed voices on the other side of the wood partition. Daddy wanted to call the police, but Mama said no.

“I don’t want to upset the girls, and I don’t think he did any real harm.”

“I suppose it’s just as well not to make an issue out of it,” Daddy agreed. “In any case, we won’t be staying here longer than a couple of days.”

“Why not?” Mama’s voice was forced.

“We’re being sent to Jamaica. We sail in ten days. But first we’re going back to Winnipeg for five days of embarkation leave.”

“When?”

“The day after tomorrow. I’m sorry, Darling.”

“But the house is rented for three months! Where will we stay?”

“Perhaps you could move in with your sister.”

“Oh Victor, you know she already has a full house!”

“Well, I’m sure she won’t mind for a few days. That’s all it will be. Then maybe you could go to Medicine Hat to stay with your sister Edith. She has more space.”

“How long will you be gone?”

“You know I can’t tell you anything. In any case, I don’t know myself. Now I must get back to camp. I’ll come again tomorrow afternoon.”

As the jeep drove away into the darkness, Moira lay quietly, thinking about the man on the beach, and worrying about going back to Winnipeg where they had no place to live. Would they have to sleep in Aunt Henrietta’s basement, or under the stairs? At last she drifted off to sleep, listening to Mama’s quiet sobbing. At breakfast the next morning Mama told the children that they were going back to Winnipeg.

“Why? It’s fun here!” Barbara frowned.

“Where will we live? Moira asked. “There are people in our house now.” She tried not to sound alarmed. She didn’t want Mama to call her a worrywart.

“Daddy’s regiment has been ordered back. They’re leaving for Jamaica in ten days. We’ll stay with Auntie Henrietta until he leaves, and then we’ll go to Auntie Edith in Medicine Hat. You’ll like it there.” Mama was making every effort to sound bright and cheerful, but Moira could see that her eyes were red and puffy, and her mouth twitched a little as she spoke.

“Auntie Henrietta doesn’t have room for us,” Barbara said. “Where will we all sleep?”

It was true. Auntie Henrietta and Uncle Jim’s grown children all still lived at home, so the bedrooms were full.

“She’ll make room for the three of you,” said Mama. “Daddy and I will take a room at a neighbor’s. It will only be for a few days. Now let’s go and explore the beach!”

They went for a long walk, watching the boats in the river and looking for interesting stones. There was no sign of the man. Barbara and Moira kept busy chasing after Roger, who insisted on running to the water’s edge, determined to get his feet wet.

After lunch, they played on the cabin porch while Roger napped and Mama began to pack. Daddy arrived in mid-afternoon and took the children for another walk on the beach. He stayed for supper, but returned to camp shortly after, promising to pick them up in a taxi the next morning.

“But we’ll have to travel on separate trains,” he said. “I have to go with the men.”

“Can we sleep in the bottom berth this time?” asked Barbara.

“We may not have berths. We haven’t had time to make reservations, and the trains are full,” Mama said, trying to sound as if it didn’t matter.

“Where will we sleep then?”

“On the seats in the day coach. They’ll give us blankets and pillows.”

In the morning Daddy arrived in the taxi. Barbara sat on his knee in the front seat as they drove to the station.

“Did you folks have a good stay in Brockville?” asked the driver.

“Yes, it was fun,” answered Barbara. “My sister and I saw a man on the beach. He showed us his...”

“Never mind, Barbara,” said Mama, and a red flush leapt into her face.

At the station Daddy paid the driver and a redcap loaded the luggage onto a cart. Daddy asked at the wicket for sleeping car accommodations, but the clerk only laughed.

“Been sold out for days,” he said.

Daddy helped them into a day coach crowded with soldiers. He asked two of them to move so that his family could sit together. He was in a hurry, as his train was leaving in less than an hour and he was responsible for getting the troops on board. He kissed each child on the forehead, and then his lips touched Mama’s briefly.

“I’ll see you in Winnipeg,” he said, and he turned and walked briskly away. Mama bit her lip hard and buried her face in Roger’s hair, her eyes filled with tears.

“Why are you crying, Mama?” asked Barbara.

Mama sat up straight and tossed her head.

“It’s all right,” she said. “We’ll have a good time on the train.”

Soon after the train left the station, the conductor came to say that he’d found berths in the sleeping car.

“Thank God,” said Mama. “It’s such a long journey. We need to be able to lay down our heads.” This time the girls fell asleep right away. They were becoming accustomed to train travel. Mama was too; this time she didn’t get sick.

FOUR

Summer of 1941

Auntie Henrietta Mitchell and her family lived in a small two-storey stucco house with a roughly finished attic that was stifling hot in summer and icy cold in winter. In summer dusty cobwebs clung to the rafters and in winter frost rimed the boards of the ceiling.

The Dennis children were to stay there for five days. As soon as Victor left for Jamaica, they would take the train to Medicine Hat. Henrietta, although she really didn't have room to spare, gave them a warm welcome. Cousin Jimmie and his brother Charlie moved up to the attic so that the girls could sleep in their room, and Henrietta set up a borrowed crib next to her bed for Roger. Lucy and Victor rented a room from Mrs. Giles next door.

Henrietta was soft-spoken and mild-mannered. She adored her sister Lucy, who was eighteen years younger than she was. Lucy was the only one in the family to graduate from university, and Henrietta was very proud of her. Henrietta had lived in Scotland until after her marriage at the age of eighteen, and she still spoke with a broad Scots accent. Her elder son Jimmie was only a few months younger than Lucy. Everyone called him Jimmie so as not to confuse him with his father, who was named Jim. Jim worked as a carpenter for the Canadian National Railway, and Jimmie had a depression-era job sweeping floors in Eaton's basement.

Moira was afraid of Jimmie. She heard him tell his mother that the house was too crowded, and he wished that the Dennis children hadn't come to stay. She liked the younger son, Charlie, who spent his days wandering about the neighborhood. Charlie was always friendly. He chatted with anyone he happened to meet. Sometimes he hopped on the milkman's wagon to help deliver the paper-wrapped pounds of butter and bottles of milk and cream. The bottles clanked together in their wire basket with its wooden handle as, full of importance, Charlie called to the customers, "Milkman here! Anything for you today please?"

Whenever Charlie noticed a crowd of people gathering outside a church for a funeral or wedding, he'd wander inside. He was fascinated by ritual. His parents were Presbyterians, but every Sunday morning Charlie got all dressed up in a suit and tie and attended Mass at the High Anglican Church on the next street.

On days when Charlie could find nothing to amuse him, he spent hours hunched forward on the edge of the green plush sofa in the parlour, his large freckled hands dangling between his knees. Chewing on a toothpick, he stared into space, his vacant eyes as blue as the sky in the watercolor painting of Loch Katrine hanging on the wall over his head. Moira often wondered what Charlie was thinking about. Did he wish he could have gone to school like his brother? Did he remember the weddings and funerals he had gone to? Did he wish he could read a book, or the newspaper? But when Moira spoke to him he just shook his head and said "Nice girl, Moira." His conversation consisted entirely of phrases picked up from other people.

“Good girl, Moira,” he’d say. “Nice girl, Moira. New dress. Moira? Going to school, Moira?” To Victor he’d say: “Nice uniform, Victor. New shirt, Victor? Working hard, Victor?”

“Dinna talk sae much, Chairlie,” Auntie Henrietta would say, but her words just disappeared into the air. Charlie went right on talking.

On the morning of the second day at Auntie Henrietta’s house, Barbara woke up with a flaming throat, a raging fever and a red rash all over her body.

“She’s a terrible sick wee lassie,” said Henrietta. “What can it be?”

Frightened, Mama phoned Dr. Tisdale right away. Moira waited on the front porch for him to arrive, carrying his black bag. Moira knew what was in that bag—wooden sticks to push down your tongue so the doctor could look at your throat, a little light so he could look in your ears, a thing with wires that hung down from his ears so he could listen to your chest going thump thump, a glass stick with a silver end on it so he could take your temperature, and some jelly beans that he gave you when he was finished looking you over. Moira always thought she was going to throw up when the doctor put the stick in her mouth, and the end of his listening thing felt so cold on her chest that it made her shiver. She liked the jelly beans though, and Dr. Tisdale always winked and smiled at her. Now he patted her on the head on his way into the house. Mama sat in the living room holding Barbara. As soon as the doctor saw Barbara’s flushed face and arms he knew what was wrong.

“I’m afraid it’s scarlet fever,” he said. “She’ll have to go to the hospital. I’ll call the ambulance.”

Mama sobbed as she cradled Barbara in her arms.

“Oh, my poor baby! How long will she have to stay there?”

“Twenty-eight days,” said the doctor. “I’m sorry, but there’s nothing else I can do.”

“What will I do without you?” Mama buried her face in Barbara’s blonde hair, but Barbara was too sick to answer. Mama hugged her tightly until the ambulance arrived to take her, wrapped in a red wool blanket, to the King George Hospital for Communicable Diseases.

In spite of the warmth of the June day, Moira shivered with fear. “Will I get scarlet fever too?” she asked her mother.

“I hope not. We’ll just have to wait and see.”

“Will it take a long time?”

“Seven days. If you don’t come down with it by then, you should be all right.”

“I’m so sorry,” Mama said to Auntie Henrietta. “Now we’ll have to stay in Winnipeg for another month. We can’t go to Medicine Hat without Barbara.”

“Dinna you worry now. Ye ken ye’re welcome here as long as ye need stay.”

“You’re so kind,” said Mama, and tears welled up in her eyes. “I’m so lucky to have a sister like you. I’ll try not to trouble you too much, and I’ll do the chores for you so you can have a bit of a rest.”

Moira and Roger were quarantined for a week, and a man from the Health Department came and tacked a red warning sign on Auntie Henrietta’s front door.

QUARANTINE
SCARLET FEVER

**All persons are forbidden to enter or leave these premises
without the permission of the HEALTH OFFICER under
PENALTY OF THE LAW.**

**This notice is posted in compliance with the SANITARY
CODE OF MANITOBA and must not be removed without
permission of the HEALTH OFFICER.**

Nobody was allowed to enter or leave the house for the next seven days, which meant that both Uncle Jim and Jimmie had to miss work, and Charlie had to miss his rounds of the neighborhood. Moira passed the time by writing in her diary.

Dear Diary,
Barbara has skarlit feever. She has to stay in the hospital for a whole month. I'm scared I'll get it too. I'd be so scared to have to go to the hospital. All the people there are strangers. Barbara won't mind becuz she isn't shy like me. Mama says if I don't get sick by the end of the week I won't get sick at all. I'm really worried but if I say that to Mama she'll call me a worrywart.

Moira counted the days, which never seemed to end. The nights were the worst. She lay wide-awake, trembling with fear, listening to Auntie Henrietta's hall clock strike hour after hour. Over and over again she swallowed, checking to see if her throat was sore, but it never was, not really. Sometimes she thought it was, and she couldn't swallow, but in the morning she always felt better. She didn't get scarlet fever, and neither did anyone else in the house.

Before the week was over Daddy left for Jamaica, and Mama moved in to Auntie Henrietta's house. They decided that Moira should sleep in the attic, across the hall from Jimmie and Charlie, and Mama and Roger could share the men's room. Mama received long letters from Daddy telling of the wonders of Bermuda, where his ship stopped on the way to Jamaica, and of tropical moonlight picnics, dinners and dances, cricket games, swims in the ocean and sightseeing tours. He enjoyed the life of an army officer.

Dearest, you used to tease me about being spoiled by having a batman. Well, the batman I have here is almost like a valet. Whenever I arrive in my room he appears, and insists on helping me undress (if I would let him). He always asks me what I'm going to wear, and after my shower, behold! Everything is laid out. Every time I take off a pair of shoes or boots they are whisked away to be cleaned, and I never bother about washing or mending. He looks after all that, even to putting things away in the drawers. He has his own methods, and if I put anything away in the wrong place he carefully changes it! So you see, Darling, I am liable to be awfully spoiled!

Every Monday morning Mama did the laundry in the chipped green enamel wringer washing machine in Auntie Henrietta's cellar. Narrow wooden stairs led to a dark, dank space that smelled of coal dust and rotting vegetables. The only light came from a single bulb suspended above the washer. Two galvanized rinse tubs stood on a rickety wooden stand, and these, as well as the machine, had to be filled using an old black rubber hose that was attached to a nearby rusty faucet. It took the entire morning

to get the job done. There were shirts and cotton dresses, aprons, socks, pajamas and underwear, sheets, handkerchiefs, towels and tablecloths, and they all went through one wash and two rinses. Then Mama carried them, smelling of Rinso, up the stairs and through the kitchen to be hung on the lines in the back yard.

Rinso white, Rinso bright,
Happy little washday song!

“You may as well go back to school,” Mama told Moira when the week of quarantine was over. “It’s another three weeks until the end of June, and there’s nothing for you to do around here.”

“But the school is so far from here,” Moira said. “How will I get there?”

“It’s not that far. You can take the streetcar, and I’ll ask Mrs. Morgan if she can give you lunch.” Josephine Morgan was in Moira’s class, and the Morgans were close neighbours.

Moira felt very grown up when she perched on the dusty wicker seat in her print cotton dress and white socks and sandals. The scent of lilacs from the hedges along the street wafted through the open windows, and the breeze tickled her nose and teased her hair as the streetcar, filled with cleaning ladies riding to work at homes in Crescentwood, rattled and clanged its way along the rails. After school she rode back on the streetcar, now filled with the same cleaning ladies, somewhat limper now, returning home. In the morning they chatted to each other and laughed, although Moira couldn’t understand what they were saying. In the afternoon they sat mostly in silence, weary after their day’s work.

Dear Diary,

Every day now I take the streetcar to school. I was scared at first to go on the streetcar all by myself but Mama took me to the stop the first day and told the driver I should get off at Waugh's Grocery Store where the streetcar turns around to go back downtown. My school is just three streets over from Waugh's, right behind our house on Dorchester. Now I'm used to going on the streetcar, and I see the same ladies every day. Mama says they are cleaning ladies coming from the North End to work. They smile at me but I can't understand what they say. Mama says they speak foren languages becuz they came from Europe. Daddy and Mama speak English becuz Daddy came from England and Mama came from Scotland. When I take the streetcar home after school the same ladies ride with me but then they look really tired and they don't talk as much as they did in the morning.

Like the cleaning ladies on the streetcar, Lucy often seemed preoccupied and tired, and after school and on weekends Moira was left to amuse herself. Mama was right, she thought, there wasn't much to do at Auntie Henrietta's. She missed Barbara. Roger was only a baby, too young to play with, and she didn't have any friends in Auntie Henrietta's neighborhood. Ivy Price lived in the middle of the block but she was ten and went to Earl Grey school and took violin lessons so she was stuck-up.

Dear Diary,

Today is Sunday so I didn't have school. It's hot out. I wanted to pretend I was a lady with a baby so I put on Mama's white straw hat and white gloves and I got Auntie Henrietta's old purse and walked around the

block pushing Raggedy Ann in my doll carriage. Ivy and her friends laughed at me and said I thought I was so grown up but I looked silly so they ran into Ivy's house and made faces at me through the window. I miss our old house. I don't have any friends on this street.

If only I had a bicycle, Moira thought, I could get away. I could ride over to our old street and play with my own friends. She pressed her arms against the rough bark of the elm tree in front of Auntie Henrietta's house, bowed her head and shut her eyes, and prayed to God for a two-wheeler.

"Please, please, God, when I go around to the back yard, *please* let there be a bike waiting for me. I don't care what color it is. It can even if be old and rusty. But *please* give me one."

Then she'd walk very slowly through the squeaky wooden gate and around the side of the house, running her hands along the rough grey bricks of the chimney and watching the ants scurry over the cracked, dry earth. She wanted to give God lots of time to answer her prayer, but even before she got there she knew He wouldn't. As she stared at the empty back yard in disappointment, she remembered that God was much too busy looking after all the people in England and Europe who were being bombed by the Nazis to be bothered with her. A little girl, that's all she was. Not important at all.

The air in her attic bedroom with its tiny dormer window was heavy with the odor of mothballs and dust. Every night she was sent to bed shortly after dinner. They just want to get me out of the way, she thought, and it's not fair, not fair at all. The June evenings were long and hot, and she'd lie soaked in perspiration on the crumpled sheets, listening to the distant sounds; the street cars clanging along the tracks, the collie next

door barking at every car that came down the street, the creak and bang of the screen door and the chatter and laughter of the grownups gathered on the veranda. Sometimes she'd creep down and sit on the hall stairs to listen. She knew that she might get into trouble for this, but the bare pinewood of the stairs felt cool under her feet, and the breeze from the open doorway cooled her cheeks. Sometimes she nearly got caught by someone coming up the stairs to use the bathroom, but she always managed to scurry back up to the attic. One evening, however, Mama found her on the stairs, and she pleaded to be allowed to stay up a while longer.

"I can't sleep," she said. "I'm hungry!"

"Well," Mama relented, "I guess you can make yourself a peanut butter sandwich. But be quick about it!"

Moira was just about to spread the peanut butter on the bread when Auntie Henrietta came into the kitchen.

"I'll do that for ye," she said. "I dinna want ye to use sae much peanut butter. Ye ken it's a bit haird to come by."

"No," Moira said. "I can do it myself!"

Just then Jimmie, who was passing through the kitchen, yanked the knife out of Moira's hand, twisting her arm.

"For God's sake, Moira. If my mother wants to butter your bread, let her do it!"

"Never mind, I'm not hungry," Moira cried, running back up to the attic where she sobbed herself to sleep in the sweltering summer twilight.

At the end of June Barbara came home from the hospital, and the next day they all boarded the train for Medicine Hat to stay with Aunt Edith for the rest of the summer.

"Just in time," said Mama. There was a polio epidemic in Winnipeg, and she didn't want to take the chance of anyone else getting sick.

Aunt Edith and Uncle Fred had a big old house. Moira had been told often that they took great pride in their large garden, and so they did. They grew lots of flowers and vegetables. Aunt Edith's gladioli won every year in the local flower show, and Uncle Fred's potatoes were the biggest Moira had ever seen. Aunt Edith made mouth-watering lemon meringue pies, and Uncle Fred let Moira play with his Underwood typewriter that sat on a big oak desk in a corner of the dining room. In no time at all she composed a two-page newspaper, The Dorchester News, named after their street in Winnipeg. The feature story was "How the Dennis Family Spent Their Summer Holidays".

HOW THE DENNIS FAMILY SPENT THEIR SUMMER HOLIDAYS

By Moira Dennis

At the end of May my Daddy went to Brockville with the Grenadiers. Mama wanted to be with him so we all went by train to Brockville. The train was very bumpy but we had fun eating in the dining car and talking to the soldiers. In Brockville we stayed at first in Mrs. Walsh's boarding house but it was not very nice there so we moved to a cabin on the river. After two days there we had to go back to Winnipeg because Daddy was going to Jamaica. We stayed in my Auntie's house because our own house was rented. Barbara got scarlet fever and had to go to the hospital for a whole month. Thank goodness Roger and I didn't get it. When Barbara got out of the hospital she still remembered us. We came to Medicine Hat (isn't that a funny name) Now we are staying in Aunt Edith's house.

My cousin Marion is seventeen. She is very pretty. She has brown curly hair and brown eyes. She has lots of boyfriends who are airmen training here to fight in the war. Marion plays the piano and she and her boyfriends have fun singing songs. They sing songs about the war like the white cliffs of Dover and there'll always be an England. Marion works in an office downtown and rides a bike to work every day.

My Uncle Fred works for the Canadian Pacific Railway. He is a trainman. Sometimes we go to the station to see him off. He is always the last person to get on the train. He pulls out his pocket watch to check the time and then he signals the engineer and the train begins to move and Uncle Fred grabs the rail and swings up onto the steps and waves good-bye to us. I'm always scared hell fall off but he hasn't so far. Last week Uncle Fred and Marion both had holidays so we all went to Banff on the train. We staid in the Cascade Hotel. It was dark when we got there so we couldn't see the mountains. The next morning Barbara and I looked out the hotel window and there was Cascade Mountain all covered with spruce trees. We couldn't see the top of it becuz it was up in the clouds. Mama said that's the first time she's ever seen Barbara speechless.

We were in Banff for three days. We went to the Cave and Basin Pool and swam in the Sulphur Hot Springs. It smells like rotten eggs. We bought souvenirs in the shops like felt pennants, little birch bark canoes and postcards.

Now we have been in three provinces Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta this summer. Mama says enough of this, she'll be glad to get back to her own house.

Before Daddy left for Jamaica he had been given special permission to visit Barbara in the hospital, and as a result he came down with scarlet fever shortly after his arrival in Jamaica. Because he was hospitalized for a month and was forbidden to send letters, Mama didn't hear from him for some time, and she grew tense and short-tempered.

Dear Diary,

Mama was very cross today. She spanked me with a big stick on my bare bottom and now it hurts when I sit down. Mama said I was making too much noise but it was all Barbara's fault becuz I was sitting on the veranda knitting a scarf for my doll and Barbara grabbed my wool and ran away with it and all my stitches came off the needles and spoiled my scarf. I screamed at Barbara and then Mama came out of the house and dragged me down to the basement to Uncle Fred's workshop and found a big stick to spank me with. I think it had nails in it because my bottom is really sore. Mama said she woodn't have me causing a disterbince in her sister's house but it was Barbara that caused the disterbince not me. Now I have to stay in my room and Barbara gets to play outside. It's not fair. I told Mama that Barbara was being mean to me but she just said that I'm older so I should know better than to scream like that and upset everybody on the street.

After writing in her diary Moira lay on the bed and stared at the ceiling. Tears ran down her cheeks. It's not fair, she thought. Everybody likes Barbara better than me. She made up her mind not to talk to Barbara anymore. Then she'd be sorry. Then she'd wish she'd been nicer.

When Marion got home from work she saw Moira lying on her bed and came and sat beside her.

“I heard what happened,” she said. “Your mother is sorry she lost her temper. Why don’t you go down and talk to her?”

“She likes Barbara better than me,” Moira said.

“Not really. She’s just upset because she hasn’t heard from your father for so long. Go and talk to her.”

Moira went slowly down the stairs. Mama was sitting alone in the living room.

“Come here,” she said to Moira. “I’m sorry I lost my temper. I know that little sisters can be a pest sometimes. Bring me your knitting and I’ll fix it for you.”

There were lots of fun things to do in Medicine Hat. Just around the corner from Aunt Edith’s house was a park with a wading pool, and Mama allowed the girls to go there every day all by themselves. And that wasn’t all. On the next street, white-haired, toothless Mrs. Nicholson kept chickens in her back yard. Aunt Edith saved all her table scraps for chicken feed, and every morning Moira and Barbara tossed these over the fence to the scrambling, pecking hens. Those chickens would eat anything; apple cores, vegetable peelings, leftover toast, cold mashed potatoes, overripe strawberries-- at every meal the girls left something on their plates to take to them. Sometimes Mrs. Nicholson let Moira and Barbara help gather the eggs from the nests. She showed them how to slide their hands under the sitting hens to feel for eggs. Moira was afraid of the pecking birds, but Barbara laughed at her.

“Sissy. They’re only birds,” she said. “They don’t have teeth so they can’t bite. See?”

Then Barbara would march up to a sitting hen and say “Shoo chicken! Give me your egg,” and the hen would flutter down from the nest squawking in indignation.

“See? They won’t hurt you,” Mrs. Nicholson said, but Moira always waited until the hens left the nests before gingerly picking up the eggs, warm and smeared with blood.

At the end of August the Dennis family returned to Winnipeg, just before the schools reopened. How wonderful it was to be back in their own house, sleeping in their own beds, with all their own things around them once again! At the beginning of September Daddy wrote:

How is everything around the house, Dear? I hope you are feeling quite settled in again after your hectic summer. I hope you don't get any cold weather. I expect we'll feel the cold when we get home.

When are the schools going to reopen? Fancy Moira in grade two! Our family is growing up, Dearest, isn't it?

FIVE

Off to War

Dear Diary,

Now I am in grade two and my teacher is Miss East. We are learning to write like grown-ups but we still have to use pencils becuz we can't use pens and ink until grade three. We are also learning about colours our paint boxes are big and flat but they only have three colours red yellow and blue. We can mix the colours together so red and blue make purple and red and yellow make orange and blue and yellow make green. It's like magic. Mama had to make me a drawstring bag out of her old apron to keep my painting things in. It is yellow with red berries on it. We tie our bags to the iron loops on the sides of our desks.

Miss East taught us a poem about an owl. It goes like this:

A wise old owl lived in an oak,
The more he heard, the less he spoke,
The less he spoke, the more he heard.
Why aren't we like that wise old bird?

I copied that from the blackboard. We say it all together every morning. First we sing O Canada and say The Lord's Prayer and then Miss East reads from the Bible and then we say the poem. Miss

East put a big cardboard owl above the blackboard. He has great big yellow eyes and he watches us do our work and he looks like Winnie the Pooh's friend Owl. I wonder if he lives in a tree in the Hundred Acre Wood when he's not busy here keeping all of us wise.

Victor returned to Winnipeg at the end of September, but the family saw very little of him, as he was busy making preparations for his next journey. He seemed a stranger to them after being away for so long.

"Why doesn't Daddy live with us?" Moira asked.

"He wishes he could, but he has to stay in the barracks with the other men."

Mama told the children that the Grenadiers would be leaving Winnipeg by train for Vancouver on October 25, but where they were going after that was a secret. She talked constantly about their departure.

"I want to go to the station," said Barbara. "I want to see Daddy's train."

"No," said Mama. "There will be too many people there, and I don't want to lose you in the crowd."

"I wouldn't get lost," said Barbara. "I'd hold onto your hand. Honest, Mama I would."

But Mama was adamant. She knew that the scene at the station would be a sad one, and she didn't want the children to be upset.

"You can say good-bye to Daddy here."

"Well who will look after me while you're gone?"

"Mrs. Wright says that you and Roger can play at her house."

“Oh goody! I can play with Irene’s doll house!”

Irene Wright was in grade four. Her dollhouse was an exact replica of the Lieutenant Governor’s home that stood on Kennedy Street next to the Legislative Building. Irene’s grandfather had made it for her. He was an architect, and every detail of the house was perfect, right down to the miniature grand piano, and the sliding doors on the pantry cupboards.

“Well, I don’t know about that,” Mama said. “Irene will be in school, and it’s her house. You’ll have to ask permission.”

“I will,” said Barbara. “I’ll ask nicely.”

Daddy slept at home on the last night, and in the morning Mama made his favorite breakfast, scrambled eggs and bacon, toast and marmalade. Then Moira went off to school, and Mama took Barbara and Roger across the street to the Wright’s. Before they left, Daddy kissed all of them good-bye.

“Be good, “ he said, “and take care of your mother. I won’t be gone long.”

A few weeks later, Mama received a letter from Daddy written on board ship.

Lucy Darling,

How are you getting along? Gee, how I miss you all, far more than I did the last time. I’m so glad I was able to have that last handclasp as we were moving out. I was feeling pretty miserable myself, and I’m sure you were feeling the same way.

If Mama was feeling miserable, the children were not aware of it. Life went on, and a party was planned to celebrate Barbara’s fifth birthday on November 19. But when the day came, Moira woke up covered with blisters.

“Chicken pox!” cried Mama. “Oh dear, we’ll have to call off Barbara’s party!”

“It’s all your fault,” sobbed Barbara. “Just wait till *your* birthday. I’m going to get measles *and* mumps!”

On November 26, news reached Winnipeg that the Grenadiers had arrived in Hong Kong. Shortly afterward, on December 7, Japanese bombers attacked Pearl Harbor. They bombed Hong Kong the next day. Mama sat up late in the evening listening to the radio. The next morning at breakfast she was very quiet.

"I have some bad news," she said. "There's war in Hong Kong."

"That's where Daddy is," said Barbara. "Is he in the war?"

"I'm afraid so," said Mama.

"Will he get hurt?"

"I hope not. But he might."

At school, Miss East asked the class if anyone knew which place had been bombed on the weekend, and Moira shyly raised her hand.

"Yes, Moira?"

"Hong Kong."

"Yes, I guess it was," Miss East said, "but there was a *much more important* place bombed. Doesn't anyone know?"

Angus McPherson waved his hand in the air.

"Yes, Angus?"

"Pearl Harbor," he answered, grinning at Moira.

"That's right," beamed Miss East. "I'm glad that *some* of you listen to the news!"

Moira's face burned. She was chagrined to think that she had given the wrong answer. But she knew that Hong Kong *had* been bombed. And her Daddy might get hurt.

During the days before Christmas, Mama baked Scotch oatcakes and shortbread as she did every year for her sister and two brothers and their families. She put up the Christmas tree, bought gifts, and played Christmas carols on the piano, but it was a time of great anxiety. For over two weeks the Canadian troops fought a losing battle, which finally came to an end on Christmas Day. On Boxing Day the Free Press and the Tribune proclaimed the news.



The Winnipeg Tribune



52nd Year Read the Want Ads. Today

WINNIPEG, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1941

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No. 308

Fate Of Gallant Grenadiers Mars Christmas Festival

The Grenadiers, in spite of their defeat, were proclaimed heroes. The families wanted only to receive word of the men's safety, but the Free Press warned that it might take weeks to obtain casualty lists through the International Red Cross.

Mama wrote to Daddy telling him about their first Christmas without him. Before he left he had given her money to buy gifts.

My Dearest One,

I hardly know what to say to you after this terrible time of trial and suspense, but I want you to know that God will bring you back to us one day. I ask nothing more of this life than to have you home again to help raise this lovely family with me. I know only too

well what you must have felt, and I have prayed constantly that you be given strength and courage and patience to live through the days until we meet again.

I tried to make Christmas as bright as possible for the children, and our friends were al so kind to us. We had several invitations to dinner. I would have to see you to tell you all the lovely things people did to help us.

Your present to me was a lovely gold-filled locket and chain, and I wear it with your picture in it. I gave the girls beautiful dolls, and Roger a big delivery truck from Daddy. Honestly, dear, they talk of you constantly, and when Roger can't do exactly as he pleases, he sys 'My Daddy told me to!' He is always kissing your picture and telling everybody about you. Barbara's prayers for you are most touching, and Moira's too.

On the home front, the people of Winnipeg celebrated the Christmas season as usual, visiting friends, going to parties, skating and tobogganing. On New Year's Eve the Capitol and Metropolitan Theatres ran double features, the Puffin Ski Club held a ball in the Royal Alexandra Hotel, and many people held private parties. Mama had been invited out to dinner, but decided to stay home with the children instead. She lit the fireplace, and they played Snakes and Ladders, and Checkers, and drank hot cocoa with marshmallows on top before being tucked into bed well before midnight.

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Moira didn't feel like sleeping. She knelt on her bed and leaned her elbows on the windowsill, pressing her forehead against the frosty glass and gazing down on the quiet, snow-covered street. The lights shone out from the neighbouring houses, and the smoke from the chimneys curled into the wintry sky. Our street looks just like the picture of the little town of Bethlehem in our Christmas carol book, she thought. Her new Christmas pajamas, pink flannelette covered with playful white kittens, hugged her little girl's body as she remembered the Christmas just past. Even without Daddy, it had been a happy time. On Christmas morning Mama had run downstairs before them to turn on the tree lights, just as Daddy always did, and Santa had filled all the stockings and eaten the milk and cookies they had left for him.

There was a huge truck for Roger and life-sized baby dolls for Moira and Barbara. Mama said that these gifts were from Daddy. Barbara named her doll Mary, and Moira called hers Marion after her pretty teen-aged cousin in Medicine Hat.

Mama had sewed matching velvet dresses for the girls, with white lace at the collar and cuffs. Moira's was forest green and Barbara's was royal blue.

"I'm a princess and you're just a tree," said Barbara.

"Hush!" said Mama. "You both look lovely."

She also made a little suit for Roger with navy blue velvet short pants and a white cotton shirt with a blue velvet bow tie.

"He looks such a little gentleman," everyone said. "Just like his Daddy."

All the aunts, uncles and cousins came for Christmas dinner. Mama cooked a huge turkey stuffed with Scotch oatmeal and onions. There was gravy, mashed potatoes, turnips, and canned green peas. Cousin Jimmie sat beside Moira and spooned cranberry

sauce onto her plate. He told her it was really good, but she didn't like the taste of it, and it turned her potatoes pink. She started to cry, but Mama took her plate out to the kitchen and scraped the pink potatoes into the garbage. She was cross with Jimmie.

"It's a waste of food," she said, but Jimmie just laughed.

There were parties to go to, and lots of people came to visit, bringing flowers and bottles of sherry for Mama, and candy canes and Christmas oranges for the children. Guests arrived, faces ruddy from the cold, struggling to latch the heavy storm door and letting gusts of frigid air into the front hall. They'd remove their snowy boots, stamping and laughing, and carry their fresh-smelling fur coats and hats up to Mama's bedroom where they'd blow their noses and run their fingers through their hat-mussed hair. The children would follow them every step of the way, giggling and chattering. Mama would make tea, and bring out oatcakes and cheese and shortbread and fruitcake, and the children would get to stay up late. After everyone had gone home, Mama would turn off all the lights in the living room except the ones on the Christmas tree, and then she and the children would sit in the soft glow and sing carols. Moira loved it when they sang "Silent Night", and she thought of snow gently falling around the manger where the baby Jesus lay sleeping, and angels singing in the bright sky overhead.

Now it was all over. Tomorrow Mama would take down the Christmas tree and put away all the decorations, and the next day Moira would go back to school. A train whistled hauntingly in the distance, its mournful sound piercing the cold darkness. It seemed to be crying for all the soldiers who were so far away from home.. Moira thought about the train that took them to meet Daddy in Brockville, and the other train that took him away to war. She wondered what he was doing at that moment. Did he have turkey

for Christmas dinner? Did he get any candy? They had sent him a parcel with his favorite black and green jellybeans in it, and some cigarettes and warm socks. Moira had given him an Agatha Christie book, Barbara a deck of cards and Roger a cribbage board. Did he get the things in time for Christmas? Her lips moved in silent prayer, her breath making a small circle of mist on the windowpane.

“God, please take care of Daddy. Keep him safe and end the war soon so that he can come home again.”

From downstairs, she could hear the muffled sounds of the RCA Victor console radio as Mama listened to the war-torn world welcome in the year 1942.

SIX

News From Hong Kong

After a long winter's wait for news, any news, of the defeated Grenadiers, Moira was startled awake one morning in early May by the sound of the phone. Who could be calling so early? Jumping out of bed, Mama ran down the stairs to answer the persistent ringing, shivering in her light cotton nightgown and bare feet.

"Oh no! Poor Jean!" Her voice was almost a sob. Moira and Barbara hurried to their listening post at the top of the stairs.

"We'll have to go and visit her," Mama said. "You say that the rest of us will get news today? We must all stick together now and be brave. Let me know if you hear anything more."

"Who was that?" Moira asked, running down the stairs.

"Mrs. Baxter. There's some bad news from Hong Kong."

"What bad news?" asked Barbara.

"Colonel Stanton has died in the prison camp. But we must be brave. We must believe that your father is all right."

"What did he die from?" asked Barbara.

"Diphtheria."

"What's diphtheria? Is it like scarlet fever?"

"It's a terrible disease. When you have it, your throat closes up so you can't breathe."

“Will I get it?”

“No. You’ve all had shots so you can’t get it.”

Moira’s throat tightened.

“How do you know that Colonel Stanton is dead?” she asked.

“His wife received a telegram from Ottawa. We should all be getting telegrams today. Now you go and get dressed for school while I make breakfast.”

Moira felt cold as she stepped into her underwear. She put on her navy knee socks and her white blouse and navy tunic, as always. What if Daddy is dead? She thought of the telegraph messengers in their blue shirts, jackets and caps, riding their bicycles along the streets. People stopped, watching them with solemn faces, knowing that something had happened. Only last week a telegraph boy came to the Campbell’s house across the street with the news that their son Duncan had been killed in action. He was eighteen years old. He used to walk past Moira on his way home from high school, and he always said hello. Moira had wanted to know what ‘killed in action’ meant, and Mama had said it meant killed while fighting the enemy.

When Moira came down to the kitchen she said she didn’t want any breakfast. She often said this, but this morning Mama seemed firmer than usual.

“You have to eat something,” she said.

“But I’m not hungry!” Moira’s eyes filled with tears.

“Well, you can’t go to school with an empty stomach. Have some corn flakes.”

Moira took a few sips of orange juice and swallowed a spoonful of cereal, then ran to the sink and threw up.

“I can’t go to school. I’m sick.”

“You seemed fine when you got up. Well, I guess you can stay home this morning, but you’ll have to go after lunch.”

Moira went upstairs and lay on her bed, listening to the street noises through the open window. She could hear the clop clop of the bread man’s horse, and the chattering of the neighbourhood children on their way to school. Dead. Colonel Stanton was dead. He will never come back to Winnipeg. His family will never see him again. Never again. Not even one time. Daddy might be dead too. What happened when people died? Miss Wilson, the Sunday School teacher, said they went to heaven to live with God and Jesus. Heaven is a beautiful place, she said, but nobody has ever seen it. Jerry Stovel asked Miss Wilson how did she know it was beautiful then? She said the Bible said so.

Mama sat in her wicker chair on the veranda, waiting for the telegram, and after a while Moira came down and sat beside her. The messenger arrived just before noon. He propped his bike against the elm tree on the boulevard and came whistling up the walk.

O Dear God, thought Lucy. He sounds cheerful. The news must be good. She signed for the telegram and tore it open. Victor’s name was on the short list of Canadian officers reported as being held prisoner-of-war.

“He’s safe!” Mama cried, hugging Moira tightly.

“Hurrah!” Moira shouted, skipping across the veranda. Then abruptly she stopped. “Poor Mrs. Stanton. *She’s* not saying hurrah.”

The neighbourhood women came running over, bringing with them Barbara and Roger who had been playing across the street.

“We have to celebrate,” said Mrs. Wright. “Why don’t you and the children come to our house for lunch? I found a jar of peanut butter at Waugh’s last week and I’ve been saving it for a special occasion!”

Moira thought that she had never tasted anything as good as those peanut butter sandwiches. After lunch she went back to school to tell all her classmates that her Daddy was safe.

That afternoon Lucy wrote to Victor:

You can imagine what a shock it was to hear about Colonel Stanton. May Baxter and I went to see Jean on Friday and took her some flowers. Her stepdaughter was with her, and they were both so brave. Four or five other wives were there too. The women have all shown wonderful patience and courage throughout the winter. We all just keep as busy as we can, and we get together when we are lonesome.

What a blessed relief it is to know that you are safe after all these months of dreadful suspense and anxiety. I don’t need to tell you what it means to us all to know for certain that we are going to have you with us again, and I feel that I can never be thankful enough, and only hope that I can be worthy of such a blessing.

Once Moira knew that her Daddy all right, she began to think about her coming birthday. On May 19, she would be eight years old. She’d have a party with games: Musical Chairs, London Bridge is Falling Down, Falling Down, Falling Down, The Farmer in the Dell, Blind Man’s Buff, and her favorite, Pin the Tail on the Donkey. There would be little white paper bags filled with jelly beans for each guest, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and lemonade with pink straws, and a birthday cake with pink icing and pink candles. Her Mama was sewing a new party dress, stiff pink organdy with lace trim and something that she called a bolero to match. All the girls on their street would be there—Irene, Josephine, Lola, Patricia and Beverley, and of course Barbara and Roger.

Moira worried that it might rain on her birthday, but when the day arrived it was sunny and warm. She could hardly concentrate on her schoolwork she was so busy watching the hands of the classroom clock slowly creep from one hour to the next. Finally the four o'clock bell signaled the end of the school day, and Moira and her guests ran giggling along the short block to her home. The party was perfect, just as she had imagined it. After everyone had gone home, she sat down to write to Daddy.

Dear Daddy,

I have to do the dishes every day now, and I have to make my bed. For my birthday I got a little golden grenadier badge from Mama. From Barbara I got a cuckoo clock, and from Roger a purse. I had all the girls on the street to my party, and they had a lovely time. Mama made me a new pink party dress, and Barbara a blue one the same pattern. I had a pink cake with eight pink candles. I am eight now and going into grade three next year. We had our examinations last week. I am thinking I will pass.

Last Saturday Mama took us downtown for lunch. I get an allowance now. It is ten cents a week. I am going to save up all my money to buy a pram for my doll Marion that you gave me for Christmas. I will write and tell you when I get it.

I miss you and I hope you are keeping well and will be home soon.

Love, Moira

The cuckoo clock hung above her bed and kept her company during the long evenings as she lay there trying to make sense out of all the talk of war and death. Every hour and half hour the cheery little bird popped out of his house to announce the passing time. Moira thought the cuckoo was a kind of angel, looking after her and talking to her when she was lonely.

One day Mama had a visitor, a man named Mr. Proulx who had escaped from the prison camp through the sewer.

“Daddy asked Mr. Proulx to get in touch with me if he got back to Canada safely,” she said.

Word From Hong Kong

Winnipeg Officer Is Safe

WINNIPEG, May 30.—A letter received Friday by Mrs. F. V. Dennis, wife of Lieut. F. V. Dennis of the Winnipeg Grenadiers now held prisoner at Hong Kong, brought Winnipeg its first direct news of the Canadian forces imprisoned by the Japanese and assured Mrs. Dennis of her husband's safety.

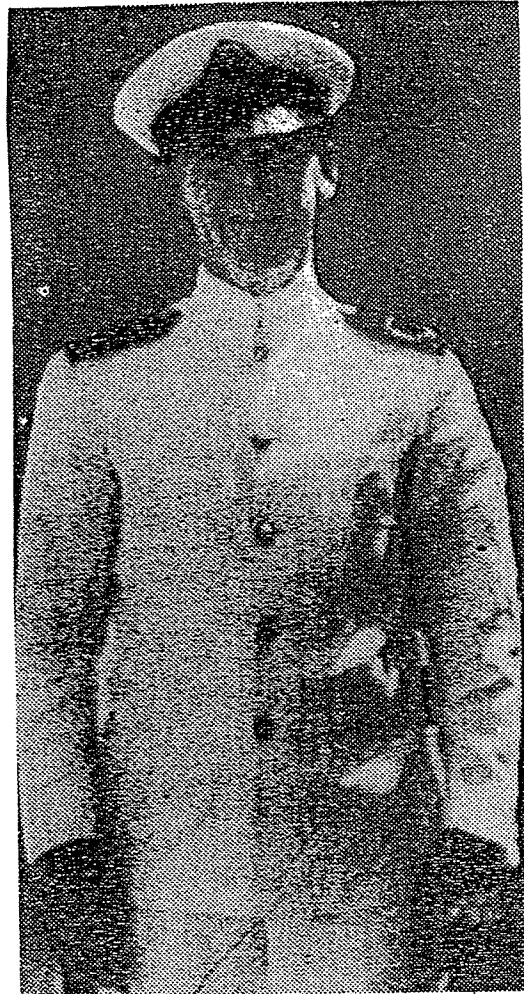
Posted in India about two months ago, the letter was from B. A. Proulx, Canadian resident of Hong Kong who identified himself as a member of the "naval volunteers," and who escaped from Hong Kong Jan. 27 and reached India after a 59-day trek through China. Proulx said he had now joined the American Volunteer Group.

Major Trist Safe

The letter listed the names of officers and men of the Winnipeg Grenadiers which had been reported safe and well by the national defence department, and added the name of Maj. George Trist, second in command of the regiment, to the defence department's list.

"The Canadians and naval men in the prison on the Hong Kong island were getting better food than we were when we were on the Kowloon mainland at the first prison," the letter stated.

"Your husband is getting rice, bread, sometimes cocoa, occasional stew and bully beef, so he is not starving like some of them are. They may possibly go to Japan soon, that is what was expected, but we cannot know for certain."



Sub-Lieutenant Proulx in the uniform of the Hong Kong Volunteer Naval Reserve.

“It must have been awfully smelly in the sewer,” said Barbara. “He must have had to hold his nose all the way!”

Mr. Proulx had written to say he would be passing through Winnipeg on his way to his home in Montreal, and wanted to see Mama. He sat in Daddy’s chair in the living room, and Mama offered him sherry and cigarettes. He had a moustache and spoke with a French accent. He said that Daddy was fine, but very thin.

“There are lots of cases of beriberi and dysentery. I was most happy to get out of there, let me tell you.”

“Do you get beriberi from strawberries?” asked Barbara.

“Oh no! You get it from not having enough to eat,” smiled Mr. Proulx.

“Oh, poor Victor! I hope he doesn’t get sick!” Mama looked as if she were going to cry.

“Well, he’s a very strong man,” said Mr. Proulx. “And he really wants to come back to you.”

“That’s what I keep telling myself and the children,” said Mama. “Don’t you worry,” I say. “He’s a strong man. He’ll be all right. Some day soon the war will be over and he’ll come back to us.” But Moira noticed that Mama’s hair was beginning to turn grey, and that her eyes had a sad look, even when her mouth was shaped into a smile

Some evenings Mama had visitors, but often she sat alone, reading or sewing as she listened to the radio. Barbara and Roger slept, but often Moira lay awake, listening to the silence that was broken only by the ticking of her cuckoo clock. Was her Mama all right? Except for the hum of the radio, there was no sound from downstairs. Fear formed a cold stone in Moira’s chest. Maybe Mama was dead. Moira had to find out.

“Mama!” she called.

Then came the familiar shuffling of feet across the downstairs hall to the bottom of the stairs.

“What is it?” Mama was annoyed at being disturbed.

“I can’t get to sleep.”

“Well, turn over and close your eyes. Say a prayer.”

Comforted by the sound of her mother’s voice, and hoping that some day the war would end and her Daddy would come home, Moira whispered into her pillow.

“Thank you, God, for Mama. And please keep Daddy safe.”

SEVEN

School

Dear Diary,

Now I am in grade three. Our room is on the second floor and our teacher is Miss Walters. She is very mean and her teeth stick out. Angus McPherson says she has buckteeth but Mama says it's an overbite. The grade fours and fives are on the second floor too. Only the baby classes are downstairs. Barbara started grade one this year and her teacher is Miss Belyea.

We are learning to write like grownups now and we have black wood pens. Everybody chews the ends of them but Miss Walters told us not to becuz we only get one pen and it has to last until Christmas. We get a new pen nib every month. The pen nibs make scratching noises on the paper. We have inkwells in our desks with little glass bottles and every morning the ink monitor has to come around and fill the bottles from Miss Walters' big crockery jug. I don't want to be ink monitor becuz the jug is so heavy it's really hard not to spill and Miss Walters shouts at the monitor to be careful. There are lots of ink stains on the floor. I'd be so scared I would spill the ink and get into trouble with Miss Walters.

Writing is hard to do. We have little writing books with exercises in them. Miss Walters says we are learning the Palmer method of penmanship. We are supposed to make all of our letters exactly like the ones on the cards above the blackboard. We have to do the

exercises in the book every day. Miss Walters says it's to make our fingers and wrists strong.

"Keep your wrist flat, don't turn your hand sideways, move your whole arm,"

Miss Walters repeated as the grade threes struggled for perfection. Miss Walters paced up and down the aisles, looking over the children's shoulders, and making them balance erasers on their wrists to keep them from turning over.

Dear Diary,

Today at school we joined the Junior Red Cross. We each paid ten cents and we got a white button with a red cross on it to wear on our tunics. We are knitting squares to make afghans for the men who are fighting in the war. A lady from the Red Cross came to the school and brought us wool and needles. Her name is Mrs. Russell. Some of the kids don't know how to knit so the Red Cross lady and Miss Walters showed them how. Mama already taught me how to knit so I can do it without help. We also belong to the Junior Humane Society. A lady named Mrs. Hansell came last week to visit us and ask if we wanted to join to help lost cats and dogs get good homes. We paid five cents each and got membership cards and buttons with pictures of dogs and cats. We could choose which one we wanted and I picked the cat because I like cats better than dogs, although dogs are cute too. We are very busy helping to win the war because we save paper and rags too. There is a contest to see which grade brings in the most.

Miss Walters was short and somewhat stout, with humorless grayish eyes that peered accusingly from behind wire-rimmed glasses.

“You’re a liar,” she said to Moira one day. Moira had been home sick, so she was late handing in a booklet about the Belgian Congo. Moira had a bad cold, and often Moira’s colds turned into earaches and bronchitis. Her mother, afraid that she might get pneumonia, made her stay in bed until the cold was gone.

“I don’t want to stay in bed,” Moira whined.

“Well, you have to. You might get pneumonia, and people die from that. A friend of Mrs. Baxter’s’s lost her little girl that way. She refused to stay in bed, and one night her fever went up to 105 degrees and she just got sicker and sicker until she died at four o’clock in the morning.”

The way Mama emphasized every syllable in “four o’clock in the morning” made it sound like the most desolate time in the world to die.

“They called the doctor,” she went on, “but he didn’t get there in time. The poor little girl couldn’t breathe. She was the same age as you—eight years old.”

Over the next week Mama treated Moira with mustard plasters, and pinned wads of orange Thermogene to the inside of her pajama top. Moira’s chest turned red and peeled from the treatments. She had been away from school for almost two weeks and did not know about the Belgian Congo project until the day she returned. It was due the next day, and Miss Walters sent Moira home with pages of purple hectographed images of straw huts and African children with spears and African men in loin cloths and African women wearing fancy dresses and strings of beads. Moira had to colour these and tie them into a booklet by the next day.

“You can’t do all that tonight,” Mama said. “You’ve been sick. You need to get to sleep.”

Moira did some of it, but it wasn’t finished when she left for school the next morning. Moira was worried.

“Tell Miss Walters you’ll hand it in tomorrow,” said Mama. “She knows you’ve been sick.”

Nervously, Moira approached Miss Walters’ desk. She stared at the floor, swallowing hard.

“My booklet is almost finished,” she whispered. “My Mama says to tell you I’ll hand it in tomorrow.”

“You’re lying,” Miss Walters said. “You haven’t done any of it. I can tell by the look on your face. You’ll have to stay and do it after four o’clock today.”

As the morning dragged on, Moira could barely concentrate. The chalk squeaked against the blackboard as Miss Walters drew a pie to teach the class about quarters and eighths. After recess they read a story about a pony named Pongo in the Highroads to Reading book. At lunchtime Moira ran home sobbing to tell her Mama she had to stay at school after four.

“Miss Walters said I was lying. She doesn’t believe I’m almost finished my booklet.”

“Poor Moira! We’ll finish it now, and I’ll write you a note.” Moira picked at her pork and beans as Mama helped her complete the last few pages. Then they tied it together with green ribbon from the sewing basket, and Mama wrote a note to Miss Walters.

Dear Miss Walters,

You know that Moira has been sick. I wrote you a note when she returned to school yesterday. She did not know about the Belgian Congo booklet until she came back. It was far too much for her to do all that work last night, and I suggested she finish it tonight and hand it in tomorrow. However, you told her she would have to stay after school today to finish it. This will not be necessary as it is now done and she is handing it in this afternoon.

Sincerely,

Lucy Dennis

P.S. Moira was telling you the truth when she said the booklet was almost finished.

Timidly, Moira put the booklet on Miss Walters' desk and handed her the note.

Miss Walters read it silently. She did not look at Moira. When the four o'clock bell rang

Moira went into the cloakroom and put on her coat and overshoes, hoping that Miss

Walters wouldn't stop her from leaving. Just at that moment Peter Johnson peed his

pants, making a huge puddle on the floor under his desk. As Miss Walters was glaring in

his direction, Moira made her escape. That night as she lay in bed she heard her mother

talking on the phone, telling Auntie Henrietta about Miss Walters calling her a liar.

"She just doesn't seem to like children, but good teachers are hard to find now.

Most of the bright young women have joined the service, so we have to put up with the

older ones, and some of them can be very difficult to get along with."

For the next two years Moira had the most difficult teacher of all. Miss Ormond was tall and heavyset. Moira's mother said she was a martinet. Her thick wavy gray hair

was worn pinned into a bun with giant wire hairpins. Her wrinkled cheeks were caked

with rouge, and her lips were permanently pursed. Too old to join the active service, she

was determined to do her part to fight the war by peddling war savings stamps to her

pupils. Every Wednesday morning she expected each child to bring a quarter for a

stamp. These were stuck into folders, each of which held twenty stamps. Miss Ormond

had a contest to see which pupils would fill the most folders by the end of the year. Each

child had to file past her desk, one at a time, whether or not they were buying a stamp. Those who did not have money had to explain why. Then they had to march all the way around the room back to their desks.

Since Mama was raising the three children on a government allowance, she had to budget carefully. Each week one of them would be given a quarter for a stamp, so on two Wednesdays out of three Moira would have to face Miss Ormond with an excuse.

“My sister is buying it this week,” she’d say, or “It’s my little brother’s turn today.”

Then Miss Ormond would boom in her thunderous voice: “Well, Moira, I should think that since your father is overseas, you of all people would buy one every week to help end the war!”

As Moira slunk back to her desk, Miss Ormond continued to taunt her.

“Now, Moira, walk straight! Keep your shoulders back! Hold your head up! After all, your father’s in the army—you should march proudly like a soldier!”

On her report card Miss Ormond wrote: *Moira has difficulty speaking out, which brought her reading mark down. No doubt as she gains confidence this will improve.*

But it was impossible to gain confidence under Miss Ormond’s constant intimidation.

Moira’s grade six teacher was Miss Windsor, who was also the school principal. A short, stout woman with flashing eyes and a patriotic heart, she was hell bent on following the laws of church, state and society to the letter. Her mother had died that summer at the age of ninety, and for the next six months Miss Windsor dressed each day in official mourning, black from head to toe. Then followed three months of semi-mourning when she wore only grey. Moira thought that Miss Windsor looked like a

crumpled up newspaper. Finally, as if released from the clutches of a long, cold winter, Miss Windsor blossomed forth in the brightest of reds, yellows, purples, blues, greens and pinks.

Miss Windsor was a true-blue Tory and a staunch Anglican. As well as saying the Lord's Prayer and reading from the Bible each morning, she insisted that the class repeat in unison the confession and general thanksgiving from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, along with any other prayers she thought fitting. No pupil was exempt from these religious exercises-- Jews, Catholics, Anglicans, Mormons and members of the United Church, as well as those with no religious affiliation at all, were included in the daily worship. One morning David Schwartz leaned confidentially across the aisle.

"Moira," he asked, "do you believe in Jesus?"

"Yes," she said. "Doesn't everyone?"

"I don't. I go to Hebrew School every day after four."

Moira thought about this all morning, and when the lunch bell rang, she ran all the way home.

"Mama, what's Hebrew School?"

"It's where the Jewish children go to learn about their faith. It's like our Sunday school, only they go there during the week."

"David Schwartz asked me if I believe in Jesus."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I said yes. I thought everyone did."

“Well” said Mama, “there are many different religions in the world, and it’s best not to argue with people. You just believe what you learn in Sunday School, and let others follow their own beliefs.”

Miss Windsor was also a paragon of patriotism. If the singing of “Rule Britannia”, “Land of Hope and Glory” and “The Maple Leaf Forever”, along with “O Canada” and “God Save the King” would be responsible for leading the allied forces to victory, Miss Windsor could take credit for winning the war single-handedly. As she pounded the ivory keys of the battered oak piano, her eyes raised to heaven and her voice proclaiming praise of king and country, all the pupils stood rigidly at attention and sang their hearts out.

“Who put this crayon in the pencil sharpener?” she asked one day. “That’s a dirty, wicked German trick!” The person who threw paper on the floor was guilty, according to Miss Windsor, of playing “a dirty, wicked Japanese trick.” In her eyes, only the Allies could do no wrong.

Moira was a school patrol. The patrols were Miss Windsor’s own little white-belted army and she drilled them with military precision. It was their duty to raise and lower the flag each day, a ritual Miss Windsor insisted they perform with great awe and reverence. Her sharp eyes made certain that the revered Union Jack did not touch the ground, and that it was meticulously folded according to protocol.

The patrols were in awe of Miss Windsor. They were expected to keep their white leather patrol belts spotless, and twice each day before going on duty they had to line up for inspection. Miss Windsor, marching down the line armed with a bottle of white shoe polish, scrutinized each belt, and if she detected the slightest bit of dirt, its

owner would have to step aside while she rubbed furiously at the spot, decrying the offense in the shrill tones of a sergeant-major. Moira often felt faint with the effort of standing stiffly like a soldier, but she didn't let on. If Daddy could do this, so could she. Once the entire team had passed inspection, the patrol captain gave the marching orders: Right Turn, Forward March, Left Turn, Halt, as the patrols marched to their posts on the street corners. As the captain passed by on his rounds, each member was expected to greet him with a snappy salute.

The teachers shared a mission: to enforce Victorian standards of morality, and infuse in the children a sense of loyalty to king and country. Aiding and abetting them in this undertaking were the Highroads to Reading textbooks that held between their blue and orange covers copious doses of history, geography, nature, science, classical literature and patriotism. One poem, "The Empire is Our Country", speaks of "That Mother Isle [Britain] whence freedom's rays are sent to light the world" and declares that all countries of the Empire "with loyal hearts acclaim across the foam the Empire as their country." These books preached and moralized, conveying the cardinal virtues of honesty, patience, fortitude, temperance and justice, and warning against such evils as selfishness, anger and greed. They also bade the children to strive to follow the example set by the soldiers, sailors and airmen who were fighting for their freedom.

EIGHT

The Neighbourhood

The Dennis family had moved to Dorchester Avenue when Moira was three and Barbara just six months old. Mama often said they chose the house because it was in such a safe neighbourhood. Grosvenor School was just behind them, St. George's Church was around the corner, and at the end of the block there was a fire hall with a tall tower for drying the fire hoses and two big red doors where the fire engines went in and out. The firemen slept in the fire hall all night with their boots and pants beside their beds in case they had to get dressed in a hurry. There was a brass pole going up through a hole in the ceiling and the firemen slid down the pole really fast when the fire bell went off. At the back of the hall was a kitchen where they ate their meals.

Moira's world was small: Stafford Street to the east, Wilton Street to the west, Grosvenor Avenue to the north and Corydon Avenue to the south. A trip to Stafford Street was always an adventure. They went there every month when Mama got her government cheque in the mail. Baird's Drug Store where Mama went to buy postage stamps and magazines smelled of oil of wintergreen and camphor. Mr. Baird stood behind the pharmacy counter in his white jacket, putting pills into little bottles and talking to people about their illnesses.

"Well now Mrs. Snowdon," he'd say. "How's the arthritis today? And how is Mr. Snowdon's gout?"

"Hello there, Mrs. Dennis! How are you getting along? And how are you children? Behaving yourselves, I hope!"

Sometimes Mama bought the children ice cream cones at the soda fountain with its marble counter, and once in a while for a special treat they got a lime ice cream soda or a chocolate milk shake or a sundae smothered in caramel sauce with a cherry on top. Moira loved the pale green lime sodas the best.

Mama cashed her government cheques at the Bank of Commerce on the corner. Across the street was Restivo's Grocery where Rose Restivo bustled around waiting on her customers. Rose was Italian, with curly black hair and laughing brown eyes.

"And what can I get for you today?" she'd ask. "We just got a shipment of oranges. We don't see them too often these days. And the butcher has some nice pork chops."

Mama and the children all had their hair cut by Muriel at the Leroy Beauty Salon, and every three months Mama had a permanent wave. Next door to the beauty salon Johnny the shoemaker, his hands grimy from shoe polish and glue and his mouth full of tacks, spent his days putting new heels and soles on shoes and boots. His shop smelled of shoe wax and leather, and the children were fascinated by the huge machines with their whirling brushes that Johnny used to polish the shoes. In the window was a big picture of a black cat with green eyes holding up a paw, advertising Cat's Paw heels.

**DON'T THROW YOUR OLD SHOES AWAY!
REPAIR THEM LIKE NEW TODAY!**

Everyone who lived on Dorchester between Guelph and Wilton Streets knew the Dennis family, and watched over them while their father was away at war. Most of the families had children, so Moira and Barbara and Roger always had friends to play with. The men on the street always wanted to help Mama with chores like putting on the storm windows and doors in the fall and taking them off again in the spring..

Ewart Morgan insisted on raking the yard for me, Lucy wrote. He is going to take off some of the storm windows. I took off the living room ones myself. Mr. Hand is taking the doors off for me. They all want to help, you see, so I have to spread the work around.

Mama was quite independent though, and didn't like to bother the neighbours, and so, through an ad in the Free Press, she found a handyman, Paul Tashnuk. Paul lived with his father on Higgins Avenue, and he rode his bicycle to the south end every day to work. Lucy wrote the good news to Victor.

My darling Vic,

At this very moment it is your birthday. We are all wishing the very best for you. By the way, how does it feel to be 40? I wish I could give you a present.

You will be glad to know I finally got a man to put on the storm windows today. Of course the neighbours would do it, but I hate to let them. It was a relief to get it done as the weather has at last changed. It has been a perfect October.

Paul could do anything: painting, wallpapering, window washing, carpentry. He pulled his tools in a small trailer attached to his bike until the McQuarrie family, who lived next door to the Dennises, offered to rent him their garage. They didn't have a car, so the garage sat empty, and Paul was happy to take up their offer. That is, he was happy until thirteen-year-old Ewan McQuarrie got into Paul's paint one day and huge white letters appeared on the brown-shingled wall of the garage.

**PAUL TASHNUK LIVES HERE PAUL IS
OUT FOR A BEER**

As punishment, Ewan had to re-paint the entire garage. It took most of his summer holidays to get it all done. The McQuarries were worried that Paul might not want to rent their garage any more, but he seemed to be amused.

“Boys will be boys,” he said, “and I think that Ewan has learned a lesson. Painting that old garage is hard work.” Paul even offered to help Ewan, but his parents said no, he needed to do it himself.

Moira was glad that Ewan got into trouble. It served him right. He called her names: Skinny, Buckteeth, and Dummy. He and his friends rode their bikes very fast on the sidewalk and laughed when Moira had to jump out of their way. One day after a rainstorm Moira fell into a puddle trying not to get run over by Ewan’s bike, and he laughed at her as she ran crying home, her tunic and socks smeared with mud.

“Crybaby!” Ewan called after her.

“I hate Ewan,” Moira cried as Mama wiped the mud off her clothes with an old towel. “He’s always so mean!”

“Well, Ewan is full of mischief,” said Mama. “The more you get upset the more he’ll tease you, I’m afraid. Just try to stay out of his way and ignore him.”

“But he calls me Buckteeth,” Moira said.

“Well, your teeth do need to be straightened,” said Mama. “I think you need braces. I’ll call the orthodontist tomorrow.”

Dr. Brownlee had an office downtown in the Boyd Building. There were lots of doctors and dentists in the Boyd Building, and it smelled like a drug store inside. Dr. Brownlee’s office was on the eighth floor and you had to go up in an elevator that had fancy brass scrolls on the doors and the man who ran it had no fingers on his hands. He pushed the handle with the palms of his hands. Moira wondered what happened to his fingers but she was too polite to ask him.

"I can make your teeth nice and straight," Dr. Brownlee said, but you'll have to wear braces for the next two years."

Dear Diary,

Today I got my braces on. They hurt my mouth but Dr. Brownlee says I'll get used to them. I have to go and see him every month and Mama says I can go downtown on the streetcar by myself. She says that after I see Dr. Brownlee I can go next door to Kresges to spend my allowance. There are lots of things in Kresges and it's fun to look at all the combs and hair barrettes and hankies and grownup stuff like lipstick and powder and rouge. I want to get some red barrettes like hearts to wear on Valentine's Day. Mama has a blue hairnet that she got in Kresges. I might buy her a green one too. They have lots of toys there and I think I'll buy a bottle for my doll Marion and maybe a pink bonnet for her too. I really want a big box of Crayola crayons but I don't have enough money to buy them. There are 24 crayons in the box and the top flips up and you can see all the colours at once. They are so beautiful. Mama only buys me boxes of eight crayons. She says that's enough colours. I'm excited to go to school tomorrow and show all the kids my new braces. At least I won't have buckteeth any more so Ewan can't tease me about that.

Moira and Barbara both took piano lessons from Mrs. McKee, who lived in a small house on the next street with her teen-age daughter, Laura. Mrs. McKee had so many pupils that she had to give lessons over the lunch hour as well as after school and on Saturdays. Almost every child in Grosvenor School took lessons from her.

“What did you learn today?” Mama would ask the girls when they came home from their weekly lesson, but they weren’t learning much about playing the piano.

“Mrs. McKee was making jam today,” they would say, or “Mrs. McKee was talking on the phone.”

Mama, who was a very good pianist and who was not discouraged by Mrs. McKee’s lack of instructions, wanted the girls to be able to play well. She told Mrs. McKee that Moira should be entered in the music festival.

Dear Diary,

Today was the music festival. There were 48 kids in my class. We all had to play Dance of the Columbines. We were supposed to play it from memory but I couldn’t do it. I could only play the first line and then I got stuck. The judge told me to start over and I started over three times but then I began to cry and went back to my seat. I thought I was going to throw up but I swallowed hard becuz I didn’t want to get throw up all over my new dress that Mama made me. It’s red plaid with pleats and what Mama calls a Peter Pan collar. The judge didn’t give me a mark he just told me not to be nervous and to practice lots and try again next year but I don’t ever want to play in the festival again. The worst part is that Sally Munro who is in my class at school came in first. She is a really good piano player and her mark was 95. When we went to school after lunch all the kids asked us how we did in the festival. Sally said she came in first but she didn’t tell them about me and I just said I forgot my piece but I felt very bad. I thought Mama would be cross but she isn’t. She says Mrs. McKee is so busy doing other things during our lessons that she doesn’t pay attention to what

we are learning. Mama says that Barbara has been taking lessons for a whole year and she still doesn't know where middle C is on the piano.

"I think," said Mama, "that next year I'll ask Mrs. McKee to come over here and teach you at home. In our house she won't have any distractions."

The other mothers on the street all thought that this was a good idea, so Wednesday became piano lesson day. After school all the children had to come straight home, and Mrs. McKee went from house to house giving lessons. A wisp of a woman with a twitchy mouth, yellow teeth, and thin white hair pulled into a straggly bun, Mrs. McKee was no match for her mischievous pupils. The children hid from her, giggling behind chesterfields or bathroom doors, chanting, "You'll wonder where the yellow went when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent!"

"Tell Mrs. McKee that I'm not home," they'd say to each other. "Tell her I've got the measles. Tell her I've gone to the dentist." They'd use any excuse to get out of playing the piano. They got away with this because the mothers always arranged to go shopping or visiting on piano lesson days to escape Mrs. McKee's constant nervous chatter.

"Here I am," said Mama, "paying fifty cents for each of your lessons. That's a whole dollar a week, and Mrs. McKee spends the entire time talking my ear off. If I'm not here, she'll have to get down to business." But Mama's escaping from the house didn't make a bit of difference, as Mrs. McKee then spent the lesson time chattering away to the children.

"My goodness, it's a cold day," she'd say. "My furnace isn't working properly and I have to keep the stove on to warm the house I've called the furnace man three times

but he hasn't come yet your house is nice and warm. I guess you have central heat I wish we did but we live too far away from the plant you're lucky it's just down the street from you oh well Laura and I have warm sweaters and I made a pot of soup today that should warm us up tonight my word I'll be happy when spring comes but then of course we'll have to cut the grass and take the storm windows off those windows are so heavy I really need to find a man to do the heavy work my husband doesn't live here you know he moved to Vancouver he has a job there with the city looking after the trees in the parks he's an arborist but there isn't enough work in Winnipeg so he went to the coast I'd go there too but I don't want to take Laura out of school I don't know how your mother manages the house and you three children of course she's younger than I am, that makes a difference oh dear I just noticed I've got a hole in my stocking and stockings are so hard to get now oh well I can always darn it now I guess we'd better get started on your lesson play me the C Major scale."

"What's C Major?" Moira would ask.

"Goodness I thought you knew that! How many times do I have to tell you?"

'If you'd show me I might learn,' thought Moira, but all Mrs. McKee ever did was chatter.

In the spring Mrs. McKee held a piano recital in Eaton's Assembly Hall. The highlight of the recital was Laura McKee's playing of a rip-roaring piece called Rush Hour in Hong Kong. All the noises of the bustling big city could be heard as her fingers flew over the keys making the sounds of honking horns, rattling rickshaw wheels, tingling bicycle bells, running feet. Laura did not take lessons from her mother, but from one of the best piano teachers in the city. The rest of Mrs. McKee's pupils

their pieces as best they could, giggling at each other's performances. Beverley Massey was the best performer. She played a lively piece called The Spinning Song, and got through it with hardly any mistakes. Mama decided the following year to find another piano teacher for Moira and Barbara, and most of the other kids on the street gave up lessons altogether.

And life went on. Behind Waugh's Grocery Store there was a stretch of prairie dotted with chokecherry, wild rose and willow bushes. A few squatters lived at the far edge of the prairie in an area known as Roostertown. One summer morning Moira and Barbara decided to build an amusement park there, so they set off pulling Roger's wooden wagon loaded with garden tools and dug and dug until they were hungry and very tired.

'We can build a boardwalk like the one at Grand Beach,' Moira said.

'With a roller coaster, merry-go-round and an underground chamber of horrors,' said Barbara.

They dug all morning, but their shovels weren't sharp and the ground was hard clay choked with grass roots.

'It's like trying to dig in cement,' said Moira.

'We need a drill like the men who build the sidewalks,' said Barbara.

'Well, we can't afford one of those,' said Moira, 'and anyway, Mama wouldn't let us use one. They're too dangerous.'

At noon, tired and hot, they went home for lunch. Prairie dust clung to their sweating arms and faces, and the kids on the street all wanted to know where they'd been.

'Over on the prairie,' Moira said. 'We're going to build an amusement park.'

“Can we help?” Beverley asked. “Please? It sounds like fun!” The others all wanted to help too, so after lunch all the Dorchester kids paraded over to the prairie with doll carriages, tricycles and wagons.

“You know,” said Josephine Morgan, who was the eldest, “it would be easier to build a fort instead of an amusement park. We can pretend we’re pioneers.”

“Yes, that would be fun,” a few more said, and they began to stake out areas for a bathroom, bedrooms, kitchen and living room, hanging doll blankets and sweaters on the bushes to divide off the rooms. The bathroom was divided into sections for “number one” and “number two.” If you went number two you had to cover it up with leaves from the bushes. Every day for a week the children played in the fort, and their mothers took turns bringing sandwiches and lemonade at lunchtime.

On the first day Josephine decided that they needed a hideout in case anyone came along and threatened them.

“The hideout has to have a secret name,” she said. “I’ll ask my father tonight. He’ll know what to call it.”

Mr. Morgan, who was a school principal and knew about such things, told Josephine that “la bois” was French for “the woods.”

“That would be a good name,” he said.

“But,” said Josephine, “what if the person we’re hiding from knows French?”

“Then call it La Boo,” her father said,

La Boo was a small clearing surrounded by willow bushes, and they retreated there several times when Josephine gave the signal. She’d whistle three times, and they’d all crowd together in La Boo, trying not to cough or sneeze, whenever a car or bicycle

came down the nearby street. One day a squatter came by in a rickety cart pulled by a skinny brown horse. He stopped the horse, climbed down and walked all around the fort, fingering the blankets on the bushes and scratching his head in bewilderment at the sight of dolls and toys strewn about. The terrified children huddled in La Boo holding their breath until the squatter got back on his wagon and drove off. As soon as he had gone they packed up all their belongings and scurried home.

“What’s wrong?” Mama asked. “Why are you home so early?”

“There was a man in our fort,” said Moira. “He looked at all our things, and we were scared.”

“Well, he probably lives nearby,” said Mama. “He must have wondered what you were doing there.”

“We were just pretending to live in a fort,” said Moira. “We weren’t doing anything wrong.”

“No, you weren’t,” said Mama, “but that man lives there. It’s as if you were playing in his back yard. Perhaps you should play closer to home from now on.”

The children never played on the prairie again, but there were many other things to do. On hot days they followed the Arctic Ice Wagon, begging for chips of ice to suck. They watched the straw-hatted horses of the milkman and bread man munching on hollyhocks in the back lane. They played hopscotch and bounced their lacrosse balls and jumped rope. They took turns jumping in and out of the turning rope as they sang:

Acka backa soda cracker acka backa boo
Acka backa soda cracker out goes you!

Moira's favourite skipping songs were

Grace Grace dressed in lace went upstairs to powder her face
How many boxes did it take?

and

Cinderella dressed in yellow went upstairs to kiss her fellow
Made a mistake and kissed a snake
How many doctors did it take?

She liked to think of herself as Grace dressed in pretty lace, or as Cinderella dressed like a princess in a yellow gown.

It was fun skipping to "Two Little "Dickie Birds", especially if your birthday was late in the year. If it was in January or February you didn't have very long to stay in the game.

Two little Dickie Birds sitting on a wall
One named Peter and the other named Paul.
Fly away Peter, fly away Paul,
Don't you come back 'till your birthday's called,
JanuaryFebruaryMarchAprilMayJuneJulyAugustSeptemberOctober
NovemberDecember

One warm Good Friday afternoon Moira found Barbara jumping rope to the chant of the Benedicite, Omnia Opera from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. "O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him forever," she sang as she jumped up and down without missing a step. Moira was shocked.

"Barbara, it's not right to sing about God when you're skipping," she said.

"Why not?" asked Barbara. "God likes people to be happy!"

Moira ran inside to tell Mama, but Mama just laughed.

"I think that Barbara may be right about that," she said.

Moira decided to ask God what He thought, but He didn't answer, and He didn't punish Barbara either, so maybe He didn't mind after all.

On hot sunny days, the sort of days when dogs snoozed and twitched under porches and flies droned in kitchens, the children would go and talk to the firemen who sat sunning themselves in their wooden chairs outside the fire hall, their jackets off and their shirt sleeves rolled up. Sometimes the firemen would take the children inside to gaze at the enormous red fire engines, and a special treat was to watch when the engines were driven outside and washed down with the big fire hoses.

In winter when the snow had fallen and the days were short and cold, the children brought out their sleighs, toboggans and skates. They built snowmen and snow forts and lay on their backs making snow angels. Sometimes they walked over to the rink on Guelph Street, their skates slung over their shoulders. Moira loved the smell of warm wet wool as the steam rose from mittens drying on top of the wood-burning stove in the shack. Their skates making a hollow sound on the splintered wooden floor, the children crossed over to a battered bench where they sat with their hands and feet held out to the round-bellied black stove. Often when it was too cold to play outside, Mama invited the children in to play around the dining room table with crayons and plasticine and puzzles, and she played the piano and taught them singing games.

The deliverymen's horses now wore blankets, and the steam coming from their nostrils turned their faces white with frost. The firemen stayed inside, and were only seen at shift changes when they walked all bundled up, their boots making crunching noises on the snow-covered sidewalk, to Corydon Avenue to catch the streetcar home. Still the

lights from the firehall burned twenty-four hours a day, a reminder that the firemen were there, keeping the neighbourhood safe.

NINE

Church

God lived in St. George's Anglican Church. It was a small cream-coloured stucco building with a peaked, brown-shingled roof. Lucy started taking the children to services there shortly after Victor left for Hong Kong. She told him about it in a letter.

You will be glad to know that we are going to St. George's now. Special prayers have been said for you many times there, and I have found it a great source of strength and comfort. The minister, Mr. Dowker, brought me all the flowers from the altar at both Christmas and Easter.

Moira felt very small sitting in the pew beside Mama. The church was dark, with red paisley carpet down the centre aisle and all the way up the steps into the chancel where the choir sat in their black and white robes. The organ was behind the choir and it was very loud and there were lots and lots of pipes going all the way up to the ceiling. The ladies in the choir wore black hats: flat on top, with a tassel hanging over one ear.

"Why do they wear those funny hats?" asked Moira. "Did God tell them to?"

Mama laughed. "I don't think it's God's idea. Church choir women have always worn those hats. They're called mortarboards."

"The tassels must tickle their ears," said Barbara. She and Moira tried not to giggle at the sight of the tassels swaying back and forth in time to the music.. Mama sat between the girls so that they couldn't talk to each other, but they communicated by

making faces and grinning across Mama's lap.

"Behave yourselves,' Mama would say. 'Don't forget you're in God's house."

"Where is God? asked Barbara. "I can't see him. Is he sleeping?"

"God is everywhere around us,' said Mama, "but he's invisible, so we can't see him."

Dear Diary,

Mama says that the church is God's house and that he's there but we can't see him becuz he's invisible. There are dark rafters up in the ceiling. It's really high up, as high as heaven. I think God hides up there watching us. Mr. Dowker tells us to confess our sins and wickedness to God meekly kneeling upon our knees. I tried to kneel today but the kneeler was hard and cold and it hurt my knees so I sort of squatted and I hoped that God wouldn't notice I wasn't doing it properly. I thought of how I teased Roger by hiding his stuffed puppy and he cried and Mama was cross and made me give it back to him. Then I was mad at Mama and said that she likes Roger better than me. She said that's not true but that Roger is just little and I shouldn't be mean to him. I told God I was sorry. I tried to think of some other bad things I did this week but I couldn't remember any, not really bad things.

In church it smells like candle wax and flowers. It's

sort of dark in there. The sun can't come in becuz all the windows have coloured pictures in them. Mama says they're stained glass. The one I like best is a picture of Jesus holding a lamb. Mr. Dowker says that Jesus is a shepherd and we are all his lambs and he looks after us. Mama says that she prays to Jesus to look after Daddy and sometimes when I sit very still in church I can hear God telling me that Daddy will be home soon.

The church is sort of scary. They bring dead people there for funerals. Sometimes Barbara and I and the other kids go and stand across the street to watch the people coming out of the church after a funeral. We never see the dead people becuz they are always in big boxes with shiny handles and there are always flowers on top even in winter. Mama says the boxes are called caskets and the dead people are very comfortable becuz there are pillows under their heads. There is always a big black funeral car and men in dark suits put the casket in the back and we can see it through the window. Everyone is very quiet and some people are crying and they all wear black clothes. I like weddings better becuz everyone is laughing and throwing coloured specks of paper and the bride always smiles and she wears a beautiful white dress, like a princess.

On Sunday afternoons we go to the church for Sunday School classes. We are split into grades and my

teacher is Miss Nelson. She has grey hair and glasses and she wears a grey skirt with pleats and a grey blouse with black buttons and a silver cross on a chain around her neck and she knows a lot about the Bible.

Sunday School began with prayers and the singing of hymns from the section 'Hymns for Children' in *The Book of Common Praise*. The hymns and prayers were chosen to make the Sunday School pupils feel guilty for their sins. 'Yield not to temptation for yielding is sin,' they sang, and "fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue." Moira wondered what dark passions were. One hymn said to "shun evil companions" and to not use bad language, and to hold God's name in reverence, and that Jesus will help you to do all this. The same hymn told of the heathen children in faraway places who don't know about Jesus and who worship idols. The hymn says that they are "benighted" and need to be shown "the lamp of life" by "we whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high". It is our job to proclaim Messiah's name until all the people in faraway nations have received salvation. Another hymn said that those faraway children had never read the Bible so did not know Jesus' name, and it prayed that "soon may the heathen of every tribe and nation fulfil thy blessed word and cast their idols all away."

The Sunday School superintendent, Miss Wilson, stood at the front of the church and conducted by wagging her index finger back and forth as Miss Riley played the organ.

“Look at Miss Wilson, the one-finger conductor,” said Jerry Stovel. “I hope she doesn’t knock her hat off!

Dear Diary,

I wonder where Africa is. Miss Nelson says it’s very far away and that it’s really hot there. There’s a map of the world in our class at school. It has pictures of chocolate bars in the corners. It’s too high up for me to read the names of the countries. Miss Nelson says that Africa is a continent and that it’s in the south part of the world and that black people live there and a lot of them don’t know Jesus so it’s our job to help them learn about him. We collect money during Lent in little boxes with pointed tops. There’s a slot to put the money in. The money is supposed to go to Africa to buy Bibles for the black people. A lady from our church is what Mama calls a missionary. She’s in Africa teaching the people there about Jesus. I don’t think I’d like to go so far away from home.

After we sing the hymns the teachers pass around the collection plates. Mama gives us each a nickel a week to put on the plate. We sing a song about pennies for Jesus. It goes like this—Hear the pennies dropping listen as they fall every one for Jesus He may have them all. Miss Nelson says our pennies go to the Indian children up north to help them learn about Jesus. Then

we go to our classes and Miss Nelson reads us a story from the Bible. God always cares about the good people and punishes the bad ones. Miss Nelson says we should try to be like Jesus and always be good so that God won't get mad at us.

"The wrath of God is to be feared," Miss Nelson said. "Remember, you reap what you sow."

Moira asked Mama what you reap what you sow means, and Mama said it's the same as the Golden Rule: Do Unto Others as You Would Have Them Do Unto You.

"If you want other people to be kind to you, you must be kind to them," she said.

"But sometimes I am kind to people and they're still not nice to me," Moira said.

I lent Angus McDonald my eraser and then he wouldn't give it back. Will God punish him?"

"You must always try to do the right thing," said Mama. "God knows that you are trying."

"But the Bible says that God punishes the bad people. What about Hitler? And what about the Japs that are keeping Daddy in prison? Will God punish them?"

"Moira, these are very deep questions. We just have to do the best we can in life and pray that God will take care of us. We can't tell what God will do to other people. There is always trouble in the world, and I think it must make God very sad. The best

thing any of us can do is put our trust in Him.”

Dear Diary,

Mama says we have to trust in God. I guess we do, but why does God let the war happen? Maybe he'll tell me if I sit very still in church and listen for him.

TEN

Aunt Betty

Aunt Betty was not Moira's real aunt. Her real name was Miss Colwell. She had taught Mama in high school, and Mama had been one of her favourite students. In 1941, concerned about Mama's being left alone with three children, Miss Colwell invaded the Dennis household on Christmas Eve.

"Miss Colwell came to see me on Christmas Eve and brought me the loveliest roses," Mama wrote to Daddy. *"I have visited her almost every week since-- She has been almost as concerned as a mother would have been."*

Miss Colwell lived a long way away in the Royal Alexandra Hotel on Main Street. To visit her in winter when the car was in storage, Mama had to take a long journey on the North Main street car. Before leaving home, Mama would scrub the nicotine stains from her fingers with a pumice stone at the bathroom sink.

"Miss Colwell doesn't approve of yellow fingers," she'd say.

Miss Colwell also smoked, but she avoided nicotine-stained fingers by slipping her Players navy cuts into the loop of a bent paper clip.

Once in a while, unable to get a sitter, Mama took the children with her on a Sunday afternoon visit to the hotel, but Miss Colwell did not encourage this, saying that the presence of children would be disturbing to the other guests. One of these guests was

Tommy, who was very ill.

"Tommy, whom Miss Colwell has mothered so long, has had to retire owing to ill health," Lucy wrote, "and I fear his future is very uncertain, as he has hardening of the arteries."

By the spring of 1944 the hotel, overcrowded with wartime travelers, no longer had room for permanent residents, and they were asked to move. Mama managed to find two furnished rooms close to her, one on Grosvenor Avenue for Miss Colwell and another on Dorchester for Tommy. The Graham had been brought out of storage for the summer, and Mama made many trips to bring all their belongings from the hotel.

"Miss Colwell is upset at having to move," Mama told the children once the move had been completed. "She'd like you to call her Aunt Betty, and I think it would cheer her up. We'll go over to see her now."

I don't even know her, thought Moira, and she's certainly not my aunt.

Mama and the children walked around the corner in the April sunshine to the three-storey gray brick house. On the screened front porch, which was bathed in gloomy shadows, a stuffed moose head stared down from the wall. The inside of the house was dark and very quiet as they trooped up the red-carpeted stairs to the second floor. All the oak doors were shut tight.

"It's this one," said Mama. "Now, remember, what are you going to call her?"

"Aunt Betty," the children chorussed obediently.

"That's good. She'll be so happy."

Mama knocked gently on the door, and they could hear the squeak of the floorboards under Miss Colwell's black oxfords. The door opened a crack and Moira glimpsed her tightly curled white hair and the wire-rimmed glasses on her aquiline nose.

"Oh, it's you, Lucy! And you've brought the children! Come in!"

In the room was a narrow bed, a small walnut desk, a bookcase with glass doors, a walnut dresser with mirror, a radio, and two chairs, one straight-backed and the other one upholstered. A toaster, kettle and hot plate sat on a small oilcloth-covered table at one end of the room. Miss Cowell sat down on the bed, her wine-colored crepe dress hanging loosely, and her shriveled, ringless hands resting on her knees.

"I'm worn out from the move," she said. "And how are you, Moira?"

"Fine, thank you," Moira answered from behind Mama's skirt.

"Fine, thank you, who?" Mama whispered.

"Fine, thank you, Aunt Betty," Moira stammered.

"Well, now, isn't that lovely!" Miss Colwell said, reaching out their hand. "Come and sit next to me!"

"Go on," Mama gave Moira a gentle shove, and she reluctantly approached the bed. Aunt Betty pulled her down and kissed her on the cheek. Aunt Betty's lips felt like

sandpaper, and she smelled old.

"You know," Aunt Betty said, "I've always had great admiration for your mother.

"I hope that you'll grow up to be just like her! I think that you and I are going to be good friends."

Moira blushed confusedly and remained silent. Mama invited Aunt Betty to dinner that evening and said that she could bring Tommy. Then they left.

"You needn't be shy with Aunt Betty," said Mama as the moose head bid them a staring good-bye. "She loves you very much."

"She's not my real aunt," said Moira.

"That doesn't matter. It's how you feel about each other that matters."

I don't even know her, Moira wanted to shout. She's a stranger! But she was afraid of hurting Mama's feelings.

That evening Aunt Betty and Tommy came to dinner, and Mama asked Aunt Betty to sit at the head of the table.

"That's Daddy's place!" Moira said.

"Well, he's not here," said Mama. She had warned the children to remember their table manners, but she needn't have worried. They were too shy to misbehave.

Aunt Betty and Tommy became frequent dinner guests. The children were always sent off to bed shortly after the meal, but Moira and Barbara, who shared a room,

giggled and talked and played imaginary games, waiting for Tommy to come upstairs to use the bathroom, which he did frequently.

"Tommy," they'd call as soon as they heard the toilet flush, and he'd come into their bedroom and entertain them with stories of his boyhood in England until Aunt Betty called him back downstairs.

"When I was a boy," he'd begin, and then he'd weave a tale which held them enthralled. He was full of stories, but Aunt Betty said that they weren't true, and that Tommy couldn't possibly remember anything of his past.

"In any event," she'd say, "when your mother tells you to go to sleep you should obey her."

"Tommy is like a little boy," Mama told them. "You shouldn't encourage him to act silly. Aunt Betty doesn't like it." But Tommy continued to tell his stories and Aunt Betty continued to chastise both him and the girls until he became too ill to visit.

This happened in the autumn of 1944. They hadn't seen Tommy for several weeks, and Aunt Betty, who now came to their house for dinner every evening, was unusually quiet and weepy.

"Aunt Betty is feeling very sad," Mama said. "I don't want you to upset her, so please be quiet." They'd sit silently at the table, listening to Mama and Aunt Betty discuss Tommy. He was so weak he couldn't get out of bed, but he'd try and then he'd

fall. His landlord had to shave him, and help him to the bathroom. His landlady made him soup which Aunt Betty attempted to feed him, but he wasn't hungry and refused to eat.

"He can't stay there much longer," Aunt Betty said. "Mr. and Mrs. Abbott are being very kind, but they aren't running a nursing home. Poor Tommy is becoming completely helpless."

"He really should be in the hospital," Mama told her.

"I know," Aunt Betty said, "but it just breaks my heart to put him there."

Finally Tommy lost consciousness, and hospitalization could no longer be postponed. The children watched from the front steps as he was carried out to the ambulance. Mama called a sitter to stay with the children overnight so that she could remain at the hospital with Aunt Betty. Tommy died early the next morning.

On the day of the funeral, Aunt Betty was to stay at their house while Mama attended the service.

"Aunt Betty is too upset to go," Mama said. "She's afraid she'll break down in front of everyone."

To Mama's consternation, Moira woke up that morning with a cold, and had to stay home from school.

"I want you to stay in your room," Mama said, after lunch, "and don't go

downstairs until I come home. Aunt Betty doesn't feel like talking ."

Moira lay in bed trying to read a Nancy Drew mystery, but thoughts of Tommy and of death kept creeping into her mind. As the mantel clock struck the hours and the half hours, she pictured Aunt Betty sitting in the living room in her black dress. Was she crying? If she was, Moira didn't hear her. The house was silent. Moira gazed out the window at the September sunshine warming the changing leaves and wondered what it was like to die.

Mama arrived home before Barbara and Roger returned from school, and as soon as they came in she sent them upstairs to play with Moira.

"But don't make a noise," she warned. "I'm going to make Aunt Betty a cup of tea before she goes home."

The next day Aunt Betty came to dinner as usual. Moira expected her to be weepy and upset, but she wasn't. She had gone through Tommy's possessions and chosen a black fountain pen and a black leather three-ring binder to give to Moira.

"You're the eldest in the family," she said, "and the most like your mother, so I want you to have these things. But you mustn't use the binder until you start junior high school. It will be something to look forward to."

She had also found an English sixpence which she decided should go to the child who had the best table manners for an entire week. She placed the sixpence beside her

water glass and watched every move the children made. On the last night Roger asked to be excused before dessert, so he was eliminated from the contest. Then Barbara, who, like Moira, had managed to get through the entire week almost without fault, reached for a cookie without asking.

"Well, Moira, you're the winner!" Aunt Betty said. "And that's as it should be, since you're the eldest!"

Mama was very seldom sick. When she did come down with a cold or a headache, she didn't complain, and the household continued to run as usual. So it was frightening one morning when she woke up with chest pains and a high fever. She phoned Dr. Tisdale who came over right away, diagnosed bronchitis and gave her a shot of penicillin.

"Stay in bed as much as possible," he said, "and I'll be around to see you tomorrow."

Mama called the children into her bedroom and told them to get their own breakfast. She said that she would be able to heat up some soup for lunch, and they'd have Kraft Dinner for supper.

"Well manage fine," she said. They had milk and bread delivered every day, and one of the children could run to Waugh's store for anything else they needed. Mama said that she'd rest while they were in school.

When the children arrived home for lunch, Aunt Betty was in the kitchen heating up pork and beans.

"Go upstairs and wash your hands," she told them, "but don't bother your mother. She needs to rest."

Alarmed, they ran straight to Mama's bedroom. She was reading an Agatha Christie book.

"Why is Aunt Betty here?" Moira asked. "Are you very sick?"

"Not very," said Mama, "but she phoned, and when she heard my voice she knew I wasn't well and insisted on coming over to help. Just go down and eat your lunch. I'll be all right by tomorrow."

"Children!" Aunt Betty called, "come downstairs at once! Your meal is ready, and I told you not to bother your mother!"

"Can we listen to The Happy Gang?" asked Moira.

"No, you haven't time, and the radio is too noisy," said Aunt Betty.

"Keep happy with the Happy Gang!" sang Barbara.

"Don't sing at the table," said Aunt Betty, "It's not polite."

They ate in silence, trying to remember their manners, and then they went back to school for the afternoon. They hoped that Aunt Betty would be gone when they came home at four o'clock, but she was still there. She stayed for three days, going home only

to sleep, and forbidding Mama to come downstairs. She made lumpy porridge for breakfast and watery stew for supper. She wouldn't let the children read the comics or listen to the radio, which she turned on only to hear the latest war news.

"When is Aunt Betty going home?" Moira asked Mama.

"Hush! We don't want to hurt her feelings," she'd answer. "It's kind of her to want to help."

"But we don't need help," Moira said.. "We're old enough to do things for ourselves!"

On the third evening Mama told Aunt Betty that she was feeling much better, and wanted to take back the running of the house. Aunt Betty seemed relieved.

"I'm happy that I was able to look after you all," she said, "but you do appear to be much better. That penicillin is truly a miracle drug!"

As the door shut behind Aunt Betty, everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

"I hope you never get sick again," said Barbara, "but if you do, I'm going to run this house by myself!"

"Aunt Betty meant well," said Mama, "but she's always lived by herself so she's not used to children. But listen, I promise not to get sick again, ever!"

ELEVEN

Winter and Spring 1945

In the winter of 1945 several of the neighbourhood children came down with scarlet fever. This happened just before Christmas, and Patricia Birchard and Beverley Massey and her brother Allen all had to spend the holidays in the hospital. Moira's old fear of the disease returned, especially in January when Roger caught it. She was sure that she would get it this time, and once again she spent many sleepless nights listening to the hall clock and swallowing over and over again. At times she was sure that her throat was sore.

The night before Roger was taken away to the hospital Mama took her supper up to his room so that she could be with him. Since Barbara had already had the disease she was allowed into the sickroom too, but Mama told Moira to stay out if she didn't want to get scarlet fever. Moira sat alone in the kitchen, frozen with fear. The house was very quiet except for Mama's and Barbara's muffled voices from upstairs. The steady tick of the mantel clock echoed in the empty living room, and the hall radiator made a hissing sound. Moira thought she could hear footsteps coming up the basement stairs and she ran to turn the key in the basement door. She pressed her ear to the door and listened hard, but the noise had stopped. Someone passed by the kitchen window, feet crunching in the snow. Moira peeked out but it was only Ewan McQuarrie coming home for supper.

Mama had given Moira a plate of cold roast beef and mashed potatoes and canned peas, but she wasn't hungry. She got her diary out of her school bag in the hall.

Dear Diary,

I hate canned peas. They're such an ugly colour—khaki like daddy's uniform. And they smell like throw up. Why did Roger have to get scarlet fever? Now he'll have to go to the hospital for a month, and I might get sick and have to go there too. It's not fair that Barbara and Mama are both sitting in Roger's room and I have to stay down here all by myself. It's cold and dark out and I'm scared and lonely and Mama only cares about Roger. Barbara could be here with me but she thinks she's so smart because she's had scarlet fever and I haven't.

Moira pushed her plate away and went up to her attic bedroom. She lay on her bed, swallowing over and over again. She thought she was going to throw up.

"Mama!" she called down the stairs.

"What is it, Moira?" Mama sounded tired and cross.

"I feel sick!"

"Is your throat sore? Do you feel sick to your stomach?"

"My throat isn't sore but I couldn't eat my supper. My tummy hurts."

"I'll take your temperature," Mama said. "If it's normal there's nothing wrong with you." It was normal.

"Moira," said Mama, "You're just such a worrywart. Now I need to stay with Roger. He's very sick and tomorrow he'll have to go to the hospital and we won't see him for a month. You probably won't get scarlet fever, but if you do it won't be the end of the world. Many other children have gone to the hospital and they've come through the experience just fine, so stop worrying and go to bed."

For many nights Moira lay awake checking for symptoms of scarlet fever. But she didn't get it. She was quarantined and had to miss a week of school, but she didn't mind having a week away from Miss Ormond's taunting. Roger spent a month in the hospital and while he was there Mama redecorated his room.

My Darling Vic,

You will be sad to hear that Roger is in the hospital with scarlet fever. I miss him greatly, but have taken the opportunity to decorate his room. There is a new wall paint that you mix with water and put on like calsumine, only it is much more durable, and will wash. I did it in a very pretty pale green, and cut the pictures out of two ten-cent Mother Goose books and pasted them around the wall for a border. Two coats of the stuff covered the old pink paint perfectly. Then I gave all the woodwork a coat of flat and a coat of enamel. I bought a new pair of curtains, white net, and a decent CLOTH blind. Remember how the kids always tore those washable blinds? And I recovered that little chintz chair, using the old rose velvet curtain that we have had since we were married. I am covering the toy box the same way. So far dear, the expense of redecorating is under five dollars!

By the end of winter there were many news reports that the war in Europe was coming to an end, and on the morning of May 8, just as Miss Ormond was taking the roll call, Miss Windsor appeared at the classroom door.

"Girls and boys, I have important news," she announced. "The war in Europe is over! School is dismissed for the rest of the day! You may all go home now!"

The children raced each other home. Mama shut the vacuum cleaner off as the three of them burst through the door all at once.

"What's wrong? Why are you home?" Mama asked.

"Don't you know? The war is over!"

"I haven't had the radio on since you left for school," she said. "We've all been expecting this, but there have been several false rumors. Are you sure?"

"Miss Windsor said so," Moira answered.

“Well, she wouldn’t have sent you all home if she weren’t sure,” said Mama. “Now I want you to treat all the children on the street to ice cream cones at Baird’s Drug Store.” She pressed a two-dollar bill into Moira’s hand.

The children walked up Grosvenor towards Stafford, the older ones holding the hands of their younger brothers and sisters. There was a trace of new green on the trees and the sun was shining. Newsboys were standing on the street corners calling “Extra! Extra! War is over! Read all about it here!” The streets were alive with people, and everyone was smiling and laughing. All the people said how happy they were for the Dennis family.

“The war in Japan will soon be over now,” they said, “and your father will come home.”

The soda fountain in Baird’s was crowded with people buying treats. Mr. Baird wouldn’t take Moira’s money.

“Your mother’s a good customer,” he said, “and this is a special day. The treats are on me today.”

The children made their way home, licking their cones and chattering about their unexpected holiday from school.

“This afternoon,” said Josephine, “I’m going to ask my father to drive us downtown. I want to see the celebrations. Maybe Moira and Barbara can come with us, and Roger too.”

Mama was kept busy answering the phone for the rest of the day as all the Grenadier wives called to share the exciting news. After lunch Mr. Morgan piled the Dennis children into his car along with his own family and drove downtown to see the

celebrations. The streets were jammed with cars all honking their horns. Paper streamers fluttered from the windows of the buildings. There were hundreds of people on the sidewalks, waving union jacks and cheering.

On the way home Mr. Morgan stopped in front of the Dutch Maid ice cream store on Osborne Street.

“I’m taking orders for cones,” he said. “What flavour would you like?”

Moira asked for her favourite, lime sherbet. The others chose licorice or chocolate, except for seventeen-year-old Lorna Morgan, who asked for rum and butter. This shocked her mother, who was a member of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and a strict teetotaler.

“Oh Lorna,” she said. “I don’t want you to get the taste of rum in your mouth!”

“I don’t think it will hurt her,” Mr. Morgan said. “It’s only imitation rum, and it’s not very strong.”

So Lorna got her rum and butter ice cream cone to celebrate the end of the war in Europe.

The Homecoming

That summer Aunt Edith invited Moira to spend a month in Medicine Hat, and Mama agreed to let Moira go there by herself on the train.

"I can't afford a berth in the sleeping car," Mama said. "You're not very tall. You can sleep on the seat in the day coach."

Mama, Barbara and Roger all came to the station to see Moira off on the train. There were two soldiers sitting across the aisle on their way to Alberta for training. Mama asked them to make sure that Moira had a safe journey.

"This is my daughter Moira. She's eleven years old," Mama said. "She's very independent but I just want to make sure that she gets to Medicine Hat safely."

"No problem, Missus. We'll be going all the way to Medicine Hat. Your daughter will be in good hands."

Dear Diary,

It's fun going by myself on the train. We left Winnipeg last night. The conductor brought me a pillow and blanket and I had a pretty good sleep. It's early in the morning now and I can't get back to sleep so I'm watching the sun come up. My big pencil broke so I'm using the small one. The soldiers are very nice and an airman gave me a chocolate bar. We are out in the country now and the dawn is beautiful. We are in Saskatchewan. I like that name. Everyone around me is very nice and one lady recognized Raggedy Ann. The man behind me opened my Orange Crush that Mama gave me. I'm taking good care of my purse. Mama gave me five whole dollars to spend in Medicine Hat and

I don't want to lose it. I need to go to the ladies room now and freshen up a bit because I'm covered with soot from the train.

Late that afternoon the train arrived in Medicine Hat. Uncle Fred and Aunt Edith were waiting at the station. Moira was very tired from the long trip and she didn't feel much like talking but Aunt Edith chattered away.

"How was the trip? Did you sleep last night? Did you talk to anybody on the train? Have you brought enough clothes? How is your mother? And Barbara? And Roger? I hope you don't mind sleeping on the porch tonight--Irvine's home for the weekend and he needs his room. We have to stop at the grocery store. I was busy working at the church and didn't have time to buy anything for supper. It's hot so I think we'll have a cold supper—potato salad and ham slices. Some of the tomatoes in the garden are ripe already so we can have those."

When they arrived at the house Aunt Edith showed Moira to Irvine's room so she could unpack.

"You can leave your things in here. Irvine won't mind. He's just here for two days, and he won't arrive until after supper tonight."

Moira unpacked her suitcase and put her underwear, socks and pajamas in the drawers. She hung her three cotton dresses in the closet. Suddenly she thought about her bedroom at home. She missed Mama and Barbara and Roger. She wouldn't see them for a long time. A lump came into her throat.

"I mustn't cry," she thought. "Aunt Edith would feel bad."

She went over to the dresser and looked at herself in the mirror.

“Moira,” she said to her image, “you are only here for a few weeks. You’re grownup enough to travel on the train by yourself, so you mustn’t be a crybaby. You’ll see your family again at the end of the month. You’re tired from the trip and you’ll feel better tomorrow.”

Then she swallowed hard and went down to the kitchen to help Aunt Edith get supper on the table.

Moira spent five weeks in Medicine Hat and was quite grown up by the time she returned to Winnipeg. Aunt Edith and Uncle Fred were very busy with their garden and church work so Moira had to find things to do by herself. Aunt Edith wrote to Mama:

Dear Lucy,

I expect that Margaret is keeping you posted on our news. She is getting along just fine and seems to be enjoying herself. She has had to amuse herself most of the time as we have been very busy. We are leaving on Sunday for our week in Banff so I hope the weather stays good and warm.

Uncle Fred let Moira use his typewriter and she spent many hours writing letters home.

July 4.

Dear Mama,

Uncle Fred is letting me use his typewriter. I dont type very well yet. Aunt Edith is at a funeral this afternoon and Marion is at work so Uncle Fred is at home with me. Tonight I am going to the Sunday School picnic in Central Park. Marion gave me some movie star pictures. Mrs. Nicholson has some baby chicks just two weeks old.

At the Sunday School picnic Moira met Betty Church. Betty was a year older than Moira and her mother was a good friend of Aunt Edith’s. Betty invited Moira to go swimming the next day in the big outdoor pool downtown and Aunt Edith said that Moira could go if she promised to be careful.

"I can swim," Moira said. "I took lessons all last winter at the Y."

July 7

Dear Mama,

I went downtown this morning and I bought a bottle of glue and a package of gum and I still havent used any of my five dollars that you gave me. I went swimming yesterday at the outdoor pool. Last night I went to the show with Aunt Edith and we saw Shirley Temple and Ginger Rogers in I'll be Seeing You. We also saw an Andy Panda cartoon.

Aunt Edith had promised Moira that they would go to Banff when Uncle Fred and Marion had their holidays. Moira was very excited about this as she remembered going to Banff when she was seven.

"Now that I'm eleven I can maybe climb a mountain," she said. But Aunt Edith said that she had no intention of climbing any mountains and that Moira could not go by herself.

"It's too dangerous," Aunt Edith said. "There are bears on the mountains. But you can go swimming in the sulfur pool again."

July 12

Dear Mama,

We are going to Banff on Sunday. Please write to me there. Aunt Edith is having her hair done this morning. I stay in bed here until ten oclock in the morning and I go to bed at ten oclock at night.

I go swimming in the deep end now and I let go of the edge and I didnt drown. I go swimming with Betty Church. She is a year older than me and shes a really good swimmer. Betty and her Mama and Daddy are coming to Banff with us and Betty and I are going to sleep together.

The weather in Banff was cool and cloudy, but they had a good time anyway.

They played gin rummy and went shopping, and all around were the majestic mountains

that Moira never tired of looking at. She could see people, tiny like ants, walking near the tops of the mountains, and she imagined she could see bears hiding behind the trees. She chattered away to Betty Church, telling her all about her family back in Winnipeg. When she got back to Medicine Hat she wrote to tell her mother all about the adventures she'd had.

July 17

Dear Mama,

We had a really good time in Banff. There was a mountain right across the street from our boarding house. I left my toothbrush in Medicine Hat and the cheapest one I could find in Banff was in a glass case and it cost 25 cents. Uncle Fred gave Marion 10.00 and me 2.00, so I had seven dollars. Now I have 6.75. We went to the Hot Springs pool and I swam away from the edge in the deep end. Betty Church and I have pajamas just the same only hers are pink and mine are blue.

It is raining today. My yellow sweater and my suit jacket are really lovely for this cool weather. I am keeping as warm as I can because I dont want a cold.

Moira was only supposed to stay in Medicine Hat for four weeks, but she was having such a good time that Aunt Edith asked her to stay for another week.

"It's strange," Moira said. "When I first arrived I was homesick and I thought that four weeks would be such a long time. But I talked to myself that night and told myself that I was going to enjoy myself and the time has just gone by so fast. It's really been fun."

"Well, it's been fun having you here," Aunt Edith said. "Marion is all grown up now. It's nice to have a child around again."

I'm not a child, Moira thought to herself. But she didn't say anything. She felt very grown up traveling by herself and being allowed to stay up late and go to movies

and swim in the deep end of the pool. She was so busy that she forgot about writing home for two weeks. Mama wrote to Aunt Edith to ask if Moira was all right.

"Moira," said Aunt Edith, "I had a letter from your mother today and she says you haven't written to her lately. I think you'd better drop her a line right away."

August 5

Dear Mama,

I will be home in two days now. I'm honestly sorry about not writing to you the past two weeks but there was nothing new to say. Last night Aunt Edith and Uncle Fred and I went to see Diamond Horseshoe. That's the first time I've seen Betty Grable in a show. Last week we saw Irish Eyes are Smiling with June Haver. She is very pretty but I like Betty Grable better. Both those shows are in technicolour.

Mrs. Nicholson's baby chicks are all grown up now. I have a lovely surprise for the whole family. Uncle Fred made a birdhouse in his workshop and I am bringing it home.

When Moira arrived back in Winnipeg everything seemed very strange. Barbara and Roger seemed so childish, and Mama appeared more bossy than usual. Aunt Edith had left Moira pretty well to herself, and had given her a lot of freedom. Moira was going into grade six, and felt that she was no longer a child.

The war with Japan ended on August 15, just a week after Moira got home. Once again Mr. Morgan took the Dennis children downtown to see the celebrations, which were even noisier than those on VE Day. It was not until September 9 that the official telegram arrived telling of Daddy's release from the prison camp.



CANADIAN PACIFIC TELEGRAPHS

World Wide Communications

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1033 DORCHESTER AVE WINNIPEG **1472**

48895

87027 FURTHER OUR TELEGRAM 85006 PLEASED TO INFORM YOU THAT
LIEUTENANT FREDERICK VICTOR DENNIS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED PRISONER OF
WAR IN JAPANESE HANDS IS NOW OFFICIALLY REPORTED SAFE WITH THE ALLIES
STOP FURTHER INFORMATION FOLLOWS WHEN RECEIVED

DIRECTOR OF RECORDS.

643P

Mama wrote a long letter:

Dearest Vic,

My heart is so full that I can hardly write. Every once in a while a wave of emotion sweeps over me and I just spill over and can't keep the tears back. It seems so wonderful that you have been able to stand so much and are really coming home!

My Great West Policy matured this month so I have bought myself a nice black coat with a silver fox collar. If it's a cold day I'll wear it to meet you, but if it is nice weather I'll be wearing a light brown suit which I tailored myself. I do all my own sewing now—you are going to be very proud when you see it, dearie!

Every one of our friends is clamoring for the honour of driving you from the station but the Browns' asked first. I am not asking them into the house afterward though—they know how we will feel!

Dear Diary,

Now I am in grade six. This will be my last year at Grosvenor. Daddy will be home soon and I can hardly wait to see him but at the same time I'm sort of scared. What will he be like? Mama says he's very tired and he needs to rest a lot so we mustn't bother him too much. I had a letter from him yesterday and he says he's looking forward to seeing me. It's really hard to think about my schoolwork just now but Miss Windsor gets mad and makes us stay after school if we don't finish our work. I had to stay three days this week.

In October, Daddy finally arrived home. Mr. and Mrs. Brown drove the Dennis family to the station. As they waited in the rotunda, they could hear the trains rumbling overhead.

"Can we go and see the trains?" Roger asked.

"Nobody is allowed on the platform," said Mama. "Daddy will come down those stairs. You watch for him."

The children stood behind Mama, watching the passengers come down the staircase. Suddenly a man in uniform appeared.

"Vic!" Mama ran to meet him. The children started to run after her, but Mrs. Brown held them back.

"Let your mother greet him first," she said.

Moira wriggled free. "He's OUR Daddy," she said, running to him. Barbara and Roger had freed themselves and were close behind Moira. Daddy wrapped his arms around all of them at once. Mama was crying, but the children eyed their father

curiously. He looked like his pictures, but was much thinner. All five of them rode in the back of the Brown's car. Barbara sat on Daddy's lap and Roger sat on Mama's, and Moira sat between them, gazing shyly up at her Daddy. He kept winking at her and smiling, and he held her hand the whole way home.

Ever since Daddy had left for Hong Kong, Mama had told the children that if he came back safely they would be given a whole day off from school to celebrate. They spent that day following him about and clinging to him, chattering in excitement about all the things they'd done while he was away. They even tagged after him when he went to the bathroom, waiting outside the door until he emerged. They just couldn't let him out of their sight.

When Moira returned to school the next day, Miss Windsor demanded the obligatory note of explanation for her absence, although she knew full well what the reason was.

"Well, Moira," she sniffed. "It's nice that your father is home again, but it's too bad you had to miss an entire day of school because of it. Now you will have to catch up on all the work you missed yesterday!"

Moira had to stay after school to finish it all, but she didn't mind. Her Daddy was home with them again, and that was all that really mattered.

XXX