

HIS BANNER OVER ME

by

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MICE WILL PLAY

MOTHER AND CATHIE were spending three days at the farm—my farm—and Amy and I were left at home to attend school and keep house for Father. I do not know how Amy felt about it, but Father and I were far from happy; I, because my heart was revisiting every beloved haunt at the farm, and Father because he was more than dubious about his daughters' cooking.

However, Amy was sensible as usual, and confined our menus to dishes we knew how to cook. Wearying of this dull diet after a while, I craved a little excitement and variety.

"I am going to make a cake," I announced.

"You don't know how," Amy objected.

"I can read, can't I?" This recipe tells how much to use of everything, and all I have to do is mix them together."

Amy predicted failure, and warned, "You shouldn't waste the eggs."

"They don't cost anything," I said. "The hens lay them for us." So I donned a big apron, rolled up my sleeves and went to work.

I had a little more trouble than I had anticipated. The butter was fairly hard and I couldn't get it mashed into the milk and flour. Amy hung around and offered unsolicited advice, still croaking of catastrophe.

"Oh well," I finally decided, "those lumps of butter will melt as soon as the cake warms up in the oven." So into the oven I popped the three layers.

After about six minutes I opened the oven door and squealed with joy, "O Amy, it's going to be wonderful!"

Sure enough, the butter had melted into lakes and pools. And there was even a slight but hopeful bubbling around the edges. Hastily grabbing a spoon, I gave each panful a good vigorous stirring to mix the butter in.

Then I waited fifteen minutes before opening the door again to behold my fluffy triumph. At the sight my heart sank till it was as flat as my cake. Any tendency the cake may have had to rise had obviously been fatally discouraged by the brisk stirring.

The only compensation I could find was, “At least I didn’t burn it, did I?”

Then, sampling it, I shouted triumphantly, “And it tastes good! Really it does. You can chew it like gum.” So I cut it into squares, called them cookies, and fed my trusting father several of them.

The next day I was seized with the ambition to clean up the back yard. In the process I stepped on a rusty nail, which pierced my black rubber gym shoes and went into my foot. It didn’t hurt too badly and since I was more or less accustomed to pain, I said nothing about it.

That evening, after an early supper with “cookies” for dessert, Father suggested: “Would you girls like to see the carnival?”

We whooped with joy. We never went out in the evening except to prayer meeting, and this Elks Carnival was a worldly affair we certainly hadn’t the least anticipation of seeing. Looking back, I smile a little. Did my father also feel the least bit like a playful mouse?

Amy and I dressed in our best. Then I went to my water color paints and picked up a cake of bright red. Amy and I looked at each other, but no word was spoken. Then feeling like abandoned women, we smeared ourselves liberally on cheeks and lips—this in a day when nice women never wore makeup. As it was nearly dark when we started down the long hill, Father never noticed that his daughters had become highly tinted.

We were too excited to mind the long walk. When we passed the light poles which held the street gas lights, we were careful to keep out of Father’s scrutiny.

Several blocks of the business district at the bottom of the hill had been roped off for the carnival. Everywhere were stretched ribbons of royal purple. Little Tacoma was indeed growing up. When at last we entered the gates, it seemed like fairyland to me though deep in my heart I was sure it was a Place of Sin. Nevertheless my heart was singing with wicked delight.

I recall little of the carnival. I suppose there were booths and advertisements, and probably food samples. There were the usual sideshows, all new to us, but certainly unpatronized by our trio since they cost money.

My chief joy was in the crowds of people. I fairly danced along through the throng even though my sore foot throbbed. I must have been starry-eyed with happiness in spite of my ludicrous makeup. The high point of the evening was when a young man, out of the kindness of his heart, tickled me under the chin with his feather duster. I imagine he did not soon forget my delighted smile.

But after a while the pain in my foot was shooting high up my leg. When I told Amy, she relayed the story to Father. It was decided that we go home. Our innocent revelry over, father and daughters climbed the long hill. Home looked very good to the weary prodigals. Amy and I washed our faces, Father having remarked that I looked feverish. I have no doubt that I was. I spat witch hazel on my foot, but with the pain and excitement, I spent a restless night.

Mother and Cathie returned the next morning. Never had Mother's arms seemed more comforting. She only laughed when she saw the flat cake, and she inquired interestedly what I had done to it. When I told her, she laughed all the harder.

But when she saw the red streaks going up my leg, she became a very busy woman with hot packs and lots and lots of hot water. Then, although I protested, she began to squeeze it. After a while out popped a piece of black rubber from the shoe. From then on my foot began to heal. (Thank you, guardian angel).

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