

# HIS BANNER OVER ME

by

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### PLANTER OF TREES

About THIS TIME my father begins emerging from the background of my memories. The yard was his domain and I, who equally loved the outdoors, was his willing little helper. Although my father was small (not over 5'5" and probably never weighing more than 125 lbs.), he was wiry and healthy. His round head was early bald and he always wore a clipped beard and mustache. He had the full lips which Cathie and I have always disliked in ourselves (Maybe that was why he wore a beard). Amy has the thin lips of our mother.

He was faithful, patient and plodding; slow to anger, but stubborn. While he had no real sense of humor, he did possess a great capacity for fun. We had good times with him when we were children. Often, his blue eyes twinkling, he used to hold us on his lap and sing about Old Dan Tucker; and another song about "Nid, Nid Nodding and a dropping off to sleep." This latter was sung very slowly, with nodding head, and finally silence and snores. While we waited breathlessly his knees dropped down and we fell off in a heap to the tune of Father's merry song, "Up in the morning, bright and early, the birds are singing cheerily."

There was another heartbreaking song:

Katie with the dimpled cheeks  
And the eyes so blue and mild,  
Swept the crossings of the street,  
For she was an orphan child.

I remember Father's sweet mellow voice singing his favorite hymn, "There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins." This was followed by "Jesus, Lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly." For years I thought a "bosom fly" was akin to a blow fly. Something else which puzzled me was, "For I am only waiting here to hear Thy summons, 'Child, come home.'" What kind of a child was a "summons child," and why was someone waiting for her to come home?

My mother always sang about the house as she worked. God pity children who do not have singing parents! Although my mother sometimes sang slightly off key, her voice was the sweetest sound in the world to me, and when I hear her again I hope she will sound just the same.

I memorized dozens of the old hymns from hearing my parents sing them. I have no voice, but the words were stored in my heart years ago and have enriched me beyond measure.

Father made the most of our two 25-foot lots. He planted trees; two apple, two cherry (the luscious Royal Anne for eating and the tart Early Richmond to can for pies), two Italian prunes and a Bartlett pear which was so loaded we could not dispose of the fruit. Between the trees were rows of raspberries, currants and gooseberries of every size and kind. Cathie usually left some in her pockets along with her round ham bone and pickled peach pits. The gooseberries faded out the color of her pockets. There was not room for many flowers since Father wanted us to have all the fruit we needed, but we had a few bushes of what we called Jack roses, a deep red rose which was very fragrant. My mother usually wore one in her pretty hair. Then we had a La France rose, a bed of “white pinks” and some lilies of the valley. In one corner grew a tall syringa so like a bride that I used the feminine pronoun in my thoughts of her.

After our own yard was complete, Father started clearing out the brush from the vacant lot next door to make a “park” for us children among the alders and hazel nut bushes. He donated some trees to the school we attended. They were planted on Arbor Day with appropriate ceremonies. Through the following years, at intervals, Papa would tell me to meet him at the school grounds with the spade; and after his long hours at the post office he would dig around his trees. I think they may still be standing.

Father spent thirty-five years in one little cooped up place, the general delivery window at the Tacoma Post office. I shall never forget the dread we all felt when the post office went under civil service. No more joking or fun. Father studied and Mother helped him brush up. He passed the examination and we all breathed again. I think he worked ten hours a day, walking up and down the steep hill for his noon dinner. He never had a chance to sit down at work. I do not see how he stood it, but I believe his love of the outdoors helped him to keep his health.

Later he planted red holly berries and to his delight they grew. Then he divided his lovely collection of little trees among friends all over Tacoma. I recall the sense of wonder he and I shared once when he found that the stake he had put up for the peas had grown. We looked at it as though beholding Aaron’s rod that budded. Father said, “Well, we will give it its chance.”

Father was living with us in California when he went Home. Later I was looking through his clothes preparatory to giving them away, and in every pocket I found eucalyptus leaves and buds. Holding them in my hands as the tears ran down my cheeks, I prayed, “Dear Lord, if You are making any new gardens of Eden, let him plant a few trees. He will take such good care of them.”

**~ end of chapter 4 ~**

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