

# HIS BANNER OVER ME

by

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## CHAPTER TEN

### JOURNEY TO PARADISE

WHEN ADAM AND EVE were driven out of the Garden of Eden and the angel with the flaming sword turned this way and that, this way and that to keep them from reentering their lost paradise, he could not take from them their memories. On all the dusty, stony paths of life, when thorns hurt their feet and enemies beset them, they must have many times relived in memory the cool sweet days in the garden when God walked with them and all was peace and beauty.

Just so do I, though many difficult years have passed since four carefree little girls raced over sun-sweet meadows, still hold to my heart the precious memories of the farm. It was more than a farm. It was a personality, a spirit; always there, waiting for me broodingly, tenderly. It was my beloved.

And how can I write about the farm? My pen should be dipped in liquid joy so that it might spread its message as one would paint a picture in green and gold and blue. There should be sound effects also; the laughter of children, the song of birds, the lowing of cattle at milking time; and later, in the almost insupportable beauty of Puget Sound twilight, the zooming of night hawks.

The warm fragrant night, enfolding one like rich dark velvet and pure gold. The moon a chariot riding the sky. Myriads of stars in its way and never one was run over! Night after night God's hand silently presented the pageant of the skies; and down below a little girl watched and worshiped Him with a heart full of wonder and delight.

I look back to the farm with almost the same sort of ecstasy as I look forward to Heaven.

They tell me that the buildings are now gone—the square brown house which was so hospitable, the weathered gray barn where we played in the hay and listened to the summer shower on the roof, the various sheds, our little playhouse which was frequently wrecked by the pet lamb Flora. These were all torn down when the farm was included in Fort Lewis. But the contour of the land is there. I could go over it as a blind man “sees” his beloved with his fingers: the softly swelling hill, the meadows, the “crick,” the apple orchards . . . Surely those old trees are still bearing, even though no eager children race out through the morning dew to gather the apples which had fallen during the night, or spy a red-cheeked beauty on the tree and cry, “Miners on that one!”

The farm was not ours except insofar as “the mind has more possessions than the sun.” The farm belonged to some dear neighbors, the Hughes’ of the “E” Street days. I do not recall the first time we went out there. We must have stayed with them in their house, which was most elastic in its accommodation capacity. I recall one night when the house was full of company, Mrs. Hughes and Mother slept on the big couch in the living room and I slept between them at the foot. It was a dreadful night. Whichever way I turned, bare feet were in my face.

The summer I was nine, we decided that it was too much for Mrs. Hughes, so we were planning to camp out, our very first experience with this adventure. My mother at that time was either thirty-three or thirty-four.

So, on a certain sunny day in early July, the K Street house was in a perfect ferment of joyful excitement. The Hughes’ were to drive in and pick us up at noon. Mother and Father had worked late the night before, packing the 8 x 10 tent, two canvas cots, cooking utensils, dishes, bedding and our new pride and joy, a Klondike stove, built of heavy tin on the general lines and proportions of a shoe box, only obviously it was larger—little enough equipment for six weeks of housekeeping for three hungry children.

At 7:30 Father had left for work as usual, turning and shouting final directions until he was out of hearing. Poor Father, who had to wait a while for his two-weeks’ vacation before he could join us! He would be home for his last dinner with us at noon. There was much to be done.

The Hughes’ could hardly get here before noon but we children kept running to the gate watching for them. In merciful pity for us, Mother kept us busy.

At long last came the clop, clop of horses and there they were, dear old Nell and Buckskin, hitched to the spring wagon, the back of which was partially filled with hay for the horses. I burst into choking sobs of joy, a trick of mine which embarrasses me to this day. Emily hopped down from the seat but Mr. and Mrs. Hughes were a bit stiff from the long drive of fourteen miles on a springless wagon.

Emily was a very quiet child. We always had to renew acquaintance with her after a separation. Her father was more quiet yet, and self-contained. Mrs. Hughes, inclined to be comfortably plump, was the very salt of the earth. I have never in a lifetime of acquaintance known her to do or say a mean thing.

For a while we all talked at once and, in the natural course of events, I petted the horses. Before we knew it, it was nearly time for Father to come home. Mother had been stewing a fat hen all morning, and the Hughes had brought in some fresh cooking green corn. Smelling all these flesh pots, I prayed devoutly, “Dear God, please have Papa bring home a watermelon and then it will be perfect.”

And Papa did—and it was!

After a hearty meal we finally told Father good-bye, all feeling a bit subdued. He kept turning and waving to us until he disappeared over the hill.

“Now children, do the dishes. We must hurry and get off.”

For once the dishes were done rapidly. Then bundles, shawl straps, valises and boxes were loaded into the wagon. My cat had to be caught and poked, yowling protest, head downward into a flour sack. Then we four little girls disposed ourselves on various bundles in the back of the wagon. The key was left next door for Father. When everybody was in, Mr. Hughes took up the lines, clucked and said calmly, “Get up Nell, get up Buckskin,” and we were off.

We children were too excited to settle down at first. So was the cat, who kept yowling and climbing up my chest, flour sack and all. But I constantly talked to him and stroked him until he finally subsided except for frequent intervals of struggling.

The patient horses plodded on, straight down the long dusty hill up which they had crisscrossed that morning. This led to Center Street, a poor part of town with shabby houses. Rough children ran jeering alongside our horses, as though to frighten them. Mr. Hughes cracked his long whip, never used against Nell and Buckskin, and the children fled. My heart ached with sympathy for them because they were not going, as we were, to a beautiful farm.

On we went, now into South Tacoma, or Edison as it was then called. On the left as we entered the little town, the cemetery gleamed with tall marble stones and statues. I knew this was the place where lay my beloved teacher’s body.

My heart began to thud. The horses took an interminable time to pass. Clop, clop, they went past the business district, and through the residential streets, wide and shady. The houses grew more infrequent. Suddenly we were in the country. The first oak tree, a fugitive bunch of bluebells by the roadside—and finally the golden prairie grass which was the final proof for which I had been waiting.

I had been holding my heart like a caged bird. It had tried to fly fast ahead of the slow team. I would not let it go. I knew we were going yet I scarcely dared to believe it till I saw the prairie grass. Then all restraints were removed, and I surrendered to my joy at last.

Though no one heard it, a psalm of thanks to God rose from my side of the laden wagon which was winding around the country roads.

We were halfway there after we passed Lakeview. I gave Mischief over to my mother’s care as we approached the Rigney Hill, where we children always got out and walked, to save the horses, though when I recall how little the quartet weighed, I cannot see that the difference was appreciable. However, it gave us a chance to stretch our legs. At the top of the hill Mother thankfully returned the cat to me asking, “How do you stand it?” My mother cared nothing for pets.

Long years afterward my husband and I drove in our car over this same road. It took us about fifteen minutes to traverse the fourteen miles which had consumed most of a summer afternoon so long ago.

I could hardly believe it when Mr. Hughes drew up before the big pasture gates and waited for us to hop down and open them. We could not as yet see the house but I knew we would shortly.

Sure enough, first the square roof and, as we proceeded, the dear house seemed to rise out of the ground like magic. Then the last gate. I refused to get back in the wagon but ran through the corral to the house gate, and stood for a wonderful second or two on the porch looking up at the “stained window,” a panel above the door containing bits of rich purple and green glass.

I stood there waiting for the slow team to arrive.

Mr. Hughes called, “Whoa, Nell; whoa, Buckskin,” and stopped the team as though he were pulling up at just any old house instead of a place of dreams.

Mrs. Hughes got out the key and unlocked the door, and the house opened its arms to us!

**~ end of chapter 10 ~**

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