

## A Daughter and A Son

### *Margaret and Jack*

In the second year of our marriage our daughter, Margaret, came. Two and a half years later our son arrived. Within an incredibly short time the two of them were undertaking the great responsibility of bringing up a couple of parents.

There was little trouble in finding a name for Margaret. She had been named from the time I was in the fourth grade. At that time, in naming my Christmas dolls, I had one name left over. So I decided to save it for my own little girl, when (not if) she should arrive and need a name. From that time on, I saved my prettiest paper dolls, several special toys, a crocheted lace yoke, a scrapbook or two, and a number of trinkets. They had been packed away all that time—first in a shoe box, then in a larger box, and finally in the bottom of the hope chest that Grandpa Ussery had made me.

Our son's name had been harder to choose. Being the boy he was so important that several of the family connections wanted to put an extra word into his name. At last we compromised and gave him one name from each side of the family tree, and

compromised still further by calling him by a nickname that had little reference to either name. We called him simply Jack.

Margaret always seemed a series of surprises to her new father. One surprise was that she had her eyes open the first time he saw her. The next was that she could make so much noise about a few minutes difference in her feeding time.

To me that first baby was a series of thrills. First was the flattering way she gripped my finger that first time it was extended to her. Another was one day in her third month, when lying on the bed kicking and gurgling, she announced, "Ah goo! Ah goo!" It sounded exactly to my admittedly partial ears as though she had said plainly, "I good."

And she was a good baby, no denying that. She got into plenty of predicaments, and she very likely started her parents' hair graying; but no more so, I suppose, than would the usual run of youngsters.

She gave me some surprises as well as she did her Dad. One day in the spring of her second year, I had her with me in the garden. And I was trying to get the weeds out of a row of very fine early beans. In our neighborhood the first "mess of beans" and the first ripe tomatoes were accomplishments. I was hoeing and pulling weeds along the row with my face turned southward. Margaret, in a little pink-checked apron, was behind me playing between the rows, or so I thought. When I turned around, Margaret was pulling, too, not weeds, but beans. She had cleaned that row so completely that we didn't have

beans till mid-June—almost a disgrace in our neighborhood. And our garden was next to the road!

Jack was considerable of a problem baby in more ways than name selection. He had nine-month colic or its equivalent in incentive to exercise lungs. Every afternoon about the time I needed to be starting supper, bringing in wood and water, and fastening up the baby chicks—about that time Jack would take the colic. There was no place he could be comfortable except on his mother's hip. It was that way for at least nine months, maybe eleven!

From that time on, Jack was an explorer. He didn't exactly discover a new world every day, but he could certainly discover a world of mischief to get himself embroiled in.

There was the time he doused himself in fresh buttermilk by trying to pull up to the churn. There was also the time he upset a gallon bucket of sorghum molasses into his lap and all over the floor around him. There were other episodes equally exasperating.



### *A Dark Coiffure*

Margaret took care of her part of the mischief, too. I was to cope with one incident for days. Baby Jack's hair was red, a bright, golden auburn that drew attention and comment every time we took the children out. We didn't realize that those comments

were having their effect on Margaret. But one day while they were playing in a little enclosure we had made for them out on the front porch I heard her say over and over again: “Now oo hair bwack. Now oo hair bwack.”

Finally I went out to see how they were getting along. Never so long as there are zebras shall I forget what I saw there. Margaret, then aged three, had found a full new bottle of black shoe dye, and had proceeded to spread it on the baby, on herself, and on the porch, lavishly, and skillfully.

She had probably begun with the offending red hair. And indeed it was then “bwack.” So were the streaks that ran down the baby’s cheeks, neck, and little white dress. She had painted his elbows, too, and the palms of his hands. Then, for some unaccountable reason, she had given him a military stripe down the sides of his chubby legs; had painted the bottoms of his feet to match the palms of his hands; had then decorated her own little legs and feet; dotted her dress, as well as his; and with the remainder of the very good shoe dye she had made railroads, stripes, dots, and splotches on what had been my clean and newly-painted porch floor.

A psychologist might have been interested in the lines and scrolls that the three-year old had accomplished. But I was no psychologist; just a hardworking housewife; and at that time too much like a certain practical grandmother to be interested in baby-made scrolls, railroads, and designs. Then, however,

and for days later, I was astonished at the stability of a certain brand of shoe-dye.

We gradually grew into a bona fide farm family; practically a non-profit organization—for our main crop was corn. We fed it to the pigs; and the pigs died. Or, if we managed to keep cholera out of the swine herd, the prices went down. Sometimes it seemed as though the mortgage grew faster than anything else on the farm.

We did, however, find a lot of LIFE in living down on the farm; and with the garden of cabbages, tomatoes, potatoes, onions, and so on, and poultry and eggs, and milk from the old red cow Mother Knox had given us; the flour and meal we swapped our grain for—we managed to live quite well. Mammy Stone would give us an occasional basket of apples or jar of honey from her adjacent farm. We'd find peaches, plums, and berries growing wild in the fence rows, so our cellar shelves were fairly well stocked.



### *Daddy's Mama's Garden*

Necessarily our life was very practical. With that greedy mortgage hanging over us we felt obliged to make every movement count in dollars and cents. However, one year Margaret announced—and just at corn-planting time—that she wanted a flower garden “just like Daddy's Mama's.” With

her Dad, Margaret's word was law; so while the mules rested at noon that day he hustled into town and brought back a roll of chicken-wire and some assorted flower seeds. I got the spading fork and started turning over sod and clods, while he put in posts and stretched the fence. Margaret sat on the steps and watched while Jack collected worms.

"Daddy's Mama's Garden" was indeed an ambitious idea for us to try to copy, but Margaret decreed it must be done, so we bent our backs and tried. Making that kind of garden included fencing in the area immediately around the front door, so chickens and calves couldn't share it, and the planting helter-skelter, here, there, and everywhere within that enclosure all the seeds, plants, bulbs, vines, and bushes we could acquire took much of the spare time we could hardly spare. From a landscape architects' viewpoint that garden was an atrocity, but from our vantage point on the front porch it was an overflowing bowl of pleasure. We had violets, sunflowers, roses, marigolds, zinnias, lilies, and as many other varieties as we could buy or beg. Margaret's garden became a family pride.

I'm not by nature an early riser; many times I've felt that I'd rather sit up all night than get up next morning; but during the season when those Shirley poppies were in bloom I'd get up and go barefoot out to the garden in gray dawn to see what colors were open each morning. For a while I thought someone was pulling our beautiful poppy blooms—then I discovered that

when the sun came up they disappeared. One must rise early to enjoy poppies.

In the evenings we enjoyed the fragrances from the garden; some odors we recognized, but one was a mystery. The children said it must be the kind of perfume that St. Peter sprinkled around the Golden Gate. I thought I knew most flowers by sight and fragrance, but this was beyond detection. However, on one of those early morning jaunts to the poppy bed I decided to stop and pull some weeds. This bed was an assortment of unknowns from a mixed seed packet. I had been afraid to pull anything out of it except lambs' quarter, plantain weed, and nut grass for fear I'd pull some strange new flower.

On this morning, however, I gathered up a handful of non-descripts and started to throw them away when I caught a whiff of the strange perfume. I sorted the dew-wet plants and smelled each one individually. At last I found it. An insignificant, rusty-looking little cone of florets, and I had broken the plant off right at the top of the ground. We'd enjoy the fragrance of that plant no more in the evenings, and we didn't know what the flower was, so we couldn't get another start of it.

Then came a search of seed catalogs for a picture or description that would identify the plant we had lost. Finally we decided that it was mignonette, and from then on we planted some of it every year. About every other year we'd either pull it up or chop it down because it looked so much like a weed.

But in the seasons it was spared we loved it and enjoyed its fragrance to the fullest.

Petunias, too, gave a great deal of pleasure and fragrance for our evenings on the porch, or lying on a quilt on the grass in the yard beside the little garden.

From this vantage point not only the garden but the whole countryside was our joy. The trees on the hilltops surrounding our valley embroidered a scalloped edge for the horizon. A cowbell would tinkle far over to the east; and over to the north we could hear the regular whacks of someone cutting wood. They'd probably be frying ham for supper. A dog would bark down at the creek.

Far, far over the hill on the highway we could hear the world roaring by—that buzzing sound might be a bus; the heavy pulling an over-burdened truck; the shrill horn, a young man in a hurry.

The evening air would be so sweet to breathe. A mockingbird would rehearse in the hackberry tree. A squeally pig down at the barn would be quarreling about his supper. The horses and mules shuffled their hay. The dogs and cats romped for our pleasure. And the hum and buzz of insects added to the pleasure of evening.

It was from digging in our small daughter's flower garden that I learned to think of the earth as "good"; even though its goodness might be only skin-deep, or mud-deep. I realized from seeing caves and underground streams that down below

the earth might seem “cold-blooded,” but the mellow topsoil I worked with seemed warm and friendly. I enjoyed being just a sister to the clods.

I suffered with fields that froze in winter and with those that parched in summer. I rejoiced with those that seemed happy in full production. To walk over land that is broken with gullies or scraped bare of topsoil hurt me to the quick, almost like broken skin on my body, like chapped hands or scraped shins.

I learned to love the earth and to cling to the promise, “Dust thou art, to dust returneth.” And as I crumbled the clods that I am but a sister to, I felt that I could welcome being laid back into the arms of Mother Earth; my mould entrusted to fingers of green grass, my soul in the hands of the Maker of Earth.



### *Measles Visits*

Some take measles; some acquire measles; some have it thrust upon them. Margaret, acquired measles; went to bed willingly; and nobody had to tell her to stay there. But Jack, poor little kid, had measles thrust upon him time after time before he condescended to accept.

From the day Margaret went to bed I began to watch Jack closely. Every time he sneezed, every time his cheeks were flushed, I would say; “Son, that sounds, or that looks, like measles; you’d better take off and go to bed. You mustn’t take

any cold, you know.” Jack would obediently (most of the time) go to bed, but by the next morning he would be up and ready to play again.

After two weeks of repeating such performances, Jack came in one day and said, “Well Mother, I guess I won’t disappoint you any longer. I guess I’ve got ’em this time.”

“But you are not coughing or sneezing,” I said.

“No’m, but I’m tired and I haven’t done anything to make me tired. I guess it’s measles.”

He went to bed that afternoon, and next morning he was ready to get up again. “No,” I insisted, “you are already settled down in bed and are good and warm, so you may as well save yourself the trouble of getting up and down so much.”

That night he slept fitfully, and ere long that hard, dry, stomach-soring cough set in. The sneezes came, and the reddish eye, and runny nose, and that terrible measly taste, and eventually Jack was all broken out with a full-sized rosy crop of measles.



### *A Bringer-inner*

I wonder if a woman is ever entirely comfortable in her mind after she becomes the mother of a son? She will be happy many times, of course, overwhelmingly happy. But being entirely comfortable in her mental regions—that’s different.

I have wondered, too, why the person who analyzed boys and found them made of “scissors and snails and puppy dog tails” didn’t complete the job. He would have found, upon further analysis, I am sure, that boys also contain abundant other surprises.

At least that is what I observed from our boy, and he seemed not very different from others. From the time Jack could toddle about the yard in pincheck aprons until he strode over the hills in size 11½ shoes and 32-34 overalls, he was always a bringer-inner, or more explicitly a walker-outer and bringer-inner. Sometimes we were quite unprepared for the surprises he brought in.

One Sunday afternoon nobody else would have been prepared either. In each hip pocket of his bulky overalls he toted an adolescent skunk. Well, I thought I would have to leave home. But you never can tell. Boys have a way of doing things with mothers, and by the second day he had me feeding the creatures with one of my company best silver teaspoons. I couldn’t stand to see the little things starve, we could not turn them out with the cows, so what else could I do?

On a drizzly day, a snowy Sunday, or an idle afternoon, Jack would always get restless and as he called it, would “go out walking.” And dear only knows what he might bring when he came back. It might be a terrapin, a toad, a sunfish. It might be the first redbud or dogwood, an elder-flower as big as a dishpan; the tooth of some prehistoric animal, an ancient

Indian's arrow-head, spear, or hatchet; a baby crow, buzzard or lizard eggs, a frying-size rabbit, a squirrel. Or just a wilted bouquet of nameless weeds and wild flowers which, for some reason, had interested him and which he wanted to share with the rest of the family.

One of the chief worries with a boy, you never can tell what he'll do next. A girl—you know she'll play paper dolls, ask for a new dress, lose herself in a book, or want to go to a picture show, but a boy is as full of surprises as his pockets, especially if he has fields, woods, and streams from which to draw these surprises.

When Jack would come home quietly, with one or both hands behind him, when he would go upstairs or down to the basement and bring out a sturdy box or the old canary cage, I'd begin to feel apprehension rising in my nervous system.

One evening he strode quietly through the kitchen and performed all these preliminary maneuvers, but instead of bringing down the regular canary cage, he brought in the smaller and more closely woven wire cage, the one in which we had reared baby birds.

He put as large a pan of water in the cage as he could push through the door, then slipped in half a biscuit, and something else. That "something else" had me so curious and uneasy that I let two griddles of our supper hoecakes turn too dark. When Jack had completed his mysterious arrangements, he stood up

and with hands on hips, said, “Mother, come over and meet Old Gold’s Rival.”

At first I couldn’t imagine what he meant, or just who or what “Old Gold” might be. But when I looked in the cage and saw a frog slightly larger than a special celebration postage stamp, I remembered that one summer California had a frog jumping contest in which a green-back named Old Gold had set something like a world’s record by covering twelve feet in three jumps.

Jack went on to explain that although he wasn’t sure whether this stamp-size frog was a bull frog or a tree frog (having found him halfway between the pasture pond and the thicket), he was practically certain that with patience and proper care and a balanced diet, this particular frog could be trained to out-jump all other jumpers, including even those from Florida and California.

That night he searched the encyclopedia and read everything he could find about frogs. He looked through our old farm and nature magazines for further information on the care and training of champion jumpers.

“Dad,” he asked, “did you ever hear of people feeding race horses raw eggs to make them long-legged?”

“I’ve heard of feeding them raw eggs, but I think it’s to make them long winded.”

“Well, do you s’pose if I fed The Rival raw eggs it would make him long-legged?”

At last he went to bed, but evidently not to sleep. For just as I had dozed off into that first sweet slumber, I heard a voice: “Mother, Mother. Are you asleep?”

I grunted an inquisitive answer.

“Mother, what was the name of that frog that got fed on buckshot? Was it Daniel Webster? Who wrote that jumping frog story? Do we have a copy of it here? Mother, don’t you think Daniel Webster would be a good name for my frog? Or do you like “Old Gold’s Rival” better? What do you think of naming him Flash, or Omaha? Mother, who was it wrote that story? What county did he live in?”

I grunted a “Wait ’til morning,” and turned over to sleep again.

But next morning the frog was gone. Jack had left the cage in the usual animal nursery behind the kitchen stove. But the occupant had escaped, and who could tell where?

Of course, I wouldn’t be afraid of a little thing like a stamp-size frog, even if he were named Daniel Webster, but I did feel apprehensive all day, never knowing when I might be jumped at. I searched the house upstairs and down. I looked under rugs, behind pictures, in the bookshelves, and even down-cellar, hoping and fearing I’d find him.

It was not until two days later that we began to suspect that Daniel Webster, Old Gold’s Rival, would never jump again. Our noses told us that Old Gold no longer had a rival, that Calaveras County still had the champion tall frog tale.



*Fireplace Dramatics*

The “very nice” housekeeper would not do such a thing: sweep trash into the fireplace in summer and leave it there a day or two or until a convenient time to burn it and remove the ashes. I must admit that I did such a thing. But I don’t any more. This is the reason:

When a day came around that seemed the proper time to burn the trash, I turned the contents of my waste paper basket into our big black kitchen fireplace and proceeded to start a blaze.

As the smoke and flames rose in the chimney, part of the burning paper and the trash began to move, not up the chimney, but out into the room toward me. As they moved, I moved—toward the door. I still kept my broom in hand and my eyes on the apparition.

At last, one large lump of dust-covered trash seemed to separate itself from the burning paper and to come even more rapidly toward me. It was making a scratching sound as it hustled along. I saw what looked like a snake’s head peeping out from under a derby crown, and four legs and a sprout of a tail coming along too. That tail could belong to nothing else but a terrapin.

As my paralysis began to loosen up, I remembered Jack had said the day before, “Mother, Buppo and I found a terrapin up in the field and brought it to the house for you to see, but you were not here.”

I called to mind a practice that Buppo and Jack made of bringing anything they found of interest, whether it was a white blossom of the haw tree, the first wild rose, a cluster of “coffee-berries,” anything they found in their ramblings for me to see. If I was not there it was left on my desk or in my chair.

The terrapin probably had been left in one of those spots and had been forgotten until it dropped into the waste basket.



### *Boys and Dogs*

Boys were always beyond my understanding. When Jack went to the back field to “cut bushes,” he would take his rifle instead of the ax. When he went to the creek bottom to sow clover, he would take fishing hooks and lines, but not a seed sower. Boys are peculiar beings, their ways beyond understanding.

Dogs are as mysterious as boys. In fact, their ways are somewhat alike. They seem sometimes to work “in cahoots.” Just as I would get Jack down to weeding onions in the garden, Buppo would start up a terrible racket in the woods. Jack would stop and listen. He seemed always listening for that dog, especially when he was at work in the garden. He would listen and then say:

“Bup’s treed.”

I’d say nothing.

Then he’d say, “I’ll bet it’s a groundhog.”

I'd say nothing. I didn't like groundhogs anyway. Too greasy.

Next he'd say, "It might be a squirrel."

Then he would begin a brief discussion of how good squirrel and dumplings would taste for supper.

I'd still say nothing.

Next: "I wouldn't be surprised if it's a rabbit. Say, Mother, don't you have another jar of that good Creole sauce that makes rabbit gravy so good?"

I'd weaken. He knew that the pride of our table is Creole rabbit, and it was the time of the year for young rabbits to be at their tenderest.

I'd finish the onions alone. It was the penalty I paid for being the mother of a son and the endurer of a dog.



### *Squeal and All*

On Saturday afternoon the old red sow found eleven little pigs back in the field by the straw stack. It was a chilly day, so Dad went back there and erected a temporary shelter of tin scraps and boards to protect the mother and her babies.

Sunday morning he went back again to see about them, and as he moved one piece of tin, the whole structure rattled to the ground. One little pig squealed, the old sow huffed, and eleven little pigs scattered in eleven different directions. You know how

baby chicks will run and squat in the grass at the least sound or sight of danger. Well, the pigs behaved in the same way.

It took ever so long for Dad to get those little squealers, at least the first ten of them, back to their places; and one simply couldn't be found. So Buppo was called. As it was a misty morning, the old dog was dozing under my desk. But at Dad's call he willingly rushed back to the straw stack.

Dad explained to him, as clearly as a human being can explain to a dog, what had happened. And Bup started smelling around. He sniffed and trailed, and trailed and sniffed, he rambled back and forth through the orchard, through the crimson clover, up a ditch, down a ditch, over one terrace, then another, until Dad thought the dog had forgotten the pig and was hunting rabbits instead.

But not that dog! He scouted out to the middle of a 15-acre rye field—rye can grow thick and tall when unpastured in the spring of the year—and there he found the lost little pig, ears, tail, squeal, and all.



### *Boys Plus Dogs Equals Trouble*

Among other things to be learned on the farm is the fact that the commonly accepted rules of arithmetic do not work when applied to boys and dogs. If you have two peaches, you have

two peaches; the same rule works with apples, radishes, and pennies. But with boys and dogs it is different.

For example: if you have one boy, you have one boy. That's granted. But if to one boy you add another boy, then, so far as work is concerned, you have only half a boy. And if to one boy and one boy you add one dog and perhaps another dog—then you have exactly zero for help with chores. You may, however, add them all in another manner and, forgetting the chores, multiply the fun.

One summer we borrowed a boy named Bill. Bill was one of those young Americans with four parents and lots of relatives. His mother and step-father lived in one city; his father and step-mother lived in another; and his grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins were scattered here and there. All this and other circumstances made it convenient for Bill to stay with us, and he was the pet of the farm. All the folks and animals, even the wild things, seemed to love Bill. From the time he lifted his curly head from the pillow in the morning until he turned up his tired little toes in the evening, he was a continual source of interest and pleasure.

Bill's age that summer was somewhere near half-past-eleven, but he always said he was going on twelve. One of the first friends Bill made after coming to the farm was the old red mule. He learned to ride the mule back and forth to the field and pasture, looking rather comical perched high up on the ambling Old Red.

Then he made friends with the bull yearling, the one we called “Little Fool,” a rascal just young enough to be fun and old enough to command respect. Bill and the calf could be seen almost any day romping about the barnlot.

Then Bill adopted the pigs. He seemed a natural swineherd. There is an art in driving pigs, and Bill was that kind of artist. But his best pal was Jeep, a nondescript pup that had been bestowed upon us by relatives in town.

Jeep was a born discoverer.

One of her first discoveries on our farm was a very dead frog, one from which Jack had removed the legs a week or so before. Jeep insisted on bringing it into the house just at supper time.

She found many long-forgotten old shoes—but no old stockings. Every stocking she discovered was new, although it didn’t in any way look new by the time its rightful owner found her with it!

Jeep’s favorite outdoor activity was discovering grasshoppers. You’d scarcely believe a grasshopper could be so fascinating unless you could watch Jeep bouncing through the weeds or tall wheat, chasing first one then another nimble grasshopper. Jeep would also get nimble, so nimble in fact that sometimes she would forget herself, and seem not to realize that when she jumped she must land on earth and on her own feet instead of on stalks of wheat like her quarry.

On one occasion we saw her land in a puddle of water deep enough to bring her out of her ecstasy of bouncing

for a few minutes at least. But she was soon back to chasing grasshoppers.

Bill alone might not have been so bad. But Bill and Jeep, added to Jack and Buppo—two boys and two dogs—well they made a zero that was indeed a problem. They were likely to attempt anything, likely to bring in anything, and at anytime.

One morning, hearing war whoops down in the lower field, I prepared myself for a surprise, but not for the surprise that really came. They all came marching single file up the path, Bill, Jeep, Jack, and Buppo. Bill was in front holding high the trophy: a very much alive half-grown polecat.

“Bill!” I screamed, “He’ll scent you!”

“He’s scented already,” was the boy’s reply.

And he had. Two boys went into the pond over their ears. Two pairs of overalls were buried. And two dogs were forbidden to come near the house.

Indeed, arithmetic does not work accurately where boys and dogs and skunks are concerned. Two boys, two dogs, and one skunk total five—and one big scent.



### *Fun on a Farm*

For a long time there had been a very lonely and unloved little farm on the south border of Knoxdale. For years it had been passed back and forth among renters, tenants, and absentee

landlords, until at last nobody would live there except one unparticular old cat.

It was part pity and part greed that made us decide that we could buy the place for a song if the loan company would sing the song. So we acquired an important looking paper containing a lot of “whereases” which denoted that we had a right to cut bushes, fill ditches, plow corn-rows, and pay taxes on another 37½ acres of land.

Dad and the part-time hired man had all they could do, of course, to manage the homeplace. So Jack and I took over the orphan farm, and Margaret adopted the little four-room house, the fireplace, the yard, and the cat.

Of them all, the fireplace seemed in the best condition, but it needed a new “face” and a new mantel-piece. The house had lost nine window-panes, and that made it look like a snaggle-toothed old hag. It had not had a coat of paint in the memory of man, and the yard was the only place on the farm that wasn’t grown up in “shrubbery.” Very likely the only reason the cat stayed there was the fact that the last family who had lived there had thought it bad luck to move a cat.

A stubby old broom was standing behind the door, and a box of salt was on the shelf—more than likely all left for the same reason. The broom we used to brush out the house and over the yard. The salt we took to the cows in the pasture. But the cat stayed on. Each time we went there we took it a pone of

bread and a little bottle of milk. We hoped the cat filled in with mice between our visits.

When weather was too bad to work outside, Jack and I helped Margaret with the house. It was remarkable how the plain little thing responded to treatment. With lye soap, sand, rainwater, and the stubby broom, we scoured the floors until the grain of the pine smiled through. We cleaned, patched, and painted around the windows, then draped them softly with some left-over tobacco canvas on cane poles. We put in some window screens; dressed up the fireplace; applied paint inside and out; planted shrubs, bulbs, and vines all around; sowed grass over the bare spots in the yard; hauled off the trash to the gullies, and generally had a good time.

As for the farm, Jack thought that we could clear off the bushes, fill up the gullies to prevent more erosion, and grow enough hay crops and a few cash crops to pay the taxes and keep up the payments on the mortgage. If we could pasture some livestock, grow some clover and lespedeza to build up the land while he was going to high school; then by the time he was ready to go to Agricultural College, the little adopted farm might grow enough corn and tobacco to pay his college expenses.

He talked over some of his plans with the County Agricultural Agent, and together they developed some bright hopes for the place. The first problem was to stop the soil from going to the sea; the second, to trim off all unnecessary and undesirable

bushes and thus give the native bluegrass a chance. The County Agent said that on a small farm one needed to make every inch count. And that was exactly what Jack planned to do.

Every Saturday the boy would work there all day with grubbing hoe, shovel, and ax. Margaret would be busy working on the dirty little orphaned house. I'd fix an early lunch for Dad and me, and then I'd take the children's lunch to them, which they would warm up and eat before the plain little fireplace if the weather was cold.

I'd take along a rake or broom and some gloves; and would get so interested in the project I couldn't get away to get back home and do my own work.

I couldn't help much with the grubbing hoe, but I could certainly help a lot, Jack said, by dragging the bushes out of the way as he cut them, and piling them into the raw, gapping ditches. I raked the dead grass and weeds and trash off, too, and found that they all made very good ditch-fillers.

I don't know when we ever had more fun on Saturday afternoons, or on any other days, than we all did in nursing that little farm back to smiling health.

At Jack's suggestion, I always wore a pair of overalls. It wasn't any job for dresses, he said. And we certainly did have some jolly tussles with those bushes and gullies.

When we would start on a new ditch we would first select the likeliest places for our dams. Narrow places in the gully

worked best, we decided. There the banks would be close enough together to help give strength to our small dams.

We would make a bed of dry grass in the bottom of the ditch in the spot we had selected, pile weeds on top of the grass, then rocks on top of the weeds to hold them all down. Small brush came next; most of it with the bushy part pointed upstream. We'd pack that down as tightly as we could, and weight it with more rocks. And the big brush came next, and Jack and I had to put all our weight—his 135 pounds and my 115 pounds—on top of it all.

We'd scramble up on top of the brush, reach out and catch hands, and as Jack would yell, "Ride 'im, Cowboy!" we would both start jumping up and down with all our might and pounds until we had that brush packed down as tight as we could into the narrowest neck of the gully.

You can scarcely imagine the equilibrium required to "ride down" a brush pile into a gully unless you have tried the stunt yourself. It is a sport I can heartily recommend to anyone who is stout of heart and strong of muscle, this game of rehabilitating a bit of neglected land. The thrills that come as the game goes on are not to be compared with those from mere spectator sports.

Of course, we were not fooling ourselves when we bought that little, rundown farm. There would be many whacks of the axes and many shoves of the shovels between the farm as it was, and the farm we hoped to make—a neat, trim, well-

groomed, well-fenced bit of earth. There would be an inestimable number of backaches and muscular pains, and hundreds of scratched shins and thorn-stuck fingers between us and our goal. We knew well how heavy and rough were the rocks that had to be moved; how pesky were the roots and bushes that had to be cut; how hot the hayfields would be in July; how pitiable the crops would look during droughts. We knew all that and more.

Way back in my mind and deep down in my heart, I knew something that Jack hadn't figured out. If he would stick to the project, fill the ditches, cut the bushes, mend the fences, build the barn he planned, if he kept on using his head, his muscles, his Scots determination, and the advice of his Dad and the County Agent, he would make the little farm support itself. He would pay his way through Agricultural College and—what is more—he'd be a "real farmer."

Many times he'd come home, dog at heel, flop down on the back doorstep and say, "Well, I liked that little old place pretty well before we traded for it, but seems the more I do for it now, the better I like it."

I could understand very well what he meant. Margaret and I put our hopes of winter coats and summer dresses into that little old place and Dad took some rather proud walks over it, too. Any time he and the part-time hired man could be away from jobs on the home place they would go over and help with the rehabilitation project.

We decided that the place should have a name, and finding one for it was like trying to christen a new baby. Finally, because there was a leaning old apple tree in the front yard and a shaggy old one in the back yard, we decided that the name should be “Apple Rest,” although as Jack said, so far as he could see there’d be few apples and no rest on the place for quite a while.

Jack at that time was indeed a son of the soil. He loved the feel of the dirt beneath his feet, the sight and touch of growing things. Farming, in his estimation, ranked somewhere up near football and fishing, and he frankly announced that he would rather spend the summer with “Oscar,” our tractor, than go to New York, London, Hollywood, or South America—not that there was any prospect or opportunity of his going to any of those places.

Jack never did enjoy Algebra or English composition too much, but he did love to take a grubbing hoe and knock a prissy little persimmon bush to Kingdom Come. And it so happened that the little new farm needed ax and grubbing hoe more than math or English.

Saturdays, summer days, school holidays all found the boy, with dog at heel, tramping across a field with an ax, rake, briar-blade or shovel, and carrying a sack of seed, either grass or clover. “Just going over to groom her up a bit,” he would say.

Early mornings and late afternoons would find him rambling up and down fence rows with hoe in one hand and a bucket

of walnuts in the other, looking for rich pockets of soil where trees would be likely to grow.

But it was not always work. There was fun, also, in that formerly unloved farm.



### *Mis-carried Christmas Trees*

There was disagreement in our family at along about this time. It was all on the subject of cedar trees. Something there was in me that loved a cedar tree more than any other tree or shrub. I don't know what this love dated from—whether it was from memories of the twig of cedar that they dropped in Papa's grave; or whether it was from the cool shade and fragrant smell and the beautiful shape of the little cedar tree in Grandma Jones's back yard, the one where we children made a cemetery and buried with appropriate ceremonies every dead mouse, bird, doll, mole, rabbit, cat, or deceased object we could find.

But at any rate I loved a cedar, any kind of cedar, and Dad detested cedar, any kind of cedar. Cedars and rocks were his pet abominations, symbols of dire poverty, and he was determined that none of either should grow or rest on his farm.

I didn't realize how strongly he felt on the subject, or even how strongly I felt. But at any rate one Saturday afternoon, the children and I loaded Jack's little red wagon with a grubbing

hoe and several tow sacks and went to the woods to hunt cedars to fill in some bare spots in the yard.

Strange, but it seemed that the prettiest little trees had the deepest roots, and were in the most inaccessible places. We searched long and dug hard. Finally we had acquired and wrapped the roots of thirteen handsome cedar specimens and one thrifty looking “beech,” taller than either of the children and almost as tall as I. We planted the beech that afternoon, and left the cedars for Monday’s planting—but be it said here that the beech turned out to be a dogwood—something we would never have tried to move if we had known, for we had heard that dogwoods were hard to move. But we tried it, succeeded, and had blooms for our efforts.

We didn’t mention the cedars to Dad. Somehow we didn’t think he’d attach much importance to them. We knew he didn’t like them much, so we hadn’t even asked or expected him to go cedar-hunting with us, much less cedar digging.

That afternoon when we returned we kept the roots carefully wrapped, put the trees, sprouts, sacks and all, in a tub of water in the basement in a dark corner. Monday we started setting cedars. We’d have plenty of Christmas trees by next Christmas, we thought. And we did do some really hard digging that Monday—I was still sore from Saturday’s digging. We got our trees out before Dad came home from the field. But somehow we still didn’t mention them to him. We thought that if we

didn't say anything maybe he wouldn't notice. And we figured that what he didn't notice wouldn't distress him.

But cedar trees began to disappear. Disappeared completely. We couldn't think that the earth had opened up and swallowed them—although we had made those holes rather deep. We couldn't see that they had been dug up or that they had been chopped down.

We never mentioned the loss to Dad, nor did it occur to us that he had any knowledge of it. He just never had seemed to notice our small trees. He didn't seem to pay much attention to our diggings about the yard and garden. He was too busy farming.

But one Sunday afternoon the secret came out. We were all walking in the field next to the road, and there we came upon a sad looking little pile of cedar trees. There were all our little trees, or rather twelve out of the thirteen. The thirteenth was still by the kitchen door. Perhaps we had watched that too closely. But it turned out that Dad had made and followed a practice of taking with him one little tree every time he went out to that field. He just couldn't stand cedars and rocks, if he could help himself ... and he could.