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How An Afternoon Starts

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the back of the stove and took down a dishcloth to wipe off the table.

“WELL, Ellen —” Dad’s voice was more gentle than she’d ever heard it before. The kitchen was so warm and comfortable here with Mom and Dad. The brown boards had mattered so much! Long-restrained tears rolled down Ellen’s face as she wiped the table, her head bent far down over her cloth.

“I’m sorry, Dad.” Her throat wrung out the words that freed her whole being. The tears fell quietly on the table.

Several minutes later Ellen crossed over to the telephone near the door, picked up the phone book, and started thumbing through it.

“1617J.” She gave the number clearly and distinctly to the operator. The Harrises should be there by now.

“Hello? Mrs. Allen? This is Ellen, and I wondered if I might speak to Bill Harris.”

“Hi, Bill, how’s the town by now?”

“Seems swell to be back—Say, when would you like to come over for dinner?”

“Tomorrow night? Just a minute till I ask Mom if it’s O.K.”

Ellen turned to Mom, who was softly crying into the potatoes at the stove. Dad’s eyes crinkled slowly at the paper as he pulled his rocker nearer the stove and poked his glasses farther down his nose.

How An Afternoon Starts

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After dinner we are sprawled under a tree in the front yard, Dad, Joe and I.

“Boys!” It is Dad speaking.

“Uh?” We sleepily protest.

“Get the horses out.”

“O. K.,” mutters Joe.

There is a period of silence. Our collie stalks over to sniff at my hair. A couple of chickens, promenading in the grass, pause as if to wonder if pecking Dad on the ankle would be worth the excitement which might arise.

"Boys! Go on, now," urges Dad.

"N-n-n," someone drones. Maybe Joe, maybe me.

A small breeze is stirring the cottonwood leaves above our heads. I make a mental effort to rise. But then, hazily, I think, "How silly. That corn doesn't have to be plowed." So I doze off.

"Hey!" No mistaking that tone. Dad is sitting up now.

Joe rolls over and raises his head. "Ut time izit?"

"It's after one o'clock," declares Dad. "Let's clear out of here."

"Well, why don't you get up?" asks Joe.

"I'll be up when you are."

But Joe's head has dropped back. So Dad looks around, slaps at a fly and lies down again.

Suddenly I am wide awake. "Where are you guys going to work?" I ask.

No answer.

"Did anyone bring in the water jug?"

"No," Dad says.

"It's behind a post," adds Joe.

At last we are all awake. The collie is standing over Joe, panting loudly. A car drives past and we all sit up. It is nobody that we know.

Dad says, "Joe, better finish up that strip by the hedge, and take a look at the cattle while you're over by the creek pasture. Those little calves might not be finding the shade."

Joe is tying a shoelace.

Now we rise and hobble away stiffly. The collie barks. Another car drives past. Joe turns on the windmill, Dad fills the hog trough with water, and I go into the barn for the horses.

In a few minutes we are hitched and ready. I ask Joe, "Are you gonna wear a shirt?"

"Just taking it along."

"Hot this afternoon. Did you get your wrench from the well platform?"

"Yep."

"Take it easy with the mares," cautions Dad.

"S-s-t! Giddap!" The harness jingles, and we start for the cornfield, yawning.