

Prairie Lily and The Cherry Tomato Summer

By Leslie Davidson

CHAPTER ONE

“Duster!” hollered Dad.

“Duster!” echoed my big sister, Mary, and my big brother, Greg.

They rolled up their windows as fast as they could, before clouds of grey dust from the passing car smothered us.

That’s how it was the summer we drove all the way to the prairie to visit our grandparents. Once in a long while a duster car would roar along the narrow gravel road toward us. Fields of wheat, like a golden ocean, rolled along beside us. Dad and Mom and Rosie sat in the front seat with the whole world in front of them. Mary and Greg sat on either side of me, looking out their windows or reading comics. And me, I was squished in the middle with not much to see and nothing to do.

Dad usually saw the dust cloud first because his eyes were on the road. Mom never saw any dust clouds, even though she was in the front seat, because she had our baby sister, Rosie, in her lap. Rosie kept her busy. If Rosie fell asleep, my mom usually closed her eyes, too.

I couldn't see the car coming because I am only nine years old and too short to see anything except the blue sky through the top of the windshield. I can see more if I stand on the big bump in the middle of the car floor but standing up for too long in the car makes me throw up. When I throw up in the car, everyone gets mad at me, even though I can't help it.

I don't like throwing up and I don't like being short.

“Small for her age, isn't she?”

That's what people say, right in front of me. Greg is thirteen years old and he is tall for his age. People say that, too. Greg doesn't mind. Mary is twelve and no one ever says anything about her size. Instead they say how pretty and polite she is.

I can't read in the car either. Reading is the other thing that makes me throw up. Mary and Greg can read in the car. When that last car dusted us, Mary was reading a comic book. And I was trying to take a quick peek at the pictures of Archie and Jughead. I love comic books. The story is all boxed up in little squares, like presents on paper.

“Mom, mom...please make her stop! She's looking at my comic book and you know what'll happen. She'll barf for sure!” Mary complained.

“Lily, honey, please be sensible.”

I get asked to be sensible about a hundred times a day. A long time ago I figured out that being sensible means NEVER having any fun.

“Lileee!” Mary whined, when I tried to take one last quick look at her comic.

“Oh for Pete’s sake,” I muttered.

“Lily Adele...if you get sick...” Mom warned.

“Oh-oh,” I thought to myself. “Two-named.”

Mom only two-names me when she’s mad. She two-names Mary and Greg, too, only not nearly as often. Mary’s two-name is Mary Helena. Greg’s is Gregory John. The baby never gets two-named because no one ever gets mad at her but she has a two-name. It is Rose Isabel.

Mary smacked her comic shut with a loud sigh.

“Never mind, Mom,” she called, while rolling her eyes at me, “I’ll put it away.”

“Thank you, Mary.”

Sometimes Mary is so goody-good she makes me want to scream.

Two seconds later, I really did scream! Mary screamed, too because a big “whump”, like an explosion, shook our car.

“Dad!” Greg shouted.

The car bumped and lurched like a wild thing. Bangs and thumps rattled my teeth.

“Sit down, Lily!” Mom shrieked, even though I wasn’t standing up.

Rosie started to cry.

“It’s OK. It’s Ok!” Mom tried to hush her but Mom was scared, too.

Rosie sobbed harder. Mary pulled me to her, tight and close.

“What’s happening? What’s happening?” she cried.

“Hang on!” Greg shouted while the car flung itself across the road in crazy, snaking curves.

I clung to Mary. I know I was squealing.

Only Dad was quiet. He drove that crazy car and fought to slow us down.

All this was happening at once, when we got the flat tire on the prairie. All this and big clouds of dust coming in because nobody hollered, “Duster.”

CHAPTER TWO

“We can’t stay here!” Dad exclaimed.

He clutched the steering wheel and peered out through the windshield.

We had bucked to a halt. The dust came in on us like rain.

We were sitting right in the middle of the road. Dad shoved his door open and jumped out. He walked quickly around the car. It was resting, tilted, with Dad’s side low and Mom’s side high. The blue sky, through the windshield, ran uphill instead of straight across.

Mom scrambled out with Rosie. Mary and Greg slipped out their doors. I had to struggle into my shoes and by the time I crawled out I was alone on my side of the car. Everyone had run around to look at the tire that blew up. Before I had a chance to see, Dad sent them all back to my side of the road.

“I’ve got to move it now. Stay behind the car, off the road,” he said.

“Lily, stay with Mary,” Mom ordered.

Mary grabbed my hand. We watched as Dad bumped the car to the shoulder of the road, as close to the wheat field as he could get. Mary and Greg talked excitedly about the flat tire and Mary let go of me.

Dad got out of the car, and stood with the car door open, looking at the tire again. I REALLY wanted to see that blown-up tire so I scooted around the front of the car, to the other side. I was standing behind Dad as he squatted down to look at the damage.

“Car coming!” Greg hollered.

Dad stood quickly and backed up to slam the car door shut. He bumped into me and grunted in surprise. I flew backwards and sat down hard on the ground behind him. Gravel stung my hands. I couldn’t catch my breath. The car thundered toward us. Dad grabbed me up and swung me as he whirled back to the car. He flung my back against the door. He tried to cover me with his body while the duster car, with its hot wind and stinging gravel, raced past. My heart banged in my chest. Sound roared in my ears. We stayed that way for a long long minute, flattened against the car, my head above his shoulder.

Finally, he put me down in front of him.

“Are you all right?”

I couldn't answer.

“ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?”

I nodded yes, though I didn't know. I didn't know if I was all right or not.

His hands were tight on my shoulders now.

“I ought to shake you silly! Are you trying to get yourself killed?”

Mom with Rosie in her arms, and Mary and Greg rushed to the front of the car.

“I had her Dad, honest I did. And then she was just gone!” Mary sobbed.

“Lily,” Mom cried, “Lily.” She hugged me to her side. “Daniel, I'm so sorry. I should have been watching!”

Dad didn't answer her. He just shook his head.

“Dad, that car stopped down the road,” Greg said quietly.

“Run and tell them we're fine, Greg.”

Greg took off down the roadside.

Mom tugged me way off the road. I was almost waist deep in the wheat before she stopped. Mary came and took Rosie who howled when Mom let her go. I could hear Mary soothing her as Mom swiped at the dirt on my face and in my hair and checked my hands and knees. She rubbed her hands over my head and back and down my arms. Her lips were tight, her face white.

“ Are you SURE you’re ok, Lily?”

“Uh-huh.”

My eyes burned with the dust but I didn’t dare tell her

“ Then you stay here. You stay here until I say you can move.”

She turned to walk away and then she stopped and whirled around to face me.

“We have to talk about this, Lily Adele. We’re too busy now but we have to talk about this.”

“I know,” I whispered and she left me there in the wheat field.

Dad popped open the trunk. He looked at all the stuff piled inside and groaned loudly enough for me to hear. Mom and Greg rushed to help him unload.

And with everything that happened after, we never did have that talk.

Chapter Three

“Cumulonimbus,” I said to myself, “storm clouds.”

I remembered that from science class.

“Cumulonimbus.”

It was good to think of that grown-up word. It was good to think of something other than the flat tire and my big mistake

I had turned my face to the fields of wheat so no one could see me and I couldn't see anything but that golden ocean, blurred by hot tears.

I stood in the field long enough for the tears to wash the dust from my eyes and leave them feeling dry and swollen. I stood long enough for great, tumbling clouds to grow, far away on the horizon. I stood long enough for the cloud's black shadows to roll themselves out and over the fields of wheat.

I half-listened to the sounds of the tire being changed. I heard the hubcap clang to the ground. I heard Greg's grunts and thumps as he jumped on the jack handle to loosen the nuts on the old tire. Even that didn't make me want to turn around.

I heard Dad say “atta boy” and “good job” to Greg as he set the new tire on the axle and tightened the bolts. And every time I heard someone call “Car!” my stomach lurched.

I heard Rosie fuss and Mary sing to her. I heard Mom say, “ Well, I guess it’s peanut butter and honey sandwiches...” as she slammed the cooler lid shut.

It was as if all these things happened in a dream, or to someone else’s family. I just stood and watched the sky and the clouds, and the shadows on the wheat, until Mom called me.

“Lily! Come and eat!”

I wanted to be left alone to stand in the field. I didn’t want to face them, any of them, but I knew if I didn’t go, it would just get worse. So, I turned and walked past the car where Greg and Dad were working. They couldn’t see me and I didn’t call to them. Mary and Mom were crowded into the patchy shade of a scrubby tree, up the road a way, at the edge of the wheat field. Rosie slept in Mary’s lap.

“Dad and Greg are finishing up,” Mom told me. “ I want you to eat something now because there won’t be another chance until Grandma’s.”

She handed half a sandwich up to me.

“I can’t, Mom.”

“Okay,” she sighed after a moment, not even bothering to argue. “At least sit down, Lily, and drink some water. And get in the shade.”

She squished over to make room and I sat down. Warm wind was tossing the wheat and lifting the hair from our hot foreheads.

“That breeze is a blessing,” she said squinting in the direction of the clouds. “Heaven help us if it’s bringing rain.”

There were more clouds now. They were gathering very quickly, heaping up in enormous white towers and growing black on the bottom. Soon the sun disappeared as the wall of tumbled clouds covered the sky. The wind was growing stronger and tried to steal our paper cups and napkins. Mom and I grabbed them and she stuffed them deep into the picnic basket.

Then, Mom hopped up and ran to the car. Dad and Greg were standing now, wiping their hands on their shorts. I could see the three of them looking at the sky. Before Mom was back to our spot under the tree, lightning flashed far away, right on the edge of seeing. Mary started to count in whispers.

“One, two, three, four five...”

She was still counting when Mom walked up.

“...twenty-nine, thirty...”. A roll of thunder stopped her counting. Rosie woke up, whimpered, and reached for Mom.

“Thirty seconds, divided by five,” Mary said. “ Six miles, Mom, that lightning is six miles away.”

“I hope we’ve got time to get on the road again.”

Mom sounded worried.

“Mary, will you try to keep Rosie happy for just a few more moments? Thank you, sweetheart. Lily, help me gather this stuff up.”

I grabbed the picnic basket and bent for the big glass water jar.

“No! You’ve got enough in your hands. That’s all the water we have until Grandma’s,” she said.

I waited while she shook and folded the blanket. She let me carry the blanket. Mary balanced Rosie on one hip and headed back toward the car. She had the water jar tucked under her other arm.

Lightning forked across the sky again, closer and brighter. I started to count.

“Get in the car with her, Mary!” Mom called.

Mary trotted to the car and Mom and I followed. All our stuff was still piled beside the open trunk. Dad was struggling to fit the old tire into a compartment in the bottom of the trunk and Greg was waiting to hand him the jack. Nothing could be packed in the trunk until they were finished.

Mom started organizing the stuff on the ground, trying to sort it out for repacking. I stood with the picnic basket and the blanket in my arms, still counting.

“Twenty-four,” I whispered as the thunder rumbled.

Mary hollered out the car window but the booms and crashes ate her words.

“What?” called Mom as she heaved boxes around.

“She’s wet through and she threw up,” Mary shouted when the thunder had rolled itself out. “There are no clean diapers in the diaper bag. She’s a real mess, Mom!”

“Oh gosh! Bring her here, Mary! Lily, dump that stuff and spread out the blanket for me.”

Mom grabbed Rosie and laid her on her back. Rosie screamed with rage. Mary crouched down to help hold her still while Mom wrestled her out of her diaper, rubber pants and sundress.

Dad grabbed a suitcase to pack into the trunk.

“No, Dan,” Mom shrieked, “Not that suitcase or the diaper box. I need more diapers and clean clothes. And the wet washcloth, Lily, in the diaper bag...”

A big clap of thunder startled Rosie into silence, then screams of terror. No one had time anymore to watch for lightning or to count down the thunder.

Chapter Four

“Greg, help me,” Mary shouted.

Lightning flashes lit the sky. Each time I held my breath until the thunder rumbled. The storm raced across the prairie. It raced toward us like an angry beast. The wind whipped around us. It tugged at our clothing and hair.

I watched Greg clumsily gather up Mary’s long brown curls and hold them at the back of her neck while she struggled to control Rosie.

Why didn’t she ask me?

Mom was washing Rosie who sobbed and fought both Mom and Mary.

“Maddie, what can I pack?” Dad called impatiently.

“Nothing yet! Please, Dan, just give me a moment.”

Dad threw up his hands and stomped around to the front of the car. The hood popped up and I guessed he was checking the oil.

“I need a clean diaper and another pair of rubber pants!” Mom called breathlessly, “and clean clothes for her...”

“I’ll do it. I’ll do it!” I cried.

I ran to the pile of luggage. I looked at three cardboard boxes. I didn’t know which one was for diapers.

“NOW, Lily!” Mom shouted over the wind and Rosie’s howls.

“I’ll get them, Mom,” Greg yelled.

I wanted to be the one to help. This was MY job! I yanked on the flaps of the box nearest to me. I had to pull hard and all four flaps popped up at once. There were no diapers, just stacks of paper.

“What?” I thought in surprise. “What’s this?”

Before I had time to take a closer look, the wind snatched the top paper and whipped it right out of the box. Hundreds more seemed to follow it. Greedy, invisible hands grabbed and tossed the papers up. They flung them out into the road and across the prairie on the other side. Greg froze and stared. Papers. Papers flying. White papers, covered in typewriter marks.

“Lily!” Greg shouted. Then, “Dad! Dad!”

“Oh no! Oh no!”

Mom’s voice rose on the wind in a thin wail, higher even than Rosie’s screams. She scooped up Rosie and ran toward me. But Dad was there first. He dove at the box. He slammed down the flaps and tucked them in.

“WHAT ... WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!” he roared. Then he flung himself in the other direction, across the road. He chased after the white sheets that danced across the wheat fields. Greg ran after him but I couldn’t move. I could only watch the white papers flying, like white seagulls over the wide prairie ocean.

Lightning cracked the dark sky, spilling the first fat drops of rain. Seconds later thunder roared. Mom thrust poor naked Rosie into Mary’s arms.

“In the car with her, Mary. Now!”

Then I knew. I knew what was on the white seagull papers that I had let fly out over the wheat fields.

“His book, Lily Adele,” Mom said, grabbing my shoulders, her voice choking on the words, “Dad’s book.”

I stared at my mom and she stared at me.

I wanted to say, “I’m sorry.” I wanted to say, “I didn’t know what box to look in,” but my brain could only chatter, “no, no, no, no...”

The next flash of lightning lit up the wheat field. Mom looked in horror to where Dad and Greg ran through the wheat in wild zigzags, chasing the papers. I saw Dad shout at Greg and they both dropped to the ground. The thunderclap that followed, it fell on top of us. It wanted to shatter the world.

Mom grabbed my hand and we flew to the car. She pitched me onto the seat and dove in after. She slammed the door shut.

Mary held Lily tight, her hands over Lily’s ears.

“Dad and Greg...” Mary said. Tears streamed down her face. “I’m scared, Mom.”

“You’re dad will look after Greg, honey. You know he will.”

I wrapped my arms around myself to try and stop the shaking, to stop my heart from leaping out of my chest.

The next thunderclap that followed was even worse, louder, longer, angrier. Mary hugged and rocked Rosie. Rosie sobbed in terror.

“It’s ok, baby, it’s ok,” Mary whispered through her tears.

I slid close to Mom. I turned my face and buried it in her wet sleeve. I braced myself for the next crashing boom. I squeezed my eyes tight and curled into Mom but when it fell, it came from a distance, as if someone had closed the door on the thunder room.

“Lily, let go. Let go!” Mom said. “It’s moving on. The worst is over.”

She peeled me off her arm and pushed me into sitting up straight.

“It’s travelling fast, thank goodness!”

She started to open the door.

“No, Mom,” Mary and I begged.

“Girls, I have to,” she pleaded, “in need to see...” and she was gone.

Mary rocked Rosie, wrapping her arms around her. Rosie's crying settled in shudders. Rain kept a steady drumbeat on the roof and giant drops slid down the windows. The thunder took itself off to an even farther place. I slid across the seat and out the door after my mom. My legs shook so badly I could hardly walk.

I made myself look. I squinted through the curtain of rain, at the wheat field across the road. But Dad and Greg were still there, on their feet, moving slowly across the prairie.

"They're OK," I told myself to stop the gathering tears. "They're OK."

Then, I held out my arms for the things Mom was quickly collecting. Wordlessly, she piled diapers, rubber pants, and clean clothes for Rosie in my hands.

"Wait," she said as I turned to go back to the car.

I stopped and hunched over Rosie's things to try and keep them dry.

She dug into the cooler and pulled out a bottle of juice.

I crawled in behind the steering wheel and handed Rosie the bottle. She grabbed it eagerly and lay back on Mary.

“Dad and Greg, they’re OK,” I told Mary.

She breathed a great heaving sigh and rocked Rosie gently.

I tried to fold a diaper on my lap but it wouldn’t smooth out. I tried and tried but I couldn’t get the folds to go where I wanted. Mary slipped Rosie on to the seat beside her, then took the diaper out of my hands. She spread it out on the dashboard, and whipped it into shape, ready for Rosie. The diaper picked up dust from the dashboard and left a mark where it had been. Mary rubbed the dust from it.

“Move over,” she said and I flattened myself against the door.

Rain drummed on the car roof and I could hear the thumps and bumps as Mom packed the trunk. Mary laid Rosie gently on her back, on the seat between us, and slipped the diaper under her.

“Pins,” she said, “I need pins.”

I dug through the diaper bag but couldn’t find any of the big safety pins for Rosie’s diaper. I slipped out and ran to Mom. She was bent over the trunk, trying to shift the biggest suitcase toward the back. Her hair was plastered to her head and her dress was dripping.

“Pins!” I gasped.

“In the diaper bag!” she snapped.

“No...I looked.”

She patted her pockets and looked on the ground, where she had tried to change Rosie.

No pins.

Oh, dear God,” she moaned and she stopped. She stood still, her wet face slumped forward, her arms rigid on the edge of the trunk. She stayed that way until I touched her elbow.

“Pins, Mom, ” I begged.

She shoved herself upright. She grabbed and lifted the suitcase. She half-turned to drop it on the ground when she caught herself.

“There’s extras in the glove box,” she said.

“In the glove box,” I told Mary as soon as I opened the car door.

Mary held the diaper on Rosie with one hand and rummaged through the glove box with the other. It was a long, hard stretch for her.

“ I’ll hold the diaper,” I said softly.

Without a word, she let go of Rosie, found the safety pins and slipped them into the diaper. Rosie pulled the bottle from her mouth and arched her head back to grin her two-tooth grin at me. There were still giant teardrops on her cheeks. Then she grinned at Mary.

“Oh Rosie,” Mary laughed softly, “what would we do without you?”

Chapter Five

“Back seat, Lily,” my mom ordered as she opened the front passenger door.

I climbed over and took my spot in the middle. Mary slid in beside me. Mom sat in her spot in the front, more clean diapers in her arms. She toweled her hair and wiped her face with a diaper. She shoved the dirty diaper and clothing into a pocket in the diaper bag. Then she finished dressing Rosie.

“Thank you, Mary,” she said turning a sad, weary smile in the direction of the back seat.

We all jumped when Dad and Greg pulled open the car doors. They fell into the car. We hadn’t seen them coming. We hadn’t heard them coming. Then suddenly, there they were. Water ran off their hair and faces. They hugged raggedy sheets of wet, white papers to their chests.

Mom looked at Dad but he just stared straight ahead.

“Give them to me, Dan.”

Our dad looked at the mess in his lap for a minute and then handed them over.

“Greg, love, let’s see what you’ve got.”

The papers in Greg’s hands dripped on me as he passed them over the back of the seat. I could see what the rain had done to all the typewriter marks. They didn’t look like letters anymore but like spills of juice, like black tears.

My mom looked through the papers in her lap. The black got all over her fingers and she wiped them on the diaper.

“Honey, I am so sorry. There’s just nothing here...the rain...”

Dad didn’t talk for a long time. Mom just looked down, wiping her eyes, catching her breath. Then, a strangled sob broke the silence.

“Dan...?”

“I don’t know what to do, Maddie.”

His voice was broken. Mary caught her breath and shot a look at Greg. Greg was rigid, staring straight ahead.

Mary’s hand covered her mouth. Greg stared. Mom’s face told her sorrow. Then she reached out her hand and placed it on Dad’s cheek.

The words were there, rattling in my brain, begging to be spoken.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”

I couldn’t let them out. I don’t why. I just couldn’t.

“Dan,” she said gently after a few minutes, “let’s go now. Let’s get to Mom and Dad’s.

We’ll figure all this out later. We’re just worn out, that’s all.”

We waited some more.

He lifted his head. Mom took back her hand. He straightened his back and started the car. Mary took her hand from her mouth. Greg’s shoulders softened.

The car rolled out onto the road.

“Well,” he said, with a bitter laugh, “so far so good.”

The storm left as suddenly as it had come. The rain stopped hammering on the roof and we opened the windows to release the foggy air. The field was a magic place with clouds of steam rising up out of the gold. I could still see sheets of paper, not flying anymore, appearing and disappearing, in the after-the-rain-time on the prairie.

Chapter Six

“I wouldn’t have known which box to open either,” Greg whispered, his head bent down close to mine.

He pulled out a comic.

“I could read to you, Lily,” he said softly.

I shook my head no.

For a long time we drove along that straight gravel road. Rosie fell asleep. Greg and Mary huddled in their corners. No more duster cars came our way.

The sun was getting low in the sky, forcing my dad to squint. It was hot in the car but no one complained. It would have felt better if someone had. It would have felt normal.

Mary rested her head against the edge of the open window and closed her eyes.

Then, Greg closed his comic book and leaned his head against the window frame. Like Mary, he seemed to drift into sleep.

I lay back on the seat and shut my eyes against the sadness. I wished for sleep that never came.

Then I heard Mom and Dad. They were whisper talking in the front seat.

“She just doesn’t think,” Dad said.

“Let it rest, Daniel.”

“She was almost killed!”

“I know.”

“Does she even know what she’s done? Is she sorry?”

His voice rose and settled as he struggled to stay quiet.

“She hasn’t even said sorry!”

“Dan, please, you’ll wake them all. What will this solve?”

“It’s like another day for her...like all she did was lose her shoes or...”

“No, she hasn’t said sorry,” Mom cut him off. “She hasn’t said anything. Not one word, Daniel. After the car...when she almost...I stuck her in that field in the hot sun and left her. It was cruel, and I did that to her. I just wanted her out of the way. She didn’t say a thing. Have you heard her move in the last hour? This is Lily, Dan, mile a minute Lily. It’s ninety degrees in here and she is sitting in the back of this car with her face as white as a ghost.”

He didn’t answer. I felt sick, like I might throw up. I tried taking deep silent breaths. And then Mary reached over and touched my leg, just a quick and gentle pat. But I didn’t dare look at her.

Mom went on. Her hot whispered words were flying now, like trapped, frantic birds.

“Do you think she doesn’t feel this? We all feel this! Think about it. She was just trying to help. I asked her to get me a diaper and she opened the wrong box. How could she know? So if you have to blame someone, blame me. That makes just as much sense!”

For a moment I thought my dad was going to pull over and stop the car. But he didn’t. He just kept driving. I opened my eyes.

Rosie woke up and squirmed herself into standing on Mom’s lap. Mom covered her eyes to play peek-a-boo.

“Where’s Rosie?” Mom said over and over again. She wiped away her own tears as Rosie shrieked with happiness.

“There she is! There she is!”

Chapter Seven

“Thank goodness!”

Mom leaned forward to get a better look of the grain elevators that stood guard on the edge of Grandma and Grandpa’s town. They shone pink in the sunset distance.

“There’s Grandma!” Mary said happily as we turned the corner onto my grandparents’ street.

“John! John! They’re here!” Grandma called.

That made our mom laugh. Dad says that Grandma Lena’s voice can wake Alberta if the wind is right. Dad parked the car in front of the house and Grandma reached out to open the car doors. Grandpa was with her now. We all piled out and Grandma started talking.

“We were starting to worry. It was getting so late. That storm would have slowed you down. Are you hungry? Of course, you are. Gracious Greg, your shorts are all wet. And your dress, Madeline? You weren’t out in the storm, were you? Rosie, little Rosie, we have been waiting so long to meet you. Give that baby to me. John, isn’t she the spitting image of Daniel? My, she’s warm. Does she seem over-warm to you, Maddie?”

Oh my goodness, look at these two big kids. And where's my little Lily. Oh, sweetie, still just a half-pint, aren't you. John, help Dan with the luggage. Everyone inside. In with you, now."

"Madeline!" Grandma stopped in her tracks.

"Are you not well? You look exhausted."

And this time our grandma waited for an answer.

"It's been a long trip...and a very hard day, Mom. I'll tell you later, ok?"

Then with Lily on her hip and one arm around Mom's shoulder, Grandma led the way into the kitchen.

The kitchen in my grandparent's house is big, big enough for the big round wooden table, big enough for an old woodstove and a new electric stove, big enough for a sofa against one wall and a row of hooks for coats and hats and things against another wall.

In that big kitchen Grandma hustled back and forth from the fridge to the table, from the cupboards to the table, with Rosie on her hip. She placed a plate piled with cinnamon buns in front of Mary. Mary passed them out, one to Greg, one to me, and one for herself. Grandma always made cinnamon buns for our visits, even on hot days.

“Before dinner, Mom!” our mom protested.

“Just this once won’t hurt, Madeline. It’s late and they must be half-starved.”

Greg was already unrolling his bun to show off the thick layer of cinnamon and sugar, all speckled with raisins. He was tearing off little squares and stuffing them into his mouth. Mary cut hers in two before taking a bite.

“Oh Grandma,” she said, “sooooo good.”

Greg nodded in agreement but his mouth was too full for talking. I looked at the bun on the napkin in front of me. It was beautiful but I just couldn’t touch it.

What’s the matter, Lily? Not feeling good? It’s not like you to pass up a cinnamon bun...”

Grandma stood behind me and slid her hands down the side of my face.

“I think she just needs some sleep, Mom,” said my mom. “I am going to take her up.”

“Into the boys old room then, Maddie,” Grandma said as she kissed the top of my head.

“Lily and Mary can sleep in the double bed and the extra luggage can go on the single.”

The stairs in Grandma's house start right in the kitchen, behind a door.

"You girls have the best room in the house," Mom said as we climbed the wooden stairs.

"I was always jealous of the boys for having it.

She pushed open the bedroom door and walked to the window.

"In the spring, that old apple tree is just a vision and the smell is beautiful, Lily. When the boys were growing up, by late summer they could reach out the window and snag apples right off the tree. That's how your Uncle Greg broke his arm, you know. Stephen and Art were supposed to hold on to him but someone slipped up and out Greg went. He pulled an old trellis off the wall on his way down and it slowed his fall...and that's what saved him."

"Grandma was so angry, Lily. Once she knew Greg was going to be ok, she just hit the roof with those boys. I remember Doc Anderson trying to calm her down when he came to set Greg's arm but she wasn't having any of it. Your granddad didn't say a thing. He just climbed that tree and took off all the branches that grew anywhere near the window."

She handed me my pajamas and took my clothes.

"C'mon, honey, let's get you into bed."

“But Grandma got over it and Greg’s arm healed and even the branches have grown back,” she said as she tucked me in.

“Tomorrow is a brand new day, Lily, my love,” she whispered as she bent to kiss my forehead. Then she walked quietly from the room.

I wondered if my dad would come up and kiss me goodnight. I worried about what he might say if he did. Then, I worried that my words would stay stuck always. I worried I would never get the “sorry” out and my dad would be angry with me forever.

And I couldn’t make the papers stop flying in my head, the papers that I let blow away, my dad’s book. He has been writing that book since before I was born. I can’t even imagine such a long, long time. Most nights at home, if I wake up, I can hear the tapping of his typewriter keys, loud in the dark. I like that, hearing our dad typing and knowing he is still awake.

That night there was no typewriter to tap me to sleep. And my dad never came. I curled around my upset tummy and begged it to settle down. I felt Mary crawl in beside me. Soon she was breathing softly in the dark. I stared at the ceiling.

“Tomorrow is a brand new day.” I repeated it over and over. “Tomorrow is a brand new day.”

Chapter Eight

“Here she is!” Grandma said as I quietly pushed open the door at the bottom of the kitchen stairs. “Come give me a hug, sweetheart.”

She was standing at the stove scrambling eggs. She pulled me to her with one hand and held me close.

“How are you doing this morning? Think you can eat?”

“Maybe.”

“Well, I certainly hope so because I saved you a cinnamon bun,” she answered briskly.

“Will you call everyone in for breakfast, Lily?” she asked as she let me go. “Mary’s out front picking sweet peas. I think your mom and dad are in the front room. Grandpa and Greg are in the backyard.”

I looked out at Greg and Grandpa. They were sitting on the bench beneath the apple tree with the chessboard between them.

“Hi Lily,” Greg called. “I’m finally beating Grandpa, fair and square, right Grandpa?”

“That you are, young Greg,” Grandpa smiled.

Then, he opened his arms out to me and I was in them in a flash. I wished I could have stayed forever, safe inside my grandpa’s hug.

“I’m glad you’re here, Lil,” he whispered as he let me go.

“Me, too.”

Then I remembered what I was supposed to be doing.

“Grandma says to come for breakfast. I have to go get the rest of them.”

I turned and ran back into the house. I stopped short in the doorway to the front room. Mom sat on the sofa with Rosie in her lap. Dad was on the floor at her feet with the box of papers, the box from the storm, open in front of him. Neat piles of paper stood beside it. A wastepaper basket stood in the corner. It was full to overflowing with the papers Dad and Greg had saved on the prairie.

I tried to turn away before they saw me but Rosie wouldn’t let me.

“Yeeyeeeee,” she called.

“Morning, Lily,” Mom called. She still sounded tired.

Dad looked up, half-smiled, and turned his attention back to the box and the piles of paper around it.

“Grandma...Grandma says breakfast is ready,” I stammered and I fled out the front door in search of Mary.

She was coming up the porch steps with a big bouquet of sweet peas, coloured like jewels, and the smell of them came up the steps ahead of her.

“ Look, Lily, aren’t they beautiful,” she said.

“Uh-huh.”

“I’m going to ask Mom if we can have some in our garden next year.”

“Do we have a garden?” I asked.

“Well, not really, but we could have one I bet, if you and me made one.”

Then Mary took some of the flowers in a bunch and handed them to me with a smile on her face that looked just like our mom.

In the kitchen, everyone was already around the table and Grandma took our flowers and put them right in the middle, where she had a vase waiting.

“I saved you a seat, Lily,” said my grandpa, patting the chair beside him.

Grandma put a boiled egg in an eggcup and two thin strips of toast, toast soldiers we call them, on a plate in front of me. That’s my favourite way to eat eggs, dipping the toast soldiers into the yolk.

“I thought you might like yours like this, sweetheart. Get it down and then you can try the cinnamon bun,” she said.

“Thank you, Grandma.”

The knot in my stomach wouldn’t untie itself but I did my best with the egg and toast. I knew I could never eat the cinnamon bun, too.

Rosie fussed and wouldn’t stop so Mom left the table with her. With worried eyes, Grandma watched them as Mom climbed the stairs. Greg cleaned up all the leftover eggs and toast on the table and looked around with an “I’m still hungry” face. I told him he could have my cinnamon bun.

“Really, Lily?” he asked. “Thanks! Do you want half, Mary?...you sure? Dad?...there’s plenty for two. Grandpa?...I don’t mind. Grandma?”

With each “no thanks” and shake of the head, Greg’s grin got bigger. Grandpa chuckled and Grandma was laughing out loud by the time he got to her.

“ Oh, Greg,” she said, “What would you have done if I had say “yes, please.”

“I’d have said pass me a knife please, Grandma, so I can cut it in two,” Greg said calmly.

“Yes, I’m sure you would have,” Grandma agreed as she pushed herself away from the table.

“It was good of you to think of your brother, sweetheart,” she said smiling at me.

The knot untied just a little and then I looked at my dad. He wasn’t laughing or even smiling. He looked weary and far away.

“I think this feels like a brand new day for Greg and Mary,” I thought to myself. “That’s good.”

I wondered about my mom upstairs with cranky Rosie. Did it feel like a brand new day to her? And what about my dad? What about me?

Chapter Nine

“Lily,” Dad said. “What are you doing?”

My head snapped up in surprise. I’d been sitting on the bottom step of the kitchen stairs for a long time. I thought if I sat very still nothing more, nothing more that was bad, could happen.

I shrugged my shoulders.

“Where is everyone?”

“Grandma and Mary are in the basement.”

It was hard to talk him.

“They’re doing the wash,” I said.

I had to take a big breath before I could get the rest out.

“Greg’s playing chess with himself. Grandpa went to work. I think Mom and Rosie are upstairs ...”

“Oh,” he said. “And you?”

I shrugged again. The knot tightened in my tummy. My heart thumped.

“Lil, I need to talk to you...about yesterday.”

“Uh-huh.”

Look at me, please, Lily.”

He leaned against the doorframe and looked down at me. I raised my eyes to his but I could hardly see. His face swam on the other side of the tears.

“You know, when...oh no, Lily, there is no need to look like that.”

I bit my lip and straightened my back, trying hard to be brave, to keep my eyes on his face.

“We all make mistakes, Lil,” he continued softly. “Grown-ups, too. It wasn’t your fault about the book. You were doing what Mom asked you to do. Right?”

I nodded.

“The wind wasn’t your fault. The rain wasn’t your fault.”

This time it was my dad who took the big breath.

“It was such a lot of hard work that blew away.” He paused. “And I got very upset, Lily. I shouldn’t have...”

The knot unraveled a little bit. It let loose the words stuck in my throat. It let loose more tears.

“I’m sorry, Dad. I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I’m sorry...”

My dad squished himself beside me on that bottom step and held me tight until the sobbing stopped. He pulled out his handkerchief and I blew my nose.

“I’m sorry, too,” he said as he wiped my tears away with his thumb.

Hope flowed into the silence that followed. I made myself ask the question.

“Your book? Dad, what will you do?”

“That, my girl, is the million dollar question.”

“Do you know WHY I brought it?” he asked after a long pause.

I shook my head.

“Well, I’d finally finished it, Lily. And an old friend of mine, a war buddy, has started a publishing house in Saskatoon. That’s a business where they make books for stores and libraries. He wants to see my book.”

“That I let blow away!”

“That blew away,” he said.

“What will you do?” I asked again.

“Well,” he said, “yesterday I was ready to give up, and try to forget that I’d ever written it.”

“Oh no,” I moaned.

“That was exactly what your mother said...only not as quietly. And then she pointed out that I wasn’t the only one who had written that book. You know, your mom has gone to sleep on the sofa in the living room almost every night for ten years so I could work in

the bedroom. Everyone in our family has helped me write that book, Lily. You looked after each other when I was too busy, trying to be a writer, to look after you.”

Then he threw up his hands.

“She said she didn’t marry a quitter,” he said.

“Mom said that?”

“Mom said that.”

“Oh.”

“So I guess quitting isn’t a choice I get to make. And she’s got your grandparents on her side, too. I might be able to face down your mother and grandfather but there’s no way that I am man enough to take on Grandma Lena.”

Dad chuckled at that, stretched out his legs, and stood up.

“So today, Lily, I guess what I will do... is think about how to fix this book mess.”

He didn’t look happy at the thought. He looked tired. But he wasn’t angry anymore.

“I just talked to my friend on the phone,” Dad went on. His name is Stephen and tomorrow I am driving to Saskatoon...”

I never heard the rest of my dad’s plans. Mom appeared suddenly at the top of the stairs, with Rosie in her arms.

“She’s burning up with fever, Dan!” she cried.

Chapter Ten

“Grandma! Mom needs you. Rosie’s sick!”

I met Grandma and Mary right at the top of the basement stairs. Grandma carried a big basket full of wet diapers. Without a word Grandma plopped the basket on the kitchen table. Mary and I followed her upstairs. Rosie was lying on the big bed, stripped down to her diaper. Mom was washing her down with a washcloth. Rosie whimpered and wiggled away, hitting at Mom’s hands.

“Shall I call the doctor?” Dad said.

“No. It’s probably just a cold coming...or maybe even a tooth... I’ve just got to get her cooled down and this heat doesn’t help.”

Grandma laid her hand on Rosie’s cheek.

“Gracious. Like hot paper,” she exclaimed. “When did this start?”

“She was warm yesterday but she seemed fine. She was warm when I put her down after breakfast... but not like this.”

Mom turned her attention back to our baby. Grandma stood and thought for the quickest of seconds. Then she was all business.

“Dan, get the big tin tub out of the shed. We’ll fill it with water and let the fan blow over it. Girls, think you can hang up those diapers? Be sure to shake them smooth before you peg them out. Madeline, go run a lukewarm bath for her. That’ll work best. Go on girls, she’s going to need dry diapers!”

In the yard I shook the diapers out and handed them up to Mary. Dad and Greg headed back to the house with the tub and a couple of pails. Mary worked in silence. We could hear Rosie’s howls through the open bathroom window.

“Is Rosie going to be all right?” I asked Mary as I handed up the last diaper.

“Of course!” she snapped angrily. “What a silly question!”

She picked up the basket and disappeared into the house.

I didn’t know why Mary was angry with me. And the knot in my stomach tightened once again.

Rosie finally slept. Mom joined us for lunch around the big round table.

“Dan, this changes nothing,” she said. “You go to the city.”

“I don’t think so, Maddie, with Rosie sick...”

“Daniel, I’ve looked after sick kids before!”

“I know, Maddie, but...”

“You go, Daniel.”

She used her “I mean it” voice.

“And I think you should take Mary and Greg.” Mom wasn’t finished.

“What?” Greg mumbled through a mouthful of sandwich.

“No, Mom,” said Mary. “I can help with Rosie.”

“That’s exactly why you should go, Mary,” Mom replied.

Mary’s eyes widened with hurt.

“Oh, sweetie, no, no, you don’t understand!” She reached her arm across the table to Mary.

“You are always such a big help. I couldn’t get by without you. But Grandma and I can look after Rosie and I want you to have a break. And Lily will help me, won’t you, Lil? You go with your dad and brother and you have some fun, Mary. Do some school shopping with your birthday money.”

“When?” Mary asked, her voice full of uncertainty. “For how long?”

“I was thinking as soon after lunch as you can get ready... if you feel up to the drive, Dan. You can be there by dinner. Stay at the Besborough Hotel. It will be a treat for the kids. And you’ll have a whole day in the city tomorrow, two if you need them.”

“Whoa!” said Dad. “I thought you were looking after Rosie up there, Maddie...not planning field trips for the kids and me!”

“I can’t be easy until I know about the book, Daniel. None of us can. Show Stephen what you’ve got. See what he says. Let’s get this settled. And then we can enjoy our visit. Please go.”

That seemed to end the conversation.

I wanted to be happy for Greg and Mary but I couldn't. I needed to take my hurt feelings away, with no one noticing or trying to make it better.

"There's Rosie," I said jumping up and heading to the stairs as Rosie's wails floated down. "I'll sing to her. Ok? I'll sing to her. She likes that."

"Lily, I think..." Mom was on her feet after me.

"Sit down, Madeline," I heard Grandma Lena say. "If you want her to help, you have to let her try."

Rosie was sitting up in the crib, her face hot, her curls plastered to her head. I knelt down beside the crib and put my face up to the bars.

"Hush little baby, don't say a word," I sang.

But Rosie didn't hush. She flung herself backwards and cried and cried and cried.

Chapter Eleven

“It’s a stupid game and I’m never going to learn!”

I heaved myself off the apple tree bench and stomped toward the back steps.

“Lily, it’s not a stupid game,” Greg explained patiently. “Chess is great. It’s not easy like checkers. But it’s great.”

“Hmph,” I snorted.

“You just have to have a little patience. Come on, Lily. I’m going to be going soon,” he said.

Greg was all ready for the trip to the city and just waiting for Dad to gather his things.

I dragged my feet back to the bench and the chessboard. He went over the moves one more time but I couldn’t keep my mind on what he was telling me.

“Mary’s mad at me,” I told him.

“Uh-huh,” he said, moving out a pawn.

“And Rosie hates me! She screams if I go anywhere near her.”

“Lily, she screams if anyone but Mom goes near!” He was laughing a little at me now.

“And maybe the publisher man won’t want to see just half a book. Maybe this whole trip will be a big waste of time.”

“Lily!” he sighed in exasperation.

“Greg!” I snarled back, mocking him.

“That’s it,” he said, snapping the chessboard shut. “I don’t know what’s the matter with you but you’re no fun to be around.”

“I’ll be glad when you’re gone,” I called after him.

And before I knew it, they were. And I was by myself again, sitting on the front step. I stared down the road in the direction Dad’s car had traveled, just minutes before.

“Why did I do that?” I asked myself. “Why was I so mean to Greg?”

“There you are, Lily,” Grandma called as she opened the front door. “Your mom wants you.”

“Quietly!” she said as I started to run up the stairs. “Rosie’s asleep.”

Mom met me at the bedroom door and moved into the hall, half closing the door behind her.

“I think I better take Rosie to the doctor, Lily. We aren’t getting this fever down. I need you to watch her for a few minutes...just while I get cleaned up.”

She stepped into the bathroom while I tiptoed into the bedroom. Rosie was on her tummy in the middle of the big bed. Mom had a nest of pillows around her but I knew that wouldn’t keep Rosie in, if she woke up. I could feel the cool breeze from the fan over the water but I was nervous about getting too near, in case I bumped it. I sat down beside the bed and looked scrunchy-eyed at the sunlight coming in around the blind. I made a wish for Rosie to keep sleeping.

“Mamamama,” Rosie whimpered.

My heart sank but I stood up and leaned over her. I used my happiest voice.

“Hi Rosie!”

She took one look at me and screamed.

I could hear water running in the bathroom and called to Mom but she didn't hear. Rosie sat up and squirmed over the pillows to the edge of the bed. I sang "Itsy Bitsy Spider" to her but she screamed more. I tried to keep her on the bed and Rosie howled and hit at me. She pushed me away. She frightened me with her loud crying. And the look of her! Rosie's cheeks were so red. And then I saw her chest and her tummy.

"Mom!" I called, "Mom!"

I heard the water stop and the bathroom door bang open. Mom rushed in.

"Mom, her tummy! Look at her tummy!"

Mom lifted Rosie, cradling her in her arms while she looked at Rosie's front, all covered with red speckles with white skin under and in between.

"Oh no," she said, sinking on to the bed just as Grandma flew into the room.

"What's wrong with our baby?" I whispered.

"Measles, I think. Measles. Poor Rosie."

“ No wonder she was such a little misery,” said Grandma peering over her glasses at Rosie’s tummy. “I’ll call Doc Anderson. He’ll have to come here. He won’t want measles in his office.”

On the way downstairs Grandma told me about measles. She said that the measles would make Rosie feel really sick for a while. She said Rosie would be fine. She told me that Greg and Mary had the measles come at exactly the same time. Then, as soon as they were better, I had the measles come, when I was a baby, like Rosie.

“By the time you were all well again, your mom was ready to sell the lot of you!”

I tried to think that Grandma was teasing but she sounded like she really meant it.

Chapter Twelve

“Show the doctor up when he comes, please Lily,” Grandma asked.

I sat on the front porch and waited a long time for him. I looked at the sweet peas and tried to imagine the garden Mary and I would make, if she ever stopped being mad at me.

Doc Anderson looked like someone’s old grandfather as he shuffled slowly up the street. His shirtsleeves were rolled up and his grey hair was all scruffy. I only knew he was the doctor because he carried a black bag, just like the doctors in the movies.

“Hello,” he said, stopping in front of me, “and who might you be?”

“I’m Lily. Our baby is upstairs. She has the measles.”

“So I hear,” he said. “I remember when your mom had the measles, and all those wild brothers of hers, too.”

Seems like yesterday,” he added with a shake of his head. “Lead the way, Miss Lily. I best see what’s to be done for this little one.”

“Thank you, Lily,” Grandma said as she met us at the bedroom door. “Come with me now and let the doctor see to Rosie.”

Grandma and I tiptoed down the stairs.

“It looks a hell of a lot like measles.”

That’s what we heard the doctor say.

“He said ‘hell!’” I whispered to Grandma. “That’s not a nice word.”

“Not for you,” she said, “but as far as I’m concerned Doc Anderson has earned the right to use any word he pleases.”

In the kitchen I helped Grandma clear away the last of the lunch dishes. I gathered all the glasses to me, hugging them to my chest, like we do at home. But our glasses at home are made of plastic and Grandma’s are made of glass. Grandma’s glasses were heavy and slippery. The harder I squeezed the lower they slipped. I tried to make a shelf by bending my knees. That slowed them down just enough for me to call out before two of them crashed to the floor.

“Grandma!”

She jumped at the sound and spun around. She shook her head as she looked at the damage.

“Good gracious, child, how many were you carrying?”

“Four.”

“That wasn’t very sensible, now was it,” she scolded as she took the two glasses I still clutched in my hand.

I shook my head.

Sparkles of glass covered the linoleum. Grandma tiptoed around the worst of it and opened the screen door. She waved me out.

I stood at the bottom of the back steps and looked up at her.

“I’m...I’m sorry...I was trying to help,” I stuttered.

“I know that, Lily. Best you stay in the backyard for now.”

I sat myself down under the apple tree, on the far side, away from the house.

“What’s the matter with me?” I asked myself, over and over. “I can’t do anything right!”

I could hear Rosie crying from the bedroom window. I knew she wouldn’t like the doctor looking at her. Rosie’s sobs and the broken glasses tied that knot in my stomach good and tight.

Then I saw the beans plants.

Grandpa had grown very tall bean plants in his garden. They grew taller than Grandpa, taller even than my dad. They looked just like the pictures in Jack and the Beanstalk.

The bean plants crawled up skinny wooden poles. Grandpa had tied the poles together at the top and spread them out in a big circle at the bottom. The bean plants hung on to the pole with tiny curly strings. The strings know how to hold on, just like a newborn baby does. It looked like a fluffy green teepee and I could walk all the way around it.

I got down on my hands and knees to see what it was like on the inside. It was dark and green with golden sunshine sparkles. And I thought if I was very careful, I could maybe squeeze between two poles and get right inside...so I did.

“Sometimes it’s good to be little,” I told myself.

I sat right down on my bottom in the middle of the damp greenness and sunshine sparkles. When I gave a pole a little shake, the leaves and the thin little beans danced and so did the sparkles. So, I shook it again. I felt like I was inside a very good magic spell.

“I’m Queen Lily!” I told myself. “I’m Queen of the bean people and this is my castle. Only good things happen here.”

Chapter Thirteen

“Hi Lily,” he whispered.

“Aah,” I shrieked.

“Grandpa?”

“Didn’t mean to scare you, honey,” he said. “You’ve been in there a long time. Think you might come out?”

“How did you know?” I asked in surprise, as I squeezed through the poles.

“I could see the bean plants jiggling. But I waited. Grandma told me about the glasses, Lil. I thought you might like a little time alone.”

It was good to see my Grandpa but as soon as I crawled out the spell was broken, the magic gone. I was back in the world where bad things could happen.

“Is the doctor still here?” I asked him.

He shook his head and a worried frown wrinkled his face.

“Rosie?” I asked.

“She’s a sick little girl, Lil. But Grandma and your mom will take good care of her.”

“I’m scared, Grandpa.”

“We’re all a little worried, Lily but there is no one better than Doc Anderson. He’s going to come back after dinner and check on her,” my grandpa said.

“Want to take a walk?” he asked.

“I want to see Rosie. I want to see my mom.”

“Rosie’s finally gone to sleep,” Grandpa said.

He was right. No sad wails drifted down from the upstairs windows.

“And your grandmother has ordered your mom to try and do the same. We don’t want to mess with Grandma, now do we?”

That made us both laugh a little bit.

My Grandpa and I walked down the lane behind the house and we looked into all the back yards and gardens on Grandma and Grandpa's street. We looked at Mrs. Morrison's sunflowers and Mr. Noren's sweet peas. At the cat lady's house we counted cats and only saw three. Grandpa told me she had seven. Seven cats!

Mrs. Vosper was in her back garden when we got to her house. She had a swinging back gate and she told me I could go for a ride.

"Little thing like you won't hurt it," Mrs. Vosper said.

Mrs. Vosper had smiley eyes and a smiley voice and a big bowl full of tomatoes in her hands. Mrs. Vosper's tomatoes weren't like anything I had ever seen before. These tomatoes were small...like big marbles... and each one had its own green hat and each one was red and round and almost perfect.

I swung on the gate while Grandpa and Mrs. Vosper talked about our sick baby.

"She's in good hands, John," Mrs. Vosper said. "Don't you worry."

"Lily, how would you like to give me a hand?" Mrs. Vosper asked. "I've got too many of these cherry tomatoes. Do you think your grandmother might like some?"

So that was the name for the special tomatoes.

“Cherry tomatoes” she called them.

Cherry tomatoes.

Mrs. Vosper took my hand and led me to her tomato patch. There were big tomatoes, green and heavy on the vine, and in the corner, tomato plants covered in the little tiny ones. Some were just beginning to be tomatoes, like little green peas, and some were only tiny yellow flowers, waiting for the bees to help them make tomatoes, my grandpa said. But most were red, like the ones in Mrs. Vosper’s bowl.

Lots left to pick, honey, Mrs. Vosper said. “I’ll get you a bowl.”

And so in Mrs. Vosper’s back garden, Grandpa and I picked a whole bowlful of cherry tomatoes. My grandpa showed me how to pick them so the little green hats would stay on.

“Come back again soon,” said Mrs. Vosper. I can’t keep up with them. You’d be doing me a favour, Lily.”

On the way home Grandpa and I each ate one. He taught me how to burst them with my tongue against the roof of my mouth and let the warm juice trickle down my throat.

Then I remembered about Rosie. It didn't feel right to be so happy about the cherry tomatoes, when our baby was so sick.

Chapter Fourteen

“That fever should break tonight, Lena,” Doc Anderson told my grandma.

“And if it doesn’t, Jim?” she asked.

“You know where I am,” he finally said.

He drained the glass of iced tea Grandma had given him and pushed his chair back from the table.

“It’s just measles.” Grandma sounded angry.

“It’s measles and sometimes they go very hard...and we don’t know why. She needs fluids and rest. I wish there was more I could do...”

“You know where I am,” he repeated.

He headed toward the front door, stopping to pick up his black bag. Grandpa walked him to the top step and shook his hand.

“Thank you, Jim,” Grandpa said.

Doc Anderson nodded at Grandpa and shuffled off down the front steps and up the road. He disappeared into the gloom of the almost night. He'd come after dinner, just like he'd said he would. Grandpa and I had eaten alone downstairs. Grandma had taken a tray up to eat with mom. We didn't eat the cherry tomatoes. I had asked Grandma if we could save them, to share with my mom, when Rosie was better.

Grandpa let me help clear up the dinner dishes, even the glasses. I carried them one at a time to the sink.

When the phone rang, Grandpa ran to the front room to answer it.

"Lily," Grandpa called, "it's your dad. Get your mom for me, sweetheart, please."

"Mom, Dad's on the phone," I told her as I ran into the bedroom.

"Oh gosh! What'll tell him?"

Mom turned pleading eyes to Grandma as she gently laid a limp Rosie on the big bed, inside that nest of pillows. Rosie's eyes were glassy. It didn't seem like our funny Rosie still lived inside that sick baby's body.

"If you think Daniel should come home, Madeline, then you have to tell him so."

My mom's face crumpled and she fled down the stairs.

Grandma held a bottle of pale apple juice to Rosie's lips.

"Please drink, Rosie," she begged but the juice dribbled out of the hole in the rubber nipple and across her cheek.

"Can I try, Grandma?" I asked. "I know a trick..."

"Well, you can't do any worse than I am," she sighed and she handed me Rosie's bottle.

"Hey, baby," I cooed quietly. "Look what I've got."

I lay on my side close to Rosie. I wiggled the bottle in front of her eyes. I stuck it in my own mouth and pretended to take a big drink.

Rosie's eyes widened and she whimpered.

"Oh, do you want it?" I teased bringing the bottle close to her and snatching it away.

The moment she opened her mouth, just a crack, I popped it in.

And Rosie started to suck.

I looked at Grandma.

“Well, I’ll be darned,” she whispered.

She’ll eat or drink ANYTHING, if she thinks someone else might want it,” I explained.

Rosie drank almost half the bottle before my mom came back upstairs.

“Oh,” she said and almost smiled when she saw Rosie was drinking.

“This was all Lily’s doing,” Grandma told her.

Mom dropped a kiss onto the top of my head.

“Bless you, Lily Adele,” she said.

Two-named! But I knew she wasn’t angry.

“They’re leaving right away,” Mom said. “They should be home sometime after midnight.”

“Mom, can I stay a while? I’ll help Rosie drink. I’ll be still. I promise.”

“I’d like that, Lil,” she said, clearing away the pillow nest from around Rosie.

Then she lay down on one side of our baby and I lay on the other, propped up on my elbow so I could coax Rosie to take the juice.

Grandma kissed us all and turned out the lights. Then she tiptoed out of the room.

“What did you do today?” Mom whispered into the dark.

First, I told her about the broken glasses.

“Oh boy,” she murmured.

Then I told her about the bean teepee, and the walk down the lane with Grandpa. I saved the cherry tomato story for last. I told her I’d kept them for her.

“Thank you, Lily. Now I have something lovely to look forward to.”

And that’s when I knew it wasn’t bad to be happy about the cherry tomatoes.

Chapter Fifteen

“Oh please, oh no!” I tried to call for help but my throat clutched the words and wouldn’t let them go. My heart beat hard in my chest. Blood rushed in my ears.

I just wanted to show her the bean teepee but something had gone wrong. The dancing light was gone and it was dark. I struggled to hold onto Rosie but she was wet and heavy and slipping through my arms. She was falling and falling and there was nothing I could do to stop her. I hugged her tight but she screamed and hit. I knew if I let her go she would break. She would shatter like glass.

“No!”

The sound exploded out of my tight throat in a harsh whisper just as Rosie hit the ground.

That’s what woke me, my own cry.

“Please!” I begged as my eyes opened. I didn’t know what I was begging for. I was too frozen with confusion and fear to think.

The room was dark, except for the dim glow from the nightlight in the hall. Mom wasn’t in the bed. Neither was Rosie.

“Ssshhh, Lily honey,” Grandma whispered.

Mom and Grandma were huddled together by the crib. I could just make out Rosie’s shape through the bars.

“Her fever broke,” Mom and Grandma said at exactly the same time.

Then they laughed softly. I covered my mouth with two hands so I wouldn’t wake Rosie. I cried happy tears and Grandma comforted me while Mom wiped her own wet face.

“She was soaked with sweat and her spot on the bed is all wet,” Grandma explained. We’ve just changed her. I think she’s already asleep.”

Later, when I crawled into the bed I shared with Mary, Grandma kissed me goodnight, for the second time that night.

“You were a big help tonight, Lily, a very big help,” she said.

“Thank you,” I whispered and I hugged her words close.

In the morning I woke to find Mary sleeping beside me. I tried to sneak out without waking her but she turned over and sat up, yawning.

“Your home!” I said. “Rosie’s fever broke in the night. She’s going to be Ok!”

“I know that Lily,” she laughed.

Just then Greg poked his head in the door.

“Good! You’re awake,” he said. We’re all waiting for you, for breakfast.”

Mary went down the stairs two at a time but at the top landing I grabbed Greg’s hand to make him stop.

“Greg, I’m sorry about... about what I said.”

“I knew you didn’t mean it. No one likes to get left behind, Lily.”

He started to go down but I tugged him back.

“What about the book?” I asked.

“I don’t know, Lily,” he said very seriously but his eyes teased. “You’ll have to talk to Dad. And can we go now? I’m starving. Can’t you smell them? Grandma’s made biscuits!”

In the kitchen, everyone was gathered around Grandma's big round table. Dad was wearing his same clothes from yesterday and he looked ruffled and tired but he smiled when he saw us. I wondered if he had even been to bed. He reached out for a quick hug. Rosie rested in Mom's arms, her face red like a little raspberry, above her white nightie. She was still lying very still but the glassy look was gone and I could see our funny Rosie shining from her eyes.

"Can I try to take her, Mom?" Mary said, reaching her arms out.

We all braced for the screams but Rosie settled into Mary's lap without a peep.

"Oh, thank goodness," our mom sighed with relief.

"Hello, baby. I missed you," Mary whispered into the top of Rosie's head.

"Sit down, kids," Grandma ordered. "Let's eat before it all goes cold."

While we ate Dad told us that his friend had like the book, or at least the parts that he had time to read. He said that Stephen was a very smart man with great ideas for "tightening it up", whatever that means.

"But will he publish it?" Grandma demanded to know.

“Grandma!” interrupted Mary, who almost never interrupts, “he said that Dad’s story will change the way people think about the war. He said it’s going to be a very important book for Canadians. He said he wished he’d written it…”

Mary stopped, embarrassed by her own outburst. Dad looked at her in surprise.

“Your friend has a loud voice,” Greg explained. “And we were waiting for you, right outside his office. We didn’t try to listen but we couldn’t help it.”

Mary nodded her head in agreement. Mom beamed. I think she already knew the answer to Grandma’s question.

“Yes, Lena,” said our dad, “If I ever get it written, he’s going to publish it.”

“Not IF, Daniel, WHEN,” Mom corrected him. “By next summer, it will be done, Daniel, You know it will.”

“Well,” said Grandma. “Well, well.”

Even Grandma didn’t have words for this good news.

“Congratulations, Dan,” said Grandpa quietly.

I looked around the table at my family, at all the happy smiles.

“Finally,” I thought to myself as the last twist in the knot undid itself. “Finally, a brand new day!”

Chapter Sixteen

“Oh, Lily, you’re so lucky!”

Mary was on her hands and knees, peering inside the bean teepee. I sat in the middle and I showed her how I could make the sunlight sparkles dance by jiggling the poles.

“What beautiful dappled light!” she exclaimed.

“What’s “dappled” mean?” I asked her.

“It’s the mixed up bits of dark and light, the shadow and the sunshine all quivering together...” she explained. “We did a poem at school about it. A really hard poem, but a beautiful one. It’s about dappled things.”

“Dappled. Dappled.”

I said it to myself slowly, to learn it, to remember it. Some words fit perfectly inside your mouth and ears. They can make you happy just to say them. “Dappled” is a word like that. It is even better to say than “cumulonimbus”; it sounds even lovelier than “cherry tomato”.

When I crawled out of the teepee I asked Mary if we could have cherry tomatoes in our garden.

“Sure,” she said. “And what about a bean teepee?”

“No... please...Grandpa makes the bean teepee.”

Then I had a good thought.

“But maybe he could make a bigger one next year... and we could both go inside!”

“Good idea, Lily,” Mary laughed.

Rosie had some fussy days and fussy nights and her measles slowly faded. We all took turns looking after her, even me. I learned to play chess with Greg and he let me win, but not all of the time. I walked every day to Mrs. Vosper’s garden. Sometimes Mary or Greg came with me. I talked with Mrs. Vosper about how our baby was doing and she told me stories from when she and my grandma were little girls. Every evening a bowl of cherry tomatoes sat on the supper table. Mom bit them in half for Rosie and let her suck out the goodness, too. Tomato juice dribbled down her front. I taught the big kids how to eat them. We burst them with our tongues against the roof of our mouths and juice dribbled down all our fronts, even Mary’s.

On the morning of our day to leave for home, everyone was out on the sidewalk.

Everyone talked at once, everyone except Grandpa. Grandpa tied string around the box with our Dad's book, the box from the bad day in the storm.

"Good," I thought. "That's good."

Mrs. Vosper rushed down the street still in her housecoat. Flap, flap, flap went her slippers.

"Goodness, you folks make an early start," she said and then she handed me a little paper bag. Right away I knew what was inside.

I opened the bag to let Greg and Mary see. Cherry tomatoes. Cherry tomatoes for the drive across the prairie.

Grandma promised no tears then broke her promise, but just a little bit.

I didn't want to let go of my grandpa.

He said that, early in the spring, he would send Mary and me seeds for our garden.

"Sweet peas and cherry tomatoes," I told him.

"I won't forget, Lily."

Our mom and dad waved out their windows. Greg and Mary knelt, and I stood, half crouched, on the back seat. We waved out the rear window.

Rosie called, “Bye, bye, bye, bye.”

Grandma and Grandpa stood, waving and calling, until we turned the corner.

Mary and Greg and I looked out the back. We leaned our chins on our arms and watched first the grain elevators and then the prairie roll out behind us. Our mom hummed softly to herself. Rosie lay sleepy in her arms.

I turned around and sat down with my back against the seat and watched the blue, blue sky through the top of the windshield. In the quiet car, I could feel the goodbye sadness as if it lived in the air around us all. It was all mixed up with something lovely, though... a dappled sadness, I thought to myself.

Long days in the hot car lay ahead of us. School waited for the summer to be over.

Out on the prairie the farmers were starting to cut the wheat. The golden ocean was disappearing under the blades of the big machines.

Everything was changing.

And then, “Duster!” Dad called out. “Duster!”

