

THE MOON BY NIGHT

MADELEINE L'ENGLE



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by Night

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Introduction

“Who are you in this book?” we would constantly ask our grandmother, Madeleine L’Engle, about every book that she wrote. Her books have protagonists that many people can identify with, generation after generation, whether it is the brave and clever, gawky and frustrated Meg Murry, or the vulnerable and awkward, but at the same time, sensitive and intuitive Vicky Austin. Madeleine also strongly identified with her characters, and said many times that she was both Meg and Vicky. There was so much that was recognizable as her and her life in her stories, and we wanted to be able to map her fiction to her biography, thereby fixing and understanding her place, and by extension, ours, in the family and the wider world.

Most children want to be told stories about themselves. We were no different, and so, reading the Austin books was always a special thrill, because the narrative is peppered with incidents and details that also featured in family lore, like the adorable malapropisms of Rob Austin and Vicky’s bicycle accident. The Austin family house in the quiet New England village of Thornhill (as described in *Meet the Austins*) is ever-present as a touchstone of their domestic peace, and is modeled on Crosswicks, a pre-Revolutionary War farmhouse in northwestern Connecticut where our grandparents and the children lived in the 1950s. The cross-country road trip in *The Moon by Night* copies the Franklin family itinerary of 1959, during which Madeleine started writing *A Wrinkle in Time*. In *The Young Unicorns*, the Austin kids unravel a mystery at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, where our grandmother was the librarian and writer-in-residence for more than forty years.

There is enough similarity of detail in the books to have caused us some confusion: If our grandmother is Vicky, how can she have the bicycle accident that left our own mother with a Y-shaped scar on her chin? If some of the details confounded our sense of reality, we never questioned the underlying truth of the characters and our grandmother’s relationship to them. If Madeleine were Vicky, then we felt understood. Because we were Vicky, too.

People would joke that *Meet the Austins* could have been called *Meet the Franklins* (Madeleine’s married name), and yet, we knew that Vicky and the Austins couldn’t be a simple translation of our grandmother’s life, because of the family tension and pain surrounding these books about this family. Madeleine’s own children were often shocked at how their own lives were appropriated and rewritten for publication, and felt judged against this very happy and practically perfect family. The line between fact and fiction can sometimes be blurry for writers, and the temptation to inscribe a certain version of and authority on events is strong.

All of Madeleine’s writing, fiction and nonfiction, was an example of how all narrative is fiction and all fiction can be true. She wrote and lectured extensively on the difference between truth and fact, arguing that it is through story that we human beings approach the truth, not through facts, which can only get us so far. As her granddaughters, this was both liberating and confusing, but we happily suspended our disbelief, and some of our best-loved stories are ones that are culled from her real life: from her days in the theater, from her early years with our grandfather, and the mysterious decade of the fifties.

The five books that are now presented as *The Austin Family Chronicles* were written over a period of thirty years. A prolific writer of more than sixty books in a variety of genres, Madeleine created a web of characters that grew, changed, and surprised her. As we re-read these books over our lifetime, what strike us are the very different responses we have to this family. At eleven, we thrilled to the references to things that our mother or aunt or uncle would confirm were true. At seventeen, we were

cynical about the blur between fact and fiction, and thought we could read our grandmother as if she were a book. In our mature adulthood, we recognize how rich and complicated our grandmother was and that fact can be the springboard for fiction, and fiction can inform who we are and tell us about ourselves.

Charlotte Jones Voiklis and Lena Rosen
March, 2000

One

“Vicky!”

It was John’s voice and he was calling for me. I suppose somewhere on the inside of my mind realized it, but with the outside of my mind all I heard was the constant crying of sea gulls and the incoming boom of breakers. I hadn’t even seen that the early morning sun had moved across the sky and the tide had pushed the waves closer up to my feet. I’d forgotten that there was any such thing as time, and almost why I’d come sliding down the steep path to the cove and climbed up on the sunbaked rock.

I wanted to be alone and I wanted to think. Indoors there was excitement and confusion and I guess a lot of happiness. I was the only one who seemed to be unhappy because nothing would ever be the same again. Up to a few days ago my life (and fifteen years is quite a considerable hunk of time—well, I’m not quite fifteen, but I’m on the way) had been all of a piece, exciting, sometimes, and even miserable, but always following the same and simple pattern of home and school and family. And now it was all being thrown away, tossed to the four winds. I wanted to leave all the chatter and babble and be alone to sort things out. Just a few minutes alone down at the beach—was that so very much to ask?

“Vicky! VICK-EEEE!”

Now even the outside of my mind couldn’t confuse John’s angry shouting with a sea gull’s squawking. I looked up. He was scrambling down the path, but much more slowly than usual, because he was dressed in grey flannel slacks and a freshly ironed white shirt and was carrying his jacket over his left arm. I waved at him.

He sounded furious. “Vicky! Victoria Austin! Get up here! Don’t you know what time it is?”

Of course I didn’t know what time it was. I’d left my watch with my clothes when I put on my bathing suit. I wouldn’t dare use that as an excuse with John, though. He knows perfectly well that I can tell by the sun, that I can tell by the tide. What he wouldn’t know was that I had been lost in time and that my few minutes had stretched out to what was obviously over an hour and I hadn’t even realized it.

I jumped off the rock onto the soft sand instead of climbing down. We’ve always jumped off the rock, so maybe what I was doing at that moment was hanging on to my childhood instead of trying to leap out of it the way I usually do. I hurried across the sand and started up the almost vertical path that leads to the top of the bluff. There’s a winding road you can take, full of hairpin bends, but we’ve always taken the path cut down through the scrubby bushes. The bushes were very useful in helping me to pull myself up the path quickly, and in keeping me from looking at my rightfully enraged older brother. He had climbed back up to the top of the bluff and was standing there waiting for me. When he spoke his voice was coldly angry. “Have you no sense at all? We’ve been looking for you for the last half hour. With everything there is to do why do you have to pick this particular day to go mooning off by yourself?”

I didn’t answer. He was right and I was wrong and there wasn’t any point in shouting in the face of that calm fury. I stared down at my bare feet as I hurried along the dusty road.

A hundred yards down the road was my grandfather’s house, if you can call it a house. It’s an old stable painted a lovely barn red. The horse stalls are still there but now they’re all filled with shelves of books, so it’s more like a library that somebody lives in than a house. There’s one bedroom with Grandfather’s huge four-poster bed, and up above the stalls is a loft with six army cots.

I ran ahead of John, into the stable, hoping I could rush through and up the ladder to the loft without seeing anybody. But of course the first person I saw was my father. I practically knocked him down in my hurry.

He grabbed me by both elbows. "Vicky, your mother has needed every bit of help she could get this morning and you simply went off without a word to anyone. Now get up to the loft and get changed and please do not keep us waiting."

John tries to copy Daddy when he's angry. He couldn't have a better model. I mumbled, "I'm sorry, Daddy," and scurried up the ladder. It seemed odd not to have to climb over the recumbent body of our Great Dane, Mr. Rochester, who usually spent most of the time when we were at Grandfather's lying at the foot of the ladder and being miserable because he couldn't climb it. But that was part of it and a part of the reason I'd wanted to go down to the beach to look at the ocean and rest my eyes where the ocean and the sky became one. This time Mr. Rochester wasn't with us.

Up in the loft Suzy and Maggy were standing in front of the mirror, preening. Suzy's my youngest sister, and Maggy's just a year older and has lived with us for the past couple of years, but won't admit it today. Another reason.

Suzy and Maggy are just about the same size and Suzy is a buttercup-colored blonde, and Maggy's hair is blue-black. Up until this winter people used to look at me pityingly when I was with the two of them. But Uncle Douglas always said I was an ugly duckling type, and suddenly with my fourteen birthday all my angles and sticky-out bones and unmanageable hair seemed to come to some sort of agreement and I no longer felt wistful if I happened to look into a mirror when Suzy and Maggy were around. As a matter of fact, I enjoyed mirrors very much.

"Well, jeeppers, Vicky!" Suzy accused as my head appeared in the loft. "Where have *you* been?"

I thought for a moment about not climbing the rest of the way up, but there wasn't any place else to go. I decided maybe a change of subject would be nice, so I said, "You look gorgeous. Both of you."

It worked. They started looking in the mirror again. Too old to be flower girls, too young to be bridesmaids, they stood dressed, Suzy in pale blue, Maggy in the softest rose, Aunt Elena's handmaidens, as Uncle Douglas called them. My dress was a very light, clear yellow, and I loved it though it wasn't nearly as dressed-up a dress as Suzy's or Maggy's, and I wasn't going to be a handmaiden. I was just going to sit in the pew with Mother, and Rob, my little brother. John was the man, Daddy was going to give Aunt Elena away, and Grandfather, of course, was going to perform the ceremony. It was a very family wedding.

Uncle Douglas is Daddy's younger brother, and Aunt Elena has been mother's best friend since they were at boarding school in Switzerland together. Hal, Aunt Elena's first husband, a test pilot, was killed several years ago, and we'd all been hoping for a long time that Uncle Douglas and Aunt Elena would get married. So why wasn't I glowing like Suzy and Maggy?

If everything else could have been the same, if we could have gone back to Thornhill after the wedding, if everything could have gone on as usual, I would have lit up the beach with joy. But nothing was ever going to be the same again. Before we left for Grandfather's I'd said good-bye to the house, to the dogs and the cats and an entirely brand new completely different life lay ahead. I was scared stiff.

"Hurry up and get *dressed*," Maggy said in a bossy way. "It's almost time to go. *I* helped make the punch."

I went into the shower, stripped off my bathing suit, and sluiced off the salt water, being very careful to keep my hair dry, because I'd washed and set it the night before. I'd even remembered to be careful of it while I was in the ocean. I hadn't gone swimming. I just sat in the shallow water and let the cool waves ripple over me. The water flowed comfortingly about my body, the sun beat warm down upon my head, and the sea stretched out and out until it seemed that sea and sky would never

meet. It was hard to tell where the horizon lay, because sea and sky seemed to blend together in one great curve. In Grandfather's cove the beach repeated the curve, the sea gulls circled overhead, the small waves that broke against my body were lazily scalloped, and there weren't any straight horizontal lines anywhere to be the shortest distance between two points.

Maggy pounded on the bathroom door. I knew it was Maggy because of the way she pounded; a pound on a door can be just as personal as a footstep or a tone of voice. This pound was a little more violent than usual, because of course Maggy was frantic with excitement. I'd been sitting down at the beach brooding while Maggy had been helping Mother make punch, and of course everything was going to be more different from now on for Maggy than for the rest of us.

Since her parents' death Maggy had lived with us even though Aunt Elena was her guardian because Aunt Elena is a pianist and had to be away so much on concert tours. Now Maggy was going to live with Aunt Elena and Uncle Douglas, in California, and this was wonderful for her. But if I were Maggy I'd have been more scared, I think, than excited.

I got out of the shower and got dressed and had to shove Maggy and Suzy away from the mirror long enough so that I could fix my hair properly and put on a small amount of lipstick. My nose had turned rather red while I'd been sitting on the beach. I hadn't thought of that when I'd gone out looking for solitude. Well, it wasn't *my* wedding. No one would be looking at *my* nose.

"Girls!" Mother called from downstairs. "Commander Rodney's here."

We hurried down the ladder. Commander Rodney is a particular friend of ours, though more particularly of Rob's. Two years ago when Rob was only four he stowed away on one of the Island ferries. We thought he was lost and went to the Coast Guard headquarters where Commander Rodney helped us find him.

Rob, dressed in navy blue shorts and a blazer and looking very snazzy, was holding on to Commander Rodney's hand and talking a blue streak. John and Grandfather appeared to be studying a large book and looking very calm. Daddy pried them out of the book and sent us off with Commander Rodney, who was to take us to the church.

During the drive I seemed to be the only one who didn't want to talk. This is supposed to have been my moody year, my difficult year, and if anybody noticed my silence, which is unlikely, they probably put it down to that.

I didn't want to talk. I wanted to think. Among all the other changes, Uncle Douglas would never be the same again, popping up for week-ends and being completely ours even when he brought girls up for us to look over in case he ever got serious about marrying one of them. I'd wanted terribly to have Uncle Douglas marry Aunt Elena, but now he would be hers, and Maggy would be his daughter, he would have his own child. I've always felt very special with Uncle Douglas because he's stuck up for me and understood me even when nobody else has. He was the one who'd made me believe I wouldn't always be an ugly duckling, and that one day everything would come clear for me and I'd develop a talent for something particular and know what I wanted to do in the adult world the way John and Suzy always have known. But it couldn't be the same with Uncle Douglas and me any more. This, like everything else, was going to change.

I was sitting next to Grandfather in the car and suddenly for no reason at all he put his hand on my knee and patted it and I felt—how can I explain it—loved and cherished sounds soppy but I think it's exactly what I mean, only in a non-soppy way. And suddenly, whammo, I began to feel happy.

At the church everything was confusion and excitement and then Rob and I were sitting quietly on our pew and Commander Rodney was sitting behind us with his wife and kids and the church began to fill up.

Because we were sitting down front we couldn't see who was coming in, but I knew just who would be: Grandfather's friends from the Island, not the summer people, because those hadn't started

coming up yet, but the year-round people, like Commander Rodney and his family, and the retired ones, like Grandfather: Dr. Wood; he's a physicist; and Isaac Ulrich, the violinist; and lots of interesting people like that. Then there would be the Rosses from the drug store, and old Mr. Cook from the grocery store, and Mr. Dolittle, the butcher. They would come in, all dressed up and not looking in the least like their every day, ordinary selves; but then neither did we, and neither did the church. It was full of candles and flowers, and a sense of expectancy filled the nave and seemed to merge in with the sunlight coming softly through the windows. They were partly open, a soft breeze came through, and the sound of the sea was always there in the background as it was everywhere on the Island.

Old Grandma Adams started playing, "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring" on the organ. It's one of my very favorite pieces of music in the world. I relaxed into listening and then there was Mother walking down the aisle looking just beautiful and so young it kind of scared me; it's much more comfortable to have her just Mother and not any age at all. As soon as Mother had sat down the Wedding March began and in came Suzy and Maggy, followed by Aunt Elena on Daddy's arm. Aunt Elena's dress was very much like Suzy's and Maggy's, except that it was moonlight color, not silver, not seagreen, but shimmering with both.

Suzy and Maggy won't sit next to me in the movies because I cry. I cried so at *West Side Story* that I was a pulp, and they didn't want anyone to know they were even with me. I had an awful time not crying at Aunt Elena's and Uncle Douglas's wedding, because it was so beautiful. When Grandfather read the wedding service it was as though it were being done for the very first time, as though those words had never been spoken before. Uncle Douglas's and Aunt Elena's voices were low, but very clear. I think the part that brought me closest to crying was when Grandfather took Aunt Elena from Daddy, put her hand in Uncle Douglas's, and Uncle Douglas said after him, "I take thee, Elena, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance and thereto I plight thee my troth." And then when Aunt Elena, taking Uncle Douglas's hand, said, "I take thee, Douglas, to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth."

Aunt Elena must have said those same words once before to Hal, and death had parted them. My own hands were very cold, and I wondered if her hand, holding Uncle Douglas's, was cold, too, and what she was thinking. But she looked at him with love and trust and her voice never trembled and I realized all of a sudden that she probably felt all the wonderful things I felt about Uncle Douglas, and a few more besides.

Then the wedding was over. Uncle Douglas kissed Aunt Elena and it seemed everybody was kissing everybody else. Commander Rodney's oldest son, Leo, who's a slob, kissed me, and I had to get into the car to go back to the stable before I could wipe it off.

Back at the stable everybody spilled in and out of the house, on the porch, on the grass, and now at least I did help, serving punch, passing sandwiches, with Leo at my heels saying, "Let me take this Vicky," "I'll do that," until I wanted to shove him over the cliff. Why couldn't he be more like his father?

Suzy and Maggy were dancing around, getting in everybody's way, but so happy and pretty nobody minded. Aunt Elena glowed and Uncle Douglas beamed and Daddy started pouring champagne and everybody was eating and laughing and talking and then I felt a hand at my elbow and it was Uncle Douglas. He said softly in my ear, "We're going to slip away now, Vic. Tell Maggy we'll see her tomorrow. And we'll see you in California in a month. No, love, don't kiss me, I don't want anybody to know we're going. I'll give you a big kiss by the Pacific ocean instead of the Atlantic. Okay?" And

he was off around a corner of the stable.

Two

That night the four of us and Maggy went down to the beach for a cook-out. We'd helped get the stable all cleaned up after the reception, and Mother and Daddy and Grandfather said they were too full of lobster salad, and stuff to feel like eating, so we left them sitting out on the screened porch talking.

We had a picnic basket full of hamburgers and hot dogs and sodas and some charcoal to add to the driftwood. It would be our last night with Maggy as part of the family. The next day some friends of Grandfather's were going to drive her down to New York where she was to meet Uncle Douglas and Aunt Elena and fly out with them to California.

Now right in the midst of sounding all sentimental I must admit that life with Maggy wasn't always easy. In fact there were times when we could cheerfully have wrung her neck. But you get used to somebody in two years, and even her faults were familiar and comforting and part of the quiet, secure life in Thornhill. I sat on my rock and turned away from the sea, and looked at Maggy with the rosy glow of sunset behind her, and wished she weren't going to fly out to California the next day, but then we were all going to drive back to Thornhill. I didn't feel like talking, and it seemed that nobody else did, either, not even Maggy. Usually she never stops talking; it doesn't matter whether she has anything to say or not, it's just yak, yak, yak, right in the middle of homework or somebody else's conversation at the dinner table.

But Maggy stood there, barefooted in the soft sand, shifting her weight from one foot to the other in a rhythmic sort of way, just as quiet as the rest of us. Rob went off to the hard sand at the water's edge to dodge the little waves and collect shells. John built the fire, and after a while Suzy said, "Well, very brightly, but that was as far as she got."

I don't mean to give the impression that, except for Maggy, we're usually a quiet family. We're anything but, and Rob must have felt that there was something funny about our silence, because he turned away from the water, dropped his shells, came over to my rock and leaned against me.

John looked up from where he was crouched beside the fire, feeding it little bites of driftwood, and said, "We'd better decide who wants hot dogs and who wants hamburgers because we haven't got too much time."

Everybody began talking about food, and things were better. That's something I've noticed about food: whenever there's a crisis if you can get people to eating normally things get better.

John had hot dogs cooked black; Suzy had hot dogs medium; I had hamburger rare ("I've seen cows hurt worse than that and get better," John remarked for the several-hundredth time); Maggy had a hamburger cooked until it might have been a piece of old shoe; and Rob had a hot dog roll with three toasted marshmallows for filling. With the food, tongues loosened and we began to jabber about the wedding, Maggy began to brag about living in California, and Rob fell asleep. As the last light drained from the sky the fire seemed to grow brighter, and then we saw the beam from Grandfather's flashlight as he stood up at the head of the bluff waving it down at us. We called up that we'd be right along; John put the fire out; we cleaned up our stuff and staggered up the path. Suddenly we were all very tired, and John and I half had to carry Rob, who couldn't seem to wake up.

When we got back to the stable Mother went up to the loft with the little ones. John and I went out to sit on the screened porch for a few minutes with Daddy and Grandfather. There was no light on the porch itself, but lights shone through from the kitchen windows, and moths of all sizes batted against

the screens, trying to get in. The great beam from the light house swung around, once every minute bathing us all in its brilliance. John was sitting on the old couch next to Grandfather, and suddenly, with the sweep of light, I had the funniest feeling that he didn't seem to be my own brother, familiar as an old shoe, someone I fought with frequently, but who could be depended on always to be there when I needed him. To help me with my math homework, for instance: John's a whizz at math and it's always been a struggle for me. Or at high school dances: if I needed him John was always there to see that I had plenty of partners and didn't get stuck, or have to spend long minutes in the girls' room taking off and putting on lipstick to kill time before going out to the dance floor again.

Grandfather must have been thinking about John, too, because he turned to him and said, "With all the festivities for Elena and Doug I haven't had a chance to congratulate you. We're all very proud of you, son."

John gets terribly embarrassed when anybody praises him, and, since he's an outstanding kind of person, that happens far oftener than he'd like. As the lighthouse beam swept across his face I could see that he was blushing. "I'm scared stiff," he said. "Do you think I'll do all right?"

John's the first boy from our regional high school to be accepted at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As a matter of fact his acceptance came through early and that was one reason the principal of our school made all kinds of exceptions and gave him his diploma ahead of time with a special little ceremony at Assembly, so he could be best man for Uncle Douglas and not miss any of our trip. We were all getting out of school several weeks early, but John was the one it made the most difference to, because he would have been Valedictorian of his class, and graduation week is something you really don't want to miss. As for me, I was glad not to be getting this final report card because it had been much my worst year. I've always done well at school, but this year I'd study hard for a test, and get a D, a mark I'd never turned up with before; and then I wouldn't study for another test at all and get an A, and none of it made very much sense.

Mother came out onto the porch just then. Rob, she told us, was asleep before he got into bed. Suzy, who has always had the ability to get right to sleep whenever she feels like it, had hardly waited to say good-night. Maggy, ever since her thirteenth birthday, has felt that she should go to bed at least as late as John does, and she was furious at still having to go up with Suzy, and was lying there in the dark glowering.

"But she has a big day ahead of her tomorrow," Mother said. "She'd better get some rest."

John stretched luxuriously. "As for *us*, we can lounge around on the beach all day."

Daddy, who was sprawled on an old wicker chaise lounge, grunted, "Aside from the time you'll spend helping me get the station wagon ready."

Mother shoved Daddy over and sat by him, then turned to me. "What got into you this morning Vicky? Why did you run off when I needed you?"

I looked at the screen door, where a moth was clinging, his wings momentarily flattened against the criss-cross pattern of the wires. "I'm sorry. I just wanted to go down to the beach for a while to think. I didn't mean to stay so long."

I expected Mother or Daddy to let me have it then, but all Mother said was, "I guess we all feel the need to go off and sort things out, Vicky. This is a pretty big step for all of us. For Daddy and me, too, you know. Next time you want to disappear for a while check with me first, will you?"

I was grateful not to be getting a bawling out. Here I was going around moping and if I sat down to think about it I'd probably have to admit that it was harder on Mother than anybody, and she wasn't making any kind of fuss at all. From the way she behaved on the outside you'd have thought that moving from our own house, that stood on its hill about a mile outside a small New England village to an apartment right in the middle of New York City was no more important than a trip to the Island.

Well, it was a lot more important than that. None of us could remember living anywhere except

Thornhill, or having Daddy be anything but a busy, always overworked country doctor. We knew he spent what few spare moments he had in research, and that he'd kept in close touch with his professors and colleagues at medical school, but when he came back from a meeting in New York and told us that he'd accepted a post teaching and doing research at his old school we all flipped. Well, we flipped if it can mean just plain shock and doesn't mean we were wild with joy. We weren't. At first we weren't anything but stunned. We didn't even realize all at once that it meant leaving Thornhill and that it meant moving to New York. But Thornhill's over a hundred miles from New York. Daddy couldn't very well commute.

Funnily enough it was Rob who was the first to catch on to what it really meant. He got terribly upset, the way he sometimes does, and burst into tears and said that he wouldn't move to New York if that Daddy couldn't leave Thornhill, and then he got very white and suddenly looked very grown up and not at all the baby we always thought him, and said, "You're not going to sell the house! Daddy, you can't sell the house!"

"No," Daddy said. "We hope we won't ever have to sell the house, Rob. We're renting it for the next year to the doctor who's taking over my office. He and his wife are people you'll all like, they've got a darling baby, and they'll take care of the animals for us."

"The animals!" Rob got positively green with dismay. "Aren't they coming with us?" He put his arms around Rochester's neck. Rochester's rear end wriggled with affection; then, as Rob's grip tightened with intensity Rochester gave him a big slobbery kiss of friendship and apology and pulled away so abruptly that Rob sat down hard on the floor.

Daddy laughed and said, "We can't very well take the animals on a camping trip, Rob."

We all went into a state of shock again. "CAMPING TRIP!"

Now Mother and Daddy were both laughing, and Daddy said, "We thought it might soften the blow if we bought a tent and sleeping bags and took a trip out to California to see Uncle Douglas and Aunt Elena and Maggy. It'll be a break between our two lives. Once I really get going in New York I'm not going to be doing much vacationing for a while."

This was easy to believe. Daddy *never* was able to do much vacationing. And the idea of going all over the United States was fabulous because we'd never done much traveling. To the Island to visit Grandfather. A trip to Washington, D.C., last spring vacation. That was pretty much it. John and I liked the idea of travel, and Suzy was thrilled with the thought of all the new insects and animals she would see. Suzy has wanted to be a doctor ever since she could talk, but sometimes I think she'd much better be a veterinarian.

Rob went off and came back clutching Elephant's Child, his filthy and favorite stuffed animal. Elephant's Child has a music box that plays Brahms' Lullaby and Rob has had him since he was a baby and even starting school couldn't change his feelings about Elephant's Child. John says Rob will probably take Elephant's Child off to college with him and play Brahms' Lullaby in the dormitory one night. And Rob, being Rob, probably will, and be so matter of fact about it that nobody will even laugh.

"Yes, Rob," Daddy said, "you may take Elephant's Child."

Aside from being pleased about new bugs and things on the camping trip Suzy didn't say very much, but you could tell that she was thinking and sorting things out in her own mind the way she always does, and the next night when I'd gone to bed early to study for a Social Studies test the next day, one of those stupid, multiple choice things, she came in wearing her polka dot pajamas and plunked herself down on the foot of my bed.

"Maggy's asleep," she said morosely.

I kept on reading. "Oh. That's good."

"Vicky," Suzy said passionately, "what does he want to do it for?"

“Who?” I asked stupidly. “What?”

She punched at my book. “Daddy. Why does he want to go to New York?”

“You know,” I said. “He *explained* it all. He’s gone as far as he can with his research here, and if he really wants to go back to New York and be with a big hospital again—”

“The hospital here’s one of the best in the country!” Suzy defended.

“Yes, but it’s a *little* hospital, Suzy, and it doesn’t have a medical school or a nursing school—o you want to be a doctor, you ought to understand, you of all people—”

“We’ve been *perfectly* happy here,” Suzy said. “Daddy, too.”

“I know, but I just *explained*, and his practice is getting so big and he’s so busy and you *know* he’s been saying for years he doesn’t have enough time for study and research.”

“We’ll have to leave all our friends—and go to new schools—”

It was all perfectly true, and I argued to convince myself as much as Suzy. “Well, maybe it’s like John. John’s learned everything he can at Regional and next year he’s going on to M.I.T. Maybe that’s how it is with Daddy. He’s gone as far as he can here and he has to take the next step.”

“At least John’s not dragging the rest of us *with* him,” Suzy said. “I think it might have occurred to Daddy that we might be involved in this, too.”

We were all certainly involved in it; it was probably the most involved spring we ever had, with Daddy and John poring over the Montgomery Ward catalogue and brooding over various tents and sleeping bags and air mattresses, and Mother being demanding about cooking equipment, and Aunt Elena coming up to Thornhill with designs for her wedding dress and Suzy’s and Maggy’s handmaiden dresses, and Uncle Douglas deciding to paint another portrait of Mother before moving out to California, and Daddy finishing up a million things at home and at the office and the hospital.

So it was no wonder, now that Uncle Douglas and Aunt Elena were safely married, we sat out on Grandfather’s screened porch and felt that we couldn’t possibly move an inch, even to go to bed. And maybe that was why Mother didn’t blast me for disappearing in the morning before the wedding.

I thought it would be nice if I did something to make up for it, so I said, “If anybody feels like lemonade or coffee or tea or anything before bed I’ll make it.”

Mother leaned against Daddy and yawned. “Thanks, Vicky, but let’s all just go to bed. Come on, Wally.”

Daddy yawned, too. “Come on yourself.”

“Father can’t go to bed until we get off the porch,” Mother said. “Come on, Wallace. I’m so tired I’m like a piece of cooked spaghetti. Give me a shove.”

Daddy gave her a shove and she slid off the chaise longue and onto the floor, and then we were all laughing, and John pulled her up. We kissed Grandfather good-night, Mother and Daddy went to sleep in Grandfather’s big double bed, John and I went on up to the loft, and for some reason just being silent out there on the porch had made me feel better. Even if everything around us was different from home, where we lived and school and everything, as long as Mother and Daddy were the same, as long as the family didn’t change, then there was still something to hang on to.

Three

The next day we saw Maggy off and then lazed around on the beach. In the afternoon Daddy and John got the car ready and practiced setting up the tent on the small patch of lawn in front of the stable while Mother, Suzy, Rob, and I stood around criticizing. John got mad, and Rob thought he really meant it and went and flung his arms around him to comfort him, which slowed things down. But the tent was really quite easy to manage. It hangs from tubular aluminum poles that fit together, so there isn't any pole in the middle of the tent at all. The back of the tent lifts up and hitches over the end of the station wagon with the tail gate down. Mother, Daddy, Rob, and John were to sleep in the tent, and Suzy and I in the back of the station wagon, and we'd all be under one roof.

The next morning we got up at five o'clock and put the last things in the car. It was a soft morning with the light a kind of fuzzy, golden-pink, the sort of hazy early morning that always brightens up and clears into a beautiful day. We hugged and kissed Grandfather good-bye and got into the car. Suzy and I wore Bermuda's and knee socks and sweaters, and John and Rob and Daddy wore jeans. Daddy doesn't like women in pants and Mother never wears them, but she looked comfortable and all ready for the trip in a plaid skirt and white blouse and red cardigan.

In the very back of the station wagon Daddy had made a kind of bed out of the sleeping bags and air-mattresses, and so forth, with a couple of extra blankets spread over the top. Rob immediately curled up there with Elephant's Child in his arms. Suzy crawled in by him, so she could lie on her stomach and look out the back window. John and I sat in the middle seat with the stove, the pots and pans, the big water thermos jug, and the ice box. There *was* room for us, but not an inch extra. Mother and Daddy sat in front with the food box and Mother's big straw bag of odds and ends, and a wooden box of books. Mother said she knew she wasn't apt to read them if she brought them, but she was even less apt to read them if she left them behind, so she was going to bring them.

Daddy stood by the car checking everything off on his list: tools, hatchet, saw, fire extinguisher, laundry rope, big-battered lantern, everything he'd decided that we couldn't possibly do without. Then he, too, said good-bye to Grandfather, got in and started the car, and suddenly my stomach felt very empty, as though we hadn't had any breakfast at all.

For once we were glad when the ferry trip to the mainland was over, because now that we were really all packed up and in the car we wanted to get going. When we reached the mainland we headed for a parkway and started playing the alphabet game. You know, you divide up by who's sitting on which side of the car, and you have to find the letters of the alphabet, in order, one by one, on signs. John and Daddy and Suzy were way ahead until they came to Q, and then Mother and Rob and I caught up with them and won. Then we played Animal Rummy, and Rob saw a white horse and won that. And of course we sang. We always do a lot of singing.

Daddy and Mother and John were going to take turns with the driving, although there were quite a lot of states John wouldn't be able to drive in after dark because he wasn't eighteen. However, we didn't plan to do much driving after dark, so it didn't matter.

Daddy had picked a route that avoided all the big towns and just went through their outskirts. Rob thought this over seriously, then asked, "Daddy, if those were the out skirts we just went through, where are the out pants?"

We had a snack of fruit and cookies in the middle of the morning, and ate our lunch in the car, too, just sandwiches, so it was easy. Whenever we stopped at a gas station we would all get out and use the

wash rooms and Mother would give us some lemonade from the big jug. In the afternoon we stopped and had milkshakes, and all through the trip we found that this was much the best and easiest way to do it—have snack and lunch while we were driving, and then stop in the afternoon when we were restless to get something to drink. We had to play it by ear all along, because we'd never been on a camping trip before, and we really didn't know anything about it.

John and Suzy and I'd been to Scout Camp, but Daddy, of course, had been much too busy to think about anything like camping trips, or even picnics. Why eat a meal outdoors, I'd heard him say, when you have ants and mosquitoes and smoky fires, when you can be so much more comfortable at home? As for views, what could rival the view from our own windows?

Aunt Elena and Uncle Douglas had thought Daddy was nuts not to take the tent and go up Hawk Mountain for a week-end for a dry run. "Really, Wallace," Aunt Elena said, looking up from designing her wedding dress, "you can't just go off on a camping trip cold when you've never had anything to do with tents before."

Uncle Douglas grinned and said, "Wally thinks he can just snap out '*hatchet*' or '*tent peg*' the way he does '*suture*' or '*scalpel*' at the hospital, and somebody'll be hovering over him to slap them in his hand. You'd really better take a week-end up Hawk, Wally."

Daddy threw back his head and laughed. "In the first place, you're confusing me with young Dick Malone. In the second place if we spent even one night up on Hawk I'd come back and put all the camping equipment in the attic and never touch any of it again."

So that first day when we set off none of us had ever slept in a tent, since the scout camps we'd been to had shacks. All our equipment was new and shiny and we couldn't wait to use it. Uncle Douglas had sent Mother some wonderful cooking equipment from Abercrombie and Fitch in New York. First of all there was a folding two burner stove with canned gas. Then the pots and pans. They all fitted in a canvas bag. There was a big aluminum pot and in the bottom of this went a frying pan. On top of the frying pan went six tin plates. Then there was a medium sized pot, then a smaller pot, then a big coffee pot top, and in this a stack of tin cups. Then came the coffee pot top, and for a grand lid over everything a big frying pan. The handles of the frying pans came off and slipped down in the canvas bag. The way it was put together reminded me of a wooden doll Aunt Elena had given me once year ago for Christmas. You opened the wooden doll, and inside was another wooden doll, and inside another and another and another, all neatly fitted together like our cooking equipment. Mother was pleased and delighted with the nest of pots and pans as I'd been with the doll.

The first night of the trip Daddy planned to stop near Washington. Since we'd been to Washington the year before, and seen as many sights as you can pack into a few days, we were going to skip the city. Daddy had the car radio on, and every once in a while there would be a weather report; showers by nightfall were forecast. Daddy would look at Mother and Mother would look at Daddy, but the sun kept on shining until we got on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and even then it didn't look very bad.

But after we left the Pennsylvania Turnpike and were heading for Gettysburg it started to sprinkle and then it began to pour. It rained so hard that the windshield wipers had a hard time keeping up. The sky was black and gloomy all around. There didn't seem to be a break in the clouds anywhere. It was after four o'clock, and Daddy'd said we'd plan to stop by five or five thirty each afternoon at the very latest.

He turned to Mother. "Do you think we should go to a motel?"

We all sat very still and waited. Mother looked at the rain streaming down the windshield and the wipers bustling back and forth. She picked up the AAA booklet of campsites, and then she looked at the map of Pennsylvania that had campsites on it. "Our very first night?" she asked Daddy. "It seems like an awful admission of defeat."

"Mighty wet for putting up tents and building fires," Daddy said.

“We could use Douglas’s stove,” Mother suggested.

“But not to sleep in,” Daddy said.

Mother looked back at us kids. “How do you feel about it?”

John said, “I’d rather not go to a motel,” and I nodded.

“Oh, please!” Suzy clasped her hands in her intensity. “*Please!*”

Rob looked very solemn and as though he were about to burst into tears, but he didn’t say anything.

Mother looked at the campsite book and at the map again. “This is the only campsite anywhere around. Caledonia State Park. If we don’t stay there we’ll have to drive another hour or so, and that would make it pretty late.”

“Let’s try it. Please!” Suzy begged.

I concentrated hard. I guess we all did. But to me it seemed that if this first night of the camping trip, which was the first step of our new life, turned out all right, then the rest of it would be all right too. But if the first night of the camping trip was a mess, then everything, the trip, New York, all of it would be a mess, too. I know that’s silly and superstitious and I certainly didn’t mention it out loud, but it’s the way I felt.

“Okay,” Daddy said. “We’ll go on to Caledonia State Park and if the weather’s still impossible, we’ll give up—and gracefully, kids—and go to a motel.”

“But it’ll unbalance our budget,” John said, and I could have hugged him for it. “There’re a heck a lot of us for a motel.”

“The budget is geared for an emergency or two,” Daddy told him. “But I agree with you. We’re on a camping trip and we want to sleep in our tent. But we don’t want to start on the wrong foot the very first night.”

Mother folded the map. “We’ll just wait and see. That’s one thing we have to remember about this trip. For once in our lives we’re not on a schedule of any kind. We don’t have to plan anything ahead. We’ll just take it all as it comes.” She looked around at me, and I must have been looking tense because she said, “and whether it’s a sleeping bag or a motel bed we’ll have fun, Vicky.”

—Not a motel. Please, not a motel.

It seemed to me that the rain was beginning to slacken.—Go away, rain. Stop. Please make it stop. Please.

I’m sure it wasn’t due to my concentration, but when Daddy pointed out the entrance to Caledonia State Park the rain began to let up, and when we reached the Park office it had slowed down to a trickle, so Daddy paid a dollar, got a permit, and drove off towards the transient campsites. And just as we drove into the grove of pines where the campsites were the sun burst through the clouds, great shafts of light shot down through the trees, and the floor of pine needles turned golden.

It was an omen!

Daddy stopped by a picnic table near a brook, where somebody had made a fireplace out of several flat stones, and we all jumped out and stretched our legs, which felt cramped and a little wobbly from the long day’s driving. Then we all set about our jobs. John and Daddy were to put up the tent and take care of the fire. I was to help Mother unpack the food and start dinner. Suzy and Rob were to blow up the air-mattresses, which they did by taking turns with a little black rubber foot pump, and then I was to help them slide the air-mattresses into the sleeping bags and get things organized in the tent. It was really lucky, as well as being an omen, that the rain had stopped, because the ground at the campsite was hard and shale-ey, not a bit like the soft patch of lawn in front of Grandfather’s stable, and John and Daddy had an awful time hammering in the aluminum pitons that hold up the tent. They never did get them in all the way; they were afraid that if they kept on hammering the aluminum would bend and break. “But they’ll hold up the tent until morning—I *think*,” Daddy said.

This was one of the few American campsites where we were allowed to go off into the forest and

collect our own wood. Mother told me to go along with the others because she didn't really need me help with dinner, so we crossed the little wooden bridge over the brook and Daddy and John took the hatchet while Suzy and Rob and I collected kindling. Rob was so excited and happy that he couldn't just walk, he had to jump and skip. When Rob's happy he seems to shine, almost as though you could actually see light pulsing from him. The rays of his light seem to spread out and touch you so that you can't help glowing with pleasure yourself.

Rob and Suzy went running on ahead while I stood there in the woods suddenly feeling happier than I had in a long time. The leaves of the trees and bushes were all quivering with silver drops of rain, the sunlight sifted down softly, the birds were singing, and I felt all full of life and hope. Maybe nothing would ever be as comforting and secure as it used to be when I was a child in Thornhill, but it was going to be exciting.

When we got back with the firewood Mother needed water to cook with, as well as water to heat for dishwashing. (As chief dishwasher I was the one most apt to miss the electric one at home. For camping we had only a good-sized white plastic pan.) Rob and I found the water, which was a spigot coming out of a cement base. We splashed water into our pots and I was so happy that I didn't even get cross when Rob slopped water all over me. After we'd brought Mother all the water she needed we scouted around and found the lavatories, which were sort of glorified privies, and were already quite dark inside. We'd need our flashlights when it came time to get ready for bed.

We had a wonderful dinner. I don't think food has ever tasted better than it did that night in the dusk of the pine grove, eaten off our tin plates, with Rob bouncing up and down on the wooden bench so excited he couldn't keep still. We had a thick, juicy steak. Salad with *three* big tomatoes. Potato salad. And we roasted marshmallows for dessert. While we ate we could hear the faint bubbling of the water for the dishes heating over the fire, and afterwards Mother and I washed the dishes while Suzy and Rob got ready for bed. Then John and I took our turn. When we walked through the campground to the lavatories there were lights in almost all the trailer windows, and they looked warm and cozy. I hadn't realized that people in trailers would have lights, while people in tents wouldn't. This camp had mostly trailers, and there weren't many children.

After I'd brushed my teeth I tried to look at myself in the mirror by flashlight, to see if I'd changed any in the exciting past couple of days. I wasn't exactly looking for grey hairs, but I thought that I might look a little older, more sophisticated, if not a raving beauty. But the flashlight made me look sort of weird, and the mirror in the camp bathroom was one of those wavy ones that distort your face anyhow, so I stuck the end of the flashlight in my mouth, puffed out my cheeks, looked at my ghoulified reflection, and decided to scare Suzy and Rob when we got to bed.

Just as I got back to the tent it started to rain again. "Perfect timing if ever I saw it," Mother said.

Suzy and I climbed into our sleeping bags on the tail gate of the station wagon, with our heads towards the tent. Rob and John got into their bags, and Mother and Daddy into theirs, which was two sleeping bags zippered together to make one big one. It took less room in the tent, which was important, and also gave Mother and Daddy more room to stretch than would an ordinary sleeping bag.

Mother adjusted the lantern, pulled a book out of her wooden box, and said, "What with John's and Vicky's homework it's been a long time since we've been able to do any family reading at bedtime and this will probably be our last chance in a while. Would you like something?"

John grinned. "You and Rob would be shattered if we didn't. Sure, Mother. What've you got?"

"I thought *A Connecticut Yankee* might be fun for a start," Mother said, and we all settled down to read the first chapter.

It made me feel younger. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to feel younger or older. All I knew was that at almost fifteen it's very difficult to be satisfied with the age you are, because you aren't real.

any age. I mean, you get fascinated with boys, but it isn't really time yet. It's too early to think about marrying and babies and stuff like that, though lots of the kids at Regional who weren't going on college *were* thinking about it, and there were even a couple of marriages in John's grade. But *I* wasn't ready, that's for sure, and I guess I'm not very good with boys, yet. Suzy can giggle and look cute and when she gets into high school she'll have dozens of boys asking her for each dance. This past year I always ended up with an invitation, but people weren't exactly falling over themselves trying to dance with me. Suzy says it's because I'm too serious about things, and she's probably right. I laugh a lot because we always seem to in our family, but I don't think my sense of humor is my strong point.

After Mother had finished reading she said, and I thought there was a double kind of questioning in her voice, "How about prayers?"

When we were little we always used to love bedtime, when Mother would read to us, and then we all say prayers together. But when John got into high school and had more and more homework piled up on him, he dropped out. This year I went over to the regional high school, too, and started staying up later to study, so I didn't go up with the others, either. Suzy and Maggy didn't have to turn the lights out till an hour after Rob, but they kept on with the reading and everything. And it wasn't just that. Our grandfather is a minister and I love him more than anyone in the world except Mother and Daddy and Uncle Douglas, but all of a sudden this winter I'd begun to resent having to go to Sunday school, and church every week, and I'd quit saying prayers anyhow most nights, partly because I wasn't sure anyone was listening—after all, *why should* anyone—and partly because by the time I'd done my homework and got into bed I was too sleepy, anyhow. I'm not sure how John felt. He's not like me. He never griped about church and all and I don't think not understanding God ever bothered him, but I think maybe he thought he was too big for prayers at Mother's knee and all that stuff, too.

This time he didn't say it would upset Mother and Rob if we didn't, he just said, "Sure," and looked over at me, as though to make certain I wasn't going to say anything.

So we said prayers and then Rob said his God-bless. We always used to say a God-bless, but Rob was the only one who did that night, and nobody urged anybody else to, thank heavens. I've always loved Rob's God-blesses. He talks very sternly to God during them, telling Him just where to get off and he spends a great deal of time blessing a great many animals and people. I guess Mother'd had to cut him down on it some, because instead of naming all the cats we've ever had, the way he used to, he asked God to bless Mr. Rochester and Colette, our dogs, and then, "and bless Hamlet and Prunewhiskers and all the cats and dogs who have been, will be, and are." Then he did the same with people, just blessed the family, and then asked God to bless all the people on all the planets who have been, will be, and are. Then he said, "And God, help the situation in the world. Please don't let there be any wars. Please just make everybody die of old age." And then, "And God, thank you because we've had a wonderful day, and please make tomorrow be just as wonderful, and keep us safe. God, I'm very much consented. Bless me and make me a good boy. Amen."

I think if everybody could be like Rob about prayers I wouldn't be so embarrassed by them.

We all said good-night and rolled over comfortably in our sleeping bags. Mother and Daddy kept the lantern on for a little while and read, but it wasn't long before they turned it off and it was dark in the tent. It seemed very peculiar all to be going to bed at the same time and in the same place. I lay in my sleeping bag and listened to the rain pattering on the canvas roof of the tent, and to the gentle splashing of the brook outside. It was hard to tell which was rain and which was brook, and, to add to it, the wind and the rain in the pines sounded like the ocean, so that we might almost have been back at Grandfather's. I've often noticed the way the sound of wind in pines is like the rolling of the waves on the beach. If you close your eyes and listen you can pretend you're at the seashore. But I didn't feel like pretending anything now. It was exciting being in our tent, sleeping out in the wilderness on the rather bouncy air mattress (Daddy said it would take a little experimenting to find out just how much

air we needed) and looking around the dark tent. The canvas flaps had to be zipped up over the n windows because of the rain, but the front of the tent had a canvas porch, and from where I was lying on the tail gate I could look through the open netting of the door to the woods. The night sounds seemed to be different from the night sounds at home, not just the brook and the rain on canvas and through pines, but the frogs and insects seemed to be singing in a different key and rhythm.

I heard a hiss in Daddy's direction and whispered, "What's that?"

"Shh!" he whispered back. "I'm letting a little air out of my mattress."

"May I?"

"Yes, but don't let too much out, because you can't put any back in."

"Go to sleep, Vicky," Mother whispered.

"I'm too excited."

"We're all excited, but Daddy wants to get an early start tomorrow, so try to relax."

I turned my mattress valve and let a little air hiss out. Then I stretched out in the sleeping bag she Mother had made sort of inner bags out of old sheets for us. These had tapes on the bottom and could be tied to tapes at the foot of the sleeping bags, so the sheets wouldn't wrinkle up too much when you tried to turn over. And we all had small foam-rubber-filled cloth pillows, each in a different pattern so we could tell them apart, that could be tossed in washing machines along the way, and of course didn't take up as much room as regular pillows. There are lots of little things like that to a camping trip that I never thought of when we first started making plans.

Suzy mumbled something in her sleep. From one of the tents or trailers somebody called out "Harry!" The rain shshed gently through the trees and the sound was a lullaby. I closed my eyes and went to sleep.

The next morning we were up early. On school mornings Mother has to pry us out of our beds, but the moment we heard Mother and Daddy stirring we were all very wide awake and excited immediately. John built the fire and Mother made scrambled eggs and hashed brown potatoes, and brewed coffee in the open pot that came with Uncle Douglas's cooking set. At home Mother uses an electric percolator; we have friends who make drip coffee and chemex coffee and instant coffee and espresso coffee and I've never given a hoot about coffee, I've always had milk or cocoa for breakfast. But this coffee! In an open pot you just bring the water to a boil, throw in the coffee (I suppose you have to measure it), and an egg shell if you happen to have one handy, then take the pot off the fire and let it sit on the side of the fireplace till the grounds settle. Well! Nothing has ever smelled quite as wonderful as that open pot coffee at Caledonia State Park, and it even tasted good, with lots of milk and sugar.

We learned that morning that it took us longer to break camp than to set it up. Daddy said we undoubtedly learn short cuts and be able to cut down on the time, but we'd have to get going earlier the morning.

As soon as we got in the car Mother got out her little notebook in which she was keeping lists of everything. Not for any real reason. Just for fun. We did want to know how much we spent each day and we wanted to jot down every place that was interesting that we went through. The first day we spent \$9.95 on tolls, gas, Cokes, and the camping permit. The second day it was \$11.84 on tolls, gas, tickets to Monticello (Rob thought it was a musical instrument), gas, sodas, and firewood. At Peaks of Otter State Park in Virginia you had to buy the firewood, but it only cost fifty cents, and the campgrounds were much nicer than Caledonia, with special places marked out for the tents and for parking cars, really nice picnic tables, and well built stone fireplaces with good grills at each campsite. That night we had spaghetti and got to bed earlier than the first night, and were ready for bed, too. There were only a few other campers there, and none very close to us, so Mother got out her guitar and we sang, first loud songs and silly songs, then the kind of sad folk songs, and then slow

slipped in some hymns. Not that I'm really against hymns, but you know what I mean.

~~One thing I do like about hymns, most of them we can sing in parts. John and Daddy sing bass~~ which makes the bass louder than anything else, but you can't stop them. Suzy and Rob sing the melody, and they both have sweet, clear voices. Rob's is really terrific for such a little kid. He never flats or gets off tune or anything. Mother sings tenor, sometimes where it belongs and sometimes an octave high, so it's sort of like a descant, and I struggle along with the alto. I'm the weak link in the part-singing deal. I'm pretty good on the alto of "All Through the Night," and "Now the Day Is Over" is a cinch. It's the Bach ones I'm apt to goof on, but they're really my favorites.

Mother put the guitar down and said, "Let's end up with 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. After the glorious hills we've seen today it seems the perfect way to say good-night.'"

As far as the Bible goes (and I suppose you might say it goes pretty far, even if not with me at that point) I like the psalms best, and that's one of my particular best ones, so that was okay.

We cut five minutes off breaking-camp time the next morning and headed for Tennessee.

Don't let anybody kid you. Tennessee's quite a state. When I look back on that night at Cosby Camp Site in the Great Smokies National Park I still get gooseflesh.

Four

But the day started peacefully enough. We drove through more beautiful mountains and *more* beautiful mountains, till I stopped looking. In the afternoon it began to cloud up, and the weather reports started mentioning possible showers. But this was becoming routine for afternoons and didn't bother us any more. We stopped at a market and bought food for dinner: pork chops, turnip green, lettuce. We still had potatoes and tomatoes and milk, and we'd replenished our ice the day before with a twenty-five pound chunk which would last forty-eight hours.

As we got near the Great Smokies National Park we passed an inn called the Black Bear Inn. It had a sign with a big picture of a bear on it, and Rob cried out, "A bear! A bear!"

"Where?" Suzy yelled, reaching for *her* notebook, because she was keeping lists, too, only her lists were of animals and insects and (she hoped and I didn't) snakes.

Daddy pointed to the sign and said, "Take a good look, kids. That's probably as close to a bear as you'll get till we reach the Rockies."

As we drove into the park the wind began to whip at the trees, and dark clouds scudded across the sky. It wasn't actually raining, but the air felt wet. There were puddles at the sides of the road, so we knew it must have showered here earlier.

"We'd better set up camp and get dinner quickly," Mother said.

We had our choice of campsites. At Caledonia it was almost crowded; and at Peaks of Otter, in Virginia, there'd been other families. Here we were the *only* people in the largest campgrounds we'd been to so far. I suppose the reason there wasn't anybody else there was that we'd started out almost a month ahead of usual camping time. School was still open most places and people wouldn't be going on vacations yet.

It was a beautiful campgrounds, with big stone tables and benches, and really good fireplaces for each campsite. But it was lonely, and for some reason I felt edgy and almost scared. I didn't quite know why, and I certainly didn't say anything about it. But I wished the ranger's house were near the campgrounds instead of way down the mountain.

The ground was soft and wet; it must have rained *hard* here. But this at least made the tent pegs looser, easier to drive into the ground, so John and Daddy got the tent up quickly. The late afternoon was a chill, so we built an extra big fire. We put on our sweaters and stayed close by the tent instead of running off to explore the way we usually did. The sky was full of low, black clouds, making it dark for this time of day. The wind was rising, whipping the trees so that the younger ones bent against its lash and the small branches tossed wildly.

As soon as dinner was ready we sat down at the big stone table. Because we were the only people there we sang grace, one we do to the Tallis Canon, a very joyful noise. Despite my current feelings about loud singings of grace it made me feel better. Also there's something very matter-of-fact about pork chops. Heroines of mystery novels are never mentioned eating a dinner of pork chops just before something terrible is about to happen.

Being a little nervy hadn't blunted my appetite, and I was gnawing on my chop bone when we heard a car coming up the hill to the campgrounds very fast. It whizzed by us—it must have been going seventy-five miles an hour on that narrow, winding road—zoomed all the way around the campgrounds, and went by us again. As it passed something was flung out of the window and shattered against the side of our station wagon with a sound like an explosion. We all stood up. I thought it was

a bomb.

~~Daddy started towards our car. He moved with such quickness and decision that he was half way there before the rest of us had untangled ourselves from the picnic table and started to follow him. I still had my pork chop bone in my hand and was trembling like an aspen.~~

“It was just a Coke bottle,” Daddy said, his voice very quiet and matter-of-fact. But it wasn’t his regular, at home voice. It was his Dr. Austin voice, the kind of voice he uses when patients get hysterical, or some kind of emergency comes up that has to be handled quickly and without fuss.

We could still hear the car zooming on around the road that circled the campgrounds. I knew it was coming by us again, and no matter how calm Daddy was, I was very frightened. There was a dent in the fender where the Coke bottle had hit it, dark stains of Coke splashes, and broken glass all over.

Daddy said, sharply, “Everybody get back to the picnic table. Quickly. Sit there and eat as though nothing had happened.”

I knew the car would come by again, and they might throw something else. This time it might hit one of us instead of the station wagon. We scurried up the side of the hill to the picnic table. Mother put her arm around Rob and pretended to eat salad. John said, “Those dumb hoods,” and drank some milk.

“How do you know it was hoods?” I asked.

John sounded disgusted. “Who else?”

Now we could hear the car coming closer, and I could feel everything about my body tightening up.

Daddy said, “Just ignore them.”

This time the car didn’t whizz on by and they didn’t throw anything. The car stopped with a great squealing skid and jamming on of brakes. It was a shabby-looking jalopy, and inside it was a gang of boys. John was right, as usual, but that didn’t make me any happier. The left front door opened and the boy behind the steering wheel got out. He had on black tapered pants and a black leather jacket.

Daddy got up from the picnic table, speaking in low command. “Stay where you are. You, too, John.”

I looked at Mother, sitting very still, her arm around Rob. I knew she was frightened because she was as motionless as a statue. I looked at Daddy walking unhurriedly down towards the boy.

Before Daddy said anything the boy snarled, and he sounded more like an animal than a human boy. “Ah believe you have one of our Cokes. We’d like it back.”

Daddy is used to giving orders and he is used to being obeyed. He spoke very quietly, but his words were as cold and sharp as ice. “Get in your car and get out of this campgrounds. At once. If we have any further trouble from you I shall report you to the police.”

“Yea-uh?” the boy said. “Un-hunh?” His voice had a southern drawl, but it wasn’t soft and it wasn’t pretty. “Just you try, mistah. We’ll go when we feel like it.”

“You will go now,” Daddy said, still very quiet.

“Yea-uh? Now just tell me why?”

Daddy spoke as though he were talking to Suzy and Rob when they were being disobedient. “Because I say so.”

The boy moved slowly, insolently towards Daddy. I remembered a TV show about delinquents where a boy had deliberately tweaked a man’s nose in order to humiliate him, and the man stood there and took it. I didn’t think Daddy would. I held my breath. Before the boy could do anything Daddy reached out casually and gave a flip and the boy was over his back and lying sprawled on the soft, wet leaves.

I let my breath out.

Daddy was a black belt in Judo before any of us was ever born. We’ve always been proud of it, but as far as I know he’s never had to use it before.

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