

Life and Love

The bright May morning was beautiful, but there was silence at the breakfast table that morning as the Wredevik children ate.

"What's the matter with Ma?" Two-year-old Freddie was not gloomy like the older children and was wondering why Ma and Pa were not eating.

"You heard Pa, Freddie," Bethany reminded him. "Michael got hurt real bad."

Only half an hour ago, Pa had received a call from the Army. He hadn't wanted to tell Ma and the rest of the family the news. But he knew that he must, and finally he had told the story.

Michael, who was twenty-one, had been in the military since he was eighteen without a scrape or a cut, but last night he had been seriously injured. He would be brought home to recover. The news had come as a surprise to Pa because Michael was in serious enough condition to come home. But it was a terrible shock to Ma, and she was almost frantic with worry.

When she heard the news, Ma had hurried to go to her room, trying in vain to hide the tears that rolled down her cheek. She had not wanted Michael to go in the first place. But she had finally consented, and Pa was happy to see him go off and win the war. Ma had slowly come to accept his being gone. She did not worry so much any more because through the years he had never been hurt. Now Pa was with Ma in their room.

Bethany, Jenny and the twins, Lena and Martha, had gotten breakfast on the table and now the children were eating.

"Lena, more eggs," Freddie said as he shook his fork at the skillet of fluffy yellow eggs. Lena spooned him more eggs. When they finished, James washed the dishes as Jeremiah dried. Bethany and Jenny cleared the table and put away the food. Lena went to gather eggs while Martha fed the horses. Lena made her way around the seventeen chickens, searching carefully. She didn't want to miss a single egg. In the barn, the bales of hay were stacked high, almost too high for Martha to reach, but she stood on the lower bales and got two. She took off the wires and threw the hay to the horses in the corral.

At the house Jenny was churning cream to make butter and Bethany was making cheese. Ma had come out of her room. Her eyes were red and her face pale, but she was sewing James's shirt in the rocking chair. Pa had gone out to fix the broken board in the pig pen.



"Jeremiah!" Martin's voice broke the silence in the barn. "Come play hide and seek. You're it!" He shouted as Jeremiah ran into the barn.

"1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10... Peaches, pears, and pun'kin pie, whoever's not hidden holler 'I!'" Jeremiah searched the hay loft.

"I found you," called Jeremiah. Martin always hid in the hay.

"Hey!" shouted Thomas, as he ran into the hay loft as fast as his short legs would carry him. "I want to play!"

"Ok," Jeremiah replied. "Let's go to the creek."

"Oh, no..." the older boys said together. Here came Freddie, running up to the barn.

"But Ma said he can't go to the creek," Thomas said, disappointed.

"Come on. Maybe he won't see us." They all dove into the hay stack. Freddie went past the barn door to the pig pen. The boys could hear James helping Pa fix the fence.

Freddie went into the pen. "James, Mama wants you to milk Zita. She is in a bad mood and keeps kicking Mama." Zita, the goat, was always having attitudes and never letting people milk her.

"Ok," James said as he started walking to the barn. Freddie went into the hay loft.

"Oh, no" Jeremiah groaned as Freddie ran into barn calling for them.

"Martin!"

The boys came out of stack covered in little pieces of hay.

"Freddie, you should really go back to Ma." Jeremiah squatted down trying to encourage him to go back.

"No!" was Freddie's loud, sharp and determined answer.

Just then Jenny walked into the barn. "Freddie. Ma wants you at the house." Freddie left, running behind Jenny.

There was a noise in the goats' pen and out came James running as fast as he could with Zita behind him. Pa came running out of the pen after them. He caught up to them just as they ran into a nearby hay stack. He grabbed Zita's horns to stop her.

"That does it," he said. "She's getting too much for us. I'll go to town and try to sell her," he said as he walked toward the pen again.



Martha stretched and yawned. She rolled over and shook Lena. Unlike her twin, Martha enjoyed getting up early. As she jumped out of bed the sunlight was still pale. Martha could hear Bethany and Jenny in the kitchen helping Ma cook breakfast. She smelled the bacon and shook Lena harder.

"Get up, get up. Come on! We have to go help Ma." She was used to mornings like this, shaking Lena over and over.

When Lena finally woke up, she hurried to dress. Lena slid next to Martha on to the bench in front of the mirror and braided her hair. The twins ran down the stairs together and into the kitchen. Ma was putting on her bonnet.

"Ma, where are you going?" Lena asked.

"Pa has to sell Zita. And you remember Michael is coming on the seven o'clock train," Ma responded quickly as she tied her bonnet strings. Lena poked her head out the door and saw Pa struggling to load Zita into the wagon. Ma hurried out to join him. Pa helped her into the wagon. The wagon took off and the children sat down to breakfast.

On the way, Pa stopped off at the Eggen's farm. Mr. Eggen had been wanting to buy Zita. Pa stopped the wagon and knocked on the house door. Mr. Eggen opened the door.

"Mornin', Bud," Pa greeted him. "Hope I didn't get you out of bed," Pa joked.

"Naw, naw," Mr. Eggen's belly shook as he laughed. "The wife's cooking breakfast. Whatcha up to?" He asked Pa, eyeing Zita.

Pa chuckled. "You guessed it. Help me unload her."

"Sure thing," Mr. Eggen said, as he hurried to the wagon. They decided on a price and put Zita with the other goats.

In town, the streets were busy. Horses rushed by, merchants called out their merchandise, and all was noisy in Ajo, Arizona. Pa drove on to the train station. It was ten minutes to seven and Ma was terribly worried. Finally the train was coming down the track. It came to a stop and

Michael was brought out on a stretcher and set in the back of the wagon at Pa's direction. Pa took off gently, heading home.

At home, all the morning chores were done and each was doing his own work on the farm. Pa drove up and the five oldest girls came running. They all helped carry Michael to his room and Ma sat with him. Michael had been shot in the head while in battle and was delirious. There was no telling how long he would be that way.

Soon, it was time for afternoon chores. Pa and James unhitched the horses. Martha and Lena fed the animals. Bethany and Jenny walked to the berry bushes with their baskets. Thomas and Freddie were with Ma watching her making straw hats. Jeremiah and Martin were gathering long pieces of straw for her to use.



Supper was on the table, but for the third time this week Ma and Pa were not at the table. Dr. Wheeler was at the house to look at Michael. He came down, closing up his bag.

"I think this delirium won't last much longer. He'll come out of it soon." There was a wave of relief as the tense older children relaxed and sighed.

"Thank you, doctor." Ma and Pa were as relieved as the children. Ma said goodbye and Pa shook his hand. Then Pa came to dinner as Ma slowly meandered back to Michael's room. After the chores were done they made sure Michael had a cold washcloth on his hot forehead. Ma had come downstairs again, but every twenty minutes she would peek into his room.

Very early the next morning, Lena woke up. She wondered why. She hardly ever woke up this early. Then she thought of Michael. Lena slipped out of bed and quietly went down the hall to see if he needed anything or was awake yet. She hoped he was better by now.

Lena was startled to see that the lamp in his room was lit. Then she heard Ma. Lena looked into the room and then shouted,

"Michael! Oh, Michael!" Her brother was sitting up in bed while Ma changed his cloth. Michael smiled faintly.

"How's my little sis?" He sounded very weak, but he was awake at last. Lena ran to the bed and threw herself on him in a hug.

"Hey, you're too big," he protested weakly. But he wrapped Lena in a hug.

Lena's shout had awakened the rest of the family. Soon Michael's room was filled with happy laughter.