

WEST SHORE BOYS AND GIRLS

WHERE TOMMY PUT THE CARTRIDGE.

"Somehow I don't feel just right about leaving the children alone," said mother, "but I suppose it can't be helped."

"Oh, there's nothing to harm them," said father, reassuringly. "Jane isn't afraid."

I was Jane, nine years old, and not especially a coward; yet in my heart I knew that I was just a little bit afraid to stay alone with my little three-year-old brother all day in our prairie home while father and mother went to town, but I said nothing.

"There is always the possibility of drunken Indians coming around, you know," said mother, uneasily.

"That's all the more reason for not leaving the place alone," retorted father. "I tell you Jane isn't afraid; she can stand off a whole regiment of reservation Indians."

In the face of this tribute to my courage I could not confess that I was afraid; so mother kissed us a reluctant goodbye and went out to the wagon.

"Guess I'll take the rifle along," said father, coming back at the last minute; "I may get sight of an antelope, and—hello! how is this? The cartridge box empty! There were two cartridges left in it yesterday."

"Tommy had the box yesterday," called mother from the wagon.

"Great Caesar! What will that kid be at next?" growled father. "Tom, where are my cartridges?"

But Tommy was already down on his little, fat knees in a corner, tugging away to get a cartridge out of a hollow in the end of a corncob.

"How did it get in there?" demanded father.

"Me put it in; me p'ay shoot Injuns," said Tommy.

"Where is the other cartridge? Hurry up now, my Indian fighter; I must be off."

But here Tommy looked blank; evidently his memory was at fault as to what he had done with the other cartridge.

"Well, I can't wait all day," said father. "You make him hunt up that cartridge, Jane, or it may get into the fire and blow the house up."

With that father went away, and Tommy and I instituted a systematic search for the missing cartridge. But in vain we investigated every nook and cranny we could think of; the cartridge was not forthcoming. Tommy admitted that he had put it somewhere, but could not remember where. At last I relinquished the search and went out to feed the chickens.

By that time the wagon was out of sight over the "divide," and a renewed sense of loneliness and responsibility settled down upon me. It was all very well for father to assert that I was equal to a whole regiment of reservation Indians, but I suspected that he only said that to put me on my metal. He surely had not forgotten how a drunken Indian, known as "Flat-nose Jack," had visited a neighboring ranch only a year previously, and on being denied admittance to the house had set fire to the hay stack and carried off a lot of chickens.

All day, as I went about my work or play, I kept a watchful eye on the trail that wound away over the ridge, in the direction of the reservation, ten miles distant. How slowly the hours dragged by, until, at last, the sun lay straight in at the southern door and touched the noon mark on the clean floor.

"Now the sun will go faster," I said, cheerfully, to Tommy.

"Why?" demanded that enquiring young gentleman.

"Because it's going down hill now instead of up," I answered, in accordance with an astronomical theory of my own construction.

It was probably two hours later that I was suddenly startled by the sound of galloping hoofs close at hand, and I had barely time to spring up and fling my arms around Tommy when the open door was darkened by the burly form of an Indian. It was "Flat-nose Jack!" I had never seen him before, but at once recognized him by the deformity in which his name originated. He was known all over the territory as the bully and desperado of the tribe. My heart sank in terror. His eyes were blood-shot and rolled horribly as he glared at us, and something was evidently wrong with his legs; they kept giving way beneath him as he clung to the door and peered into the cabin.

"Where man? Where woman?" he grunted.

I did not attempt to answer, but Tommy blurted out, in his shrill, little treble: "Git out, ug'gy Injun; me shoot 'ou!"

The ruffian laughed loudly, and realizing that we were alone, staggered into the cabin and came toward us, with clutches extended. The cabin consisted only of one principal room and a small bedroom at one end. In my terror I darted into the bedroom, dragging Tommy with me, and slammed the door shut, only to remember that the sole fastening—an iron bolt—was on the outside of the door and of no use to me whatever. Father had put the bolt on that side because at times we had to keep belated wayfarers over night, and as the country was full of rough characters, and he never could tell what sort of persons he might be entertaining, he always lodged them in the bedroom and shot the bolt for safety. A wise precaution, truly, but in the present emergency I was not in a frame of mind to appreciate the wisdom of it.

The Indian pushed the door open a little way, and putting his head in, grinned at us horribly and made hideous faces, before which I trembled and shrank; but Tommy stood still and stared at the monster dauntlessly.

"Now me shut door; me burn you up," said the wretch, when tired of his facial contortions, and stepping back he closed the door and attempted to bolt it. But something seemed to be wrong with the bolt. I heard him fumbling with it for a minute or two, then apparently he struck it with some hard substance, probably the horn handle of the big knife he carried in his belt, and at the second blow there came an explosion that almost deafened me and shook the plaster in a shower from the chinks of the log walls. I could not imagine what had happened, but thought the house was coming down, and screamed with all the power of my lungs. In a moment, however, I caught the sound of oaths and groans of pain outside, and ceased my own lamentations to listen in wonder. Soon I heard the outside door go shut with a vindictive bang, and peeping through a crevice between the logs I saw the Indian running toward his pony, his hands, all blackened and bleeding, hanging limply at his sides. He mounted with evident difficulty and galloped away.

When I tried to open the bedroom door I found it so broken and shattered that some of the boards fell off at the first movement. The door frame at one side was torn off and the plaster was blown out of chinks in every direction. In vain I tried to conjecture what had wrought the havoc, and, at length, perplexed and awe struck, I locked the outside door, and taking the now mute Tommy in my arms, sat down to await the return of my parents. It was near nightfall when they at last came, and, after hearing my story, father had to light a lamp to investigate the damages and mystery. He was a long time about it, and seemed greatly perplexed until, at length, he found a piece of the broken bolt-socket and picked an exploded cartridge shell from it.

"Aha! The lost cartridge, I guess," he exclaimed. "Tommy must have put it in the bolt-socket, and when that drunken fool tried to drive the bolt in it exploded, of course, and nearly blew his hands off; and served him right, too, for frightening children. Hurrah for our young Indian fighter!"

"Shoot, bang!" shouted Tommy, suddenly realizing that he had done something commendable, though not quite clear as to what it was.

CARRIE BLAKE MORGAN.

Nell was a little girl of eight years, and she believed most devoutly in the efficacy of prayer, and in praying about all the simple things of every day life. She was learning to bake cakes; and each time she put one in the oven she would wrinkle her little forehead and say, very earnestly: "Now, Lord God, please make that cake come up." Well, the cakes always "came up" light as a thistle, but, alas! in two minutes after they were taken from the oven, they sank as if to hide themselves, to the bottom of the pans. This grieved and perplexed the little girl; but her faith was strong, and at last a happy idea came to her. Her mother in an adjoining room heard her exclaim, audibly and with utmost solemnity and satisfaction, as she set a cake in the oven: "Lord God, please make that cake come up; and please, dear Lord, when it comes up, make it stay up!"

Nita, who had been used to a warm and comfortable eastern home, was taken to the wild west to live. The first winter was cold, and as their little, poorly built house was set on stilts high above the ground, the wind poured so strongly through the cracks in the floor that Nita was kept in her high chair most of the time. One day, when the wind was fiercer than usual, and the carpet was rising and falling in regular swells with every gust, Nita's mother heard a little shriek of terror, and running into the sitting room, found the little lady in her high chair, with her eyes fixed upon the carpet in a ludicrous expression of mingled fright, awe and amazement. "O, mamma! mamma!" she cried, with a sob of exhaustion and disgust; "vat carpet is a-breavin'!"