

Serendipitous Rescue



Lowell Dunn

ESCONDIDO, CALIFORNIA: Word Wizards®

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Lois Olsen Dunn, who grew up during the Great Depression. She worked in the factories during World War II building B-17 airplanes with her sister Virginia and her brother Lowell. Then she raised a family.



Part 1

1951 - 1971

JJ and Laddie

Tutu House

The old woman lay crumpled on the dark kitchen floor, unable to pull herself up. “Is this how I’m going to die?” she thought. A fever had robbed her of her strength. She lived alone. She imagined her nephew coming to check on her, and the horror of what he would find.

The sun was not yet up, but it was beginning to get light outside. A cool breeze gently fell from the open back door. Only the screen door separated her from the outside. Occasionally the aroma of freshly cut grass from somewhere else would enter the kitchen. She had been lying on the floor since the previous evening and was parched with thirst. “I might see one more sunrise,” she thought as she drifted in and out of consciousness.

A dog barked. There was a knock on the screen door. A young boy’s voice called out.

“Oh,” she thought, “it’s my son Jack, come to take me to heaven. But why is there a dog?”

* * * * *

Earlier that evening, after everyone had gone to bed, JJ slipped away from the orphanage. He had been heading northwest, away from Tutu House and out into the country.

The year was 1951. JJ was eleven years old. No one knew his exact birthday because of how he came to the orphanage at Tutu House, named by the first orphans who lived there, because of the address: 22 Colonial Drive, Indiana, Pennsylvania. Colonial Drive had a bend in the street, and Tutu House was situated right on the bend so you could

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see down the road in both directions. Tutu House was a grand home built in 1920 by a businessman who lost his fortune in the Great Depression. The state claimed the property for back taxes and eventually leased it to the Grace Hope Home for Children. It wasn't exactly a mansion, but to the people who lived there, it was a castle.



The house had two stories, an attic, and a basement. It had five bedrooms plus a main bedroom and other rooms that could be used as bedrooms if needed. The attic had three rooms plus a large and small storage area. In the back was a sleeping porch, screened in and airy. There was also a garage, big enough for two cars.

Two ladies ran the home for children. Mrs. Barclay was in charge, and Miss Nancy helped. Mrs. Barclay used the master bedroom which also served as an office.

“Uncle Larry” came by once in a while to check on things and make repairs. He kept some tools in the garage and let JJ use them.

At breakfast and dinner, everyone sat at the dining room table. It was twelve feet long and had six chairs on each side, plus one at each end. Mrs. Barclay sat at one end and Miss Nancy at the other. The children populated the other twelve chairs in pretty much the same pattern each meal. JJ and the other four boys sat at the end with Miss

Nancy and the girls sat by Mrs. Barclay. The house was a perfect place for an orphanage.

Miss Nancy was JJ's favorite. She was 49 years old and seemed like a grandma to him. She was a thin woman of average height. Her face was kind but showed the signs of a difficult life. Miss Nancy did most of the cooking, and both ladies did the cleaning and laundry. Even the older kids helped with the laundry. To most people, it seemed Miss Nancy had never married, but that is another story. She had a room on the second floor, across from the stairs to the attic. There were no pictures on the wall or her desk, but the room had a window overlooking the back yard. Once when JJ was five, he had asked Miss Nancy why she didn't have any pictures like Mrs. Barclay did. Miss Nancy hugged JJ and said the window was her picture. On the table, next to her bed was the little music box which everyone loved.



Nine kids lived at Tutu House — five boys and four girls. The older children all had their own rooms. JJ often thought it was like they were a big family. They argued and quarreled, but mostly they got along.

JJ loved Tutu House. He had his own room at the top in the attic. When it rained, he could hear the rain on the roof. The window was big enough to see all over the neighborhood. He hoped he would never be adopted. But, like many boys, he longed for adventure.

Two of the kids who lived at Tutu House, Jon and Shannen, were Mrs. Barclay's children. Mrs. Barclay's husband had been killed in the war. Nearly everyone in town had been affected one way or another by World War II.

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Tutu House was always clean but showed the effect of age and the children who lived there. Scuff marks could be seen on corners and walls. The house hadn't been painted since it had been built. The yard was mowed, but worn patches of grass gave evidence of the children who played outside.

On rainy days, there could be no better place to play hide and seek. From the attic at the top down to the main floor, there were dozens of places for children to hide. Only the basement and the small storage area in the attic were off limits.

Every Thursday the two "Friends Ladies," as JJ called them, came to deliver eggs from their farm, and fresh bread they had baked. They were really from the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, and everyone at Tutu House loved to see them arrive in their old blue truck. They brought other food items, but bread and eggs were what JJ liked best. Fresh bread for dinner and eggs for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. On Monday it was back to Oatmeal.

Saturday nights were always nice. Everyone would gather in the living room and sit on chairs, couches, or blankets on the floor. Miss Nancy sat in the big chair and read a story, or a chapter from a book, or even made up stories. Sometimes they would listen to radio programs. Miss Nancy would always play the piano. Everyone looked forward to story night. Miss Nancy liked to say "Behind everything you see is a story."

In every respect, Tutu House was an ideal place for children, but its days were numbered. The 25-year lease given to the Grace Hope Home for Children would expire in 1959, only eight years away. Then the property would be taken back by the state and sold. It was a worry for Mrs. Barclay and Miss Nancy.

JJ liked school. He was in the 6th grade and did well. He had his friends, Michael, and Steven. There was also Deborah, a girl he liked, and Cynthia, a girl who liked him. Then there was Kevin Connor, a bully who had been teasing JJ since third grade. Kevin picked on a lot of kids. He was the biggest kid in elementary school. Besides being big for his age, he'd been held back twice.

At home, JJ was interested in mechanical things and kept the lawnmower running. They had an old Stearns model that looked like the kind you pushed by hand but had an engine on top. When JJ was

eight years old, the lawnmower had “died.” Someone donated another lawnmower of the same model that didn’t work well. JJ and Uncle Larry worked together to fit the best pieces of each mower together and ended up with a working mower. JJ learned how to sharpen and adjust the blades, and how to clean the simple carburetor.

JJ had learned to read early, and enjoyed reading books about Lassie. He was an average looking eleven-year-old boy with blond-brown hair and brown eyes. Not many adoptions had occurred during the war. Now, being older, he was less likely to be placed in a home. He was glad he could live in Tutu House, the only home he could remember.

One Thursday evening just a few weeks ago, the “Friends Ladies” came by with their eggs and bread. JJ overheard them complaining about the truck. Their old Ford truck was older than JJ, and the engine was running rough. While everyone was inside, JJ opened the hood and looked around. He found one spark plug wire not connected, just dangling. JJ connected the wire back onto the spark plug and waited for the ladies to return to the truck. When they started the engine, it ran fine, and JJ was once more considered a genius.

Summertime was the best. Not only was there no school, but they also got to go to the movies. Every Wednesday the Mills Movie Theater let the orphans come for free if they came at noon.

Last Wednesday, after returning home from watching “Alice in Wonderland,” JJ was the first to see the small dog on the back porch. The dog was very young. Miss Nancy said someone must have abandoned him at the nearby park. “I’m going to call him Lassie,” said JJ. He had seen all six Lassie movies, some more than once.

“Well,” said Miss Nancy, “that’s a good name for a girl dog, but this is a boy.”

“Okay,” said JJ, “he must be Laddie then, like in the movie.”

“Laddie is a fine name, JJ. But I don’t think you can keep a dog here.”

“I know,” said JJ with a sigh, “But how about if we just feed him. He seems hungry. We can give him some bread or something.”

Miss Nancy knew it wasn’t a good idea but did it anyway. She always had a special place in her heart for JJ, who had latched on to

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her immediately after arriving at Tutu House as a baby. For quite some time after he arrived, Miss Nancy was the only one who could console him. She made a meal for the hungry pup by putting some meat and broken bread crust in a bowl with some milk.



Laddie was brown, with a little white patch on his head. He was probably no larger than ten pounds and bounced over to JJ like he wanted to play. “He seems like a puppy all right,” said Miss Nancy. “I don’t know what we’re going to do with him.”

“He can stay in the garage at night,” said JJ. “We can let him stay there.”

In no time at all the other kids were playing with Laddie in the back yard. When Mrs. Barclay came outside, she asked about the dog and said they couldn’t keep it here. She said it was probably someone’s dog in the neighborhood. Miss Nancy said, “Let’s make a poster and put it out front. We’ll keep Laddie here for a few days, and if no one comes to claim him, then we’ll call the dog pound.” Miss Nancy was deliberately vague. Even though Mrs. Barclay was in charge, Miss Nancy was a little older, and Mrs. Barclay would often go along with Miss Nancy’s ideas. Mrs. Barclay agreed they would keep the dog for a few days and try to find the owner.

Laddie was put in the garage with some water. He whined and barked. “He’ll probably calm down after a while,” said Miss Nancy.

They made a bed for Laddie with some old rags. Sure enough, after a short while, Laddie was quiet. What they didn't know was that JJ was out in the garage. He had sneaked outside and was sitting with Laddie, trying to think about what to do.

When everyone had gone to bed, JJ carried Laddie into the house. He walked carefully and quietly up the stairs to his room in the attic. There were two bathrooms downstairs and two bathrooms upstairs, but no bathrooms in the attic so it wasn't unusual for someone to be walking up and down the upper stairs during the night. It was handy that JJ's room had a door.

Laddie sat on JJ's bed and watched as JJ slipped under the sheet. Laddie curled up on the bed, down by JJ's feet. JJ looked at Laddie, and Laddie looked at JJ. As they gazed at each other in the semi-darkened room, JJ thought about the Lassie movies and knew he could never be without that dog.

The next morning JJ was up before anyone else and carried Laddie outside. As other kids woke up and came outside, they were delighted to see that Laddie was still there. Once again, Miss Nancy gave Laddie some food. Mrs. Barclay was disappointed that Laddie hadn't run off.

Laddie stayed close by and wanted to play with anyone who came outside, especially JJ. When everyone came inside for lunch or dinner, Laddie sat by the back door and waited. JJ spent all day outside. It was painfully obvious to Miss Nancy that JJ and Laddie had formed a bond.

For the next few days, JJ picked up Laddie at night and carried him carefully and quietly back to his room. He knew he couldn't keep doing this forever. He believed Mrs. Barclay was about to call the pound and decided the only solution was to run away. After all, that's what Tom Sawyer had done.

Yesterday evening, after bedtime, JJ sneaked out to the garage. The two ladies heard Laddie settle down like he did each evening. JJ picked up Laddie and sadly walked quietly toward the street. As he headed away from Tutu house, Miss Nancy talked to Mrs. Barclay.

"I'm worried about JJ," said Miss Nancy.

"Becoming attached to the dog?" asked Mrs. Barclay.

"Yes," said Miss Nancy. "Would it really be so bad to let JJ keep it?"

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“I don’t know. It just doesn’t seem right,” said Mrs. Barclay. “I’m not used to having a dog around.”

“I know,” said Miss Nancy, “but there sure are worse things a boy can get into.”



“I suppose you’re right,” said Mrs. Barclay. “But there’s no fence here.”

“It doesn’t seem likely that Laddie will run off,” said Miss Nancy.

“No, I guess not,” said Mrs. Barclay. She thought about the trouble it would be to have a dog, but Miss Nancy had been her dearest friend for twelve years and rarely asked for anything.

Mrs. Barclay sighed. “I wouldn’t be surprised if that dog was up in his room right now.”

“He’s a good boy,” said Miss Nancy.

“I know,” said Mrs. Barclay.

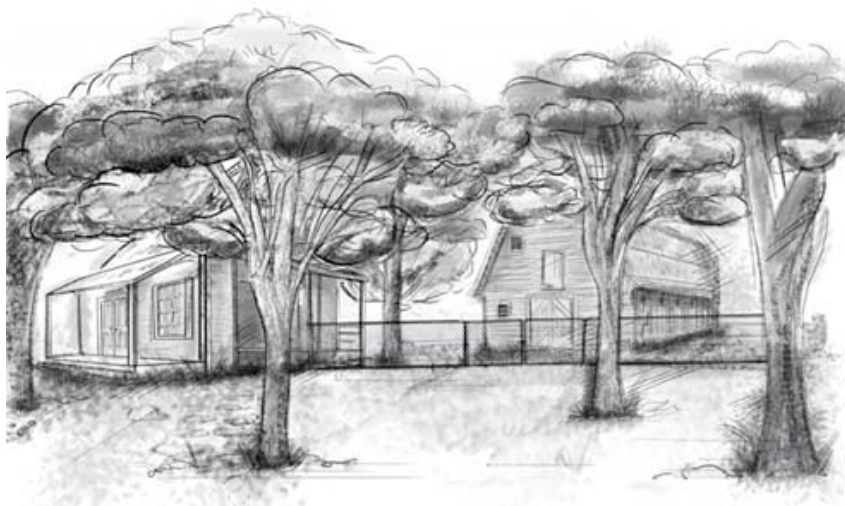
“He loves that dog,” said Miss Nancy.

“What happens when JJ has to leave?” asked Mrs. Barclay, softly.

“I don’t know,” said Miss Nancy. “Hopefully that’s a ways off.”

Mrs. Barclay agreed to let the dog stay. JJ never heard that conversation, and now his adventure was underway. And that brings us back to where we began.

He and Laddie walked five miles by the time it was starting to get light. Up ahead was a small farmhouse with a barn. It was set back a distance from the main road. There were some trees in front and around the house. The house and the barn were both very old. Beyond the house and the barn was an open field. At the far end of the field was another tree. Past the tree was a fence, and beyond were more trees. JJ decided to rest. He was getting hungry and thought maybe he could ask for some food. At least maybe he could rest in the barn.



The barn was off to the right at the end of a dirt driveway, and the farmhouse was to the left. JJ figured he could sneak into the barn if no one was up or paying attention. As he got closer, he picked up Laddie and carried him. He had to open a gate across the driveway. As he walked quietly past the tree which stood between him and the farmhouse, Laddie started barking and looking back toward the house. Laddie squirmed so violently that he broke loose from JJ's arms and ran to the back door, pacing back and forth. JJ had no choice but to get closer, and when he did, he heard someone quietly moaning inside. It sounded like someone was sick. He knocked on the old wooden screen door. He could barely see inside.

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“Hello!” called JJ. “Are you all right?” He carefully opened the door and looked inside. Lying on the floor was an old woman. “Water,” she was barely able to say.

2

The Farm

JJ quickly found a cup and got water from the kitchen sink. It was an old-fashioned manual pump, but he knew how to use it. He took the cup of water to the woman and tried to lift her head so she could drink.

He could tell that the woman had a fever and was ill. The woman was able to drink a little and then closed her eyes. JJ felt bad that she was lying on the hard floor and grabbed a pillow from the couch in the living room. He started placing it under her head. She seemed to wake again. This time, she looked at JJ with half closed eyes and asked him to help her to the couch. He helped her sit up and then used all his strength to help her to the couch. The house was small, and the living room was right next to the kitchen.

The woman lay down on the couch. JJ found a dishrag and rinsed it in the sink and placed it on the woman's forehead. He'd helped Miss Nancy with sick kids before at Tutu House and had been asked many times over the years to get a wet rag to help cool a fever.

JJ had acted almost without thinking, but now the seriousness of the situation made him nervous. He sat in a chair not knowing what to do next. Perhaps the cool dishrag helped because the lady started moving and managed to sit up slowly. It was obvious she was sick. "What's your name, boy?" she asked.

"JJ, ma'am."

The lady looked at JJ, then at Laddie, through half-shut eyes, and asked for another drink of water. JJ brought her the glass of water, and she slowly sipped. Then she closed her eyes and asked if he could get

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another cold rag. He quickly rinsed the dishrag and brought it back. She lay back down on the couch and closed her eyes.

JJ was starving and tired. It was now 6:30 am. He was too worked up to try to rest so he went to the kitchen and found a loaf of bread in the breadbox. He was so hungry he could have eaten the entire loaf by himself but at Tutu House everyone learned you should always try to figure out how much there was to go around. He cut off a piece of bread and shared some with Laddie. There was a small refrigerator humming quietly and what looked like a gas stove. He looked out the back kitchen window and could see a cow. He opened the refrigerator door and could see a jar of milk inside. "That must be a milk cow," thought JJ. He poured himself some of the cold milk and let Laddie finish drinking from his cup. As he drank the milk, it occurred to him that if it were a milk cow, it probably hadn't been milked recently.

The old woman was still asleep on the couch, so he went back outside. The back porch was covered and ran the entire length of the house. There were some shelves, an old washing machine, a broom, a mop, and a chair.

In the back, off to the side, was the barn. A fence, which was attached to the house, ran around the back of the barn and came around back to the house. There was a gate where the fence crossed the driveway leading to the barn. The fence was nice because it kept the cow close by without having to be tied up. It seemed like a beautiful place to JJ, but there were signs of wear. Quite a few weeds were growing around. Inside the barn, he saw an old lawnmower, a dusty old car, and some boxes and old tools. Everything was old and covered in dust.

JJ grabbed a bucket from the shelf and washed it with the garden hose. He had milked cows before when he visited the Friends Ladies' farm. They had explained how important it was for cows to be milked regularly. JJ patted and stroked the cow's head for a minute and then sat beside the cow. He milked the cow for a while and filled up the bucket to overflowing. He kept milking until it seemed the milking was done. He brought the bucket back into the house and poured some of the milk into two clean jars he found in the cupboard and put them in the refrigerator. Then he poured some milk over some bread in a dish

for Laddie just like Miss Nancy had done, and drank another big glass himself.

JJ sat down on a chair in the kitchen and heard the woman say something again. He got up and walked back to the living room where the couch was. "What did you say your name was?" the lady asked again.

"JJ, ma'am. And this here is Laddie."

"Do I know you?" she asked.

"No, ma'am. I'm from the orphanage."

"Can you get me another drink of water please?"

JJ filled the glass with fresh water and rinsed the wet rag.

"Thank you, JJ. How old are you?"

"I'm eleven."

After a short pause, the lady said, "Can you help me up, please?"

JJ helped her to her feet, and she slowly walked to the bathroom. Then she went into her bedroom and lay down on her bed. It wasn't eight o' clock in the morning yet. JJ was so tired he lay down on the bed in the other bedroom, crosswise. The bed had a slightly dusty smell, but before JJ could even think about it, he was asleep, with Laddie resting next to him.

JJ woke up a few hours later when he heard the sound of the lady walking to the bathroom. He jumped up, not knowing where he was for a moment. By the time the lady was back in her bed JJ was awake. She asked for the wet rag again. JJ got the rag, rinsed it, and brought it to her. She put the rag on her forehead, closed her eyes, and said, "What are you doing here, JJ?"

"I ran away, 'cause they were going to get rid of my dog."

"I see," she said. To JJ, she looked like she was 100 years old but she was only 72. "My name is Beverly."

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am."

"Pleased to meet you, JJ. I'm pretty sure you saved my life."

"I hope you don't mind I milked the cow," said JJ.

"Oh my land, the cow! Thank you so much!"

"You're welcome."

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“I’ve got to rest. Can you take care of yourself for a while?”

“Yes, ma’am. Do you want me to call anyone for help?”

“There’s no phone dear. I have some soup in the cupboard if you’re hungry. I wouldn’t mind just a taste myself.”

Beverly closed her eyes and appeared to be sleeping again. She was about the same height as JJ, but heavier.

JJ walked around the house and could see a small entry way by the front door, a small living room, a short hallway leading to the two bedrooms and a bathroom. The kitchen was on the other side of the living room by the back door. On the mantel over the fireplace were a few pictures. One was an older man, and another was an old picture of Beverly holding hands with the same man, but younger. Another was a picture of a young man in a military uniform. Next to it was a gold star service banner, folded neatly.

JJ walked out the front door and stood on the porch. It had a roof and ran along the full length of the small house, like the back porch.

Laddie followed close by wherever JJ walked. JJ returned to the kitchen and found a can of Campbell’s soup. He mixed it with milk in a pan on the stove. As he stirred the warming soup, he wondered what Miss Nancy would be fixing for lunch.

He sliced a piece of bread and ate a bowl of soup. He put some more soup in the bowl and gave it to Laddie. Then he got another bowl and put in a small amount of soup and took it to Beverly. She was grateful for the food and ate a few spoonfuls of soup. She wanted to rest again, so JJ took the bowl and let her go back to sleep.

It was now a little past noon. Outside, clouds were moving in, and it looked like rain.

* * * * *

At Tutu House, Sheriff Doug had arrived and was talking to Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay. All the kids were outside with their noses pressed against the window trying to hear what was going on inside. After a time, Sheriff Doug walked outside and to the police car. He talked on his police radio and returned to the house. Miss Nancy’s eyes were red from crying. Soon, two more police cars arrived. The sheriff deputies talked together and then began looking around the yard. There weren’t any clues to follow because JJ had simply walked down the

street. Sheriff Doug sent cars out in all directions while he headed South. They drove around for a while but found nothing. It started raining. Sheriff Doug returned to Tutu House and spoke with Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay. "I'm guessing the rain will bring him home. I don't expect a young boy will want to stay out in this. Most kids who run away come back within a few hours."

* * * * *

JJ walked out to the barn. It wasn't raining hard, and he was interested in the lawn mower. Even though he was tired, nervous energy made him restless. He needed something to do.

The weeds and tall grass made walking in the yard difficult for Laddie. He dusted off a gas can that was sitting in a corner and poured a little gasoline into the lawnmower. He tried to start the lawnmower but had no luck. After some difficulty he finally got the dry carburetor primed and pulled the rope several times. The engine began sputtering to life. Laddie didn't like the smoke and the smell and stayed by the open door, almost getting wet from the rain. JJ fiddled with the levers, figuring out which was the choke and which was the throttle. He let it run for a few minutes, then turned it off. It was after three o' clock now, and the rain was letting up.

He went back to the house to check on Beverly. She was still sleeping so he came back outside and started the lawnmower. The back yard past the back gate on the left was a mess, making Laddie disappear into the tall grass and weeds.

Everything was slightly wet from the rain, but JJ started mowing anyway. The back area was large, nearly an acre. JJ mowed an area from the barn to the back fence about twenty feet wide. It was only a small part of the yard, but it provided a nice area where he could walk around with Laddie.

Inside the house, Beverly woke to the muffled sound of the lawnmower outside. It brought back nice memories. She could easily imagine her husband out working in the yard and her little boy playing with his toys.

JJ turned off the lawnmower and put it in the barn. He took his jacket and dried Laddie, and walked back into the house. Beverly was sitting on the couch in the small living room. Laddie jumped on her

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lap, and she started petting the dog. JJ smiled and said he was glad she liked dogs.

"I've never liked dogs before," she said. "I don't know why this one likes me."

Beverly paused for a moment and got a sad look on her face. "My boy Jack wanted a dog, but we never got one."

Then she said, "Well, JJ. Tell me more about why you ran away."

JJ told all about Tutu House, and how Laddie had become his friend. They talked for a long time. Beverly told him about her husband, how he had died almost four years ago, and about their son Jack, who had been killed in the war. She didn't seem at all ashamed to let tears roll down her face as she talked. "I remember quite clearly when Jack was your age. What I wouldn't give to have that time again."

"Is that a picture of Jack?" asked JJ as he pointed to the photograph above the fireplace.

"Yes," said Beverly. "He was a wonderful son. He never married. He and Tom, that's my nephew, were always together until the war."

"I'm sorry you have to live here by yourself," said JJ. After a moment he said, "Maybe you should get a telephone."

"Yes, I should," said Beverly. "Everything costs so much. I'm glad you came by, but if it wasn't getting late, I'd send you home. I'm feeling much better."

"I'm worried about being gone from home," said JJ. "But I'm afraid I'll have to get rid of Laddie."

"You need to get back home," said Beverly. "I'm sure they're worried about you."

"It makes me sad to think about them," said JJ. "Especially Miss Nancy."

"First thing tomorrow morning we'll have breakfast and you can be on your way. I'm doing better now thanks to you and Laddie. You can take a message for me to have them call my nephew."

After a moment, she added "You can let Laddie live here. I'll take care of him for you. You can come and visit." That made JJ feel better, but it wouldn't be the same.

It was starting to get late but not fully dark yet. “We’ve got plenty of hamburger meat,” said Beverly. “We could make spaghetti for dinner if you could do the work.”

“It seems like you’ve got plenty of food,” said JJ. He thought about the dusty old car in the barn. “How do you get to the store?”

“My nephew comes by now and then to check on me and take me shopping. He was here just the day before yesterday. I also have the milk cow and the chickens. If I can just sit in the kitchen, I’ll show you how to make dinner.”

JJ helped Beverly to the kitchen where she could sit at the table. He had helped Miss Nancy make spaghetti many times before and just needed to know where everything was kept. Beverly told him where to find a pot, the strainer, the sauce, and everything else. The only tricky part was pouring the water out of the cooked spaghetti without spilling the food.

By the time dinner was ready, it was starting to get dark. JJ tried to switch on a light, but it didn’t work. Beverly said, “The lights don’t work. I think I blew a fuse yesterday. My nephew usually fixes those things for me.”

“Where’s the fuse box?” asked JJ.

“It’s out on the back porch.”

“Do you have a flashlight?”

“Oh dear,” said Beverly. “Where would that be? There’s one around here somewhere. Might be out by the fuse box.”

JJ looked around the back porch. Over by the washing machine, close to the corner, was the fuse box and there was a stool nearby. On a shelf right under the fuse box was a flashlight. JJ turned it on, but it was almost dead. The sun had set, and it was getting dark quickly. JJ opened the fuse box and could see there were only four fuses. He knew about fuses from watching Uncle Larry and even Mrs. Barclay replace a burned out fuse at Tutu House. It had a fuse box with eight fuses.

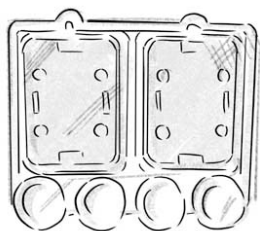
He unscrewed one fuse and looked at it, but it seemed ok, so he screwed it back in. It made a little spark, so he knew it was ok. He unscrewed another fuse and looked through the small glass window. It looked like it was blown, but it was hard to see. There were three spare

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fuses on the shelf where the flashlight had been. He grabbed one and screwed it in. Instantly there was light inside the house.

He put the flashlight back and climbed down off the stool and walked back into the house. The kitchen and bedroom lights were on.

“My, isn’t that wonderful,” said Beverly. “Aren’t you smart!”



An old-fashioned fuse box
with screw-in fuses

“It was just a fuse,” said JJ. He finished setting the table and sliced some bread. He was hungry and glad for the food, but Beverly didn’t eat much.

After dinner, JJ washed the dishes and Beverly said, “Turn out the lights and let’s look outside.”

Here and there, throughout the fields behind the farm area, a few flickering lights could be seen bobbing around. There weren’t too many out yet, but it was still fun to see. JJ helped Beverly outside and onto the chair on the porch. As they watched the fireflies, they talked again. JJ told more about Miss Nancy, the orphanage, and school. Beverly reminisced about her life, how she had sold most of the farm to have money to live, and her wonderful nephew who checked on her and helped get groceries and other necessities. “He wants me to sell the rest of the farm,” she said, “and come to live with him. It would be nice not to have to worry about things, but I love this little place. My husband and I saved for many years to be able to buy this farm. We worked hard and loved it here. Jack was born and raised here. We both hoped he would live here someday. Our final wish was to have our ashes mixed together and be left here on our farm. Jack will never live here now. I don’t know how I can move away and leave these memories behind. Everything just seems unfinished.”

JJ didn't say anything and just thought about things. Finally, he said, "It seems life is a big mixture of good and bad things."

It was quiet for a while. Finally, Beverly got up and gave JJ a hug. "I need to get back inside and rest. I wish you could stay here but tomorrow you should get back to your home. I'm feeling much better."



JJ helped Beverly back inside to the couch in the living room. He asked, "Can we listen to the radio?" He had seen a radio in the living room corner. It was the big, old fashioned kind.

"Why yes! That would be good." JJ walked over and turned on the radio. The light on the radio dial came on, and after about a half minute, it started to make a sound. It was already on a station, but the tuning wasn't quite right, so he adjusted the dial until the sound was pretty clear. A man was talking, so he changed the dial around until he found some music. It was old "Big Band" music. Beverly smiled, and JJ sat on the couch. Off in the distance was some rain, and the occasional lightning would make a popping sound on the radio. With the fireflies outside, the lightning in the distance, and the crackling sound on the radio, it felt magical.

JJ was quickly getting sleepy. Before they turned off the radio, they heard a news item about a lost eleven-year-old boy and to please call the police department with any information. Beverly looked at JJ who said, "I do want to go home. But I'm worried about you and what will happen to Laddie."

"I'll be fine tomorrow," said Beverly. "Besides, you need to take that message for me. I can always take care of Laddie if you can't keep him."

Beverly found some pajamas for JJ. "These used to be Jack's. I've kept so many of his clothes." JJ gave her a hug. Then he took Laddie to

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the other bedroom and lay on the bed. Laddie jumped up next to him and licked his face.

“I sure do miss home,” he said to Laddie. “They’re probably worried about me. I could just go back now. But what if Beverly gets sick again? I better wait till morning. But what will happen to you? I don’t want you to have to live so far away.”

JJ slept fitfully, dreaming of Tutu House, and stories of Lassie.

The next morning Beverly and JJ were both up early and made breakfast with sausage and eggs. While JJ cleaned up, she went to her room to write a message for JJ to take home.

* * * * *

At Tutu House, JJ still had not returned. Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay hadn’t slept all night. Sheriff Doug was disappointed that JJ was still missing. He decided to do more searching and sent more officers to ask around.

“I’ve put out another bulletin,” he told Mrs. Barclay. “The boy will get hungry eventually. Someone will find him, or he’ll show up back here. Meanwhile, we’ll keep looking.” No one wanted to think about the alternative.

Officer Lowell drove around, looking for a likely place where an eleven-year-old might want to hide. He checked out parks and some wooded areas but found nothing. No one saw or knew anything. It wasn’t known exactly what time JJ had left, so it was hard to figure how far he might have gone. Officer Lowell kept driving around. The houses thinned out. He decided to go ten more miles on each of the main roads before giving up. He came to a small farmhouse and decided to stop and check it out.

3

A New Life

Officer Lowell parked in the driveway of the little house, walked to the front door and knocked. JJ was washing the dishes when he heard a knock on the door. Laddie started barking. JJ put the pan down, walked to the front door, and opened it. Officer Lowell and JJ stood there and looked at each other. “Hi, I’m JJ.”

“What the heck are you doing here?” asked Officer Lowell. “Everyone’s looking for you.”

“I’m sorry,” said JJ. “I was going to come back, but I found Beverly. She’s sick. There’s no phone here, and she needs help.”

Beverly walked slowly into the room with her message. “Oh dear,” she said. She almost collapsed. Officer Lowell and JJ helped her to the couch. Laddie was still barking. “If you could call my nephew he could come and get me,” she said.

Officer Lowell walked to his car and got on the police radio. Within minutes, Tutu House was notified that JJ was safe, and Beverly’s nephew, Tom Robinson, was on his way. Officer Lowell waited for Beverly’s nephew and listened to Beverly and JJ tell their story. Soon, another police car arrived. It was Sheriff Doug. “Boy, are we glad to see you,” he said. While Officer Lowell was explaining to Sheriff Doug, another car pulled up. It was Tom Robinson and his wife, Laura. They rushed into the house with great surprise. It was quite a scene. Two police cars, a lost boy, a dog barking, and sick Aunt Beverly.

Officer Lowell started explaining the whole situation to Tom and Laura. JJ gave Beverly a hug and each said goodbye. Beverly called

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out, “Don’t forget – I can take care of Laddie if you need. Thank you, JJ.”

Sheriff Doug helped JJ and Laddie into the police car and said, “Let’s get you back home.” As he pulled up and parked in front of Tutu House, Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay were standing on the front porch and came running. There was much hugging and crying.

“JJ, we were so worried,” said Miss Nancy.

“JJ is a hero,” said Sheriff Doug.

JJ and Sheriff Doug relayed the story to the ladies as the other kids gathered around. “I’m sorry I ran away,” said JJ. “I was worried about Laddie, then we found a sick lady.”

“Don’t worry,” said Mrs. Barclay. “We’re just glad you’re home and safe!”

JJ looked up at Mrs. Barclay, then at Miss Nancy. He looked at Laddie, and his heart was heavy. Mrs. Barclay knelt down and looked directly at JJ and smiled. “JJ dear, Miss Nancy and I already decided Laddie can stay.”

JJ’s face lit up. The children were ecstatic. Tutu House was filled with merriment. JJ was glad to be home. Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay were relieved beyond measure and Sheriff Doug was glad for the happy outcome.

The children played with Laddie and visited with JJ while Miss Nancy made an early lunch. JJ wasn’t hungry, but the others were ready to walk into town. Being a Wednesday, they were ready to go see “Treasure Island” at the Mills Movie Theater. Mrs. Barclay took the older children and left JJ with Miss Nancy.

“I’m really tired,” said JJ. “I didn’t sleep well last night or the night before.”

He and Miss Nancy climbed the stairs to his room. Miss Nancy sat on the edge of his bed and talked. It was different seeing Laddie on the bed with JJ.

“I really like Beverly,” said JJ. He already sounded sleepy. “She lives all alone, and her husband died a few years ago, and her son was killed in the war.”

"I'm glad you were able to help her," said Miss Nancy as she stood up to leave. Hearing about a widow living alone made her feel melancholy. She walked back down the stairs and let JJ sleep. She was tired, too, and sat down in the big chair to rest, keeping an eye on the two youngest. She was exhausted and felt bad that Mrs. Barclay had to take the kids into town. I'll give her a break when she gets back, she thought.

After a short while, Miss Nancy woke. "Oh dear. I must have dozed off," she thought. The house was still quiet, but everyone would be coming home soon. Lying next to her in the big chair was Laddie. JJ was still asleep in his room, and the kids were still playing with their toys. Laddie sat up and wagged his tail. Miss Nancy couldn't help patting him on the head. "Well, Laddie, I don't know what to think of all this." Then he rested his head on her lap. "I can see why JJ loves you."

When Mrs. Barclay and the children returned from the movie, Laddie started barking. JJ woke up and came downstairs. Miss Nancy started fixing dinner. Things were getting back to normal, except for Laddie being in the house. After dinner, JJ told his story to all the children again. He thought of the little farm house and said, "There really is a story behind everything, just like Miss Nancy says!"

Dinner was a challenge for Mrs. Barclay. She didn't like having a dog in the house during dinner but kept her feelings to herself. The other children all wanted to feed something to Laddie, and it was chaotic. Mrs. Barclay could only hope that things would eventually settle down. Getting ready for bed took forever. Everyone kept going to JJ's room to see Laddie on JJ's bed.

The next day started early with children running up to JJ's room to see Laddie. Kids and dog ran around the house and were soon told to go outside. After lunch was a surprise when a lady from the newspaper came over. She wanted to hear all about JJ running away and saving an old lady. Once again he told his story.

After dinner was another surprise. Laura Robinson called on the phone to ask if they could bring Beverly by tomorrow after dinner to visit JJ. Mrs. Barclay said it would be fine and gave Laura the address.

JJ was excited about seeing Beverly. Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay were curious.

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The following day all the children wanted pets. Mrs. Barclay was afraid this might happen but said, "Let's just take care of one thing at a time."

After dinner, as the children ran around the yard with Laddie, an older car pulled in front of Tutu House. A man, a woman, and an older lady got out. Shannen ran inside yelling "Somebody's here!"

As Tom, Laura and their Aunt Beverly walked toward the front door, JJ ran out and gave Beverly a hug. She appeared to be doing better. Tom had a newspaper in his hand. Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay greeted them at the door.

"My, what a nice house!" said Beverly.

They all walked inside, shaking hands and greeting each other. Tom smiled and asked if they had read the newspaper. "I brought you a copy," he said and gave it to Miss Nancy. There, on the lower right-hand corner of the first page, was a story about an orphan boy who rescued an elderly woman.

Everyone smiled as they walked into the living room. Tom and Laura looked all around the house. Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay examined the newspaper. "This is certainly a day to remember," said Miss Nancy.

"So, JJ," said Tom. "We didn't get a chance to meet you the other day."

"Aunt Beverly wanted to come by and see you," said Laura. "We wanted to meet you, too. It's amazing how you came along and saved her."

"Aunt Beverly says you fixed the lawnmower and mowed the yard," said Tom.

"Well, part of it," said JJ.

"Where did you learn to work on things like that?" asked Tom.

Miss Nancy said, "JJ is quite a clever boy. He keeps our lawnmower running and even fixed a problem some ladies had with their car."

"I just do stuff with Uncle Larry and learn how it works," said JJ with a smile.

"What do you do, Mr. Robinson?" asked Mrs. Barclay.

"I'm an electrician," said Tom.

“We’re trying to rebuild the business,” said Laura. “The depression and the war have been hard on us.”

“It’s been hard on everyone,” said Miss Nancy.

“Were you in the war?” asked Mrs. Barclay.

“Yes,” said Tom. “I was in Europe.”

“My son died in France,” said Aunt Beverly.

“My husband died in the Pacific,” said Mrs. Barclay.



For a moment, no one said anything. Then Miss Nancy got up, smiled, and said, “How about some cookies and milk.”

Without waiting for an answer, she walked into the kitchen. Mrs. Barclay followed her. They returned with a plate of cookies, a pitcher of milk and some empty glasses.

“I just wanted to make sure JJ wouldn’t have a problem with the dog,” said Aunt Beverly. “He’s welcome to leave Laddie with me.”

“We’re hoping to have Aunt Beverly come and live with us,” said Tom. “We’ve got a little house in the back she can stay in.”

Aunt Beverly started to say something but stopped and just smiled.

They enjoyed their snack and visited politely. Soon the other kids were over wanting cookies and milk.

“It’s very nice here,” said Laura.

“We love it here,” said Mrs. Barclay.

“Do you want to come up to the top and see my room?” asked JJ.

“Well, not this time,” said Aunt Beverly. “I’m still a little tired.”

“When you get better, you can come back.”

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“Ok, I will. You can call me Aunt Beverly if you want.”

They talked about Aunt Beverly being sick, and how fortunate it was that JJ came along when he did. As they got ready to leave, Aunt Beverly gave JJ a hug and then walked out the door with Tom and Laura. JJ waved as the car drove away.

“Well, that was interesting,” said Mrs. Barclay.

JJ and Laddie ran outside to play with the other kids.

“Yes,” said Miss Nancy. “You look like you’re thinking of something.”

“I was just thinking what a nice family they would be for JJ.”

Miss Nancy’s face gave away an inner feeling of panic.

“Well, think about it,” said Mrs. Barclay. They live here locally, and if JJ were placed with them, he would never be far away. Tom has a trade he could teach JJ. It’s just a thought.”

It was quite a thought, indeed.

* * * * *

For now, having a dog in the house wasn’t so terrible, but it was different. Neither Miss Nancy nor Mrs. Barclay had ever had pets. Fortunately, JJ didn’t have any trouble getting Laddie to go outside when necessary.

On Saturday, story night was extra fun. Laddie was worn out from playing with the children all day, and was quiet, resting next to JJ. It was a good time to be reading “The Story of Dr. Doolittle.”

Sunday afternoon produced another phone call from Laura Robinson. Again, Mrs. Barclay answered the phone. “I really hate to bother you,” said Laura, “but Aunt Beverly wants to see JJ again. She’s agreed to come and live with us. We’re hoping maybe we could occasionally bring her by to see JJ and Laddie.”

“That would be fine!” said Mrs. Barclay. “We would love to see you again! Why don’t you come for dinner tomorrow? The children aren’t in school, and we can eat anytime you like. What time does Tom get home from work?”

“Tom is usually home by late afternoon, but I was just thinking of bringing Aunt Beverly over by myself.”

“Why don’t you bring Tom, too,” said Mrs. Barclay. “We don’t eat fancy.”

“Neither do we,” said Laura.

The next evening was Monday. Tom, Laura, and Aunt Beverly arrived at 5 pm. While Miss Nancy finished getting the meatloaf and mashed potatoes ready, JJ took Aunt Beverly upstairs all the way to the attic rooms.

“My, what a nice room,” said Aunt Beverly, nearly out of breath. “And look at that window.”

JJ showed Aunt Beverly his Lassie books and other things he had in his room. Laddie jumped onto the bed while Aunt Beverly held one of the Lassie books.

“Laddie doesn’t look like Lassie,” said Aunt Beverly with a smile.

“No, he doesn’t,” laughed JJ.

When JJ and Aunt Beverly came down from the attic, everyone was ready to sit at the big table. For the first time in recent memory, all fourteen chairs at the large dining room table were filled.

Five-year-old Susan, sitting next to Laura said, “I’m glad you’re here.”

“Why is that?” asked Laura with a smile.

“’Cause we get soda pop at dinner.”

“Soda pop at dinner?” repeated Laura with a smile.

“Mrs. Barclay said if we promise to be extra good we can have soda pop at dinner.”

Laura laughed, and Mrs. Barclay smiled.

After dinner, JJ took Aunt Beverly outside, and the other children followed.

Mrs. Barclay spoke to Tom. “You’re very fond of your aunt, aren’t you?”

“Her boy was my cousin. He was like an older brother. It was devastating when Jack didn’t come back from the war. Before that, when my mom died, Aunt Beverly was like a mother to me. She took care of me and now we take care of her. I just wish she was happier about coming to live with us.”

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“She sure seems taken with JJ,” said Mrs. Barclay.

“Yes, she does,” said Tom. “I guess it’s not too surprising.”

There was silence for a moment. Mrs. Barclay walked to the window where she could see the children playing outside in the back. Tom and Laura followed. Outside, JJ was holding Aunt Beverly’s hand and was walking back toward the house.

Once inside, Aunt Beverly said, “Tom, one of their bicycles is broken. See if you can fix it.”

“What’s the problem?” asked Tom.

“It’s Carol’s bike,” said JJ. “The frame broke. Uncle Larry tried to fix it, but he said it needs to be welded.”

“Tom knows how to weld,” said Aunt Beverly. “He could fix it.”

“I could try,” said Tom. “I don’t have my welder with me.”

“Why don’t the three of you join us for story night on Saturday?” said Mrs. Barclay.

“What’s story night?” asked Laura.

“Well,” said Mrs. Barclay, “after dinner, we turn on the radio and listen to Annie Oakley while we have dessert. Usually, it’s just cookies. Then Miss Nancy plays the piano, and the children sing songs, or we just listen to some music. Then Miss Nancy tells or reads a story. We’re reading Dr. Doolittle right now. After that, the children start getting ready for bed.”

“That sounds lovely,” said Laura.

“Oh, I hope you can come for story night,” said JJ.

“We’ll be back, and Tom can bring the welder,” said Aunt Beverly.

Tom and Laura just smiled.

When it was time to leave, Tom, Laura, and Aunt Beverly said goodbye. As they walked out the door, Mrs. Barclay called out to them, “I meant for you to come for dinner too.”

“Okay,” said Aunt Beverly.

Late Saturday afternoon, Tom, Laura, and Aunt Beverly were greeted by enthusiastic children. Miss Nancy prepared a nice stew. At the table, JJ sat between Miss Nancy and Aunt Beverly. The children

were once again curious about Tom, Laura, and Aunt Beverly. Dinner was especially good.

Afterward, the kids went outside to play while Miss Nancy washed the dishes. JJ was happy to show how he could ride a bicycle. Thanks to the generosity of others, the children who lived at Tutu House all had a few nice toys, clothes, bicycles, tricycles, and wagons. Sometimes Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay even used their own savings to get something a child needed.

JJ brought out the broken bicycle, and then helped Tom carry the welder from the car. JJ watched with interest while Tom clamped wires onto the frame of the bicycle and cleaned the broken area with a brush. He put on a welder's mask and told JJ and the others to stand back. He began welding and in a matter of seconds, sparks were flying, and the cracked frame was repaired. JJ was amazed. He had never seen anything like it before.

"Wow," said all the children, who had come to watch.

"Can you teach me how to do that?" asked JJ eagerly.

"We'll see," said Tom.

"Can you fix my light switch?" asked Carol, timidly.

Tom had to smile. "What's the matter with it?" he asked.

"It doesn't make the light go on," she said.

"Well, let's see," said Tom. "Let's get this stuff back to the car and we'll take a look."

JJ, Jon, and Carol helped carry the welding equipment back to the car. Tom enjoyed his attentive helpers. He put the welding equipment away and picked up a few tools, a small box with two wires dangling from it, and one of the spare switches he always carried. He gave each child something to carry and walked back to the house with the children following. They showed him which room was Carol's.

"Let's see what the problem is," said Tom.

He unscrewed the switch cover and did something to the switch. The light flickered for a moment.

"Did you fix it?" asked Carol.

"No, but I can see what the trouble is."

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JJ and Carol watched while Tom replaced the light switch. In two minutes it was fixed. Carol smiled and said, "Thank you Mister Robinson."

Tom was pleased. JJ was amazed that Tom carried a spare light switch in his car. It was a good time for dessert.

At Tutu House, they only had dessert on story night or special occasions. Sometimes they had Oreo cookies but this morning Miss Nancy had baked oatmeal cookies.

Not everyone sat still to listen to the Annie Oakley radio program but most did. Aunt Beverly sat with JJ and Laddie while Tom and Laura visited with Miss Nancy and Mrs. Barclay in the kitchen.

"That was a very nice meal," said Laura.

"Thank you," said Miss Nancy.

"Thank you for fixing Carol's bicycle, and the light switch," said Mrs. Barclay.

"You have a wonderful home here," said Tom. "What happens when the kids grow up?"

"The older ones usually graduate to facilities in Pittsburgh," said Mrs. Barclay. "They try to get them trained for jobs and apprenticeships. There's a girl's home and a boy's home. We feel our home here is an ideal place for young children."

"There's hardly a year that goes by when we aren't saying goodbye to a child we've learned to love," said Miss Nancy.

"We do keep in touch with most of them," said Mrs. Barclay.

Mrs. Barclay and Miss Nancy both smiled.

When the radio program was over, Mrs. Barclay told the children to make a place on the middle couch for the guests. The younger kids brought blankets from their rooms and sat on the floor, even though there were plenty of chairs and two other couches.

Miss Nancy sat at the piano and played different songs which the children named. The younger kids sang along with some. "Für Elise!" said JJ. Miss Nancy played the song that for some reason JJ had always liked. Then she closed the piano and walked to the bookshelf, filled with many well-worn books. "Let's see," said Miss Nancy. "Where did we leave off?"

When the evening was done, Tom, Laura, and Aunt Beverly got ready to leave. Laura and Aunt Beverly thought everything had been very nice. Miss Nancy thanked Tom again for fixing the bicycle and the light switch. Tom enjoyed how the kids liked him for fixing things. Aunt Beverly was still talking with JJ, and the other kids were heading to bed. Mrs. Barclay looked directly at Tom and Laura. "I'd like you both to think about an idea I have. What if JJ came to live with you? He can't stay here forever, and living with you would make your Aunt Beverly happy. You could teach JJ about your work, and he would learn a trade. He's already interested in what you do."

Tom and Laura were both shocked and didn't say anything.

"Just think about it," said Mrs. Barclay. "Nothing would make us happier than to find a good home for JJ close by here. He's clever, polite, and loves to help. He's one of the nicest boys we've ever had."

Tom tried to say something, but he was truly in shock. Laura just said, "Oh my." It was silent, except for the sounds of children getting ready for bed. Emotions swirled inside him. He and Laura had not talked about children since the death of their little girl so many years ago.

"I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable," said Mrs. Barclay. "Just think about it."

Aunt Beverly walked over. "Think about what?" she asked.

"We'll talk in the car," said Tom.

"It was a very nice evening," said Laura.

"No matter what," said Mrs. Barclay, "Please come back for story night again."

Tom, Laura, and Aunt Beverly walked to the car, and JJ called out "Goodbye! We'll see you next week!"

"My goodness," said Miss Nancy as the door closed. She was nearly in a panic. In her mind, JJ would be with them until he was thirteen or more. But Mrs. Barclay was right. Who knows what would happen to him then? What could be better than a home right here in town? It was all so sudden.

"I'm going to do my best to make this happen," said Mrs. Barclay, "for your sake and mine."

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“I know you’re right,” said Miss Nancy, “but, oh dear.”

At the Robinson home, there were some serious discussions. Aunt Beverly was surprised and delighted at the prospect of having JJ come and live with them. Neither Tom nor Laura was sure what to think.

“Didn’t you enjoy being with the children today?” asked Aunt Beverly. “I sure did. I felt young again.”

Tom and Laura had to admit that it had been the nicest evening they had experienced in more than ten years, and Tom would do almost anything for his aunt.

“I kind of like the idea,” said Laura.

“I don’t know,” said Tom. “I enjoyed being there too, but it seems impractical to think about having a child here now.”

That made Laura sad. “If Baby Karen hadn’t died we would have a child now. Would that be impractical?” She went into the bedroom.

That thought made Tom depressed. It was a horrible memory.

“That’s not what I meant,” said Tom to his aunt. “It’s not like JJ is our own child.”

“But he could be,” said Aunt Beverly. “I like him. He saved my life.”

“I know,” said Tom. “But I wasn’t prepared to think about taking in a kid.”

“He’s not just any kid,” said Beverly. “How many boys his age would have milked my cow for me?”

“He is an unusual kid,” said Tom. “There’s no doubt about that.”

“Thomas,” said Aunt Beverly in one of her more serious moments. “JJ can’t replace Baby Karen. But I want you to think about this for me, for JJ, and for Laura. I know you two haven’t been as happy as you could be. Life has been hard. But I have a good feeling about this.”

Tom apologized to Laura. He said he would try to make things work. He wanted his wife and aunt to be happy, but this was so sudden. Besides, he was busy and behind schedule. It wasn’t easy finding work, and he was currently on a big job that needed to be completed soon.

The next day at Tutu House, Mrs. Barclay and Miss Nancy talked with JJ. He also had mixed feelings. Everything was so sudden.

“We don’t want to see you go,” said Mrs. Barclay, “but if you went to live with the Robinsons you would always be close by, and your future would be settled. Mr. Robinson could teach you about his work.”

JJ was smart enough to understand the situation. He already had worries about having to go to the home in Pittsburgh. This would be a big change, but at least he would still be in town. “Let’s see what they decide,” said Mrs. Barclay.

“Can I take my things with me?”

“Of course you can,” said Miss Nancy.

“What about the bicycle?”

“You can take it if you want but it would be nice if you left it for Greg,” said Mrs. Barclay.

“I guess I could leave my Lassie books here for someone else to read. I’m probably too old for them anyway.”

“Nonsense,” said Mrs. Barclay with a smile. “You can certainly take your Lassie books. You’re never too old for a good book.”

“If it doesn’t work out you can always come back,” said Miss Nancy hopefully.

“Someday I’ll have to leave here anyway.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Barclay, “but this would be much better than going to Pittsburgh.”

For JJ, a lifetime of security was evaporating.

“Life doesn’t always give us what we want,” said Miss Nancy. “Sometimes we just have to deal with what life gives us and do the best we can.”

The next few days were touched with anxiety, waiting to hear what the Robinsons would decide. On Wednesday, there was no trip to the movie theater. It wasn’t a good movie for kids anyway. Miss Nancy was glad to have all the children around. That evening the telephone rang. Miss Nancy was cleaning up from dinner. Mrs. Barclay answered the phone. “Hello, Mrs. Barclay. This is Tom Robinson. We’ve made a decision about what you suggested.”