

And he went straightaway to Polar Place and found Baby Bare sleeping in his bed.

Mother Bare swooned when she heard Baby Bare tell the man with the badge that indeed he was one of the Bares who tried to chop down Polar Central.

"It was all Ted's fault," said Baby Bare. "He had an axe and I didn't, but he said I could play with the fire hose."

"After all, Mother Bare," he said, a tear rolling down his cheek, "when I was a young Bare, I wanted an axe of my own more than anything and you wouldn't let me have it. I never had a fire hose either. Young Bares should always have what they want to make them feel secure."

"I'm Comin', Pa"

Lucia Walton

THICK boots stamped and scraped the cement outside the door. It swung open, slammed against the thick body of the old shepherd dog sleeping in front of it. She pulled herself up with a whine and lurched across the room. Ben dropped his arithmetic book and ran to the dog; burying his face in her fur, he began to croon sympathetically.

"That won't do no good," Ben's father muttered from the sill. "That dog can't hardly hear your fussin'."

"Oh, yes, she can, can't you, Frisk?" The boy's tone was half-defiant, half-pleading.

"I said she can't hear right! Can't see, either." The big man looked angrily down at the dog, then turned his jutting nose toward the kitchen and inhaled deeply. "Supper ready, Martha?" he called, the heavy odor of stew twitching his nostrils.

"Pretty soon, Frank."

Unzipping his leather jacket, he sank into a bulky chair.

"You can too see, Frisky. Just as good as I can, can't you?" Ben was singing into the dog's ear.

Frank scowled at the blond hair swirling out from the boy's pink cowlic. "Quit fussin' and go help your ma. And bring me some coffee."

Ben gave the dog a squeeze and ambled unhappily to the kitchen. Frisk's pointed nose followed him tentatively, then snuggled between her freckled paws.

"Hurry up, boy!"

"I'm comin', Pa."

The dog raised herself at the sound of Ben's voice and trotted to the doorway. Ben, hurrying from the kitchen, fell over her; coffee inched blackly over the gaily-flowered rug. Frank flung out a curse. Running in, Martha snatched off her apron and began to blot the steaming rug with it.

"All over my new rug—oh, Ben, can't you be careful?"

"It's that dog. She's too old. Guess it's time to shoot her."

"Pa!" The boy's eyes stopped their anxious shifting from one parent to another and glued themselves in terror to Frank's dark face.

"She's too old. She don't do nothin' but make trouble any more."

"Oh, Pa, she ain't old!"

"She's older than you are, boy," Martha said in a worn voice.

"Get me my gun. There's light enough."

"Pa, you can't!" Ben slipped his grimy hands through the dog's matted fur and gulped.

"Get the gun!"

Still on her knees, Martha looked up at her husband, then at the boy. "Go on, son. Frisky'll be better off."

White-faced, Ben stood up and slumped out of the room.

"Get your jacket, too." Frank called after him.

"Frank, you're not takin' the boy!"

"Time he quit all that foolishness."

"He's only a baby, Frank!"

"You're makin' him into a sissy. I'm takin' him!"

Stubby fingers locked in the dog's neck fur, Ben shuffled over the field, lagging behind his father's determined stride. Cold was settling down, hardening the earth; sun-reddened stubble crunched underfoot. Hoarse cow notes drifted to them from the north.

"Starr's gettin' his herd in late," Frank remarked.

Ben didn't answer. His thin shoulders slumped further inside his big wool jacket. They came to a stile, climbed over it into the pasture.

"Take her over by that stump and make 'er stay."

A raw wind stung Ben's tears into his cheeks as he stumbled to obey. He told Frisk to sit, then threw himself to the hard ground, clutching her, crying soundlessly against her soft ear.

"Stop bawlin' and get over here!"

Ben shuddered convulsively. His arms fell numbly from the dog; he got up, sniffing head down, and walked quickly past his father.

"Where you goin'?" Frank growled. A strangled howl answered him.

"Get back here! You ain't a girl!" His black angry eyes pulled the boy around. The barrel of his gun raised.

"Frisky!"

The dog started at Ben's anguished wail and began to trot toward it. A bullet spewed dirt in front of her; she stopped uncertainly, lifted her nose, screamed as the rifle cracked once more and began to run crazily away from it. Thick redness spurting from her shoulder sucked the blood from Ben's face; tearing animal shrieks beat at his brain as the rifle's steel mouth spat again and again. Suddenly there was only the sound of his father's hoarse panting. He struck out blindly across the field, running faster and faster until his knotted stomach threw him to the bleak earth.