



A DAY AT SCHOOL

TOM MARKIN

Slowly the boy awoke. He was about seven years old, husky in a squat manner. He blinked, opened his eyes on a squalid scene dimly visible in the early light of a mid-September morning. His younger brother was sleeping calmly at his side — lying on a filthy straw tick that they shared, and covered by an equally filthy partnership patchwork quilt.

Filth was the keyword in the description of the room the boy sleepily gazed on. It lay in the wide cracks in the rough board floor. It was visible on the black broken wallpaper that covered the four walls of the room. It lay in the foul close air, on the battered cook stove in one corner of the room, in the two iron beds where his two sisters and parents were sleeping.

The boy arose with a grunt. He slept in a faded blue denim shirt; it was but a moment's effort to step into the patched

pair of overalls. Shoes were unnecessary; the weather was still warm. He stepped out the back door into a lean-to that served as a back porch. A tin wash pan rested on the wreck of an old-fashioned wash stand. The pan was full of whitish grey water. The boy threw the water out, pumped the tin basin full from a rusty pump nearby. Disregarding the grey ring close to the top of the pan he splashed his face and hands, gulped as the cold water trickled off his face down onto his chest.

Having completed his morning toilet the boy turned, re-entered the one room hut. His mother was up, sleepily, grumpily preparing the eggs and greasy ham that would be his breakfast. She had wide hips; thin, stooped shoulders.

"This school is a hull lot of tom-foolery," she growled as she shoveled the greasy mess onto an unwashed tin plate. "Takin' a' able-bodied kid like you off all