

Go Away Home
A Novel

Carol Bodensteiner

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Go Away Home is a work of fiction. Though some characters and incidents are based on the historical record, the work as a whole is a product of the author's imagination.

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www.carolbodensteiner.com

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Chapter 1

Iowa – 1913

A fly buzzed against her cheek, and Liddie brushed it away with the back of her hand, leaving a streak of flour in the sweat trickling down her temple. When a train whistle sounded in the distance, it triggered the dreams that were never far from her mind. She imagined standing on the platform, handing the porter her bag, stepping up into the car, and waving good-bye. Sometimes, she visualized a man traveling with her. Often, she traveled alone. The boldness of the idea thrilled her.

She sighed and turned her attention to the bread dough. Making bread was a deeply satisfying aspect of being a farm wife. One of only two good things, so far as she could see, the other being sewing. Not that she was a farm wife—not yet. At sixteen, she dreamed of breaking away, of deciding her own future, as the suffragettes promoted, of being a seamstress, of traveling, of doing *anything* but living on a farm. At sixteen, she wanted to get out there and start living her life. She hummed a wordless tune, matching the rhythm to the train she imagined chugging on the tracks.

Grabbing a handful of flour from the bin, she spread it across the breadboard. It took both hands to lift the heavy gray crockery bowl and turn a small mountain of sticky dough onto the floured surface. Enough to make six big loaves. Enough to last the family a week. Coating her hands as she

dusted more flour across the dough, she prepared to knead. She grasped the outside edge of the dough and pulled it into the center, pushing the mass in with the heels of her hands. Outside to inside; Maquoketa to Chicago. Outside to inside; Chicago to New York.

Looking out the kitchen window, Liddie could see her mother and sister bent like question marks over their hoes. Amelia had inherited their mother's stocky build. From this distance, both wearing wrappers and straw hats, one could be mistaken for the other. The hems of their dresses snagged on vines as they moved down the long garden rows, clearing weeds and breaking up the black Iowa soil—ground so rich a seed need only fall on it to spring to life and make a crop. Just-picked radishes and peas filled a basket at the end of the row.

Liddie strained to make out what they were saying. The words eluded her, but she could detect a certain tension. Well, it was a hot day—unusually so for mid-June. She was glad to be inside making bread. Though it was hot in the kitchen, at least she was out of the sun.

She had begun mixing the lard, water, yeast, and flour as soon as the breakfast dishes were cleared, measuring the amounts automatically from long experience. Before she was ten, she'd learned to make bread. She was a competent cook—*the best way to a man's heart*, her mother so often said. Bread baking was the only household undertaking for which Liddie was solely responsible, and she took great pride in it.

Outside to inside. Outside to inside. The dough took shape. A lock of cinnamon-colored hair came loose from the twist she'd so carefully sculpted that morning. It was when she put up the pin-straight hair that came from their father's side that Liddie especially envied Amelia their mother's curls. She hooked the strand with her little finger, tucked it behind her ear, and continued kneading.

In her free time, she studied pictures in magazines and newspapers to see how city ladies fixed their hair and what they wore. The latest fashion was hobble skirts. As she considered making such a dress for herself, she wondered how anyone negotiated such a narrow hem. So one morning,

she'd looped a rope around her ankles to limit her stride as a hobble skirt would do. She had practiced walking in her room, giggling at the simpering image she imagined she presented, inching around on shortened steps. Hidden by the length of her cotton housedress, the rope hobbles were invisible to anyone who saw her when she finally went downstairs, but she found she could not move with ease and had to grab the table several times to keep from falling.

"What's the matter with you?" her mother had asked as she set a basket of clean laundry on the kitchen table and set to folding. "Are you sick?"

Laughing, Liddie collapsed into a chair, pulled up her skirt, and displayed the ropes that had worked their way past the shoes laced above her ankles and now snagged at her stockings.

"What on earth?" Her mother frowned.

"I was practicing how to walk in a hobble skirt." Liddie slipped the rope off one leg and ran to the bureau to get the picture of the dress she'd found in the *Ladies Home Journal* her Aunt Kate had brought during her last visit.

Her mother surveyed the picture. "That is the silliest thing I've ever seen," she said.

"It's beautiful. Look how the shape of the skirt makes her seem so tall and elegant."

"You couldn't do an honest bit of work in that." She pulled another shirt out of the clothesbasket.

Liddie considered the picture. Women who lived in cities did not hoe weeds, gather eggs, or milk cows. How they did spend their days, she could only imagine.

"And now you've torn your stockings," her mother said. "Mend them before the holes get bigger."

Remembering that day made her giggle. She glanced at the table where her sewing basket waited. She enjoyed making bread, yes, but not nearly so much as she enjoyed sewing. She picked up the pace of her kneading to get to the work in her basket more quickly. Only the monogram remained to complete the shirt she was making for Papa. Her future was in that shirt—it was part of the plan she and Aunt Kate had hatched to transform her from farm girl to city seamstress.

She spread another bit of flour on the board. As she moved the mound of dough round and round, the mixture became less sticky, holding its form as a firm, elastic ball.

“How’s the bread coming?”

Liddie jumped at the unexpected sound. “Aunt Kate! I didn’t hear you come downstairs.” She held her flour-covered hands in the air as she gave her aunt an awkward hug.

Kate kissed her niece’s cheek and wiped away the flour smudge. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

Liddie ran her hands lightly over the top of the dough. “It’s ready to rise.” She swiped a light layer of lard around the bowl then wiped her hands, draped the cotton towel over the bowl, and slid it to the back of the counter.

“Where’s Margretta?” Kate asked.

“Mama’s in the garden with Amelia. Did you talk to her again?” Liddie asked. “What did she say? What do you think Papa will say?”

Kate laughed as she looked out toward the garden. “Did you forget I just arrived last night? I have to work into these things.” She opened the cookie jar and peered in, considering the contents before taking out three chewy molasses cookies. “It was good of you all to let me sleep in on my first day. But now it’s a long time until dinner.”

“I thought maybe you talked after I went to bed.” Liddie poured her aunt a cup of coffee, and they sat at the kitchen table.

Kate dipped a cookie in the coffee and chewed it slowly, a look of bliss on her face.

Liddie waited. It was pointless to rush her aunt when she was savoring a sweet.

Finally, Kate finished the first cookie. “Yes, I talked with your mother. She still doesn’t much like the idea of you living away from home so young . . .”

“I’ll be seventeen in four months!”

“You’re still her baby and she worries about you. And since you’re dead set on not following in my footsteps as Amelia did . . .”

Kate arched an eyebrow, causing Liddie to wonder if her aunt was going to launch yet again into the merits of

teaching. She assumed her aunt's ability to persist on a topic served her well in a classroom, but sometimes Liddie wanted to shout, *Get on with it!* She kept her face impassive.

"Your mother doesn't want you to be at loose ends."

"I don't mean it as a slight to you. Or Amelia. Amelia likes keeping a roomful of children corralled. I wouldn't."

"Teaching has its advantages. Like spending weeks each summer with you."

"That's true." Liddie enjoyed her aunt's visits. Each time she came, Kate brought with her a bit of the world Liddie longed to experience. Though her mother and aunt looked alike, the similarity ended there. While her aunt talked about suffrage and women's rights and the latest theories in pedagogy, her mother's days revolved around laundry and gardening and the next meal.

When she was thirteen, Liddie had spent a week with her aunt in Dubuque, where Kate worked as a school superintendent. Kate had taken her to a suffragette rally where Liddie had been entranced by the women who spoke fervently about the changes women would make when they had the right to vote.

Now Liddie leaned forward, willing to set aside her own interest for news of the suffragettes. "What have you heard about suffrage?"

Kate signaled dismay with a shake of her head. "I really thought after Illinois got the ball rolling with their vote last year that we'd see more progress in Iowa. We have been distressingly quiet since the march in Boone. Four years ago already! There's a rally in Dubuque next month. Mrs. Carter—you heard her speak—hopes Mr. Roosevelt's enthusiasm will convince others, even though he didn't win the presidential election."

"Could I go? Would you take me?"

"Your mother wasn't happy with me the last time," Kate said. "She sent you off for a week, and you returned making placards and marching around the house."

Liddie slumped in her chair. "That's what I mean. Every day I spend on the farm, I feel like the world is passing me by. I want more."

“More what?” Kate asked. “And please sit up. Ladies do not slouch.”

Liddie pulled herself upright. Since the last time her aunt visited, Liddie had grown two inches and was now taller than her mother. She stretched tall and lean like her father and like her brother, Vern. As she straightened up, excitement pulsed in her chest, as it did every time she thought about her future. She leaned forward, her face animated. “Training to be a seamstress is a good place to start. From there, who knows? I might have a career. I could make dresses like the ones in the magazines.” She hesitated. “Can women do that?”

“I don’t see why not. Women surely know better than men what a woman would wear.” Kate finished off the second cookie and bit into the third. “Are you still making doll clothes? I will always remember the little dresses you brought to Dubuque.”

“I was sure you’d think I was such a baby.” She’d been mortified when her aunt caught her trying to hide the dresses behind a pillow. “Vern teases me about that.”

“Brothers tease sisters. Ignore him.”

“Not always easy.” She began to flop back in her chair but immediately thought better of it. “I’ve made dresses far better than those. But they just fill time. If I stay on the farm, Mama and Papa will push me to marry a farmer, like they’re trying to do with Amelia.”

Six years older than Liddie, Amelia was well into marrying age. And Amelia wanted to get married. She said so often. But none of the men she liked survived their father’s critical eye. Meanwhile, the men her parents suggested invariably arrived encased in the aroma of pig manure—and left, predictably, before it was dark.

“What do you mean?”

“Amelia was seeing a fellow. Fred Winslow. He came here from Indiana last summer.”

“Was seeing?”

“Papa put his foot down last week. Said Fred was a no-account, not worth Amelia’s time. Right after that, Fred left town. Papa said Fred leaving so quick only proved his point. Amelia’s heartbroken.”

“What did this Fred person do?”

“Not enough, Papa said. When he came to Iowa, Fred worked for the railroad, but he quit and hired on with a farmer over by Hurstville. Then he quit that and made deliveries for the mercantile.”

“Hmm.”

“He liked Amelia. He took her to picnics and dances. They’d sit on the porch at night until Papa made him go home.”

“Did you like him?”

“He could sing. That’s how Amelia met him. She was playing piano at a house party last summer, and he sat down next to her to sing along. He was a lot of fun.”

“That wasn’t what I asked.”

“I don’t understand it, Aunt Kate. Mama and Papa say they want Amelia to get married, but then they don’t. It’s been a row around here lately.”

“Is Amelia as set on not marrying a farmer as you seem to be?”

“I don’t plan to marry anyone! You know that.” She thought for a bit before asking something that had been on her mind for months.

“Aunt Kate, does it bother you that people call you an . . . old maid?”

“My goodness! Why do you ask?”

“Last winter, some of the neighbors were here for a quilting bee. Mama and I were in the kitchen, and I don’t think they knew we could hear them. Mrs. Stevens said if Mama and Papa didn’t look out, Amelia would be an old maid. That made me wonder about you.”

A frown furrowed Kate’s forehead as she pursed her lips. “Well! By a technical definition of the terms, I am old, and I am a maid, ergo, I am an old maid.”

“I mean, you’re successful and happy, even though you never married. Aren’t you? I guess you are an old maid, but they made it sound like the worst thing in the world.”

“Many people think it is. And they’d have their reasons. But I believe no woman should get married just to be married. Thank heaven and the suffrage movement for the

fact that girls have choices these days. That's what we've been fighting for." She saluted Liddie with what remained of the last cookie. "If the title 'old maid' comes with having made my own choice, well, my dear, I wear the title proudly." She popped the cookie into her mouth.

"Liddie!"

Liddie heard her mother's voice and ran to the window. She saw her sister collapsed in the garden, and the hair rose on her arms. "Something's wrong with Amelia!"

She raced out the screen door and across the lawn, leaping over the vegetable rows, dropping to her knees at Amelia's side. The sight of her sister's pasty-white face sent a chill up her back. "Is she dead?"

"Don't be silly." Her mother rubbed Amelia's cheeks. "She fainted."

"Amelia!" Liddie grabbed her sister's hand and chafed the palm with her thumbs. "Amelia! Are you all right?"

Amelia's eyelids fluttered. She struggled to raise her head, but her eyes crossed and she fell back. The look on Amelia's face would have been comical if her face hadn't been so white.

Her mother grasped Amelia under the arm. "Let's get her to the house," she said. "Help me lift her, Kate." She motioned Liddie toward the pump. "Get some water."

"What happened, Margretta?" Kate asked as she took Amelia's other arm and helped to half walk, half drag Amelia out of the garden and into the shade on the porch steps.

Racing ahead to the pump, Liddie couldn't hear her mother's answer. With a few urgent strokes of the pump handle, she coaxed cold water up from the well into the bucket and grabbed the tin cup from the hook. She thrust the cup into her mother's hands.

Margretta dipped water and held the cup to Amelia's lips.

"Your apron, Liddie." Kate held out her hand.

Liddie untied the strings and handed the apron to her aunt, who soaked it in the bucket and pressed it against Amelia's neck.

Liddie crouched at her sister's knees. "What

happened?”

Amelia didn't look up. "The heat."

"Don't fret your sister," Margretta said. "She's going to lie down a bit."

"It was the heat," Amelia insisted. She took the cloth from the back of her neck, dipped it in the bucket, and wiped it across her forehead. "See? I'm better now." She pushed upright but wobbled and had to grip the handrail to steady herself.

The three women watched in silence as Amelia made her way up the porch steps and into the house.

"What's wrong with her, Mama?" Liddie asked. She'd never known her sister to be ill, though lately she'd taken to bed with headaches.

Margretta shook her head. "I feared this," she muttered. She handed the cup to Liddie. "Put that back. Then get the basket from the garden. And take water to your father and the boys." She motioned for Kate to follow then started up the porch steps, her shoulders bowed as though she carried a heavy weight.

Kate's lips creased in a tight line. "You better check on that bread, too, Liddie," she said. "It'll be ready to punch down soon."

Liddie frowned. She wanted to know about Amelia. She wanted to say she didn't need to be reminded about the bread. They were keeping something from her; that was certain. She felt shut out, but out of what, she didn't know.

Chapter 2

Once she returned from taking water to the men and had the bread in the oven, Liddie settled herself on the porch swing, her sewing basket beside her, the shirt on her lap. Finally, she had time to finish the monogram. Her father's full name was George William Treadway, though everyone, even her mother, called him G.W. Liddie thought it a distinguished name. GWT—white on white, on the breast pocket. So subtle. He would know. She would know. But unless someone looked closely, it wouldn't be apparent to anyone else.

She cut a length of embroidery floss, separated two strands, and threaded them through the eye of a fine needle. Even if they thought of it, many women would not bother with such a touch, finding it worth neither the time nor the effort.

As with baking, her mother had made sure Liddie learned to sew, putting fabric in her hands as soon as she could hold a needle. Even at five years old, Liddie had shown an unusual willingness to sit quietly and stitch. By the time she was ten, her stitching had far eclipsed Amelia's skills. The more her mother taught her, the more she wanted to learn. After making quick work of hems and tears and other everyday sewing tasks, she moved on to the fancier work she enjoyed.

Recently, she had taken to appliquéing a blue printed fabric cut in an oak leaf and reel pattern on muslin squares. Her aim was twenty eighteen-by-eighteen-inch squares.

Enough for a quilt. She expected this might take the rest of her life. But as her father said, "If you don't start, you'll never finish." Each time she picked up a square, the oak leaf pattern reminded her of fall and how much she enjoyed walking in the hills, hearing the fallen leaves crunch under her boots. It had taken months to complete the first square, and she'd begun a second.

Liddie's sewing basket always held something she was making for someone. She especially enjoyed embroidering the wearer's initials in some hidden spot—the interior of the placket, the yoke just below the collar, a cuff. It took a little extra time, and although some—her brother, Vern, for instance, or their hired man, Joe—were unaware the initials were even there, she drew pleasure from putting something of herself in each item she made.

She patterned the doll dresses she sewed for friends in fancy designs she'd have no occasion to wear herself. Sometimes, she worked to duplicate the dresses she saw in Aunt Kate's magazines. Other times, she combined features from many dresses.

As the yeasty smell of baking bread wafted out to the porch, she tied off the thread and snipped the ends.

"There," she said, smoothing the front of the shirt. "Ready." She folded the shirt and went inside to set the table for supper.

"Are you all right?" she asked when Amelia came downstairs.

"I'm fine." Amelia took the silverware out of Liddie's hands. "I'll set the table."

"Where are Mama and Aunt Kate?"

Amelia shrugged.

"I hope Aunt Kate is talking to her about me."

"I hope so, too," Amelia said.

Amelia's voice sounded so oddly hopeful that Liddie looked at her. Since Amelia didn't say more, she went on: "Do you think Papa will say yes?"

"I have no idea. Now don't be wasting time talking. Papa and the boys will be in soon."

Liddie drew back from the sharp tone as if she'd been

slapped. "What did I do?"

Amelia didn't answer. Instead, she dropped the silverware on the table with rattling force and ran out of the room.

For the second time that day, Liddie was left looking at someone's retreating back.

* * *

"You still planning to go into town tonight?" G.W. asked Joe over supper.

Joe nodded. "Catherine's making dessert."

Vern snickered.

"What?" Joe asked.

"I'm thinking you're sweeter on her than that cake she's making."

Joe elbowed him. "Maybe someday you'll be so lucky."

"Don't be late," G.W. said. "We're making fence tomorrow."

"Yes, sir."

Joe's tone conveyed an edginess Liddie hadn't heard in a long time. She looked from him to her father. Neither reacted, and she guessed she was being oversensitive.

Joe had come to live with them four years ago, after his father died, leaving him the only member of his family still in Iowa. G.W. had said he could use another hand, so Joe moved in.

Liddie had been twelve, and she remembered well those first days after he arrived. Her mother had sent her with sheets to fix a bed in the tack room for the new hired man. She'd expected a man and was surprised to find a thin, dark-haired boy sitting on the edge of the bunk.

"Hi," she had said. "I'm Liddie."

He stood at once, extending a hand to shake hers. "I'm Josef—Joe—Bauer."

She shifted the bedding to her left arm and reached for his hand, a strong hand, rough with callouses. Hardly ever did anyone shake her hand. "I'm pleased to meet you, Josef."

"Joe." He reached for the bedding. "I'll take that."

“No bother. I’ll do it.” She slipped past him and began to unfold a sheet.

He caught the loose corners. “I’ll help.”

Between them, they flicked the sheet out so it billowed over the bed. Pulling it taut, he tucked the sheet around the mattress, deftly mitering the corners the way she’d learned to do it.

He straightened up when he saw her looking at him and raked thick, dark hair away from deep-set hazel eyes. “My ma taught me.”

Liddie liked him at once.

Joe had been with them a month when he ran off the first time.

“Where is he?” Margretta had asked when Joe didn’t come in for supper.

“Did he say anything, Vern?” G.W. asked. A tall man with even taller expectations, G.W. carried himself with the confidence of earned success. Investments in sound livestock—particularly the sows that sent a steady stream of pigs to market each year—allowed him to retire the mortgage ahead of schedule and build a tidy savings. Though not a church-going man, he made regular contributions to the Union Methodist Church because his wife attended. Further, the church supported his own values of hard work, honesty, and neighborliness. It was his belief that both livestock and children benefited from a firm, gentle hand, and clear expectations.

Vern shrugged. He forked potatoes into his mouth without looking up.

Liddie looked at him in surprise. On a regular day, Vern conserved words as though they were drops of rain in a drought, but she’d always known him to answer a direct question.

“Vern.” Her father’s tone made Liddie stiffen in her chair.

Vern went to set his fork on the edge of his plate, but his hand shook and the fork tipped, flipping peas around the table. As he grabbed for it, his hand knocked against his glass, splashing milk. Vern’s neck flushed red as he clenched his

hands in tight fists.

Liddie clapped a hand over her mouth to hide a laugh. At fifteen, Vern had been as clumsy as a newborn calf.

“Did you boys get into it?” G.W. asked

“Oh, Vern,” Margretta said. “You didn’t fight!”

G.W. lifted his hand and she fell quiet. “Tell me what happened, Vern.”

“He acts like he knows everything.” Vern’s eyes darted between his parents and wound up focused on his plate. “Just because he could break that horse.”

G.W. regarded his son. “Vern, every man has his own talents. Joe has a way with horses like you have a way with building things. It takes all of us to run this place.”

Vern raised his head and looked defiantly at his father. “You act like he’s so special.”

“He’s had a hard time. We’re blessed to have a great deal. The least we can do is share it.” G.W. took his knife and cut into a pork chop. He looked at Vern before forking a bite into his mouth. “And be gracious about it.”

It took awhile for Vern to meet his father’s eyes. “I don’t know where he is, Pa. He headed south. Should I go after him?”

“I expect he has things to work out. I’m thinking he’ll be back.”

Joe sat down to breakfast with them the next morning. He didn’t say where he’d been, and no one asked.

The second time Joe disappeared, he was gone for three days. They all looked at Vern.

“We’ve been getting along,” Vern claimed. “I swear.”

Liddie wondered if that was true. She’d come upon them arguing one day, but they stopped when they saw her. Margretta begged G.W. to go find him, but G.W. said the boy had decisions to make and no one could make them for him.

When Joe came back, it looked as though he hadn’t eaten or washed since he left. G.W. met him on the porch steps. Liddie followed, but he waved her back, so she watched from inside the doorway.

“I don’t know as how I belong here,” Joe said. He stood, feet planted, shoulders squared. He clenched his hands

into fists and then loosed them before finally shoving his hands into his back pockets. "I come back to get my things."

"Have we made you feel unwelcome?"

"You and Mrs. Treadway have been good to me. I appreciate it."

"So this is about you and Vern?"

Joe looked away. Liddie saw the muscles work in his cheeks and she wondered what he was fighting to say. Or not say. She strained to hear.

"It's just you aren't my family."

"Every family has its own ways. Every man does, too. You can't run off every time the going gets rough."

"I know, sir."

"You're a good boy, Joe. You'll be a man to make your folks proud." G.W. put his hand on Joe's shoulder. "We'd like you to stay."

"You'd let me?" Surprise showed on Joe's face.

"As long as you want. We don't abide fighting though, so whatever's going on between you and Vern, you better work it out."

"Yes, sir."

"Another thing. You can't run off like this. It upsets Mama too much."

Joe flushed. "It won't happen again. I promise."

"All right, then. Get cleaned up and come in to eat. This afternoon, you and Vern go hunting. Mama has a hankering for rabbit stew."

Vern and Joe came back later that day with a brace of rabbits. Through the fall, they apparently worked through whatever competition there'd been between them because Joe didn't run away again, and eventually the boys became friends.

In those first days, Liddie had a crush on Joe that embarrassed her to think of now. She'd followed him around like a puppy, trying to get his attention, abashed when she did.

"I remember my first crush," Amelia had said when she found Liddie lying on the bed, a pillow flattened against her chest. "He was a hired man, too. Hank Thompson. Remember him?"

Liddie shook her head.

“He worked here one summer. He was so handsome.” She made a face. “He never looked my way.”

“What did you do?”

“Mooned around him like a sick calf.” Amelia laughed. “He left at the end of the summer. Joe will be gone by the time you grow up, too. You’ll get over it.”

Liddie doubted that could ever be true. But the crush only lasted for the better part of a month, ending when Joe dashed her hopes by taking a neighbor girl to a dance.

Not much later, Liddie’s interests began to move in the direction of suffragettes and sewing and careers and travel. Over the years, the only boy she’d ever taken such a shine to became more like a brother. She was happy for Joe and Catherine. She expected he’d be happy for her, too, when he learned she was going to Maquoketa.

Her attention back to the matter at hand, Liddie looked at her aunt, waiting with growing impatience for her to bring up the apprenticeship. Kate responded with an almost imperceptible shake of her head. Liddie mouthed, *What?* Kate tilted her head toward Liddie’s mother. For the first time, Liddie noticed that her mother’s eyes were red, and she’d barely touched the food on her plate.

“You got a good scald on the roast, Margretta,” G.W. said.

Even the compliment didn’t bring a smile to her mother’s face. Anxiety gained traction in Liddie’s stomach. Had her mother changed her mind about the apprenticeship?

“Pass the bread?” Joe asked.

“At least you didn’t burn it this time.” Vern pointed the tip of his knife at Liddie.

“No. I didn’t burn it this time. Or the last six times.” This was an old jibe, one Vern brought up too often. With heat radiating through her chest, Liddie gripped the edges of her chair and glared.

“Let it rest,” Joe said to Vern. “That only happened once, and you know it.”

“Aw, I was just joshing. Can’t she take a joke?” Vern looked at Liddie with a satisfied grin. “Got you again, didn’t I?”

“Some joke.” Liddie frowned.

Amelia squeezed Liddie's hand under the table. Liddie tried to smile. Amelia supported her. With Amelia at home taking care of things, she could go to Maquoketa.

“I can't do this. Not tonight!” Margretta pushed back from the table, standing so abruptly the legs of her chair caught in the rug. The chair teetered and Kate reached out, grabbing it before it fell. Raspy sobs erupted from behind Margretta's hankie as she ran out of the room.

“What the . . . ?” G.W. looked bewildered.

“I'll go.” Kate left her napkin crumpled by her plate.

Liddie's mouth fell open. She turned to Amelia. “I didn't mean—” She stopped. Amelia was crying, too.

* * *

Later that night, Kate sank heavily into the porch rocker. “Your sister is pregnant,” she said without preamble.

“Pregnant!” Liddie felt the bottom drop out of her stomach. “Pregnant? How can Amelia be pregnant? She's not married.”

“Ah, Liddie.”

Kate's gaze told Liddie how naive her comment had been. Embarrassment flushed her cheeks and she lowered her eyes to the toes of her shoes.

“It does happen. Unfortunately. But there are places for girls who get themselves in trouble.”

“She'd go away?”

Kate nodded. “In the morning, I'll call a colleague to make arrangements. There's a place in Des Moines where she can stay until it's her time.”

“But . . .” Liddie saw immediately that if Amelia was gone, not just off teaching during the days but really gone, there was no chance her parents could do without her on the farm.

“It's necessary. She won't see anyone there who knows her or the family.” Kate had been sitting still; now she set the chair to rocking. “It's a shame. She had such a promising future.”

“Couldn’t she teach? After?”

Kate shook her head. “Oh, my, no. News like this has a way of getting around.”

“But she’ll come back here, won’t she?”

“I suppose she will. But this will hang over her the rest of her life.”

“But she has to be here. She has to stay on the farm.”

As the reality solidified in Liddie’s mind, so did desperation. “So I can go.”

“We’ll have to see about that.”

“But Mrs. Tinker needs an answer. You said so.”

“It can’t be helped. Your parents cannot be bothered with that decision now.”

Liddie’s eyes stung. “It’s not fair.”

“That can often be said of life, dear.”

When Liddie went to bed, she had the bedroom she shared with her sister to herself. Amelia was still with their parents. As Liddie pulled her nightgown over her head, she imagined Amelia doing *that*—though she didn’t exactly know what *that* was—with Fred. Bile rose in her throat, and she pulled the quilt up around her, protecting herself from the idea of a man doing such things to her. Her thoughts turned to Maquoketa and sewing. As she saw her own future slipping away, disgust gave way to anger, embarrassment, and shame.

From Liddie’s earliest memories, Amelia had been the one to bathe and dress her. Amelia washed and braided Liddie’s hair when she was little, taught her to put it up when she went from a child’s short skirts to a woman’s long dresses. Amelia told fairy tales to get Liddie to sleep, held her tight when thunderstorms sent her cowering under the covers. Amelia was always there.

How this had happened was beyond her comprehension. She knew Amelia was disgraced. The family was disgraced. How would any of them look at their neighbors ever again without feeling shame?

She thought of how other farmers came to Papa for advice on crops and cattle. How the school directors got his approval on work to be done on the schoolhouse.

She thought of how much Mama enjoyed having the

neighbor women over for quilting bees. She knew how proud Mama was that all of her children had finished eighth grade. When Amelia took over as teacher after she graduated, Mama brought out her special cordial glasses. Even Liddie had a sip of corn wine.

No one had needed to explain to Liddie that her behavior would be respectable. How could it happen that her sister was pregnant? Out of wedlock?

When Amelia came to bed, Liddie pointedly rolled on her side, her back to her sister. She wanted Amelia to know she was awake and to know she was not going to speak with her. She pulled the covers over her ears and pretended not to hear her sister's muffled sobs.