



School in Winston-Salem

turned to face the dishes that were stacked on the table in the center of the room. Helen worked with two dishpans, washing in one, rinsing in the other and making neat towers of wet and dripping dishes and glasses on the table.

Eventually Mother came in to help. She asked, “Did you say that Cal is planning something for tomorrow?”

“Yes, he and Joe are going to talk about their plans while they sell Joe’s newspapers this afternoon.” Helen replied.

“Maybe,” Mother said, “if they are going to see the Saturday train come in, he’ll take you with them. Then you won’t feel as bad about his leaving you with his work today.”

Mother didn’t know that Cal’s plans would make trouble for him and Joe.

next chapter—Cal sells newspapers

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WINSTON, N.C., 1909—

No going without your shoes until the first of May. That was the rule at the Sharps’ house. However, nine-year-old Helen thought the idea of walking home from school on this hot April afternoon with long stockings and high top shoes made no sense at all. She lagged behind some school friends hoping to find a time and place to take off her shoes and stockings.

Only Libby, her sister, walked with her. Libby was in her first year at school and was two years younger than Helen. Since the pace was slow, Libby did not have to run to keep up as she usually did.

“We can’t be late today!” Cal shouted back over his shoulder as he ran past them down the middle of the road.

Their older brother, Cal, was the high-spirited member of the family. He was mischievous at home and at school. He won at marbles and would have had a huge collection if Mother had let him play for keeps. Sometimes he walked with Helen and Libby, bringing along the friends and excitement that accompanied him wherever he went. But today he was off without them.

Helen and Libby continued on the small dirt road that cut through a wooded area with no houses. Horses and wagons seldom passed this way, so the place was perfect for Helen to hide behind a tree, unbutton her stockings from her shirtwaist, roll them down to her ankles and unhook the

tops of her shoes.

Libby tagged along with Helen who skipped down the road in her new freedom, blonde curls bouncing and shoe tops flapping like birds rising from the ground. They paid no attention to Cal’s reminder to hurry.

On Holly Street, Helen spotted and sat on the steps to a neighbor’s yard. Hiding behind Libby’s dress, she rolled up her stockings and struggled with the buttons on her shoes. Never mind that she was a mess. Now she would have to hurry before both Mother and Cal were angry with her.

When the girls came through the gate to the high board fence, they faced Cal sitting astride the railing of the porch, kicking his feet in disgust and beating an impatient rhythm on the rails. His rebuke made Helen long to escape to her secret tree.

“Hurry up, Helen. I’ve been waiting on you!” he shouted. “What took you so long? You knew I had something special planned for today.”

Helen was hurt that she was left out of his plans. She could see that now she would be left to clean the dinner dishes alone, so she grumbled at him. “Libby and I had something to do on our way home from school.”

Cal looked at her. “I was going to help, but, now, you’ll be by yourself.”

Cal’s buddy, Joe, whistled from the corner, and Cal bounded off the porch, his newspaper delivery bag flying

behind him.

Usually Helen and Cal shared the job of washing the dishes left by the boarders who ate their noon meal at the Sharps’ house. Since their house on Spruce Street was ideally located, three blocks from town, boarders could walk the distance from many businesses. Taking a few extra people for dinner helped to supplement what Papa earned at his new grocery business and Mother made as a tailor.

Harry and Mabel, their grown brother and sister, ate with the boarders. Harry worked at the downtown YMCA, and Mabel, at a department store. The Early sisters came with her. The sisters worked in town as secretaries. The Sharp children sometimes called them the “Early Birds” because they chirped and clucked as they talked.

As Helen stood on the porch, Mother tapped on the inside of the window with her thimble

and beckoned her into the sitting room. Libby and Moddy, a younger sister, were already inside playing with a box of buttons. Mother was hand stitching the collar onto a new dress while little Jack sat on the floor under the Singer sewing machine. He pushed and pulled on the treadle that turned the wheel high on the machine, making a click each time the needle went up and down.

“Helen,” Mother said to her, “Get Jack away from the machine and set him here, closer to me. And, then, tell me why that big frown is on your face.”

Helen answered reluctantly,

her frown deepening, “Cal has gone with Joe and left me here to wash the dishes by myself.”

“He knows that his chore is to help you before he leaves to do anything else. Did he tell you where he was going?” Mother answered.

“They are planning to go to the train station tomorrow.” Helen said. She offered no more and headed for the kitchen, not wanting to get Cal in trouble.

The fire was low in the big cook stove. She added a stick or two of wood to it and then ran water from the spigot on the wall into a kettle. Placing the kettle on the stove, she

ACTIVITY: List the members of the Sharp family introduced in this chapter and all the work they do. Which jobs earn money? Which are chores to help the family?

Consult the newspaper and select ways that the family members might earn their way, if they lived today.

HISTORY: The hyphenated name, Winston-Salem became official in 1913.