

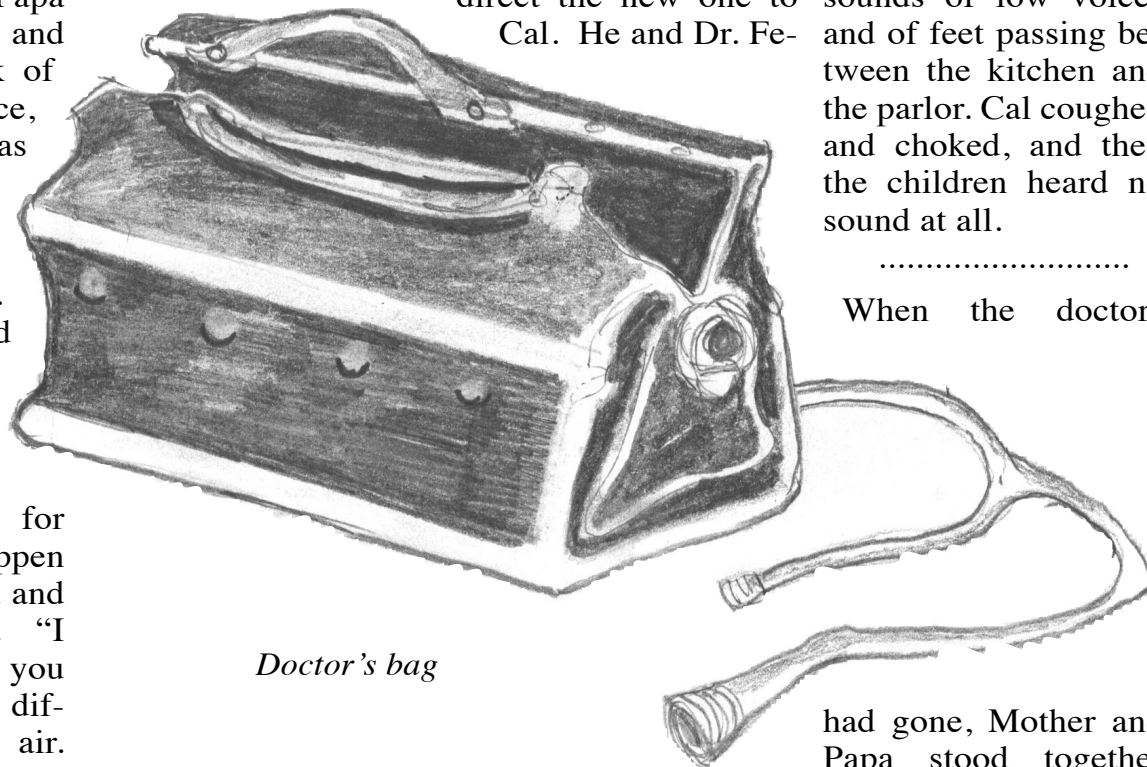
WINSTON, N.C., 1909—Mother and Papa were frozen like two statues. Papa was standing tall and erect, with a look of concern on his face, and Mother was bent over Cal like Mary leaning over the manger. They were still while Dr. Ferrington stood behind a chair that he rocked back and forth while he talked.

“I cannot say for sure what will happen next.” He stopped and cleared his throat. “I don’t need to tell you that he is having a difficult time getting air. He could get much worse suddenly and not be able to breathe at all.” He continued to rock the chair as he explained, “A young doctor just moved to town from a hospital in Virginia. He has had special training in treating patients with diphtheria and has a method for keeping the disease from closing the throat.”

Just then Mabel found Helen on the stairs and hurried her back to the other girls. “Come to bed,” she said. “Mother and Papa don’t need to worry about the rest of us right now. They

have enough on their minds.”

Mabel sat on the side



Doctor's bag

of the bed while Moddy, Libby and Helen knelt by the bed to say their prayers.

All through the night and all through the house, Cal’s brothers and sisters worried. In the parlor, at the telephone, up and down the stairs and tucked away in the bedrooms, they thought about Cal.

In the early morning, as the sky turned from black to gray and the first pink light appeared in the sky, the doctors arrived at the house. Their horse and carriage could be heard clearly in the stillness of

early morning. Mother and Papa hurried to meet both doctors and direct the new one to Cal. He and Dr. Fe-

arrington seemed to know already what to do if Cal’s condition had not improved during the night.

By the time the doctors opened their medical bags, Cal’s brothers and sisters were out of bed and waiting on the stairs to learn the result of the doctors’ visit. Each of them strained to hear.

Dr. Ferrington gave some directions to Mother and Papa who left the parlor and went to the kitchen. Next the doctors talked to Cal, soothing him as they spoke. After that they

talked only to each other as they worked.

The children heard the sounds of low voices and of feet passing between the kitchen and the parlor. Cal coughed and choked, and then the children heard no sound at all.

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When the doctors

had gone, Mother and Papa stood together at the bottom of the stairs looking at the group huddled at the

top. Papa had his arm around Mother and had a weak smile on his face that broke into a big one. Mother spoke first and announced, “He’s breathing clearly. They think he will be able to get through this, and I know he will. We’ll get Sis Nan to come and help care for him while he’s getting better. But, I know he will get well.”

The children scrambled down the stairs to join in the embrace. When the initial excitement was over, Mother explained all that happened. The doctor had held Cal’s head back until his throat was straight, and then they had slipped a rubber tube down his wind-

pipe. The air he desperately needed could get through to him at last. They had saved his life.

next chapter—Helen plays with fire

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ACTIVITY: What do you learn about diphtheria from this story? How is diphtheria treated or prevented? What more do you want to know? How would you find out?

Look for a current news report about a disease. What do you learn about the disease from the story? What more do you want to know? How would you obtain more information? Use your newspaper’s archive, available through its Web or e-edition, to learn about any publicized illnesses, treatments and health services available in your community.

HISTORY: In the 1880s, as an alternative to surgical tracheotomies, New York physician Joseph O’Dwyer designed tubes and a method for inserting the tubes to relieve the suffocating effects of diphtheria.