WINSTON, N.C., 1909—After many weeks, Cal recovered from diphtheria, and the period of quarantine ended at last. A true spirit of celebration filled the Sharps’ house.

To the children, the long weeks of being confined to the house and yard seemed longer than they actually were. The young ones had made playhouses under the dining room table and behind the piano. Helen had read the books that had been sent from school to keep from getting too far behind the other children in her grade. She also read aloud to entertain Libby and Moddy while Mother looked after Cal and Jack and helped the girls as they came down to me,” she shouted.

“Bring those things on to me,” she shouted to the girls as they came through the kitchen door onto the back porch above her. Moddy and Libby took care not to trip over their small bundles, but Cal gathered up his entire bedroll. Rather than drag it down the stairs, he merely pushed it over the railing and let it fall.

“Cal,” Aunt Emma yelled to him. “You just walk down those steps like you ought to. I know you’ve been sick, and mighty sick, I say. But, not now!” She went on cautioning him, “You just about started a fire in all these sheets, dropping them the way you did. We’re supposed to wash ‘em not burn ‘em.”

Farther down in the yard, beyond where the chickens were fenced near the barn, Helen watched her brothers. Finally, when they were looking away toward the barn, she reached down and picked up one of the cakes. The cake was blazing hot. No one saw her drop the cake into the pocket of her dress and quickly turned away. She started across the yard, intending to go through the gate to the front yard where she could look at the brimstone. But the gate wouldn’t open. Then she thought she would run up the back stairs and go through the house to the front, but she could not. She felt a terrible burning on her stomach, and suddenly her dress was on fire. She grabbed at it and screamed, while Aunt Emma ran and lifted her in her arms.

“Mrs. Sharp, come quick, this baby’s on fire!” Aunt Emma seemed to hold Helen too close. Why wouldn’t she let her go? And why didn’t she stop the fire? Helen screamed and cried, while Aunt Emma held her tight. Mother came flying down the steps. In one big swoop she grabbed Helen, spreading her wide walking skirt and wrapping it around her. The fire ate its way up under Helen’s arm. She cried, and mother rocked her and moaned. “Oh, my girl, my girl. Whatever has happened to my beautiful girl?”

Now Aunt Emma threw herself, half running, half falling, up the steps to the back porch railing where she had hung a big rug that she and Sis Nan had just washed and put there to dry. Aunt Emma pulled and heaved and somehow dragged the rug to where she and Mother could roll Helen in it.

When the flames were finally smothered, they gently unrolled Helen from the heavy rug. She lay there, charred and burned badly. Once again Dr. Fearrington was called to the home.

**ACTIVITY:** Is “brimstone” an unfamiliar word? First, use context clues and then dictionaries to understand the word. Select unfamiliar words from news stories and use context clues, class discussions and online dictionaries to learn more about the words.

**HISTORY:** In the 1930s, the first automatic washing machine appeared, reducing the time and effort required to do laundry.