

WINSTON, N.C., 1910— Papa had to stay at the hospital for three months. On the children’s first trips to see him, Papa seemed weary and worried. But with time, he gained some energy and began to walk with his crutches to meet them at the door.

In February, Helen took him a beautiful valentine she had made with bits of lace and ribbon from Mother’s sewing box. “This is for you,” she said as she slipped it from her pocket and surprised him with it.

He put both crutches under one arm and balanced himself to hold the card with his free hand. “You are my valentine,” he said to her as he looked at it, “and you’re Mother’s valentine, too. I’m sure you’re a big help to her with all the little ones at home. And school? How is school going for you this winter?”

Her lessons had not been easy. She was behind in her studies because she had missed days of school last spring. Other things about school troubled her too. She didn’t fit into the classroom as well as she did at home, and the teacher expected more of her than Helen could do.

She looked up at Papa. “I’m doing my best,” she said, “and I think I’m growing up a little bit.

The smile on his face made her think that he was pleased and feeling better.

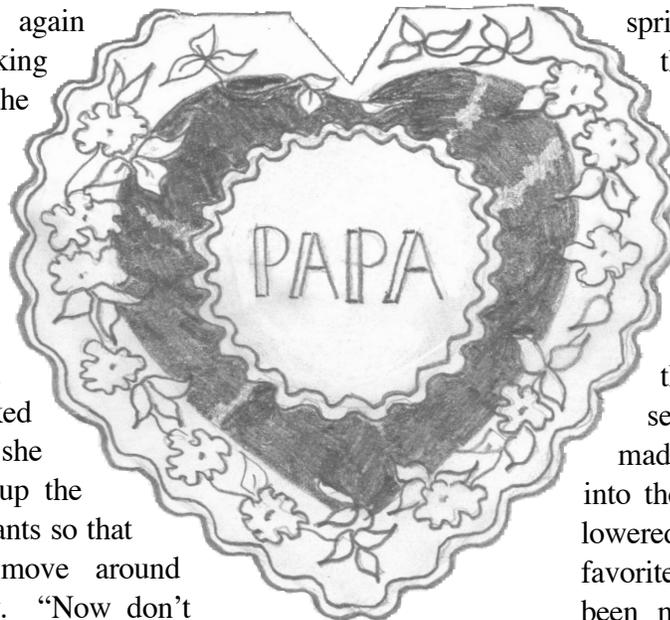
She was encouraged too because he was wearing his glasses again and talking about the news he had read in the paper. He had started to get dressed each day, and he asked Mother if she would pin up the leg of his pants so that he could move around more easily. “Now don’t cut the pants’ leg or sew it because I’ll need to let it down again if I get a new leg.”

“A new leg,” Helen thought when she heard it. “He will walk again.”

As the weather warmed, visiting the hospital became easier. One afternoon after school was out for the day and the dishwashing chore was completed, Helen and Cal carried a basket of cold supper to Papa.

When they arrived, Papa was full of talk about what had happened that day. “A man came to the hospital to talk to me about getting an artificial leg. He, too, had had a leg amputated, and he explained what it would

be like if I had one like his. He walked over some rough ground in the yard, and he went up and down the



A Valentine heart

porch steps to show me how smoothly he could move.”

Cal interrupted, “What did the leg look like, Papa?”

He laughed. “It looked just like a leg. He had a shoe and sock on the foot, and his pants covered the wooden leg. He did roll up his pants, so I could see how it attached at the knee.” He continued, “Now that my own leg is healing, I need to decide what to do.”

“Papa, we do want you to walk just like you used to,” Helen declared as she hugged him around his waist.

When the day finally

arrived to leave the hospital, Mother and Harry went to get Papa in the buggy. The children were dressed for his homecoming in their spring best, waiting on the porch, and Mabel could hardly hold them back as they pushed out the walk to meet him. Alan handed Papa the crutches, and he leaned on them to slide off the seat. With help Papa made it to the house and into the sitting room. He lowered himself into his favorite chair, which had been moved close to the window. His eyes moved around the room and back to the window where the sun came pouring through the freshly-washed curtains. He was glad to be home.

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Later, Libby and Moddy came running to Helen with a secret. “Come here and see,” they whispered as each of them tried to explain first. “Somebody is

hiding under Mother’s and Papa’s bed.”

Helen thought she knew the answer to the mystery, but her sisters were still reluctant to enter the room. “Don’t you want to go and see?” she asked them.

The two smaller girls clutched Helen’s hands as they stood at the door. Nodding in silent agreement, they tiptoed into the room and approached the bed. Helen leaned down and gently raised the bed curtain enough to peer under the bed.

“Oh, Papa’s leg!” Libby cried with a gasp.

“Sh,” Helen hushed her.

The girls looked at each other. All three were curious about the leg and wanted to get a better look at it. Carefully they pulled it from under the bed and began their inspection.

The leg was made completely of wood, with Papa’s shoe covering the foot portion and his sock coming up on the leg. At the top there were leather straps so that the wooden

leg could be attached to Papa’s leg at the knee.

The girls had watched him as he was learning to walk with it. He would hold his weight on his strong side while he moved his new leg forward. He said that dragging it was easier, but he was trying to lift the leg instead. He limped, but he was learning to walk more smoothly and without a crutch.

Helen had wondered about Papa’s new leg, and now she felt satisfied to have seen it up close. The sisters quietly pushed it back and went to see how Papa was getting along without it.

next chapter—Helen views from perch

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ACTIVITY: Helen made Papa a Valentine. What would you give your father or other family member to show your love and appreciation? Use words and illustrations from the newspaper to create a Valentine. Or, choose a gift from ads in the print and/or digital edition of your newspaper and determine the cost of the gift.

HISTORY: Injured soldiers often require artificial limbs. Confederate soldier James Hanger developed a wooden leg to serve Civil War veterans. Current research focuses on using modern technology to improve the limbs for soldiers and other amputees.