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1

Teachers Are Big

Jeannie was the youngest of the three red-haired Otto sisters. Joanne, the oldest, was nine, and Joyce was eight. Jeannie was six and a half. She was in the first grade at school. The girls had one little brother Justin who was just learning to crawl.

Of all the students in the first three grades at Trillium Christian School, Jeannie was the smallest. She was so little that even though she sat in the smallest desk in the whole school, only her toes could reach the floor. She always drank her milk and ate her potatoes, but her line on the growth chart on the classroom door did not move much.

Jeannie loved school. Her classroom in the basement of the Trillium Christian Church was so bright and pretty! Along one wall marched a whole row of little paper mailboxes, one for each student. Every time Jeannie said her



memory work correctly, the teacher put a tiny envelope in her box. She did the same for the other students.

“I have a surprise in each of your envelopes,” Miss Gail told the children. “But you’ll have to wait till the end of the term to open them.”

Next to the memory work mailboxes was a job chart. A little red plastic sand pail hung from a tiny hook. In a circle around it were a small mop, a blackboard brush, a tiny broom, a dust rag, and a little wastebasket. Every week Miss Gail pulled names from the pail and placed one name under each job. This week Jeannie’s name was under the wastebasket. It was her job to gather all the paper scraps at the end of the day.

Tacked on the bulletin board on the back wall was a poem about snow. It was surrounded by many glittery paper snowflakes. Miss Gail had squirted a border of snow around it from a spray can.

Across the top of the blackboard hung animal pictures the children had colored. Under the blackboard small cards showed all the letter sounds the first graders had learned.

Jeannie loved school, and she loved her teacher. Miss Gail was a tall strong person. She could reach high enough to write the date at the top of the blackboard without even standing on her toes. She could pick up the desks and move them around. She could carry big stacks of books. She could run very fast and kick a soccer ball a long way. Her voice carried all the way across the schoolyard.

Miss Gail was very tall and strong, but she was also very kind. When the first graders stuttered over their

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words, she would say, “Let’s slow down and try that sentence again.” Then she would wait patiently until they got the words out. When Amos, one of the two first-grade boys, fell off the swing and scraped his elbow, Miss Gail helped him into the classroom. She cleaned and bandaged the scrape.

One day something happened that made Jeannie admire her teacher even more. Miss Gail was teaching second-grade social studies. Jeannie’s sister Joyce was the only other girl in the classroom, and she was in the second grade. “Joyce, can you please bring me the C encyclopedia from the bookshelf?” asked Miss Gail.

The encyclopedias were packed tightly together on the shelf, so Joyce had to tug hard to get the book. The bookcase wobbled as she yanked out the encyclopedia. A large seashell that was sitting on the top shelf slipped off and hit Joyce’s head before it landed on the floor.

“Ow!” Joyce yelled. She lifted her hands to her head. Blood squirted from the cut and ran down her face. The other children gasped. Some jumped to their feet, and several started crying.

When Joyce saw the blood on her hands, she burst into sobs. Miss Gail grabbed a handful of tissues and pressed them against the cut on Joyce’s head. “Kenny,” she said to the biggest boy in the room, “run to the restroom and bring me a bunch of wet paper towels.”

“Hush, Joyce. It will be all right,” Miss Gail soothed. “The rest of you sit down and stop crying,” she added calmly. She smiled at the children. “A cut on the head always bleeds a lot, but usually it isn’t as bad as it looks,”

she said. "Joyce will be fine as soon as we get this cleaned up." Her calm voice quieted the worried children who had crowded around Joyce.

When Kenny returned with the wet towels, Miss Gail pressed a handful of them against the cut. With the rest, she wiped the blood from Joyce's face. When the bleeding stopped, Miss Gail said, "I'll call your mother, Joyce, to come and get you."

Joyce's mother soon came and took Joyce to the doctor to see if the cut needed to be stitched. Miss Gail decided the rest of the children needed an early recess so they could run off some of their excitement.

That was the kind of teacher Miss Gail was. Jeannie longed to be just like her when she grew up, but she was so little. She was afraid she would never be able to be a teacher. She would probably never be big and strong and brave like Miss Gail.

2

The Little Teacher

Jeannie and her sisters liked to play school. In the corner of the big room of their log house were two school desks and a blackboard. Last year Joyce and Joanne had used them because Mom had taught them at home.

“It’s my turn to be the teacher today,” said Joyce. The two oldest girls always took turns being the teacher.

Joanne frowned. “You don’t know how to do multiplying and long division,” she said. “I want to be the teacher.”

“I wish I could be the teacher for once,” put in Jeannie timidly. “I want to be a teacher when I get big.”

“You can’t teach,” Joanne snapped. “You just learned to read. Besides, you’re too little.” Joanne passed out workbooks and laid a pencil on each desk.



Joyce giggled. “Jeannie couldn’t make the children behave,” she said. Joyce often misbehaved when they played school.

Jeannie sighed as she slid into one of the desks. She *was* too little. She knew it. Her own teacher was so big and strong. She was afraid she never would grow big enough to be a teacher.

Mom had heard Jeannie’s wish to be the teacher. She came into the room, bringing little Justin. She set him beside Joyce’s desk and smiled at the girls. “Justin wants to come to school too,” she said. “He can sit here and watch. I need to make supper.”

Then she looked at Joyce and Joanne. “Why don’t you let Jeannie be the teacher for once?” she asked. “She’s been in school for several months. She knows what a teacher does.”

Joanne frowned, but with a sigh, she handed the bell to Jeannie and plunked down in one of the desks.

Jeannie took her place between the blackboard and the two desks. “Class, stand,” she said in a teacher voice. “Good morning, boys and girls.” She led them in the Lord’s Prayer and had them sing “The Birds Upon the Treetops.”

“Now we’ll practice our memory work,” she said. “Joanne, you may stand and repeat Psalm 23.” Joanne rattled off the verses in such a hurry that she missed one part.

“You left out ‘He restoreth my soul,’ ” the teacher scolded. “Study it some more.”

Jeannie wrote a list of words she knew on the board and told Joyce to read them. Joyce read very fast,

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“Fat-mat-sap-dog-pup-top-gum-mot-bog. You don’t even know what a bog is,” she complained to the teacher.

“A bog is a swamp,” snapped the little teacher. “You made a mistake. This word is *mop*, not *mot*. Read the list again.”

“Now it is time for writing class,” announced teacher Jeannie. “Write these words three times each.” She carefully wrote on the board

bell apple feet

“You haven’t learned how to do cursive writing yet!” said Joanne.

“Even *I* don’t know how,” added Joyce.

“I just watch the others do it and practice by myself,” replied Jeannie. “It’s easy. You try it, Joyce.”

Instead of copying the writing lesson, Joyce pretended to be naughty and drew pictures on her paper.

“Go stand in the corner,” ordered the little teacher. Her voice was so stern that Joyce went.

Soon it was time for recess.

“I guess you can teach school after all,” admitted Joanne. “From now on, all three of us may take turns being the teacher.”