

That Wonderful Bird

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shoulder and jerked me the way he does when he's happy. We went downstairs.

"How's fishing down at the lake?" he asked.

"Pretty good," I said. "But what about Mother?"

"How would you like to use my new pole when you come home from school this afternoon?" he asked.

"I don't feel like fishing," I said. "I'd rather stay with Mother."

"Oh," he smiled. "Mother's all right. She's going to be fine."

I couldn't believe him. He walked to the porch with me. I hated to go. I wanted to ask him to let me stay home; but I knew he'd say no. Then Clara came to the door to close it. She didn't know Dad held the knob from the outside. Dad told her to come out.

"Clara," Dad smiled, "my son here seems to think his mother is very ill, and, as you can see, he's in a highly nervous condition himself."

Clara watched Dad and laughed. She had been with us a long time, even before I was born, and had taken care of Mother when she was a girl. Dad kept puffing his pipe. Then they both laughed. It made me feel a lot better. I waved to them from the driveway and walked up the street for one block to the bus stop.

We lived in Lakeside Park, which was a brand-new part of Denver. It was only two miles from our house to Crestview Lake. All of that land once belonged to my grandmother, and when Mother was a girl, she had the whole lake country for a playground. Now all the houses and streets were new, and there were a lot of new trees and drives, and the whole thing looked like a park, with green lawns and white pavements. You couldn't see the lake because of the pine trees beyond the Country Club.

THE bus came along. Just as I got on, I saw a car pull into our drive. I knew it belonged to Doctor Fenton. He got out and hurried up the steps, where Dad was holding open the door. A nurse in white followed him. She was wearing a black cape, and she ran so fast it spread out. I sat down in the bus and didn't know what to do. I wanted to go back; but I knew Dad wouldn't like it. All the way to school I did something I hadn't done since I was in the first grade, which was bite my fingernails. Mother had made me stop by putting alum on my fingertips, which tasted awful, and so I had quit.

I didn't see how I was going to stick it out all day at school. I kept thinking how the nurse ran, with the cape flapping after her. It made me kind of weak.

The first bell rang, which meant study period. Miss Jason was in charge. She was nearsighted. We always talked and passed notes when we had her. Someone had brought a baseball to study hall, and the fellows were throwing it back and forth over Miss Jason's head, while she walked up and down the aisles trying to find out what all the excitement was about. The girls loved it.

Jim Henderson was sitting six rows away, on the other side of the study. He was tossing the ball with the others. I tore a sheet from my notebook and wrote Jim. He knew his stuff about storks and babies. I figured maybe he could tell me.

I wrote: