

Chapter 1

Lookout in the Far North

“She’s gone,” sighed Poggy. “We might as well go ‘ome now.”

“Yes,” agreed his sister, Sharna. “I ‘lows we might as well.”

“I wish she didn’t ‘ave to go away,” sighed LuDell, shading her eyes against the glare of the sun on the bay.

The three children were standing on Lookout Rock, the highest point in the village of Rocky Bay, which stood on the shore of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. This was the Far North country, and to the east was the Atlantic Ocean. It was late in the afternoon, and they had been intently watching a small dark object far out on the shining waters. Their center of interest was the passenger steamer that was taking their beloved teacher back to her home in Canada, back to the world “outside.” The boat dwindled to a tiny speck and finally disappeared on the distant horizon.

There were tears in Sharna’s eyes. Her friend, LuDell, also had been crying. Poggy felt a big lump in his throat, too, but he swallowed hard. Eight-year-old boys don’t cry - of course not! Poggy was not quite eight, but he would soon have a birthday.

“There’s no need to cry over something that can’t be ‘elped,” said Poggy.

“I ‘lows you are right,” said Sharna. “But we’ll never ‘ave another teacher like her.”

“No,” agreed LuDell. “And we may not ‘ave school next year, if grandfather isn’t able to find somebody to teach us.”

“I’m glad we made two grades in one year,” said Sharna. “At least we can still study by ourselves, can’t we?”

LuDell nodded, then said, “It was ‘ard work, but we passed. I guess I’ll go ‘ome now. Good-by; see you tomorrow.” LuDell made her way down the rocks in the direction of her home.

“I wish I ‘ad a special friend,” sighed Poggy as he followed Sharna over the rough rocks to the path that led to their little white house by the seashore. “If I were a girl, maybe I could be a pal to Sharna,” he mused to himself.

Poggy was too young to be intimate with his three older brothers, Verl, Ken, and Don. He considered himself too old to play dolls with his younger sister Lolo; and, besides, she was a girl!

"Maybe I will 'ave a pal someday," he sighed, as he thought of the close friendship between Sharna and LuDell.

As the children neared home, Poggy saw his brothers Ken and Don going to the spring for water. He blew five sharp whistles through his teeth, and the answer came back - two whistles, then three. It was a signal code the children had adopted to call to each other, especially if they were lost or in trouble. Verl, the eldest child, always answered by one long whistle. Each of the children followed in order with two, three, or four whistles, and Poggy was No. 5. Lolo had not yet learned to whistle through her teeth, so she always carried a tin whistle on a string around her neck, and blew six short blasts when she needed help.

Poggy waved to the boys and then ran to join them.

"What were you doing up on Lookout?" asked Ken.

"Watching the boat," admitted Poggy.

"Didn't you know it is almost time for supper?" asked Don.

"I 'lows it is," admitted Poggy, as he followed the boys to the spring.

When the boys returned home with the buckets of fresh water, supper was ready. Sharna and Lolo finished setting the table while the brothers took turns washing at the bench.

They ate heartily of the simple but wholesome meal. Now and then between bites they talked of the school year that had just ended.

"Remember the day teacher came?" mused Verl. "We all wondered what she would be like coming from 'outside.'"

"But she showed us that 'outside' isn't so bad. Anyway, she wasn't stuck up. She understood, too, and she was kind. She 'elped us a lot." Sharna took another bite of bread, spread generously with rich red-berry preserves.

The people of Rocky Bay were fishers by trade, as their fathers and grandfathers had been before them. They built their two-story frame houses on the rocks, to be conveniently near the water or landwash. In the evening when the fishing boats came in, nearly everyone in the village went to the fish shed, where the boats were unloaded, to clean and salt the fish and spread them on the rocks to dry.

The villagers were happy and contented to live in their own little domain, remote from the modern world, with its busy hum of commerce and industry. They had no curiosity, no desire to see or to become a part of it. Their supplies of fruit, vegetables, meat, and staples came twice a month in summer by steamer. They ordered their clothing from Eaton's, the big mail-order house in Toronto, Canada.

Wild game was plentiful. Red berries and bagh apples for preserving could be found in abundance across the cove. Wood for fuel and building purposes was obtained from the forests in the interior. With their needs supplied, they had no desire to go “outside,” so they stayed home to catch seals and fish. They had no greater aim in life.

Strangers coming from “outside” were not likely to be welcomed with as much cordiality and esteem as that which the teacher had been given. Perhaps it was her quiet, sincere Christian way of life that won their hearts and endeared her to them. She had brought a new concept of God, whom they called the holy omnipotent Father. Through her quiet influence and gentle leading, they saw Him as their loving heavenly Parent, not a cruel tyrant.

Instead of obeying the holy omnipotent Father through fear of dire punishment, they now had a desire to please Him because He loved them and had given His Son to die for them that they might have eternal life.

“Poggy, will you pass the bread, please?” asked Ken.

“Sure,” said Poggy. After a few moments of silence he continued, “Remember the time teacher ‘ad to wade through deep snow in a blizzard? That was the day we found the door of the school’ouse open and the wood all covered with snow. The ‘oodlums ‘ad been there in the night and scattered our books and papers all over the floor, and we couldn’t get the fire started.”

“What do you mean, we?” said Don. “The ‘father of the week’ built the fire after ‘e thawed out the wood. And we ‘ad to sit around the stove with our coats on and wait till our ‘ands thawed out so we could ‘old our pencils.”

“Yes, and do you remember the time the teacher was invited to our ‘ouse for dinner?” laughed Verl, “and the ‘oodlums turned my dogs loose and they came in and ate up all the food?”

“Yes,” began Don, “and the time Poggy ‘ad to stand in the corner because - “

“Don!” chided mother. “That is all in the past now. Let’s talk about the pleasant things.”

The boys became silent and finished their supper.

“What’s the matter, Sharna?” asked Ken. “You’re as solemn as an old owl.”

“Please excuse me,” begged Sharna, rising from her chair. “I’m going to Lookout.”

“Better take your flashlight,” said mother. “It will soon be dark.”

SHARNA AND POGGY, LIGHTS OVER LOOKOUT

"And take a stick," advised Verl. "You never know if somebody's dogs might be loose."

"They 'ave been ordered to be chained," added Ken, "but you never know."

Sharna put on her light jacket and tied a scarf over her hair. Since the wind always blew over Rocky Bay, the scarf would prevent her curls from becoming tangled.

When she reached the top of Lookout Rock she waved her flashlight in the direction of LuDell's house, hoping she would see the tiny, waving light and come up to join her. Lookout was a special trysting place where the two girls met to share their joys and sorrows. They had met on Lookout ever since they were big enough to climb the rocks. It was their inner sanctum, their private meeting place.

Sharna waved her flashlight again. Far down the path leading from LuDell's house, Sharna could see the gleam of a gasoline lantern, flickering back and forth. She knew that LuDell was coming up to join her.

"I'm glad you came," said Sharna. "It seems so lonesome, now that teacher has gone. I don't remember 'ow it was before she came."

"I know we're going to miss 'er a lot," said LuDell. "She 'elped me more than she'll ever know." LuDell sat down on her favorite rock and looked out over the bay. Somewhere beyond the horizon the steamer was plowing through the waves, and teacher was on that boat.

"She taught us many things," said Sharna. "Remember the big blizzard last winter when father came home from the mines at White Lake? I was afraid he would not get home safe but teacher told us that God watches over everyone, even the men in ships in a storm. So I prayed, and father come home all right."

"Yes," said LuDell, "and I prayed one night when mother was sick, and she got well."

"And the time Poggy drifted out on a floating ice cake," said Sharna, "and we thought we'd never see 'im again. Then we prayed, and God sent Verl to help him."

For a long time the girls sat on the rocks looking out over the sparkling water. The moon was coming up, making a golden path on the shining waves.

"Shall we go 'ome now?" asked LuDell after a long silence.

"All right," said Sharna, turning on her flashlight. "I'll see you tomorrow."

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When Shama arrived home, she found the family gathered in the living room, listening to the battery radio. Mother was knitting as she sat in her large chair, and the four boys were stretched out on the rugs. Lolo was curled up on the cot, fast asleep. She stirred when Sharna sat on the edge of the cot beside her. When the program was over, mother laid aside her knitting and said briefly, "Bedtime."

Ken turned off the radio and sauntered up the little stairway to bed. He called back, "Coming, Poggy?"

"Oh, yes," mumbled Poggy from the rug where he was dozing. "I'll be right up, after I get a drink."

Verl put on his jacket, lighted the lantern, and went out to the kennels to check the dogs for the night. Don went out with him to hold the light.

"I 'lows I'll 'ave to get a couple more dogs," said Verl. "Too bad we lost so many last winter from distemper. I miss Boots and Blackie, and old Smut."

"Yes," said Don. "Old Smut was the best lead dog we ever 'ad, even if 'e was vicious sometimes. Where do you think we can get some more dogs for our team?"

"There's a fellow over in Wolf's Head who has some dogs for sale. I'll go and see him one day next week. Down, Jip," he commanded. "I know you want to be loose so you can run, but you'll get enough running next winter, if we 'ave plenty of snow. Get back, Max. Hold the light over 'ere, Don."

After Verl was satisfied that the dogs were secure in their kennels, the boys went back to the house, extinguished the light, and hung up the lantern. Then they went upstairs to bed.

Ken and Poggy were still awake. The little kerosene lamp was burning low on the dresser. Verl turned up the wick and then took his new Bible from the box in his dresser drawer. He opened the Book and turned the pages carefully. He was very proud of the Bible, for it was a gift from teacher on the closing day of school. He paused a moment when he came to a familiar passage, and began reading aloud. The three boys were attentive, for they had been taught always to listen respectfully when the Scriptures were read.

At the end of the reading Verl closed the Book, placed it carefully in the box, and closed the drawer. He blew out the light and prepared for bed, kneeling for prayer before he crawled in between the sheets.

"Did you pray for teacher?" asked Poggy.

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“Yes,” said Verl. “I am sure the holy omnipotent Father will give her a safe journey home. She’s a good teacher. Good night, Ken and Don. Good night, Pogy.”

From the bed across the room came sleepy replies.