
Winter 1959

Discovery

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DISCOVERY

Pauline Hylkema

It was already 7:00 on an evening in the late fall when it begins to get dark before suppertime. "Outside, Ma," he begged again and again.

Finally he brought me his too-small jacket, dragging it on the floor from the hall to where I stood at the kitchen sink.

"Outside, Ma," he said again.

I drew my hands across the apron, picked him up and lifted him in front of the window.

"It's dark outside—and cold."

"Outside, Ma," he said again.

I zipped him into his jacket, snapped his cap, and buttoned my own sweater over the damp apron.

He wasn't afraid as I carried him into the dark, though the wind creaked in the big elm and bore through my sweater as I stepped around the house. Surely he would change his mind.

"Want to go in the house now?"

"Sandbox," he said, and I could see by the light of the swaying street lamp the sparkle of his eyes, "Sandbox."

I set him down in the driveway and we walked hand in hand to the back yard where the play bars hung naked in the night air and the doghouse towered larger than usual in a fearsome silhouette.

"Andy, new house?" he asked, pointing at the vacant shell next door.

"Yes."

"Mike, new house?" this time with a rising inflection.

"Mike's moved to the new house—and Jerry, too," I added, anticipating the next question.

He pulled me toward the sandbox and I sat on the edge of it while he sent an exploratory finger into the cold and dirty sand.

"Cold," he said, looking at me quizzically, "Cold."

He came over and settled himself in my lap; I felt the cold from his cheeks in front of me in the dark. We sat for several minutes listening to bare tree branches rubbing against each other, watching the swaying shadows cast by the streetlight rocking in the wind and smelling the smell of cold earth. I shivered.

"Cold," he squealed, putting his hands against my face, "Cold."

He didn't protest when I picked him up and carried him toward the house.

Once back in the warm envelope of the kitchen he slipped down and ran, jacket dangling half on, half off into the dining room corner where a begrimed elephant lay face down in the wheelbarrow.

"Cold," he said, winding the elephant in an old hanky, "Cold."