

Anticipation

Eleanor White

H. Ec. So.

FLAT on her tummy, her chin propped up by her two chubby hands, Patty Parker lay sprawled on the living room floor engrossed in the evening funnies. The foot at the end of one of her legs was vigorously carving figure eights out of the air. The other, twisted around a rung on the big wicker chair, was pulling it back and forth on its rockers.

The sound of her mother stirring food and moving about in the kitchen was good to Patty's ears. She had played hard all day, and she was hungry. How good the supper smelled! She took in big prolonged whiffs trying to imagine what the tempting odors meant in the way of food. Could it be that—yes, she was sure of it. There was the unmistakable aroma of chocolate pie. Her favorite dessert! Mother knew that it was her favorite dessert, but she only baked it for her on very special occasions. Mother said pies were too rich for little girls to have very often. This wasn't her birthday or Daddy's birthday, or Perky's birthday. Sometimes, when—what had she done that chocolate pie should be her reward?

PATTY thought hard over everything she had done that day. There just had to be some excuse for a chocolate pie.

Suddenly, a car door slammed. Patty knew the sound and knew that it came from the garage behind the house. In a few moments her father and sister would come in the back door, and then they would all sit down to dinner. Maybe Martha would know why they were having chocolate pie.

A short shrill whistle came from the back yard. Then a, "Here, Perky; here, boy!" Dad liked her dog almost as well as she did. If it hadn't been for him, Mother probably never would have let her keep Perky. She thought of how dumb Perky had been when he first came, and a smile curled up the corners of her mouth. Now he was the smartest dog in the neighborhood. She

and Dad had taught him how to sit up and roll over and speak—why, Perky was a regular circus dog.

There was Dad's whistle again. Perky must be quite a way down the street. He usually was at the garage to meet Dad, but tonight he didn't even come when Dad called. She guessed she had better go out and help. When Patty reached the kitchen, her mother was just hastening out the back door. She seemed to know Patty was coming after her, for she called back over her shoulder, "Pat, will you finish setting the table like a good girl, and then watch the food on the stove until I come back?"

It was funny the way Mother had rushed outside. Perhaps she did have a surprise and wanted to let Martha and Dad in on it before they got in the house.

PAT'S eyes roamed about the kitchen. Ah, there it was, cooling in the window. The meringue was the fluffiest, peakiest ever. Her eyes twinkled as she walked over to it and poked it gently, just to make sure it was real. Then, unable to resist the temptation, she broke off the tiniest bit of crust and popped it into her mouth. But—too late. Mother, Dad, and Martha, coming in just then caught her in the act. Still, they only smiled. Not a word of reproach—what had she done to deserve all this?

To show her heart-felt gratitude, Pat helped her mother set all the food on the table. Then they all sat down to eat. Between mouthfuls, Patty suggested to her father that they go out after dinner and finish teaching Perky how to walk on his hind legs. He had almost succeeded the night before. Tonight he would for sure. Mr. Parker, his eyes fast to his plate, merely nodded; he said nothing.

All at once, Martha pushed back her chair and wailed, "Mother, you've just got to tell her. She thinks it's something nice." With that she fled from the room. Pat's eyes opened wide. Now, muffled sobs were coming from the vicinity of Martha's bedroom. Secret or no secret, she wanted to go and comfort her sister. But, before she had reached the door, her Mother was beside her. "Pat," her voice was gentle and sympathetic, "Pat, this afternoon, Perky was run over by a car." Pat's heart swelled inside her. She searched for something in her mother's eyes that would mean he was only hurt, but she found nothing. Swallowing hard, she turned, and walked slowly upstairs.