

Winter--- Forever

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I WAITED—waited a long time. Mom had said that the first really warm day she'd take Daddy out for a walk and he could watch her out there, digging in her flowers instead of looking out through his window. He hadn't really walked for two years—stroke—and paralysis. I leaned on the sill of "his window," which had been his only interest in the outdoors for all that time. The sun poured in the warmth that goes right through you. I loved it. It was spring.

I waited—for I couldn't help remembering that first morning—early. Mom came in to wake us. She hesitated and then, "Daddy—stroke." None of us said anything, then Mother added, "Paralysis—right side, arm and leg. He doesn't know. We must not tell him. Go in and—act as if nothing has happened." He wanted to get up—get up and walk and get away from us. Bill had to sit on him to keep him down. He didn't know, he'll never know that the doctors said he'd never walk again, but they were wrong. They were wrong once. They said he couldn't live a week, and he did. They might be wrong again.

Then after nearly a year, when Daddy got better we used to sit in front of the fireplace. Mom would read to us . . . Dickens, "Gone with the Wind," and we'd sew or do something and Dad would go to sleep in his wheel chair. We'd have to stop because he'd feel hurt if we went on and he missed any of the story. Then we took the wheel chair back, and Bill and Mom would help him to his chair, his weight on them. It wasn't far; so he could

make it. It was something he looked forward to every night. The fire, a story, something to think about . . .

LAST night, I dreamed he played golf again. He loved golf, just for the fun. He wasn't very good.

Mom always said he would walk, and we kids told him so too—but he'd say, "I can't." It wasn't like his real self—before he never used to say "Can't."

Mom never gave up. She and Daddy went to Baltimore three times for a month, and the masseur taught Mom how to massage. She did it twice a day and it helped his leg, but his arm would never come back—he wore it in a sling.

I waited for Mom and Dad to turn the corner. They'd be coming down the drive because Daddy couldn't take the flagstones. Mom's flower beds were beginning to bloom—violets and blue terraces of myrtle. I loved it. It had been a long winter and then—Daddy came in sight—stumbling and stooped—no crutches, just Mom's support. He was tired and said, "Mother, can't I please rest—please!" He had called Mom "Mother" for two years. She was his mother; he was her child. Mother helped him sit down on the log at the end of the drive, and then she pattered a little in her garden. She showed him all her flowers—especially the bird's-foot violets that they got out in the woods three springs ago. She promised him that Bill would drive them to their woods again.

THE sun was farther in the west, and it was getting a little cooler. Mom got his old coat sweater and slipped his arm into the sleeve and urged him to try again. He said he was tired, but Mom helped him up, and he put one foot in front of the other. Then he dragged the lame leg and rested it beside the first. Mom tried to show him how to swing it ahead, but he said he couldn't. He stumbled on across the lawn, leaning heavily on Mom—she looked worried. His shoulders were stooped, his head forward with the weight of the sling. The wintry shadows of the chestnut oaks lengthened across the lawn, and the sun sank beneath the hedge. The air became suddenly chilly, and the leafless twigs snapped in the winds. It was still winter. I suddenly became dizzy. I felt sick in my stomach. I wished I hadn't seen him. I turned away as I heard, "Mother—Mother, I can't." A big lump came to my throat, but the tears wouldn't come.