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1

Jeff Makes a Decision

A pale yellow sun looked down on the streets of Richmond as Jeff Majors made his way along the line of shops. From time to time he saw his reflection in a plate glass window. What he saw was a tall young man wearing an ash-gray uniform with a shock of black hair coming out from beneath his cap. At seventeen he looked older. He already had shoulders broader than most of the men in his company, and there was a sureness about his movements.

After passing several shops, he turned into one and greeted the short, fat storekeeper with a quick nod.

“Howdy, Mr. Bennett!”

“Why, hello, Jeff!” Mr. Bennett was quick to wait on him, for there was only one other customer in the store, a man with one arm missing, who stood looking sadly at the empty shelves that composed most of the store. “What can I do for you today?”

Casting his eyes around the depleted shop, Jeff said, “Not much, it looks like, Mr. Bennett. You’re about out of stock.”

“Well, in that you’re right.” The storekeeper nodded glumly. He dropped his head, stared at the floor, then shrugged his bulky shoulders. “If some of them blockade runners don’t make it through pretty soon, I’m gonna have to close up.”

Jeff was well aware of the shortage of goods in wartime Richmond. Ever since the War Between

the States had started, the Federals had thrown a blockade of naval vessels around the coast of the South. It had grown steadily stronger until now only the boldest captains would risk their vessels, for if they were captured they would lose everything they had.

"I guess it's pretty tough, but we'll make it!" Jeff's eyes continued to run around the shelves as he said, "I need some butter. Looks like you got some of that."

"Sure have." Bennett picked up a yellow mound of butter that had been carefully molded. "Woman that keeps cows on the outside of town, she brought this in just this morning. Real fresh."

"How much?" Jeff asked.

"Well, I'll have to get fifteen dollars for it."

Jeff stared at the man. "*Fifteen dollars* for a pound of butter? Why, that's outlandish!"

Bennett licked his lips, then shrugged. "I know it is, and if Confederate money keeps on losing its value, by this time next week it'll be thirty dollars. Better stock up while you can, Jeff!"

Taking the shopkeeper at his word, he collected a few supplies. As Mr. Bennett put them in a box, Jeff pulled a thick fold of bank notes from his pocket. Peeling off several, he said, "Used to be you had to bring your money in your pocket and take your groceries off in a box. If things don't get better, it looks like I'll have to bring the money in a box and take the groceries home in my pocket."

Mr. Bennett took the cash and managed a smile. "Won't be long before we'll whip the Yankees. Then things will get back to normal again." He stared at the money dolefully, then put it into a cigar box beneath the counter. "Tell your pa I said hello!"

“I’ll do that, Mr. Bennett!”

Jeff left the store and continued down the street. There was a mournful air about the streets of Richmond that had not been apparent when he and his family had first arrived here from Kentucky. Then, war fever had been at its height. Bands had been playing, and pretty girls had been handing out cookies and glasses of lemonade to farm boys as they flooded into Richmond to fight the Yankees.

As Jeff crossed the dusty street, his mind went back to his old home in Kentucky. *Wish I was back there!* he thought, then shook his shoulders and pushed the thought away. “Can’t be thinking about things like that,” he murmured aloud. Still, thoughts kept coming to him, mostly thoughts about his boyhood when he and Leah Carter had roamed the hills, fishing, hunting, and looking for birds’ eggs. “Sure do miss Leah,” Jeff muttered. Then, when he saw a man looking at him strangely, he grinned and said, “Just talkin’ to myself!” and laughed as the man smiled.

Many of the men on the street hobbled along on crutches, missing a leg. Many had only one arm. Some had patches over one eye, and their faces were scarred. It was a depressing sight, and Jeff had never gotten used to it.

A large black-and-tan hound thumped his tail against the floor of the post office as Jeff stepped toward the door. Leaning over, he patted its head. “Wish me and you could go out and hunt coon, boy.”

The tail thumped again, and Jeff pulled the dog’s long ears.

Inside the post office, he waited his turn, studying the notices posted on the walls. The mail did not

get priority in the Confederacy, and sometimes it took weeks for a letter to get to its destination. However, when Jeff got to the window and said, "Any mail for Nelson Majors or his family?" he was pleased to see the postmaster nod.

"Yep, got one right here! Just come in!" He handed Jeff a letter and twisted his head to one side and winked. "From your sweetheart, I'll bet!"

Jeff looked at the envelope and saw that it was Leah's handwriting. "That's right!" he said. "Prettiest sweetheart in the whole Confederacy!"

As he turned away, the thought came to him that actually Leah was not *in* the Confederacy. Kentucky had not come out to fight for the South. It was for that reason the Majors family had left there to come to Richmond, where Jeff's mother died shortly after their arrival.

He moved to one side of the walk and leaned against a hardware shop. Across the street, a blacksmith was making a rhythmic clanging as he hammered out a white-hot piece of steel. He heard the hum of voices as people passed and the sound of horses' hooves as men rode by or drove past in wagons and buggies of every sort.

Jeff opened the letter and eagerly read it:

Dear Jeff and all,

I trust that this finds you well. It seems so far away from the war here in Kentucky. The woods are quiet, and there are no sounds of guns, and even Pineville doesn't seem touched by the terrible struggles going on where you are. However, I must be more cheerful. Esther is fine. She is the prettiest, happiest little girl in the whole world! She would love you, and you would love her!

She babbles like a magpie. She is so pretty. She has the same blonde hair and blue eyes your mother had. I think she's going to look just like her when she grows up.

I'm worried about your brother. Tom's discouraged again. For a while he was doing better, but he's much quieter than he used to be. He was always so happy and laughed all the time, but now he hardly says anything. He helps Ezra and my father with the work around the farm, but he goes off by himself for long times.

Ezra made him a fine, wooden leg, as I told you the last time. We finally got him to put it on, and though he limps some, it works fine . . .

Jeff looked up as a drover passed with a wagon full of goods. The man yelled and cracked his whip over the heads of the oxen, which were straining to pull the heavy load. Jeff watched for a moment.

Tom and Sarah, Leah's sister, had planned to get married, but the war had driven them apart. Leah's brother, Royal, was in the Union Army. Tom had served with his father and Jeff in the Army of Northern Virginia until he lost a leg at Gettysburg.

Jeff looked down and read the rest of the letter, devouring the news of the farm and all the things that were going on back home. Finally he sighed, folded the letter, and stuck it into his inside pocket.

He walked on through town and out to the camp just south of Richmond. The sound of bugles, and men drilling, and the many other noises that go with an army camp came to him, but he was so accustomed to them he hardly noticed.

When he got to where his company was sta-

tioned, he glanced up at the flag that indicated the officers' headquarters.

The corporal on guard outside the tent winked at him. "Hello, Private Majors! You want to see your pa—I mean Colonel Majors?"

"If he's not busy."

"Just go right on in! He said he's been looking for you."

Jeff found his father, Col. Nelson Majors, sitting at a portable desk and staring at a map that was laid out before him. Jeff thought again how fine his father looked. He was a dark-skinned man with hazel eyes and a black mustache. At the age of forty-one, he had hair that was still totally black. Looking up, he grinned. "Hello, Jeff. Did you get something to eat?"

"Yes, I did, Pa—I mean Colonel. It cost the world, though!" He put down the box and exhibited his purchases. Then he handed over the remains of the cash and said, "It was the best I could do. The store's about out of everything."

Colonel Majors leaned back and took a deep breath. Balancing himself on the back two legs of his camp chair, he put his hands behind his head and stared up at the tent roof. "Well," he said thoughtfully, "it's not good—but it's better than what we'll get when we take to the field."

At that moment, a tall, rangy captain walked through the door and saluted.

The colonel returned the salute and said, "Well, Captain Dawes, how do the new recruits look?"

Dawes lounged at ease in front of the desk and shrugged his shoulders. "Not like much, Colonel. I guess all the good ones have already been scooped up. Some of them we got in this bunch are either

too old to do much good or so young I hate to see them coming on.”

Jeff said instantly, “I’m as old as some of them, Pa—Colonel.”

“Now don’t you start on me, Jeff! You’re not joining the Regulars! You’re going to be a drummer boy at least a few more months. Let’s hear no more of it!” Colonel Majors looked down at his map. “Not much question about what’s going to happen next, is there, Captain?”

Dawes bit his lower lip. “Reckon not, sir. I hear Grant’s got an army of a hundred thousand men ready to feed into this here war. I wish we had half that many!”

“Then we’ll just have to do better. Every man will have to cover a little more ground and fight a little harder. We knew all this would happen when the war started.”

Then the two men talked about the battle that was to come.

Throughout the early years of the war, the South had won battle after battle, but the superior weight and the manufacturing power of the North were now ready to roll. Every time a Southern soldier fell, he left a gap in the ranks. When a Northern boy was taken, all General Grant had to do was reach into the city and pick up a recruit. Many in the North were tired of the war, but President Lincoln was now sure he had found a fighting general.

“I’ve heard about Grant,” Colonel Majors said. “They say he’s merciless!”

“Yes, sir, and now that we’ve lost Stonewall Jackson, it’s going to be harder. After Gettysburg, we’re down mighty thin! Where do you think they’ll hit?”

“Right up in this area, and we’ll be moving out soon, Captain Dawes, so get these men trained as quick as you can! That’s all!”

“Yes, sir!”

Colonel Majors waited until the captain had left the tent, then said, “It’s going to be mighty tough, Jeff.”

“We can whip ’em, sir!”

A smile flashed across Colonel Majors’s lips, then he said slowly, “You know what I’ve been thinking about? Kentucky.”

“Oh, and I just got a letter from Leah. Wait’ll you hear what she says about Esther!” Jeff handed the letter to his father and waited until he had finished reading. “She sounds like a beauty, doesn’t she? Says she looks just like Ma!”

A frown creased the colonel’s brow, and his lips drew down tightly. He moved uneasily in his chair, then finally got up and walked to the tent flap. He stared out for such a long time that Jeff wondered what he could be thinking.

Finally his father turned back and said, “Jeff, I think so much about Esther—and about your mother.”

“Well, I do too, and I know Tom does.”

“I don’t feel right about letting the Carters do all the raising of my daughter. It just seems like I’ve let your mother down somehow.”

“But you couldn’t help it, Pa!”

After Mrs. Majors’s death, it had been the Carters back in Kentucky who volunteered to raise baby Esther until such time as the Majors men could get settled. That meant, of course, when the war was over, but being separated from the child had been hard on all of them.

“Maybe after this next battle the Yankees’ll quit and go home. Then the war will be over, and we can get her back again.”

Jeff’s words did not seem to reach Colonel Majors. He returned to his chair and said thoughtfully, “It’s hard not being able to have your child. I think about it all the time. I wish there was some way that we could take her, but I guess there’s not.”

Uncomfortable, Jeff moved toward the tent door. He did not like to see his father so downcast.

After bidding the colonel good-bye, he went to his own unit, where he was surrounded by his squad and took part in the activities that went on, including cooking supper. But after eating, he sat by himself for a long time in the tent that he shared with the other young men. Finally he clamped his jaw and said, “There’s *got* to be a way! Lord, please show me what to do!”

He waited for a moment as if he expected the Lord to speak out of heaven. Then he laughed aloud at himself. “Well, I *know* what I’m going to do! I’m going to write Leah!”

He found a scrap of paper that had already been used for a letter, crossed out the used side, and then with a stub of pencil began to write:

Dear Leah,

There’s something I want you to think about. You see, my pa and I miss Esther an awful lot . . .

2

Tom Makes a Decision

The lanky, blue-nosed mule that stopped in front of the Dan Carter home was straddled by an equally lanky rider. Pete Mangus pulled back on the leather reins, saying, “Whoa, Clementine, hang on there just a minute, will ya!”

Leah Carter emerged from the white frame house to see Pete peer past the picket fence and touch his hat with his left hand. “Well, howdy there, Miss Leah!”

“Hello, Pete!” At sixteen Leah had grown out of the gawky stage. She still saw herself, however, as a tall, awkward girl, though her mother had told her many times, “You’re going to be a beautiful woman. Don’t mind it—just think about how awkward the colts look until they get their full growth.” Leah’s eyes were sea green, and she allowed her long blonde hair to fall down the back of the simple blue-and-white dress that reached almost to her ankles.

Pete Mangus kept his eyes fixed on her with evident pleasure. “Wal,” he said casually, shifting his weight on Clementine’s back, “don’t you look pretty now!” At that moment he spotted a huge grasshopper crawling along the ground and expertly loosed an amber stream of tobacco juice that drowned the insect. Pete nodded, satisfied with his aim, and then turned back to Leah. “You expectin’ a letter, are ya, Leah?”

Leah knew that he loved to tease her about her letters from Jeff. She was accustomed to this and said eagerly, "Yes, and I bet you got one from Jeff, haven't you?"

"Well, that might be." Pete fumbled through the letter sack that hung beside his leg, finally coming up with an envelope. He peered at it as if he had never seen it before. "Well, dog my cats, sure enough!" He held the letter close to his eyes, and his lips moved as he read the words. "'Miss Leah Carter, Pineville, Kentucky.' Yep, I reckon it's for you, all right!" He looked down and saw Leah reach for it but did not hand it to her at once. "I expect you and that young man are gettin' mighty serious, Leah."

"Oh, Pete, give me the letter! Please!"

Pete, however, held onto it. "That sister of yours and that young Rebel, they ain't aimin' to marry up, are they?"

This was a question that came up often. Tom Majors had been brought back to Pineville to recuperate after losing his leg. He and Sarah Carter had been practically engaged when the war broke out, and many were speculating on whether or not Sarah would have him now.

Pete said, "I expect she didn't calculate on no one-legged man. That might change things, don't you think, Leah?"

Knowing Pete could be the most terrible gossip in Kentucky, Leah refused to get into a discussion. "I don't know, Pete. That's their business. Now, let me have the letter, please!" She took the envelope as he reluctantly extended it, and began to walk away.

Pete called out after her, "I'd be glad to hear what Jeff has to say, Leah." When she paid him no attention, he kicked his heels against the mule and

sighed. "Come on, Clementine, we can't stand here all day! We got the mail to deliver!"

Leah considered going to her own room to read the letter, but news was so precious that she thought it was only fair to share with the family. Her parents, Sarah, Morena, and Tom were seated around the table when she entered the dining room and held up the letter. "It's from Jeff!"

Tom Majors, sitting across the table from Sarah, looked up quickly. He was a tall young man, dark complected but still pale from the ordeal of losing his leg. He had the same dark hair and hazel eyes as his father and had a rather sad look about him. "What does he say, Leah? Are they all right?"

"I haven't read it yet. I thought you'd all want to hear it." Leah opened the letter.

They watched as she scanned the letter. Her father, Dan, was a thin, sickly looking man. Her mother, who had the same blonde hair and green eyes that one saw in Leah, was holding three-year-old Esther on her lap. Sarah had dark hair, dark blue eyes, and a beautiful complexion. From time to time her eyes went across to Tom. Leah's sister Morena sat next to Sarah. Morena was a beautiful young girl—but one who had never developed mentally. She could do simple things such as dress herself, but she never spoke and was like a small child in her mind.

"Well, what does he say?" Sarah asked. "Is he all right? Is Colonel Majors all right?"

"Yes," Leah said slowly, "but it's not what I thought." Looking around the table, she saw their anxiety and added quickly, "Oh, they're both all right. Neither one of them has been wounded or

anything like that, but Jeff says his father's got a problem."

"Well, can you read it to us, or is it too private?" her father asked.

Leah hesitated, then said, "March the twentieth is when it was written. I'll read it out loud." She began:

Dear Leah,

There's something I want you to think about. You see, my pa and I miss Esther an awful lot. Pa is awful down in the mouth, Leah. You know how he's always been real happy and able to handle anything, but he's worried now and it's about Esther. What it is, he thinks he's letting Ma down by not having a hand in her raising. He thinks he ought to be doing more, and nothing I say makes him feel any better . . .

The letter went on about how bad Nelson Majors felt being separated from his daughter.

Finally Tom said abruptly, "I know he's always felt bad. All of us feel bad about it!" Then he seemed to think about how that sounded, and he quickly glanced at Mr. and Mrs. Carter. "Not that we aren't grateful for all you've done. Nobody could've done more, but—"

"I know how it is," Dan Carter said sympathetically. "A man wants to have his children around him. I know how I'd feel if one of my young ones was growing up and I couldn't have nothin' to do with 'em."

"That's exactly right!" Mrs. Carter said. She shifted Esther around to where she could look into the child's face and smiled gently, touching the rosy

cheek with a forefinger. "And Esther needs to see her pa, too. Why, I bet she'd know him in no time!"

"Well," Leah said, "that's exactly what Jeff says." She continued reading:

What I want to ask you to do, Leah, is to help me pray for some way to bring Esther to Richmond. There's no chance at all that Pa or me can get back to Kentucky. I know there's going to be another big battle soon, and I know it sounds impossible, but your pa always said that with God all things are possible. That was his favorite verse, I reckon. And now I'm asking for you to pray that somehow you can get Esther back here.

Well, that's all for right now. I miss you and look forward to the time when I'll see you again.

Your friend,
Jeff Majors

A moment of silence ran around the table, and Mrs. Carter reached over and stroked Morena's hair. Then she said, "I'll help you pray for that, Leah. I know Colonel Majors needs to see his little girl."

A frown crossed her father's face. "Well, there ain't no doubt that it would be a good thing, but I don't see how in the world it could happen! With a war going on, just *gettin'* to Richmond would be a chore. And to get a small child down there? Why, the trains ain't runnin' most of the time, and some of 'em not at all! I just don't hardly see how it could be done."

"But with God all things *are* possible," Leah said. "That's what you always said, Pa."

Grinning, Dan Carter smoothed his thinning hair. "Well, if you're gonna start throwin' Scripture back at me, I ain't got no answer for that. I guess we'll all just have to pray for it."

"I could take her to Richmond," Leah said abruptly.

"All by yourself? Don't be foolish, child!" Her mother shook her head sharply. "It would be no trip for a young girl like you to take!"

"Ma, I'm almost grown!"

"I could take her," Sarah said, glancing at Tom.

"No, you couldn't!" he said. "Remember how you were warned to stay out of Richmond after they accused you of being a spy?"

Sarah sniffed. "Why, they've forgotten all about that! It was all made up by that Confederate officer anyhow!"

"No, I reckon Tom's right, Sarah," her father said. "It wouldn't do for you to go back." He toyed with his fork, making a design on the tablecloth. "We'll all just have to pray that God will open up a way."

For the next few days, Dan Carter found himself the target of many pleas from Leah, which he steadfastly refused. She insisted she was old enough and mature enough to make the trip. He insisted that it would be too dangerous for her.

"It would be dangerous for Esther too!" he said, as Leah for the tenth time asked for his permission. The two were sitting on the front porch as the sun went down. They had been admiring the sky's red glow tinged with pink and orchid tones, and now the sun, a big yellow globe, seemed to be sinking into the side of the mountains to the west.

Leah had used every argument she had. In desperation she said finally, "But, Pa, think about if it was you and you hadn't seen me or Sarah or Morena. Wouldn't you want Colonel Majors to send us to you if things were turned around that way?"

"Of course, I would! But . . ." Her father teetered on the back two legs of his chair and whittled slowly on the long piece of red cedar in his hands. The razor edge of the knife sliced off a thin, curling piece of the fragrant wood, and it fell onto a small pile that lay at his feet. Looking up at Leah, he added, "I'd do it myself in a minute, but I'm not able to go. I wish I was. And your ma can't go. There just ain't no way—unless God does it Himself."

This was all Leah could get out of her father, and she reluctantly determined not to say anything more to him about it.

Sarah thought Tom grew even more withdrawn after the news came that his father wanted Esther in Richmond. She watched him hobble around on his wooden leg, never complaining, although she knew it pained him at times.

She figured he knew he'd behaved abominably about the leg. He'd sat around the farm for weeks, refusing to even speak, and would not listen to anything about an artificial leg. Only Ezra Payne's persistence, along with hers and Leah's, had persuaded him. Then he kept to himself, thinking dark thoughts, even after mastering use of the wooden limb.

Sarah found him out beside the fence, watching the newest litter of pigs as they grunted at their mother's side. It was hot, and she wore a cool dress made of cotton, which outlined her trim figure. Her

black hair caught the last rays of the red sun as it went behind the mountains. Stepping up beside Tom, she looked at the pigs. "You wouldn't think pigs could be cute, would you?"

"I guess anything's cute when it's little—even a pig."

The two stood talking for some time about unimportant things, then turned to go back to the house. When they were halfway there, Sarah caught his arm and pulled him around. "Tom," she said with a question in her voice and in her eyes, "what's going to happen to us?"

"Happen to us? I reckon it's already happened," Tom said, and there was bitterness in his tone. "I don't reckon that we've got any future, Sarah."

"Because you lost a leg? I thought we had all this settled. A man's more than a leg."

"It's all right for you to say that, but I'm the one who has to make the livin'. How can a one-legged man care for a wife and a family?"

"Why, Tom Majors, I reckon you can do just about anything you set your mind to!"

Tom stared at her briefly, stirred for the moment, it seemed, by her words. "I used to think that too, Sarah, but think how hard it'd be to be a farmer. I've tried to plow, and I just can't keep up with Ezra."

"There's more to farming than *plowing*. You can always hire a hand to do that!" Sarah said steadfastly. "I just thank God every day that it wasn't worse. You could've been killed!"

"Sometimes I wish I had been."

"Tom, don't talk like that!" Sarah put her hand on his chest, then laid it on his cheek. Her touch was soft as a feather.

Reaching up, he placed a hand over hers and held it. Finally he said in despair, "I'd like it if things were like they used to be, but they never will be, Sarah!"

"I thought you wanted to *marry* me!"

"That was when I was a whole man!"

"We've talked about this! You *are* a whole man! A man is what he is in his heart and in his mind!"

Tom stood there, perhaps trying to believe her words, but finally the depression that had been eating at him for some time seemed to overpower him. Heavily he said, "I've made up my mind. I'd never let you tie yourself to a cripple, Sarah."

He pulled away, and she watched him limp down the path toward the house. Tears rose to her eyes, and she almost called after him. But she realized that the Tom Majors she had known might have lost a leg but he had retained all the Majors stubbornness. Slowly she followed him to the house and went inside.

Leah was sitting at the table with her father, studying arithmetic. Dan Carter had a fine grasp of the subject, and Leah was very poor at it. She could not keep her mind on numbers today, and from time to time she lifted her eyes to the homemade calendar that hung on the wall. She had made it herself, and every day she checked off the day before she went to bed. She got up to cross out April first. "I forgot to do that last night. Yesterday was April Fools' Day, and you forgot it!"

"I reckon I did," her father said. He looked down at the figures and began explaining them again, but at that moment Tom came in. "Well, hello, Tom! You been out walkin' again?"

Tom stood by Dan Carter's chair. "I been thinkin' a lot, Mr. Carter," he said. He sat down slowly and clasped his hands in front of him. "I think you're right about Leah. She's too young to go on that trip by herself."

"I am not!" Leah protested.

"Yes, you are, daughter! Now, hush!" Dan Carter turned back to Tom. "Have you thought of something else?"

"Well, I should've thought of it first off." Tom moved in his chair and then straightened his back. "I'll take Esther to Richmond. It's time I was leaving here anyhow."

Dan Carter stared at his young friend. "Are you sure you could make it? Your leg's going to be all right?"

"I'll be all right!" Tom said shortly. He never liked anyone to refer to his injury. "It's time for me to go back. I need to get back where I belong."

"But you can't go in the army!" Leah said, then wished she had not. "I mean—"

"I know. I can't march with one leg, but maybe Pa can find something for me to do. Maybe be a clerk in headquarters." Bitterness came to his lips then, and he said, "I can't do much, but I'll do what I can."

Leah walked over and stood beside Tom. She put her hand on his shoulder, looking down at him, thinking how much he looked like Jeff. "Then, if you go, I'm going with you. You couldn't take care of a three-year-old!"

Tom looked up and found a smile. "Why—that would be good, if it's all right with your Pa."

"Well, of course it's all right with *you* along, Tom! Wouldn't be good to ship the poor child off

with just a man to take care of her. She needs a woman!"

Leah smiled brilliantly. "I can do it, Pa! I'm going to tell Ma right now!"

As soon as the girl left the room, Tom shook his head. "It still could be dangerous, Mr. Carter. You know what it's like in wartime."

"I won't worry about it a minute with you there, Tom. You Majorses have a way of doin' what you set out to do." He rose and slapped the young man on the shoulder. "I'm mighty glad you decided to do this. Your pa will be glad to see you, too—although we'll miss you around here."

"I'll miss you too, sir."

From that moment on, the house was in a flurry as everyone got things ready for the journey to Richmond.

The Carter family stood waiting for the stage-coach to arrive. The stage would take Leah and Tom and Esther to the train in Lexington, and from there they would travel by rail to Richmond. Because so many of the railroads were out, the trip would take a long time.

Sarah was sure Leah wasn't thinking about that. Her sister was eagerly standing beside Tom, holding Esther in her arms, when the coach pulled up.

Sarah and her father and mother and Morena each gave Leah a quick kiss. Her parents and Morena all shook hands with Tom.

When it was Sarah's turn to say good-bye to him, she looked up, expecting him to kiss her.

Instead, he awkwardly extended his hand. "Good-bye, Sarah," he said gruffly. He got into the coach

with Leah and Esther, the driver cracked his whip, and the coach pulled out.

Sarah stood watching them go, and sadness came over her. *He didn't even kiss me good-bye*, she thought. She watched until the stagecoach disappeared in a cloud of dust down the road, then turned to go with her family back to the house. She knew it would be an empty house for her, but there was no other way.