

CHAPTER FOUR

SETTLING IN

The days of settling in Franklin began in earnest for the coal mining families. It was a green land with wet weeds growing as tall as your waist. And rocks — there were always rocks enough to pile one upon another to build a high fence of cobbled wall. The mornings were cool. The grass dripped with dew until 3 o'clock, then the sun warmed and dried the ground. Franklin laundry flapped and dried easier in July and August — it had almost guaranteed sunshine.

There was no time for regret; they had moved there, and survival in a mining camp kept everyone busy. Only the sleeping time brought tears or words of sorrow. The atmosphere was confusing with so many guards watching the troubled area. Annie bit her nails and Melinda walked to the outhouse more often. She peeked outside first. "I have to go more often, Mama. Strange people make me nervous." "I know, Melinda." Claude stood by and guarded the door. Fannie scrubbed harder; things on her mind made her work as if cleaning would cure strikes and bring enough clothes to cover three growing children. The job of caring for the children took up most of Fannie's daytime chores. Water had to be carried. New patch squares were laid out on the table after supper. Annie and Melinda fussed over placement of the squares in the winter quilts. "My square has more flowers." "Flowers should be on the outside." "Hush up, girls. I'll put Claude's shirt patch in the quilt instead of yours if you don't hush up." Work was a good cure for the newness of Franklin life. When it didn't rain, Fannie found a big laundry tub, and with a new scrub board from the company store she handed the whitened and rinsed pieces of laundry to Annie to hang up. The chore never seemed to end, and Annie sighed. Melinda mimicked her sister and sighed. "Goodness!" Fannie looked at her girls. "You must be overworked. Scoot, go and play, but not far from the house." "Yes, Mama." With new found energy they disappeared to play house.

Annie did escape from the cleaning chores. She met a little girl sitting on the bank and brought her home to meet her mother. "She is Odetta Jackson. We didn't see her on the train coming from Saint Paul, but she was there, Mama. She knows how to braid flowers for your head." "Good! Take Melinda with you to play." "She can pick flowers, Mama, but Odetta is my friend."

John and Claude put worms on the newly peeled sticks used for fishing poles. Claude looked up at the trees, some 100 feet high, dwarfing any tall man to a permanently small size. "I can't see their tops from down here." "Don't try climbing one or we will lose

you forever, Claude."

The June days were warm, and the laundry swung in the warm breeze, drying in a hurry. John brought in supplies and helped Fannie put everything in a proper place. Fannie stated as a fact of life, "There is a place in this house for everything, so put it there."

Fannie saved the lard buckets for the school lunches. If the strike got settled, school would start on time. Annie polished her lunch bucket. "You will wear it out, Annie." Fannie watched her out of the corner of her eye. "You should polish yours, Claude." Annie gave Claude a knowing look. "I don't care what mine looks like, just so there's enough lunch in it." John smiled. "Now that's my kid, Fannie."

On Monday, June 29, 1891 the first bloodshed of the mining troubles occurred at Franklin, Washington. Two companies of militia were called out to the scene. To prevent the race war that was imminent, the riot commenced early in the morning and continued until evening. Fannie kept the children safely closed in the house. One white miner was killed and several other miners, including one Negro, were wounded.

The Oregon Improvement Company safely transferred eighty Negroes from Franklin to New Castle early in the morning, and it was this move on the part of the company that led to the trouble. The arrangement for the transfer of eighty Negroes from Franklin was made with such secrecy that the white miners on strike at Franklin and New Castle were taken by surprise. The train left Seattle at two o'clock and arrived at Franklin at three o'clock, running straight through. The eighty Negroes, all armed, and ten white guards were taken aboard. Just as the train was pulling out, it was fired at by the home guards who had heard the train come in and posted themselves along the track. They fired fifteen shots through the window, but no one was hurt. The train ran through without incident and arrived at five o'clock in New Castle.

So complete was the secrecy observed that not even the operator at New Castle was informed until two minutes before the train arrived. Not a soul was astir, and the train was run right through the town to the mines at Coal Creek, two miles beyond without molestation, and the Negroes were safely housed in the camp which had been established. They would be put to work in the mines with 90 men already there, and with the guards on the ground were considered fully able to attack.

On hearing the departure of the train, the white miners at Franklin seemed to have thought that the guards were so weakened by the withdrawal of the men to protect the train, that the opportunity was a formidable one for an attack on the Negroes. About four in the morning, a party of them started from their homes on the flats to the Negro camps on the mountain-side, near the mouth of the mine. One white man, who