

lately, and so I crocheted you this afghan. Took awhile!" Matilda handed her sister Fannie a soft bundle of pink and white. "Don't you dare, sister, put it in the drawer of your dresser cuz it's too pretty to use. I remember you from a long time back. Your drawer had all the pretty things saved in it. I expect you to cover your shoulders in this drafty old house." "I promise." Fannie brushed away the tears slowly starting to gather in her eyes. Fannie whispered in her sister's ear. "Watch the kids; they think you're never getting to them." "Wait and see, Fannie. Knitted socks, Alfred, for you and thick hot pads with your name, Annie." Fannie pulled the packages out while the children sat wide-eyed watching her. "See that steamer truck, John? Go and unsnap the buckles." "Sure." John laid bare the contents, and snuggled down among Aunt Matilda's clothes lay a doll — a most beautiful doll of recent origin. Matilda had stuck her finger with the needle sewing on the last piece of lace. The train didn't jog to the rhythm of the sewing needle. Matilda had found brown material for the body and arms and legs. Two black button eyes looked up at Winona. "Take her up in your arms." Winona held her close. All the sights and sounds of the family gathering around her were forgotten. She touched the shoes. "Most beautifulest in the world, Aunt Matilda." John parted the clothing, and near the bottom of the trunk all laid out was a train — a carved wooden train. "I know an old man who sits on a stool in the village and whittles and carves things." "Just like a real train." John ran his fingers over the designs on the cars. All good times have a begining and an end. At night the doll and train found their places in the covers beside their new owners. Winona stared for awhile at the ceiling; so much excitement kept her from sleeping. When she did fall asleep, she seemed to smile like the sewn mouth of her doll.

Aunt Matilda was good for other things besides presents. She could tell you a story about when she was young. John sat at the kitchen table on one side of Aunt Matilda; the other side was for Winona. Matilda stirred her coffee while the children ate their bread and butter. "See my thumb?" Matilda pointed to a spot near the top of her thumb. "Can I see too?" "That is your thumb alright." Matilda folded her hands. "Are we going to play a game, Aunt Matilda, or are you going to tell us a story?" Matilda put Winona on her lap. "A story for sure." "When I was bitten by a snake I was a kid like you about 7 years old. It was in the late summer, like when your leaves start to fall and school will be starting. Well, the leaves had already started to fall in Tennessee — great heaps of them all over the ground. I went outside to get some tree bark I knew was laying in a pile near the stacked woodpile. It was cold in the morning and I wanted to start a fire in the wood stove. A curled up rattlesnake lay under the leaves and woodpile, not wishing to be disturbed." At the pronouncement of

snake, the children gave their full attention to their aunty turned story teller. "I bent down to pick up more bark. I already had a small amount in my arms. I wanted more wood so I would not have to go back outside. The snake rose up." Winona dropped her spoon. It landed with a clank and everyone jumped. "The snake hissed, then struck my thumb. It was the snake's way of saying, 'get out of my corner of the woodpile'. It slithered away and I screamed. That snake was deadly I tell you. I started to cry and scream. Everyone came running; the field hands, milkers, the house workers, just everyone. Fannie, your grandmother, was three years old. She stood and peeked at the goings on from behind her grandma's apron. I just put my head back and let out a bellow; even the cows jumped in the back pasture." Winona put her hand over her mouth to not laugh. She knew it wasn't funny. "Don't worry, honey, it was a very long time ago." "How long ago?" John wanted to know. "Never you mind that, Aunt Matilda laughed. "Well now, the only way to take care of the bite was to behead a chicken and put my whole arm inside of it to draw out the bad poison blood." "Oh, that sounds awful!" Winona scrunched up her nose. "I cried the whole time; I wasn't very brave." Winona patted Matilda's arm. "I would cry too." "I think I would rather be hit by a coal train." John shivered at the thought of being crushed like a piece of coal. "They half dragged and half carried me to the wooden table in the kitchen. My grandfather held my head, and someone made me open my mouth so they could pour whiskey in me. It was terrible tasting. I sputtered and spit and choked. Pretty soon everything got mellow and soft, and people far away. I was out of my head for eight days. They got me real drunk so I wouldn't feel any pain. Of course, there was a real good prayer meeting too. God spared me so I could live a long time."

*[Matilda did live a long time. She didn't care to stay in the coal mining towns, so after a time she went to Vancouver, Canada to live. She lived to be 107 years old. Queen Elizabeth gave her a plaque on her 100th birthday for being the oldest subject in Vancouver, Canada.]*

Aunt Matilda placed her straw hat on her head, fixing it tightly so it wouldn't fall off. A three gallon lard pail clutched in her hand swung by her side. She walked through the front door to the blackberry patch on the upper side of Franklin. The berry brambles were all over, but the big juicy berries were higher up on a hill. The soil or amount of sun was just right, and everyone knew the spot. John and Winona followed after her. Annie shouted from the kitchen sink, "Bake you a pie later."

The day was perfect for filling three gallon pails all the way to the top. Matilda stopped on the road and talked to John. "Where are the best and biggest berries?