

the Christmas tree

Chapter Six by Kay Hively

Saturday was always the day the Drake family went to town. Mary Jo and her mother went first to the city park, which was full of women and girls. Mary Jo played with her friends. Her mother visited with the other ladies and played with the babies.

Mr. Drake and his sons walked around town, talking to other men and boys. Mary Jo's father talked about the cotton crop and the weather. Mac and Morey played in the alleys with their friends.

At noon, the family met at the park for the picnic lunch that Mrs. Drake had brought from home. After they had eaten, the family always went shopping. Most of the time they only bought food. On special occasions, someone got new clothes.

When the family went to the general store, Mary Jo liked to look around.

This time, she could tell that Christmas was not far away. There were bins full of pecans and walnuts, and there were many boxes of chocolates with holiday designs. There was a big display of toys in one corner of the store. Mary Jo saw dolls, trucks, teddy bears, tea sets, wooden animals and even a train. They were pretty to look at but Mary Jo didn't dare hope for a toy this Christmas.

As she stood looking at the toys, Mary Jo heard her mother calling to her. It was time to go home.

Mr. Drake carried three boxes to the wagon. With the supplies loaded, everyone climbed in the wagon and the mules moved off down the street.

Mary Jo stretched out in the wagon and covered herself with an old quilt her mother had put there. Mary Jo was very happy. She had seen many of her friends from school, and she had even seen candy in one of the boxes her father had put in the wagon.

Before the wagon had gone very far, Mary Jo fell asleep. She did not wake up until the mules turned into the yard. Quickly she sat up and watched the mules pull the wagon up to the back door of the house. As soon as the wagon stopped, Mac and Morey jumped down and carried the boxes up the steps of the back porch.

Mary Jo and her mother also climbed off the wagon. Her mother hurried into the kitchen, but Mary Jo waited as her father drove the mules away from the house to the barn. As she stood watching her father, Mary Jo saw Mr. Weaver out by the little tree. He was walking back and forth very slowly, and he was carrying something. She looked closer. The old man had a stick in his hands – no, he had two sticks.

It was the strangest thing she had ever seen.

As Mary Jo watched the old man, her father came from the barn and stood beside her. Looking up at her father, Mary Jo asked what Mr. Weaver was doing.

As he walked into the house, Mr. Drake looked at his daughter and said, "He's witching, Mary Jo. He's witching."



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Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do –

- How often does Mary Jo's family go to town? How often do you go to town or to a store? If you could get Mary Jo a Christmas present, what would it be?
- What is "witching?" Look it up in an encyclopedia or on the internet.

Next Week: Chapter Seven – Mr. Weaver's Promise