

The Quilters

"It's your turn to be *it* this afternoon, Dorothea," Mrs. Peacock said with a tone of finality in her voice that Dorothea had become familiar with. She knew sooner or later it would be her turn to be *it* and she wasn't looking forward to it. She wondered why Mrs. Peacock always got to choose who would be *it* and why she didn't take a turn like everyone else.

Dorothea, a schoolteacher who was raised in the city, was the newest member of the Edgewood Ladies Aid. It had been more than two years since she had married Johnny Simpson and moved to his farm. Learning how to be a farmer's wife while still finding time to be active in the small community was daunting, but still she thought she was fitting in quite well.

She remembered what Mrs. Peacock said about Mrs. Corvan. "Thick as a stone, that woman," she said, "it doesn't matter how often we tell her, she insists on making those big coarse stitches and then we have to stay after she's gone home to rip out her stitches and do them right."

The Edgewood Ladies Aid Society has been making a quilt every winter for as long as most people can remember. The ladies are perfectionists and they have the ribbons to prove it. Their quilts have won several firsts at the Swift Current Frontier Days and shared first prize the one time they had entered a quilt at the Moose Jaw Exhibition. "There was just no comparison between those two quilts," Mrs. Peacock said. "Our quilt was so much better than theirs and you don't have to take my word for it either. I overheard the women who made that other quilt and they agreed with me. 'There is just no comparison', they kept saying."

Now it was Dorothea's turn to be *it* and if you didn't know any better you would think the ladies were planning a matronly game of tag. In fact they were preparing for their weekly quilting bee. Being *it* meant it was her responsibility to keep Mrs. Corvan away from the quilt. If she could keep Mrs. Corvan occupied with things other than stitching the quilt there would be fewer stitches for the women to rip out and redo after Mrs. Corvan had gone home.

Mrs. Corvan seemed agreeable enough when Dorothea suggested they spend some time cutting out squares. She was hoping that if they worked slowly they would be kept busy until lunch. It soon became clear it wasn't working out the way she had planned. In less than an hour they had finished with the squares and she could see Mrs. Corvan eyeing the quilt. It was still too early to start getting lunch and Dorothea was running out of diversionary ideas. Fortunately, Mrs. Bricklen came to her rescue. She handed Mrs. Corvan an empty spool and a two-dollar bill. "Would you ladies mind going up town for some burgundy thread?" she asked, "We probably have enough for today but we wouldn't want to run out at the last minute now would we?" Dorothea got the message—we have lots of thread, just get the old girl out from under our feet for an hour or so.

The two women stepped out into the crisp air. It was late February and the sun was shining brightly. Dorothea took Mrs. Corvan by the arm to keep her from falling on the icy street.

Dorothea was growing to like Mrs. Corvan—she certainly wasn't as dense as Mrs. Peacock had allowed. "How are you enjoying the quilting dear?" she asked Dorothea as they picked their way gingerly down the street. Dorothea hesitated—she wasn't sure she should express her true feelings. What if Mrs. Corvan were to tell the other women that she found quilting boring? Finally she decided to speak her mind. "You took the words right out of my mouth," Mrs. Corvan said, "bending over that quilt all day almost

breaks my back in two and my glasses always fall down on my nose and I end up pricking my fingers. But if you don't mind I can give you a little advice. "Just make big coarse stitches the way I do and then those ladies won't let you anywhere near that quilt." Both women had a good laugh and after that Dorothea always volunteered to be *it*.