



## All Over but the Crying



**I**N THE EARLY spring of 1908, two people stood beneath the porch of a barn in the dark. They pulled their caps lower over their eyes. They pulled the collars of their coats up around their faces as far as possible. The two stood talking quietly. They eased out into the cold night which was made worse by the blowing rain. They knew they must not be seen, though the chances of it seemed small on such a night. The two mysterious figures turned the corner of the barn and walked to the front of the building. It was a large structure, two stories high. The two young men seemed small beside it. They stood facing the back of a very large house about a quarter mile away. Off to their left was another barn. They knew they must walk past that barn without disturbing the farmhands sleeping in the back. They walked in the shadow of the fruit trees in the orchard, moving quickly, silently toward their goal: the back porch of that farmhouse. All seemed well. Then a cacophony of sound split the quiet night. The two figures froze. Howls, growls, and barks echoed in the barn. A sleepy voice called, "Muffin, Lily, hush." The dogs stilled. On the two crept. In

a short while they stepped quietly to the porch. Easing to the door, one of the young men put a trembling hand on the cold brass doorknob. Slowly, he turned the knob. It was not locked. The door swung inward. They stepped inside, closing the door behind them. Nothing stirred...then from the corner of the large dark kitchen a slender, cloud-like figure arose. It was made visible by the white it wore and by the embers of the coals in the fireplace. It rose like the mist off the river on a hot, humid night in August. Not scary then or there, but here? Oh yes! The young men grabbed hold of one another. Their worst fears were realized. Then, as if in a nightmare, a voice cold as ice said, "Oh, I have you now. Yes, I do. Now I have you. Long I've waited in the dark. I've watched. But I have you now." Then a sinister move in the dark and a bright light shone in their eyes.

"Dang it, Charlotte, turn off that flashlight!" Andrew snapped.

"Make me," said the voice from the corner.

"You're not my boss, Andrew Keller."

"The both of you hush," said thirteen-year-old Samuel. "Do you want Papa down here? Is that what you want?"

"No," said ten-year-old Charlotte. "I want in. That's what I want. Whatever you two are doing, I want to be a part of it. I'm strong, and I am as smart as either of you. Spill the beans. Tell me now, or in the morning I tell Papa."

"All right, Charlotte. You win," Samuel answered tiredly.

"Don't you do it, Sammy," begged twelve-year-old Andrew. "Don't do it. Don't say anything. I'm telling you right now, she's trouble. We'll be sorry if you tell her anything. You know that. She will rattle to all of Frederickson County. She makes more announcements than the Bixby Soap Flake Man on the radio. She chatters

like a magpie. She's bossy, and she won't listen to a thing we say. Think of all the work we've done."

"We don't have a choice, Drew," Samuel responded.

"That's right: you don't have a choice, Sammy," Charlotte shot right back.

"Well, remember back last fall when we..." Samuel began the tale that had led to the sad state of current affairs.