



A Necklace for Mama



BY HAZEL LAMOREAUX

(Based on a true story)

For it is by faith that miracles are wrought
(Moroni 7:37).

In the still darkness a bugle sounded, signaling for the pioneers to wake up. Will groped around the floor of the covered wagon for his shirt.

“Time to get up,” he said to his little brother, Tommy. “The sooner the wagon train starts, the sooner we get to Zion.”

Tommy sat up. “And the sooner we can find Mama a new necklace.”

Mama’s necklace had been a special gift from her mother before their family left for the Salt Lake Valley. But by the time they reached Omaha, Mama had smallpox, and it had been necessary to pull out of the wagon train for a time. While very ill, Mama had whispered: “Have faith. Good things can come from bad. You must sell the necklace to buy medicine and necessities to continue our journey.” So they sold Mama’s special necklace.

Now they had joined the wagon train again. Papa entered the wagon with a lantern. In the dim light, Mama’s face was pale, still scabbed with smallpox.

“Mama, stay in the wagon and rest,” Papa said. “We’ll make the bread.”

“The wagon jolts a body so,” Mama said. “It rests me to feel solid ground under my feet.”

Papa hesitated. “You are still weak. But a little while outside may do you good.”

The family knelt for morning prayer. Papa thanked Heavenly Father for their blessings, prayed for Mama’s continued recovery, then asked for wisdom in dealing with the Indians sighted yesterday by wagon scouts.

After the prayer, Papa jumped from the wagon and helped Mama down. Will scrambled out with Tommy. The boys started a cooking fire while Mama whipped up a batch of pan bread. It was almost daylight when everyone settled around the fire to eat.

Will bit into a biscuit and licked his lips so as not to waste a speck of good bread. “Butter and jam like we had in Nauvoo would be good.”

“We must be thankful for bread,” Mama said. “Only by careful rationing will we have enough to eat before we reach the Salt Lake Valley.”

After breakfast, Papa hitched the horses to the wagon. Mama made herself a bed in the wagon.

Will and Tommy took care of the dishes. Then the bugle signaled that it was time to move out.

Heavy clouds of dust hovered over the wagon train as it crawled across the baked prairie land. Sweat streaked Will's face as he and Tommy plodded bare-foot alongside the wagon. Their shoes had to be saved for the coming cold weather.

Papa called, "You boys had best walk outside the dust. But remember we're in Indian country, so keep a sharp eye out. And mind that you don't get into cactus."

Will and Tommy scuttled through the dust cloud,

careful to avoid the prickly pear cactus. Outside the dirty air, Will stared at mounds of gravel. "Anthills!" he said.

Tommy picked up a shiny red object. "What's this?"
"A bead. Indians who camped here must have spilled them. The ants think they are just gravel for building."

"They'd make a pretty necklace," Tommy said. "Have you noticed that Mama doesn't smile much anymore? I think she's sad about her necklace."

Will nodded. "She used to smile all the time. Let's make her another necklace." He pulled a coarse thread from his ragged shirt and handed it to Tommy.



"I'll grab the beads. You string them on this thread."

Ants swarmed over Will's bare feet as he snatched up a handful of gravel from a mound. Jumping away, he sifted the gravel through his fingers to find beads. He handed them to Tommy.

With his tongue, Tommy moistened the thread. Twisting it to a point, he poked it through the beads.

Will waded back into the ants. He hopped up and down, wiggling his toes against painful bites as he grabbed more beads.

Finally, the thread, filled with bright beads, flashed in the sun. Will tied the ends of the string together. "We'd better run to catch up to the wagon train," he said, and shoved the string into his pocket.

"The wagons aren't moving," Tommy said when the train came into view.

Peering ahead, Will forgot to watch for prickly pear. A hundred tiny barbs pierced his already aching feet. As he staggered out of the cactus bed, he heard a great commotion.

Indians! On ponies, they circled the wagons, shouting and waving guns. Will forgot the throbbing in his feet and raced for their wagon.

Unnoticed in the confusion and noise, the boys clambered into the wagon. They crouched with Mama, watching the Indians. "The wagon master said that it isn't a war party," she told them. "They want food. If we give it to them, they'll leave."

"We can't give our food away!" Will protested. "You said we'd have to ration our food to make it last to the Salt Lake Valley."

Reaching for Will, Mama's hand brushed his swollen feet. "You've stepped in cactus!" she said. "Those spines must come out. I'll fetch water to wash your feet."

Clutching a pan, she stood at the front of the wagon, ready to jump down. She had to dip water from the barrel strapped to the wagon's side.

Looking up, the Indian chief saw Mama's scabbed

face and pointed toward her. Mama jumped from the wagon. Other Indians, seeing her smallpox scabs, turned their ponies. Whooping and shouting, they galloped across the prairie and disappeared over a rise.

Mama returned with the pan of water. When she bent to wash his feet, Will slipped the necklace over her head. "Tommy and I made this for you. So you'd be happy," he said.

Mama smiled. "It makes me very happy. I've always believed good things could come from bad. This beautiful necklace will always remind me of the day smallpox saved a wagon train." ●



"There is one thing the Lord expects of us no matter our difficulties and sorrows: He expects us to press on."

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles²

