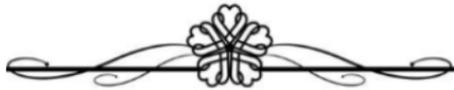


GROWING UP WILDER

The diary of Virginia Anne Wilder



Hannah Loviisa

Dustville, Texas

1921

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Tuesday, May 3, 1921

Dear Diary,

I would like to address you, "My dear speechless friend," but I suppose that might be unsuitable so I will have to settle with calling you "Diary" until I think of something else.

Right now, I am perched in the branches of our old peach tree behind the barn. The peaches aren't quite ripe yet, but they will be soon.

I guess it is only fitting that you know your history, so I will tell you. I got you on my fourteenth birthday, which was eight months ago, but I lost you until now. That, I believe, had something to do with one of my little brothers.

I was sitting in the barn reading when Ma walked in and handed me a small book, leather-bound with a handsome blue ribbon bookmark. "This is for your thoughts, Virginia," she said. So...this is my story.

I guess I should tell you a bit about the towns where I live. There's an old, fascinating story about them. Two brothers founded the towns in 1874. The tale goes that they both fell

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in love with the same beautiful woman and set out to impress her.

The brothers toiled endlessly to each start their own huge ranch. These later became Fort Derek and Fort Ethan as people started to settle around them. Now they are known as Dustville and Growlersburg.

My family lives between them, but closer to Dustville, about twelve minutes walking time. Growlersburg is about half an hour away from my family's farm.

I must go. Ma is calling. I will write more later. Until then I remain faithfully yours,

Virginia Anne Wilder

After Dinner

We have just finished eating beef stew. There are eight of us in the Wilder family. There's my wonderful Pa who is always working so hard to provide for us. He's so strong and cares about each one of us deeply. Ma says she thanks the Lord every day for him, and for his strong chin which she noticed when she first met him. Ma is so humorous and wise. I hope that someday I will be able to acquire half her tenderness and compassionate heart.

Clara is the oldest of us children at seventeen. She's a lot like Ma, smart and sweet. We're very close.

I am the next child and fourteen as I mentioned. Daniel comes after me. He's very persevering and enjoys working on the farm

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with Pa. I would have to say he's the most mature thirteen-year-old I know.

Samuel and Martha are seven and five. They're naughty at times, but not on purpose for the most part. They just don't think about what could—and usually does—go wrong. Sam and Martha don't have to work as much as we older children do, but lately they've been learning more farm and house chores.

The youngest is Charles. He's a bouncing blond one-year-old. Soon there will be another Wilder! Ma will be having a baby in November.

I'd better stop writing now. Pa is going to read to us from the Bible.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Wednesday, May 4, 1921

Dear Diary,

Just a little bit ago I was helping Ma put out Samuel. Ma and I were out in the garden picking tomatoes when we heard Martha screaming in the kitchen. Jumping up, we went rushing into the house.

Lo and behold! There stood Sam with his shirttail aflame! Ma started beating the fire with her apron and I grabbed the dishwater and drenched him.

Martha told us that she and Sam were trying to help by starting a fire in the oven so Clara could bake when she got home from Growlersburg. (Clara met us after school, and she and Danny went to the General Store to get

some supplies.) Martha was handing Sam the kindling and he was putting it in the stove when he turned his back to the flames and a tongue of fire shot out. That's when Martha started screaming. Thankfully, Samuel didn't get burned badly. Ma scolded them both and instructed them to always wait for an older person before starting a fire until they are mature enough.

This morning, we got a ride to school because Pa had to pick up a delivery from the mill in town. In Dustville we have our little church, the Van Merrill's Dress Shop, a grain mill, Hay & Seed, Dr. Lansford's office, a sawmill, Van Merrill's Drugstore, a livery, and a schoolhouse.

Growlersburg is bigger than our town of Dustville, and most people there have electricity and cars. It also has some buildings that Dustville does not have, such as a press, Rowdy's Soda & Ice Cream Parlor, a grocery store, barber, butcher, seamstress, bank, and gas station. There is a telephone at the soda shop that the public can use for 5 cents. A few of the rich families even have a telephone in their own house!

Sometimes we go to the barber shop at the General Store in Growlersburg or the soda fountain in Van Merrill's Drugstore here in Dustville to listen to the radio, mostly just from a local station. They give crop reports and broadcast music and such. Danny likes to listen to the baseball games they've started broadcasting. It's all so razzle-dazzle.

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During the election, Pa went to the drugstore a lot to discuss political views with the other men. Last year, women voted for the first time! Quite a few women kept up on politics. Ma was too busy for all that, so she just had Pa help her mark her ballot. It's so strange to think that I will be able to vote once I turn twenty-one!

Virginia Anne Wilder

Thursday, May 5, 1921

Dear Diary,

Before school today, I went to deliver eggs for Ma. We sell eggs to DeWayne's General Store in Growlersburg, the Van Merrills, and a few other people in town. I cannot stand the Van Merrills. They're irritatingly snobby, probably because they are the richest people in town. Mrs. Van Merrill owns a small fabric store, and Mr. Van Merrill owns the Van Merrill's Drugstore. They also own stock and buy a lot of things on credit.

When I entered the Van Merrill's house, Angie took great pleasure in showing off one of her birthday presents. It was a doll that her mother ordered from a catalog. I've seen it advertised before in the Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalog under the heading: "Splendid Values in Pretty Dressed Dolls." It can say "Mama" and has rolling eyes which close when you put her to sleep. It was huge—23 inches high! Angie

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bragged that her mother bought the most expensive one. That doll was \$4.98!

It was pretty nice, but I would think that Angie is a little old for dolls. But then, I suppose she needs something to do since they don't have any work. They have a maid to do that for them. Her name is Lydia, and she is Irish.

Poor Lydia has to do all the work. I feel sorry for her. Being a maid must be awful enough, but being a maid to the Van Merrill's and doing all the cleaning, dishes, cooking, and laundry for a household with five daughters and a mother who are always changing their ritzy get-ups must be really hard.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Later

It's past bedtime now. I am sitting on the counter next to the kitchen sink in my cold, muddy nightgown, trying to wash the dirt off my feet so I can get back to bed.

Pa saw a cougar earlier from his bedroom window and grabbed his gun. It was stalking one of our milk cows that had broken out. (The door was open so I guess something caught in the latch and it didn't shut properly. The cow must have bumped against it.) While Pa and Danny went after the cougar, I had to go catch the distraught cow and put it back in the barn.

Sometimes I wish I had older brothers so they could be doing this kind of work and I could be sleeping. My friend Merry Martin is

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very fortunate. She has three handsome older brothers and a twin brother. She also has lovely golden hair and dancing blue eyes. She is so pretty.

My own hair is wavy and chestnut-colored with blond and red streaks. My eyes are green, and I have freckles sprinkled on my face like cinnamon, or a starry night, as Pa puts it.

I wonder if I could be pretty. Ma says that outward beauty isn't important and it's inward beauty that matters, but it still would be nice. Merry must know she is beautiful, though she isn't proud about it. At least a dozen boys asked her to dance at the winter social. Merry's twin asked me to dance. His name is Ryan. He is sixteen and has the handsomest brown eyes.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Friday, May 6, 1921

Dear Diary,

My dear friend Merry came to my house after school. She tried to console me about not being invited to Angie Van Merrill's birthday party yesterday. I do not know why I feel somewhat sad. I do not even like that girl. I guess it's just because it hurts my pride; she thinks I'm not good enough to associate with her. Why is she so mean, anyways? At this point, I guess I don't really care what she thinks, but she doesn't have to express her opinions to the whole school.

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During recess today, Angie declared to her friends in an overly loud and patronizing voice that the whole school could hear, "That Virginia Wilder is just too dirty to come to my party—that's why I didn't invite her. Mother said that she does not belong in my social class. Did you know that most of her dresses are hand-me-downs?"

Then they hooked arms and walked off laughing. I bet they were all thinking about what Angie would think of them if she knew that most of their dresses are hand-me-downs, too. They just are not bold enough to stand up to her.

The Van Merrills are so rich! Angie and her mother and sisters have their ball dresses specially made by seamstresses back east, as if it wasn't good enough for them to just get them sewn in the shop in Growlersburg. They only have a few of their everyday dresses sewn there. Some of their dresses they order from a catalog, but they also buy from stores in the big cities.

Angie is so fortunate. She has more swank get-ups than I could ever dream of and no chores. I have endless chores.

Ma told Clara and me when we were baking that we have to cut back this year, so no new dresses this spring. I don't really mind it that much, except that Angie kept asking when I'm going to make myself a new dress.

With the market value of crops decreasing and the costs of machinery and tools increasing, most of Dustville will be cutting back this year since the majority of settlers in our town are farmers.

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Night

I feel real bad about complaining lately. I guess I ought to be more thankful for what I do have. Ma said that it's always good to write a thankful list to keep us from getting stuck on what we want and don't have, so here's my list.

1. My family
2. Our wonderful farm
3. The dresses I do have
4. It's Danny's turn to do the dishes tonight
5. The surprise I'll write about below

A package arrived today! It was from Aunt Cassie, Pa's youngest sister. She went to France as a Signal Corps operator or "hello girl" during the Great War. That's where she met Uncle Will, who was a doughboy from Maine. They live in Fort Worth.

Pa brought in the package and set it on the kitchen table. I washed my sticky hands and hurried over. Clara squealed and clasped her hands in delight when Ma pulled back the wrapping.

God surely does provide! Inside was a note and four lovely bolts of fabric. The three bolts intended for Ma, Clara, and me are silk! (Martha's is gingham.) Aunt Cassie wrote that the fabrics were early birthday presents because they were having a super swell sale over there.

It's so exciting that I will be getting a new dress, especially one that wasn't Clara's first. Besides that, I've never had a silk dress before!

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I will have to be very careful so I don't ruin it before Martha gets big enough to fit it. I have to be careful with all my clothes actually. When I get home from school, I change into my old clothes so I don't ruin my school get-ups.

We moved the fabric to the sewing table and finished making the jam from the blackberries that Danny, Sam, and Martha picked. Then we canned all the jam and put the jars in the cellar.

When we retired to our rooms after dinner, Clara and I spent hours poring through our pattern book, fashion magazines, and the Godey's Lady's Book. Then we brought out our sewing kits and matched up our lace and buttons with the fabric.

Clara is going to use the light blue and I will use the dark green. I don't have enough buttons so I will have to buy more.

I'll try to make the prettiest dress I've ever had. I do hope it turns out nice. Unfortunately, most of my good intentions don't end up the way I expect them. I guess that's pretty much my fault, though.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Saturday, May 7, 1921

Dear Diary,

A fox ate one of our chickens last night. Danny saw it this morning and shot it with the rifle he got for his thirteenth birthday. He

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skinned it before breakfast. Now he is working on tanning the hide.

Sam and I helped Pa pitch hay into the barn loft this morning while Ma and Clara made pancakes. After breakfast, Clara and I changed to our town dresses and walked to town with Pa. He's a carpenter and is working right now on an addition to the Van Merrill's house. We also make our money by growing corn.

After leaving Pa, Clara and I went to the Van Merrill's Dress Shop to buy some supplies so we could begin work on our dresses. We dread going there, but the General Store in Growlersburg only has a small fabric section while the Van Merrill's Dress Shop has a wide variety of sewing supplies.

I brought the money I got for winning the three-legged-race with Merry at Founder's Day last year and from corn shucking for some neighbors. Clara had money she earned working once a week at the seamstress shop in Growlersburg. Two kind elderly sisters, Marty and Patricia Carlston, own the shop. I have done a bit of work there myself. They are really kind and make sugar cookies that would cause your stomach to growl a mile off.

I soon found some pretty, white pearl-looking buttons that would match. We bought those and some thread. We also got some trimming that Ma liked and Clara and I had been saving up for. Then Mrs. Van Merrill mentioned that the white cloth was on sale, the kind that you use to make petticoats. I decided I should buy some fabric because mine needed

quite a bit of mending done on them—partly from fighting at school, I am ashamed to say.

That horrible Angelica Van Merrill came in just as Clara and I finished counting out the rest of our money to see if we could afford to add the fabric to our purchases. Angie just stared at us and sucked on a piece of candy, which is one of the rudest things you could do in front of someone who hasn't had store-bought candy in a long time and wants a piece herself.

We had Mrs. Van Merrill measure out enough of the white fabric to make Ma and each of us a petticoat. Just as we were about to leave, Angie commented, "Well, you might as well buy yourself new cloth for petticoats since the ones you have are partly threadbare." Then she added to me under her breath, "My parents wouldn't let me walk around looking like a rag-a-muffin."

Mrs. Van Merrill sighed with mock sympathy and said, "Now, Angie, let's be kind to the less fortunate."

My temper rose and I wanted to punch Angie for saying such mean things about my parents. Clara must have seen the look in my eyes and the clenching of my fist, for she took our package and my arm and we marched out the door, saying "Good day, ladies." I don't know how Clara can stand it. If she hadn't been there, well...

Virginia Anne Wilder

P.S. And when indeed did Angie see my petticoat?

Evening

Ugh! Having a temper is such a horrid thing! Ma says that I must learn to think before I act. Am I glad that Clara was at the dress shop with me earlier so I didn't behave rashly!

I have finally found a name for you. I have decided to call you "Blythe" because it means "joyful, cheerful one." I hope that I am a "Blythe" most of the time. People like that are such blessings to everyone they meet.

Right now, I am in the barn sitting on a pile of hay. George Washington is being a real nuisance. She knows exactly how to be a perfect brat. She keeps purring and rubbing at this diary while I am trying to write! Martha is the one who named her George Washington. Pa said she's going to have kittens soon.

I just remembered something that I forgot to write about yesterday! The funniest thing happened when we were all sitting in the living room. Pa had just finished reading Aunt Cassie's letter aloud and was handing it to Ma when there was an explosion in the kitchen! Then another and another! We froze solid in shock while the explosions continued. After about half a minute, Pa jumped up and went charging into the kitchen.

"The boiling eggs!" Ma gasped, and clasped her hands over her mouth.

We all glanced at her in surprise, then our eyes traveled to Pa who was slowly entering the living room. He was quite a sight with egg remains in his hair and all over his clothes.

"Oh, my!" Ma exclaimed over the noise. "I'm sorry, dear, I completely forgot them."

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"I say we wait out here 'til the battle is over then go clean up the mess," Pa said. Then he took a good look at the mirror and started laughing.

I'd better stop lollygagging and help with dinner now.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Sunday, May 8, 1921

Dear Blythe,

Merry Martin sang a solo in church today, "I Know Whom I Have Believed." She has a beautiful soprano voice.

After the service, there was a picnic outside. Merry and I wandered away from the group and stuck our feet in the creek on the outskirts of town. We just sat there and watched all the people talking. One of Angie's horrible older sisters was giggling up a storm. She has four of them; Dorothy (they call her Dora), Lucille, Hectorinia, and Roxanne (Roxie). Angelica is the youngest.

Ryan came over and sat with us for a while. He and Merry are very close since they are twins. All Merry's brothers are real nice and gentlemanly. Joseph is the oldest and is always working on this or that. He has a very serious and considerate temperament. Then there's Alex who is nineteen and has a wonderful sense of humor. Joshua is a year older than Ryan and Merry who are both sixteen. He's usually reading in his spare time. Ryan is the youngest

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brother. He's smart, kind, strong, and awfully good-looking. The Martins run a cattle ranch outside of Dustville.

Merry's ma died in a barn fire when Merry was just four, so Merry is the only girl in her family. She has to do all the cooking for her Pa and four brothers, plus their foreman, George Cameron, and his son, Travis.

The Camerons just came to Dustville two months ago as ranch hands for the Martins. Mr. Cameron and Mr. Martin are old friends because they went to school together when they were younger.

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P.S. Mrs. Van Merrill announced after the church picnic that she is starting a Young Ladies' Class. They're meeting at the schoolhouse on certain Tuesdays. I asked Ma if Clara and I would have to go and she snapped, "Not on your life and over my dead body! I do not want that woman influencing any of you!"

Pa hooted and then quickly took up the reins and drove us off so no one would hear Ma's outburst.

Monday, May 9, 1921

Dear Blythe,

At school today, Angie kept calling Merry and me half-pints. She has been especially proud since her fifteenth birthday. I was mad about it but I kept it to myself. She is only four

months older! Merry must have been even more annoyed because she is a year and four months older than Angie is. Angie is much too big for her britches. Well, in this case, bloomers. At least Dora and Lu Van Merrill are already graduated so only the three youngest Van Merrills are still in school.

When school was out, Clara joined me in town and we stopped in at the Van Merrill's Drugstore. Alex Martin was there making a delivery. We said hello, then I left Clara talking and went to make our order.

While they were talking, Mrs. Van Merrill came in and exclaimed, "Alex! Alex! I thought we might be seeing you before the dance!" Then she smiled knowingly and grabbed his arm. "Come along, now. Our Lucille is right in our parlor."

Alex gently retrieved his arm. "I beg your pardon, Ma'am, but I didn't have any plans for the dance. If you will excuse me please, I am in a conversation with Clara."

Mrs. Van Merrill stood frozen for a moment, then turned her attention to us. I hate it when she does that. It's a clear sign that something unpleasant will follow.

"Oh, Clara, dear," Mrs. Van Merrill exclaimed, "I hardly noticed you. Some girls are so quiet and plain it makes it so easy to pass them by with hardly a glance. That doesn't quite happen with my daughters because they are always stopped and given compliments about their looks. That does make it quite hard for one to get around, doesn't it? Oh, well, why am I asking you? I mean you're one who's

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lucky, my dear. I'm most certain you and your sister," (she gave me a cruel look), "have never had such an experience."

Clara just stood there, unsure of what to say as her face grew a brilliant shade of red.

Then Alex turned to her and said, "You look beautiful today, Clara. Your shawl really brings out that dazzling blue shine of your eyes. Will you allow me the pleasure of being your escort at the spring dance on Friday?"

Clara flushed redder, shot me a glance, and said softly, "Thank you. I would be honored." Then he took her arm and walked her home.

Mrs. Van Merrill glared furiously as they left together and exclaimed, "Banana oil!"

I just smiled sweetly and curtsied. "Good day, Mrs. Van Merrill."

I'd better go now. Danny wants me to pitch for him and Sam is covering all the basemen.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Bedtime

Pa and Danny fixed Mrs. Perry's hinges today. She is a nice elderly widow who lives a short walk away.

After dinner, Clara and I cut out our cloth. We will start sewing tomorrow. Clara can use the sewing machine when I am at school and I can use it when I get back. We are hoping to finish the dresses in time for the spring dance.

I'd better stop writing now. Clara is begging me to turn out the lamp. She, Martha, and I

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share a room. The boys share a bedroom, too, except baby Charles who sleeps in his crib in Ma and Pa's room.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Tuesday, May 10, 1921

Dear Blythe,

My arms are so tired and so are my eyes. I almost fell asleep in school! Thankfully, Merry sits with me and poked me to keep me awake, sparing me much embarrassment.

This is because last night after I wrote, one of our cows, Bessie, was having trouble calving. We were up until two o' clock! It all ended well, though, and the calf was fine.

Bessie's baby is a darling little heifer. She's so cute that I wish we could keep her, but we don't need another cow. We will probably end up selling her once she is weaned.

At school, Angie has been talking of nothing but the upcoming dance on Friday. I am so sick of hearing her go on and on. Jake LeRoy, one of the fastest runners of the boys at school, challenged me to a race today. I accepted and we had a draw.

I think Angie is jealous that the boys challenge me because she is always reminding me that proper young ladies do not run. Mrs. Van Merrill doesn't allow her daughters to participate in any such activities.

I don't agree with her. I think recreation is an important part of just living. My best friend

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Merry is the most sought after girl in the school and I've seen her walk a fencepost once. Afterwards she hopped down gracefully, without losing any of her charm, and still had three boys fighting to carry her lunch pail.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Later

Ugh! Why are awfully embarrassing things always happening? One of our young pigs got out right after I wrote, and Danny and I had to chase it for a good hour. We dove for it a few times and were all covered in mud by the time we entered town. The dumb pig cleared the drugstore porch and headed straight for the open double doors of the schoolhouse.

"You dirty little brat!" I shouted, as I charged up the step and through the doors after it. "Just wait 'til I catch you!"

"No! Virginia, don't!" Danny yelled from outside. But it was too late. I was already sailing over a desk after my ill-behaved victim when I realized what was happening.

"For our first lesson, we will be discussing how an elaborate entrance can change one's..." Mrs. Van Merrill stopped, staring at me in my muddy dress as I frantically captured the squirming piglet. Turning to face the Young Ladies' Class, I gulped and offered a shameful half-smile while the whole room froze.

"How revolting!" Lu, one of the Van Merrill girls, exclaimed.

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I tried the smile again, then quickly turned and ran out with the piglet tucked under my arm.

“Well, um, let’s just start with looking decent...” Mrs. Van Merrill tried again.

I sighed and sat down on the school step next to Danny while the squealing animal tried to wiggle its way out of my grasp.

“Revolting!” he mimicked.

I elbowed him and he snickered. Well, at least if I can’t do anything, I can make life more interesting.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Wednesday, May 11, 1921

Dear Blythe,

Danny fell out of the barn loft this morning and sprained his wrist while he and I were caring for the horses. We left for school early and stopped by Dr. Lansford’s office so he could look at it. He said it was a pretty nasty sprain and would probably take a couple weeks or more to heal. All Danny cares about is that it is better before the big baseball game. It’s a little less than three weeks away. He can still pitch because he’s right-handed, but he won’t be able to bat unless his left wrist heals.

Roxanne Van Merrill wore an extra hoity-toity dress to school today and took a lot of trouble trying to show it off.

Only a minute before, some men had moved the outhouse, and if Roxie was paying any

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attention, she would have heard them warn everybody not to come near until they filled up the hole.

While she was spinning to show off her full skirt, someone's dog went running past and spun her off course. Roxie tripped over the dog and fell down, right into the outhouse hole!

We all jumped at her scream and went running over. Thankfully, Roxie wasn't harmed...the poor girl! How awful! However, afterwards it was dreadful but terribly funny at the same time. Even the men had to laugh, after they yelled down to her and made sure she was all right. Then somebody got a rope and threw it down to pull her out.

At the sight of a dirty, smelly Roxie being pulled up, Merry and I could not contain ourselves and ran behind the schoolhouse where we fell into each other's arms and tried to muffle our laughter. I don't think Roxie will be showing off for quite some time now.

I had better go change into my nice dress. We have to leave in a few minutes for a prayer meeting at church.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Thursday, May 12, 1921

Dear Blythe,

Since Danny hurt his wrist, I have so many extra chores to do. Every single minute I am not working, I spend sewing my dress. I hope I will finish it in time for the dance tomorrow.

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Clara is done with hers. She is going help me with mine. At this moment, she is sitting in front of our mirror trying out different ways to fix her hair. It's blond like Ma's. So is Martha's. Somehow, I am the only girl in the family who did not inherit blond hair and blue eyes.

I have to go milk the cows now. I'm just waiting for Danny, who is coming with me to feed the oxen with his one good hand. Right now, he's trying to persuade Ma to give him a lump of sugar for his colt, Prairie Fire. He loves that colt so much that sometimes when it's cold he'll take his blanket out there and sleep in the barn with him just to make sure he's warm.

Well, here comes Danny with the sugar. I guess he succeeded in sweet-talking Ma.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Friday, May 13, 1921

Dear Blythe,

I got up real early this morning and finished sewing my dress. My neck is a bit sore from sleeping in rag curlers so I will have fresh curls for the dance tonight. Clara put in the curlers last night.

Earlier this morning, Rhoda Jane, our plumpest Rhode Island Red hen, came clucking through the yard with seven fluffy little chicks behind her. So that's what she's been up to. We thought for sure she was a goner.

Danny found her nest because one of the unhatched rotten eggs cracked. A skunk was

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attracted to it, and Danny almost got sprayed. I had better go get ready for school now.

Virginia Anne Wilder

Saturday, May 14, 1921

Dear Blythe,

We just finished dinner. After dinner, Pa reads to us from the Bible. Then we somewhat just sit around until bedtime, which is what we are doing now. Pa is mending a harness next to the fire, and Ma is in her rocking chair, tatting lace for the collar of her new dress from the material from Aunt Cassie. Clara is at the kitchen table cutting out the fabric for Martha's dress. Sprawled on the floor are Danny and Sam playing checkers, and Martha is playing with her doll, Susanna, also known as Black Hawk, the Indian chief. Charlie is asleep, and I am rocking his cradle with my foot while I write.

I was so tired when we got home yesterday that I just slipped into bed without writing. The spring dance was at the schoolhouse since that is the biggest open-spaced room in town. We just move all the desks out.

Alex arrived at our house a few minutes before we left to pick up Clara. She looked lovely, especially later in the candlelit schoolhouse. I wore my forest green hair ribbon I got last Christmas from Pa and Ma because it matched my new dress. I pulled back some strands of hair from my face and tied them with my ribbon. Clara decided to look mature and

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wore a bun. (She is having this phase where she wants to look grown up.)

All of the Van Merrill girls were wearing fancy new dresses. (Which Angie announced to the world that they were specially made by a seamstress in Paris.)

Usually before the dance, the adults talk and the young men and ladies just stand around looking nervous. This gives the younger children plenty of freedom to sneak around and drop an ice cube fished out of the punch bowl down the back of some unsuspecting fool. That happened to Dora Van Merrill once. She gave little Jenk Thompson a look that would scald water, and he hasn't recovered well enough to do it again since.

While waiting for the dancing to begin, Merry and I snuck off to the creek to our special place that no one knows about, except Ryan. No one can see us from there. In past years, we've laid down on the grass and arm wrestled or something while waiting for the dance to begin, but we decided not to because we were both getting older and wearing new dresses that we didn't want to spoil. Nice clothes can be so tiresome because you can't do most hardly anything in them for fear of getting them ruined.

Oh, dear. It's seven o'clock. I had better go close in the chickens and feed the animals now. I have to do both the milking at night and morning until Danny's wrist is better. I'll finish this when I get back in.

Virginia Anne Wilder

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Later

Old Dandelion sure is aggravating. She swatted me several times with her tail and gave dirty looks because I was a little later at milking her than usual.

Now, to continue about the dance: After playing around next to the creek, Merry and I hurried back into the ballroom once the dancing started. I talked with Merry until one of the boys came and asked her to dance. Then I went to find out where Danny and Sam were. I found them sprawled out in a corner, along with some other young boys from town, playing marbles and daring each other to try tripping Mr. Donner, a young bachelor who thinks a lot about his looks. I scolded them and made them sit on some of the chairs lined up on the side of the room. Then I sat next to them and just watched.

Clara danced mainly with Alex since he was her escort. I could tell she was delighted. She told me a few months ago that she was sweet on him. Merry had several requests for dances. She wore a pretty blue dress that her father and brothers got for her birthday. Pa and Ma enjoyed themselves very much. It was so good to hear them laughing.

Angie was dancing with Tim, one of the boys at school. As they danced past, she stuck her tongue out at me. She is so awful.

However, this is the funny part. Right after she did that, Tim left her then and there, without even escorting her off the dance floor. I snuck outside to the far end of the schoolyard

HANNAH LOVIISA

to die laughing. Clara says I should control myself.

It was so nice outside in the moon-lit night that I just sat there in our special spot under the great willow tree and watched the moonlight dance on the creek. I hugged my knees to my chest and pulled my shawl around me to keep off the night chill. It was beautiful just watching and listening to the crickets.

I snuck back in before the dancing ended, so I would have a chance to dance with Pa. I also danced with Joseph and Ryan Martin, Andy Rutler, and Herman, a boy from school who lives five miles out of town and smells real bad.

After I danced with him, Danny whispered to me, "I'm glad I'm a boy so I can pick who I want to dance with, or better yet, don't dance at all."

I guess he is lucky. Girls can only dance with the people who ask them, and worse than that, they pretty much have to because it's rude to turn them down.

Virginia Anne Wilder

**Sunday, May 15,
1921**

Dear Blythe,

Travis Cameron's Pa is dead! It is such a shock. I knew something was wrong when the Martins' foreman didn't ride in to church with them today.

GROWING UP WILDER

Mr. Cameron died last night while the Martins and Travis were in town. They found his body on the floor of the barn. He had fallen from the loft and broke his neck. Travis is so grieved. I feel awful for him, especially since he's just been in Dustville for two months and doesn't know anyone that well.

I couldn't believe how mean Mrs. Van Merrill was to Travis. She has always been mean to him, not that she isn't mean to just about anyone, but she's particularly mean to him because he is a ranch hand and she considers anyone who works for someone else as second-class.

When she greeted the Martins at church, she told them that she was sorry that their foreman died and they would have to look for a new one. Then she added that she hoped for their sake that the feller hadn't spent all of his money on booze so they could have some to "buy a train ticket and send that boy back to wherever he came from."

I was so mad I shook my fist at her when she looked at me. She knows perfectly well that Mr. Cameron was a Christian gentleman and never did any such thing.

As soon as the service was over, Travis got up and left without even waiting for Reverend Hollister to open the door and shake his hand. Mr. Martin went after him. Merry said that she is afraid that he's going to leave. She said to pray that he stays; he doesn't have anywhere else to go.

Virginia Anne Wilder