



The Magnolia Homeplace

Chapter 1: Winter 1947-1948*

Moving, Moving, Moving

A new home! Their third home! How wonderful!

When Papa and Mama had married and rented the Little White House, Katherine was not even born yet. She was born three years later.

When Papa and Mama had moved to the Little Yellow House, Katherine was ten years old. She had hated the move with every ounce of her being . . . but after some months in the yellow house, she had learned to enjoy living there. That move had taken just one day, although unpacking and fixing up the house lasted over a month.

Now Katherine was seventeen years old as Papa and Mama prepared to move a third time, to the last rental house they would live in. They would live here until they retired and moved to a house in Luverne, their final home — and the only home they bought for cash and owned.

This time Katherine looked forward to the move. She was just as weary as was Mama of living in such a tiny house. It was time to have breathing space!

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Katherine thought back on how different this move had been. When they moved from the Little White House to the Little Yellow House, it was a rushed move, done quickly because Mama was expecting a baby and they had just been notified of the need to move. They had moved

* See Postlude for Historical Accuracy, Chapter 1

while snow from the Armistice Day Blizzard of 1940 still lay in piles on the ground.

But this move in 1948 gave them time to prepare.

In late August, Papa had been in Rock Rapids when the local real estate agent talked to him. He informed Pa of a farm for rent near Magnolia, Minnesota. Pa rushed home and took everyone who wasn't in school — Ma, Willie, and Katherine — to see the farm. That resulted in Pa deciding to rent the farm.

They had needed a change for years. With six children, there wasn't room to move around in the tiny yellow house. As Mama lamented, they were "squashed like sardines in a can."

But they hadn't found another farm to rent until they found this farm. They fell in love with the Magnolia farm the moment they saw it. Everything was neat and orderly, with large shade trees dotting the front lawn. Mama's eyes glowed like stars as she roamed the house and saw the space it had — perfect for them. Katherine loved the house immediately, too. She was also impressed by the farm buildings, especially the huge barn — although only Pa had walked through the buildings that first day.

She was also impressed by the large silo. Not many farms then had silos.

Most of all, she was excited because this farm had electricity. She had never thought she'd live on a farm with electricity. It was just coming to Midwest towns!

They would move in March, the usual moving time. Another man still rented the Magnolia farm during the winter months. They could use the winter months to move some of their larger equipment. Everything else would have to be moved in one or two hectic days in March.

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Immediately when he rented the farm, six months before they moved, Papa realized they would need more farm equipment for that larger farm and began looking around for good deals.

Although World War II was now ended, it was still difficult to find new tractors. It took time for factories to change from making war machinery to making farm machinery. But when Papa talked to the tractor salesman in Rock Rapids, he learned of a good promotion that Massey-Harris had right then. If you bought five new things all at the same time — a tractor, a plow, a cultivator, a loader, and a single-row corn picker — you could get a good discount.

Massey-Harris had red tractors. John Deere had green ones. While Papa liked green Ford cars, he liked red farm implements.

Papa was concerned about being able to get all the work done on this larger farm and knew that new equipment would help.

Pa first talked to Mama to see if she thought this was wise.

Katherine was working in the kitchen while they talked at the oak table just outside the kitchen. She couldn't help overhearing most of the discussion.

"Wilbur, do we have enough cash? We don't want to start borrowing," Mama cautioned. "Borrowing means trouble. The bank has to be paid back with interest . . . and who knows what problems we can have? We mustn't get reckless!"

"Of course not, Susie," Papa assured her. "We have enough saved for this already. Besides, I plan to sell two of our four horses, since we won't need them anymore. With a tractor instead of horses, we can accomplish so much more."

"Which horses will you sell, Wilbur?" questioned Susie.

"We will keep Molly and Frank," Papa replied. "They are the younger of our four horses, still strong and able to work well. A neighbor would like to buy Prince and Topsy. We can get a good price for them, considering their age."

Katherine almost wished she hadn't overhead all this. How she hated to see those two horses sold! It felt as if Prince and Topsy were members of the family. Especially faithful old Prince, who had saved Dorothy's life. She was thankful the horses were being sold to friends. But she knew this would be hard for her younger brothers, who loved those horses. Selling them might even make the younger boys hate the move.

However, once Mama agreed and finances were figured out, Papa sold the horses. He returned to Rock Rapids a few days later and ordered the red Massey-Harris tractor and the four implements that came with it.

Not only would this be useful on the new farm, but it made work that fall much easier on the Iowa farm. With their old tractor and also a new tractor, twice as much could be finished in the same amount of time.

After harvesting was finished, Willie drove the new tractor to the new farm. Papa drove the 1934 Chevy truck to pick him up. Not wanting to waste any trips, Papa also moved the new implements on the back of the truck. That took most of a Monday afternoon.

Meanwhile, on a farm a few miles down the road, they drove past Prince and Topsy pulling the farmer's plow. Changes for the Kroontjes also meant changes for their livestock.

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Having all winter to prepare was wonderful. They could plan ahead and move things little by little. Especially large farm machinery could be moved piece by piece whenever it was convenient. A farm has lots of machinery!

One large piece of equipment to be moved was the elevator, used for raising oats and corn into the granary. Gerrit and Papa moved the elevator one Saturday morning.

The shaft — or “tower” — of the elevator went high into the air. It also swayed as they rode. So it was tricky to move without hitting overhead wires.

They pulled the elevator with the tractor, always watching for wires. Gerrit drove the tractor. Even though he was too young to drive a car, he was allowed to drive a tractor. Papa followed him in his Chevy truck so Gerrit would have a ride back home.

There were no wires south of Highway 90 but there was electricity in Minnesota, so that’s where they had to be careful. Papa and Gerrit were highly relieved when they reached the new farm. They had hit nothing!

But once on the Magnolia farm yard, they forgot that there was also electricity there and quit watching so closely. As they pulled the elevator across the yard, the tower caught on a wire and tore it apart. Sparks flew!

Fortunately, the farmer renting the place knew what to do. He was able to shut off the electric flow and then to contact the electric company from a neighbor’s phone. The electric company was out in a short time to get it fixed.

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The new farm lacked other modern-day improvements. There still was no indoor plumbing. Still no telephones. Still an outdoor toilet and indoor chamber pots.

Those things would come! With time, they would come. A telephone was installed in 1952 . . .

But not before Katherine was married. In her years at home, Katherine never knew the luxury of a telephone or of indoor plumbing.

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March, the month of moving, was a month of frantic activity.

Everything in the Little Yellow House was cleaned, packed, and moved to the new Magnolia house. Even the stoves had to be sparkling clean for moving.

The cream separator — kept in the porch of Little House #1 and in the Summer Kitchen of House #2 — was moved into a special room for it at the front of the new barn. How handy!

Everything in the old farm buildings had to be hauled to the new farm. Pa needed all his farm equipment. Yes, he already had the new tractor and its implements. And he had to add more new equipment, since this farm was larger. Other than that, he began with what he had and added more as he needed it.

All the livestock had to be moved.

The pigs. Katherine wished she didn't have to help with them . . . but she did, of course. They were moved in a wagon with an end-gate.

The dozen cows. Katherine pictured them on their daily walk along the edge of the corn fields, thought how faithfully they gave milk — the whole milk to churn cream and the skim milk to make cheese and to feed hogs. Pa would now save some calves to increase the size of the herd.

The chickens. Katherine felt her cheek. Yes, she still had the scar from a scratch given by an ornery old hen! Hens weren't fun to load into wagons, either.

The dogs. Watchie, who saved the children from the angry bull, had recently died. Two dogs, Puppy and Terry, moved along with the family. Puppy was getting older, had already been their dog in the Little White House. Terry was a younger and smaller dog, part Terrier. Mom had said she'd never have a house dog . . . but Terry became a house dog, the only indoor pet they ever had.

A few days before the final move, they loaded breakable house items onto a hayrack. Everything was insulated with straw bales so nothing would break. Dishes were carefully packed in boxes and surrounded with bales. A large mirror was laid flat on top of several bales with blankets on top of it.

Molly and Frank pulled the hayrack. Willie and Gerrit rode on the hayrack to make sure nothing shifted and broke. Papa followed with his truck, also loaded with household items.

Once there, Molly and Frank remained at the new farm, their new home.

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One of the blessings of moving was visiting. They had so many friends in the Rock Rapids' area! Most of their neighbors and friends had been over, some of them several times, to help as much as possible. Scarcely a day went by that someone didn't stop in for a few hours.

Katherine was especially happy when the Smidstra family came over. Her friend Jessie came with her family. They only helped for one afternoon, but it was so special to visit as they worked! Jessie promised to visit them also in their Magnolia home as soon as possible.

On the actual moving day, the house swarmed with neighbors and friends. Everyone hated to see them go, even though they were happy for them that they had a new and larger farm.

Papa and Mama kept reminding people that, with modern cars and pickups, they weren't that far away. You could drive from Rock Rapids to Magnolia in only half an hour! They were welcome to stop in for coffee and a visit anytime they had a free evening.

It wasn't , after all, as if they were moving across the ocean. While they were moving to a new state, they were still not that far away.

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The day they moved, Katherine noticed that John and Marvin were both very downcast. She remembered how she had felt when they moved from House 1 to House 2, as if her whole world had fallen apart. She could tell that this was how they now felt.

When Katherine saw Marvin run behind the new house to hide, she followed him. She found him sitting behind the house, head on his knees, trying to swallow his tears. Quietly, she sat down next to him.

"Moving is hard, isn't it, Marvin?" she asked gently.

"I want to go back home!" Marvin gulped, trying his best not to cry.

"I know how you feel," Katherine replied. "It is never easy to leave the only world you've ever known. I'll never forget how hard it was for me to leave the first home I knew, the Little White House. I couldn't imagine that I'd ever be happy somewhere else.

"But you know something? God is the same no matter where you live. He was in the Little White House and also in the Little Yellow House. Marvin, He's with us here, too. Here by Magnolia, in Papa and Mama's third rental home. Don't you think He can make you happy here, too?"

"But . . . but I have to quit kindergarten!" Marvin stammered. He had begun Kindergarten in Iowa but Magnolia had no kindergarten. He would have to stay home until first grade and then start all over, already knowing the things he would be taught there.

"That is too bad," Katherine nodded her head. "Maybe we can keep studying at home a bit, though. And just think," she added, trying to lighten the mood, "next year you'll be the smartest boy in your grade in Magnolia!"

Marvin gave her a weak smile, trying to be a good sport.

"Ready to go help Pa and Ma again?" Katherine encouraged. "There are lots of things to carry in, you know. 'Many hands make work light!'"

Taking her hand, Marvin followed her back to the wagon. And all the rest of the day, whenever Katherine checked, he kept busy carrying things in. When he caught Katherine watching him, he gave her a brave smile . . . and she gave him a conspiratorial wink.

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What a great feeling, though, when the last boxes were packed away!

They were now totally moved. This farm near Magnolia was their new official home. They were beginning a new life, a life in Minnesota.

**“Be not forgetful to entertain
strangers: for thereby some
have entertained angels
unaware . . .”**

