

A small girl helps in a BIG way

By Julie Pruitt

Annie quietly slid from her bed and tiptoed to the front door. Sleeping in one bed with three

older sisters cramped the small seven-year-old girl. She loved the woods near her family home, and sometimes, when everyone was asleep, she sneaked outside. Tonight was one of those nights.

Carefully Annie unlatched the door and stepped into the night's fresh air. With the crickets chirping, she gazed at her beloved stars that twinkled back at her.

Then, Annie heard someone softly crying back inside the house. She hadn't closed the door and worried that she had awakened Baby Hulda. Peeping into the dark house, Annie listened. She heard the crying again. The sound was **muffled**, like someone trying to hide sadness in a pillow.

As she strained to see through the night's misty shadows, Annie realized that the crying wasn't coming from her baby sister's crib. The sobs drifted from her momma's bed.

"Momma, what's wrong? Annie quietly asked as she reached her mother's bedside.

"Phoebe Ann, you're supposed to be in bed."

If Annie hadn't been concerned about her mother, she would have scrunched her nose and stomped her feet at the sound of "Phoebe." She hated her first name. Her older sisters

called her "Annie," and she liked that just fine.

"Momma, why are you crying?" Annie **persisted**. She reached for her mother's hand and patted it between her own tiny fingers.

"Annie, my dear girl ..." Momma Moses started to say, but her tears started flowing again and the words melted into more hushed sobs.

"Momma, whatever is wrong, I will help you."

"I pray that you could help me, my girl. If only you could,"

Momma Moses said sadly. "Since your pa died, we've been living hard times. I can barely keep us all fed."

"Momma, I can help get food," Annie exclaimed. "I know how to trap – papa taught me and Little John."

"Don't worry about it now, child," Momma Moses said as she hugged her daughter. "You go back to sleep and dream sweet dreams."

Annie crawled back into her bed (she had to give Lizzie a nudge to move her over). An hour would pass before Annie could sleep. She kept plotting how she and John would trap and hunt enough food to feed the family.

Early the next morning, Annie

sprang from bed and awoke her younger brother John from his feather-stuffed mat on the floor.

"Come on, John," Annie said as she tickled her brother to **rouse** him. "We're going trapping, like papa taught us."

Annie grabbed a handful of dried corn and a tool from the shed before she and John headed into the forest. When they reached a shaded clearing, they knelt down and dug a small deep hole with a hand spade Annie had

brought. When the hole was deep enough, they covered it with sticks and weed stalks. The final step

was sprinkling a few of the precious corn seeds over the top of the trap. The two then hid behind some nearby bushes and waited.

"Can we go home, now," John whimpered after ten minutes of squirming silence.

"Sh-h-h-h! You're going to scare off the grouse," Annie warned her brother. "I know I saw some grouse near these trees the other day."

While Annie was yet speaking, a fat grouse **strutted** into the

thicket. He pecked around at some weeds until he eyed the kernels of corn. The rusty-colored bird inched toward the tempting grain. Just as the fowl was about to peck the golden treasure, the sticks crumbled inward and the grouse fell into Annie and John's trap.

Annie came charging from her hiding spot with John close behind her.

"We caught a grouse! We caught it!" she hollered.

Annie pounced across the

trap's opening and scooped the **indignant** bird from the hole.

"John, give me your jacket!" Annie exclaimed.

John took off his light jacket and handed it to Annie. She secured it firmly around the bird. Then, she and John dashed home to share their fortune with their Momma and four sisters.

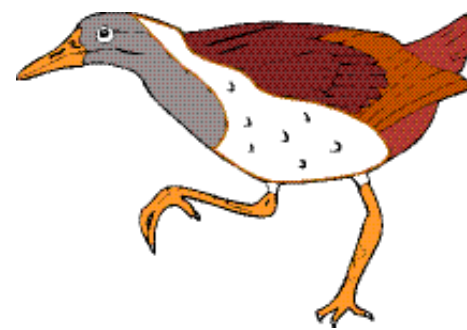
That night, the Moses family had one of the best meals they had eaten in weeks – roasted grouse stuffed with cornmeal dressing and hickory nuts, with pole beans on the side.

As Momma Moses said the mealtime prayer, she gave thanks

for the grouse and her daughter's **talent**.

"Lord, you know I didn't think Phoebe ... I mean Annie ... could do it, but You and she proved me wrong," she humbly prayed. "Thank you for giving so big a talent to so small girl."

Trapping game to feed her family would be the beginning of Annie's talents that she would one day share with the world.



Next week —
"Annie breaks her mother's rule"

What did you notice about the story?

- 1.) What is a grouse? a.) a bird b.) a reptile c.) an insect d.) a mammal
- 2.) Use one word to describe Annie. Explain why you chose your word to describe Annie.
- 3.) How old is Annie in the story? How many brothers and sisters does she have? How many are older and younger than she?
- 4.) If your family were starving, what could you do to help feed them?
- 5.) The main character in the story is Phoebe Ann Moses, nicknamed Annie. She would become a famous person as an adult. Do you know who she is yet? (Hint: she would change part of her name.)
- 6.) In the story, there are six bolded words (**muffled**, **persisted**, **rouse**, **strutted**, **indignant**, **talent**). Can you find them? Do you know what they mean? Try using each word in a sentence that you write or say.
- 7.) Write a short story about how you could help your family in some way.