

Davie's Corn Patch

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“I WANTA garden this year,” Jane said. Jane was seven years old and her long chestnut hair was tied up in two red rubberbands.

“Me, too,” Davie added, pulling his straw hat on his head.

It was a warm May day and time to think about gardens and vegetables to eat in the summer. Daddy was planning where he would plant the radishes and lettuce. A merry twinkle lit up his eyes as the children spoke to him. He answered slowly, “You’re gonna have your own little patches of ground this year, and you can plant

anythin' you wanta."

"Oh, goody!" Jane began jumping up and down, and the little pigtailed bobbed merrily, too.

"Mine's gonna have straighter rows than yours," Davie put in.

"Mine'll have straight rows, too," Jane said, "and a bigger space, too, 'cause I'm older."

"Phooey, I c'n garden best!" and Davie wrinkled up his face and stuck his tongue out at Jane.

"Hey, that's enough of that. You'll each have the same size plots," Daddy said quickly. "What d' ya wanta grow?"

"Beans!"

"Corn-on-the-cob!" answered Jane at the same moment.

"O yeh, corn-cobs!" Davie changed his mind.

The two excited children, both in blue jeans and red plaid shirts, were out in the backyard. Their daddy had just finished plowing up a section of the yard for the garden. He wiped the sweat off his forehead with a big red hanky, and sat down to light his pipe.

"Here're your seeds," he said and put little packages of yellow corn into Jane's and Davie's outstretched little hands. "We'll put sticks 'n th' ground, 'n' tie strings 'round 'em, to mark off your own plots." Their enthusiastic father began to pace off spaces for them to plant their seeds.

"Ya grow corn in hills. We studied it in school," Jane said to Davie. He was standing in the middle of his square, his feet wide apart.

"I don't wanna grow mine in hills," he replied, defiance in his voice.

"But that's so they get sunshine, see?"

"I wan' mine in th' valleys t' get water." And that was what he did. While Jane carefully shaped mounds of fragrant soil with her slender hands, Davie made little hills, too. But while Jane tucked her seeds one at a time into the center of the rounded mud nests, Davie forced each kernel into grooved hollow places between the heaps of freshly turned earth.

Suddenly Davie was lying on his tummy, with his toes dug in the rich soil. He was watching a big worm slipping in the pungent dirt. "Look, Daddy, my dirt has somebody in it."

He and Jane went over and looked at the "somebody."

"It's a worm, Dopey," Jane told him. "Worms're for fishin'."

"They help the soil, too," Daddy said.

"Ooey, worms!" Jane shuddered and went back to her work. Her red sandals were heavy with the moisture and sticky clay that clung to the soles.

After a little silence in which they all worked hard, Davie grew tired. "When can we eat the cob-on-the-corn, Daddy?" He was looking closely at the first place where he had stuck a seed.

"Well," Daddy emptied the radish seeds into a furrow, and straightened up, "it takes a few days for the seeds to sprout. And

then, it takes quite a long time 'fore the stalks have ears." He tried to explain it better with waving arms.

"But I wanta eat mine now!" Dave wailed. He ran his tongue around his lips making a clean line on his chin below the lower lip.

"Can't be done, Stupie," Jane said in scorn. "You hafta wait 'till it's ready." She began to roll the dirt on her hands into a tight ball with a circular motion.

Davie still wasn't convinced. He was eager for his corn to be the first green shoot to break through the ground.

That night after supper, he went out to his corn patch. He groped on his knees, poking an inquisitive finger into the valleys, until he felt a seed. He lifted it out of its resting place. He looked at it closely in the white moonlight. He couldn't make out a sign of a root. "Aren't you gonna grow sometime?" he asked it seriously. He bent his head close to the seed and waited for an answer. Then he put the corn tenderly back into its hole.

Night after night, Davie disappeared from the house, and went out to the garden. He dug up one seed after another, and spoke to them. "Aren't you sprouted yet?" or "When will ya have a root?" He would then carefully replace it after looking for some signs of life in the yellow grain. He was getting impatient with his garden for not giving him any corn-on-the-cob yet.

A week had gone by, and Davie had not missed a night talking to his sleeping seeds. Jane met him this time as he came in the back door. "Where ya bin?" she asked.

"Nowheres," he answered, quickly hiding his dirty hands behind him.

"What's on yur hands?"

"Nothing."

She pulled one of his arms forward and looked at his caked fingers. "It's dirt! You've bin out in th' garden!"

"So what, Miss Smarty?" He had to swallow hard to conceal his discouragement that was close to tears.

"What'cha bin doin' out there? Diggin' up th' seeds t'see if they're sprouted yet?"

"No-o," he lied.

"They won't grow if ya keep a-diggin' them up, Stupie!"

Davie wrenched himself loose from her grasp, and climbed up on the kitchen stool to wash the tell-tale grime off his fists. He glanced sorrowfully out of the window above the sink, while the water ran up his sleeves.

Then from his perch on the stool, he saw a small figure carefully stepping through the strings and sticks in the backyard. He could see the pigtails flying out behind the bent head. It was Jane. She stooped over and dug in one of the hills with her fingers. She pulled out a swelled-up kernel, and, through the open window, Davie heard her ask, "When *are* you goin' ta sprout?"