

Actions Speak Louder . . .

Anna C. Monahan

“WHO did this?” came explosively from the bedroom. And from the living room, out of sight around the corner, piped the answer, “I did it, Mommy. What did I do?”

Usually he had, too, whatever it was. When the television acted up, he had “poured water down the little holes in the back, cause that’s how Mommy fixes her iron.” He dragged his grandmother’s freshly washed, still wet clothes across the basement floor and up the steps so he could drop them down the clothes chute “to see how it worked.” If his own room was too warm for comfort, he turned off the furnace and the rest of the family were chilled through. He discovered how to build a ladder by pulling out the drawers, each a little farther than the one above, in the cabinets and chests, and no spot in the house was inaccessible. He knew how to operate the dishwasher, the garbage disposal, and the washing machine, and how to fix the temperamental clothes dryer—“You have to kick it, right there.”

They couldn’t teach him how to fight, but he could run faster than any other little boy in the neighborhood. It seemed to his mother that she could look out the window almost any hour of the day and see Chris, his skinny little legs working like pistons, with a pursuer just an arm’s length away. Exasperated, she talked to him about standing up for his rights and taking his own part; his dad tried to teach him to box. His reasoning was always the same.

“I *can’t* hit him. He’s my friend!”

There was one exception to this rule. Although Sharon, his younger sister, was a husky little tomboy and a match for any child in the neighborhood, let any hand, no matter what its size, be raised against her, and Chris materialized like magic. “Let her alone! She’s my sister!”

Ol’ Lady Kratch

Mary Johnson

NO! SHE ain’t no sixty years old. She’s only forty. I don’t care who told it. People talk bad about her now; they forget how good she was. After her dad died, she didn’t have to keep the Cabinet Works going. She’d been away to school all her life, remember. She didn’t have no ties here in Kratchville. But she stayed just the same. If she’d sold out, everybody here woulda had to go to Daleville for work cause the Kratch Cabinet Works is all we got. She raised wages and give vacations—that’s something Ol’ Man Kratch would never a done. And that ain’t all she done neither. She put lots of kids from this town through college and, if you’ll remember, Elinor Jenkins was one of ’em.