

The Mitchells:

Five for Victory

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
Hilda van Stockum



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*To my beloved brother Willem
and to all others
who laid down their lives
for their friends*



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1. Father Leaves

IN THE hot July sun Washington's Union Station seemed like a vaulted oven. Joan felt the heat more than the other Mitchell children because she rushed around so. She could see little sweat drops glistening on her nose when she shut one eye. She tried it first on the left side and then on the right. It made her forget about Daddy. Joan hated "good-bys" and this one was going to be terrible, worse even than when Uncle Jim had left. Daddy hadn't been drafted very long yet, and the Mitchells had hoped he would have a long period of training first, like Uncle Jim. But the Navy needed electrical engineers so badly that they had made Daddy a lieutenant right away and after a few weeks' training he had been assigned to a ship. Now his family was seeing him off.

A lot of other people seemed to be leaving at the same time as Daddy. The station was full of uniforms, weeping ladies and shrieking children. Joan hoped Mother wouldn't cry. She knew Grannie would, but Grannie was so old Joan felt sure people would understand and forgive her. Besides, there were strangers who were sobbing too, and Joan appeared to be the only one who blushed for them. One soldier

had to take leave of a dog, and the dog didn't understand. He was a strong dog and he was dragging a red-eyed lady around on a leash. When the soldier tried to rush past the ticket collector, the dog gave a howl and bounded after him, tripping up Daddy with the leash. Luckily Daddy was able to catch his balance in midair.

"Dogs!" he muttered in a tone of rage. Daddy hated dogs.

"I'm so sorry," began the lady on the leash, but the dog didn't wait for her to finish. He whisked her off and she soon vanished in the crowd.

"Dogs!" repeated Father, almost sounding like one himself, he growled so. "Useless parasites of civilization, objects of slobbering sentimentality, verminous vandals. . . ."

"Daddy, don't say such bad words!" cried Joan, shocked. Daddy's blue eyes twinkled down on her.

"Joan," he said, "I know you and I warn you. Don't you go filling my house with animals while I'm gone. I don't want to come back to a *zoo*! And especially, *no dogs*! Do you hear?"

"Yes, Daddy," said Joan meekly, though with a heavy heart. Joan loved animals and longed for a pet, but Daddy said five children were noise, confusion and expense enough.

"Hurry, John!" cried Mother, who was trying to keep her youngest daughter from being trampled underfoot. "We're late!"

Joan's heart skipped a beat. What if Daddy missed the train and let the ship go off without him? Would he be courtmartialed? They were very strict in the Navy.

"Daddy! Daddy! Hurry!" she cried, tugging at his uniform.

But Daddy was as calm as ever. Now they were shoving past the ticket collector and there beside the platform stood the train, panting to leave. Lieutenant Mitchell took a hasty farewell of his family. First Grannie, then Mother, who held Baby Timmy, then Joan, Patsy, Peter and Angela. The train was already in motion when he jumped on, his cap at a rakish angle.

"Don't forget your gun!" shouted Peter after him. "And shoot first, hear?"

"And bring back a baby-orphan from Europe!" yelled Patsy. Daddy was already too far off to hear, which was just as well, thought Mother. She had enough children to take care of at present.

"You take Peter and Patsy, Grannie, will you?" she said. "And watch out for those luggage carts. Joan! You hold Angela."

Another train thundered into the station, oozing passengers, who pushed past Mother and unsettled her pretty new hat with the red cherries. It dropped over one ear, giving Mother a wild look as she clutched Timmy and tried to watch over the other children as well.

“Take care!” she cried, but Joan had already caught Angela before the child could fall off the platform.

Angela was the beauty of the family and she had need to be, as Mother often remarked grimly. If she hadn’t been so cherubic, with long blond curls, wistful blue eyes and the most enchanting little legs in the whole wide world, she’d surely have been disowned long ago! She was more trouble than the rest of the family put together. Now she set up a howl as Joan attempted to force her to follow the family procession.

“My shoe!” she screamed. “My li’l shoe!” Joan looked down. Yes—Angela was walking on one sock and one shoe.



“Mother! Mother!” cried Joan. “Wait!” Mother heard her, notwithstanding the roar and rumble of traffic.

“What is it?” she asked, turning around.

“Angela has lost her shoe.”

“Oh my goodness,” sighed Mother. “And I’ve spent my last shoe stamp. We’ll just have to find it.” She gazed around at the shuffling crowd.

“Grannie!” she cried. Grannie had gone on, not noticing the interruption, but Peter pulled her to a standstill. “Mother is calling you.”

“Yes, what?” said Grannie. She was thinking of Daddy and it was hard to make her understand.

“Shoe? Which shoe?” she asked.

“Never mind,” said Mother. “You go on with Peter and Patsy; we’ll find you in the waiting room. I’ve got to hurry and look for that shoe.”

So Grannie walked on with her portion of the Mitchell family, while Mother straightened her hat, settled Timmy firmly on her arm and ran back to Joan and Angela, who each wanted to go in a different direction. Poor Joan’s face looked like a radish.

“It’s no use,” she cried bitterly. “I can’t do a thing with her.” And with melancholy eyes she watched a bead of sweat roll down her nose and jump off at the tip.

“My shoe!” cried Angela in a heartbroken voice. “The pretty li’l one!”

“Where did you lose it?” asked Mother, peering around in vain.

“Down there,” said Angela, pointing a fat little finger at the tracks. “I threw him.”

“You threw it?” cried Mother indignantly. Joan couldn’t help laughing, and after casting an angry look at her, Mother had to laugh, too. The little white shoe perched jauntily on one of the gleaming steel tracks.

“How shall we ever get it back?” sighed Mother.

“Why don’t you ask a porter?” suggested Joan.

“I see one there,” and she was off, presently returning with a redcap, who took in the situation at once.

“I’ll have it for you in a jiffy, ma’am,” he promised, lowering himself to the tracks while Joan watched anxiously for possible trains. The porter picked up the shoe, dusted it on his sleeve, and leaped back on to the platform with astonishing agility.

“Now don’t go losing it again, honey,” he told Angela as he bent to put the shoe back on her foot. Angela rewarded him with a

golden smile. The porter flashed his teeth at her and straightened up again.

“Lawdy, ma’am!” he cried, rolling his eyes and pointing at Timmy, who sat still as an angel on Mother’s arm. “That chile is eating your hat!” Mother hastily lowered Timmy to look at him. The baby gazed back at her complacently, his face smeared with red paint. In his hands he held the pretty bunch of imitation cherries, several of them obviously missing.

“Goodness, I hope they’re not poisonous!” cried Mother, trying to clean Timmy’s face with her handkerchief.

The redcap laughed. “I don’t reckon so, ma’am,” he murmured consolingly. “They’re just paper and paint; he’ll never notice it. It was your hat I was thinking of, such a pretty hat, too. Give me the boy, I’ll tote him for you; you look plumb tuckered out.” And the good-natured porter took Timmy and put him on his shoulder. Timmy gazed triumphantly down on Mother.

“That is a relief,” sighed Mother gratefully, fanning herself with her plucked hat.

“Where were you all fixing to go?” asked the redcap.

“To the waiting room,” said Mother, hurrying to keep up with his long strides. “I have more children there, waiting with my mother-in-law.”

“Whew!” whistled the porter. “How are you all going to get home?”

“In a taxi, I suppose,” said Mother wearily. She couldn’t face the long bus journey after all this. It meant changing into another bus, half-way, too.

“You’ll need a moving van,” the redcap told her. He pushed ahead, Timmy crowing with delight at seeing so much of the world. Mother and Joan followed, with Angela between them.

When they arrived at the spacious waiting room with its ocean of seats, Mother asked: “Do you see Grannie anywhere?” Joan peered around.

“No,” she said.

“I wonder where she went?” murmured Mother.

“There’s a lady’s waiting room further on,” the porter pointed out helpfully. “Perhaps she went there.”

“Yes . . .” said Mother. “That will be it,” and she made a motion to go on, but Joan had caught sight of a glass counter and cried: