

Baby Doll



A story based on Pearl Biggers Fansler Caruso's memories

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We came to Indian Territory about the spring of 1907 when I was four years old.

It was a long way from my grandparents' home in Ash flat, Arkansas. It was the longest trip I ever made in a covered wagon.

Day after day we trundled along, our wagon wheels making their own tracks through the tall grass.

It had been weeks since we started our journey. Twelve miles a day, if we were lucky.

I was the youngest in the family. My three sisters and three brothers were all a lot older than me. In fact, my two oldest sisters were already married and each had a baby of their own.



My oldest sister, Cora, married John Grigsby in Arkansas, two months after I was born, in 1902. I liked John. He gave me a baby doll with a red dress. It was the first little doll I had that would go to sleep, you know, it would close it's eyes see.

One evening we were making camp by a grove of trees. I was tired from the long day of traveling in the hot wagon bed. I wanted to get out and run!

I grabbed my baby doll and crawled out of the wagon. As I started to run I noticed the roots of the trees were kind of white looking in the moonlight. **I caught my foot on the root of a tree and fell to the ground.**



I cried because my knees stung. I cried because my hands were bleeding. I cried because I was just so tired. But, I wailed when I discovered my baby doll was dead! It was horrible! **Her eyes were out of place and sunk back into her head!**

“Go bury her!” I sobbed to my brother-in-law, John, as I pushed my baby doll into his hands.

Nothing my sister, Cora, said or did helped. I felt so sad.

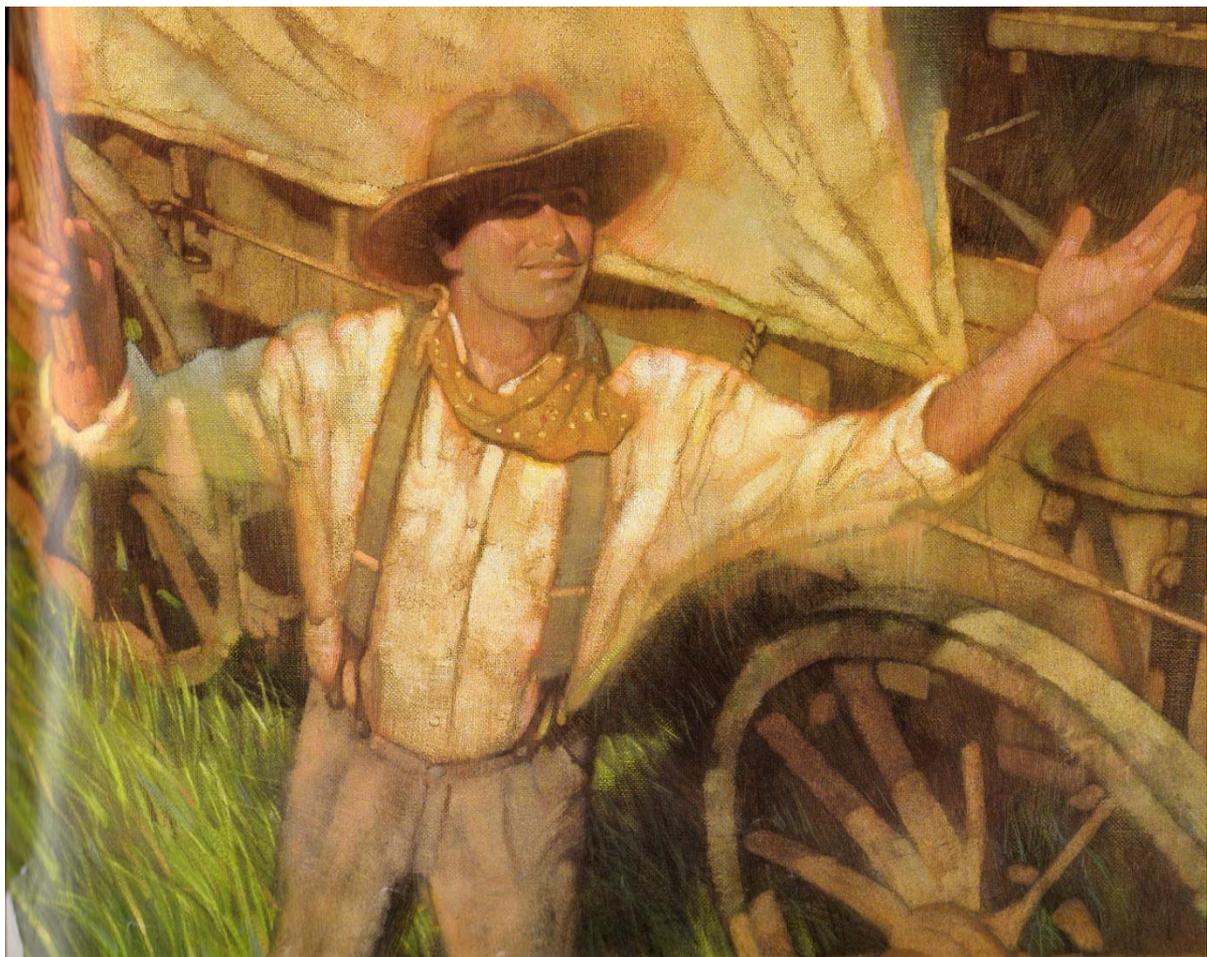


Father tried to cheer me up by playing his violin. I watched the curl of reddish blond hair on his forehead dance as he bobbed his head to the music. I fell asleep in my mother's arms blanketed by her long, dark black hair, while father's Scotch-Irish accent filled the sky with his favorite tune in honor of his mother, Peggy:

***If her eyes are blue as skies,
That's Peggy O'Neil.***

***If she smiling all the while
That's Peggy O'Neil.***

***If she walks like a sly little rogue-
If she talks with a cute little brogue-
Sweet personality, full of rascality,
That's Peggy O'Neil.***



Eventually we landed in Indian Territory - Cherokee Strip, they called it.

“Don’t tell anyone I’m part Cherokee Indian,” Mother made me promise.

“We could get a free homestead, Margaret, if we tell them you’re 1/8 Cherokee,” Father commented.

“I don’t want to take the risk of being treated different, Bill,” Mother shuddered. “I’m not an Indian, I’m American.”

Just a few months later on November 16, 1907 Indian Territory officially became known as Oklahoma, the 46th state.

The next year, 1908, we moved from Tahlequah to Stuart, Oklahoma where father started farming cotton.



John found work at the coal mine in McAlester, Oklahoma, twenty miles east of Stuart.

I liked to go visit them on the train.

John took me to the first movie I had ever seen and they had those kids, those little tiny kids that were always playing pranks called, "Our Gang." It was before "The Rascals."

You may be wondering what happened to my doll. Cora hid her and eventually had the eyes repaired and made a new dress.

"Here's a new doll, Pearlie," Cora told me, but I knew it was the same one.



I rode in covered wagons, horse and buggy and I rode a horse and the first little car that came out, you know, and the train. So I've been in all transportation.

The End

Fall 1908 – shortly before Bill died of double pneumonia in October

Ecles Biggers – age 22 Arkie Biggers – age 17



Cora – age 24
& William
John Grigsby
& baby

Norah –
age 19 &
Jess Smith
& baby

Margaret – age 41 Bill – age 46
Jesse – age 14 Pearl – age 6 Esley – age 12