

The Feather Bed

(adapted) Mary Pratt Parrish, *Friend*, Feb 1971, 2

Tommy and Betsy were excited and happy about going out west. “It is just like going on a picnic,” said Betsy.

“It would be if it weren’t so cold,” replied Tommy, as he snuggled down into the featherbed. Its feathery softness kept Tommy and Betsy snug and warm, even though the wind was blowing, snow was falling, and ice was forming on the edges of the wagon cover.

The road was ice-covered. As they started down the steep slope to the river, Father called to Tommy and Betsy, “You had better get out of the wagon and walk. It will be safer that way.”

They climbed out of the wagon and, lowering their heads into the wind, walked the remaining distance down the hill to the river.

When Tommy and Betsy saw Father leading the frightened oxen and Mother walking by his side, holding a pan to protect his head from the hailstones, they were glad that they weren’t found crying. Happily they climbed into the back of the wagon and settled once more into the cozy warmth of their featherbed.

In a moment or two, Tommy raised a corner of the wagon cover and peeked out. To his amazement he saw wagons coming from every part of town. “How can they all cross the river?” he wondered aloud. “The ferry is locked in ice.”

His father, who at that moment was near the back of the wagon, heard Tommy and answered him. “We will go across the river on the bridge our Heavenly Father has provided—a bridge of ice a mile long.”

Tommy looked across the river. It was so far to the other side! Could a river so big freeze solid enough to hold up a heavy covered wagon? He was breathless with fear that when his father moved the oxen onto the ice it would crack, but it did not! Tommy and Betsy sighed with relief as one wagon after another followed until there was a whole train of them moving slowly across the river. The ice would hold!

For a moment all was quiet, and into their hearts came a feeling that their Heavenly Father really loved them and that he would watch over and protect them on their journey west. It was then that a woman started to sing, and soon others joined in. The singing continued until the wagon train arrived at Sugar Creek.

The people who had arrived there the week before heard the singing, and they built campfires—many of them—to welcome the travelers and so that all could get warm when they arrived. Tommy and Betsy were thankful for the campfires. Tommy left the

fire first to help his father feed the oxen and milk the cow.

“Betsy,” called her mother, “please bring a loaf of bread out of the bread box so we can have bread and milk for supper.”

The loaf of bread was frozen solid. Her mother tried to cut it with a knife. Then she tried to break it with a hammer, but she only succeeded in making Betsy laugh. When her father came with a pail of milk, he said, “I’ll get the saw,” and they all laughed when they saw him try to cut that little loaf of bread with his big saw. He succeeded in breaking off small pieces. Tommy and Betsy put these pieces into the warm milk.

That night when Tommy and Betsy snuggled down into their warm featherbed, they thought of all that had happened during the day. Betsy thought of her kitten, of the chair with the big round back, and of the clock they’d left back in Nauvoo. In her mind she could hear the clock saying “Sleep, Betsy. Sleep, Betsy,” just as it used to do. And Betsy was soon asleep.

With Tommy it was different. He thought about the wicked men who had driven them from Nauvoo, and he hoped these men would not follow them out west. The more he thought, the more wide-awake he became. Then he heard the ice on the wagon cover crack as Father raised a corner and said, “Tommy, Betsy, wake up!”

Tommy was up in an instant. “Is something the matter?” he asked.

“Sister Johnson has a new baby girl,” replied his father. “Your featherbed would help the mother and the baby keep warm on this bitter cold night.”

By that time Betsy was awake, and both she and Tommy helped their father pull the featherbed out of the wagon. Afterwards, her father bundled Betsy up in some quilts and she went back to sleep.

Tommy was too excited to sleep. Soon his mother came out of Sister Johnson’s wagon carrying the baby. “It will only be a minute before the featherbed is ready, and then we will tuck her in next to her mother, and she will be snug and warm,” she said. The next morning when he and Betsy asked about the baby, their mother said, “Instead of just one new baby, there were nine babies born last night.”

“Nine new babies!” Tommy and Betsy could hardly believe their ears.

Mother looked from one to the other and said softly, “I know of at least one of those babies who is doing well because two kind children gave up their precious featherbed so the baby could be warm.”

Tommy and Betsy smiled at each other, and a warm glow of happiness filled their hearts.