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# 1

## The Organizer

**J**oanne was the oldest of the three Otto girls. She had the reddest hair and the bluest eyes of them all. Maybe because she was the oldest, she liked to organize people and things. After all, she would be ten years old next year, and she did know a lot. She certainly knew more than her two younger sisters, Joyce and Jeannie.

The Otto family lived in a large, partly finished log house. The house had no doors between its rooms, no carpet on its floors, and no cupboards in the kitchen. But it was snug and warm. A big fireplace in the middle of the house separated the kitchen and the large open living room.

The three girls slept in a loft that they reached by climbing a ladder made of small peeled poles. Dad worked for a company that made computer parts, and



Mom took care of the girls and their little brother Justin.

“When I have time,” Dad often said, “I’ll put in a kitchen sink and cupboards.” But for now, they washed dishes the old-fashioned way. Every night after supper, Mom filled two plastic tubs with water from the faucet in the laundry room. She carried them to the kitchen table for the girls to wash the dishes.

Joanne liked to do things in an orderly way. She always washed the cups first, then the plates, then the silverware, and last of all, the big pans. She had a special place for everything when she put clean dishes in the draining rack.

When the middle sister Joyce washed the dishes, she plunked the clean dishes into the drainer wherever they happened to land. This careless method bothered Joanne. “Why don’t you set them like this?” she fussed. She rearranged the dishes herself before drying them.

Every Saturday morning the girls had to clean their bedroom. Joanne drew a map of the room showing where everything was to go. “Our china dishes will sit on the shelf between the windows,” she told her sisters. “The dolls and teddy bears belong in the old wooden cradle. The coloring books and crayons need to go in the old school desk in the corner. Joyce and Jeannie, you have to make sure the storybooks are lined up neatly on the bookshelf.”

Joyce and Jeannie rolled their eyes at each other. They didn’t always like Joanne’s way of organizing everything.

## Chapter 1

One Saturday Joanne was especially upset with her sisters. “These stuffed toys belong in the cradle!” she sputtered. She scooped the fuzzy monkey and a baby doll from under the covers on Jeannie’s bed.

“But I want my monkey and my doll in bed with me,” complained Jeannie. As soon as Joanne turned her back, Jeannie rescued them from the cradle where Joanne had tossed them.

“You can get them every night,” said Joanne. “But in the daytime they should stay in the cradle. Your bed looks lumpy with those things under the blankets.” Joanne tucked the doll and monkey back into the cradle.

“Joyce, how many times do I have to tell you to put your books back on the shelf?” Joanne scolded. She swept up an armload of books from Joyce’s nightstand.

“But I’m reading those!” wailed Joyce. She grabbed for her books. “Put them back.”

“You can’t read all of them at once,” Joanne objected. She turned away so Joyce couldn’t snatch the books.

Mom heard the argument. She left their little brother Justin in the living room with some toys. She came up the ladder to settle the problem. “Joanne,” she said, “I know you like to have everything organized. It’s good that you like to keep your room neat, but you need to let the other girls be themselves too. You can keep your own corner spic and span, but if Joyce wants to read books, let her keep them on her stand. If Jeannie wants to leave her dolls in her bed, let her. God makes each of us different. We can’t expect everyone to do things exactly as we would.”

Joanne sighed. She put Joyce's books back on her nightstand and gave Jeannie her doll and monkey. It was hard to be the oldest. She *knew* how to keep a room tidy. But what could she do when the others wouldn't listen to her?