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EMMOT from The Roses of Eyam by Don Taylor

EMMOT

Father died on the Sunday night. The day after you came. Mother made us stay in the other room, and we heard crying. It's an indescribable noise, Rowland, a grown man dying: like a baby sobbing, except that it's low and deep. Mother wouldn't let us see him. The carpenter left a coffin outside the door, but he wouldn't come in. My mother had to do it all herself, even the nails. We stayed in during the week after the funeral, and it seemed all right. I was going to come and see you when I promised. Then on Saturday night, John got ill – my little brother John, and on Sunday morning Ellen was ill, too. John died at dinnertime on Sunday, and Ellen on Monday morning. I saw it all that time.

My mother couldn't manage two by herself. She kept crying and saying, "I'm sorry, Emmot, but you've got to help me with them". We stayed in the next week, too. There were other people dying in the village. Some of your cousins Torre, I think, but I don't know who. We just saw the coffins going past the window. The next Saturday – a week to the day, both the baby twins got ill. Only two, they didn't have any idea what was happening, except that it hurt. Elizabeth died on the Sunday. It seemed as though Alice was getting better, but on Tuesday night she died, too.

Then there was just my mother and me. Every day we sat opposite each other at the table, always on the same chairs, waiting for the first sign which of us would be the next. Which would have to bury the other.

We've been sitting like that for three weeks. But nothing has happened. Others are dying, but we pray that God has finished with us. We've been in the house all that time. Today is the first time I've been out since Alice was buried. We've been sitting there, all day, everyday, listening to the

church bell. It's a month since Alice died now, and it seemed as safe as it ever will be. So I came. That's why I haven't been before, Rowland.

[To return to the lists of speeches, exit this page](#)