

SO BIG BY EDNA FERBER

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Introducing "So Big" (Dirk DeJong) in his industry... CHAPTER II—Selma secures a position as teacher at the High Prairie school... CHAPTER III—The monotonous life of a country school-teacher... CHAPTER IV—Selma hears gossip concerning the affections of the Widow Paarlansberg... CHAPTER V—Propinquity in their positions of "teacher" and "pupil" and Selma's loneliness in her crowded surroundings... CHAPTER VI—Selma becomes Mrs. DeJong... CHAPTER VII—Dirk is eight years old when his father... CHAPTER VIII—Continued

"Take your hand off me!" Her speech was clipped, vibrant. "How dare you touch me! How dare you! Take your hand off me! How dare you touch my shoulder. He took his hand from her shoulder. The red surges heated toll-rows woman, her abundant hair shivered into a topknot... "We go home now?" demanded Dirk. "We go home now? I'm hungry." "Yes, lamb." Two dollars in her pocket. All yesterday's good soil, and all today's, and months of labor behind those two days. Two dollars in the pocket of her black calico petticoat. "We'll get something to eat when we drive out a ways. Some milk and bread and cheese." The sun was very hot. She took the boy's hand off, passed her tender work-enclosed hand over the damp hat that clung to his forehead... "Dear shock her. She told herself she was tired, nervous. That terrible week! And now this. The heat. Soon they'd be home, she and Dirk. The comfort of it, the peace of it. Safe, desirable, suddenly desired. A woman like that! Well, perhaps they were right. Down Washburn avenue, with the L trains thundering overhead and her fears, frightens and unguessed, and her mind, her mind and danger of traffic. It was terribly hot. The boy's eyes popped with excitement and bewilderment. "Pretty soon," Selma said. The minutes showed white beneath the skin of her jaw. "Pretty soon. Prairie avenue. Great big houses and lawns, all quiet." She even managed a smile. "I like it better home now." Prairie avenue at last, turning in at Sixteenth street. It was like calm after a storm. Selma felt battered, spent. Then another thought came to her. Her mind's eye saw a crowd, more and fresher than those in the nearby markets. Why not try to sell some of them here, in these big houses? In an hour she might earn a few dollars this way at retail prices slightly less than those asked by the grocers of the neighborhood. Agitely she stepped down the wheel, she ran to Dirk. She filled a large market basket, packed, packed and freshened of her stock and with this on her arm looked up a moment at the house in front of which she had stopped. The kitchen entrance, she knew, was at the alley at the back, but this she would not take. Across the sidewalk, down a little flight of stone steps, into the vestibule under the porch. She looked at the bell—a brass knob. "I can't! I can't!" cried all the prim dim Vermont Peakes in chorus. "All right. Starve to death and let them take the farm and Dirk, the poor woman selling in the market place is an innovation frowned upon."

"That's nothing to laugh at, is it? Stop laughing this minute, Selma Peake!" "I've stopped now. I was just laughing at my ignorance. Sweet and blood and health and youth go into every cabbage. Did you know that, Selma? Do you remember how I used to despise Mrs. Tebbitt's cabbage because she used to have boiled cabbage on Monday nights?" "That's nothing to laugh at, is it? Stop laughing this minute, Selma Peake!" "I've stopped now. I was just laughing at my ignorance. Sweet and blood and health and youth go into every cabbage. Did you know that, Selma? Do you remember how I used to despise Mrs. Tebbitt's cabbage because she used to have boiled cabbage on Monday nights?" "That's nothing to laugh at, is it? Stop laughing this minute, Selma Peake!" "I've stopped now. I was just laughing at my ignorance. Sweet and blood and health and youth go into every cabbage. Did you know that, Selma? Do you remember how I used to despise Mrs. Tebbitt's cabbage because she used to have boiled cabbage on Monday nights?"

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