

Voyage to Roswell

by Tatum Este'l



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The Preacher

Chapter One



Estel Bonine. There was nothing very remarkable about the man. He wasn't very tall, but skinny. He was a hard worker, loved carpentry, and worked as a farmhand on his father's farm in Texas alongside his five brothers and two sisters. There was Richard, whose square face and thin nose did not fit his name; Earl, who looked like a mature man from his birth;

Elijah Alexander Jr. the fisherman, with his ruddy complexion, always wanting to go to sea (everyone called him 'Leige); Paul, whom his father said would become a preacher but would rebel against him and become an alcoholic; James, the level headed, of whom everyone asked advice; little Viola, the dainty, who loved flowers and pretty dresses; and Eva, blonde and demure, a hard laborer in the cotton fields.

Estel's father lived up to his name of Alexander. He was quite the organizer and ran the farm like General Robert E. Lee, whom his father John had served under in the Civil War. His dad was not a man to be crossed, but he was always fair and a god-fearing Methodist. Estel's mama was sweet Alice who had the imagination of a Lewis Carroll, and whose mind was filled with strange ideas that came from too many books. It was she who drove her children to get a good education. She recited the Good Book every time discipline was needed.

Estel loved his mother. He would do anything for her. He himself had no real ambition but was encouraged by his teacher in school to try for a scholarship in a Methodist college. With her and his mother constantly prodding him as though he were a prized bull, he would do it just to get them off his back. He could have gone to college right out of high school if it hadn't been for the Germans invading France and the draft. President Woodrow Wilson had promised peace and non-intervention in foreign wars, but there was a faction in the government since the time of Teddy Roosevelt that thought the United States should be the policemen of the world. They persuaded the president to save our allies, Great Britain and France. Estel was sent off to North Africa.



In high school, when Estel was fourteen, he tried out for the school band. It wasn't a marching band then, but they played at school dances and concerts. He tried the drums. He had the rhythm, but it wasn't him. He picked up a flute and only silence came from his lips. The recorder wasn't bad, neither was the clarinet. What attracted him was the saxophone. Its brass, contorted lines, and the many valves intrigued him. The vibrating reed did not bother him like most students. His lips held it tight, and it sang for him.

Estel was not the kind of person to be bothered by chalk scratching the black board. He had an aloofness about him that many people thought was insensitivity. But after he married, his family found that he was very sensitive to the point where he would put up a strong emotional and defensive wall. That wall gave him a power he held over people, and his children took it as an authority to be obeyed.

On the other hand, Estel was jovial, playing tricks or telling jokes, but his laughter was restrained, having been trained by his mother's switch across his legs, a bare branch of a bush from which she had stripped the leaves.



During senior year, there was a new girl at band practice. Her name was Ruby, but her family called her "Nannie." She had rounded features but not was overweight. Her nose was especially round like pictures of Santa Claus. They call it a button nose. She had a sparkle in

her eyes as though she knew something you didn't and would sit and smile at you. She kept her long hair wrapped around her head, sometimes in braids. Her laughter was also restrained unless someone fell off their stool.

When Ruby sat down beside Estel and raised her saxophone to her lips, he felt excited and challenged. He put his saxophone up to his lips, accepting the challenge. She blew out a chord, and he matched it. She blew out another chord, and he matched that. He blew out a number of chords in a row, and she matched them, all the while smiling with her whole face. He stopped and laughed softly.

“The name's Estel,” he said, offering his hand.

She shook it and introduced herself. “Ruby.” She tried to imitate someone who was coy, but failed, because she giggled. “Looks like we're the only saxophones.”

“Yes,” he said, constraining his smile. “You play swell.”

“So do you.” She set up sheet music on a stand. “Can you play *Camp Town Races*?”

“Let's try it,” he said, putting his reed back into his mouth.

When the music teacher, Mr. Tangle, strolled in, Estel and Ruby were jamming. Mr. Tangle did not like anything spontaneous. He had to be in control, as he exhibited when he blew his top, banging on a music stand with his wand, saying, “That will be enough! The practice music is written on the board.” He pointed his wand at the black board.

Ruby giggled and Estel smiled. They turned to the right sheet music.

“I see we are all here,” said Mr. Tangle, whose name described his appearance. He tapped on the music stand in front of him. “Let's start.”



Estel and Ruby, after seeing each other several times in the music room, started seeing each other after school. He would walk her home and became familiar with her father Tatum Walker, another cotton farmer between Noodle and Merkel, Texas. The lane down to Ruby's home was lined with elms. They provided a crisp path of autumn gold to walk in. A pungent smell of cotton seed filled the air as the harvest began. It wasn't always cotton. There was also the perfume of freshly cut alfalfa upon the breeze mixed with the scent of cows. It was the smell of money and honest living. Strolling this lane in the late spring, holding hands and walking slowly, staring into each other's eyes, Estel and Ruby fell in love.



As Estel came into the house, Mama handed him a letter. "From the government," she said. "Must be important." She peered over his shoulder as he opened it.

"You are hereby notified pursuant to the act of Congress," he read, "approved May 18, 1917, you are called to military service of the United States by this local board from among those persons whose registration cards are within the jurisdiction of this local board."

Estel and his mama looked each other in the eye. Mama sighed and took the letter and read it again. "Yep. It has yer name on it." She looked up. "That what comes of registering."

"It was the law, Mama," he said matter-of-factly. "I'm gonna hightail it right back to Ruby's and ask her to marry me."

"You do that." As he let the screen door slam, Mama yelled out to him, "Don't they let you graduate first?"

“Remember, Mama,” Estel called back, “I’m a year older now.”

Viola, checking on some flowers she planted near the road saw her brother fly past her. “Where you goin’?”



“I have to ask a girl to marry me!” Estel called out as he ran down the road to the Walker farm. Estel forgot it was near dinner time, and he would be interrupting Ruby. She would be in the kitchen helping her mother. As Estel approached, he could see Papa Walker on the porch bouncing his little son, Willie, on his knee. He was singing something about knights and horses to his little one. Papa Walker had a long face with a small nose, bushy eyebrows and lots of curly hair. He was taller than most men in the area, over six feet. Several of his sons were six feet. Ruby was the short one.

“Hello, Papa Walker,” Estel greeted as he ascended the steps. “May I speak to Ruby?”

“She’s in the kitchen,” he said, letting his boy down. He started to get up, but Estel sat down beside him.

“Hump?” Papa Walker asked. “It must not be important what you have to say, or it is very important.” He stared at Estel, waiting for an explanation.

“Sir,” Estel said, swallowing nothing. “I don’t want to disrupt Ruby’s work, nor make your dinner late. I came here to ask for Ruby’s hand in marriage.” He hoped that the old man would give him his consent.

“Well,” Papa Walker said, peering into the blue sky, “you will have to take that up

with her ma.” Then he looked back at Estel. “Hump?” He waited. When there was no response, he said, “You may as well stay for dinner.”

When Ruby learned that Estel was there and that he was staying for dinner, she acted a bit perturbed. “Why is he here, Mama?” she asked, chopping up carrots. “What does he want?”

“Don’t be angry at the carrots,” Mama said. “They didn’t do anything to you.”

Ruby sighed. “Oh, bother!”

“Did you and Estel have an argument?” Mama took the carrots, added some potatoes, placed them around the roast and slid it into the oven of the wood stove.

“No, Mama.” Ruby grabbed the bowls and utensils they had been working with and placed them in the sink. “But I know what he wants.”

“And what is that, Dear?” Mama said as she wiped her hands on her apron and approached Ruby to be more private.

“He wants to marry me.” Ruby couldn’t look into her eyes as though she felt ashamed.

“What ever gave you that impression, Ruby?” Mama said with a wide grin on her face.

Ruby looked up and said, rather too loudly, “He’s staying for dinner, isn’t he? Why else would he stay?”

At the dinner table everyone was talking about the war in Europe and how President Wilson had reneged on his promise to keep us out of it. This made Estel tighten his stomach. He was losing his appetite. How was he going to explain that he was drafted just today, and that is why he wanted to marry Ruby?

He was sitting next to her, and she hadn’t said a word, just kept stuffing her mouth

full, glancing every now and then at Estel. He leaned over and whispered, “Ruby. I need to talk to you. Can you meet me outside after dinner?” She pretended not to hear him.

“They are pulling troops out of every state in the union,” Papa Walker said. “My oldest received his draft notice not two days ago.” He finished chewing, swallowed, and peered at Estel. “Have you received any letter recently, Estel?” He waited for a reply. “Hump?”

“Well ... Sir.” Estel choked and had to take a drink. “Yes ... yes Sir. Ahhh ... this is one of the reasons I came over today ... to address this situation.”

Estel touched Ruby’s hand she had placed on the table. She quickly removed it.

“Ruby ...” he said quietly.

“Mama!” Ruby pleaded.

“I want to marry yer daughter,” Estel blurted out.

Ruby bowed her head.

“There will be plenty of time,” Mama said, “to talk about that after dinner.”

Estel looked around the table at several brothers staring at him as if to say, “Not with my sister you don’t!” He slunk down in his seat, glanced at Ruby and played with his food with his fork. He had lost all his appetite.



After dinner everyone retired to the living room except for the younger boys and Mary, Ruby’s sister. She waited in the hall outside with her ear to the door. She heard her

mama say, “Now what is this about marrying Ruby and announcing you are going off to war?”

“You see, Mama Walker,” Estel said apologetically, “Ruby and I have fallen in love, and I might get killed and then where would I be?”

“In Heaven, I hope,” Mama Walker said. The two boys in the room laughed. “Quiet.” She reached over and touched Estel's hand. “You are saved, aren't you?”

“Yes, Ma'am, and I aim to apply to ministerial college on a scholarship.” Estel spoke mostly to the floor with his hands gripping each other.

“That's good,” Mama said politely. “But what are you going to live on?”

“Miss Truman, my teacher,” Estel said, resting his elbows on his knees and twisting his head to see her, “said that the scholarship would provide for me, and I can work small jobs as well. We will get by fine.”

“But you are going off to war,” Mama said, “and who knows what will happen?”

“That's why I want to marry her now.” Estel pleaded.

“Do you think about Ruby and what this separation will do to her? You will be gone two years at the least, if you live. Do you expect Ruby to wait? What if another eligible young man comes along?”

“Well, Mama,” Ruby said, “If all the boys are going to war, who will I marry? Young Willie who's poking his head around the corner?”

Mama turned around. “Willie, you get up to bed right now. I will be in there directly.”

“Yes, Mama,” Willie said as he scampered up the stairs.

“May I marry yer daughter, Mama Walker?” There was no emotion in Estel's eyes.

“There will be no weddin' until you come back to us,” Mama Walker announced, and

that was that.

Estel rose. He knew there would be no getting around it. He and Ruby could elope, but he would not disrespect his father and mother-in-law to be. He took Ruby's hands as she arose. "I'll wait for you," she said.

"Can I kiss you goodbye?" Estel asked.

"There will be no kissin' until you are married." Mama Walker laid down the law as she always had.

"Let me look at you, Ruby," Estel said, still holding her hands. "I want your face burned into my memory."

"Wait." Ruby let go of his hands and ran back to her bedroom. She came back with a small photo of herself taken with a Brownie camera. "Take this with you."

Estel stared at the photo a moment. "I'll keep this next to my heart." He put the picture into his shirt pocket.

As he opened the door, he slowly said, "Goodbye, Papa and Mama Walker. I love you, Ruby."

Ruby had her fingers to her mouth and couldn't say a thing.

Mama spoke up. "If you love her and love the Lord, you will be back. I have the faith. We'll pray for you."

Strolling home from the Walker's was the longest walk Estel ever took in his whole life. It seemed ages as the moon rose into the night sky and the crickets plucked their fiddles. By the time he entered his front yard, it seemed he had already slept the night.



“The way of the slothful man is as a hedge of thorns’, says the Good Book,” cried Mama as she tried to hurry Estel. “Yur ride is waitin’ out front.” She waited at the door and opened it as the young man hurried out, returned and kissed his ma on the cheek. He said, “Tell Dad I love him and all the family. I’ll write.”

“You’d better,” she sniffed as she ran off the porch, grabbed and hugged him. As Estel climbed into the back of the pickup, she called out, “I’ll pray for you!”

Estel said hello to all the boys in the truck he knew from school. They all said a sullen “Hi.” He waved at little Viola as she chased the truck, crying her eyes out, calling his name. Mama ran down to the road and grabbed her up into her arms.

“There there, now. He’s comin’ back, girl,” she said as her voice tightened. “He’s comin’ back.” She had to wipe away her own tears as well.

Estel's older brother Jed got his draft notice in the mail in the same month. It devastated Mama that two of her boys had to go into the Army, and that ‘Leige actually volunteered to join the Merchant Marines. He had been so happy he was old enough. He had always wanted to go to sea. If the others had not been too young, the farm would have suffered. Paul got to stay home to work the farm on account of his liver and flat feet. At least, that’s what he told his parents, but everyone knew it was his age.



The pickup truck carrying Estel stopped at the train station in Merkel. It would take

him into Abilene just east of Merkel where he would wait for a train to Dallas. There, he understood he would get a lift to Fort Bowie outside of Fort Worth.

Estel found his father waiting on the platform. They smiled at each other as Estel jumped off the truck. Estel ran up the steps and they embraced.

“Thanks, Dad,” Estel said. He felt a great love from his father.

“I couldn’t let cha leave without sayin’ goodbye, now, could I?” He grabbed his son’s shoulders. “You strike a blow at those Krauts, now. Do it for us and yer country.”

“Will do, Dad. We’ll kick ‘em in the rear as they run back into their hole.” Estel stood smiling. He didn’t know what else to do.

“God’s blessings go with you, son,” his father said, placing his hand on his shoulder.

“All aboard,” called the bus driver.

“Don’t forget this,” father said, handing his son a small New Testament.

“Thanks again. I was in a rush this morning. I forgot.”

Estel grabbed the book and his bag and ran to the door of the train car as the conductor called, “All aboard!” He threw his bag up the steps, grabbed the handle, and stepped aboard as the train chugged forward.

The train poured coal smoke and steam into the surrounding air as it left. Alexander Sr. waved goodbye to his boy who waved from a window. He was proud of him. It made his chest swell.



War was the least thought in Estel's mind as he peered out the window of the bus. His thoughts were of home and school and the people he would miss. He took out the picture of

Ruby. He felt homesick already. He put it back into his pocket.

“Yer girl?” asked the person sitting next to him.

Estel smiled, a little embarrassed. “We’re going to get married as soon as I get back.”

The young man slapped him on the knee. “Boy, don’t you know you’re going to war? You could git killt. We all could.”

“I’ll come back,” Estel said with confidence.

“How do you know?”

Estel stared out the window. “I know. The Lord has a work for me.” He looked again at the young man. “I believe in my mother’s prayers. Once our school band went to Abilene. I could feel her praying for me all the way there and back.”

“You believe in prayer?” the boy asked with a deep look into Estel's eyes.

“Don’t you?” Estel countered.

“Naw.” The young lad screwed up his face and sat back. “I’m not religious. Too many restrictions.”

“I find that sin has too many restrictions.” Estel grinned a half smile.

“How’s that?” the boy asked with a fake surprised look.

“Too many bad consequences.” Estel cocked his head. “Take for instance, the gambler. He can never bring his paycheck home to feed his family. Neither can the alcoholic.”

The young man leaned forward to see Estel better. “You’re talking about the person addicted.”

“Any man who goes far enough will be addicted,” Estel said sincerely. “Especially if he thinks he is losing what he wants in life.”

“You a preacher?” the young man sneered.

“Not yet,” Estel said meditatively as he stared out the window. “Not yet.”

Chapter Two

“I want to contribute to the war effort, Mama,” Ruby said over breakfast.

“Well, I’m going in to Noodle today to do some trading. Got to get supplies for the kitchen.” She poured syrup on Ruby’s pancakes as well as her own. “There’s a place down town where you can sign up for something.” Mama halted as in thought. “There are so many girls leavin’ home and workin’ on other people’s farms when they are needed at home. Some are goin’ to the factories. But there’s a better thing for you to do down town if you have a mind.”

“Mine too,” Mary said, holding out her plate.

“Put it down,” Mama said. “I know yer there.” She syruded the other daughter’s cakes.

“Why do we have to eat after the boys do?” Mary asked, shaking her brown curls.

“Well, men have the priority when it comes to eatin’ ‘cause they have to git out there and work in the fields.” Mama peered out the window. “Them that are left to us.” She took a bite of her cakes. “Besides, it’s Saturday, our day to go tradin’.”



After breakfast the two girls piled into the wagon, and the black boy, Jim, harnessed old Jebbie. He climbed up and gave his hand to Mama. She stepped up and the boy slapped the mule on the rear, and away they went at a speedy five miles per hour. With another slap on the rear, Jebbie would go at a thrilling eight miles an hour and then slough off to four after a few minutes.

The ride in the fresh morning air provided a time for the girls to tell stories, laugh, and giggle at the funny things they could see or imagine. They lay down in the wagon and told what they saw in the clouds.



“Do you think it’s an omen,” Mary asked, “when the clouds look like marchin’ soldiers?”

“I think that is a bit superstitious,” Mama said, looking straight ahead in her sternness. “Look not to the East and their soothsayers ...”

“I wasn’t soothsaying,” Mary said, demurely.

When they saw a man out in the field, they made up a story from what he was doing or imagined what he would do, or try to make a new Uncle Remus story from the passing background.

“I know another story,” Ruby said. “Look at that man with a scythe, cleaning up all those tumble weeds. I bet for sure ...”

“We don’t bet,” Mama reminded her girls.

“As I was saying, Mama,” Ruby grunted, “I know for sure that Br’er Rabbit is among them weeds.”

“Those,” Mama said.

“Those weeds!” Ruby said angrily. “Mama, if you keep interruptin’, we won’t be able to tell our story.”

“Just remember your education and enunciation.”

“Yes Ma,” Mary commented. “We will talk nice.” She jabbed Ruby in the ribs.

“You just go ahead.”

“Br’er Rabbit hears this swish-swish, back and forth, comin’ closer and closer. He tries hiding farther down the patch, but the man keeps coming with his blade, swish-swish.

“Br’er Rabbit cries out like a baby. The man stops and listens. Someone’s baby, he thinks, is lost in the weeds. He puts down his scythe and wades through the weeds. But Br’er Rabbit wants to play a trick on the old man, so he goes deeper into the weeds until he comes to the brier patch. He slips in there and cries out like a baby.

“The man can’t tell if it’s a cat or a baby. He stops to listen. ‘Oh, it’s over there,’ he says. So he wades farther into the weeds. Br’er Rabbit scurries behind him and cries again. Now the man stops and listens again. He turns around. The baby sounds like it’s behind him. He goes to move, but he is held tight by the briars.

“Be’er Rabbit lays down and laughs and laughs.”

“That was a good one, Ruby,” Mary said.

“Thems are hateful tales ... Br’er Rabbit indeed!” Mama said pridefully.

“Those!” the girls shouted. They rolled over with laughter.

Mama couldn’t help it. Their laughter was catching, and she had been caught in a fault, so she laughed with them.

By the time they arrived in town, they were melancholy and staring out at the passing buildings, having spent all their imaginations. They spotted a large red cross flag over one of the shop windows. On the other side of the door was a sign, “Nurses Wanted: Support the War Effort.”



“Mama, Mama. Stop the wagon.” Ruby climbed out, followed by her sister. “This is what I meant. Is it all right? Can we all sign up?”

“You go right ahead. I see your cousin Lulu beat you to it.” Mama pointed to the door where a heavy set girl was walking out. “You join her, and I’ll do the tradin’ and join you shortly.” Jim clicked his tongue and slapped old Jebbie with the reins.

“Lulu, Lulu,” Ruby and Mary shouted excitedly.

“Mary! Ruby!” Lulu ran out into the street to them. They all hugged.

“Hi, Aunt Mary,” Lulu called out and waved.

“Hi, Lulu. See you three at the store,” Mama called as she looked for a hitching place.

Jim always parks the wagon in out of the way places.

“Have you signed up?” Ruby asked.

“Yes. Are you coming to sign up too?”

“Yes,” both sisters exclaimed.

“They teach you everything you need to know.”

Lulu grabbed the sisters by their arms and escorted them through the wide double door.



When the girls returned home, their brother Paul, lengthy as a bean pole, light headed, and a simpleton, according to the census records, came up to the wagon with a letter in his hand.

“Look Ma, look. We got a letter. Ruby’s boy friend. Ha ha.”

Mama stepped down and took the letter. It was addressed to the 's, and it had been opened already. "Who gave you this letter, Paul?"

"A man came and gave it to me," Paul answered with a big smile.

"The postman?" Ruby asked as she and Mary slid out of the back of the wagon.

"No," Paul said. "It was another man. It was a neighbor."

"You didn't catch his name?" Mama asked as she took the letter out. "Let's go inside." She turned to Jim who was about to take the wagon to the barn. "Jim, take the wagon around back and unload the groceries into the pantry. Then go and ask Mr. Walker what he wants you to do."

"Yes'm Miz Walker." *I was gonna do that already ... Ma'am.* Jim drove the wagon around back as the family went inside.

It was near dinner time and some of the boys joined Paul and the girls after they washed up on the back porch.

"Gather 'round, everybody," Mama said from her big chair. "It seems Mr. came by and shared this letter from Estel."

"That was nice of him," Ruby said with a sigh.

"It's stamped *Camp Bowie, Fort Worth*," continued Mama, "addressed to the s, of course. It reads,

"Dear Family,

"I have a moment to write. They have provided a table, pen and paper. In fact, they told all of us here in the barracks that we have to write our folks once a week. It's an order, as though we wouldn't write anyway.

"I'm here in Fort Worth at Camp Bowie. It is a large area cleared off from a farmer's

field, set up with tents and barracks and offices. We have to march every morning in the parade grounds and then go and fire weapons. We have the latest M-1 rifles. Then there is combat training. Some of that is real muddy. I mean, you have to crawl in the mud under barbed wire that scratches your helmet and your pack while holding your M-1 in front of you. Boy, does the sergeant yell at you if you get mud on your M-1, and all of us do.

“We get up at four in the morning, farmer’s hours, you know. Well, I’m used to that. They give us five minutes to shave and get dressed. Then we march over to the mess tent and eat scrambled eggs, beans and toast with a cup of coffee. We don’t eat much of a lunch. We are given a sandwich to take with us on our practice march. Halfway through that, we sit down and have five minutes to eat our sandwich and take a drink from our canteen.

“Today is Sunday. We had a nice sermon from the camp chaplain. He talked of Christ’s example, which we should all follow. He didn’t call anyone to the altar, just gave a sermon, prayed, and left. There was a chaplain’s helper that got us to sing a few songs and recite a prayer from the serviceman’s prayer book. Then we were let out to spend the day at the barracks. That’s when we were told by the sergeant to write home. They regiment everything here.

“Later on, there will be a football game. We are all expected to participate. I have never played football. I am a baseball fan. I hope we will get to play baseball one of these days. I think the sergeant is a fan of Knute Rockne. He’s not a Texan. I think he must be from Indiana.

“I will say goodbye and write again when I get the chance. Love you all. God Bless. Estel”

Mama carefully folded the letter and placed it back in its envelope.

“I wonder where they will send him?” Ruby asked reverently.

“We will pray,” Mama said, “that wherever they send him, he will be kept safe.”

“Paul, you know where the s live?” Mama asked.

“Mama,” Ruby said quietly, “I know where they live. I’ll take it back to them.”

“All right.” Mama looked at Paul. “I’m sorry, dear, but Ruby should take it back.”

“Ahh, Mama, I want to,” Paul complained.

“You can come with me,” Ruby said. She rose and took the simpleton’s hand.

“Goody goody,” he said. “Now, I will know the way, and if they send us some more letters, *I* can take’*m* back.”

Ruby pressed her head against his arm as they went out the door. “You’re such a dear, Paul.”

Chapter Three

There were no more letters from Estel for a couple of months. In that time, Ruby and Mary, along with their cousin Lulu, learned nursing and took plenty of pictures of the three in their nurse uniforms. They also took pictures of their school and classmates.

The boys that were able to stay home worked their farms along with their sisters and volunteers, made up of more women than they cared to look at. They were always having contests to see if the guys could beat the women in their work but were surprised to see the women keeping up with them. The women could furrow, seed, and harvest, even lift bails of hay, and take care of both animals and machinery.

Ruby and Mary were taking a breather in their lives ... no more picking cotton for them ... at least until after the war or until they could get married. Ruby knew that her wedding depended upon the end of the war. She would have to wait on her fiance.

But Mary had received a letter from 'Leige Jr., who hadn't gone to war. He avoided the draft by joining the merchant marines. He had been so smart. She wouldn't let anyone else read the letter. It would somehow lose its magic.



“Have it yer way then,” Ruby complained when Mary wouldn't share.

“We were seeing each other,” Mary said as she held the open letter to her bosom and sighed.

“When do you get the time?” Ruby asked as she folded the clothes Mama was ironing.

“Remember that day when I said I wanted to walk home?” Mary said, reading the letter again for the twelfth time.

“Yes. That was not a nice thing to do,” Ruby said, folding her father’s undershirt, “leaving me with that Tommy Braggart.”

“You got a ride home, didn’t you?”

“Yes, but he couldn’t keep his eyes on the road and was swerving like a drunkard.” Ruby screwed up her face at Mary. Folding up a sheet she said, “You are just ignoring my question.”

“Well, I walked home because ‘Leige was to meet me. He walked me the rest of the way.”

“I didn’t see him,” Ruby said.

“Nor I,” Mama said, butting into the conversation. “You never told me about ‘Leige . And don’t you say it’s none of my business. I can still paddle yer hide with the back of a brush, and I’ll use the big kitchen brush, not a hair brush like when you were a child.”

“Mama, I declare,” Mary said, quite perturbed. “I wasn’t *goin’* to say no such thing.”

“Deportment, Dear, deportment,” Mama said as she slid the hot iron across a fancy white blouse.

“Going,” Mary said under her breath.

“I don’t see how you don’t burn that blouse, Mama,” Ruby said.

“You got ta have a light touch.”

“If you would buy one of those newfangled electric irons,” Ruby said, stacking the folded clothes, “you could turn it down to a low temperature for delicates.”

“And get myself fried by electricity? No thank you.”

“I am going somewhere else to read my letter,” Mary said, as she wistfully removed herself from the room. She poked her head back into the kitchen. “Did I tell you that he was on a Texas boat?”

“The Houston!” Mama and Ruby said in unison.

“You already told us,” Ruby added.



“Dear Mary,” Mary read, as she lay on her bed,

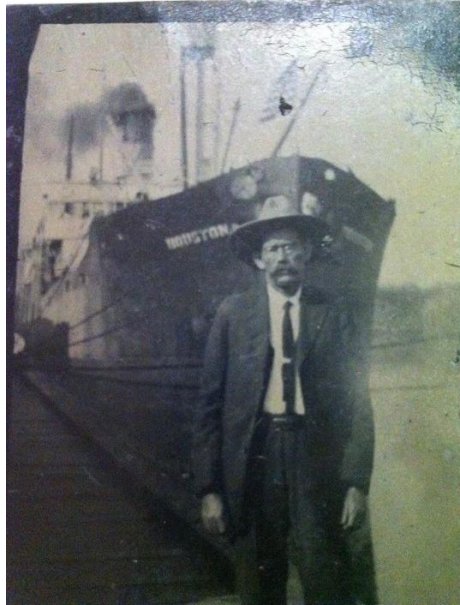
“Living on board a ship is not as tough as working on a farm. I don’t mean it isn’t tough work. If you don’t get seasick, it’s great. If it’s not your watch, you get eight hours sleep, and you get lots of breaks. The hours are like farming, but you don’t have to get up until six o’clock. Can you imagine that? My other two brothers, Estel and James I know for a fact have to get up at four in the morning for sure, just like at home. I do mostly rigging work, loading supplies for the guys overseas, and ammunitions. On the first time aboard, I was loading all manner of trucks and cars. Ambulances made me think. I thank the Lord I am not in the fighting. But if you are not careful, you can be killed right here on the ship. One kid was dragged overboard because a cable got wrapped around his ankle.

“I miss you a lot. Thank you for sending me your picture. I look at you and talk to you every night before I bed down. We sleep in hammocks. They don’t roll with the ship. The officers think they are smart sleeping in beds, but they are attached to the bulkheads and they

roll back and forth all night. It isn't a wonder they are cranky all the time. Here is a picture of my ship.

“Love you lots,

“Alexander.”



Paul came running down the road to the house holding up two envelopes. “Here’s some more letters. Here’s more letters.”

He huffed and puffed as he handed them to Mama. Ruby was just coming from around the house. “Two letters, Ruby,” Paul said excitedly. “Two.”

“Let’s sit on the porch,” Mama said. “It’s such a nice day out.” She addressed Paul. “Go to the kitchen and bring us out some lemonade. It’s in the ice box.”

“Okay.” Paul hesitated at the door. “You want yer good glasses?”

“No. Don’t you dare touch those. I don’t want them broken. Just the regular glasses will do. The ones that come in the boxes of oats.”

“Okay.” The screen door slammed.

“And don’t spill it!” Mama called.

“Mama,” Ruby said, with her hand out.

“Let me check them out first. You never know what a soldier will write.” Mama

opened the first envelope.

“Mama, please,” Ruby pleaded with her hand almost touching the letters.

“Patience is a virtue.” Mama started reading the letters, scanning them to see what they contained. “Okay. Here.”

Paul came out with the lemonade on a tray as Ruby started reading.

“Dear Family,” Ruby started. She accepted a glass of lemonade from Paul, took a sip, and put it down.

“Living aboard a ship,” she continued, “is a different experience. I am sick a lot. I don’t eat much. I will be glad to get my feet on land. Most of the time the troops have to stay downstairs in the dark. I don’t mean total dark. There are lamps down here, but it is brighter up on top. It stinks pretty much down here. There are no showers for us. I don’t imagine there will be showers where we are going. Man was not meant to live like cattle, you know. That’s what we are aboard this ship, just cattle. I lay on my bunk most of the time and try to read the New Testament. I am sure to have it memorized by the time we land. They won’t tell us where we are going. Don’t want us to write back home about that. Who knows what spies the enemy has, they tell us. Our mail could be intercepted and they would know our movements. We are let above decks by divisions and billets. There are so many of us, we are not let topside every day. I get up there every other day or every third day. We get to have Sunday services. There must be one chaplain to every division, plus the ship’s chaplain, so we don’t have the same one every time. There is a new song we sing about being on the sea called The Sailor's Hymn. I can remember the chorus goes:

“Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee, For those in peril on the sea!

“I know it isn’t in our hymnal at home. Well, I must end this and save paper. Love you

all. Say Hi to Ruby for me. Maybe you can share this letter with her.

“Estel.”

“They are, Estel,” Ruby said, addressing the letter, as though it were him. She looked up at Mama. “I don’t get a love letter, do I?”

“Don’t worry,” Mama said. “You will have plenty of time when he comes back.”

“How do you know he’s coming back, Mama?” Ruby asked with a tremor on her lips.

“Now, now. We will have none of that, girl.” She patted Ruby on the knee. “You have to have faith.”

“I will try, Mama.” She rose and stared at the plowed field beyond the barn. “I will try.”

“Come sit down,” Paul pleaded. “Let’s read the other letter.”

“Oh, yes,” Ruby said mechanically. “Another letter.” She sat down and took up the next letter and started reading.

“Dear Family,

“There wasn’t much to say until we arrived at our new post, so I didn’t write again until now. I can’t say where we are, but it sure reminds me of the Bible Lands. The camp is spread out along the border of a desert to the south and ocean to the north. There is a village to the east of us and then the desert again. The natives all look like Arabs, but I know we didn’t sail that far. We did pass the Rock of Gibraltar. I heard Spain is to the north of us. Camp life is generally what it was back in Texas. We drill all day and play at war. I guess they want us to keep up our fighting skills. Other than that we just eat, sleep and read if you don’t want to play cards. I don’t. I know it’s not Christian. Many of the others go into town and go to bars. Yes, they have bars here too, except they don’t call them that. They speak

French here and the bars are called cantinas. Most of the men are looking for female companionship, but I think the men of the village frown on that. The girls seem to run away when the soldiers arrive. And you can't blame them. The women cover themselves with a tent. I don't know how they manage to see out the little slit for their eyes. They don't let us go into the village in large numbers. Imagine how overwhelmed the village would be if they let that happen. When I go I visit the shops, but I can't buy anything. I don't have any money to speak of, and if I did, I would be swamped with little beggars. The children follow us in droves. They think the Americans are rich. I have been teased by the men because I don't go to the bars. They call me the preacher because I read my New Testament every day and kneel at my bunk at night. Except for the drilling, there is nothing else to do. I would go walking in the desert, but they tell us not to do that because of the Bedouins who will slit your throat. They are the people of the desert, you know. I will write when I can, if there is anything that comes up as interesting. But still, I have to conserve my paper.

Love to you all, and God bless you and protect you.

Estel.”

“Well, that's sad,” Ruby said, staring at the letter. She sighed and put the letter back into the envelope.

“He is being a good Christian boy,” Mama said, “and that makes me very happy. I think he will make a good husband.”

Ruby wanted to say something to that, but the letters made her a bit melancholy. She didn't talk much at supper and sat on the porch afterward and watched the sun set. The growing darkness filled her soul.

Chapter Four

Ruby, Mary, and Lulu were shipped off to Fort Worth and joined the nursing corp there in Camp Bowie. They took the place of the army nurses who had been transferred overseas. There was a skeleton crew of medical staff left on the base, but the main group of nurses were the volunteers from the surrounding cities and counties.

The girls had never left home before, and it was all new and exciting. They were bivouacked with other nurses in Quonset huts that looked like giant corrugated pipes that have been cut in half lengthwise. The latrine and showers were in two separate but nearby buildings.

“You get the top bunk, Ruby,” Lulu said. “I like close to the ground.”

“I swear,” Mary said, as she took her shoes off.

“Mama would tell you, Mary, not to swear,” Ruby said.

“Anyways,” Mary continued, “I could have stayed home if I wanted to do housework.”

“The other nurses,” Lulu said, finally getting to sit, “didn’t live up to the standards. I thought they would have been taught the principles of cleanliness.”

“They were, dear,” said the neighbor whose bunk faced Mary. “Cleaning up the infirmary is a daily chore. That’s why they hired us.”

“Oh, great!” Mary complained. “I thought we were going to be nurses.”

“Well,” said the neighbor, “there are more nurses than there are sick.” She extended her hand. “Hi, I’m Allice.”

“Mary. The one up there is Ruby. Behind me is Lulu.”

“They do let us out on the weekends,” Alice said, twisting her curls that fell down her temple. She was blonde and in her thirties. The way she slumped was a trick women did to attract men. It showed she was a woman of the world. “They make sure everyone that wants to can go to church.”

“And be with your family,” Mary added.

Lulu turned around from looking out the window. “Our grandfather’s sister started up her own church.”

“How’s that?” Alice sat on her bunk and brought out a cigarette from underneath her pillow.

The other three stared at her, wondering if she was going to light up. They were told that they couldn’t smoke inside.

“Oh, don’t worry,” Alice said, smiling. “I’ll take it outside. So, Lulu, how did your ... how would you call her? An aunt? ... start a church? Is she a preacher?”

“She thought people,” Lulu said, “in their church weren’t holy enough.”

“And they just felt like they should just start up another church?” Alice asked.

Mary and Ruby sat on their bunks and listened.

“Pretty much,” Lulu said, not knowing whether she should be defensive.

“Are you all members of her church?” Alice asked, putting her cigarette up to her lips, grabbing hold of it as if she were taking a puff. When they all three nodded, she asked, “And what do you mean by being more holy?”

“Oh, we can’t smoke or drink, dance, or go to movies,” Mary answered.

“Can’t dance?” Alice screwed up her face. “Oh, kids. You are missing out!”

“I don’t think so,” Ruby said. “We find a lot to do that makes us happy.”

“What can take the place of dancing and music?” Alice asked, worrying about their social development. “And what about boys? How are you going to meet boys?”

Ruby and Mary smiled and squeezed their shoulders together.

“They both have sweethearts,” Lulu said, “but the men are off to the war in Europe.”

“And you expect to wait for them until they get back?” Alice said, leaning forward, her cigarette bouncing up and down in her lips. “What a heartbreak!”

“We have faith,” Ruby said, smiling.

“They will return,” Mary said. “Our mother knows it.”

“Your mother knows it,” Alice said. “And your aunt,” she pointed to Lulu with her nose, “has started a holiness church.” Alice sighed. “Well, girls. I really need to go outside, smoke this fag, and think about all this.”

Alice walked out the door wagging her head. “My my.”

“I think she will be a good friend,” Ruby said.

“You think so?” Lulu asked.



Estel almost memorized that New Testament his father had given him. He felt ashamed that he was bored with it and wanted more in life than sitting around and reading. He had learned a lot, but his natural man wanted to be up and doing. He couldn't go out into the desert unless he was in the company of at least ten men with guns. He had been to town enough to be bored with that also. He exercised out of boredom, and so kept fit. Besides all the exercises the troops did in the morning, he went to bed after doing fifty push-ups.

Derbie was a man of the world. He was of average height, straight black hair, which would have been long if he didn't have to visit the barber every week, and a classic straight

nose. His black eyes looked blacker against a nice tan which, never lightened. He could have been one of the natives, either Arab or American Indian. Estel knew he was from Texas but didn't know his bloodline.

When Derby asked him to join the boys in a card game, Estel declined. When Derby asked him to join the boys in going to town to drink, again he refused. But Derby knew when boredom finally won out. He asked Estel one more time to go with him and the boys to town. Estel agreed on one condition. "I won't do any drinking unless it's ice cold tea." He smiled as he remembered what quenched his thirst at home on a hot summer's day.

"That's fine with me," Derby said. He grabbed Estel's hand and lifted him off his bunk. Estel walked as if newly cured from the palsy.

"Wow!" Estel exclaimed. "Let's go."

Estel felt like a huge weight had lifted off his shoulders as he tread the dusty road to town. His memory of iced tea was held out before him like a carrot on a stick. All the men were laughing and patting Estel on the back, thinking he was joining them to become a man. They were going to get him drunk and introduce him to women. He wouldn't return to camp a virgin nor a preacher. This was going to cure him of all that Christian stuff.

The first cantina was an adobe hut having a rounded entrance with swinging French doors. Estel imagined he could have been in the American Southwest except for the different clothing and language. Inside, they sat at a round table in an atmosphere lit by kerosene lamps on the ceilings and candles on the tables. Electricity hadn't hit this part of the world.

A slim waitress appeared at the table and all the boys ordered beer as they were accustomed to in the states, but she said they only had liqueur or wine. She spoke in French. The liqueur came in small glasses and the wine in larger glasses probably for filling the

stomach. Estel of course ordered iced tea. The waitress explained they didn't have ice, so people drank tea with milk or cream.

"That will cool down the tea," she said. "We keep them in the basement where the temperature is low." Her French accent was mesmerizing.

Estel decided to try cream. He had never done that before. Maybe it would taste good.

It tasted awful. He would try the next place, as the boys got up and said they were going to a better place.

The next place looked exactly like the first one, and their tea was also warm.

The fourth place they wound up in was a bit fancy, and there were a lot of girls there. The boys ordered their drinks and as one of them happened to speak French, he got in a very interesting conversation with one of the girls.

"Hey, Estel," he called out in a slight slur. "Guess what? They have a decanter of tea down in the basement, and its quite cool. Not as cold as iced, but will that do?"

"Yes. Yes. I think so," Estel said with a smile as wide as it would go. It is hard to smile wide with a small mouth.

A lady came up to him with a glass of tea on a small round tray. As she placed it on the table, she sat on Estel's lap. His eyes went wide. Her cleavage was quite apparent. What might have been called trousers had slits up the sides and he could see all the way up to her hips. In shock, he shoved the girl off his lap and rose so fast that he spilled his cold tea on the floor, splattering the girl. He ran out the door, and Derby rushed to help the lady, who was cussing in French, off the floor. He calmed her down by telling her, "He only likes boys." With that, she started laughing, as did everyone.

Back at the barracks, when Derby tried to explain what he told the girl, Estel turned

red all over. He had ruined his life, all for the desire of iced tea. He didn't say anything, just walked out. He went back to the cantina to make things right.

As Estel walked down the narrow, winding street towards the cantina, he saw a girl in the street, walking toward him. When she approached, she giggled.

"Don't you remember me?" she said, holding her veil as though she would remove it. Her eyes were unforgettable.

"I do," he said. "I want to apologize. "I have a girl at home. She is a very lovely girl. We are to be married when I return. I was just surprised by your actions. I ..."

She covered his lips with her finger. "Not necessary," she said coyly, and with her cute French accent. "The boys, they were just, what you say, funning with you. You are a good guy. I like you. You will come again?"

"I ... I don't know. Maybe I will just have something to eat, and tea. You know, the cool tea from the basement? I am so sorry I made such a mess. I will try to make it up to you."

The girl appeared to be flattered. Her eyes smiled.

Estel was only thinking of what he had learned, studying about Jesus. He tried to do what Jesus would do. Go to someone whom you had hurt and try to make it right. Besides, he could use the excuse that Jesus visited with wine bibbers.

The girl grabbed Estel's hand. "Come with me. You will get a good quality tea."

Estel had no power to resist. He let himself be led down a narrow winding street. Was this the same person he had met in the cantina? He doubted it. This personality did not belong there.

He would write in his next letter:

“I had not the power nor the will to resist this temptress. I did not fear what was going to happen or wonder. I was completely at peace. I know I had given my life to my Savior, and I would not do anything amiss.

“We came to a door in a wall that ran along the whole street. It also had a rounded top as the door to the cantina. As she opened it, I saw that it was a gate into a garden. There was a fountain in the middle surrounded by flowers and fruit trees. Many of them were lemon or lime. There was a bench near the fountain.

“She said for me to wait there and she would be back with my tea.

“She was gone for maybe a half hour. Meantime, a man in a robe of many colored stripes came and sat on the edge of the fountain, facing me. He was tall, brown, sported a thick mustache and wore a tall red hat with a tassel hanging from the top.

“He addressed me as Monsieur. He said that he heard I was thirsty for their tea, and also possibly for a pretty girl.

“I answered him that I thought she was a girl I had met in a cantina, but after talking to her, it could not be the same girl, except that she asked me to follow her here for some tea.

“He agreed that it could not be the same girl, that it was his daughter Afrah, that she was flighty and had a vivid imagination and often brought men home for tea.

“I told him that she was very charming, but my interest went deeper.

“He asked if I wished to get to know his daughter more intimately, and I got very embarrassed. I told him that I would like to get to know her family as well as herself. I said that I have a family back in the States which is quite different. I even

have a fiance' waiting for me. I merely wanted to get to know this strange people I see planted in this land. They remind me of the people in the Bible.

“He said that they also have a bible and worship Jesus, but I had assumed that they were Muslim. He said that it was a mistake many people often make. His family have been Christian for centuries, since the time of the apostles. He was from Egypt. He said that I would find many people from all over the world here.

“I asked if they speak French in Egypt. He said yes, since the days of Napoleon.

“After saying this, the man turned and clapped his hands. I then peered in the direction he had turned and saw the girl, without her veil, bringing a tray with a crystal carafe of tea. It was filled with lemons and limes.

“The father of the girl said that I would enjoy the tea. It would be better than what I was served at the cantina.

“Indeed, I did enjoy their tea more than any other I have ever had. I also enjoyed their congeniality. I have visited this family often and even have had church services with them. Although, I could not understand the French, I greatly enjoyed the spirit of their worship.”

After writing that letter, Estel wadded it up and threw it in the trash. It was not something for home. It was too private. After the war, he would go home and remember it no more. It would be futile to linger in this little village and fall in love with a strange girl and her people. It would ruin his life. Ruby would not be his anymore. His family, what would they think? He couldn't go home and have this little affair on his conscience. But he would enjoy the family while he was here.

He wondered how long it would take to forget Afrah. Her name meant happiness. But it was a happiness that was taboo for him. Yes, they were both Christians, but he wanted to

have children with her. It was a temptation he would have to leave behind. She wasn't meant for him. Though his love for Afrah burned in his heart, he couldn't just leave her.

Yesterday had been two years of suffering in the heat and boredom of this desert camp. Estel had been given his transfer papers. He was going home. He had to see Afrah one more time before he had to leave. She was the one thing that had prevented him from losing his faith, drying up as a reed in a river without water.

Estel knocked on the garden gate. Afrah's servant answered.

"Yes?" he asked through the little sliding window. "What is it?"

"May I see Afrah?" Estel almost pleaded.

"She is not home," he said, handing him a note through the little window. "Now go away."

Estel unfolded the paper and read it.

"Dear Estel,

"I had my father write this letter, as I do not write well in English. He is an educated man and is very wise. He knows that some day you will be going home to your United States and will marry one of your kind. We had fun together. Let it be that. We made some good memories, did we not? We enjoyed the sunrises and sunsets, the wine and the tea, my sister's wedding. I am so thankful you were able to get permission to come. But we cannot love each other as you would like, and then you leave me with your baby to raise it alone. No. I have seen this all too many times since the start of your European war and other wars we have had with the French, and etc. Many women beg for a living or become prostitutes because, having children from the infidel, they are cast out. I will not become one of them. I love you like a brother, a fellow Christian, and have enjoyed your companionship. We need to say

goodbye now. I hope you can understand and not come around anymore.

Sincerely,

Afrah.”

Estel grieved. He would go to the cantina. Maybe she was working.

When Estel walked into the cantina where he first saw Afrah, he was surrounded by girls barely dressed. His face felt hot. He looked around. He kept his nerve and asked, “Is Afrah here?”

The girls just giggled. Who knows what they thought of him. One of them said to him, “She is in the back room.”

When Estel started to walk to the door the girl had pointed to, a big thick bartender said, “You can’t go in there.”

When he tried to stop Estel, the boy slipped through his arms like a ghost.

Estel quickly opened the door. He couldn’t believe what he saw. It didn’t seem real. There Afrah was, lying in bed with a man. They seemed to be wrestling, and she was giggling, laughing and screaming.

Suddenly, Afrah stopped, noticing Estel had been standing there staring at them. She quickly grabbed the blanket and covered herself.

The man in bed asked, “What is this?” Derby looked up from the covers and smiled.

Afrah said, “Estel. You have to leave.”

“Estel, my man,” Derby said. “Come to have a little fun? It will cost you, you know. Why, I paid a whole month’s wages.”

“What are you doing?” Estel asked Afrah.

“He is a customer,” she said.

“Does your father know what you are doing?”

Afrah laughed. “Father? He owns this cantina.” She sat on the edge of the bed.

Derbie sat next to her, putting his arm around her. “How do you think she can afford such a nice house?”

“But you are a Christian,” Estel mumbled.

“So?” she said nonchalantly.

Estel felt pins and needles cover his face as he blushed. He threw the note at her and left. He could hear Afrah continue to scream and laugh.

What a fool I have been. I don't understand this culture. It is demonic!

Estel walked back to the barracks with a sullen black cloud over his head. *Oh perfect Jesus. Forgive this fool, to be so deceived by the devil. How can I be friends with anyone when the whole world is reeling in sin?*

As he walked along the path with his head down, he meditated. Dust devils whirled by him, and the sun in the clear blue sky beat down upon him. He came upon large boulders surrounded by brush along the side of the road. Feeling his pent up emotions ready to burst, he fled behind the bushes and knelt in prayer.

“Almighty God,” he started, then bawled like a baby. “I am sorry!” He put his fist to his mouth in anguish. He relaxed into solemn prayer.

Estel got to his feet, feeling lighter of heart, and continued on the road towards camp. Then, as though he had been hit by lightning, received a message from God. It was only a moment in time, but he understood it. The boys in the camp called him The Preacher, but this was a call to be a preacher, to preach the word of God to the world. It was clear. God had forgiven him and chosen him to preach His word. He walked into the barracks as if he

walked on air.

Estel picked up his New Testament. He was no longer bored with it. He read it as if it were brand new and had more meaning. As he pored over its pages, his heart was filled with love, and he remembered Ruby. He would forget Afrah and always be true to her who waited for him back home.



Ruby was down on her knees in the kitchen scrubbing the floor when Alice came in to interrupt her.

“Ruby! Come quick,” she called. “Your sister Mary has been hurt.”

Ruby rose slowly, wishing she didn’t have so much weight to worry about. “Oh, my goodness,” she said, throwing her brush into the bucket and wiping the sweat off her forehead with her apron.

Alice took her by the arm. “She’s in the infirmary.”

When they arrived, Mary was having her arm put in a cast. She had a wrap around her head. Ruby sat beside the bed Mary sat on.

“I thought,” Ruby said, “that we were supposed to clean up the infirmary, not become a patient here.”

“I don’t know what happened, Sissy,” Mary said, staring blankly into the large room. “I was up on the stepladder, cleaning the blinds. I went to take a step higher, and all of a sudden, I was on the floor. I guess it’s not bad.”

“Done,” said the orderly, a tall thin man dressed in a white smock and trousers.

“You’ll get to go home early this week if we can find someone to go with you.”

Ruby spoke up. "I'm her sister. I'll go with her."

"I thought," Alice said, hands on her hips, "that wrapping people up was the doctor's duties."

"I'm studying to be a doctor," the boy said. "They let me do all the first aid here. The two doctors they have are kept busy."

"You would think there wasn't enough people to be that busy," Alice said, walking off with the orderly. "I'll clean up yer mess in the kitchen," she called back.

"Thank you," Ruby answered. She looked at Mary. "I think you should lie down. You don't look so well."

"I won't argue," Mary said. "I feel a bit woozy. I don't know what he gave me in that needle."

"I'm sure it was morphine," Ruby replied. She helped her sister lie down and covered her with an army blanket.

Lulu came running in.

Ruby turned upon hearing someone running toward her on the hardwood floor. "It's over with, Lulu."

"I was in the latrine, cleaning up in there," Lulu said, huffing and puffing. "When I came out, there was Alice, arm-in-arm with that young orderly. She said Mary broke her arm."

"I imagine we're going home when Mary can get up," Ruby said, patting Mary's leg. "She's out of it right now."

"I'll go to the office," Lulu said, "and tell them we're going to cut out."

"Okay. I'll stay here with Mary."

That night the three girls were on the bus to town, heading for the train station. In their purses were the chits giving them permission for the bus and train rides. The train was to leave at midnight.



After settling into their seats, which were more like hard benches, Mary slept against the window. Ruby sat across from Lulu and felt like talking all night.

“I think if we went by horseback we could go faster,” Ruby said, using Mary’s shoulder as a pillow.

“Yeah,” Lulu said. “What do you think of that Alice and the orderly? Doesn’t he know she’s old enough to be his mother?”

“If she had him when she was twelve.” Ruby laughed lightly.

“Oh, you know what I mean.” Lulu stared at Ruby’s hands. “How can you knit in the dark?”

“If you had been doing it as long as I have, Lulu, you would be able to also.”

“I guess so. When did you start?”

“I was eight when Mama showed me how, but I had been watching her forever.”

Lulu opened an envelope, took out a paper and started reading it.

“What’s that?” Ruby asked.

“Nothin’. I didn’t know if I should let you have it or not. You might get too excited and bloat until you explode.”

Ruby reached over, saying, “Give me that.” She grabbed it out of Lulu’s hands.

“Stop. Will be in the States in one week. Stop. Estel. Stop.”

“I picked it up at the office,” Lulu said, as Ruby stared at the telegram. “I don’t know how it got to the camp.”

“I guess ... well, no,” said Ruby, quite confused. She looked at the envelope and then back to the telegram. Then she sees it. “It is addressed to his parents.”

“I guess they sent it to the office.”

“Yes, I guess so.” Ruby looked at Lulu dreamily, holding the telegram to her bosom.

“Oh, Lulu. The war is over for us.”

“You think you will leave the corps?”

“What ... what?” Mary was waking up.

“Never mind, Mary,” Ruby said. “We’re not going to be nurses anymore.”

“Thank goodness. I think I am done in. Too much work.” Mary went back to sleep.



Ruby and Lulu helped Mary off the train. Papa Walker was there with Jim and the wagon. He hugged the girls and he and Jim waited for their luggage to be retrieved by the porter. After they saw the luggage, they picked it up and put it into the wagon. Then the men helped the girls into the wagon. Ruby got to sit up front, seeing she was the younger one.

“Good to be home, Papa,” Ruby said, clinging to his arm. She placed her head on his shoulder and he squeezed her other hand.

“Mary all right?” He asked.

“Mary,” Ruby called. “You all right?”

“Yeah, I’m all right.”

“She’s all right, Papa.”

“That’s good.” Papa smiled.

Chapter Five

Estel's stomach was filled with expectation. He peered through the window of the train and watched the Texas flatlands roll by with its sparse trees and brush and wide ranges of cattle grazing interrupted by a few small farms. His reflection drew his attention. He would not be a single man for very long. There would be a nice woman next to him soon. He imagined the reflection of Ruby next to his.

Backs of buildings and backyards of homes started appearing next to the tracks. The buildings suddenly slid together as the train entered the town and slowed down. The train left the shadows of buildings built next to each other, and the main street of town threw the bright light of the sun again through the window. The train stopped.

The conductor walked down the aisle, calling out, "Merkel, Merkel, all passengers getting out at Merkel."

He stopped at Estel's seat, scanning the list on his clipboard. "Merkel, sir? We have stopped at Merkel."

"Ahh, yes," Estel said. "I guess I have to get up and get moving."

"Your luggage will be on the platform at the porter's station."

"Thank you," Estel said, rising. He took his books and packages from the overhead rack and saluted a man he had met earlier. "Nice to have talked."

"Good luck," the man said.

"I'll need it," Estel said, slipping out the door and greeting the outdoors with a smile. It was good to feel the ground under his feet once more.

He looked around. His family to his left, the porter's place to his right. Which should

he rescue first? His family looked so forlorn, and there, his luggage waited. He stared at his family for a moment. They seemed so strange. He didn't see Ruby among them or any of her family. He guessed that 'Leige wasn't back from the marines yet. He was not in the group. Maybe he would show up in a few weeks.

"Sonny!" Mama rushed forward with arms wide open.

Estel tried to hide a smile, but was unsuccessful. He gave his mama a bear hug.

"Mama." She smacked him right on the mouth with a big smooch.

The people on the platform added to the embarrassment by clapping.

"Oh," Mama moaned. "You've grown into a man."

Estel remembered the boys back at the camp teasing him about becoming a man through girls and drink. He had wished they would grow up and become men. Their way would only have anchored him into sin. It was refreshing coming home to a Christian family.

Estel shook hands with his brothers and hugged his sisters, went to shake his father's hand, but Father pulled his boy into a manly embrace. Estel shed a tear. "Thank you, Dad, for being here."

"Welcome home, son. It's so good to see you alive and well."

"We got a picnic waiting in the wagon," Viola said, clinging to his arm. "We're heading right to the park." She gave his arm a squeeze. "The place is all reserved."

Eva tried to cut in, but when she said, "We have a sur ..." she got her foot stepped on and Viola gave her an evil look.

"What?" When Eva didn't get it, Viola gave her another evil look. Eva apologized with, "Oops. Sorry."

Estel ignored them. He was used to their arguments. Besides, Father just had to glance

at them for them to straighten up.

“I guess I can rest under a tree,” Estel said, hoping for a nice bed at home. *But*, he thought. *I just might enjoy that*. He hadn’t rested under a real tree for over two years. Not that palm trees and scrawny locust trees were not real.



The wagon rolled into a little area south of town dotted with clumps of cottonwood trees and green picnic tables. The boys took the supplies and put them on two tables underneath the trees. Fried chicken and hot coffee filled the air as plates and bowls thudded onto the tables.

“Lands o’ Goshin!” Mama cried out. “Take those things off the table and place the table cloth down first.”

“Ahhh,” Jeremiah said. “I thought those were fly covers to keep the flies off.”

Mama took a table cloth and tried to spread it onto the table before the boys lifted everything up.

Then a friendly voice: “Let me help you, Mama.” Ruby took the other end of the table cloth and placed it down just right. She also helped Mama with the other table.

There was a hint of perfume in the air. Estel assumed it was the girls. Maybe it was the flowers. Trying to get the plates and bowls back onto the table, his back bumped into someone else’s back end. He thought it was his sister. He turned around. “Sorry.” He blinked then smiled and almost laughed. “Ruby!”

“Here,” she said, “Give me those things. This is woman’s work.” She was all decked

out in Sunday clothes, wore a nice bonnet with flowers, and proved to be the source of the perfume.

“How?” Estel asked, not knowing what to do but to hand her the plates and one bowl of potato salad he carried.

“Your sisters came and got me,” she said, not looking up, but arranging everything to her own sense of perfection. “There.” She turned and grabbed Estel's hand. “I know we are about to eat, but can we please go somewhere and talk privately?”

“Sure.” Estel pointed to another clump of trees and a vacant picnic table. “There’s a place.”

The two crossed the field and sat in the shade across from each other.

“How’d you get along?” asked Ruby, probably concerned about the way war can do bad things to a body.

“Oh,” Estel said, a little reluctant to talk. “I did okay. Got bored mostly. After seeing the small town once or twice, there wasn’t anything else to do but read. Daddy gave me a New Testament before I left. I have about memorized ...”

“I guess what I really want to know,” Ruby asked, reaching over and taking his hand.

“Were there girls in that town?”

Estel blushed. He smiled a bit, looked down at the table, and asked, “Your mother wanted you to ask that?”

Now Ruby was embarrassed. She smiled and said, “Yes.”

“Well, to tell the truth,” Estel said, “Each guy could have a dozen girls if he went to the right places. I learned to avoid those. It was hard to find a place to eat though, without the evidence of spirits, so I mostly bought presents to bring home.” Estel patted Ruby’s

hand. "I bought you something I hope will be useful."

"What is it?" Ruby asked with a big grin.

"Well, now. Let me have the pleasure of surprising you."

Ruby placed both hands over one of his. "Ohhh, but let me be surprised right now."

"Well, if you must know," Estel said, a bit perturbed, "It's a little alabaster box."

"Is it cute?"

"It has carvings all over it. Feels nice to hold ... quite polished."

After they had been talking for some time, Viola and Eva brought plates filled to the brim to them.

"Would you two like a chaperon?" Asked Viola.

"We would love to volunteer," Eva said, smiling playfully.

"I'm sure," Estel said, sticking a chicken leg into his mouth, "that we can care for ourselves. But thanks for the chicken. I've been homesick for Mama's good Southern cooking." He cleaned the meat off the bone with his teeth. "You couldn't imagine what the boys have been eating."

"Oh, I could," Ruby said, slipping a spoon of potato salad into her mouth. "Now watch yer manners."

Viola rested her chin onto her fists as she leaned over toward Estel. "Tell us some war stories."

"Go away," Estel said, disgruntled.

"Girls," Ruby said, stripping a chicken leg of its meat and gristle, making a crunching sound as she chewed the gristle. "This is our time together. You will understand someday. You'll have time with him tonight. Now scoot."

Not if I can help it, Estel thought.

The girls left as Mama showed up. “You kids doing okay? Is everything delicious? Can I get you anything?” She looked around. The want-to-be-lovers smiled at her. “Oh. The girls didn’t bring you any tea. The boys brought their coffee, but would you like some iced tea?”

“That would be great, Mama ,” Ruby said.

“Okay. I’ll be right back.”

Estel and Ruby smiled at each other and laughed, shaking their heads.



Ruby was dropped off at the door at her place. The sun was going down, and someone had just turned the lanterns on inside. The windows presented a soft yellow glow as she stepped down from the wagon. She and Estel had said their goodbyes. She didn’t turn around, but walked forward, not drying her eyes. She didn’t want anyone to see she was crying. He hadn’t proposed. Maybe it had been all the interruptions, but still ... As soon as she entered and closed the door, she patted her face with her hanky, pinched her cheeks and smiled.

Mama Walker came into the living room. Everyone one else, it seemed, had gone to bed. She looked at her daughter and tilted her head. “How’d it go?”

Ruby sat on the settee. Her mama came and sat beside her. “We had a pleasant time, talking and eating. I am stuffed. I don’t think I ate so much since Christmas. We didn’t talk coming home. I mean, I don’t think anyone talked.” Ruby gave a little laugh. “We were so full. There were no leftovers. I liked the lemon meringue pie the best. I had two big heaping

servings of that.”

Ruby sighed, and her mother wrapped her long puffy arm around her. She put her head on her mother’s shoulder. She started to snifle. “Mama,” she said. “He didn’t propose.”

“Did he ...”

“No Mama, he didn’t kiss me either.”

“That’s good. We don’t want any hanky panky going on until after the wedding.”

“Will there be one?”

“I’m certain.” Mama Walker caressed her hair. “Now, tell me about his life overseas.”

Ruby described the post and the little village according to the conversation she and Estel had, sitting under the shade of the cottonwood trees.

“He said he didn’t mix with the girls there. He did go to church however. It was all in French, though.”

“That’s wonderful.” Mama Walker paused. “Do you think he is honest?”

“Yes, Mama. He is the perfect gentleman. I just wish he weren’t. Now I don’t mean to hurt your feelings, but he is so pure of spirit that he doesn’t seem interested in me anymore.”



The next time Estel saw Ruby was at church. He came in and sat next to her and held her hand. He smiled and she smiled, but he didn’t say anything. They stood and read the prayer book together when it was time and shared a song book. But this was Estel’s way. He didn’t talk in church like some of his family or her family.

After church, people gathered out on the lawn into their little cliques and families to talk. Some lit up a Camel or Lucky Strike.

Mary and Lulu found Eva and Viola.

“What’s wrong with Estel?” Mary asked.

“What do you mean?” asked Viola.

“Why, he didn’t ask Ruby to marry him,” Lulu asked impertinently. “He was supposed to do that at the picnic, or so we thought.”

“Dear me,” Eva said. “Are we to be held responsible for our brother?”

“Doesn’t the scripture say we are our brother’s keeper?” Mary asked, staring into her eyes.

“Well what do you want us to do about it?” Viola asked, a little taken aback.

From that point, the four girls were like a brood of chickens, laughing, giggling, screaming, and all talking at once as they made plans to get Estel and Ruby married.



For two weeks, wherever Estel went, there was Ruby. He found her at the general store. He found her showing up for dinner. He found himself invited to her house for dinner. He went to the school to pick up his saxophone and some papers and she was there to do the same. He received a Valentine’s card out of season. She received one also. Walking her home one evening, she thanked him for the card.

“What card?” he asked. “I never sent you a card, but thank you for the card you sent me.”

“I never sent you a card.” Ruby laughed. “Do you think ...?”

“Well, I never.”

Estel and Ruby stopped in their tracks and turned to face each other. “I wouldn’t put it past Mary and Lulu,” Ruby said.

“Or Eva and Viola,” Estel returned.

They held each other’s hands and laughed.

“Or the invitations,” Mary said softly.

“I thought you had just showed up.”

“Me too. You just showed up.”

They smiled at each other and continued their walk. There was a cool breeze as if especially for them. The cows mooed a lullaby. The birds chirped and warbled in the trees. The sun was setting over the Walker farm, and Estel didn’t want to say goodbye.

“It seems natural for you to stay the night,” Ruby said, holding onto his arm.

“And the next and the next.”

“Why haven’t you proposed?” Ruby’s eyes reminded Estel of a sad cow. He wiped the tears from her cheek with his handkerchief.

“I meant to, Ruby. I just didn’t think I could after what happened over there.”

“There was a girl, wasn’t there?”

Estel took Ruby’s hands and placed them on his heart. “You’ve got to promise never to tell anyone. Promise me out of your love, if you still love me.”

Ruby sighed. “I promise.”

“I want you to know that my integrity is intact. I never did anything the Savior wouldn’t have done.”

“Okay.”

“Ruby, all we did was eat dinner together and go to church together with her family. They were always with us. In fact, it was the custom in their country that we never be alone.”

Ruby hugged her future husband.

He whispered, “I didn’t know I could have the same feelings for you, but when I came home, I left that girl back there with her family and their customs.” Estel took Ruby’s face into his hands. “I love you and only you.”

“Ruby?” Mama Walker called from the door.

Ruby cleared her throat. “Yes, Mama. Be right there.”

She put his hands in hers. “I guess we should set a wedding date.”

Estel smiled. “How about tomorrow?”

“Now, Estel,” she said, trying not to be hurt because of his joke. “It will take near a month for us to prepare.”

“Okay. We will be married next month on this day, the twenty second. How about that?”

Ruby’s face sparkled. She wanted to kiss him goodnight, but her mother’s strings, like the controls of a marionette, pulled her back. “Good night. I’ll let you know about the arrangements.”

“Good night, Ruby. I can’t wait.” When Ruby pulled away, he didn’t let go of her hands. He wanted to draw her into his arms, but there was Mama Walker standing on the porch. He let her go, waved at his future mother-in-law, and left, walking on air.



“What will you wear, Ruby?” Mary asked, going through Ruby’s closet, inspecting each of her dresses.

“I’ll wear my Sunday best. You don’t have to be worrying or having big dreams.” Ruby put her hand on Mary’s to stop her. “I’m a simple farm girl, and I expect the rest of my life to be simple.”

“Simple’s okay,” Mary objected, “but not plain.”

“See?” Ruby said as she took a dress from the closet. “This frock is just fine.”

“It looks plain Jane to me.”

“Well, you’re not getting married in it. When it’s your turn, you can choose. I choose this one.” Ruby smiled. “Besides, Estel will be wearing his regular Sunday suit, a white shirt and a bow tie. It will do fine.”

Ruby didn’t have to go out to a printer and get a lot of invitations printed up. She wasn’t rich, and she only had a few school friends. A note would do for them. It was Family that was important, and she knew who would show up at the wedding, invitation or not.

The second thing to think about would be the wedding cake and then the decorations in the assembly hall in the church building. The only one she knew of that had a large hall was the one in Merkel just south of the farm. She would get Papa to rent it.

It was Mama Walker’s duty to make the wedding cake. It would be a large two layer cake, lemon, with Mama’s most popular lemon butter frosting.

White sheets would drape the walls, windows and tables of the assembly hall with a

hint of satin ribbons. Candles would light each table. *This is what friends are for*, Ruby thought. *They will contribute the decorations.*



The day of the wedding came. Two families entered their wagons in the early morning and traveled south from Noodle to Merkel, just west of Abilene, Texas. Everyone wore wide-rimmed hats and dusters, large thin overcoats to keep the dust at bay. There was gay laughter and singing and hugging each other in the cold morning air.

Several wagons drove up to the chapel almost at the same time. There were aunts, uncles, and cousins coming from Sweetwater to the west and Abilene from the east.

As the relatives entered the chapel, they kept looking back and talking about the new automobile parked among the wagons. They couldn't guess who it belonged to.

Everyone settled down as they hung their dusters on the coat racks in the foyer, and families sat together on the pews as they waved to their relatives. Some of the children had to go visit their cousins whom they rarely saw. Usually on holidays.

Ruby was not influenced by the movies or magazines, since she was not allowed that kind of entertainment, so the ceremony was simple. She would not be marching down the aisle. She would wear no veil, and her father was not going to give her away. She sat with her mama and papa on the left front row, and Estel sat with his family on the right. When the preacher entered and moved up to the pulpit, he motioned to the couple to come forward.

He advised them to live the gospel and to treat each other as Jesus would and commenced saying:

“Estel Lee , do you take this young lady, Ruby Emma Walker, to be your wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do you part, according to God's holy ordinance?”

“I do,” Estel said, smiling at Ruby.

“Ruby Emma Walker, do you take Estel Lee to be your wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, to cherish and obey, till death do you part, according to God's holy ordinance?”

“I do,” Ruby said, starry-eyed.

“Then by the power and authority invested in me by the state of Texas, I pronounce you man and wife.” The preacher smiled in his grace given him by the state, spreading his arms proudly in this political love and awareness and said, “You may kiss the bride.”

Estel and Ruby tenderly kissed for the first time. Was it worth the wait? Ruby’s mother thought so. They hugged each other and faced all their relatives, in-laws, and friends. They almost ran down the aisle. They wanted to get away from the rice throwers who waited at the door.

They laughed as they ran down the stone steps, not avoiding the rice that rained down upon them, and into a newly decorated automobile that waited for them. Papa Walker was their driver.

“Who had time to decorate this contraption?” Ruby asked, holding onto the bouquet of flowers. “Oh, I forgot to throw it behind me.”

Estel patted her on her knee and smiled.

Papa Walker laughed all the way to the picnic area, for he loved weddings.



There was a special table set up for the bride and groom. Others followed and had their picnics nearby. It was almost like when Estel returned from the war, except this time, the whole picnic grounds were filled with family.

Estel and Ruby stared at each other as their hands plunged into the sandwiches prepared for them.

“I think we are going to have to move to Abilene,” Estel said. “Would you mind?”

“It will be a change from these parts,” Ruby said, talking with food in her mouth.

“Leaving my family may be tough, but families do that now-a-days.”

“Well, that’s where the college is at, in Abilene.” Estel laughed softly. “Our families will only be a short hop away.”

“Yes,” Ruby said, taking another bite. “You’re right. And my Aunt Mary will be there.”

“She’s the one.”

“Yes. She started the church. Of course, her husband will get all the credit.”



In the evening, everyone moved back to the church and its assembly hall. The white cotton draperies covering the walls, stage, and tables turned the hall into a fairy land with

candle lit dinners at each table. Now Estel and Ruby met all their relatives and friends in a formal setting. One of those friends, Maggie Shoemaker, had made a short veil of netting and placed it under her bonnet of flowers, making it look authentic. So as Estel and Ruby stood on the stage, shaking the hands of a long line of people, they actually looked like a bride and groom. Someone came up with a camera, and Ruby quickly took her bonnet and veil off. She smoothed her hair, and the two posed for a picture.



Chapter Six

Farming came first. Estel had said, "I'll have to raise some money before I can attend college." Ruby agreed. Putting food in their mouths would have to be top priority. Maybe after they got established as a good commercial enterprise, Estel could think of furthering his education.

But then the nightmares came and the guilt. He had promised the Lord he would preach his gospel, and he wasn't doing it.

"Didn't sleep good last night?" Ruby asked as Estel, half asleep, made his way to the kitchen. "You almost kicked me."

"Kicking against the pricks," he said, sitting down at the table.

Ruby placed some hot coffee and a plate of eggs, bacon, and pancakes in front of him.

"Not talking about you," Estel said as he poked at his breakfast. "I am sure that my nightmares are coming from the Lord. I'm not doing what he called me to do."

Ruby sat across from him at their little table built for two. "I remember you telling me." She sipped her coffee she had been working on since she got up. The cup was now half full. "May I make a suggestion?"

"Not that I can read your mind," Estel said as he poured molasses on his pancakes. "I have the same idea."

"Make a trip to Amarillo and visit Aunt Mary and Uncle Cage," they said together.



The next Sunday, Estel took Ruby in their new car, Papa's wedding gift, and drove to Abilene. They were soon sitting in Ruby's Aunt and Uncle's living room.

Estel told his story of how he was called to the work in faraway French Algiers.

"You see," he said, "I need to start preaching, or I think I will go mad with grief."

"I heard," Uncle Cage said, "that you were going to a Methodist college right out of school."

"Well, you see," he said, "Uncle Sam stopped that. And now that Ruby and I got married, we feel that we need to work. I don't think I can work the farm and go to school at the same time."

"Maybe that's the wrong work," Aunt Mary said, deep in thought. "Perhaps you have another skill you can depend upon."

"Well," Estel said, half smiling, "I do love carpentry. I have grown up doing a lot of that at home with Pa, Richard, Earl, and 'Leige."

"There you go then," Uncle Cage said, leaning over and taking Estel's hand. "We have started a seminary here in Abilene, and we would be proud if you joined."

"We know a few contractors," Aunt Mary said. "We could ask around and call you back."

"Papa has a telephone," Ruby interjected. "He can send someone over when you get word."

Ruby gave out the phone number and then her Aunt had to make them stay for dinner. Of course, they brought out everything they had, several meats, corn on the cob, green beans, potato salad, rice and gravy, scalloped potatoes, pickles of all kinds, several kinds of squash, beets, and beans. They continued their conversation as they ate, making plans for their future and getting to know the two evangelists.

As they stood on the front porch ready to leave, Uncle Cage said, “You can stay with us when you settle your affairs on the farm.”

“We have a harvest to take care of first,” Estel said.

Ruby kissed her aunt goodbye, and they went down to the car.

“I could sure take a nap,” Ruby said as she slipped into the front seat.

Estel closed her door, went around the car, sat behind the wheel, and closed his door.

“You can lean on my shoulder, and I’ll try not to go to sleep at the wheel.”

“I’m so full,” Ruby said, getting comfortable.

“I’m already anxious to move here and get started.”

Estel sounded his horn, “Arooga!” and waved as he pulled out and headed home. Aunt Mary and Uncle Cage waved.

The wheels drummed against the newly laid pavement. The sun settled down in the west, and Estel turned the lights on. He followed the two cones of light down the highway and flashed them at rare motorists who flashed their lights in return as if to say, “Hello world, it’s wonderful to have cars.”

When Estel pulled into the driveway, he put his arm around Ruby and said, “We’re home.”

Ruby smiled and said, “Looks like we have turned a new page.”

The Reluctant Farmer

Chapter One

Dallas, near 1900

Eliza had trouble crossing the streets with her little ones holding to her skirts. The box shaped automobiles among the traffic of horse drawn wagons and carriages were always getting in her way, and the honking of their horns, made her nervous. She hadn't seen so many of these newfangled things. It was a new experience for her, as she had grown up on a farm and continued to live on a farm with her husband O. B. Murdock until his death. She finally reached the building she was looking for and could take a breath.

The arched sign over the large green doors read *The Masonic Widows and Orphan's Home*. The Dallas building was red sandstone brick with large thick blocks around the doors. Its side walls turned into a fenced-in compound in back. Eliza was a tall, lanky, uneducated Indian woman with four children. She couldn't read the sign, but she was told this was the place to get help. She bent down and gathered her brood, whose names were Aalice, eight, Ollie, seven, Henry, six, and, Thomas, five, into her arms.

"I don't want you to worry," she said softly. "The woman at the church said they would take care of you. Your daddy brought home the money to buy things." She wiped a tear from her eye. "Since your daddy went to Heaven, we have no more. I will ask someone write to you when I get work. I will come back for you then."

Eliza pushed the heavy door open and the children hung onto her skirts.

"Mommy, we don't want you to leave," they all said, stomping on the tile floor, as

though they were dancing in place.

“Shhh! Let’s not make a lot of noise.”

Eliza didn’t show any emotion as she approached the front desk, but her heart was pounding.

“My husband died in the influenza,” she told the man behind the counter.

“Do you have means of support?” asked the bald round head with glasses and mustache.

“No sir,” Eliza said, rubbing her hands together.

“Do you have folks?” The man stared, but she was accustomed to that.

“I used to. I don’t know. It’s been such a long time.” The strain started to show on her face.

“Can you read or write?” He seemed to be checking things off on a paper.

“No sir.”

“Come this way.” He strode out from behind the counter, opened a dark wood gate made of balustrades and ushered the urchins through. “Miss Meddles will help you fill out our form.”

“Children, you can come with me,” the little round man pointed. “We will find something for you to play with while you wait.” He led them into a fenced-in enclosure, made of the same dark wood balustrades, where there were toys.

The man talked with Miss Meddles in a low voice, handing her some papers. He turned to Eliza and said, “Please have a seat. Our secretary will help you.”

Eliza sat on a dark hardwood chair and leaned over rather than scooting the chair forward.

“Your name, Ma’am?” Miss Meddles said, pen in hand.

“Eliza Murdock.” She lay her hands in her lap, clasping them together.

“Maiden name?”

“Beaty.”

“What were your parent’s names?”

Eliza tilted her head and said, “Leonard Beaty and Maholly Morgan.”

“Race?”

“Irish and Cherokee, Ma’am.”

“Husband’s name?”

“Isaac Newton Murdock. He was a Mason. That’s what brought me here.”

“Odd name.” Miss Meddles hesitated. “Did your husband have Jewish ancestry?”

“No Ma’am. Not that I could tell.”

“I see.”

“Do you know his parents? Was his father a Mason?”

“No Ma'am, except his mother was a Good Knight.”

“That sounds Mason.” After writing a few things, she asked, “What is your address?”

“We don’t have one, Ma’am. The bank took our farm.” Eliza continued to squeeze her hands together in her lap.

“You owe a mortgage?” Miss Meddles looked up, pen erect.

“No, Ma’am. They took our farm because they said I was a Injun.”

Miss Meddles wrote a few more things and took out four slips of paper. “What are the names of your children?”

Eliza gave the long version, introducing her to each child, telling the secretary all

about them. "Alice is the oldest and sober. She is the leader and protector. Ollie is named after his father. He is a prankster, always trying to make people laugh. Nothing ever seems to make him sad. He is always cheerful. His brothers and sister call him 'B.' I don't know why. Henry is the smart one. He listens to what I say. Thomas is the baby. I pamper him and give him whatever he wants." She looked over to where the children were playing. She smiled as she heard Ollie laugh.

Miss Meddles gave Eliza four slips of paper with the children's name written on them and pins. "Go to the playpen with me and show me which child is which, and I will attach the name tags to each child."

Eliza was greeted with, "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy." The children raised their hands as if they wanted her to lift each one of them to her bosom.

"This is Alice. This is Ollie. This is Henry, and this here is Thomas." She pointed to each one, and Miss Meddles pinned the labels on them.

"Children," Eliza said as she kneeled down. "I will be back. These are name tags so they can tell who you are. Go back to playing now. I will see you again later."

Before Eliza could return to the desk, Miss Meddles said, "Please follow me, Mrs. Murdock," and escorted her to the door.

"I'm sorry we are short of space or we would have given you a bed for the night. We hate to turn you out. The children will receive excellent care."

Miss Meddles opened the door and Eliza left, looking back over her shoulder in the direction of her children. She said a little prayer that the Lord look after her young ones and then thought how rude the whites were. *Just 'cause I'm an Indian, she thought. I bet if I was white they would have a bed.*



Eliza got a job in downtown Dallas as a washer woman, scrubbing floors. She saved enough money to furnish a rented apartment, then she went back to The Masonic Widows and Orphans Home to collect her children.

“What do you mean they’re not here?” Eliza looked at the receptionist aghast.

“Mrs. Murdock,” the receptionist said, a young girl, different from the one Eliza remembered, “you have been gone three months. We have farmed them out to different families.”

“I had to save money. I worked, and I saved so they could come back home with me.”

Eliza pleaded with her eyes. “Where are they? What families?”

“We are not allowed to give out that information, Ma’am.”

Eliza left the building, covering her mouth so she wouldn’t cry out. After she returned to her apartment, she collapsed onto her bed, covered her mouth with a pillow and sobbed until she fell asleep with the thought, *I will find them.*



Ollie, now thirteen, spent the afternoon hoeing weeds in the cotton field. Mr. Hardy, the owner of the farm, walked over to him and said, “That will do for the day. Let’s go to the house and wash up for dinner.”

“I bet Ma has that chicken cooked as good as a goose with all the trimmings,” Ollie said, hefting his hoe onto his shoulder.

“I bet she has,” said Mr. Hardy, an older man with graying hair, clean shaven, thick

eyebrows and a mountain of a nose. He was much shorter than Ollie who was growing tall and lanky.

There was a tub of water in back of the house where the two washed up near a towel rack with one towel for all. It might have seen the laundry soap last week. Mr. Harp took the tub and threw out the water.

“Fill it up for in the morning, Ollie.”

“Okay, Pa.” Ollie went to the pump between the house and the barn, filled the bucket and took it to the tub which sat on a handmade table. He poured the water into it and made one more trip with the bucket to fill the tub to the brim.

As he entered the back door, Mrs. Harp yelled from the kitchen, “Wipe yer feet! Don’t come into my kitchen bringin’ in all o’ Nature.”

“How many years you been tellin’ me that, Ma?”

“All yer life, boy. You keep minded me an’ we’ll get along fine.”

Ollie wiped his feet good on the hemp mat and went up to his foster mother and kissed her on the cheek.

“You take these taters to the table.” Mrs. Harp handed him the white oval bowl. “I’ll bring the chicken. The beans are already there.”

Jacky, the oldest boy came through the back door. He was tall with black hair. His face was elongated, following after his mother’s family.

“You washed up?” Mrs. Harp yelled.

“Done right good, Ma.”

“Then come and sit at the table. Pa will say grace.”

“Wait on me, Ma.” Ellie, a teenage girl with bouncing auburn hair down to her

shoulders ran in at the last moment and sat down at the table.

Mr. Harp started right in, saying, “Oh Lord make us truly grateful for this bounty. Amen.”

“Pa says the same prayer every meal,” Ollie said as he grabbed a thick slice of homemade bread as the plate whizzed by in front of him.

“Daddy always says the same prayer, don’t cha, Daddy?” Ellie said, grabbing a spoonful of taters before Jacky grabbed it from her.

“Never you mind,” Mr. Harp said.

“I want a leg, please, Ma,” Ollie said, drooling.

Mrs. Harp was doing the carving. “Thanks fer yer manners. For that, you can also git the wish bone.”

“Aw, Ma,” Jacky said. “I always get the wishbone.”

“You had it long enough.” Mrs. Harp sliced the collar bone right off the front of the carcass and handed it to Ollie.

Jacky raised his fork at Ollie, ready to stab.

Mrs. Harp slapped Jacky’s head with the butcher knife. “We’ll have none of that at the table.”

“Pa,” Ollie asked, “Why is my last name in the middle and you all’s is on the end?”

“I reckon yer real ma named you that way ‘cause we are rightfully your aunt and uncle.”

“Then why do I call you ‘Pa’?” Ollie scratched his head, getting chicken fat in his hair.

“You been doing it so long it stuck.” Mr. Harp said, pouring more gravy over his

chicken and potatoes. Then thinking a mite, he poured gravy on his string beans.

“Oh.” Ollie continued eating and said, “Okay if I call you Uncle?”

“It would be more proper, but then I would lose a son.”

“Oh. I guess I won’t then.”

After dinner, the family sat on the front porch and Ollie asked, “Do I have any other brothers and sisters?”

“I hear,” Mrs. Harp said, “that you have two brothers and a sister. I think their names was Thomas, Allice, and Henry.”

“Where are they?” Ollie asked, leaning forward so as to see his parent’s faces.

“Who knows, who cares, half breed?” said Jacky with his arms behind his head, stretching.

“Stop that,” Ellie said. “He can’t help it if his ma’s an Indian.”

“We don’t even know where yer ma is,” Mr. Harp said.

Ollie watched the sun set into a puddle of deep orange clouds and thought, *Someday I’ll find them and her.*



Years passed with Eliza looking at every young boy and girl to see if she recognized them. Every time she went to the store or to the park, she would scan the area to see if she could recognize any of her children. One day in Woolworth’s Five and Dime Store she saw Allice. She hid and watched her. She was all grown up.



Eliza tried to smooth her gray hair, tucking it under her plain beige bonnet. She sniffed

the roses as she ascended the concrete steps. Knocking on the door of the recently built house with a wide porch, she cleared her throat. She looked around nervously. The green paint on the sideboards looked fresh, and the pillows on the porch swing looked new.

The door opened. A tall young woman with dark cropped hair appeared.

“Yes?” she asked. Her dark eyes looked like a replica of Eliza’s.

“Is this the residence of Mrs. Alice Green?”

“Yes,” Alice said, tilting her head. “And you?”

“I’m Eliza, yer mother.” Eliza stood there like an old leather doll that had been propped up in front of the door.

Alice’s heart dropped into her stomach. “Oh my Gosh! Come in. Come in.”

Eliza stepped forward and entered something like a dark cave. She waited a moment for her eyes to adjust.

“I’ve been workin’ and savin’ money, always in the hope my children would come home.”

“Have a seat on the couch.” Alice directed her way with the wave of her arm. “You look so hot. I have a pi’ture of lemonade in the ice box. Would you like some?”

“I been walkin’ a long distance,” Eliza said, sinking down toward the sofa. “Yes, please.”

Alice came back with two tumblers filled with iced lemonade. She handed one to Eliza and sat in a chair facing her long lost mother.

“Do you live far?” Alice asked, leaning forward.

“I rented an apartment here in Dallas to make a home for my children, but they took you all away.”

“You still live here?” Alice sipped her lemonade.

Eliza just held onto the cold glass. “Yes. It isn’t far.”

“It is beyond me why the two of us have lived in the same city and haven’t run into each other.”

Eliza sighed. “I hope you’ll forgive me, but I saw you downtown once. I froze in my tracks. I didn’t know what to do. I wouldn’t have known what to say.”

“How’d you know it was me?” Alice sipped her lemonade and pressed her lips together, bowing her head and glancing up.

“Honey, your eyes haven’t changed a bit,” Eliza said, smiling. “And, the sales lady asked your name and address when she was writing the receipt.”

“Oh.” *Well. This is embarrassing, your mother showing up after all these years.* “I guess that made it easy for you to find me.”

“Yes Ma’am. It sure did.” Eliza stifled a giggle. She cleared her throat instead.

“Would you stay for dinner? It’s just something simple.” Alice put her empty glass down. “We have pork and beans over cornbread.”

“That’s my kind of meal. Can I help?”

Alice rose and said. “The kitchen is this way.”

Eliza held back on the advice she wanted to give. Instead, she asked, “How do you do this?” But Alice was adventuresome and said, “You cut the ham however you do it,” so the two got along fine.

Time zipped by, and the two women heard, “Honey, I’m home.” Mr. Green had come in and rattled the door as he slammed it. He explained later over dinner that the latch on the front door wasn’t installed right.

“Calvin,” Alice called out. “We’re in the kitchen.”

“We?” Mr. Green poked his head into the kitchen.

“Come in and meet my mother,” Alice said, as she slipped three white porcelain plates onto the table.

Calvin extended his hand, “Mrs. Wentworth?”

“No, Calvin,” Alice corrected, “This is Mrs. Murdock, my birth mother.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Calvin apologized, “I’ve never met Mrs. Wentworth, so I automatically thought ...”

“That’s okay, Mr. Green,” Eliza said, wiping her hands on her skirt. “I’m just the dishwasher right now.” She shook his hand.

“When did she show up,” Calvin whispered to Alice.

“Just this afternoon,” Alice whispered back.

Eliza left the kitchen and headed for the front door. Alice noticed and cut her off.

“Where are you going?”

“I don’t want to interfere,” Eliza said, looking at the floor.

“You’re not interfering in the least. Please come back, and we will eat a nice dinner and get to know each other.”

“Okay. My stomach is growling a bit, and it’s a long walk home.”

At dinner Eliza learned that Calvin was a fireman, but his first job when they got married was driving a coal truck, delivering coal to homes and businesses in Dallas and Fort Worth. He started as a volunteer fireman when one of the homes he had delivered to caught on fire. He started helping the firemen and liked it.

She also found out that she was going to be a grandma. Alice was pregnant.

“You sure don’t show much,” Eliza said.

“I’m not that far yet, but the rabbit died.”

“Well, I guess that confirms it.”

It was late after they finished talking, and Alice invited Eliza to spend the night in the guest room.

The next morning, Eliza didn’t want to leave. She didn’t say that, only, “Can I visit again?”

“Yes, but let Calvin come and pick you up.” Alice held her mother’s hands. “What about Sunday after church? We can have dinner at a park somewhere.”

“I know a little park near my home,” Eliza said.

They hugged each other as the cab Alice had called drove up. “That will do fine, then. We will have a fun time. Goodbye, and take care.”

Eliza remembered when Alice was a little girl. She would hang onto her mother’s skirts and call “Mama! Mama!” Now she called her by her first name as one adult to another, one friend to another, not Mama, and it hurt.

As she rode home, she fingered the two dollars Alice had given her to pay the cabbie. At least Alice was thoughtful in that way.

Eliza visited Alice and Calvin every Sunday for a month. Calvin was joking when he said she might as well move in. Alice and Eliza took him serious, and the mother-in-law stepped into where angels fear to tread. She moved in.

Chapter Two

Dallas, sometime before 1910

Eliza sat in the living room sobbing. She just couldn't believe the goodness of God and the Lord's blessings. Henry had been standing in the doorway talking to Alice when Eliza walked in from her bedroom. She didn't know who he was until Alice introduced him. He had changed so much, but when he called her "Ma," she screamed, and hugged and kissed him. She almost passed out and had to be carried to the sofa.

"How did you find me?" Alice asked.

"It was a fluke," he said. "I was at the library downtown. I spend time in libraries wherever I go, looking for Ma. I took up the Dallas City Directory and found your two names together, Alice and Eliza, and here you are." He stood there tall and lanky like the rest of his family, with his thumbs in his front pockets. His nose was sharp above thin lips. Alice noticed he looked a lot like the picture of their father Eliza carried in her purse.



"What brings you to Dallas, anyway?" Alice asked, holding her hands behind her back.

“The railroad. I work for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company,” he said slowly to get all the words in. “We just call it the AT and SF. I came down here from Roswell ... been working in Boas, between Roswell and Clovis. It was built by the railroad to house the men. We’re laying rails all the way through Roswell, perhaps to Carlsbad.”

“Better go sit with yer Ma, poor thing.” Allice said, stepping toward the kitchen. “I’ll get some coffee and sandwiches for us.”

Henry sauntered over to the couch. He sat down by his long lost mother. “Hi Mom.”

Eliza dried her eyes with her dainty handkerchief. “How’d you find me?” She sniffed.

“I’ve been looking for you since I came to myself and left home.”

“Where did they take you?” She sniffed again.

“I grew up in New Mexico. Alamogordo.” He leaned back and put his arm around her shoulders.

“That’s a long way off.” She tugged at her skirt as if it were too tight.

“Yep.”

“Here we go,” Allice said, bringing a tray of three cups of coffee and three sandwiches.

As Henry took his snack, he said, “Boy, Allice, you sure are big.”

“It’s due any day now.”

“You got a telephone?”

“Yes,” she said as she settled down on the other side of Eliza. “Here you go, Mom.” She looked back toward Henry. “You need to use it? It’s in the kitchen.” she asked, taking a sip of her coffee.

“No,” he said. “But you will pretty soon.” Henry smiled from ear to ear.

“Oh, Calvin will take me.”

Henry just sat there holding his coffee and sandwich. “He your man?”

“He’s mine all right. I hope he realizes my plight and not go to the saloon on his way home.”

“He does that?” Henry started sipping his coffee at the suggestion of drinking.

“He’s been doing that a lot lately,” Eliza butted in, taking a bite of her pimento and cheese sandwich.

“I can imagine,” Henry said, “and this looks like his first child?”

“Yes. It’s our first.”

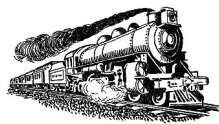
“Well, he’s probably nervous and worried about having a child. I know I would be. It’s a lot of responsibility.”

“I can attest to that,” Eliza said.

The three of them spent the afternoon chatting and telling stories. By the time Calvin came home and dinner was on the table, Henry was coerced to stay.

He had to explain all over again why he was here, how he got here, and what he did for a living.

“Someday,” he said, “I’ll find Ollie and Thomas.”



After dinner, Alice confronted Henry with a problem. “Our mother has become a burden,” she said in a low whisper on the front steps. “Calvin has started complaining.”

“Mothers-in-law are always a problem.” Henry answered. “Is it money? If it is, I have plenty of money, and I can call her a dependent.”

“I don’t like to say it so bluntly.” Alice turned her eyes away so she didn’t have to see his face. “It’s shameful for me to ask, but you see, Mom has quit working, expecting us to support her.”

“So don’t worry, Sis,” Henry said, grabbing her hands. “We’re family. The railroad pays me good since I have become a section boss. Let me take care of her by sending her some money.”

“I wish she could go back with you, but I have ambivalent feelings about that. After all, she is my flesh and blood too.”

“Yeah,” Henry smiled, “and I don’t think she would like living with a bunch of drinking, swearing men.”

“No.” Alice laughed softly. “I could just imagine.”

“Well, I have to get back. Wish she wasn’t sleeping. She looked so peaceful there on the couch. I would like to say goodbye.”

“If you don’t, she will be very gloomy tomorrow.” Alice opened the screen door. “I have to wake her up to go to bed anyway.”

They both went in. Alice sat down by her mother and gently woke her.

“Huh?” Eliza blinked and looked around. She smiled when she saw Henry.

He knelt down beside her. “I have to get back to the train. I’m leaving early in the morning. Four o’clock. Have to say goodbye.”

Eliza held onto his hands. “I wish you didn’t have to.”

“I’ll write,” he said, “and I’ll come back as soon as I can.”

Henry helped her up. They hugged. She kissed him on the cheek.

“I’ve always loved you,” Eliza said softly.

“Goodbye. Love you too.”

Eliza reached her hand out as he left. Alice escorted him to the door.

“I’ll send a check when I get back.” He took Alice’s hand and squeezed it.

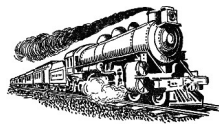
“Thank you.” Alice kissed his cheek.

“It’s nice to see you. I’ll be back.”

“Me too. I guess the family is getting back together.”

“Yeah.” He squeezed her hand again. “Good night.”

“Good night.”



Henry was a people person and a magnet of different personalities. He had friends of every character. He could walk into any saloon, business office, or church and be greeted. One case was pivotal. He walked into the R&R Saloon in Boas and was approached by Ross, a nearly bald, full bearded ruffian.

“Hey, Boss,” he said, blowing cigar smoke into Henry’s face, “guess what?”

“What Ross?” Henry sat on a bar stool.

“There’s a feller come to town sellin’ calves to eat. Bollard here,” referring to the bartender, “bought one. He’s gonna bar-b-que it out back in a hole.”

“That’s good, Ross.” Henry turned around to order a beer from Bollard, a large shaggy man with a long beard.

“But that’s not what’s so strange.”

Henry turned back around, a little annoyed, as he was powerfully thirsty. “What, Ross?”

“He’s got such an odd name.”

“What is it, Ross?”

“Ollie Murdock. That’s yer name isn’t it? Murdock.”

Henry hopped off the stool and grabbed Ross by the shoulders. “Where is he Ross?”

“Doggone it, Henry! It’s not that strange. What do you want with him? You need a little dogie?”

Henry pushed at him. “Where?” He let go of Ross and grabbed the bar. “Bollard! Where’s the guy that sold you the calf?”

“Sorry Henry,” Bollard said, continuing to dry a mug. “Saw him down by the stables this mornin,’ but I doubt he stuck around.”

Henry ran through the doors and left them swinging back and forth, squeaking, squeaking.

Bollard yelled out, “Signed ‘is name O.B.!”

Henry ran toward the stables to the north of town. When he entered the manure and hay smelling barn, he asked old Pickard, but he said the man left with his cattle some time ago.

Henry ran back behind the barn. He could see a cloud of dust on the horizon. He ran back to the saloon, hopped in his new model T and raced after that dust cloud. He soon caught up with it. There was a lone fellow with a bandanna covering half his face on a horse herding his cattle down the dirt road heading away from Boas west. The fellow motioned to him to go around. There were no fences, so Henry hurried around, got right in front of the guy and stopped. Then he got out of the car and the horseman stopped.

“Hey! What’re you doin’?” he asked, greatly perturbed.

“Ollie! Ollie!” Henry yelled. “This is Henry. Your brother, Henry. Do you remember? We were both dropped off by our mother at that Masonic orphan’s home. I saw her just recently in Dallas. She’s still there. And here you are!”

“Well I’ll be doggoned!” Ollie said, dismounting and pulling his bandanna down. The cattle started mooing louder, seeing there was an obstruction in the road. “If it isn’t my little brother!”

Ollie grabbed Henry and gave him a big hug.

“Don’t cut my air off,” Henry pleaded. “I love you too.”

“What’er you doin’?” Ollie asked.

“Workin’ for the railroad like all the guys out here.”

Some of the cattle started roaming off the path.

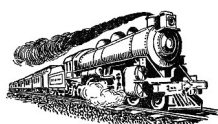
“And what are you doin,” Henry asked, “with all this cattle? You workin’ for a rancher in the area?”

“Not me,” Ollie said, getting back on his horse. “These are mine, and if I don’t get busy, they won’t be for long. You go up ahead. This road leads right to my place.”

“Okay, but it looks like you need some help.” Henry started running after the cattle on the right. “You go collect those on the left. I’ll go after these over here.”

Henry ran around the straying cattle, and waving his arms and yelling, got them to go back to the road. Ollie let his horse do the cutting and corralling. He had bought a smart one.

After Henry returned to his car out of breath and lunged forward, leaving in a trail of dust, Ollie was able to get the little band moving again.



Henry leaned against his car and lit a pipe. With one foot on the running board, he surveyed his brother's place. It was nothing but a small house, a barn with hay in the loft surrounded by a wide corral. On the other side of the barn he could see a windmill slowly turning in the constant breeze. There were a few low trees in the area out beyond the corral and around the house. They were all contorted and bent in the direction of the wind. The leaves were still green despite the dust.

The dust cloud sauntered over to the corral, Ollie opened the fence, and the cattle obediently strolled in, mooing. Somehow, it sounded like they were glad to be home.

After Ollie let water into the slew and busted a couple of hay bails open, kicking the hay out onto the ground, he wiped his face with his bandanna and came over to Henry.

"Come on inside," Ollie invited, "it's a lot cooler in there. I have another windmill on the roof. It pumps water through a swamp cooler." Ollie let Henry follow him up to the porch and into the house. "It also turns the fan. Built it myself. No electricity out here."

"You an inventor?" Henry asked as he came through the screen door. He swatted at a fly with his hat.

"I never thought of it that way. Maybe I am."

Henry moved from the living room to the hallway that went to a back bedroom. He unfolded a stepladder. "You want something to drink?"

"I'm might thirsty."

"I don't have any beer, but there's a jug of tea in the cooler."

"Yeah, that's fine," pushing his hat back

Ollie stuck his head up into the rafters, reached in and brought down the jug.

"Who would have thought of it but you?" Henry asked, settling into a dusty old sofa.

The place smelled of dust, sweat, and old dirty blankets.

Henry went into the kitchen, poured the tea into two tumblers and replaced the jug into the cooler. Bringing the tumblers back, he gave one to Henry and settled into a large chair at an angle from the sofa. The chair and the sofa were soft navy blue velvet.

Henry tasted the cool tea and took two gulps and said, “Ahhhh.”

“Good, huh?” Ollie grinned.

“Hits the spot.”

The two lifted their glasses and swallowed the last gulp.

“So,” Henry said, “you sell cattle. How’d you wind up here alone? I would expect you to have a wife.”

“You have a wife?”

“Nope.” They both broke into laughter.

Ollie pointed to Henry. “You see? There’s yer answer.”

“Yeah, I know.” Henry took off his hat, scratched his head and cupped it back on. “It’s hard when you work way out here with the railroad or with cattle, isn’t it?”

“I’ll say.”

“So tell me. How’d you get way out here?” Henry leaned back and put his feet up on the coffee table expecting a long story.

“When I was taken from the orphanage ...”

“And as I faintly remember you not being there, I guess you were the first to go.”

“Yeah.” Ollie turned his hands to show his palms. “I was given to a Mr. and Mrs. Harp. They said they were my aunt and uncle, but I still don’t know. They said they knew my ... our ma when she and our dad were young. Anyway, I grew up on their farm in

Johnson county next to Dallas.”

“So, you weren’t very far from us.”

“That’s right. But when I got older, I got the roaming fidgets and had to leave. My dad told me to join the railroad. I did and wound up here in Boas. Met this man that owned this place. To make a long story short, I won it in a poker game.”

Henry slapped his knee with his hat and burst out laughing.

“Yahoo!” Ollie added.

They laughed until the laughter turned to smiles.

“It’s good to find you, Ollie.”

“It is good, isn’t it? I’m glad to see you’re doing well.” Ollie looked at his glass, wishing it was full.

“Heard of a section boss named Murdock. Was that you?”

“Yeah. I don’t like the title, but it pays more.”

“Say,” Ollie said, leaning forward toward his brother. “I forgot. I was going to tell you about Thomas.”

“You found little Thomas?” Henry now leaned forward with supreme interest.

“Yes. Found him down there in Roswell. You see, it was Sunday, and I decided it was time I found a church. I hadn’t gone to many churches growing up, but I felt the urge.”

Henry lit his pipe again while listening.

“I walked into this Church of the Nazarene next to the Hondo River. I sat down and my attention was drawn to this young couple across the aisle. They looked really in love. I was envious. It was a nice sermon, but nothing to get me to the alter, and we sang a lot, nearly half the songbook. Well, it was a nice spirit, and I was satisfied for a while.

Afterward, going out the door, I bumped into this feller, and I say to him, ‘Don’t I know you?’

He said to me. “You look mighty fermiliar. What’s yer name?”

I have retaken my original name of Murdock, so I say, “Henry Murdock.”

He says, “Well, my name is Murdock too. Thomas. This here’s my wife Sally.”

“Hi ya do,” she says, and I tip my hat and shake her hand.

“I tell them they are the most pleasantest people I’ve seen in long time, and they invite me home to have Sunday dinner. Well, on the short end of the stick, I find that it is our Thomas, the little snort. He had a picture of our mother and him when he was a baby, same as I have. Do you have one?” Ollie takes a brass framed picture from the wall behind and shows it to Henry.

“Yes, the very one.” Henry sends a smoke ring into the air. “I wonder if they gave us these before we left the orphanage.”

“Better yet,” Ollie suggested, “maybe Ma put one in each of our clothes bundles.”

Henry took his pipe out and looked very thoughtful. “Yeah, maybe.”



Henry moved in with Ollie, but after a couple of years, they got on each other’s nerves. Henry bought the farm, hoping to make money selling beef to the railroad, and Ollie went to Roswell to work for the outfit. After laying rail down from Boas to Roswell, the cook got sick and Ollie was appointed to do the cooking. The food was so good, the guys assumed that he was a professional. Later, when he had rented a room, he confessed to his landlord that he was not. He had only learned to cook for himself on the farm. “Well,” said

the landlord, “you must be a natural.”

Ollie had looked for a place away from the boys who were quite rowdy, and always vied for his attention. Looking in the newspaper, he found a place south of Roswell that gave room and board.

Ollie walked south on Main Street, passing the city limits, and came to a small farmhouse that was set back half a block from the dirt road. He walked up to the door and knocked. An older woman opened, peering at him through the screen. She had a slim face and a square jaw, wore wire-rimmed glasses, and had her hair up in a bun.

Ollie tipped his hat, bowed slightly, and said, “I was wondering if you have room and board?”

“Certainly do,” she said. “Come on in. It’s cooler in here than it is out there.”

Ollie slid in between her and the door as she held the screen open for him. His eyes had to adjust to the dark, but he could see the hand offered him and shook it. He felt a cool breeze, probably from a swamp cooler.

“I’m Emma Singleton,” she said for introductions. “My husband Sam is out back with the calves. We had some boys, but they all scattered and scadoodled; got married, ya see.” Emma put her hand to her mouth and yelled, “Agnes! Git yerself in here.” Then she told Ollie that Agnes was the last to go and she hadn’t “went” yet.

Agnes strolled into the living room. She was nearly as tall as Ollie, and he was six feet one. She also had her hair in a bun, and her nose and lips were thin like her mother’s. Ollie imagined that when Agnes became as old as her mother they would be twins. She offered her hand. He shook it, and she said, “We got plenty of room.”

“She’s the one that put the ad in the paper. She needs the money for school,” Emma

said. "She'll show you the rooms. You can pick."

Agnes was mild mannered with a falsetto voice. She didn't really sound like a chicken, but Ollie had a good imagination. "Where are you coming from?" she asked.

"Oh, I shipped in with the railroad," he said, and added, "I'm the section cook."

"Maybe you can help Mom in the kitchen."

"I heard that!" Emma yelled.

Agnes giggled, and Ollie smiled.

Agnes opened a bedroom door. Ollie peered in, almost brushing up against her. She smelled like some kind of wild flower out in the country. Being this close to her made him start breathing heavy, so he forced himself to focus on the bedroom.

The bed sat next to the double window with its roll down shades and was almost the length of the room. The bedstead had nobs on each corner. The pink bedspread was ribbed, and the dresser was full of girl stuff. There were angled pine shelves decorated in scroll work hanging in the corners of the room that faced the bed, and a walnut chifferobe at the end of the bed.

"This room will do," Ollie said softly.

Agnes's face went red. She slammed the door, almost knocking Ollie off his feet.

"This is my room!" She smiled and said, "Sorry." Agnes didn't understand why she did such stupid things sometimes. It irritated her so.

She led him down the hall to the next bedroom. It was the same as hers except the bedspread was brown, and instead of a dresser was a chest of drawers.

"This is fine," Ollie said. "A lot better than the shack I've been living in."

"Well, I'm glad," Agnes said, biting her lower lip.

“I left my suitcase on the porch,” Ollie said. “I’ll go get it and move in.”

“Okay,” Agnes said, folding her arms. “Is ten dollars too much?”

“A week? ‘Cause I could live on that.”

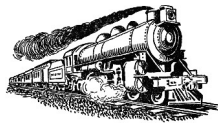
“God, no!” Agnes said with eyes wide. “A month.”

Ollie smiled and walked back into the living room with Agnes following.

“Oh! You’re just joshing. Aren’t you?” She laughed.

Ollie turned and winked.

They walked past Emma, knitting in the big chair. She made an “O” with her mouth and then smiled at Agnes.



At dinner, Ollie couldn’t keep his eyes off of Agnes. Whenever she caught him staring she turned red with embarrassment. There was something odd about her and her dad, he thought. *They both have slanted eyes.* Perhaps they had Cherokee in them like his ma, only they weren’t as dark as she was. The father’s dark skin was suntanned from being out in the fields. When Ollie got suntanned, he was as dark as his ma. But Agnes was light skinned. He wondered what kind of children they would have.

Ollie sat across from Agnes with Ma and Pa Singleton sitting at the ends of the table. Pa Singleton sat to Ollie’s right. The table was long and wide to accommodate the boys who weren’t there anymore, and the butter was across the table next to Agnes.

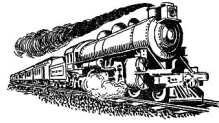
“Please pass the butter, Ma’am,” Ollie said slowly. He smiled.

She giggled.

Every time Ollie spoke, Agnes giggled.

Ma Singleton said, “Agnes, hush. Eat yer dinner. You’re upsetting the man.”

It was then that Ollie decided he would have to marry the girl.



Every day Ollie came home, he had to visit with Agnes on the porch swing until dinner was ready. Her magnetism made it compulsory.

From the kitchen Ma Singleton complained to her husband, “Ever since Ollie arrived, I can’t get Agnes into the kitchen to help me.”

“You better be kind, Emma,” Pa Singleton called back from the living room. “You might be saying ‘Goodbye’ to her pretty soon, the way they’re making out.”

“I heard that,” Agnes called through the screen door. Agnes grabbed Ollie’s hands and giggled.

“So how is the farm going?” Ollie asked, putting his finger under his collar and stretching it away from his neck as though it were a noose.

“Well,” Agnes said, “Pa fully owns the farm now, and all we have to do is raise a few chickens and cows. We also have a vegetable garden in the spring. We’re cuttin’ even. Most of the money goes to taxes, but whatever we need we make or go without.”

“How did yer parents meet?” Ollie tried to keep romance out of the subject, but maybe if they talked about someone else’s romance, he could avoid the one that seemed to be popping up.

“Well, Mom lived on a plantation in Mississippi and Dad was a local minister, I think Baptist or Methodist. They met at a church picnic on a Sunday. He was dirt poor, and she was a rich kid, spoiled rotten.”

“I heard that,” cried Emma from inside the house.

“At a social where the girls sell their box lunches to the boys, he happened to buy her lunch box, and she had to sit with him. That must have been something to see. He probably had to borrow the money. Only fifty cents, but if you’re poor, you don’t have it.”

“I know what that’s like,” Ollie said.

Agnes looked around, ducked her head and spoke in low tones. “Let me tell you one story that will crack you up. When I was a little girl, Mom was ironing Dad’s pants for church, and he was standing there butt naked, waiting in his white shirt and tie. He got too close and she reached over and touched his bottom with the iron. You should have seen him hopping and dancing around like a savage Injun.”

Ollie had to clamp his mouth shut with his hands because it did break him up. He just laughed and guffawed underneath his hands, trying not to let the folks inside know it.

“Dinner!” Emma yelled. “Come and get it!”

Chapter Three

Henry wasn't making enough money selling beef to the railroad, plus he made the mistake of selling all his cattle at one time. At least that's what all the guys working on the rails told him. Now he would have no cattle to breed. They didn't understand it was not stupidity but a way to buy a ticket to Phoenix. He heard there was better land in the Gila River valley in Arizona. If he had been working for the railroad still, he could have had a free ride.

Henry wrote a letter to Ollie and had the railroad deliver it to him. Ollie would receive it when he arrived for work the next day. He didn't bother to say goodbye, just saying where he was going and what he was doing. He would write him again from his new farm. When Ollie opened the letter and read it, he said to himself, *Don't blame you, brother. I didn't like the place either.*

On the trip, Henry got restless, counting his chickens. When he arrived at Phoenix, he actually jumped off the train and took a breath of fresh air. It was the same air as he had in New Mexico, but there was expectation and wonder in the air, and he wanted to breathe it in.

Henry deposited his luggage inside the railway office, slipping the red recovery chit into his pocket. His agenda was to find the land office, purchase some land, and then find a place to stay. He grabbed a paper from a newspaper stand on his way out. He looked for land sales as he walked down the main street. As he read the paper, he bumped into a young lady.

"Oh, pardon me, Ma'am," he said, tipping his Stetson. He kept walking until he realized how beautiful she was. He looked back and saw her gazing at him. He tipped his hat again and kept on walking. After all, his priority was the land office.

It occurred to Henry that he didn't know where the land office was, and by coincidence, he found himself at the Phoenix City Library. He went inside and asked the librarian. She said, "You don't have to go very far, just keep walking west. You'll run into it in a couple of blocks."

"I hope not, Ma'am," he said. "I have been running into too many things this morning."

The librarian was taken aback. She asked, "What kinds of things have you been running into, may I ask?"

"Pretty ladies," he said, saluting with his finger and replacing his hat. "Good day to you, Ma'am."

The librarian smiled, saying, "And a good day to you, sir." But as he approached the door, he heard her say, "Fresh!" He chuckled.

Henry peered up at the hanging signs as he passed each one. After crossing a couple of streets, he found one named The Arizona State Land Sales Department. *I don't want to buy state land. I'd rather take a look at what I read in the papers.*

He read:

Duncan, Arizona

Gila River Valley - fertile land

400 acre lots, going cheap

Wonderful for farming or grazing

Henry went into the office anyway. He saw a young woman at an important looking desk, dark and highly carved with columns for the vertical edges. Behind her was

a map of Arizona and the Gila River Valley.

He approached her. “Excuse me,” he said, looking like a lost boy.

“Yes?” she answered. “May I help you?”



He said, “I saw this ad in the papers.” He showed it to her as he leaned over the desk.

“I was wondering if I could get some information about this here.”

“A lot of these ads are from land speculators and are a risk,” she said, looking straight through him with her large blue eyes. Her shiny red lips smiled. “Would you please have a seat so I don’t have to strain my neck?”

“Oh. I am truly sorry. I don’t realize how tall I seem to someone sitting at a desk.”

She wore a pink blouse with the collar raised to hide the back of her neck. Her blonde hair was pulled back into a ponytail. Spit curls covered her temples. Because she was so shapely, Henry was immediately enamored of her. He wanted to say *Will you have dinner with me tonight?*

“We usually don’t take notice of these ads or don’t have the information you might desire, but I remember this one. It is legitimate, and I have some information here. She opened a filing drawer in the desk on her right. “Here it is. Do you want a copy of it?”

“Yes, please.”

The pretty lady rose, taking the paper with her, placed it onto a mimeograph drum,

secured it, and with a couple of turns, obtained a copy of the information. It was in blue smudged ink and smelled of developing fluid.

“Here is the man’s name and address where you can contact him,” she said as she handed it to him across the desk. “You might have tried at the newspaper office, but they usually don’t give out that information.”

Henry took the paper, scanned it, and as he put it into the newspaper, said, “Thank you.”

He hesitated as he rose as though he wanted to say something.

“Is there anything else I could help you with?” she said.

He leaned over the desk. “Would you like to go out and eat lunch with me?”

She smiled. “Thank you for the compliment, but I brought my lunch.”

She waited for him to stand and then said, “Hope you find what you’re looking for.”

What kind of a crack is that? Is she talking about the land, or is she talking about a girl?

Henry left the building and then noticed that the office was just a corner of a larger building. He walked back a ways and looked up. *Wow!* he thought. He had heard of sky scrapers, but had never seen one. He walked farther west to the front door. There was a plaque saying “The Heard Building 1920.” On the entrance door the words Phoenix Gazette and Arizona Republic Newspapers were written in silver lettering. “Humph! Brand new building,” he said. He walked to the corner and counted the stories. There were actually seven stories. *Well, I guess Dallas is building tall buildings too.*

Henry found an apartment in a building several blocks away from downtown. It appeared to be squished by the buildings on either side, it was so narrow. There were two

apartments on either side of the entrance, stairs going immediately up to the second floor, and then a hallway going back to the landlord's apartment. Henry rented an apartment on the second floor. There were two on each side and one in the back. He took the second one to the right as you left the stairs.

It was a Saturday, and Henry was just leaving the landlord's apartment when he spotted a woman ascending the stairs. He looked up at her, and she looked back at him. A bell rang in his head, a *dejavu* experience. This had happened before, only on the street downtown. It was the same girl he had bumped into.

"You going to be my neighbor?" she asked.

"You live on the second floor?" Henry asked, taking his hat off.

"Just across from you." She smiled and continued up the stairs. "See ya."



A week passed before Henry saw his neighbor again. When he did, she was coming out of her apartment at the same time he was. He walked with her down the stairs.

"What's your name?" she asked, descending the stairs. "I'm Molly."

"Henry Morgan." He tipped his hat. "At yer service."

Henry opened the door for her. "Thank you," she said.

"Going to work?" Henry asked, still walking beside her.

"Yes," she said.

"Walk with you?"

"Won't you be late for work?" she asked. *I hoped he would ask.*

"Living off my last job right now," he said.

“Oh.” Molly looked up and down the street before crossing.

Henry put his arm around hers. “May I?”

“You may,” she said, smiling.

“Always formal with people you meet?”

His arm remained holding hers as they stepped up to the sidewalk.

“Am I being too formal?” she asked.

Henry only smiled.

“I am sorry. I’m not normally.”

“Where do you work?” he asked.

“I teach at the city high school.”

“Is that why you’re carrying those books?”

She was actually carrying a woven basket-like bag with her books in it.

“You’re pretty observant,” she said.

“Habit I guess.” He reached out his hand. “May I carry them for you? I should have asked.”

“Thank you.”

“I didn’t know there would be a high school in this tiny town,” he said.

“Oh, it’s growing fast.”

When they came to the high school, she stopped at the wrought iron gate between two stone pillars. A gray brick building stood beyond.

Henry returned her bag. “When will I see you again?”

“At dinner?” She asked.

“Of course.”

“My place, eight o’clock sharp.” She smiled, turned, and walked down the cement walk toward the door.

Henry stood at the gate, holding it open, watching his neighbor until she turned, waved, and walked into the building. Henry walked away on clouds.



Ollie came home from work. Agnes waited at the top of the steps, leaning against the post that held the porch together. She handed him a letter.

“From Arizona,” she said. Her frown said that she would like a letter.

Ollie took it, dropped his coat onto the porch. They sat together on the top step as he eyed the name and address on the back of the envelope.

“From my brother Henry,” he said. “Wonder what’s happened to him. Last I knew he was working on my old farm up in Boas.” Henry flapped the envelope against his other hand. “Now he’s in Phoenix, Arizona.”

“Well, open it and read it,” Agnes said with anxiety and impatience. “You may find out.”

Ollie took out his pocket knife and opened the side of the envelope. Slipping in his fingers, he pulled out the letter, licking his lips.

“You always do that?” Agnes asked. “It isn’t food, you know.”

“Huh?” Henry ignored that comment and unfolding the letter, began reading it.

“Dear Ollie,

“You may be surprised at hearing from me. I came over here to Arizona to buy land. Came to Phoenix to the land office and bought some outside Duncan. The railroad doesn’t go out to Duncan, but I have visited the area. It has nice soil and will grow cotton, but my wife Molly can’t leave her job. She’s a teacher here in a high school. Yes, I am finally married. We got married 23 May 1920, this year. I found a job building houses just outside the city. It’s a growing place as she says. I never thought I would wind up as a carpenter, but that is me all over right now.

“I wonder if you have found someone yet. The land out there in Duncan isn’t going anywhere, so if you still have a mind to do some farming, I’ll let you use it. It’s a beautiful place right next to the Gila River. It’s good water. I bet if you dugged a well nearby you would have plenty. I met some Mormons out there, and they bring the water from the river. They call it irrigation.

“Say, you still have that picture of us when we were in the Army? My wife would like to see what you look like. You could go to a photographer with the negative, and he can make a copy, so you don’t have to send me the original.

Henry”

“Well I’ll be danged,” Ollie said. “That son of a gun. Imagine him married.”

“That’s right nice of him telling you. Are you going to Arizona and be a farmer?”

“Well Annie, I might.” Ollie held Agnes’s hand. “I wouldn’t want to go alone. I’d have to have someone go with me. It’s a lot of work for one man on a farm.”

“Don’t have to tell *me*,” Agnes said, staring into Ollie’s eyes. “I grew up on a farm near Texarkana,” she said with glistening eyes filling with tears, “where I was born, right on the border of Texas and Arkansas.”

“Would you, Agnes?” Ollie asked. “Go with me as my wife?”

Agnes grabbed Ollie around the neck and smacked him good on the lips. “I would. I mean, I will.”



That night at dinner, Agnes was glowing. Emma looked at the both of them, and Sam was saying, “My my. Ain’t you two lookin’ grand.”

Agnes noticed her parents staring at her and started giggling. She wiped her mouth with her napkin. “Mama, Daddy ...”

“Go on,” Emma said. “Say it.”

“Ollie’s asked me to marry him.”

“Well,” Emma said, continuing to fill her mouth with potatoes, “that took long enough.”

Sam said, “Congratulations, the both of you.”



Ollie rummaged around in his bag in which he kept odds and ends. He found the picture in which he and Henry were in the army. He showed it to Agnes.

“What did you do in the war?” Agnes asked, settling onto the porch swing next to him.

“We never went.” He handed the photograph to her. “Henry claimed our mother as a dependent. The Army decided that it would be a hardship on our mother if she lost both of us. Besides, the war was almost over, and we had a ranch to run. I don’t think they take farmers. They didn’t take me, but we had to show up anyway.

“We never told them that our mother lived with our sister, but we did say we sent her money. Anyway, we didn’t wear those uniforms long enough to be trained. It was at Camp Bowie, Fort Worth in Texas. That’s just a hop and a skip from Dallas where our mother lives. We got to visit her. She was glad to see us both. She sure shed a lot of tears. Why I never seen someone cry so much.”

“Didn’t you tell me she had to give you all up?” Agnes said, holding Ollie’s hand.

“Yes.”

“Well, you see, a mother loves her children. That’s just the way she shows it.”

Ollie gazed at the porch floor. “Allice’s husband left her and ran off for the oil fields.”

“That’s sad.”

“I think he couldn’t stand my mother living with them.” Ollie took Agnes’s hands in both of his. “I won’t ever leave you.” He gave her a kiss and they heard, “Dinner’s ready!”



Sam Singleton had been a preacher since before he met Emma, and so Ollie and Agnes naturally chose him to marry them. It would be a simple wedding right in the house where they lived, seeing that Sam did not have access to any church building. He had retired from the ministry ages ago. Now he turned his life to farming in order to earn a living for the

family. As long he could work, he didn't accept any help from his boys, Claude, James, or George.

Ollie and Agnes went to the Chavez County courthouse there in Roswell and took out a marriage license.



A couple of friends of the family attended the wedding as witnesses. Agnes's brothers and their families showed up. They had to argue with Claude, seeing he had just opened a filling station on top of Comanche Hill east of Roswell, but he came.

When Claude arrived, Agnes said, "Yer not missin' my weddin'! I didn't miss yer's."

"Okay, okay," tall lanky Claude said, sauntering into the house.

Most of the family had to stand because all the chairs and sofa were filled with wives holding babies and neighbors with their children. Agnes and Ollie stood all dressed up, facing her father who stood in the doorway to the kitchen. That way no one could sneak in to get a treat beforehand.

"Dearly Beloved," Sam began, clearing his throat, "We are gathered here in the sight of God to join these two sweethearts to make them man and wife."

Agnes giggled like a little girl, holding Ollie's hand. She liked his hard-worked hands, his handsome face and muscular He-Man body. She thought she could never attract a man, not the way she looked, but he was a god-send. Their personalities just fit together.

Ollie looked at Agnes. She wasn't much to look at. He had met other girls whom he was attracted to, even fell in love with, but Agnes was different. He felt at home with her. He could relax and be himself around her. He was scared of really beautiful women. Agnes was just right for him, and he knew she would be a nice mother to his children. Of course, she was laid back and didn't wear make-up. She was a farm girl after all, and that was just all right.

The both of them were deep in thought and weren't paying attention to dear old dad.

Sam cleared his throat and said again, "I say, do you take this woman, Agnes Ozzella Singleton to be your lawful and wedded wife?"

"Oh, um, yes, I do," Ollie said.

"I do would do," Sam instructed.

"I do," repeated Ollie.

"And Agnes Ozzella Singleton, do you take Oliver Bradley Murdock to be your lawful and wedded husband?"

Agnes could say a dozen things, but now she had forgotten them as she focused on the two words, "I do."

"I pronounce you man and wife." Sam smiled as big as he could. "Now you may exchange rings and then kiss the bride." Sam looked around, pawing his overgrown white mustache. "Who's got the rings?"

A little boy came up with the rings in the palm of his hand. "I do, Grandpa."

Ollie picked up the little sliver ring studded with diamonds. He placed it on Agnes's skinny ring finger. Agnes picked up the man's sliver ring, plain and unadorned, and put it on Ollie's finger. They kissed. The family and friends clapped.

Emma stood and announced, “The bride and groom will retire to the kitchen where they will cut the cake.”

Agnes kissed her father on the cheek. “Thank you, Dad.”

“Yer welcome,” he said, kissing her in return.

Ollie and Sam shook hands. “Take good care of my daughter now, will you?”

“I will, er, Dad.”

“Come on, Ollie.” Agnes pulled Ollie into the kitchen.

Family members crowded the kitchen door. Some who were in a hurry went to the back door or poked their heads through the kitchen windows, and everyone was able to see Ollie take Agnes’s hand and slice the cake. Everyone clapped again. Agnes placed a slice of cake into Ollie’s mouth and shoved it in. Everyone laughed. Then Ollie placed a lady-like piece of cake into Agnes’s mouth. The ceremony done, everyone yelled, “Hurrah!”

That night, Agnes was ecstatic. Now she would have children. When Claude had come over with his wife all plump and pregnant and Agnes saw the child born, she fell in love with babies. She had wanted to have a baby ever since then. Now it was her turn. She embraced Ollie, thanked him, and fell fast asleep.



The next morning, Agnes and Ollie went downtown and had a photographer take their picture.



Ollie took Agnes on a train ride for their honeymoon. Their Pullman was covered in a light maple wood with green plush benches which folded out into a bed at night. There was a dental lavatory where you can brush your teeth, electric lights, and a green plush carpet. Heating vents just below the windows could be opened and closed. They even had a small writing table between the seats that folded up. There was an upper berth above the seats that looked like the folding cover of a desk, except it was upside down.

“How did you afford this room?” Agnes asked, rubbing her hand over the green tufts of the seat.

“I work for the railroad,” Ollie said, taking his seat across from Agnes. “I have friends on the inside. They like me.” He smiled. “You want the upper berth or the lower one?”

“What do you think?” Agnes took her bonnet off and placed it on the writing table.

“I’ll take the upper one.”

“I wish we could sleep together.” Agnes folded her arms. “It’s cold in here.”

Ollie reached over to the two heating vents and opened them. “Is that better?”

“Much.”

A porter knocked at the door and announced himself. Ollie rose and opened the door.

“Sir, your table is ready.”

“Thank you.”

“It will be the third one on your left as you come through the door,” the porter said, saluting.

Ollie turned to Agnes. “You ready?”

“Ready as I will ever be. I don’t want to leave this plush,” she said, rising.

“I’m sure it will be here when you return. The diner will be just as plush. We’re not second class here.”

“I hope my dress is appropriate.”

“I like it,” Ollie said with a smile.

He took her hand, stepped out, the porter closed the door behind them, and they followed him to the diner.

There was just enough room to fit two skinny people at the table. The walls were wood panel painted green.

“I think they painted everything green because of all the greenbacks we give them,” Agnes said as she rubbed her hand over the wall. “They plaster the walls with them.”

The Porter brought the meals they had previously ordered when they had boarded the train. Agnes giggled as she cut into her filet mignon. Ollie cut a bite out of his New York steak, grilled to perfection. The fried fat oozed down his mouth. He had to grab his napkin.

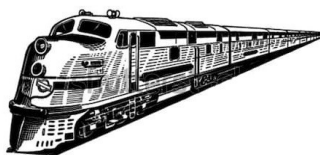
Agnes giggled again. “It’s delicious.”

“That it is.”

Halfway through the dinner, Ollie asked, “What do you say as soon as we get back we telegraph brother Henry and tell him we’re coming?”

Agnes stuffed her mouth with potatoes and said, “We need to know if there are buildings on the land,” she swallowed, “or do we have to build our own house and barn?” She sipped her coffee. “Ummm. This is not Maxwell House. Everything here is delicious.”

Ollie smiled as he finished off his steak. “We will see.”



Ollie and Agnes stepped out of the train car into a place out of time. The train station was a sand-colored adobe building. Over the entrance was “Welcome to Santa Fe.” As they entered the swinging glass doors, they discovered that the door posts were pine logs and the desk areas were paneled in pine. The ceiling was supported with ponderosa pine logs, and the room was decorated with different types of cactus. Lamps and furniture were made of



cholla cactus which looked like small dead trees, and the room was accented with cactus planters.

Gathering their luggage, they crossed the large room fitted with wooden benches which stretched from the train side door to the opposite door which led to the street. Outside, Ollie hailed a taxi. It was a modern car, painted yellow, and looked like a box on wagon wheels. The taxi driver saluted them with “How ya’ll doin’ today?” trying to imitate a cowboy. He threw the luggage into the open trunk in the back and opened the door for them. Ollie helped Agnes enter the taxi. He ducked and crawled in to sit beside her. His long legs always got in the way inside these new-fangled contraptions. He was used to traveling in wagons or on horseback where he had lots of legroom.

“Casa del Rancho,” Ollie instructed as the taxi driver closed the door.

As they rode down the street, Agnes commented, “Everything’s adobe.”

“Some of these buildings are hundreds of years old,” the taxi driver said.

“My, my,” Agnes said, sitting forward and clutching her purse. She gazed out the window with her mouth open, repeating, “My, my. They must have been built by the Indians.”

“Most of them were,” the taxi driver replied. “Mostly as Spanish slaves.”

“I thought you would like this town,” Ollie said, smiling. “It has remarkable architecture and history.”

The taxi driver was thin, about five-seven, wearing a black suit and tie and black taxi hat. He looked like a chauffeur. He turned his head back to see his passengers and said, “Did you know the Casa Del Rancho used to be a hacienda?”

“No,” Ollie said. “It must be very old.”

“It is,” he said. “It’s as old as Santa Fe itself.”

“I hope they have modern facilities,” Agnes said with a worried look.

Ollie put his arm around her and gave her a good squeeze. “Honey, I’m sure they’ve improved since then.”

“I hope so.” She rested her head on his shoulder just before they drove through an archway and up to the hotel lobby. “It will make our time more enjoyable, don’t you think?”

“I’m sure it will,” Ollie said in a soothing tone.

The taxi driver stepped out and opened Agnes’s door. Ollie let himself out.

“Hope ya have a very nice stay,” the driver said.

Agnes looked around at the surrounding adobe cabins. There was a long one across

the grounds holding a half a dozen or more suites and two wings spread out from the main lobby. The whole was surrounded by an adobe wall, culminating in the archway.

“I guess that’s where a gate would have been,” she said.

As the taxi driver gathered their luggage, placing them next to the door and said, “They just recently took the gate out. They thought it looked modern without it, seeing everyone’s driving cars nowadays.”

“Well,” Agnes said, “It looks nice.”

Agnes waited with the luggage while Ollie went to check in. He was pleased that his reservation hadn’t been canceled. They were a couple of hours late. He came out with a porter to carry their luggage.

“It’s across the park,” Ollie told Agnes.

“It would be, and me so tired. I could sleep for another hour or so.”

“At least,” Ollie whispered, “you don’t have to carry yer own bag.”

Agnes laughed loudly, “I’m sure glad about that!”

Ollie could only smile.

He tipped the porter a quarter after the man placed the luggage inside and gave Ollie the key. He said “Thank ye,” and stepped out. “You need anything, just call.”

“We will!” Agnes cried out as though her voice couldn’t go through the screen door.

She turned around and took a tally of the little apartment. It was decorated with pine paneling. There was a kitchenette to the left, a sofa cradled in pine to the right, a large bed in the middle against the back wall. She peered into the door to the right of the bed and saw a toilet, sink, and shower stall. “We got modern conveniences!”

“That’s good.” Ollie put his arm around her. “Tell you what. You take a nap, and I will

go see if I can't round up some grub."

"Oh, don't go," she pleaded with lambie eyes. "Don't they have a restaurant here? You could come and take a nap with me."

Ollie sighed. He had wanted to go off on his own and spy out the area. "All right," he said. "Let me look around. They usually have a pamphlet. Ahh. Here it is. Yes. They do have one. See?" He showed it to her. "They even have a menu and a telephone number if you want to order."

Agnes sighed. She drew him into her arms and led him to the bed.

The afternoon was spent in bed, and then the newlyweds sauntered over to the restaurant inside the lobby doors to the right. Agnes ordered the fried fish and Ollie, the t-bone steak. Both of them ordered the Lyonnaise potatoes. When they first had seen the menu, they had looked at each other and said, "No more Mexican food," and laughed. Before they had left Roswell, Agnes's mother had gone on a Mexican food craze, and for several weeks, that was all she would cook.



They enjoyed their meal and took a long walk downtown. What they saw was the adobe buildings they had seen on the way to the hotel, but the night was cool, the stars were out, and they enjoyed each other's company. By the time the moon rose, they had worn themselves out window shopping. Agnes couldn't walk another step, and Ollie had to hail a taxi.

The taxi driver was the same one that brought them to the hotel.

"Aren't you the same one?" Ollie said, helping Agnes into the car.

“This can become a habit,” the taxi driver said.

“You would think,” Agnes contributed, “that there is only one taxi in the whole city.”



The driver stepped on the gas and they were off.

“Home, James,” Ollie said.

The honeymoon was uneventful except for two things: Agnes loved the food and conveniences, and she got pregnant.

Back in Roswell, Ollie quit the railroad, not wanting to be shipped off to another town to work, having to leave Agnes behind, so he applied to the Nixon Hotel near the county courthouse. The hotel was on the southern corner on Main street, and the courthouse was in the middle of the block. The railroad ran behind them both. That was convenient for the hotel when it ordered supplies. The train would stop close enough for the supplies to be rolled out on a dolly from the train car to the dock behind the hotel.

Ollie was hired by the hotel after they found he was a cook for the railroad. It was not a break in Ollie’s routine because it was as though he had never left the railroad. One of his duties was to order the supplies, and when they came in, he was back on the train unloading.

Maggie was born in the spring of next year. Everyone was excited to have another baby on the farm. It was not unlike having a calf born, and everyone wanted to watch. Dr.

Bradley had to shoo all kinds of relatives and neighbors from the bedroom before he could deliver the youngster.

When Agnes heard the whap on the baby's bottom and then the cry, tears ran down her face and she reached up. "My baby. Is it a girl?"

"Yes," Dr. Bradley said. "A beautiful healthy baby girl. Just a second. Nurse Modock is cleaning her up."

"I knew it would be," Agnes said. "Her name is Margarite. I guess we'll call her Maggie."

"There now. Here comes your placenta. We'll dispose of that and clean you up too."

The nurse handed Maggie to Agnes, and immediately she felt her milk come in. She unbuttoned her nightgown and popped out her breast, fitted the nipple into the baby's mouth and gush, the baby started sucking. Agnes sighed with relief and looked at the doctor, smiling proudly.

"You did all right, and everything is working," he said. "Nevertheless, I'll let the nurse stay for a few hours to watch over things. If there are any problems, phone me. I will want to see you at my office anyway in two weeks. My secretary will give you a call." He collected his things and said, "I'm glad you people put a phone in. It makes things a lot less difficult."

"Well, electricity is the modern miracle, just like this baby."

Ollie rushed through the door almost knocking the doctor down.

"Whoa, now," said the doc as he grabbed Ollie's arms. "Slow down. It's all done. You can see yer wife and baby now." He looked toward Agnes. "See ya then next week."

"Okay, Doc."

Doctor Bradley picked up the equipment Ollie had knocked out of his hands, nodded,

and left the room. “Humph!”

“I’m sorry I’m late,” Ollie apologized. “Cooks don’t get any grace.”

Agnes patted the bed with her right hand, the left hand holding the baby. “Come sit down. I called her Margarite. You like the name don’t you?”

“Yes.” Ollie reached over and caressed Maggie’s head and cheek. “It’s a beautiful name.”

Chapter Four

Ollie worked his father-in-law's farm for a year as well as cooking at the hotel. He didn't have much time with his family except at night. Pa Singleton appreciated the help and loved his new grandchild. She was always on his knee in the evening. He would talk to her and play with her, bouncing her up and down.

“Horsey Horsey, don't you stop!

Just let your hooves go clippety clop!

Your tail go swish! And your wheels go round!

Giddy-up giddy-up. We're home agin!”

“Oh Pa!” cried Ma Singleton. “That's not the way you say it. Gimmie that baby.”

Ma Singleton took Maggie who was laughing, and repeated the nursery rhyme.

“Horsey Horsey don't you stop!

Just let your hooves go clippety clop!

Your tail go swish! And your wheels go round!

Giddy-up giddy-up. We're homeward bound!”

When Maggie started calling Pa Singleton, “Daddy,” Ollie took over the job and bounced her on his knee.

“To market, to market to buy a fat pig,

Home again, home again, jiggity jig.

To market, to market to buy a fat hog,

Home again, home again, jiggity jog.

To market, to market to buy a plum bun,

Home again, home again, market is done.”

Maggie just laughed and laughed.

Agnes got jealous and grabbed Maggie away from Ollie. The baby laughed harder.

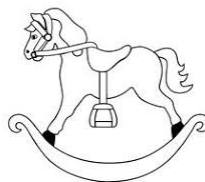
Agnes put her on her knee and quoted:

“Ride a cock-horse* to Banbury Cross,
To see a fine lady upon a white horse;
Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
And she shall have music wherever she goes.”

“You little cutie,” Agnes pronounced in a loud squeaky voice, tickling Maggie’s tummy. “Cutie, cutie, cutie.”

Maggie laughed so much she got the hiccups. She tried to laugh again but hiccuped. She laughed, hiccuped, laughed, hiccuped, and that made everyone laugh. Maggie slid to the floor, rose, and ran all over the house hiccuping and laughing.

Agnes sat on the edge of the sofa with her hands folded in front of her. She loved her daughter. She had thought this kind of joy would never enter into her life. In her thoughts, she thanked God for such a blessing.



Agnes was excited. She hadn’t had her period the whole month. Then another month went by. No period. She hummed and smiled as she washed the dishes.

Ollie came in to dry and put his arms around her. “You’re in a good mood.”

She only smiled as she looked up to him. She kept humming. The tune was Rock-a-



bye Baby in the Tree Top.

Maggie ran into the kitchen, grabbed Agnes's legs, saying, "Ma ma, ma ma."

"You're not ..." Ollie said. He raised his eyebrows. "Pregnant?"

Agnes just smiled and hummed the tune.

Ollie kissed her on the cheek.

"You come to work or play?" Agnes asked.

"Well, I'll dry, but it sure will be a labor."

"Ha ha."

"Ma ma!" Maggie yanked on Agnes's dress. "My dypie. Wet! Wet! Wet!" She started dancing around, holding to her mama's dress.

"I'll take care of it," Ollie offered.

"You just want to get out of work."

"I'll be back." Ollie grabbed his little girl and held her at arm's length.

"I'll be done by then."

And so she was.

Ollie changed Maggie's diaper and put her to bed, singing her a lullaby:

"Little brown baby, the moon is here,

She comes at night and brings a dream.

Go to sleep little baby; the stars will guide,

Will guide you across the Milky Way.

Then come back, little brown baby;

Rest tonight and tomorrow come back,

Come back little brown baby,

Then come back to me.”*

Ollie went out to the porch. Agnes was waiting for him on the steps. He sat down beside her.

“The stars are nice,” Ollie said, staring up at the sky.

There was not a sound besides the mooing of the cows and the fiddling of the crickets. Agnes and Ollie breathed in the night, barely speaking, just holding hands. “It’s a good life,” Agnes said.

“Yeah.”

The Evangelist

Chapter One

Estel and Ruby moved in with Aunt Mary and Uncle Cage. They had a back room where cousin Lulu used to live. It was a single bed, but large enough for the both of them. Estel thought of bringing in a cot, but Ruby said they could make do.

Estel went to college during the day and Ruby cleaned house.

“I’m not getting in your way, am I Aunt Mary?” she asked every time she would clean around the desk while Aunt Mary was sitting there, working.

Of course, the old woman always said, “No, dear, you go right ahead.”

When it was time to fix dinner, both women were in the kitchen getting into each other’s way. After a couple of weeks of this, Ruby suggested, “Why don’t we take turns? I know what Estel likes, and I can fix his favorite foods on the days you suggest.”

“I don’t mind you in here, dear,” said Aunt Mary. “You worry yourself too much.”

But Ruby could plainly see that Aunt Mary was upset.

When Estel came home that day, she guided him into the back bedroom and asked, “What shall I do with my Aunt? We get on each other’s nerves all the time.”

Estel grinned. “You know what the scriptures say. Love thy neighbor as thyself, turn the other cheek, et cetera. Some things you just grin and bear it.”

“I know that.” She sat on the bed, and he sat beside her. “I want to know what I should do.”

Estel scratched his head. He thought he had already explained that. “Don’t push her.

Let her be in charge.”

“But she’s so slow. I want to get in there and get things done so I can have a little free time to myself. If I take time to myself, I’m afraid she will think I’m lazy. I don’t want that.”

Estel thought a moment, put his arm around Ruby and said, “I think this is where patience is needed. I’m sure things will settle down between you two. Just give it some time. One of the teachers at the college, a wise old man, said that one of the defining characteristics of Christianity is patience.”

“She’s always talking about holiness,” Ruby said, staring at the floor. “She makes me ashamed of sleeping with my husband. She points out that she and Uncle Cage sleep in separate beds.”

“Well,” Estel said calmly, “that’s because they are past childbearing years. You want a family, don’t you?”

“You know I do.”

“Well, we will work on that and ask the Lord what He wants us to do after we get children. Okay?”

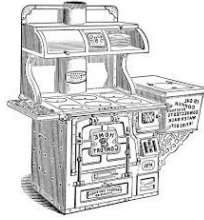
“Okay.” Ruby clasped Estel's hands in hers. “Maybe we should ask the Lord if we can have peace between me and my aunt.”

“I think that would be wise.”

Estel and Ruby knelt down and took turns praying. Having done that, they arose with peace in their hearts. They smiled at each other.

“You feel all right now?” he asked.

“Yes.” She took a deep breath. “Now it’s kitchen time.”



Ruby was given the job of peeling the potatoes.

“Do you have a compost to put these peelings in?” she asked Aunt Mary.

“Oh, we don’t keep those dirty things,” she responded. “Just put them in that bucket and we will throw them out later. Here’s some carrots also.”

“We have a compost back home on the farm in the spring,” Ruby said as she peeled a carrot into the sink. “But we also had pigs, so all the remains from the kitchen would go to them.”

“We aren’t on the farm now, dear.”

Ruby picked up a peeling and ate it.

“Oh, honey, that isn’t very healthy, you know, all that dirt and all.”

Patience, Ruby. Patience.

Ruby tried again to be patient with her aunt. Outwardly she shined and was very gracious towards Aunt Mary, but inwardly, she became fidgety and complained to Estel that they needed to get a home of their own, and she would get a job to support them while he studied.

“Didn’t you say yesterday you were pregnant?” Estel said, almost whispering, trying to keep his words between him and Ruby. “A move right now doesn’t seem like a good idea.”

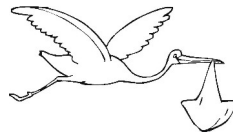
“I’m not a cripple, Estel. Our mothers and grandmothers worked out in the field while pregnant.”

“You are very strong.”

“I know I am.”

“But I think we should wait until our first child is born,” Estel suggested. “I will be at a crossroads then. I will be able to preach, and I can frame houses and build cabinets on the side. We should find some independence then.”

“I guess so.” Ruby gave him a hug. “I do so need some independence.”



The day came when Estel came home to the birth of his first child. When he walked in the door, he was expecting to be present at the birth, but Aunt Mary announced, “It’s a girl.”

The doctor backed out of the bedroom, talking with someone inside. He turned around and took Estel's hand. “Congratulations, Mr. . It’s a beautiful, fat little girl. Eight pounds. You’re wife’s doing fine. She’s a strong farmer’s girl to be sure. I’m sorry I have to rush off, but other babies are waiting.”

“Thank you, doctor,” Estel said before he stepped into the bedroom.

There she was, the love of his life, her hair up in a bun, smiling and cooing, caressing his little daughter. When she heard footsteps, she looked up to see who it was.

“Is Mimi a nice name? I have a cousin somewhere named Mimi.”

Estel stared at the two women in his life. He didn’t know if he had yearned for a boy. It didn’t matter now. She was God’s great gift. “Mimi is a nice name.”

Noticing his stance and the expression on his face, Ruby commented, “It’s a big step for us, but it’s God’s way.”

“Yes, it is, and I’m proud of you both.”



Three year old Mimi was a handful, getting into trouble all the time. Ruby couldn't keep up with her. One moment she was taking all the pots and pans out the drawers, then she was making a mural on the living room wall. When she started getting into her daddy's books in the bedroom, Ruby gave her a swat on the bottom. "What am I going to do with you? You will get it when your daddy comes home!"

Mimi didn't mind the swat, she just ran off to to make another mess.

When Estel came home from framing houses, smelling of pine, he took little Mimi and played with her on his knee, laughing at her antics.

Ruby fumed.

"Now now, Mother," he said. "Remember patience is a virtue, and I hear that if you are upset, so is the baby inside you."

Ruby sighed and patted her pregnant belly. "Yes, here we go again." She went back to the kitchen to try to get dinner ready. She did love her new home where she could be the boss, but sometimes she thought that perhaps Mimi was the boss.

At the table, Ruby spooned potatoes and gravy onto Mimi's plate and placed it on her highchair, hoping she wouldn't try to paint her face with it. But she did. Estel laughed as Ruby scooped the potatoes off the toddler's face with a spoon and fed it to her.

"I'll be preaching in Merkel Sunday," Estel said proudly.

"I have a premonition we will be moving to Merkel someday."

"If I have a commission there, I guess we will. It depends upon how my sermon goes, if the people like me or not."

“I don’t know why they shouldn’t. You are a powerful preacher.”



Sunday did not prove to be prodigious. Everyone shook hands with the new preacher after church, but he did not make such an impression on them as to hire him. After all, he was only a visiting pastor, which they called an evangelist, was right out of college, and new to the profession. Back in Abilene, they went to Ruby’s aunt’s house. Uncle Cage gave him an itinerary, showing what towns he was expected to preach in and the addresses and times of the meetings of the churches.

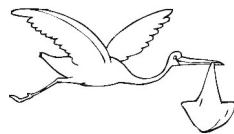
“You will be just like Paul in the New Testament,” Uncle Cage told him, “ministering in all the towns and cities round about.”

Estel heard a scream from a cat. It sounded just like a little child. He rushed into the living room. “What happened?”

“Mimi pulled on the cat’s tail.” Ruby laughed. “You should have seen it. It was running around the room trying to find the way out.”

“I let it out,” Aunt Mary said with a frown on her face. “Really, dear,” she said to Ruby. “You need to pull in the reins on that child. She is a hellion.”

“I know, Auntie, but I just love her so much, even if she is a handful.”



Ruby’s next was another girl. “She’s shy,” she told Estel. “Maybe she won’t give me so much trouble.”

“She is a bit small, isn’t she?”

“Well, she’s healthy enough. The doctor wasn’t worried. He said to watch her though; don’t be rough with her. She’ll be all right.”

“What shall we name her?” Estel sat on the bed and took the baby, kissing her on the forehead. “It’s the quiet ones that give you the real trouble.”

“Louiese, because I know she will be a trial to us.”

“I hear it was a hard birth.”

“Yeah. It was tiring this time.”

Louiese squirmed and tried to cry. It wasn’t very loud.

“I think she’s hungry,” Estel said. “I’ll give her back. You can nurse her while I get out of these dirty clothes.”

As he passed through the door, he came back, stuck his head inside the room and said, “I forgot to say that Lulu is coming home. She is supposed to come over and help.”

“That’s nice,” Ruby said as she started nursing the baby. “I would like to see her again and show off our family.”

“I’ll tell Mable to start the dinner,” Estel said as he headed toward the kitchen.

Aunt Mary had sent Ruby, a colored maid named Mable, to watch after her, do the house cleaning, and cook dinner.

“Have her cook the chicken Uncle Cage brought over.”

“Did he tell you about Lulu?” Estel shouted.

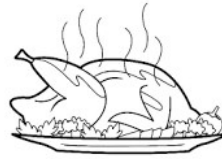
“Yes.” Ruby shouted back

“Oh.” Estel said to himself.

Ruby laughed. “For a little one, she sure is going after this ninny.”

Ruby wondered if Lulu was going to Mable’s her place. She would like that, but

Mable would lose her job.



“What’s a few dollars, Estel?” Ruby asked at dinner.

It didn’t matter that Mable had to hear all this. “Don’t you want Lulu here?” he asked. “She will work for free, and it’s only a couple of weeks before you will be fit to take care of the house yourself.”

“Good chicken, Mable,” Ruby called out, crunching down on the leg gristle.

“Thank ya Ma’am,” Mable called back from the kitchen.

“Mama,” came an invisible voice.

“I would like to keep Mable on permanently,” Ruby said. “I’ve become fond of her.”

“You know she was just on loan. We can’t afford a maid.” Estel sipped his coffee.

“Mama,” came the voice again.

“Well, she’s been company.” Ruby dipped her roll into the gravy.

“Lulu will be company.”

“Mama.”

“Only for a while,” Ruby said.

“Pass me a roll.” Estel took one out of the white flat bowl she handed him. He opened it, buttered it and then said, “You can visit her and your aunt when you get better.”

“Mama!”

“What is it, Mimi?” Ruby asked.

“I need a bread.”

“Aunt Mary and Uncle Cage are moving to Merkel,” Ruby said as she buttered a roll

for Mimi.

Estel had enough of this conversation. He stared at his wife, chewing her chicken.

“I’m sure we can afford a maid, Estel,” she said, investigating the bones on her plate to see if she missed any meat.

“We can’t.” Estel cut his slice of chicken breast. “That’s final.”

Ruby learned early that even though she was the boss at home, Estel had the final say. After all, he was a preacher, wasn’t he?

Preaching seemed to be just a hobby for Estel. His real job was building houses in Abilene and the outlying areas. He made good money where he could give his family nice clothes and plenty to eat. They had a decent home, a good running car, family and friends. When at church, everyone respected him and had to shake his hand and talk to him. They called him Reverend . He was proud of that and always kept a prepared sermon in his coat pocket just in case.

Chapter Two



Estel had a growing family, and his extended family was not far away. His life was quite comfortable, but he had one nagging desire. He wanted a parish of his own.

The call came from the Nazarene Synod. He was to go to Tennessee, the state of his birth, and take up residence in a parsonage near Memphis. The year was 1932, deep into the Depression, and the country was in the throes of political upheaval.

The parsonage was a two story house covered in unpainted planks, an old farmer's house set next to a forest of young trees, a farmer's field reclaimed by nature. The back yard was full of weeds and had a pump between the house and a rather large garage in back to the right. The double door garage had one door that was unhinged. The garage smelled of dirt and grease. Old tools lay about with weeds growing up through the floor boards.

The inside of the house wasn't any better. It was as though whoever lived there before never cleaned up the place, or they had to leave in a hurry. The old furniture, one couch and a large cushioned chair, coffee table, and a kitchen cupboard were covered in dust and leaves. The windows hadn't been closed when the previous occupants left.

There was evidence of tramps living in the place: cigarette butts everywhere, beer bottles, and trash consisting of cardboard cartons, newspapers, wadded up letters, candy wrappers, cans that said Campbell's Soup, or Hunts Beans. On the couch was an old wadded up blanket that stunk* to high heaven.

The kitchen was empty except for the dust and an old tin cup used for drinking at the pump next to the sink. *Ahh, running water*, Ruby thought. She peered out the window above the sink at a frazzled clothesline. The wires sagged and were all bent out of shape. She turned and opened a door she thought might be a closet. It was a large pantry. She didn't know if it would ever be filled. The stove smelled of wood ashes. Last year's leaves covered the floor. She went to close the back door and noticed the pane was broken. She sighed. *What will the bedrooms look like? And there is the toilet out there. I don't prefer outhouses. Some people don't use lime to keep them smelling clean.* She remembered that awful smell when one year they had to use someone else's outside toilet.

The two girls ran through the house, yelling and crunching paper and leaves beneath their bare feet.

As Ruby went to view the rest of the house, Estel came up to her carrying some suitcases. "You want to help unload the truck?"

"Not yet, Dear," She said with a despairing look. "Help me clean up this mess. Then we can move in."

"Girls! Girls!" Estel called out. "Calm down. Go outside and play."

"They're big enough to help," Ruby said. "Don't you think?"

Estel caught each one and said, "Okay." He bent down and instructed them to pick

*stink, stank, stunk

up the rubbish.

“Aw, Maaamma,” Mimi complained, stamping her foot in slow motion.

“It’s a game,” Ruby said, smiling. “You and Louiese start picking up and taking everything outside to the trash bin by the barn. Whoever gets the biggest pile gets a sucker.”

“Oh, boy!” Mimi exclaimed. “I’ll be the winner.”

“No, I’ll be,” Louiese moaned. “It’s not fair.”

“Now do as you’re told, Louiese,” Ruby said, shaking her finger at her. “It will be fun. I will be helping.”

“Okay,” Louiese said, dragging her word as if it were heavy.

As Ruby swept, Estel went upstairs, brought the mattresses down, and hung them on the line.

The bedrooms were not anything to look at, just empty rooms with a bed and chiffarobe. There were no curtains on the windows and no chest-of-drawers. The master bedroom was on the east side of the hall. A closet with shelves to store bedclothes in was between two smaller bedrooms on the west side. An acrid odor like an elderly person who had never bathed came from the upstairs. It bothered Estel. He hoped airing out the mattresses and the rooms would help get rid of the smell. He would also have Ruby mop the floors.

After the house cleaning, Ruby helped Estel unload all the boxes and table and chairs from the trailer. She concentrated on putting groceries and cooking paraphernalia away so she could cook dinner.

Mimi was given the red sucker. She taunted Louiese with it, saying “Na nan a na na!” She ran up to Louiese and said, “Ya want a lick?” Louiese got excited with anticipation,

nodded her head, but Mimi replied, “Well, ya can’t have none!”

Mimi kept doing this and running away until Louiese picked up a rock and threw it at her. She didn’t hit her, but Mimi bawled and ran to their mother. “Louiese hit me with a rock.” She cried again, playing it up as good as she could to get her mother’s support.

Ruby, too tired to poke, went outside to a bush, took a long straight and thin branch, striped the leaves off to make a switch, and chased after Louiese who sped around the house. Ruby decided she wasn’t going to run after her, but Louiese didn’t know that. When Louiese came running back around Ruby caught her by the arm and started hitting her bare legs with the switch.

Louiese screamed. Estel heard and came running, thinking his daughter was hurt. Indeed, she was.

“What’s going on?” he asked, astonished.

Ruby stopped switching Louiese, but held onto her arm as Louiese started bawling. “She hit Mimi with a rock. I guess I should have given both of them a sucker, but I didn’t think of it.”

“Let her go.”

Estel knelt and held his daughter by the shoulders at arms length until she stopped crying. His stare melted any confidence of consolation Louiese had. “You don’t throw rocks at people. Understand?”

“Yes, Daddy,” Louiese sobbed.

“Okay,” he said, letting go of her. “Up to your room now and lie down.”

“Your bed is made,” Ruby added.

Estel rose and looked at Ruby. She dropped the switch and they walked into the house.

They didn't argue, but there was a strained silence between them.

Mimi, watching from behind a bush next to the house, giggled.

Ruby yelled from the kitchen door. "Mimi! Come in and get washed up. Time for dinner."

The strain of moving in and trying to keep up with the girls had stolen a perfect day. The sun had been out, birds sang, and it had been just the right temperature with a little breeze for an enjoyable afternoon, but now it was dark with a round moon looming up above the trees. Getting dinner had been exhausting. Louiese was asleep upstairs, so she missed out.

Estel tried to smile at the meatloaf and potatoes. He tried to tell Ruby he liked everything, but he was too famished to stop stuffing his mouth. He did grunt, "Good." She said, "Um hump." Mimi growled and whined at her dinner, her appetite having been spoiled by the sucker.

"Eat up," Ruby said.

"I don't want it," Mimi complained.

"Then go up and go to bed."

Mimi whined again and pushed her plate away.

When she arrived at her new bedroom, Mimi pinched Louiese. Louiese groaned. "Yer not supposed to sleep on top of the covers," Mimi said, and went to the other side of the bed. She crawled under a warm comforter and was asleep in no time.

Louiese woke up feeling hungry, but she didn't have to complain, for Ruby came in with Mimi's plate. She sat on the bed and let Louiese sit on her lap and eat.

The moon peeked through the windows as it rose high into the night sky. It smiled its

light upon the sleeping family as a greeting. It seemed to wink as it passed a tall pine tree.



Preaching may have been satisfying to the soul, but it didn't bring in much money. There was no other work to be done. No one had any money to pay him at church or on the farms or in town. No one was building, so he couldn't frame houses. He did do some volunteer carpentry work for people in his parish, but that didn't put food on the table. He prayed a lot, and one answer to his and Ruby's prayers was that there was a lot of wild squash, beans and pumpkins that came up in an old garden next to the trees. There was also a lot of apple and peach trees in the neighborhood that put forth extra yields. Some of these were on their property, and Ruby was able to bottle the fruit. She also made a pie now and then when they could get flour.

There was a rumor that there were wild turkeys in the county. Everyone was hoping to find one. Every now and then a wild chicken would show up, and Ruby would say, "Praise the Lord!" laugh, and go after that bird. Dinner time was a joyous occasion when that happened. It was more often that a parishioner brought them a chicken.

One of those occasions was at church when he gave a specially spiritual and comforting sermon.

He started out with, "Brothers and Sisters, I want to call everyone to the altar tonight to come unto Christ. That is what I am here to do, to preach the Gospel of power and peace ... peace to the soul. But we live in very unfortunate times. People are without jobs ...

without money ... without support for their families. Many men have gone off to find work, leaving their families to fend for themselves.”

When he mentioned that the population of squirrels and rabbits was shrinking rapidly, the congregation laughed.

Reverend read from the New Testament,

Acts, chapter 4, verses 31, 32, 35 and 37:

“31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common ...

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.”

“Now it says that those who believed the Gospel of Jesus were mindful of their neighbors. Remember that the Lord Jesus said that all the law and the prophets come down to two things: to love God with all your heart, might, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Now look unto yourselves. Look into your hearts. Look after your neighbor as you would your own family. That’s what the Lord asks of us. I know it looks bleak now, but if we all pull together, give if you are able to give, and share what you have with your neighbor, if you do, we will all be better off, and we can get over this financial

hump in the road. Neighbor helping neighbor is what this nation is built on. Again, if we pull together, we can last the winter, each and every one of us.”

The Reverend Bonine went on giving examples of pioneers making the difference between starving and survival by neighbors giving a hand, and how the nation’s growth depended upon love of neighbors and family.

During his sermon, he did have one disturbance. His two daughters who were sitting on the front row were talking and playing. He stopped, stood still and stared at them. When they had noticed, sat still and paid attention he continued talking, smiling at the congregation as though nothing had happened.

After the service and comfortably sitting at home, they heard someone knock several times. Estel rose and went to the door. Opening it, he had a live chicken thrust upon him.

A sister from the church said, “Your sermon touched me so much, Pastor, especially when you paused. It had such an affect upon me, I had to bring this here chicken. Y’all have a nice dinner on me.”

“Thank you Miss Prichard, I ...”

She ran off before he could say more.

Estel came in with the chicken clucking rather loudly, and Ruby asked, “What on Earth?”

The two girls danced around their father, advancing into the room, holding the chicken carefully, trying not to step on the girls’ feet. They were both crying, “Mama, Daddy, a chicken ... a chicken!”

Louiese tried to pet it as Estel handed it over to Ruby. “It’s so pertty.”

“I guess we can have chicken with our greens,” Ruby said as she marched to the kitchen and out the back door. There was one loud screech from the chicken and then she

brought it in, laid it in the sink and put on a pot of water to boil.

Estel commented at dinner, "It's a good thing you put up those collard greens to have with this chicken."

Louiese sat poking at her chicken leg with her finger. Tears ran down her sweet face.

"What's wrong, dear?" Ruby asked her.

"It were so pertty," she said.

Mimi said, "It sure tastes good too."

"Eat up, Louiese," Ruby said. "Food is right scarce now. Be thankful we have chicken on the table."

Louiese tried to take a bite, but she started bawling.

"We'll have none of that," Estel said. "If you're not hungry enough to eat this blessing from God, go to your room."

Louiese fled from the table and ran upstairs.

"My goodness, Estel," Ruby said, gnawing on Louiese's chicken leg. "I've never seen such a finicky girl."

"She'll eat when she gets hungry," Estel commented, cutting off some more chicken.

Of course, there was not chicken left when Louiese woke up the next morning. There was butter and biscuits though.

Another lean year went by and the whole family was getting skinny, especially Louiese. It was her first year in school and she got made fun of. She was going through a growth spurt, and the kids called her a bean pole. One of the reasons for her thin waist was that she hated her lunch.



Every morning her mother would take yesterday's biscuit, put a pat of butter in it and wrap it in waxed paper. This she would slip into Louiese's pocket. By the time she arrived at school, she had thrown it into the weeds on the side of the road. Biscuits and butter at breakfast were fresh, moist, and the butter melted. But when she took one to school, she would take it out of her pocket and find that it had crumbled and was really dry. The kids laughed at her for trying to eat it. She couldn't anyway, because the thick pat of butter made her gag.

Mimi never knew Louiese threw her lunch away because they didn't walk together. Louiese wanted to walk with her sister, but she ignored her, and when her friends would show up on the road, she ran ahead and walked with them. Louiese walked alone. She didn't have any friends. To add to her troubles, her teacher was always yelling at her. She wasn't paying attention, she stared out the window, she talked to herself in class, and she didn't hand in her homework. She was a C student for sure.

Leaving Roswell

Chapter One



Agnes bought a Kodak Brownie camera and took pictures of her family, their farm, and their cute kids. She wanted to remember the good times they had in Roswell. She had never left home to go live somewhere else, except to visit relatives or have a picnic in the El Capitan Mountains to the west. Now she would be passing through those mountains and going all the way to Arizona. Ollie had made arrangements with his brother Henry to move onto the land outside of Duncan. Henry had refused to sell the land because he had future plans for it, but he allowed Ollie to pay rent.

Ollie traded in his car and bought a used truck, loading it with all their belongings. It waited alongside the farm house while they said their goodbyes.

“Come back now and visit,” Sam said, hugging Agnes and patting her back.

“We will Pa,” Agnes said, tears running down her face. She wiped away the tears with

the back of her hand.

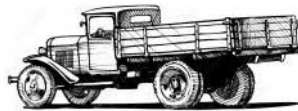
Ollie shook hands with Sam but kissed Emma on the cheek. “We will visit when we can,” he said.

“You bet you will,” Emma said, giving him a hug. “We’ll miss our grandkids fer sure.”

The children raised their arms and jumped up and down, yelling “Granny! Granny!” wanting her to lift each one of them up to say goodbye.

Agnes had chased the kids trying to get them into the truck. She scratched her head and said, “I’ll be darned,” as her mother lifted each one, kissed them, and sat them on the front seat. Agnes giggled and said, “Scoot over, yer ma is comin’ in.”

Ollie shut her door, went around and got behind the wheel, and everyone waved, crying, “Goodbye, goodbye!”



As Ollie headed for the middle of town and Second South, he apologized for the truck. “It will be good for hauling hay and supplies.”

He pulled into a filling station. The attendant came up to the window. “Check the oil?”

“No,” Ollie said. “Just filled it. I do need a full tank of gas, though.”

“Gotcha!” the attendant said smartly. He was a short wiry boy full of energy, wearing a flat cap. He pulled down the hose from the pipe-shaped pump and stuck the nozzle into the tank behind the cab. Then he grabbed onto the door, lifted himself up onto the running board, and commenced washing the window. “Heading out?” he asked.

“Bought some land in Arizona,” Ollie exaggerated. “Going to raise my chillens on a

farm.” He smiled broadly.

Little Jacky crawled onto Ollie’s lap, looking quite suntanned, stood up and pressed his hand onto the attendant's stomach.

“Hi, little feller,” he said, hopping down. “You going to be a farmer?”

Jacky smiled and said, “Blib, blib, blib,” flipping his bottom lip with his fingers.

By the time the attendant finished washing the windows and head lamps, the tank was full. The smell of gasoline filled the air. Ollie thought it smelled nice. Agnes waved her hand over her nose. “Oh, oh! Awful!”

The attendant retrieved the nozzle, screwed the cap on and replaced the nozzle onto the pump. “Two dollars even,” he said. Ollie handed him the cash. “Good luck on that farm.”

“Good day to ya.”

Ollie slipped onto Second South, pointed the truck toward El Capitan, and headed out.

The children were squirming already. Little Bradley, the oldest boy, said, “I need to go potty. I need to do a number one.”

“Hand me that Coke bottle, Maggie.”

Maggie took a coke bottle from the floor and handed it to her mom. “Pull yer pants down.” She took Bradley’s nozzle and stuck it into the Coke bottle. “Okay. Do it. See if you can fill’er up.”

“Didn’t fill it,” Bradley said.

Agnes looked in the glove compartment, found a stopper and shoved it into the bottle.

Maggie asked, “What about me? What can I do?”

“Well,” Ollie said, “If you have to go, why didn’t you tell me before we left?”

“I didn’t need to go until Bradley did.”

Agnes rested her elbow on the window and put her hand on her face. “We will have to wait until we get out of town. Maybe there will be a bush you can hide behind.”

“I want to do it in here like Bradley.”

Ollie laughed. “Honey, you are not built like Bradley.”

“I know. He’s got plumbing and I don’t.”

Maggie had to hold it a long time before they came to a clump of bushes. Then Ollie pulled over and let her out. “It’s coming out my eye’s I’m so full!” she whined.

No one had to go again until they came to a roadside stand selling cherry and apple juice. Ollie bought some apple cider and everyone drank a gulp out of the same tin cup. The two gallon jug sat between Agnes’s feet. They kept sipping out of it until they were on the other side of the mountain. In the meantime, she handed out peanut butter sandwiches to Ollie, Maggie, and Bradley. Jacky and the baby girl got bottles of maple syrup mixed with water.

Hot air blew through the windows and mixed with the music of tires racing along the highway. The whizzing of cars passing the other way became a humming in the ears of the children and sang them to sleep. Agnes watched the grassland, scattered with juniper and sage, rush by and turn into hills surrounding the El Capitan. She remembered it was the home of brown bears and porcupines, both disagreeable animals.

The baby they called Baby “D” woke Agnes from her reveries. She let her nurse for awhile. When they got to the farm, she wouldn’t have time to nurse, and she needed to ween her, but not yet.

The Capitan mountains came and went. They were all pine trees and rocks. Their last stop was near a fresh water stream, and Agnes handed out a second lunch of baloney

sandwiches. The apple cider was almost gone, but the water was heavenly as was the pine scented breeze.



Arizona didn't look much different from New Mexico, and Duncan was a small western town like Roswell with a main street housing motels, saloons, a bank and post office, mercantile and co-op stores. The town sported a new asphalt pavement though, and the welcome sign as they entered Duncan pointed it out. The rest of the town still supported dirt roads, and the dust swirled up and into people's houses and lungs.

By the time they arrived, the kids were worn out and crying, and the gas tank was empty. Ollie coasted up to the gas pumps at a motel, as the sun settled behind a cactus tree.

Agnes spotted a restaurant beyond the pumps. "Thank the Lord," she said, wiping Jimmie's nose with her overused handkerchief. "We got here in one piece. Can you imagine?"

The neon lights on the motel signs flickered on and off in greens and reds.

"We'll rest up a bit tonight," Ollie said, getting out and stretching. "We'll get to the farm in the morning."

"What'll it be?" asked the service attendant.

"Just fill it up," Ollie said, hanging onto his suspenders.

"Regular or Super?" the boy asked. "And can I check yer oil?"

"Yes," Ollie said, looking confused. "I didn't know there was a choice."

"There is now."

“Well, then, just regular.”

“Daddy, Daddy,” called the kids, “I got to go potty.”

Little Jacky simply said, “Potty.”

Ollie lifted Jacky out of the truck as Agnes got out the other side. “I’m afraid you already went potty, young man.”

Jacky shook his head up and down slowly and smiled. He gave him to Agnes.

“Don’t have anymore diapers. I hope this place has a laundry-mat.”

Agnes rummaged around for an old towel, tore it in two and replaced Jacky’s diaper. She took the baby and the other three into the restaurant to look for a restroom. Ollie leaned back on the truck door, preventing the boy trying to wash the windows. “Oh, I’m sorry.” Ollie scooted away to let him up onto the running board.

Agnes came back and asked for some change for the pop machine. It was the tub kind, like a floor freezer, where you lifted the lid which had the face of a sprite painted on it with a Coke cap for a hat. The bottles were on racks and covered with melting ice. She put in a nickle and slid one bottle out through a lock, put in more money and got out two more. One was orange, and the other two were Cokes. She opened the bottles on the side of the machine.

“Here you two,” she said, handing the bottle to Maggie. “You have to share.”

“I wanted the first sip,” Bradley complained.

“You just gotta wait yer turn,” Maggie said, sticking out her tongue.

“Be nice now,” Agnes warned.

“Yes, Ma’am,” they both said.

Agnes gave one of the Cokes to Ollie.

“You and the kids go get something to eat,” he said. “I’ll get us a room and join you.”

“Okay.”

The kids were tired and didn’t eat much. Maybe it was the soda pop. They took the leftovers with them in a small box, leaving the restaurant half asleep. It wasn’t hard to put the children to bed. Bradley had to be lifted into bed, and Maggie sleepily crawled in beside him. She closed her eyes and was fast asleep. Agnes put the babies on the lounge chair and then washed out Jacky’s and the baby’s diapers in the bathroom, hanging them on the shower rod to dry. Then she joined Ollie in bed and sighed with relief. They enjoyed the fresh air coming from the swamp cooler overhead. The drive to Duncan had been hot and dry.

“Thank you,” Agnes said, squeezing Ollie’s hand as they both dozed off to sleep.



The kids woke up early full of energy. They were dancing around the room, screaming, and laughing. Both Ollie and Agnes groaned.

“That was a short nap,” Ollie said, yawning. He got up and dressed. He picked up a card from the night table. “Porter left a menu. Has a picture of the motel on the other side.”

“Let me see,” Agnes said, rolling over and resting her head on her hand. “Humm. Reminds me of our honeymoon.”

“Yea. No kids then.” Ollie sat on a chair to put his shoes on.

“Daddy?” asked Maggie as she climbed up onto her daddy’s lap. “What’s a honeymoon?”

“Oh, honey. I’m trying to put my shoes on.”

“What is it?” She reached up and pinched his nose.

“Darlin’, it’s that sweet moon shining down on two lovers who are about to have ... children!” Maggie jumped down, and he swatted her bottom in jest. “Ha ha.”

Agnes got herself and the children dressed, grabbed the baby, and everyone was out the door, heading for breakfast. At the restaurant, they settled around a curved table, sitting on a red padded bench. All the kids were talking at once, asking for pancakes, cereal, sausage, scrambled eggs, grits, hash-browns, rice pudding. You name it, they asked for it.

Ollie said, “Hush, hush. Listen to yer mama.”

“Bradley, you get pancakes. Maggie, you get bacon, eggs and toast with grape jelly.”

“Oh, goody,” Maggie said, pounding her fists together. “I love grape jelly.”

“I like maple syrup,” Bradley commented.

“Syrup,” echoed Jacky.

“I’ll get you some mush and a bottle of milk,” Agnes said, trying to nurse Baby “D.”

“Maybe Bradley will share his syrup.”

Agnes and Ollie had the same thing as Maggie, only more of it plus some hash-browns. When everyone was full, Agnes took the kids to the restroom as Ollie paid for the breakfast, then they all piled into the truck and sped off to the farm. The rumbling of the truck put the babies to sleep.



When they arrived at the bend in the Gila River and rolled over the rocky road into the front yard, something unexpected confronted them. The old farmhouse had burned to the ground.

Agnes covered her face with her hand and sighed.

Ollie, not worried, simply said, "I'll have to go back to town and get some supplies."

Before noon, Ollie was busy tearing down what was left of the house. Agnes had the job of keeping her rambunctious children out of the way. By dinnertime, Ollie had cleared everything away and left the main floor. He found a stairway to a livable basement which gave him an idea. Eating the rest of the sandwiches he brought from town, Agnes and Ollie cleaned the basement and unloaded the truck into it. By firelight, Ollie put an A-frame over the floor of the house and secured it to the foundation.

Ollie set up the old brass bed from the truck, and put the sheets, blankets, and pillows on it. Blankets were placed on the basement floor for the kids to sleep on, but little Jacky had to sleep with the grownups. Maggie took care of the baby, so it slept with her. There was no need for heat during the cold desert night, for they noticed it was warm enough down there.

"We don't have enough money to build a house," Ollie said, cuddling up next to Agnes's back. He placed his arm around her. "I can finish the roof tomorrow, add a couple of rooms down here, and fit in a doorway. We can make do right here."

"I guess so," was all Agnes could say.

"Basement houses are cool in the summer and warm in the winter. It's just like a dugout."

"I guess so."

"You'll see. It will be a wonderful place." Ollie reached over and kissed her cheek.

“I’ll bring that old wood burning stove for you before I put the door in.” Agnes smiled.

Chapter Two



Getting the cast iron kitchen stove down into the basement proved to be a back-breaking task. It was just his luck that someone had left a block and tackle in the barn. He hooked it up to a tree in the front yard, put what was left of cabinets and a chest of drawers on the ground in front of the stove to roll it and shove it to the stairway on the front left side. He placed the stove on its short side, attached the hook on the tackle to it and let it down the stairs on two beams.

“Supper will be cooked on a stove tonight,” Agnes said. “I guess that rope was used to hoist hay.”

“Yep,” Ollie said after huffing and puffing to catch his breath. “So, what corner do you want it in.”

“The right back corner next to laundry sinks,” Agnes said. Sticking her nose in the air, she said, “Now I think you need to go back to town and buy some groceries. I don’t know why you didn’t think of that yesterday. We’re tired of sandwiches.”

“Sorry,” Ollie said, smiling. “I guess I’m just a one track kind of a guy.” He stood there a moment with his hands on his hips. “I have a lot of work to do here. Maybe you can take the kids, take the truck, and go shopping. I’m sure you can open an account with the grocer.”

“No you don’t. Today, you get to watch the kids.” She held her hand out for the keys.

“All right.” He reluctantly handed them to her. “You know how to drive? I’ve never seen you do it.”

“I know how to drive a tractor. It’s not much different.” Agnes paused. She hadn’t thought of money, so she said, “You got any money?”

“You’ll have to go to the bank. Tell them you’re setting up an account with the grocer and the butcher, and they’ll transfer the funds. That’s how they do it out here.”

“Okay. What if there’s more than two banks or more than two grocers?” she asked as she headed for the truck.

“It’s a small town.”

“Okie dokie.”

“Mama, Mama,” Maggie cried, carrying Baby-D in her arms. “Where ya goin’? Can we come too?” the two boys followed her to the truck.

“Not today baby. This is my day. I’m going to have me a holiday and not have you kids under foot.” She smiled as she climbed into the truck and closed the door. She stuck her head out. “Love ya dearly. Now stand back so I don’t run you over.”

“Come on, boys,” Maggie said. “Let’s go in back of the house and play coming home from the war. You’re the husband,” she said to Bradley. To Jacky she said, “You be the bawling baby ‘cause yer daddy’s been killed.”

The backyard was scruffy with burned wood and things scattered about, but there was plenty of room out by the barn. The kids marched out there as though they were soldiers.

“Now you lay dead,” she said to Bradley. “I’ll be the nurse and come over to you and make sure. Yes, yer dead enough. Now you come home and yer a ghost. My my! It’s my

husband home from the war.” Maggie put her hand up to her face in surprise. “Look, honey, we got ourselves a baby.” She held out Baby-D.

“I’m a ghost,” Bradley said. “Got kilt in the war.”

“Daddy, Daddy,” Jacky said, standing next to Maggie.

“Now Jacky, you run off like yer scared.”

Jacky ran away into the barn.

“What’er you doin’, little feller?” Ollie said, swooping Jacky up into his arms.

“Playin’ war,” he said.

“Well, let’s round you doggies up and go into the house and play.”

Maggie complained, but he got her to read stories to the boys as he put up the walls for the rooms.

The kids were more interested in watching their daddy saw the timber which he had across two sawhorses, laying out the studs and nailing them together.

By the time Agnes returned with the groceries and other things she needed for the kitchen, and things a woman would think of when moving into a new house, Ollie had created two bedrooms and moved the stove into the corner. He placed the bedrooms so the rest of the space was L- shaped. The shorter part of the L was the kitchen. The other end of the L ended up at the stairs that went outside.

The kids were underfoot again, but everyone was happy. They asked their mother what was in the bags, and told her all about Daddy building their house.

Ollie had also built a bench to go with the kitchen table, because they only had two chairs. Now the children had a place at the table, and they had to show her.

After Agnes had seen his work, she clapped her hands and gave him a big hug. Then

she said, "What about a bed for the kids?"

"I'll do that tomorrow."

"What are you going to do after dinner?" Agnes looked around to see where she could put the groceries. When Ollie scratched his head, she said, "Do it tonight before bedtime."

Maggie and Bradley both said, "Hurray! we're getting a bed!" They had to dance around their parents like wild Indians on the war path.

"Okay okay," Ollie said, trying to calm down the savages. He saw the grocery bags sitting on the table and in the sinks. "I guess I'll get some cabinets going."

"It would be nice to have another spring house like you made me in Roswell."

"I won't have cement this time." He thought a second as he rummaged around in the bags to see what Agnes had bought. "We do have the advantage of a river nearby. There will be plenty of clay for adobe brick."

"I'm sure that will work."

While Agnes worked on the dinner, Maggie read to the boys, and Ollie started building the cabinets.

Dinner was fried chicken, peas and carrots, and a homemade loaf of bread that rose more than it should have. The children raved at the new bench, and when they found that their daddy was going to make a bed for them, Maggie went up to him after dinner and hugged his legs.

The kid's bed was simply a rectangular frame with the rope used to haul the stove downstairs connected through holes on each side of the frame woven into a checker board pattern. For the mattress, which Agnes sewed up, a tarp was folded over and filled with straw.

That night, the children had a lot of thank you's in their prayers for their new home, new bench, new bed, as well as their smart parents and the new farm they could play on.



Ollie easily finished the cabinets and the A-frame roof. He added a door and used the space for his tool shed. He had to instruct Maggie and Bradley every day to keep off the roof. "But Daddy," Maggie complained. "That's our mountain."

"You knock off those shingles and you'll have rain dripping into your ears and on your face."

Next, he tackled the spring house. He found that the previous owner had dug a ditch that connected the river to the fields. He would build the spring house over the ditch and run the water into the fields. He realized he couldn't have the fields under water all the time, so he dug another ditch back toward the river. Since the river was lower in the direction of the flow, he had a constant stream.

The bank of the river had plenty of red clay and was sparsely covered with mesquite trees. He was able to make adobe bricks, piling them up to form four walls. He placed thin logs between the bricks from one side to the other to make shelves and a roof. He covered the roof with sod. The door frame and door was an easy add-on. Using a small metal wagon he had found among the rubble, he stocked the spring house with the groceries bought the other day. It proved to be a little cooler than the basement. When he wanted to water the field, he would stick a shingle into the canal that delivered the water back to the river.

"There you go," he told Agnes when he showed off his work.

“Thank you,” Agnes said, giving him a kiss. “I married a right smart man, I did.”

Ollie smiled. “Now, let me go plaster those walls, and we will have some privacy.” He winked at her.

Ollie covered the studs with chicken wire, mixed up a batch of plaster of Paris, and covered the wire mesh, smoothing the plaster with a trowel.

He didn’t have doors for the two bedrooms, so that night they put up some thin quilts on rods to cover the entrances.

“I’ll make you some cabinets to go under the sinks tomorrow,” he said at night in bed.

“I’ll appreciate that,” Agnes said, holding onto Ollie’s arms as he cuddled her from the back. “Right now there’s no place to put up all the things I bought. Some are still in the sink.”



In a couple of more days Ollie was through with the house. Now he could start working on the fields, getting them ready for the Spring. When he was putting up the spring house, he had time to take a careful look. First of all, there were old cotton plants that hadn’t been plowed under. He would have to rent a couple of horses and a rig to do that. He went down to the co-op in town and found a farmer that would let him rent a horse and a plow. He couldn’t get a full rig to harrow the field, but that was okay because his truck only had room for a plow. The one he had on the farm was very old. He glanced heavenward and said thank you in his heart for a new plow. He hitched the big horse to the back of the truck and slowly drifted out of town with the horse plodding along behind.

Chapter Three

Agnes and Ollie sent the kids to bed, and Bradley crawled in and cuddled up against Maggie. She was more of a mother to him than his own. He put his arms around her even though she moaned an objection. She was comforting and he could sleep easier holding onto her. He didn't like leaving home and coming to this strange place, even though he had fun playing in the yard and fields.

Mommy had a high screeching voice; she treated babies like a sack of potatoes; her friends laughed at her way of speech and lack of manners, and she only felt comfortable in familiar surroundings. She didn't seek crowds and loved solitude. She liked her family and extended family, but she wasn't affectionate. Bradley wasn't aware of all these other things, but he did notice she wasn't affectionate, something he naturally longed for. He sought it from Maggie, but she had troubles of her own. She was always hesitant to hold him or return his hugs. She would hold Tom because he was a baby. Maggie made excuses or ignored him, as she concentrated on the little skit she was directing at the time.

Their daddy was a hard worker and was never around, always in the fields and came home late in the night, but one day, he came in at noon. Mommy had fixed Bradley a piece of bread smothered in molasses. He took his plate and fork into the living room and sat down to eat this mouth watering treat. When he heard his daddy clomping down the stairs from outside, all sweaty and tired, Bradley jumped down and sat his dish on his chair. He ran to the stairs, jumping up and down and grabbed his daddy's legs.

His daddy responded with, "Bradley, go to the kitchen and grab me a glass of

lemonade.”

Daddy sat down onto Bradley’s chair without looking at what was sitting on. Bradley’s eyes grew wide, and his mouth became a small round hole. He thought he was in trouble now, but Daddy rose up with the bread, molasses, and plate stuck securely to his bottom. Mommy came into the room just as Daddy stooped over and danced a jig. Mommy and Bradley laughed and clapped at his funny antics. Bradley almost forgot how hungry he had been, but when the plate fell from Daddy’s bottom, Bradley grabbed his bread off his daddy’s pants and stuck it back onto the plate, went to his chair and commenced eating.

Agnes, still laughing, said, “Take off those trousers and I’ll wash ’em up.”

“Got one field cleared,” Ollie said as he stripped.

“Made some frilly curtains for the kitchen this mornin,’” Agnes said as she lifted the pants into the air, looked at them and shook her head.

Agnes washed the pants while Ollie ate a baloney sandwich and drank some cold lemonade. When she was finished, Ollie pulled on his wet jeans, kissed his wife, and went back outside.

Maggie was sound asleep on the porch swing, holding tightly onto Tom who was asleep in her lap.

Ollie thought of waking her so she could go eat something, but it was such an angelic scene, he left her as she was.

Later that day when the sun was settling into its bed of dust and cactus, Ollie headed for the little underground house and noticed there was no porch on the house and no porch swing. What vision had he had? It got him thinking. His family deserved a better home than this. It wasn’t even theirs. He flapped the envelope he had retrieved from the mailbox against

his leg. It was a letter from his brother. He could feel in his heart something terrible.

“Got a letter from Henry!” Ollie called out as he descended the stairs.

“What’s he say?” Agnes called from the kitchen.

Ollie walked to the kitchen table and sat down. He opened the envelope with his thumbnail, took out the letter and flipped it open. It read:

“Dear Brother,

I hate to write with bad news, but I had to sell the farm to a Mr. Hillrose. I owed him a lot of money trying to set up a business that wasn’t doing very well. Even though business has picked up, Mr. Hillrose wanted his money. I still don’t have it. I’m doing contract work as well as carpentry. Business is booming, but there are a lot of dishonest culprits that don’t pay their bills.”

“Or you just don’t know how to run a business, dear Brother!” Ollie commented.

Ollie looked up at Agnes. They both were stunned. She put the dish down that she was washing and sat opposite her husband and friend. “What are we going to do?” She asked.

“Well,” Ollie said, staring at the letter. “It says here that he found a small farm over in Red Rock among the Mormons up from Mexico. He has written to the owner. It’s up for sale if we can get a loan from the bank.”

“We just opened an account.”

“Yeah.” Ollie hit the letter against the side of the table several times as he thought.

“I’ll have to go to Red Rock, talk to the owner. It says here, a Mr. Hays. Gives the address.”

“What about all the work you put into this farm. That must count for something.”

Agnes rested her head in her hands and sighed.

“I don’t want to stay another day in this dad-blasted farm.” Ollie rose from his chair.

“If it weren’t for you and the kids, I would leave right now.”

“You go and see if we have a place to live this time. I don’t want a surprise like with this farm.” She grabbed his arm. “We will be fine ‘til you git back.”



Ollie left right after supper. He kissed all the little kiddies goodbye and then Agnes.

He drove several hours into the night until he arrived at the address. He had used the flashlight to track his way across the map he carried in the glove compartment from the last trip. There had been no street signs, but he followed the directions in the letter. This many miles to the east then turn off the road. Go up this dirt road so many miles and then down this dirt road until you come to a fork and take a left and backtrack this way, go up this path that way, and there is a house there.



Ollie parked on the road until daylight. When the sun rose, he got out of the truck and stretched. He reached back into the cab and took out his thermos which Agnes had filled with coffee the night before. He poured a cup into the lid, put the cork back, and set the thermos back onto the seat. He sipped his coffee while looking around. It was a little shack surrounded by a dry tumble weed yard. There was no evidence that the place had been kept up. Someone had just planted a house out here in the desert and put a barbed wire fence around it. There was no paint and no evidence of living in it. There were no curtains in the windows. He walked around the house to see if there was a well. He didn’t see one. That was

a bad sign, and then there was no barn, just this one house and a cotton field beyond that.

There was a bunch of elm trees beyond the field, so that must be the source of water.

When he came back around, another truck drove up. A rugged man with a chin beard got out. He walked up to Ollie.

“May I help you?” the man said, extending his hand.

Ollie took it and asked, “You Mr. Hays?”

“Naw,” the old man said. “I’m Harper. He died, and his family moved to her relatives over in the Gila Valley beyond Duncan.”

“Oh.” Ollie put his hand into his pocket as he took a sip of coffee. “Like some?”

“Naw. Had breakfast already.”

“I heard this here place was up for sale.”

“That was fast.” Mr. Harper headed for the front door. “Come on in.”

Ollie followed the man into a small living room, closing the door behind him.

“Have a seat,” Mr. Harper gestured with his hand.

He sat in the large green corduroy chair, and Ollie sat opposite him on the couch next to the door.

“Have a family?” Mr. Harper asked.

“Yes. I left them just outside Duncan. My brother Henry sold the farm out from under us. We won’t have a place after the new owner comes to claim ours.”

“We’ll be glad to have you become a part of our community. Your brother wrote us. He said you are honest and love your family, a hard worker, and all that.”

“Oh. You know my brother.” Ollie felt a bit of anger rise out of his bowels.

“He did some work for us awhile back. He said you’d need some help. I wrote him as

soon as this place became available.”

“Sounds like this was all planned.” Ollie stared into the room, not focusing.

“Could be the Lord planned it.”

“Well, I guess he’s the one really in charge of this world.”

“You can say that again.”

“I see my brother weaving his webs again. He did that when we owned a farm together above Roswell.”

“All I know is that he does good work, and he mentioned you, and here you are.”

“Yes.”

They both rose at the same time.

“I would have to get rid of all the furniture and clean this place up, unless ...”

“I see. Unless you have another family ready to move in.”

“It’s in the plan if you need a place right away. I can get it cleaned up and ready if you want to move in.”

“I’ll have to talk to the wife.”

“It’s better than nothing, and if you are want to stay, we neighbors will help with the work to get this farm going.”

“That is neighborly of you. We don’t even know each other.”

“We always look out for each other.” Mr. Harper smiled. “What say ye?”

“I don’t know why. But I like yer offer. I can feel it in my gut. Where do I sign?”

“The place belonged to the community when the Hays family moved in. All we expect is some hard work and a fifth part of the cotton.” Mr. Harper smiled and extended his hand.

Ollie spit into his hand and shook hands with his new neighbor. “Deal sealed.”

“Deal sealed.”



Agnes was a little upset at having to pack all her things again after just settling in and getting comfortable. She fumed as she took all her kitchen and table stuff and put them back into boxes.

“I hate moving,” Agnes said in her monotone high pitched voice. “Here, hold this box.”

Ollie helped her load the dishes from the cabinet that hung on the wall above the sink. “We couldn’t stay here unless you want to live with another family.”

“Well,” remarked Agnes out the side of her mouth, “why couldn’t we just pay the rent to new landlord?”

“This isn’t a good home.” Ollie took the box and stacked it with the others by the stairs. He raised his voice a bit. “I want to give you a proper home. And you know that no matter where we live I’ll do my dead best to make it good home for you.”

“I know that. I just hate, hate, hate to move!”

Agnes came with a heavy box.

“Here,” Ollie said, taking it from her. “Do you like moving in?”

“It’s better than moving out, but then you have to start all over again.”

“Well, just think. Next week we will be all comfy again.”

“Yeah, but not now, and I’ll good and well complain now.”

“Yes, you’d better, cause you won’t have time later.”

“That’s fer sure.”

Agnes laughed softly. Ollie joined in. He started tickling her and they were all laughing except for Maggie.

Maggie was begging her dad to take the bed he had made for the children.

“Don’t worry, Maggie,” he told her. “There are plenty of beds where we are going.”

But it’s not the same!” She folded her arms, pouted, and swung her body away so she wouldn’t see the bed. She finally walked outside.

Bradley on the other hand was just depressed. He didn’t know why. There was a lot going on, people moving around, pushing him out of the way, hauling things outside. Maggie wouldn’t play with him, and someone put Tom in the truck. He lay down on the bed. It was forsaken of its sheets and blanket, and Mommy took down the curtain in the doorway. The straw still smelled fresh. He listened to the pounding of his little heart and breathed heavy. His out-breath was a shudder.

“Come on, Bradley,” called his mother. “It’s time to go.”

“Where we goin’?” he asked.

“To our new home.” Agnes tried to be cheery, but Bradley new it was fake. “Come on. Get up. We got to go.”

Bradley slowly rose, saying, “But I like this home.”

“You’ll like the next one. Here. Carry this box.”



The trip was a lot shorter than coming from Roswell. They arrived before the sun went

down, but to Agnes, seeing the shack for the first time, it felt like a new day, only she had missed the night. But she didn't miss the nightmare.

"I think I would rather live underground," she said as she slowly stepped out of the truck.

"I know it's just serviceable, but when we start making money, I'll build us a nice house."

"Primitive is what I'd say."

Ollie started carrying boxes inside. "I'll fix this place up so it's livable. You'll see. It will be a good home."

"All I got to say ..." Agnes picked up a box from the back of the truck, "If it doesn't, you'll see me and the kids back with my folks."

Ollie kissed her cheek as he grabbed another box. "I wouldn't blame you a bit, and I will be right by yer side."

Chapter Four

Agnes, though tired, rummaged around in the boxes to see what she could fix for her little family. She heard a knock at the door. *Who could that be?* She opened the door, pushed the screen door open wide enough to stick her head out. She saw three women. One held a large casserole of ham and potatoes with a little cheese on top. The other two held a loaf of bread, wrapped in a kitchen towel and smelling like yeast, and a cherry pie.

“What’s this?” Agnes asked. She squinted to see, as the sun was descending, giving off a low orange light.

“We’re the Relief Society, Ma’am,” said the one holding the oversized baking pan. “We know you and your family must be awfully tired after moving in, so we brought you some dinner.”

“Why, you shouldn’t have.” A spark of joy came from Agnes’s voice. “Come in, please.” She reached out from behind the screen and took the pan, holding it with her apron because she could feel the heat coming from it. “Thank you so much. What’s yer names? And you said some kind of society?”

“We’re a lady’s charity society in the neighborhood,” the woman said as they entered. “I’m Sister Harper. These are my councilors, Sister Meredith and Sister Erwin.”

“We take care of each other,” a younger woman said.

The women followed Agnes to the kitchen and sat their gifts on the table

“Well! I’m mighty grateful.” Agnes paused as she remembered her manners. “Oh, won’t you stay awhile?”

“No, thank you,” said the woman who seemed to be the leader. “We will let your

family eat now. If you don't mind, we'll come by tomorrow to give you a hand with moving in." She had eyed all the boxes in the rooms.

"Thank you. I guess that's okay. Thanks again." Agnes walked them back to the door.

"Goodbye, Ma'am," said the lady.

"Agnes."

"Goodbye, Agnes."

As the ladies left, Agnes shut the door and went back to the kitchen and the warm, fragrant casserole. The kids jumped up and down asking "What's this?" Ollie, coming in after washing up, walked into the kitchen just north of the living room.

"That was a nice surprise," he said. "What box are the dishes in?"

"You kids sit down. I'll get the dishes. You too, Dear."

"Yum!" Maggie said.

"Yum! Yum!" Tom echoed.

Agnes dished up the plates, giving her husband an extra helping. Everyone dug in after the short prayer over the food by Ollie.

"Such a blessing!" Agnes said with her mouth full.

Ollie ate with relish, smiling ear to ear.

"Can I have more?" Bradley asked.

"I want to eat it up all by myself," Agnes said. She slapped another spoonful of the casserole onto his plate and winked.

Bradley smiled and started eating again.

When there was no casserole left, everyone went to bed with a full stomach.



Next morning, Ollie found a number of men with harrowing equipment and a good complement of horses in his cotton field. Agnes had several women in her home asking, “Where does this go?” and, “Can I help you with that?”

At night after they were in bed, Agnes and Ollie had to discuss their neighbors.

“I don’t know whether to call them busy bodies or angels,” Agnes said with eyes wide open. She wasn’t as tired as she would have been without the ladies showing up, and she appreciated that.

“Should I feel cheated?” Ollie asked, “not getting to do my own work? Or should I be grateful? It makes me feel a bit guilty as though my dad were calling me lazy.”

“I know they meant well.”

They looked at each other and laughed.

“Thank the Lord,” Agnes sighed.

“Me too.” Ollie kissed his wife. “I’ve never met men quite so neighborly, not in Texas, nor in Arizona.”

“The women were kind enough. They didn’t put away things where I didn’t want them.” Agnes rubbed Ollie’s shoulders and back as though he had done all the work. “It’s a little too strange for neighbors to act that way ... and to have a helping society to boot.”



Ollie found how the neighbors helped each other. They would come to him and ask his help on this farm and then on that farm. He said to himself, *Now I know how they make me pay them back for the help they gave me.*

Ollie wondered what kind of religion these families must have to make them so kind and helpful, so when he and his family showed up to the church one Sunday morning and were met with outreached hands, hugs and kisses, he found out. He also found that Mr. Harper was in charge, because he was the one at the pulpit directing the meeting. It was a bit strange at first, everyone wanting to shake his hand, that thing about passing out bread and wine when it wasn't Easter, and having more than one preacher. Even a woman stood up to exhort. But all in all, there was a peace he hadn't felt in any other church.

Agnes, on the other hand, stood aloof, knowing it wasn't her father's religion. Her father had been a Baptist preacher when she was younger. She liked to be with the women, but she didn't like them talking to her. There were too many voices. She could visit one-on-one, but she didn't like to be in a group of them. Everyone talked all at once, like when they sat around the same quilt, sewing. It reminded her of being in a chicken coop with all the chickens cackling. She would rather just go to church on Sunday, listen to the preacher and go home. It was too strange that she should visit the women in their Relief Society during the week. They also wanted her kids to join a youth group that met during the week. There was just too many interruptions to her schedule. She finally had to tell Ollie, "You go to church if you like. I'll stay here at home and read Bible stories to the kids." She didn't mind when one of the sisters would come and visit, and she told the ladies so, but she wouldn't see everyone all at once.

There was another thing she saw that was strange about these people. Many of them

had the wife's sister staying in their home or several sisters visiting the family. Once when they were invited for a Sunday dinner at the Harper's, Agnes asked who the extra woman was. She looked the same age as Sister Harper, so she couldn't be an older daughter.

"This is Mary, my sister," Sister Harper said. "She's a bit shy."

The sister nodded as they sat around the table with the sound of tableware clicking against the plates. Some of the children whispered. There was one girl who kept staring at Agnes's kids as if someone had brought the dogs to the table, and she disapproved.



When Ollie had driven his little family home and they were getting ready for bed, he whispered to Agnes as though someone in the neighborhood might be listening, "Mary is Brother Harper's other wife."

Agnes lay Tommy into his crib and covered her mouth with her hand. She didn't want to say what she was thinking.

"You know," Ollie said, sitting on the bed, taking off his boots. "They are Mormons after all, up from Mexico because of the revolution down there."

Agnes took her dress off and lay it on a chair next to the door. "And I thought they

were such a nice people.”

“Mommy,” Maggie said, pulling on her mother’s slip, “come put us to bed.”

“Okay.” Agnes lifted Maggie into her arms. “Oh, yer getting heavy.” She turned to Ollie. “I’ll be right back.”

Agnes tried to sing the children a lullaby, but Maggie pleaded, “Read us a story instead.” Agnes sighed and read Maggie and Bradley the story of David and Goliath. They liked that one. When their eyelids became heavy, she kissed them both and left for the arms of her loving husband.

When under the covers and being cuddled, taking deep breaths of the scent of Ollie’s sweat and Old Spice, she asked, “What would you think if I were to marry another guy?”

“As long as I’m dead and gone, that would be okay.”

“Same here.” Agnes closed her eyes. “Bothers me. Having more than one wife.”

“They are nice people, but I do have my limits.”

“Yeah.”



Ollie had grown up with no affection for animals. You either use them, eat them, or kill them. Anything like mice or any kind of rodents were a nuisance. If he could, he would stomp on them. His adoptive father, Mr. Hardy, would not allow him to have a pet. Dogs were trained to care for sheep or cattle, and cats were for catching mice in the barn. Any kind of small animals, like puppies or kittens were killed if the population was getting out of hand or if they were sick. Maggie and Bradley had seen him stomp on little animals, especially if they were caught in a trap he had laid.

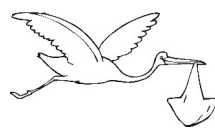
There was a clump of woods near the house, bordering on the cotton fields. Ollie lay traps for any small furry creatures that may be out there. He was sure the traps were far enough away from the house and barn, and telling the children to never go into those woods, he thought the children would be safe. They were safe enough. At least Maggie knew to wait until the traps had snapped shut before looking at them to see if any animals were caught.

The day Maggie and Bradley found the traps, there were a couple of skunks in them. They promptly set about following their daddy's example and stomped on the skunks, jumping up and down on them. When they came home for lunch, Agnes almost screamed. Her house had been invaded by two little skunks. She was tempted to paint a stripe down their backs. She sent them outside where she filled a tub with water, got some strong lye soap, and scrubbed them both, and their clothes. She tried hard not to cuss in their presence because she wanted them to become good Christians.

It wouldn't have been a trial for Agnes if that was the only time they did that, but after they were bathed and dressed, they went right back to the woods to continue stomping on skunks and laughing.

When they came home and Agnes had to scrub them up again, she yelled, "What am I going to do with you?" She didn't wait for them to get dressed. "You two get into bed and take a nap until your clothes are dry. I'm too tired to paddle yer tails."

Bradley cuddled up to Maggie. They giggled until they were told to go to sleep.



Agnes stood at the sink washing dishes. A sudden awareness dawned upon her. She stepped back and put her hand on her tummy. *That was a kick.* She started laughing. "Ah,

well,” she mumbled.

Maggie stumbled in, slapping Agnes on the hip. “Mommy, I’m hungry.”

“You just ate. Maybe yer thirsty.”

Agnes pressed Maggie’s head against her stomach.

“Mommy,” Maggie said as she stepped back and looked up, “you must be hungry too, ‘cause yer tummy is growling.”

“Listen agin. Tell me what you really think.”

Maggie put her head on her mommy’s tummy again and listened. “There’s a thump thump.”

“That’s his heartbeat.”

Bradley came in the door.

Maggie turned to him. “Mommy’s pregnant again. Come listen.”

“Naw,” Bradley said. “That’s fer women.”

Agnes’s eyes went wide and then she frowned. “Well, I’ll be.” She left off washing dishes and wiped her hands on her apron. “I guess yer all hungry.”

She took out some bread and butter. “Whar’s Tom?”

“Oh,” Bradley said, with his hands on his hips, “He’s sittin’ on the back steps.”

“Just sittin’?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“Well, tell’im to come in.”

“He’s hurtin’ too much.” Bradley scrapped the floor with his feet, looking down.

Agnes stopped spreading the butter and asked, “And what, pray tell, is he hurtin’ for?”

“I whapped him.”

“Why’d you whap him?”

“Cause he bit me.”

“And why did he bite you?”

“Cause he wouldn’t share.”

“God have mercy! And I got another one coming.”

That night when Ollie came in from working with the brethren, he sat down to a nice hot dinner of beef and potato soup. “My, this smells good.” He sipped a little. “And tastes good too.” He looked at his wife. She was sitting there smiling. “Aren’t you gaining a little weight? I don’t think we have enough food that you can gain so much weight.”

“Daddy, you didn’t say prayer.” Maggie reminded him.

“That’s right, Maggie,” he said, putting down his spoon. “Your mommy is teachin’ you right.” He bowed his head and said, “Lord, thank you for this food, and thank you for the youngen that’ must be comin’. We do appreciate it. Amen.”

“How’d you know?” Agnes asked, pointing at him with her spoon.

“Well ...” He slurped some soup into his mouth. “I sort o’ guessed with the way you’ve been acting and talking. I pay attention to these things, you know.”

Agnes wrinkled up her eyebrows. “I wanted it to be a surprise.”

“Weel...It sure is, Love, It sure is.” He smiled widely. “And I’m thankful.” He reached across the table and patted her hand.

It was January 1925 when Ollie heard from the bedroom the cry of a little infant. The midwife came into the living room and congratulated him. “It’s not a boy like she thought. It’s a fine young girl as healthy and as purty as you please.” She wiped her hands on her apron.

“Can I go in now?” asked the new daddy who had been pacing up and down.

“Yes. You go right in and see the gorgeous princess. Sister Murdock got it to suckle right off. She’s might hungry, that one.”

Ollie peeked in through the bedroom door.

“Come in. You seen me like this before. Come look at her. She’s so beautiful.”

Ollie came in and pulled up a chair and sat down. He stared at the little darling sucking away at the big tit. “What’d you call her?”

“She told me her name is Dorothy.”

“She told you eh?” He leaned over to see her better.

“She said naught a thing. All she had to do was to look at me with those intelligent eyes of hers, and I knew it right away.”



Sister Cramer had lost her husband to Poncho Villa down in Mexico. An elderly woman with a gray bun in her hair and wearing long flower print dresses made from flour sacks, she liked Ollie, and he liked her. He would often visit her place about two miles away to the east, fixing the roof, making sure the windows would shut easily or planing off the doors so they would swing, any little carpentry tricks that would make her comfortable.

“You do so much for me,” she would say. “You take this home to your family.” It would be a cherry pie or apple dumplings. She became quite a friend of the family.

With winter coming, Ollie made sure the stove pipes were clear and there was enough insulation in the attic. He patched up holes in the walls and around the windows so the wind wouldn’t come whistling in. He made sure she had plenty of firewood to last her several

months.

Mr. Harper said he was being a good ward teacher. He didn't understand what that meant, but continued to be of help.

One night Sister Cramer became ill. Ollie heard about it from one of the neighbors he was with as they shoveled snow up to the church door.

"A couple of us elders are going to visit this sister later on this evening if you want to come along."

"Sure," Ollie said. "I'll go home and tell the wife."

"It'll be after dinner. We'll come by and pick you up. We know how fond she is of you."

"Yeah. She's just like a mother to me."

At the dinner table that night, Ollie put his hand on Agnes's and told her about Sister Cramer.

"Goodness." Agnes covered Ollie's hand with hers. "You feel hot."

"It's just the effects of handling a cold shovel for a few hours. I'll be all right."

Agnes pushed her chair back. "I'll fix her some chicken soup."

"You don't have to," Ollie said. "You should finish yer dinner."

"I want it done before you go."

Agnes boiled some leftover chicken bones and added onions, but by the time dinner was over and Ollie's ride was there, the soup wasn't done.

"I'll come back and take it over then," Ollie said as he walked out the door.

"I don't like that idea," Agnes said with no one to listen. She went back to washing the dishes. The children played in the living room, but Agnes didn't hear them, worrying about

Ollie. She couldn't even hear little Dorothy. Maggie had to take her and walk her around to calm her down.

Arriving at Sister Cramer's, Ollie felt a chill go through his bones. He went in with Brothers Harper and Denton. The orange light and heat of a warm fire greeted them. The cabin was small with a double fireplace in the wall that separated the front room and kitchen from the bedroom. It gave heat to both rooms. There was a musty smell of old people that don't bathe and blankets that don't get washed over the years, although the house seemed clean.

Sister Cramer raised her hand as they came in. Ollie took it in his. "Oh, yer warm," she said. "No matter how many blankets I cover up with, I can't get warm."

Ollie stooped down and said, "I'll bring you some hot soup later."

They all knelt beside the bed, one of the elders on the other side. Ollie kept holding her hand as the other two lay their hands on her head and said a prayer. Ollie wondered at their words. It wasn't a prayer of supplication, it was as if they commanded God.

After saying their goodbyes and they were back in the truck, Ollie asked what kind of prayer that was.

"We hold the priesthood of God," Brother Denton said. "We can command the elements if it were necessary." Ollie thought that was awfully presumptuous of them.

At home, Ollie stepped out of the truck and thanked the brothers who called themselves elders.

"Take care," Brother Harper called back as he drove away.

Ollie didn't tell them he was going to return to Sister Cramer's house. He went inside hoping the soup was done.

“How is she?” Agnes said as she gave him a covered dish wrapped in a towel.

“She’s expected to be doing better. The Elders laid their hands on her head like in the scriptures. They’re really good men. I think God will respect their prayer. She had a good attitude about the whole thing. I’d better go.”

“Don’t stay too long.”

“Okay.”

Agnes took little Dorothy in her arms and stared out the window, watching her dear husband out in that blizzard. He disappeared into the blowing snow and sleet.

It was two miles straight way in the snow and wind to Sister Cramer’s. Ollie held the soup under his coat to keep it warm. He had to wrap his scarf over his cowboy hat to keep it from blowing off. After one mile, Ollie’s legs became stiff, and his feet felt like lead. After trudging through deep snow the whole way, passing through several farmer’s fields, he was exhausted. Yet, when he stepped onto Sister Cramer’s porch, he felt light.

As he passed through the door, a heat wave hit him. He had to wait until his senses returned.

“Hello?” Sister Cramer asked. “Is that you again, Ollie?”

“Yes, Ma’am. I brought you some good chicken soup.”

He came into the bedroom after getting a bowl and a spoon. He set the bowl and soup on the bed-stand next to the bed and pulled up a chair so he could visit.

“Bless you. I think my appetite has come back,” she said, taking a deep sniff of the soup. She smiled.

“You seem to be in good spirits.” Ollie filled the bowl and was about to feed her, but her countenance was more cheerful, so he handed it to her, instead.

“It’s the priesthood blessing. I feel so much better now.”

“That’s good. Can I get you anything else?”

“You have done so much already. I think after I eat this, I’ll feel good enough to get up and do some housework.”

“I wouldn’t advise that, Sister Cramer. You might want to get a good night’s sleep.”

“Sleep? That’s all I’ve been doing, young man. I’m all out of sleep. All I need is a little nourishment, and you’ve provided that.” She tasted the soup. “Oh, it’s good and still warm.” She didn’t tell Ollie it was only lukewarm. “Can you go to the kitchen? I think there may be some bread in there.”

Ollie found bread in a bread box. It looked fresh. The Relief Society sisters must have been here. He took it into the bedroom and sat down again. He planned to visit, but he dozed off.

He woke suddenly with a jerk.

“I think you’d better be gettin’ home,” she said, smiling. “You can come back tomorrow and get this pot. The soup will be gone and I’ll have cleaned it up. I don’t want you to come down with anything.”

“I think yer right. Well, I’ll be off. You take care, and I’ll drop in on you again.” Ollie took her hand and squeezed it. “I’ll see ya.”

“See ya, son. God bless.”

It was hard for Ollie to tread back home through the snow and wind. His whole body felt like lead. He didn’t feel the cold much, it was just hard to move, but he put one foot in front of the other. When he finally got home, he collapsed onto the couch. He woke up the next morning but only for a moment. He heard Agnes say, “My, you feel hot,” and he fainted

away into a dream. He was still outside in the cold and snow trying to get home. Now he could feel the cold and shivered.



Agnes patted Ollie's head with a cold towel. "You shouldn't of gone. You should've stayed home. Pray the Lord you wake up." With the other hand Agnes wiped back the tears.

"Mommy," Maggie said, bouncing Dorothy in her arms. "Is Daddy going to get better?"

Tommy nodded his head. Bradley only looked on.

"He'd better darlin'. He'd better. I won't forgive'im if he goes and dies on us. Lord forgive me." She kept trying to get his temperature down, patting his head with a cold wet towel. "He's so hot."

Ollie fought two days of delirium and fever. No one came to check up on them as though the whole world deserted them. On the third morning, he gave up, squeezed Agnes's hand then became limp. He breathed his last breath and lay still.

Agnes cried, "Oh my God!" and threw herself on top of him.



There was a knock at the door later that day. A tall old woman stood there with a dark, wrinkled face, her head covered with a shawl. The sun was out and had melted the snow.

When Agnes peeked out the door with three little babies holding onto her skirt and one in her arms, only their faces revealed, the old woman asked, “Where is my boy?”

Agnes saw an old covered wagon with two mules hooked up to it behind her.

She spoke again before Agnes could ask who she was. “The Lord told me to come, but I can feel it in my bones it is too late.”

“Come in,” Agnes said. “You must be Eliza. My husband spoke of you often.”

Eliza stepped in. “Where is he?”

Agnes pointed with her outstretched arm, and the old woman followed her to the bedroom. The children followed, but they would not look in.

Ollie lay there on the bed all dressed in his Sunday best with his hands resting over his chest.

Agnes pulled up a chair with one hand and let Eliza rest. The old woman didn’t show any emotion. She just sat there looking at him. Although, after awhile, tears ran down her wrinkled cheeks. Agnes opened the curtains and let the sunlight shine on Ollie’s face.

Agnes heard the children say, “Mommy, I’m hungry,” except little Tommy just nodded his head. She hadn’t been taking care of them for two days. Now that there was someone else here to carry the burden, Agnes turned to her children and sighed.

“Come on,” she said. “I’ll see if there is some bread.”



One of the neighbors came over. He announced himself as Mr. Denton. “Sister Cramer told me I should look in on Mr. Murdock. She said he didn’t look very well.”

“He was ill,” Agnes said, sticking her head out the door. “Very ill. I’m afraid he didn’t

make it. Won't you come in?"

"I'm sorry." Mr. Denton came in and removed his hat. "Is he ...?"

"He's laid out in the bedroom. His mother is here."

As Agnes led him to the bedroom, Maggie came up and raised her dress, exposing her nude body. "Mommy, I tore my dress."

"Take it off and I'll get you another one."

She turned her attention back to Mr. Denton. "He's in here. That's his mother."

Before he entered, he asked in low tones, "How did his mother know? Does she live around here?"

Agnes spoke softly. "She came from Dallas, Texas."

"Then she came in that wagon outside?"

"Yeah." Agnes tried to sooth little Dorothy in her arms. "Now, now."

"She came a long way. That must have taken a couple weeks. She must have come to visit." Mr. Denton sighed. "What tragedy. To come here and find him dead."

"Yeah. But she said that the Lord sent her, that she knew he was sick."

Maggie interrupted again. "Mommy. Here is my old dress. I'm cold."

Agnes lifted the naked little girl with her other arm.

Mr. Denton seemed to get embarrassed. He said, "I'll leave you to take care of yer family. I'll let the bishop know. I'm sure he will want to take care of the funeral if that will be okay with you."

"Yes, that's all right," Agnes said.

Maggie was squeezing her mother's neck too hard. "Let go little rascal." Dorothy gave a little scream of disapproval.

“I’ll let myself out.”

“Thank you.”

Mr. Denton left, and Agnes put Maggie down and slapped her bare bum. “Let’s find you a dress.”



The Relief Society sisters came and took over. The house was cleaned, the children were fed and dressed, a meal for the funeral was prepared. Bottles of milk warmed on the stove. Gradually, the house was filled with neighbors talking in low tones. It was like the loud whispering of spirits unsettled about the state of the world. Ollie was put into a coffin which was brought out into the living room.

Eliza sat in a corner of the room where she stayed for the rest of the day. Peeping out from her black shawl she kept over her head was close cut hair, gray, curled tightly against her scalp. She didn’t say anything, and she stared straight ahead, not moving or flinching. Bradley stood by her side and looked intently at her. Agnes had to grab his arm and move him away. “Go play with yer brother and sister,” Agnes said, sending him off with a pinch to the bottom.

Dinner was served, and all the people milled around, eating and talking. The noise went up a decibel.

Agnes was numb. She was in no condition to take on a farm and the children. She couldn’t even take care of Dorothy. Maggie had to assume that responsibility. When people would come up and give their condolences, she had enough mind to be polite and not cry on their shoulders. When people asked, “What are you going to do now?” she would say, “I

guess I'll get in that old truck and take the kids back to Roswell. My folks are there."

Each person said, "Oh," except one. That was Bishop Harper. He said, "We can take care of the farm. You can stay here and take care of the children. We don't want you to be without a home."

"No. I've made up my mind. I need my ma right now."

"Okay then. As soon as you want to leave, let us give you a hand."

"Okay."

Agnes saw Maggie sitting in another corner of the room holding Dorothy on her lap. Tommy stood next to her giving her a lecture. She didn't hear what he was saying, but she hadn't seen him talk so much, not but a couple words at a time. She scratched her head and thought *funerals have different affects on different people*.

Before the viewing was over, Agnes was on her bed hugging her pillow, sobbing. Sister Harper came in and said they were ready for the burial.

"Okay," Agnes said, sitting up. "Let me refresh myself, and I'll meet you outside."

"Okay." Sister Harper put her arm around her. "We'll wait for you."

After the woman left, Agnes poured some water from a pitcher into a bowl and splashed water in her face. She dried herself and stared into the mirror. Was that wrinkles around her eyes? Is that what crying does? Makes you old? Ollie had laughter wrinkles on the corners of his eyes. Agnes sighed. It was better to remember him laughing. He had been a fun guy. Yeah, better that way.

Everyone and the casket were gone. The house was empty, and it gave her a pain. All the people being there had covered her feelings. Now, she wanted to cry again. *I guess someone has the kids*. She approached the door, took one look behind her to make sure Ollie

wasn't there somewhere playing hide-and-go-seek. He loved to play that with the children. He would take them to the mountains sometimes and give Agnes a vacation. They went to Roswell one time, scooped up her parents and went to the Bottomless Lakes to the east of town. They always had fun times together. She sighed, wrapped her coat around her, and opened the door.

Agnes wondered for a moment where Eliza was. She seemed to be like a ghost that came and went. She glanced at the line of cars and then stepped into the black car next to the gate. Sister Harper was inside with the kids. She held Tommy to make room for Agnes. Bradley had to sit on his mother's lap, leaving Maggie in the middle, holding Dorothy. Agnes ducked to look out the front window to see the hearse leading the way. She didn't see the wagon and mules. Maybe Eliza was in another car.



The grave yard was a small one used in the past for pioneer settlers. It was square with a white picket fence around it. One large tree hung over the fence to the east, and a smaller fruit tree to the west. Both were bereft of their leaves and shook in the wind. A grave had been dug by a Mr. Porter whose land this was. The party walked slowly from their cars and congregated to this little spot.

Eliza showed up and stood next to Agnes who sighed with relief. She held Dorothy up to let Eliza see. Both of them stared at the baby.

“I thought I'd lost you,” Agnes said.

“I'm here.” Eliza now stared at the grave.

Maggie, Bradley, and Tommy peeked out from behind their mother's skirt as the casket was brought from the hearse. The bearers placed it onto a stand next to the six foot deep hole. Maggie wanted to look down into the hole, but Agnes grabbed her by the neck of her dress and held her back.

"I only wanted to see," she complained.

"Not now," Agnes said.

Mr. Harper came to the head of the grave.

"Mr. Murdock was an asset to us all. He was a loving father and husband and one of the best neighbors we had. He was always doing for others. The last service he performed was to give Sister Cramer her last meal. As most of you know, she died the next day. I had gone to see her, and her last words were, 'Tell Ollie we will see each other beyond the veil pretty soon.' I didn't have the heart to say that he went first.

"Ollie was born in Texas and grew up not knowing his father and mother. His father died, and he was given to a farmer, probably a distant cousin of mine, Mr. Harp of Johnson County, Texas."

There was a soft laugh from the company.

"When he grew up, Ollie worked for the railroad just above Roswell. There, he met his brother Henry, and through him, he found his mother Eliza, who is here with us today."

Agnes winked at Eliza next to her and held her hand. Eliza still didn't show any emotion except a single tear that she wiped away with her handkerchief.

As Agnes listened to the eulogy with an expected heavy heart, her mind wandered, thinking back to her marriage, the honeymoon, and the birthing of her children. Her hand found Maggie's ear, and she gave it a loving squeeze. She also remembered saying to Ollie

that if he didn't build them a good home, she would gather the kids together and run away in the truck to her home in Roswell. So, she decided, that is what they would do. Of course, she had already told Sister Harper. The Relief Society would help her tomorrow to get things packed up so she could leave.

She was asked if she wanted to say a few words, but she declined with a shake of her head.

The pall bearers lowered the casket down into the hole with straps. This time, Maggie got to watch. Agnes was too distraught to hold her back. Agnes joined Eliza, the two of them becoming like stone statues as they withheld their emotions. The next thing Agnes was aware of was a blessing pronounced upon the grave to protect it through the years until the resurrection. They gave Agnes and the children the opportunity to throw sod onto the casket, plus flowers. Maggie threw flowers. Bradley threw a rock, and Agnes grabbed Tommy before he fell in. Dorothy's diaper leaked onto Agnes. She didn't notice.

The party dispersed and Agnes and the children found themselves back home. She fed the kids on leftovers that night and tucked them all into bed. She sat in the big chair in the living room and fell asleep weeping.

The next morning, the neighbors helped Agnes pack the truck with all their belongings. She gave Ollie's clothes to the Relief Society. Agnes looked at the old house once more, sighed, and drove away. Baby Dorothy hadn't cried since before the funeral. Now, she wailed like a siren as they sped down the highway toward Roswell.

Eliza sold her wagon and mules and bought a ticket back to Dallas. She would enjoy herself on the train. She decided she was too old to go back in that wagon. It had worn her out.

The Move to Roswell

Chapter One

Pastor Estel Bonine was first called to preach at Bittercreek about five miles northwest of Merkle, just east of Amarillo. That would be his first church where he wasn't a guest speaker. Papa Wasson had moved his family there before the Bonines had come from Tennessee. Papa's Aunt Mary and Uncle Henry Cagle were there from Abilene, so Estel moved his family there, and the daughters cried. They had lived in such a beautiful brick home in Abilene, and had enjoyed all the money their daddy was making doing carpentry work. Now he and his family were paupers, depending on the gifts of his parishioners. But there was one consolation Estel thought was worth it.

Ruby and Estel had gone to church Tuesday night, letting Mama and Papa take care of the girls. After the service Estel preached, Ruby had gotten a ride home with Aunt Mary, picked up the girls and waited for Estel.

"Is Daddy comin' home?" six year old Mimi asked, as her mother pulled her nighty over Mimi's head.

"He'll be in directly," Ruby said, "or whenever he gits done."

"Will he come in to kiss me goodnight?"

"I imagine."

Ruby had more trouble getting Louiese ready for bed. She was skinny, but when she was asleep she was very heavy.

After she tucked the girls into bed, Ruby went to the kitchen and poured herself some

coffee, took it to the living room and settled in her chair with a happy sigh. She could relax a spell and read the Bible. She enjoyed reading it when Estel was gone and the girls were in bed.

Just then, Estel walked through the door. Ruby put down the Bible and stood. There were tears flowing down his cheeks. She walked over to him and took his hands.

“Estel?” she asked. “What’s wrong?”

He smiled, took the back of his left hand and wiped his cheek and took her hand again. “Ruby, you know Brother Masterson?”

“Yes.”

“I just had the experience of turning a man’s heart to the Lord.”

“Oh, Estel.”

They hugged each other.



There was one thing the Bonines kept with them when they moved from Abilene. It was their 1927 brand new Chevrolet. The cushions still smelled like fresh leather after a year. It looked very odd though, parked next to the little shack they lived in now, but Estel kept it clean and polished. When he drove the family to church on Sundays, he stepped out of that car a little taller than he really was.

The parish was dirt poor and little cash flowed into the coffer. The girls were outgrowing their dresses and shoes faster than Ruby could sew up new ones. Sometimes, when she couldn't get cloth, they had to do with hand-me-downs from the members of the little church. Of course, with a needle and thread, she could work miracles to make the dresses look nicer.

Ruby was always letting her parents, Mama and Papa Wasson, take care of the girls during the day so she could sew for people, selling several dresses each week. She was able to keep milk on the table with the money she made. With the money she saved, she was able to bake a cake each time a birthday came around. Chocolate cake with meringue frosting was her papa's favorite, and so that was the one she made most often. Sometimes she would make a stove cooked frosting, called seven-minute frosting. It was similar to her pecan candy she made every Christmas.

When everyone was settled in and their lives became routine, Ruby's family had a crisis. When she had picked up the girls at Mama and Papa's that day, Leota, Ruby's sister, had said, "I smell something peculiar." She was ironing and Ruby could smell the hot cloth, but upon sniffing the air, she said, "It's only chimney smoke."

When Ruby returned home, her phone rang. It was Clyde, her younger brother. "The house is on fire!"

"Get out of there! Where is Mama and Papa?"

"They're here, trying to get things out of the house."

"We'll be right over!"

Ruby ran down the street with Mimi and Louiese following after her, yelling, "Mama! Mama! Where you goin'?' What's going on?"

Ruby could see the smoke. When she got a block away she could see the blaze. Tears ran down her eyes not knowing the condition she would find. Her parents could be burned up.

Miz Dennis was there helping out. She was Ruby's friend she had met at church.

"My goodness Ruby!" she said. "Look at that fire. It's burnin' everything up."

Papa came out of the door with Leota, the smoke swirling all about them.

"Papa!" Ruby yelled. "Stay out of there. Leota, where's Mama?"

"She's still in there trying to keep the pictures. She's takin' them off the walls."

Mama came out crying, "They're all gone ... all gone! I couldn't save 'em." She was coughing and coughing. "Where's Papa?"

Everyone looked around. He was nowhere to be seen.

Little Billy cried, "Papa went back in lookin' fer Mama."

Papa came out calling, "Mama! Mama!"

"She's over here," Ruby cried.

Mama had collapsed on the ground and Miz Dennis and Leota helped her up. "Miz Wasson," Miz Dennis said, "you'd better come home with me."

The yard was covered with furniture, clothes, and canned food. There was a double barreled shotgun, fishing rods, plates, pots and pans.

Papa, Leota, and Miz Dennis walked Mama down the street to the Dennis's house as the clanging bell of the fire engine with its hand cranked siren screamed toward the burning house. The firemen had to scoot the neighbors, Mrs. Greer and her husband, out of the way as well as the Dennis and Wasson children.

By the time the firemen put the fire out, the house was gone. The pictures were gone. Most of the books were gone. Some of the clothes they were not able to save.

Ruby took her brothers Clyde and Billy home with her. Mimi and Louiese trailed behind them. The boys were about the same age as the girls.

Estel was out ministering to his congregation. When he found out about the fire, he came home and called his father who was living with his new wife Florence. She owned a boarding house, and Estel asked if Mama and Papa could stay there. His father said he would come and pick them up.



“That’s a relief,” Ruby said. “Now we’ll have to see where we can put all their stuff.”

“Yes,” Estel said as he leaned against Ruby’s chair. He stared into the air as he thought. “I’ll call on a few of the elders from the church and see if we can’t find an answer to that problem.”

The preacher consulted with the men and found that the best place to put the furniture and things they had saved from the fire was right there at the parsonage.

“Ruby. You know that shed out back?” Estel stood at the phone with his hands on his hips.

“You mean we got to tote it over to our place?” Ruby stopped her knitting and looked up at him.

“Well, we’re not using it.”

“Okay.”

“Ed Crow is coming over with a truck. We’ll take care of it.”

“Okay.” Ruby pouted, put down her project and said, “It’s a crying shame. What are we going to do about Mama and Papa? Why did this have to happen? We don’t have room

for them. If we had stayed in Abilene we would have had room.”

“I’m sorry, but the Lord placed us here where we can do some good.” Estel walked over to Ruby’s chair. “Besides, my Dad and Florence will put them up until we can find them a new home.”

“I guess so.” Ruby rose, laying her knitting down. “I’d better go with you. See what we can salvage.”

Brother Crow drove up in his Doge pick-up, and by the time they arrived, Mama and Papa Wasson were there along with Miz Dennis, rummaging around in the smoking tailings of what used to be their house. Ruby joined them while Estel and Brother Crow started loading the furniture onto the pick-up.

Ruby looked at her father as he kicked at the smoldering embers, picking up trinkets such as pieces of pottery, a coin, a fork, etc. Some things he threw back. Other things he stored in his suit coat pocket. He looked older today. She sighed and followed suit, finding a coat that could be washed. Then she walked over to help Estel pack clothes and dishes in boxes that Brother Crow had brought.

The truck loaded, Ruby kissed and hugged her parents and said goodbye, then said goodbye to Miz Dennis and the Greers. At the parsonage, the truck rocked back and forth as it headed to the back. They unpacked the truck and stored all the furniture and boxes in the shed.



The wind and rain blew hard as Estel and Ruby let the girls off at Mama's. Louiese and Mimi ran for the door, covering their heads with newspaper. Their parents headed for another Tuesday night revival meeting.

Louiese grabbed Mama's legs as thunder sounded like cannon bombarding the little town as in the Civil War. She shuddered.

Mama lifted her. "There now," she said in a comforting voice. "You needn't be afraid."

Papa sat in his big comfortable chair, puffing on a pipe and reading the newspaper, ignoring the intrusion.

Mama took the girls into the bedroom. Lightening flashed through the window and Louiese almost jumped out of Mama's arms like a frightened animal.

"You're such a scardy cat," Mimi said.

"Come," Mama said. "Sit on these feather pillows. It will comfort you."

She put each girl on a pillow on the bed. They sat cross-legged while Mama covered them with the bedspread to stop their shivering. "Now, there you go. You're not scared now, are you?"

"I'm not scared!" Mimi said after her shivering went away.

Louiese just smiled, holding the comforter about her neck.

After the girls calmed down, Mama took them to the kitchen. She placed fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and green beans leftover from dinner on some small plates and sat them at the dinner table.



When Louiese didn't eat any chicken, Mama asked, "Would you like me to warm that up for you?"

Louiese answered, "My daddy and me don't eat meat. We only eat veg-a-tables."

"She's like that, Mama," Mimi said. "That's why she's so skinny. I'll eat her chicken."

When Mama buttered two slices of bread and gave them to the girls, Mimi said, "She won't eat butter."

"My, my," was all Mama could say.

After dinner, the girls went back to sitting on the pillows, as the thunder and lightening grew worse.

"Mama, tell us a story," Mimi asked.

"One night there was a bird that kept trying to fly into the window." Mama paused to catch her thoughts. "I went to the window and lifted it open. The bird flew in and settled on the dresser. It was a crow. I couldn't see it earlier because it was so dark out. He strolled up and down like some proud cock, cawing and cawing. I wondered what I was going to do with him. Obviously he belonged to someone because he kept saying, 'Twee little dumb, twee little dumb.' I think he must have belonged to a little girl because he was quoting from *Alice in Wonderland*. It took several days before I could find the girl, but after looking up and down, high and low, I found her. She was so thankful she gave me this little hanky." Mama took out a hanky to show them it was beautifully embroidered with flowers and birds.

"Let me hold it." Mimi reached her hand out.

Mama let her handle it a bit and told her to let Sissy hold it. Mimi tried to hide it behind her back.

"It is a very special hanky," Mama said. "If you try to keep it, you dream such awful

dreams. But if you share it, you get to have a wish of something very nice.”

Mimi thought a moment and shoved the hanky over to her sister and pouted. “What nice thing can I have?”

“I will be right back. You think about it while I’m gone.”

Mama went to the kitchen and brought back a slice of blackberry pie. She gave it to Louiese and Mimi put on the sadist face she could. When Louiese started eating the pie, Mama said, “Sissy. Can I get you something else?”

“A piece of pie for Mimi,” she said with a smile.

Mimi immediately glowed with a happy face.

Mama went to the kitchen and brought Mimi a piece, and the two girls were reconciled.

Louiese asked, “Can you read us *Alice*?”

The rest of the night was spent listening to *Alice in Wonderland* until the girls fell asleep. Their parents came and picked them up and they woke the next day in their own bed.

At breakfast, while the girls were eating their eggs, bacon, and biscuits, Mimi said, “Sissy was a scardy cat last night.”

“Was not,” Louiese said, getting jelly all over her face from her biscuit.

“Were too!” Mimi retorted.

“Hush girls,” Ruby said as she poured each of them some milk.

“Sissy said she saw a woman without a head,” Mimi said, licking the jelly off her biscuit.

“Where was that?” Mama asked as she took the adult’s dishes off the table and deposited them into the sink.

“In that old vacant lot,” Louiese said nonchalantly, wiping her milk mustache off with her arm.

“I don’t think you did,” Ruby said.

“Yes. She was carrying two large buckets of water.”

“She just dreamed it,” Mimi volunteered.

Ruby waited with a stern face for breakfast to end. Then she took her youngest, sat down and placed her on her lap. “Now Louiese,” she said. “We don’t lie in this family. We don’t tell stories.”

“Mama told stories last night,” Louiese said naively.

“That is different. Now turn on your stomach. I am going to paddle yer bottom.”

“But Mommy! I didn’t lie.”

Ruby turned her girl onto her stomach, pulled down her under pants and whapped her bare bottom with her hand several times until Louiese started crying. She had learned that it takes about five to seven times before she would cry, then she would give her several more whaps to make it good.

She sat Louiese up and said, “Now don’t lie again or you’ll get more of the same.”

“Yes, Mommy,” Louiese said through her efforts to breathe. “I won’t ... tell ... no lies.”

“All right. You two go to yer room.”

Mimi smiled. Louiese slid off her mommy’s lap and the girls went into their bedroom. Ruby could hear them whisper, “No I didn’t!” “Yes you did!” “No I didn’t!” “Yes you did!” Ruby shook her head and went about cleaning the kitchen.



Louiese was getting a reputation for telling stories. In fact, she played with a little puppy she made up. At first, it was a sock doll her mother had sewn together. It had a face of a monkey with red lips, actually, the heel of a sock with overly stuffed arms and legs. It looked more like a dog than a baby doll, so she called it Puffy.

Mimi was jealous. Even though she had a store-bought doll, she had wanted a sock doll for herself just because Sissy had one. She always called Louiese “Sissy” because she was her sister. She stole the doll, and when Sissy told her mother she couldn’t find her Puffy, Mimi went behind the back shed where she had hidden it and tore it up, throwing the remains on the grass.

When Ruby asked Mimi if she had seen it, she said, “Yes, Ma’am. I saw Sissy go out back and tear the thing up. Now, she says she can’t find it. Must be that’s why.” Mimi grinned, lifting her face toward her mother.

Ruby dragged Sissy out back, found the remains of the doll and asked, “Is that what you did with your doll? Is that why you can’t find it? Shame on you. Shame. Shame.”

Ruby got a switch from the nearest bush. Sissy stood there shaking, too scared to run. She let her mama switch her bare legs and ran off crying. Ruby let her go.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do with that girl!”

Mimi mocked her. “I don’t know what I’m going to do with that girl.”

“Hush your mouth or you’ll get more of the same.”

Mimi straightened up like a little soldier. “Yes, Ma’am.” She started marching behind her mother as she headed back toward the house. “You want I should find her?”

“No. She’ll come in when she’s hungry.”

After that, Sissy could be found talking to herself. At the dinner table, she pretended to hand a bone to someone down under the table. “Puffy, you want this bone? I’m finished with it. There’s no more chicken on it, but I know you will like to chew on it.”

Her father stared at her. She bowed her head. “Pick up that bone and put it back on yer plate,” he said.

Another time when she was outside, she said, “Puffy, catch this stick. Go git it, boy.” She ran after her unseen playmate and picked up the stick, again throwing it across the yard.

These little things went unnoticed, but when one of the sheets of her daddy’s newspaper was found torn to shreds, Mimi told their mother Sissy did it. When she was confronted, Sissy confessed, “Puffy did it.” She got another spanking.

One day Mimi got angry at Sissy at the breakfast table and threw her glass of milk at her sister. She missed and it hit the bottom of the cupboard next to the kitchen sink. When Ruby heard the noise, she ran into the kitchen. “I can’t leave you two for one second! Something always happens.”

Mimi had quickly taken Sissy’s milk and put it next to her own plate before her mother could see. “She just threw it. I don’t know why.”

Sissy started to shake and stammered. “P-Puffy did it.”

Ruby yanked her out of her chair. “Elva Louiese Bonine! I’ve had enough of this.” She sat down in another kitchen chair and pulled Sissy over her lap. She didn’t even take the time to strip her bottom. She just started spanking. “We do not lie in this house, and we do

not make up stories! Do you hear me!”

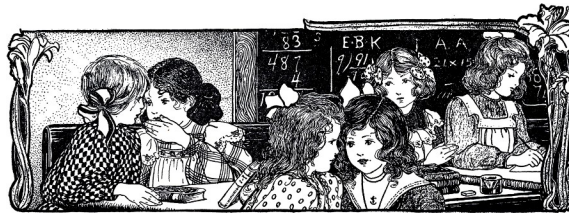
Sissy cried out, “Y-yes, M-Ma’am!”

“Now go to your room and just think that over.”

Sissy ran to her room and jumped onto her bed, grabbed her pillow, and sobbed into it.

Later, when Ruby looked in on her, she saw Sissy holding her pillow, caressing it, and talking to it, telling it all her woes. She wasn’t crying or stuttering, just using the sweetest little girl voice that charmed her mother. Ruby stood there wondering. Was she treating her right? Maybe she should talk to someone about it. Sissy seemed to have the devil in her.

Ruby sighed and left.



It was Teacher’s and Parent’s Meeting at the little school house and Ruby consulted with Louiese’s second grade teacher, Miz Petty Lee. There was no other chair, so Ruby sat on top of the nearest desk.

“First,” Miz Lee said, “I want to check the records we have.” She raised a card from her desk, letting the bottom end of it lay on the desk. “Louiese was born in Abilene?”

“Yes.”

“1922?”

“Yes.”

“She started the first grade in Tennessee, and then moved back to Abilene where she finished the first grade?”

“Yes. We did a short stint in Memphis where my husband preached.”

“Then she entered this school in the second grade.”

“Yes.”

“Louiese has a very well-fashioned imagination,” Miz Lee said. “She daydreams instead of paying attention in class.”

“I try my best.”

“Do you think it has to do with moving around so much?”

“Never thought of that, maybe so.”

“We have one consolation, Mrs. Bonine.” Miz Lee placed the card back onto her desk.

“Yes?”

I would like you to go to room 102 down the hall. That is our art class. Miz Tappet would like to talk to you about Louiese’s art work.”

“Okay.”

Ruby rose and shook hands with the teacher, left and went down the hall. The room’s door was open. There was a smell of tempera paint in the air. She saw a plump woman talking with one of the mothers and her son. She was just saying goodbye. Ruby sauntered over. Stood a moment without speaking until the others parted and they were alone.

“Mrs. Bonine?”

“Yes. Miz Lee said you would like to talk with me.”

The teacher stood and offered her hand across her desk. “Miz Tappet.” They shook hands.

“Just call me Ruby.”

“Okay, Ruby. If you would come over to the bulletin board.”

Ruby followed the teacher to the left side of the blackboard.

“Look at these pictures she drew.” The teacher pointed to some of the drawings
“Louiese draws like a sixth grader.”

“She’s always telling stories,” Ruby said quietly, touching the papers with her finger tips.

“We encourage that here. We let the students stand in front of the class and make up stories.”

Ruby’s eyes looked straight at Miz Tappet, then she lifted her head a bit. “Does Louiese do that? Get up and tell stories?”

“I’m afraid not. She is very shy and doesn’t talk to anyone.”

“Yes,” Ruby responded. “She usually keeps to herself.”

“But this is her talent, here.” Miz Tappet referred to the pictures again with a wave of her hand. “I think if you would encourage this at home, Louiese would gain self confidence and do better in school.”

“You think so?” asked Ruby, feeling a knot forming in her stomach.

“I know so, Miz Bonine. I have seen it time and time again in my profession.”

“I see. Well, I will try. God knows I’ve tried everything else.”

Ruby left the Parents and Teachers Conference with a new perspective and a new tool to use to help her with Louiese. She wouldn’t mention this to anyone, but she would try to get her wayward daughter to draw her some pictures.

Chapter Two

Five years passed. Mimi, now fourteen, was getting plump in all the right places and attracting the eyes of all the boys. Louiese, twelve, sat around and drew, sketching trees and bushes, cats and dogs, houses, clouds, and making portraits of all her family members. Ruby and Estel thought her art was pretty good. “At least she’s not telling stories anymore,” Ruby said.

On her birthday they gave her a water color painting set with paper to go with it. She almost cried and hugged them both. They didn’t tell her they had to save up the money. From then on, her drawings had lots of color. She had painted pictures at school, but now she could do that all through the summer as well. The talk was that she was going to art school and become professional. Mimi told everyone, “She’s already professional.”

Sister Patrick made programs for church and asked Pastor Bonine, “Could Louiese do a drawing of Jesus for the program Sunday?”

“I’ll ask her,” he said as he scratched his head. He never thought his daughter’s art would amount to anything or was that interesting.

When he came home, he asked Ruby, “Where is Louiese?”

“She’s out back. She’s made herself an easel out of sticks. She’s painting a picture of the shed.”

Estel left the house and went out back. He walked up to his daughter and stood behind her. She turned slightly.

“What do you think, Daddy?”

“It’s pretty good.” He stood there with his hands in his pockets peering at the painting

and then at the shed where all of Mama and Papa's old furniture still resided. He wondered what he was going to do with all that junk, and almost forgot why he came out there.

“Oh. Sister Patrick wanted to know if you could draw a picture of Jesus for the program Sunday. I'll have to approve it, of course.”

Louiese turned all the way around. Her long thin box of water colors almost painted a crest across her father's chest. “Oh, Daddy! I'd love too. I'll get on it right away.” She stood. “Is it a portrait or standing, or what?”

“A portrait will be nice.”

“I'll do it.”

Estel watched her gather her things and followed her back into the house. He wondered what this was going to lead to. Had she found her calling in life?



Louiese spent the rest of the afternoon perusing the library of books in their home. She found a perfect picture of Jesus in the large family Bible. Estel smiled as he looked in on her. She was drawing with an ink pen. He had not seen her do that before. He couldn't believe she had such talent. He couldn't think of anyone in their family that could draw. Where did she get it from? He didn't think she had a devil. She just had talent.

When Louiese went over to Sister Patrick's with the picture, she was amazed. “Let's walk over to the church. There is a mimeograph there. You will have to trace it onto the copy paper.”

“Oh. I thought ...,” Louiese hesitated to change gears in her thinking. “Of course not.

You can't paste this one picture onto all the programs."

Sister Patrick smiled. "That's right Louiese. You have to trace it onto the copy paper which will pick up ink from the ink sheet, and that will print onto all the other papers."

Louiese almost ran to the church building. Sister Patrick had to tell her to slow down several times.

"I'm sorry," Louiese said. "I'm just so anxious."

The portrait of Jesus didn't look as good on the copy paper after having traced it.

"It will look all right. People don't look that close anyway." She tried to comfort the girl, but Louiese was a perfectionist and felt disgruntled. And now, the picture she drew didn't look as well either, having all those grooves on it where she had pressed down with a pencil.

"You can draw another one." Sister Patrick put her arm around her as she walked her home.

Louiese waved the ruined picture through the air as she swung her arm as they walked as if the air would take the wrinkles out. She leaned her head over as she walked and thought. When they arrived at Louiese's home, Sister Patrick hugged her and said goodbye.

Louiese sighed, folded the paper and walked in through the door. When Mimi saw her downcast, she asked, "What's wrong? Wasn't the picture good enough?"

"Leave me alone," Louiese said as she strolled to her bedroom.

"I knew you weren't good enough."

Mimi didn't know her dad was there in the door of the kitchen.

"Mimi." Her dad's look was all that was necessary for her to stop her persecution and go off and pout.



Sunday came and Louiese didn't want to go to church.

Ruby put her hand on her head. "Come on, Sissy. You're not sick. Get up and get dressed. You're going to church."

Louiese got ready, but she had a sour face all the way down the sidewalk. Mimi knew what she was sad about and she smiled as she stared at her sister. When she arrived at the church, she went through the door with bowed head. Then there was the smiling face of Sister Patrick as she passed out the programs.

"Louiese," she said, handing her a program. "They came out really nice."

Louiese looked at it and saw it as just so so. Then someone complimented her.

"What a good job, Sissy."

Another woman came up and said the same thing. Louiese started feeling better. Maybe she had done a good job. She half smiled and jerked her head back. She breathed better.

Mimi had to sit with her sister on the front row so their father could watch them. She held her head to one side and sneered as though she would catch some disease being close to her. Louiese just smiled.

Chapter Three

The family visited Aunt Mary and Uncle Cagle often as well as the girls staying with them at times. It was on one occasion as this, when Ruby and Estel came to pick up their girls, that Estel received further direction in his life. He had been approached by his brother 'Leige, who was removing his family to Pasadena, California. He came to Uncle Cagle for some council and advice.

“Well,” Uncle Cagle said, placing his hand on Estel’s shoulder, “your family needs you as well as the church. I know you can find ways to minister to people in California.”

“I know I can,” Estel said, glancing up. “I did some building with my brothers here in Abilene. Now they have run out of work, and they think California is the place to be. Everyone else is moving there.”

Aunt Mary added, “The depression is getting people to move from here to there.”

“Moving again,” Louiese mumbled, staring at the floor.

“I have boy friends,” Mimi complained, sitting on the couch, staring out the window.

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“You don’t need boy friends at your age,” Aunt Mary replied.

“Especially,” Ruby added, “the way you’re filling out.”

Mimi looked down her dress and giggled.

Estel interrupted the conversation he was having with Uncle Cagle. “Mimi! Get yer things and go to the car.”

“You too,” Ruby said to Louiese. “We got to git.” She gave her aunt a hug and a kiss. “Thank you so much.”

“You’re always welcome here,” Aunt Mary said.

“Drop by after church,” Uncle Cagle said to Estel. “We’ll talk again.”

“Okay,” Estel said as he waved. “See ya then.”

The little family followed Mimi out to the ‘27 Chevy, piled in, and scurried home.



Everyone felt a thrill they didn’t understand that day as they packed their clothes and dishes and utensils. All the furniture was put into storage. Even morose Louiese was happy and helping.

“I know this is the Lord’s will,” Estel said, stuffing his socks into his suitcase.

“I hope we’ll find a better house than this one,” Ruby said, fitting her dresses into her garment bag.

Louiese passed down the hall. “I will miss Miz Tappet. She’s been so nice to me.”

“I’m sure you’ll find someone in Pasadena,” Mimi said, thinking of all the boys she was leaving, especially Jesse. “You artists are all alike.”

“I can’t say who you’re like,” Louiese said as she gathered up her drawings and paintings. “Mama would wash my mouth out with soap.”

“You two!” Ruby called out from the bedroom. “Keep yer minds on yer packing. I still need help with the kitchen stuff.”

She turned her attention back to her husband. "Can we get all this stuff into the car?"

"On top of it is more likely," Estel said, pulling the straps on his suitcase tight.

"We might have to make a second trip, it looks like."

"That would be tiring," Ruby said. "might have to leave some stuff."

"Wish we had a truck," Estel said, throwing a suitcase on top of the car. "But you know."

"Yes, I know," Ruby laid out the problem. "Preaching doesn't bring in the money."

"God knows we sacrificed for Him." Estel went inside to get another suitcase.

Following her husband, Ruby added, "He'll open up the way if we do our part."

Mimi helped put the pots and pans into the boxes. Just looking at the food implements made her hungry.

"Mimi, start making the sandwiches for the trip," Ruby said, closing one of the boxes. "I'll help you in a minute."

Mimi made herself a sandwich and took it into the living room. Halfway through her snack she heard, "Mildred Estelle! Come back in here and help me."

"Oh, Mama. I'm just about finished."

"You'll be finished when I get through with you."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Louiese noticed Mimi bring the rest of her sandwich into the kitchen. "I didn't get a sandwich."

“Well, I’ll be,” Ruby said with her hands on her hips. “It must be time for lunch.”

“It’s two o’clock, Mama.,” Louiese pointed to the clock with her thumb over her shoulder.

Estel came into the kitchen wiping his hands on a towel. “Did someone say lunch?”

“Find a seat, Estel. Me and Mimi are working on it.”

Everyone was glad to have a break and breathe a bit.

“Reminds me of when Ma and Pa moved us all out here,” Estel said, leaning back, chewing on his food. “Heah heah. Yes, it was a fun time.”

Both Louiese and Mimi threw ice cubes at him. “Hey! I’ll have some of that lemonade.”

That night excitement robbed Louiese of her sleep. What was her life going to be in California? What were the schools like? Would the house be nicer? What were the people like? Would she be accepted? It would be a new start for her. People wouldn’t know her, and perhaps she could be a better friend to others and not so reclusive. Uncle ‘Leige’s, Richard’s and Uncle Earl’s families would be there. We will have fun together, all us cousins.

The morning was cool. The sun wasn’t quite up yet. All the luggage, boxes and clothes were strapped to the top of the car. As everyone hopped in, another black car packed to the hilt approached. Uncle ‘Leige honked his horn and yelled out the window, “Richard and Earl are waiting for us just outside town.”

“Okay,” Estel called back.

Aunt Leota yelled out the other car window, “Everybody up to this? We’re gonna sing all the way.”

The kids waved to each other, and the two cars headed out, leaving the parsonage.

The old shed out back was still full of Mama and Papa’s things.

Breakfast was a peanut butter and banana sandwich on the road. They followed three other cars in front, each one topped with baggage, like overflowing wagons.

The first stop was in Lubbock where they had to fill up. All the children got to go to the outhouses in the back of the building. The little ones had to have the older ones keep them on the wooden seats so they wouldn’t fall in.

Everyone drank soda pops at a nickle a bottle. The empties were placed in a wooden crate next to the pop machine. The travelers stood in little groups for the camera to commemorate their trip. Little ones had to go again, and after much cackling and running after the children, they returned to their caravans.

This happened again in Roswell, Artesia, Duncan, Globe, Phoenix, and then the desert. The desert crossing was miserably hot. Cars had to stop while water stored in canvas bags was poured into the radiators. The children complained or slept. The adults’ tempers were on edge all the time. They passed other cars camped “along side the road.” The people they saw looked dirty and haggard. It was surmised they were from the dust storms that ate up thousands of small farms - the poor, looking for hope. There were no more gas stations or motels. When night came, they copied others and camped.

On the day they crossed into California at Blythe, everyone yelled, “Hoorah!” There were motels and service stations galore. The families could rest up and eat a picnic dinner in one of the many little parks on each end of the town. Rest stops, they were called, with

picnic tables, outside toilets, grass, and mesquite trees. It was like a family reunion of about twenty people. At least the people in the passing cars might think so.

The next layover was San Bernardino. They stopped for the night at a motel and prepared for Pasadena by calling a few people, making connections for jobs and housing. Each motel room was strewn with children sleeping on pallets, blankets folded up to provide a soft layer between them and the floor. The adults had to step over kids and talk in whispers. That's what Louiese remembered about San Bernardino. She put it into her night visions, the whispering and the anticipation. She woke up the next morning to heart palpitations. They persisted until they arrived at Pasadena ... California ... A new life.



Uncle 'Leige's and Aunt Leota's house was covered in white clapboard siding and had a screened-in porch with a drive on the left side. Estel's family moved in with them until they found their own house. Uncles Earl and Richard moved in within blocks of each other. Estel wanted to work a few weeks before finding a house. He didn't have a down payment yet. He also wanted to stay close to his brothers.

Louiese was interested in getting back to school, but that wouldn't happen yet. It was still summer. She, Mimi, and Wendy would stroll downtown, window shop, get whistled at, and drink ice cream sodas at the five and dime store. Of course, Wendy was much younger than the other two, but Mimi looked old enough to make the other two more than their years. Their parents wouldn't allow them to associate with boys, but Mimi didn't follow the rules. She would talk to boys they found standing on a corner, but Louiese and Wendy would play

shy and not say anything.



Evenings were spent playing board games such as Prince Valiant or Monopoly and listening to the radio. Estel and his brothers would gather around to listen to a fight or a ballgame. The women talked and sipped tea, and the men smelled of pinewood and sweat. The kitchen smelled of tea and dish soap. Ruby made sure it was always kept clean. That was her rent as well as sweeping, vacuuming, and dusting. Her sister Leota let her do it. It was nice they lived a communal life; family seemed like forever.

Ruby and Estel eventually moved their family into a turquoise clapboard sided house with white finish and a small porch to the right of the front door.

One warm afternoon, Louiese sat on a kitchen chair under the canopy of the porch drawing different views of the house. Mimi came out and asked, “Do you want to come with me downtown?”

“I might as well.” She stood and lay her pad and pencil on the chair. “I was dozing off anyway.”

“Do you good to get some fresh air.”

“Yeah.”

They found themselves at the five and dime being served by a new soda jerk. “What will it be today? I’ve noticed you here before.”

“We haven’t seen you,” Mimi said, serving herself from a straw dispenser.

“I’ve been stocking shelves and working in the back,” he said, wiping down the counter with a towel. “The regular boy joined the army.”

“Are you going to join up?” Mimi ripped the end of the straw wrapper off, put the straw up to her ruby lips and blew the wrapper across to the wall mirror. “And she hits the target. The crowd cheers, and she receives the honored cup.” She smiled. “I’ll have a chocolate soda.”

“Vanilla,” Louiese said shyly.

As the soda jerk grabbed a couple of trumpet shaped glasses, he asked, “What’s yer name?”

“I’m Mimi. This here’s Sissy, my little pet. She follows me around.”

As he plopped the ice cream into the glasses, he said, “Good looking pet.”

Louise blushed.

“Careful,” Mimi said. “She may explode if you notice her.” She turned to Louiese, smiled and jabbed her with her elbow.

“Name’s Jack,” he said as he squirted syrup into the glasses and filled them up with carbonated water. He served the soda’s and leaned on his elbows, eyes wide open. “There was a third girl.”

“Wendy,” Mimi said. “Our cousin. She’s at the beauty shop right now.”

“Haven’t seen you at school. You live around here?” he asked.

“We just moved from Texas.” Mimi grinned.

“I thought I noticed an accent.” The soda jerk reflected her smiling face.

Mimi jerked her head toward Louiese who was busy making short work of her soda, noisily sucking the bottom of the glass with her straw. Then she started scraping the crispy edges of her ice cream with the long teaspoon.

“She doesn’t have an accent,” Mimi said, after taking a sip of her chocolate soda. “I bet if I could get her to talk, she would sound like a native Californian.”

Louiese stared at her soda and poked Mimi with her elbow. Mimi and Jack laughed.

“Say,” Jack said, reflecting his smile with his bright eyes. “How about you meeting me after work? We can hit the town and make a night of it.”

“Got a date,” Mimi said. “But why don’t we make it a double, and Sissy here can tag along.”

“Super do. Bring yer date here and the treat will be on me.”

A couple of old women sat down at the counter to the left of the girls and the brass cash register. Jack popped over to them and, Mimi raised her voice. “Will do.”

Mimi and Louiese finished their ice cream in silence. Then Mimi said, “Come on. Let’s go to the beauty shop. Wendy should be done by now.”

At the beauty shop, Wendy was still under the hair dryer. It looked like a giant blue space helmet or a large vacuum sucking on her head. Mimi went to talk to her while Louiese waited up front. When she was approached by a beautician, it didn’t take a split second to decide to have a permanent. She hadn’t planned it, but neither had she planned on going on a date that night. And when she walked passed Mimi and Wendy, who was just getting out of the dryer, Mimi was shocked.

“What are you doing?” Mimi asked with her fists on her hips.

“I’m getting a permanent.” Louiese grinned.

“You can’t do that now. Wendy is almost done.” Mimi fumed.

“I want to look my best tonight.” Louiese sat in a chair that seemed to have come from a barber shop. The seat and back were padded black leather, and the arms looked like

porcelain.

“I don’t have the money to pay for it,” Mimi complained.

“I’m using my paint money,” Louiese said. “I can get some more later.”

“Well, Wendy and me are going to the movie.”

As the beautician placed the cape over Louiese’s shoulders, Louiese said, “Okay,” with a disappointed look. She had wanted to see that Clark Gable movie, but she was here now, and she did want to look nice tonight. *Maybe I can see it with him.*



At dinner, Louiese sat down with her hair in tight curls.

After the blessing on the food, Ruby, staring straight ahead while scooping gravy onto her mashed potatoes asked, “You got a perm today?”

“Wendy did,” Louiese said, staring at her plate. “So I did.”

“Where’d you get the money?” Ruby passed the gravy.

“My paint money you gave me.” Louiese licked gravy off her finger.

“I didn’t give it to you to get a perm.” Ruby stared straight ahead, ready for a fight.

“Well, I was just in the mood.” Louiese stared passed her mother.

“Maybe I won’t be in the mood next time you ask me for money.”

“Oh, Mama!” Louiese poked at her green beans. “I’ll get a job and pay you back.”

“Huh! I doubt it. You’re too young.” Ruby passed the roast beef to Estel.

“People will think I’m older. I’m filling out like Mimi.”

“You’re not too old for a spanking if you're thinking of lying about your age.”

“Mama, I’m not going to lie about my age.”

“She lies all the time,” Mimi volunteered.

“No I don’t!”

“Enough of that,” Estel said loudly. Then with a soft smile, he said, “Let’s talk nicely to each other.” Estel looked at each of the girls until their heads bowed. “Now, your mother has some news for us.”

Ruby smiled from ear to ear. “The Lord has given us a little surprise.” She patted her stomach.

“I hope it’s boy this time,” Louiese said enthusiastically.

“Whatever it is,” Ruby said, “I’m sure we will all love it.” She dabbed her mouth with her napkin and smiled.

Louise raised her eyebrow. *Surprise, surprise.*

After dinner, Louise went to her bedroom and brushed the curls out of her hair with a vengeance. Drops of tears spotted her dresser.



That Christmas Louiese received a camera as well as some strange paints. They were translucent, and the box had a label on it saying, "Marshall's Photo Oil Set." The set contained fifteen colors in small two-inch tubes, a one-ounce bottle of Marlene Medium for removing undesired color, cotton balls, toothpicks, a wooden and a metal application tool.

"There's no brushes?" she asked.

"I guess they mean for you to buy your own brushes," her mother said, unwrapping her present. "Look. Another dress." Estel winked at her.

Mimi handed Louiese another present that looked like a cardboard tube wrapped in red paper with Santa Clauses covering it at different angles. "I bought you some brushes, Sissy," Mimi said most demurely.

"Thank you, Mimi." Louiese, sitting on the floor next to her sister, reached over and kissed her.

Mimi smiled and went back unwrapping a black sweater.

Little Nellie, who was walking now, was more interested in playing with the crinkled wrapping paper strewn on the floor. She ran across them, squeal, pick them up, push and pull them like an accordion, and giggle.

"She likes the crackling sound," Mimi said. "Thanks for the clothes. I have to tug to get my blouses on."

"I could see that," Ruby said, squelching a laugh.

Louiese went to the bathroom, turned the lights off, and put film in her camera. She understood that light would ruin the film. She shut the camera and locked it, and using a handle on the side of the camera rolled the film into place. There was a little click. She folded the handle into the side of the camera and came out, taking pictures of everyone and everything. Thankfully, someone had bought her some inside film which was very sensitive and would take good enough pictures without a flash. She didn't think flashes fit onto a Brownie camera anyway.



A month later, Louiese was painting on top of her black and white pictures of Christmas. There was the tree. She could still smell pine scent in the air as she painted green onto its branches. She had the right shades for the red bubble lamps and the frosted glass bulbs. She could taste Christmas as she painted the candy canes and the rich fruit cake.

Leaving her paints and photos on her dresser, she went into the kitchen to get a glass of milk. When she came back, she saw Nellie, wearing nothing but her diaper, holding a paintbrush in the air. She had paint all over her.

"Me paint," Nellie said.

Louiese screamed, spilling her milk. "Maaa-ma!"

Nellie had painted marks all over her finished work.

"I'm going to kill you!"

Nellie ran out of the bedroom screaming, wielding the paintbrush like a sword. She ran into her mother's arms.

Louiese ran after her. She saw Nellie grinning, sitting on her mother's lap. Her mother's face wrinkled into a frown.

"Louiese!" her mother yelled. "What are you doing?"

"She messed up all my work." She breathed heavily as though she had run a mile. "All my photos are ruined." She collapsed onto the floor and sobbed.

"She's just a baby," her mother explained. "You need to be kind to her. If you don't want her in your bedroom, just lock the door."

Louiese heard nothing but that it was all her fault. She went out the front door and sat on the porch. Her throat was sore from yelling, and she became very thirsty. She rose from the porch swing and walked downtown.

It was Saturday. Students were lining up for the movie, walking in couples or groups on the sidewalks. It seemed she was the only lonely single. She went into the five and dime, landed on a stool at the fountain, and ordered a vanilla soda. The soda jerk was different from the last one she remembered. He was handsome. He stared at her as he made the soda. She was irresistibly drawn to smile at him. She forgot about the ruined photos.

"Seen you at church," he said, handing her the soda with a long spoon and straw sticking out like rabbit ears. "Your father Pastor Bonine?"

Louiese rolled her eyes. How could this happen? "Yes."

He leaned on his elbows in front of her. His breath smelled of peppermint. "Heard him speak. I don't know whether to go to seminary or join the army."

"You may live longer in the Army."

He laughed. "Why do you say that?"

"My father is growing old too fast." She took a big sip through the straw. "At least in the army, you can die young."

"That's not logical."

She looked up with her mouth on the straw. "Joining the army is not logical. Neither is preaching. It's a war either way."

"Not much else I can do," he said, ducking his head.

"Be a soda jerk. This is delicious." Louiese smiled.

They both laughed.

"Doing anything tonight?" He asked with a wry smile.

"Can't. But you can come visit my family if you want." Louiese started on the ice cream, spooning it into her mouth.

"Sure. I'd like to see your father." He looked back from washing a glass at the sink.

"He won't be there this time," she said, finishing her soda. She licked her straw. "We have to babysit our little sister."

He placed his hands on the counter and leaned over. "Where do you live?"

Louiese took a napkin, took a pen from the boy's front pocket, and drew a map, shoving it over to him.

"I get off at five." He winked.

"Then come to dinner. Everyone will be there then."

Louiese stood to go.

"Oh, what's yer name?"

"Sissy," she said, standing there, gazing. "That's what everyone calls me."

"Name's Doyal."

"Thanks, Doyal." She felt around in her pocket and turned red. She didn't have her purse nor money.

"That's all right, I'll pick up the tab."

"Thanks. I'll give you a dime when you come over," she said, leaving. Then she turned around. "Don't you tell my parents."

"Okay. I won't." He smiled, shoved off from the counter and started wiping it down with a damp towel.

Louiese left the five and dime rather fast. *Stupid, stupid, stupid! Carry yer purse next time!*



"Mama?" Louiese asked when she came home. "You and Daddy know a Doyal at church?"

"There must be a couple of them. Why?" Ruby was dressing Nellie in a jumper so she could play outside. "Well, one of them is coming to dinner."

Louiese ran to her bedroom and held her breath.

She heard her mother say in a raised voice, "Thank you for telling me."

Dinner was quite awkward. No one was saying anything. As Mimi raised the bone of her lamb chops to her mouth, Louiese kicked her leg. She mouthed the words, "Say something." Mimi kicked her back really hard and smiled about it. Louiese tried hard to not show any pain except for taking a deep breath.

"Good lamb chops, Sister Bonine," Doyal uttered. Not receiving anything from Ruby except a smile and a nod, he addressed Brother Bonine. "Heard you served in France during the war."

Estel gave him a fake smile. "Algiers."

"Oh." Doyal pointed with his spoon at Sister Bonine. "Good mashed potatoes."

"Where was it you said you two met?" Ruby asked, ripping the meat off the bone on her pork chop with her teeth.

"At church," Doyal lied. It wasn't exactly a lie. He had seen her there.

"We met at church," Louiese said to support her new boyfriend.

"Oh," Ruby said. "Would you like another roll?" She passed the basket to Doyal.

"Thank you. Everything is really good."

"Um-hum." Ruby rolled her eyes.

Mimi spoke up. "Now I know where I've seen you. You're a soda jerk at the five and dime."

Louiese kicked Mimi's leg. She kicked back. "Ooh!" Louiese reached down to rub her leg.

"Girls!" Estel stared at his daughters. They became humble and bowed their heads.

"I thought that was a nice sermon a month ago, Brother Bonine," Doyal said, trying to change the subject.

Estel smiled at Doyal, but he didn't say anything.

Little Nellie was so busy with her bowl of beans and mashed potatoes, smearing on her face and bare chest, and trying to place the stuff on her spoon with her hands that she made no sound but oos and goos. Ruby got tired of it, took her bowl away, and tried to clean her up with a napkin. She fought with her mother and complained to the point of crying. Ruby gave her a bottle of milk, and she seemed satisfied with that, shutting her eyes half-closed.

When Ruby stopped she saw everyone staring at her as though there was no better entertainment.

"My my," was all she said as she went back to eating.

By the time apple pie was served for dessert, everyone was talking and Nellie was asleep in her high chair, leaned back with her curly head resting on her shoulder.

Louiese found that she had to share Doyal on the porch swing.

Mimi said, "I have to chaperon you two love birds."

Doyal's face went redder than Louiese's.

Louiese leaned around Doyal. "Don't be silly, Mimi."

Ruby and Estel came out on their way to visit an elderly sister they ministered to each week.

Ruby said, "I'm sure Doyal has things to do. I put Nellie to bed, and I want you two to keep an eye on her."

"Okay, Mom," Mimi said. "We'll be right here if she needs anything."

"Well, I must go," Doyal said as he stood. "I have to do some schoolwork tonight. It's the only time I have to do it."

"Can we drop you off somewhere?" Estel asked, pausing on one of the steps.

"Sure," Doyal said enthusiastically. "Bye girls. See ya tomorrow."

"Bye," they both said.

Louiese went inside feeling gloomy. *That didn't go well.*

Chapter Four

Sunday, Louiese and Mimi met Doyal's whole family at church. They were the Wimples, and Louiese fell in love with them. Doyal's sister Cleo, unlike her brother, was big-boned with a rounded nose and mouth. She reminded Louiese of the Wassons and her mother. The two girls were fast friends from the start.

Cleo had another friend, Lillie Mae Evens. She was tall and skinny with lots of dark hair. A long Roman nose accentuated her face. The three of them were cheerful and laughing all the time. Whenever Mimi joined them, they were a riot. They burst into laughter at the least provocation or for no reason at all. The girls would raise their skirts to take pictures of their legs, trying to imitate the girls they saw on pinups and at the movies.



Of course, these pictures were kept out of the sight of their parents. Mimi, though, considered the black sheep of the family, never had her picture taken with her leg showing. She only laughed when the other girls wanted her to raise her skirt. The girls concluded she wasn't proud of her legs even though Louiese's legs were just as fat.

“Come on, Mimi,” Lillie chided. “Be one of the girls.”

"Yeah, Mimi," Cleo said. "Don't be a spoilsport."

Maybe it was the place that bothered Mimi. While taking pictures, they stood right in front of the red-brick church where their daddy preached. Laugh as much as they did, they couldn't get Mimi to show off her legs. But the ice cream store was only a block away across the corner of a vacant lot. Everyone enjoyed ice cream, even more than taking pictures.

The girls came together after choir practice or youth group meetings and walked over to the ice cream shop. It was a small store, so they usually ordered cones and stepped outside with them, everyone talking at the same time.



Louiese's picture was like this but rectangular and in a frame.

Louiese was fond of taking pictures as much as drawing portraits. Her paintings of some log cabins in the woods were considered the height of her art career. They were scenes of the evening near sunset. Two of them looked like the same cabin but at different angles. The two cabins were near a lake. Ruby and Estel liked them so much they kept them in the living rooms of their different homes throughout their lives.

Every time people came to visit, Louiese had to show off her paintings on the walls, but sometimes, the visitor asked to see them before she could say anything.

Visiting Doyal at the five and dime was now done as a group. Mimi, Louiese, Cleo and, Lillie sat at the counter sipping ice cream sodas, everyone talking like cackling hens. Occasionally, Doyal was able to get in a word edgewise, and any thought of him becoming Louiese's boyfriend diminished to him becoming a family friend. Both Louiese and Doyal would have to look in other directions for romance.



Louiese, alone in her bedroom, was visited by her mother. "I just happened to be passing by, looking in. You seem very sad."

"Oh, I'm not sad, Mother." She smiled because her mother's face seemed compassionate now instead of having the usual strict, stern look.

"You want to talk about it?" Ruby sat on the bed beside her daughter.

"I guess it started with Doyal." Louiese leaned on her arm and tried to keep the smile up, but it turned to a frown. "I thought he was going to be a boyfriend. Oh, don't get me wrong, I love all the Wimples, especially Cleo, and we girls have lots of fun, but ..."

"You don't have a boyfriend." Ruby noticed Louiese's Bible on her night stand.

"Yes." She sighed.

Ruby reached over and handed her the Bible

Louiese put it in her lap and pondered a moment. "Thank you, Mother. I guess I need to read this more often."

Ruby smiled and nodded her head. She placed her hand over her daughter's and left. Louiese opened the book and started reading about Jesus. It did help.



Louiese came in from the porch and handed her daddy the mail. He saw a letter among the bills. "It's from Uncle Cagle, Ruby." He opened it with his thumbnail, slid it out of the envelope, and flipped it open. He sat down on the couch next to Ruby's chair and read it. "We've been called to Roswell. He wants us to head up a little church there. Just started. The plan is to occupy this little shack and raise money for a real church."

"Sounds like a plan all right." Ruby put down her knitting needles, looked up at her husband, and sighed. "How soon?"

"As soon as we can get ready."

Louiese had been in earshot. She came into the room and announced, "I'm not going."

"Honey," her mother said, "We're a family. We can't leave you here. Besides, you're underage."

Louiese's stomach felt sick. Tears came. "I can't leave school. I can't leave my friends."

"Life's like that sometimes," her mother said, trying to comfort her. "And you know that always having to move is what it's like living with a pastor."

"I know that, Mother. I just need to stay here."

"Where do you plan on staying?" Ruby stood with her hands on her hips.

"I can stay at Cleo's. I'm sure her parents will let me."

“Ruby,” Estel interrupted. “Let me give them a call. Maybe something can be worked out.”

"You're a pal, Daddy." She hugged him as he stood. He didn't respond. She forgot he didn't hug women, and she moved away. He had that half-smile he usually displayed when anyone tried to get too friendly. He went to the phone and dialed a number. He was good at numbers. He didn't have to look it up in the phone book.

After a few hums and haws, he asked the Wimples about their situation and whether they could allow a young girl to live with them for the summer.

“Bro. Wimple is talking to his daughter,” he said, covering the mouthpiece with his hand. “Yes,” he answered. “Yes.” Then he smiled.

“Cleo is jumping up and down as far as I can tell.” He tilted his head. “You have their permission to stay awhile.”

"Oh, Daddy!" He let her kiss him, but he sat down with that half-smile.

“I want to call her right now.”

“Just a second.” He peered up into Louiese’s eyes. “You think you can behave yourself? Not be showing off?”

Louiese blushed and cleared her throat. “I’ll behave myself.”

“Okay. I’ll dial for you.”

Estel handed his daughter the phone. "Cleo? ... Isn't he a darling? ... Yes!" Louiese stifled a scream. "I'll pack up all my things. See you."

“Oh, Daddy! Thank you. Thank you.”

“There’s no hurry, now,” her mother said. “You can wait until we’re all packed and ready to go.”

“Oh. I can’t wait.”

“Hold yer horses,” her father said. “You have all summer.”



It took almost a week for Estel and Ruby to pack all their things. Estel found a trailer for rent for not very much. He and the owner struck up a friendship right away. He told Estel where the location of his partner was in Roswell. Estel had a week to turn the trailer in. They shook hands after payment, and Estel left with a contented smile. He found that the guy was a Christian. That was part of his satisfaction. It was a flat trailer with ropes included. As Estel backed the trailer onto the front yard, Ruby stood ready with a box of knickknacks from the living room and kitchen. They left enough kitchen utensils for making and eating dinner. They would be washed and put into a box that night. Brothers Dick and 'Leige and the Wimples showed up to help load the cargo. They had the trailer loaded and tied down within an hour. Easy work. The beds and furniture stayed with the house. But what they brought and bought was all neatly packed.

Louiese had her suitcase by the door prepared to go. She had to visit each room in the house to say goodbye. She kissed everyone in gratitude that came and then her own family.

Mimi said, “Sissy, I wish you were coming with us or that I was staying. It’s been a good year for you and me.”

“Yes, it has ... friend.”

“Friend.”

They hugged each other and then helped their mother with dinner. Ruby had invited the whole bunch to stay, filling the kitchen and living room with everyone eating all the leftover food they couldn't take. There was ham, chicken, roast beef, green beans and beets, a lettuce salad, and lots of gravy and mashed potatoes. The bread didn't go around because someone forgot to take the buns out of the oven. So they had some buns to take with them on the trip with enough leftover meat for sandwiches. Other things were packed for the family staying there to take home.

After dinner, family and friends gave hugs and kisses again.

"So, will you get a cabin tonight?" Leige asked.

"We will sleep in our clothes until about four o'clock," Ruby said, "and get an early start."

"Okay, then," Leige said. He hugged his sister-in-law goodbye.

Mimi hugged her Sissy, Louiese, saying, "Write."

"I will."

Louiese picked up her suitcase, said, "Bye," again to her mother and daddy.

Doyal stored her suitcase in the trunk of his car. Louiese and Cleo hugged each other, saying, "We will have lots of fun," before sliding into the front seat.

Estel, Ruby, and Mimi stood on the front porch and waved goodbye to Louiese as she left with her friends. The cars sprouted waving arms as they sped off.

"I'll miss everyone," Ruby said as the three turned to enter the house for the last time.

"Yeah," Estel said.

"Now, I don't have anyone to pester," Mimi laughed.

"I'm proud of you two," Ruby said. "You've come a long way."

"Yeah," Mimi said.

The screen door slammed behind them.

Back in Roswell

Chapter One

An old truck loaded beyond the height of its cab rolled into the driveway of the Singleton's farmhouse and died. Ma and Pa Singleton were expecting their girl and her kids. She had phoned from a truck stop in Las Cruces, named for a field of crosses from a massacre two centuries earlier. It was on the Union-Pacific rail line from Lordsburg where Dorothy was born. They took Highway 70 through Alamogordo and came into the west side of Roswell. This highway connected Duncan, Arizona, Lordsburg, and Roswell, New Mexico into a lifeline of family history.

"I'm almost as dead as this here truck," Agnes announced as her parents bolted out the front door. Sam grabbed her and hugged her tight.

"Our precious grandchildren," Emma exclaimed as the children piled out on top of each other. Little Tommy cried. Emma picked him up, but he reached for his mother. Maggie stood there with Dorothy on her hip. She looked vacant as if she had no sleep for two days. Bradley wandered off toward the house.

"Who's this?" Emma asked, clapping her hands onto her cheeks.

"Dorothy," Maggie said. "She thinks I'm her mother."

Emma gave Tommy to Agnes and took Dorothy, bathing her in hugs and kisses. She yelled out, and Maggie took her back.

Everyone strolled into the white stucco house and spent the next hour describing the trip up to Roswell. After that, Agnes, Maggie, Tommy, and Dorothy fell asleep on the couch.

They found Bradley asleep at the table, having raided the icebox. He had drunk a glass of milk, eaten a boiled potato with carrots and a hunk of roast beef.

Sam and Emma stood at the entrance of the kitchen, staring at him.

“I have work to do,” Sam said. “Those calves need cutting and branding.”

“I’ll put the poor boy to bed,” Emma said. “The dears are all worn out. They must have driven straight through.”

“Yeah. I’ll see you later.”

That night, Agnes and the three older children slept in her old bed. The baby slept in one of the drawers of the chest-of-drawers.

Agnes rose early, visited the chicken coup, and gathered several eggs. She came in the back door and helped with breakfast. Emma fried the eggs and bacon, and Agnes took care of the pancakes, piling them on a common plate.

Maggie moseyed in half-asleep. "I'm hungry."

Bradley followed. “I’m hungry too.”

Tommy nodded several times as he came in and laid his head on the table.

“Sit down, little chillens.” Agnes smiled. “We’re ready for you.” She always spoke like a hillbilly when trying to lighten the air.

Agnes set the eggs and bacon on each plate containing griddle cakes and poured on the maple syrup as her daddy strolled in.

“You washed yer hands?” Emma asked.

“Yeah,” he said, holding them up for Emma’s inspection. “They’re spittin’ clean.”

"Well, if you got spit on them, you'd better wash'em agin."

Sam grumbled and sat down. Smiling, he said, “Hello, little kiddies.”

"Morning, Grandpa," Maggie moaned.

"Ever one said grace?" Sam asked. His family paused as he asked for the blessing on the food.

"What a room full of sourpusses." Sam smiled at the kids, but they were too interested in their food to look up.

"Well," Emma intervened. "You know. They're all missing their daddy."

Agnes sighed. "He's in the grave now. Nothing more to do."

"Yeah," Sam said, gobbling down his eggs, bacon, and griddle cakes. "The sun's still shinin'."

After breakfast, Agnes assumed her duties as if she had before she ever met Ollie. She went out to the corral and helped her daddy cut the calves while he branded them. She threw the rocky mountain oysters into the branding fire and snacked on them later.

The kids ran here and there, trying to find some mischief. There were no skunks to stomp on, but there were plenty of sticks they could beat each other with or play sword fighting. Bradley liked to lift Maggie's dress and whap her bare bottom, run away, and dance a silly dance as he had seen his daddy do. That made her angry. When she chased him, he ran off laughing.

Later, they tried to wrestle with the calves but found they needed to be rescued, as the calves, being upset at having lost their privates, would run and butt them with their heads.

By lunchtime, they were all tired out again and could barely eat a sandwich. After taking a brief nap, their grandpa decided they should learn how to work, and so he assigned them to clean up the barn, raking the floor.

"After you make some small piles, here's a little shovel you can use to put them into this big pile."

Sam came back later to look in on them. "Yes, that's right. Keep on doing it."

The kids learned that life was not all play. They had to help with the farm to make it easy for everyone. Each person had to pull their load, even little Tommy. That's what their grandpa said. Tommy enjoyed helping, even if it was just a handful of dirt or an armful of hay that he could move.

They liked their grandpa but did not like to work. After a month or two of feeding the chickens and calves, raking out the barn and corral, gathering the eggs, and cleaning their room, they got down to a decent schedule.

After a year of living with their grandparents, the kids were ready to tackle a vegetable garden without complaining. Pulling weeds began to be fun as long as they didn't throw dirt clods at each other. Getting dirt in your eyes was not fun, but planting and watching things grow was.

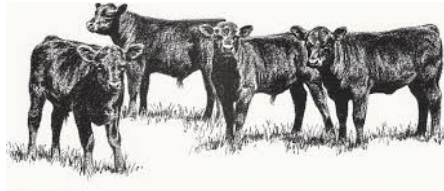


Tommy, Maggie holding Dorothy, Bradley in the garden

Their mother was always there to help, this being her project. She had to instruct the kids how to care for "what will become yer dinner," she said.

Their mother was always there to help, this being her project. She had to instruct the kids how to care for “what will become yer dinner,” she said.

Raising a few calves, bought from nearby farmers, proved to bring a better profit than cotton, especially when the farm kept getting smaller and smaller. Sam had to keep selling land to make ends meet. Agnes became a pretty good cowgirl as the years passed. Her parents were getting older, and she decided she could use the calf business to take care of them. Some of the calves would go to market, and some back into herds to remain steers.



The Singletons had two cows they milked. Bradley's job was to take the cows out to pasture in the morning and bring them back in the evening. Agnes milked the cows, but she let him do it a couple of times to get the hang of it.

They also had an orchard and some honey bees. With an apple press, they squeezed out the honey from the honeycombs and bottled it, but using a milk separator, Sam could extract a little more than he could otherwise, and save the wax. Both were marketable. They usually put up a table with a tarp overhead out by the street during the season. Many people stopped to buy their honey, and the sale didn't last but a week before they were out.

Bradley was getting on in years himself. He soon learned to drive the wagon by the age of eight, and by the time he was twelve, he did it full time. To acknowledge that he was not a little boy anymore, they called him "B."

One of his chores was to take eggs and milk into town and sell them at the local grocery. He made the trip each week. One day the wagon rolled over a bump on the side of

the rough dirt road, tipping the wagon over. Bradley jumped from the wagon and tied the horse to a bush. The eggs had not been secured well enough, and how to tie good knots was hard to remember. He got the horse to pull the wagon straight, and it tipped back onto its four wheels. That cracked one of the wheels, but not too bad. He put the eggs and milk back into the wagon. The milk cans didn't spill. They had tight lids, but as he was putting one of the cartons of eggs back, there was raw egg all over it. He placed the unbroken eggs in an empty carton he had on the wagon, having wiped the eggs off with his handkerchief.

This was not good. He shouldn't have been looking at that hawk's nest above in the tree next to the wagon. It was his fault, and he would remedy it. He shimmied up the tree and looked into the nest. It had in it just the right amount of eggs that would replace the broken ones. He carefully put the hawk eggs into his shirt and let himself down slowly. Placing the hawk eggs in with the chicken eggs, he climbed back onto the wagon and slapped the horses with the reins. They were off to the store, and B wore a big grin on his face.

Roswell's streets were still dirt roads, and traffic was usually horse-drawn wagons as farmers came to town. There were a couple of cars in town, but Roswell was still a frontier town. The only interest was farming. Most stores were built back in the nineteenth century and kept their old facades. One of these was Will Smith's General Store.

When B parked his wagon on the side of the store, he took a crate of eggs in and announced himself. "Delivery, Mister Smith!"

Will Smith, short and balding, wore a white apron. He called back, "Bring them to the counter, and I'll check them over." Will's grandfather Vic Smith named the town Roswell after his father Roswell Smith. Vic was the first owner of the store. His picture was prominently displayed about the cash register.

B hefted the crate onto the counter. "I have some more eggs and milk in the wagon."

"Jeff!" the man called. "Help B unload."

Will raised his eyebrow when he saw the hawk eggs. He chuckled and shook his head.

When the two boys came in with more eggs and milk, he said, "Just put them in the regular place in the back." Will had known B for almost a year. When B came to receive his money, he didn't say anything about the odd-looking eggs, and when B left, he only winked at the lad.

As B drove back home, he thought, *Whew, I thought I'd had it.* He had been smart. He had to upright that wagon all by himself. That took intelligence, for he was only a little boy, not strong enough to do it by hand. He had to handle the horse just right, and he did it. He was proud of himself that day.

By the time B arrived home, the broken wheel had become worse. It was almost ready to fall off. After looking at it, Sam just shook his head. Something else to fix. He got Agnes to help him. They took the front axle off and turned it on its end where the wheel could be worked on while up in the air. But then something else caught his attention, and the wheel stayed on end for days.

B and Maggie thought that wheel sticking up in the air was heaven sent. They climbed up on it, sat on it, and the other person turned it around. Whenever they had free time, they would go to the wagon and take a spin on that old broken wheel. It was their merry-go-round.

B took a spin on that broken wheel one last time. He decided it would be fun if Maggie pushed the axle over with him on it. When B went down, he yelled. When he landed,

Maggie saw that his leg had twisted within the spokes of the wheel. She immediately ran to get her mama, but Sam was there already when Agnes arrived.

"I heard him scream," she said, shaking and rubbing her hands together.

B was lying on the ground whimpering as Sam, cussing like a wild man, attached a rod to his leg with a cord.

"I already set it," Sam said to his daughter. "You may want to take him to Doc's just for a check over."

"I guess we can lay him in back of the truck," Agnes said.

"I'll get the wheelbarrow. He can sit in it."

"Yeah. We don't want to lift him."

Maggie started sobbing. "It's all my fault."

"There there, now." Agnes hugged her daughter. "Everything will be all right. You've learned your lesson. Let's git him to the doctor."

Sam dragged B into the tilted wheel barrow as Agnes held the handles. She tipped it back, and B gave out a little yelp. Emma looked on from the kitchen door.

They placed B carefully onto the back of the truck after Emma had made a pallet of blankets.

Emma waited at the front door as the truck sped off down the street. She took a deep breath, said a prayer for B, and went back inside. After an hour, she heard the truck and raced to the front door. They drove the truck to the back of the house, and she ran through the kitchen to the back door.

B looked well as they helped him out of the back of the truck. His pants leg had been ripped open, showing the white cast. It covered his knee down to his ankle. He hobbled up to

the back door with one arm around his mother and the other around his grandpa. Emma kissed him as he came through the door. Maggie came in with the blankets folded neatly in her arms.

B healed. Farm work became a habit, and things were running smoothly until the market crashed. There was no money to be had anywhere.

Chapter Two

Edward came by and consulted with his pa and his sister Agnes about the sudden depression of the market. As they sat in the living room on plush blue couches and chairs, Edward suggested, "Hey, Why don't we throw in with each other? I have a small herd of cows. You only have two. I also am getting a lot of calves."

"But the papers say," Agnes spoke up, "no one has any money to buy, let alone raise the alfalfa for feed."

"I'm still selling. A lot of small farmers are building co-ops to keep floating. They're keeping their heads above water just combining efforts. We should do the same."

"Family comes first," Sam said, putting in his two cents worth.

"All right then." Ed slapped his knee. "I'll bring my cattle down here and sell my farm. We can use your land, Dad. We will still have room to grow alfalfa the first year, and if the farmers around here are still growing the same stuff, we can buy from them or barter and use all the land for grazing."

"Yeah," Agnes agreed. "And we can grow the alfalfa and just let the cows eat it on the stalk."

Sam laughed and slapped his hat onto his knee. "You just do that and I won't have to bail the hay."

Agnes and Ed chuckled.

"And when will this happen, Ed?" she asked.

"Right away. After dinner, of course."

"Men are always thinking of their stomachs," Agnes said, rising to the occasion.

Ed invited their twelve-year-old nephew Eben to come and work with them. Agnes was surprised the boy knew so much about cattle. He could ride a horse well and lasso a calf, jump off the horse, and tie the calf's legs together in three seconds flat. B, three years younger, was learning a lot from his older cousin. They got along well and helped each other in their work. B helped in the feeding, and when the time came, in the branding. He also drove the wagon for any chores that needed to be done, like fence repair with Eben and going to the market to trade.

Agnes learned to cut out a cow or its calf with one of the trained horses Ed had brought with him. When the rodeo came to town, he asked her to show off her skills, but when Agnes saw other women doing so much better, she declined. She would rather watch.

The kids enjoyed the calf roping, especially watching Eben.

There were times when everyone went to bed dead tired. One of those was when something spooked the cattle, and they ran through the barbed wire fence. They had a hard time rounding up the herd because no one had saddled the horses. Some of the family, Agnes included, ran after the cows, waving their arms and yelling. Then there was the tending to the cattle and putting grease on the wounds they received from the barbs on the fence. Morning came and her pa, Sam, had to shake her awake.

After doing all this work for a couple of years, prices plummeted, and they couldn't sell their stock. They wound up giving cows away. Ed complained, "I shouldn't have sold my farm."

But Ed was a businessman. He had saved enough money to build a filling station at

the top of Comanche Hill. It was one of the first filling stations in the area and the first and last stop for people coming into and leaving Roswell. He did good business.



Ed and his filling station

Whenever family or neighbors went out to the Bottomless Lakes, they always stopped at Ed's store and gas station to fill up their cars and themselves with candies, chips, and sodas.

Through all these troubles, Agnes pondered on her need for another man. The kids were growing up without a father, and she was getting lonely. She met a man down at the Bottomless Lakes park. He was friendly and seemed very kind, and they had pleasant conversations as they sunned themselves at the edge of the pool.

"I like to come out here and relax," he said.

"Me too. Taking care of cows all day takes it out of me." Agnes took a sip of her Coke through the straw sticking out of the green bottle.

"So, you're a cowgirl?" he asked, smiling.

"You can say that. I never thought of it that way."

"I read in the papers and hear a lot of talk from my friends that selling beef is hard. In fact, selling anything is hard right now." He slapped the arm of his lounge chair.

"Yes, nobody has any money, and here we are, spending our last few pennies lounging around."

They looked at each other and laughed.

"Are you out of work like me?" she asked.

"Just about. I'm working with my brother, Jack. He's got a trucking outfit in Roswell."

"He probably moved some of our cows. What's the name?"

"Jack Frost Trucking."

"The name makes me shiver."

The man laughed. "Yes, the name gives you a cold shoulder. Someday it may read Boyd Frost."

"So that's yer name?" Agnes winked.

"Yes." He winked back.

"Well, the sun's setting." Agnes raised herself from her chair to a sitting position. "Got to go see about my chillins."

"You have children?" Boyd rose to his feet. He offered Agnes a hand with which he helped her up. "I have three boys myself."

"Yes. They're over there in the children's pool. Got to get back so I can feed everyone."

"Hey. Let me feed you all here. They have a restaurant inside."

"Oh, you shouldn't."

"Let me treat you. I haven't been able to have company in a long while."

"Well. Okay. Let me get the children. I'll meet you in there when we're all dressed."

"Thank you. I'll see you in a few minutes."

Bradley and Maggie didn't like the man. Dorothy and Tom hadn't made up their mind. But they all enjoyed the hamburgers and French fries, and everybody had a Coke. When it was time to go, Agnes yawned.

"Well, time for bed. I bet everyone will be asleep before we get home."

The children huddled around their mother's skirt, eyeing the stranger.

"Let me follow you into town, if I may. You look pretty tired."

"I won't argue with that." Agnes took the children, carrying Dorothy, and led them all to the car. She had parked in a gravel lot.

Boyd was at the other end near the entrance. He waited for her car to pass and pulled out, following her to the highway.

Everyone was asleep by the time Agnes pulled into Ed's and filled up with gas for the next day. She bought more candy and said, "For tomorrow." He bobbed his head, letting her know he understood little kids.

Boyd's car looked like an overgrown hog and had a huge tank, so he just waited in the shadows. Ed noticed and wanted to go out there and ask about his business.

"It's okay, Ed. He's with me," Agnes said, taking his arm.

Ed hesitated a moment and said, "Oh! I see ..." He smiled and touched his nose with his forefinger.

"Don't go off yer rocker, old man. He's a decent feller."

"Okay. I'll drop by tomorrow and see how everything's goin'." He winked as he stood there by the pump with his hands in his pockets.

"I'll see ya tomorrow, Ed. Keep safe."

"See ya."

Agnes drove off the gravel drive and onto the highway again. The kids were awake except for Dorothy who slept on the front seat.

"Mommy?" Maggie asked. "Did you buy us something?"

"You can have some tomorrow. Now here we go, down the hill."

Agnes sped up and let the warm night air blow through the windows. Maggie squealed, and B put his face out into the wind. Tom stuck his hand out the window and let it get blown upward like the wing of an airplane taking off. Dorothy slept through the fun ride.

The tires made a whirring sound against the road. Agnes looked out the rear-view mirror to see Boyd's big black Chrysler following. She raised her eyebrows, not knowing what to think of his forwardness. But she was tired, and if she fell asleep at the wheel, it would be nice to think someone was there to help.

When Agnes pulled into the driveway, she felt weary. The sun does that to a body, whether from working or relaxing. Her face felt burned a bit. Boyd pulled up behind her. She got out and thanked him for his kindnesses.

"Can I call sometime?" he asked, poking his arm and head out of the window.

"Sure. I'll be in church tomorrow, but you can come over in the evening. We have dinner at six if you want. I can return the favor if you come and eat with us."

"Thank you. I will if I can make it. You have a good night."

"You too."

Agnes watched him go. Maggie came up to her and clung to her dress.

"You goin' to marry him?"

"Oh, Honey. I don't think that's in the wind right now."

"I hope not."

Agnes took a deep breath. She gathered the little chicks under her wings, carried them inside, and put them to bed.

Mother hen lay there too tired to close her eyes. She stared at the ceiling, wondering if this was another turn in her life. It worried her and exhilarated her. She didn't remember falling asleep, but when she woke in the morning, she felt rested. *I must have had angels visiting.* She took a deep breath of fresh air coming through the window and walked through the living room and outside to sit on the porch.

Her mother was making breakfast. Dad was feeding the cows. She was a cowgirl, that is, past tense. Right now, Agnes just wanted to take in the morning, feel the fresh air, smell the hay and cows, and watch the sunrise. She hadn't felt like this since you know who came into her life, him working for the railroad as a cook. He had been a good cook. Well, water under the bridge. Now she felt like she was standing on that bridge, and if she crossed over, everything was going to change. But for now, she would stand in the middle between two different lives, as it were, and enjoy the morning.



At church, Agnes was listless, and the children were restless. She listened to the sermon, but couldn't remember a word afterward. She sang the songs hypnotically. Even the children went to sleep just before the preacher called people to the altar, and the meeting was

over. Then she felt a tingling sensation on the back of her neck. She turned and saw Boyd by the door. He stood that staring at her. He saluted her with his forefinger.

During the afternoon, everyone took naps except Boyd and Agnes. They sat outside on the steps by the front door, where she and Ozzie used to sit. He talked about his small dairy run by him and his boys. He said he had about ten or twelve cows.

"It would take all day," Agnes said, "to milk those cows by hand, so what do you do?"

"Milk them by hand."

That made them both laugh.

He put his hand on her shoulder. "Feel that grip."

"Oh, keep doing that. You could go into business." Agnes almost melted as the pain fled from her shoulder. She closed her eyes and turned her back to him, and he massaged her shoulders. "Oh. Oh. That feels so good."

She wound up in his arms and almost fell asleep until Maggie showed up.

"Mommy! Mommy!"

"Wha ... What, Darlin' ?"

"B keeps pinchin' me and won't let me sleep."

Maggie settled down into her mother's arms and went off to sleep.

"Well," she said to Boyd. "I'll go put her on the couch and start dinner."

"I'll come and help."

"My husband used to cook a lot," she said, passing through the screen door.

"I just cook bachelor food, you know. That's why I like to eat out."

Agnes placed Maggie on the couch and covered her bare bottom, pulling her dress down. She had noticed a couple of bruises there. So he was pinching her.

As they entered the kitchen, Boyd said, "I often take the boys out."

"We've been having a lot of veal cutlets. I hope you don't mind."

"Order it all the time."

"You've come to the right place then."

As Agnes bent over to take the veal out of the icebox, Boyd said, "You bet I have."

"What?"

"I said, I bet you're a good cook."

She lay the meat on the cutting board on the counter, and waving the butcher knife,

"You'll have to remember that it is in the tasting of it."

That could be taken several ways, Boyd thought.

Agnes took her frustrations out on the veal as she pounded it with a kitchen mallet.

She cut the veal into strips as Boyd watched. She dipped them in flour and then in an egg and oil mixture and then in flour again.

"So that makes it all stick together."

"Yup."

Boyd watched and would retrieve things for Agnes when she would ask, like a surgeon asking the nurse for instruments.

Everyone liked the veal, green beans, and potato salad.

"Of course," Boyd commented, "the more privileged class call this Wienerschnitzel."

"They do?" asked Sam. "I thought that was a hot dog. Wiener, you know."

"The poor man's schnitzel," Boyd said. "Bread-covered pork." Taking another bite of veal, he expressed his feelings as "Mmmm."

"I'm glad you like it," Agnes said. "More potato salad?"

"You're going to spoil me." He wiped his mouth with his hand. "And I like the cook."

Boyd poured coffee from his cup into his saucer and sipped it from there. Everyone raised an eyebrow, but his defense was, "Everybody does it in Arkansas."⁰

Agnes and Boyd were married in August. Boyd took her to the west mountains, again, where Ozzie liked to take her. She was melancholy most of the time, but she was happy for the manly support he wanted to give her. "I will take care of you and the kids," he'd said.

Boyd was a big-boned man with a balding head. He kept the rest of his hair short. One of the things Agnes liked about him was his self-assuredness. He always knew what to do to get things done make a buck at the same time. People could use a fellow like him, she thought, at a time when most people don't have a buck. Even though he was the same height as her, he seemed taller and more man than most. He treated her and the kids with kindness, but he expected everyone to be honest and hard-working.

When Boyd heard that the Singletons were living dirt poor and were in hot water with the bank, he moved his family and his cows to their farm. When Sam and Emma saw this happening, they wanted to know what was going on.

"I'm taking over," he said. "You'll be glad I did." He was that sure of himself. "I got the bank to hold off a little bit, so meet yer new boss."

"I'm sure he means instead of the bank," Agnes tried to explain.

He moved his boys and her boys onto the screened-in back porch.

They were to sleep, not lounge around. Agnes made pallets out of blankets for the first night, but later, Boyd got the boys army cots to sleep on. These cots were just wooden

⁰This is a note.

frames that folded up with canvas stretched across them. The boys slept there year-round, in sun, rain, and snow. Boyd said it would make them hardy.

There were no lazybones at the farm. Boyd saw to that. If anyone stopped working for a moment, and he saw it, he would just have to say "Git to work," and they'd jump. It was the tone of his voice, to be sure. They couldn't tell if he was angry or just tough. None of his boys would try his patience because they knew from experience they would get his fist across their face.

Boyd's boys seemed happy at their work. They were always joking or telling stories, and when it came time to sleep, no one could shake them awake. Each one of them was dead to the world. They were powerfully strong from handling bails of hay for one thing, and B desired to be part of the group. Whenever they had arguments, they usually wound up in an all-out brawl.

One day Agnes was about to stop the fight. She picked up a broom handle to protect herself, and as she approached them, Boyd restrained her.

"Let them be," he said. "I always let them settle their own disputes."

After the fight, they were all laughing, and having come to an agreement, went back to work. B wanted to join in, but he was pushed down by a hand in the face. Tom, on the other hand, never got upset. He had this wry smile that no one trusted, and so they left him alone. He was like Joseph in the Bible, the favorite of their father. So, they didn't mess with him.

B shivered in the cold night. One blanket wasn't enough, even wearing his clothes. The snow swirled in the cold wind that blew through the screened-in porch where the boys slept, except for B and Tom. The other boys seemed used to it. They were fast asleep, but they were all bunched up together. Their dad had given them a bed with a mattress.

Tom reached over from his cot to his brother's. "Hey, B. You thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?"

"Yup," B said through chattering teeth.

The two boys grabbed their blankets, shook the snow off them, and jumped into bed with the Frost boys. Now, everyone was warm. From then on, everyone shared the bed whenever they knew Boyd was fast asleep.

Boyd caught on one morning when he went to the back porch to rouse the boys. He needed them up an hour early, but he winked at it. He admired Tom's initiative. He knew it hadn't been B's idea. He wasn't very smart in his estimation. Too much imagination.

"That boy has his head in the clouds," Boyd said to Agnes at lunch one day.

"He does pretty good driving that wagon back and forth to town." Agnes tipped her head and then took a sip of coffee.

"He takes good care of the horses," Boyd admitted. "Maybe when he gets old enough, I'll hire him and Tom. They can drive truck together."

Boyd took a bite of his roast-beef sandwich and sipped his coffee from his saucer. "I know when he's driving the wagon, he's dreaming."

"You have the last word," Agnes said, winking. "But he will show you up, just wait."

Chapter Three

Boyd did so well with the farm that the Singletons retired in Dexter to the south. He sold the farm, and Sam and Emma had enough money to retire. Boyd took over Jack Frost's Trucking Company next. The company land was located outside of Roswell on the east side along the Dexter highway, surrounded by alfalfa fields. Cotton was grown further south, and a cotton mill was located not far to the north. Boyd found a lot of work in the fall, hauling cotton to the mill. At other times, he hauled bails of hay to the surrounding farmers. He wheeled and dealed, juggling cows, hay, and cotton.

Across the highway was the railroad that Ozzie had helped build. It was bordering on several farms, so the train would stop along the highway and load up on hay or calves to carry further south. It stopped near the cotton mill to stack cotton bails onto the flatbed cars to take up north.

Everyone moved into a little shack that Boyd's brother, Jack had vacated. Rumor had it that Boyd had forced himself into Jack's trucking business, taking it over and kicking Jack out. It was later found that Boyd had bought him out.

Boyd's little shack was in the shape of a trailer house, with a workroom on the east end, a dining room, living room, and bedroom on the west end. The middle contained a hallway with the kitchen and shower on the north side and two bedrooms on the south side. The dining room, which was filled with a dark rust-colored picnic table, was actually on the north side of the hallway which ended there. The wall on the south side of the dining room separated it from a bedroom. The living room was at the west end between the dining room and master bedroom. There, Agnes hung giant oval portraits of her, Ozzie, and her parents.

The main entrance was on the north side between the kitchen and dining room. There were two other doors on the east and west ends. Essentially, the hall went right from the east door to the west door, passing through the workroom, dining room, living room, and master bedroom. East of the workroom was a screened-in area with lots of dead potted plants.

Agnes said, standing amid the dried plants, "I will soon remedy this. It will be my nursery."

Agnes put her hand on her tummy. "I'm going to need two nurseries."

"I'll take care of that. There's enough room in the bedroom. I'll make a crib for her."

"How do you know it's a her?"

Boyd patted her bottom. "Because you're my lucky jewel."

Agnes squinted at his sexual antics. She let him manhandle her, not complaining because he was nice, and she had the children to think of. She stayed with him for their sake.



Agnes started having second thoughts about Boyd after an incident with his brother Pete, or was it, Jack? She couldn't remember. But anytime he met with either of his brothers, it culminated in an argument. The last time, it turned into a fistfight. Of course, Boyd won. He told her at one time that he had always been the stronger of the three. And now he had three boys just like his mother, had become a widower, and now, he took over the trucking business just as he had taken over her dad's farm.

When Agnes asked Boyd what his former wife died of, he said, "Aw, she had an accident."

A horrifying thought crept into her mind that made her reach up and touch her throat. *Naw. He couldn't do that.*

The house was just north of, and about a city block from East McGaffey. There was a corner store located on the northeast corner at the junction of that street and the Dexter highway. There was a large vacant field between the trucking company and East McGaffey, a road that ran across Roswell.

Boyd stood at the foot of the large drive where the trucks came and went. He stared at that field. It hadn't been farmed in he didn't know how many years. What a waste when that field could be making money for him. Then an idea struck him. He didn't want to be a farmer. What he needed was real estate. He could build a row of houses there along the highway. They didn't need to be large houses. A row of small houses would bring in more rent. There wasn't any sewer line down this way, but he had grown up with outhouses. They had one for the big house, so he could build a couple behind the houses that people could share.

When Agnes found out what Boyd was planning, an idea came to her head. She took her savings and bought up several houses on East McGaffey east of the little store and north of Boyd's land he used for trucking.

Boyd blew his top when he found out. "What have you done?" he yelled. "I was going to use your money to build the little houses over there."

"I'm sorry. I thought you had your own money." Agnes placed her hand on her cheek as though protecting her face from a slap.

Boyd took a deep breath and slapped the table. He sat down, facing Agnes who was waiting to go into the living room. "I was going to ask if you would help. All my money is tied up in the business right now, and we could use an extra income."

"We could share the money on the rent I get."

He rose and slapped the table again, making Agnes jump. "I need my own money to do with as I please. Now you've gone and spoiled it."

Agnes smelled beer on his breath as he approached her. He grabbed her by the collar. "Now you're gonna help me get those houses built."

"I said you could have some of my rent money." Agnes's voice trembled.

"I said," he yelled into her face. "I don't want yer money!"

"Come on." He started dragging her along with him. "I know where I can get my hands on some lumber."

Agnes stumbled into the hallway and lost her shoe. She reached down to get it, but he was faster. He picked it up as she ran into the boy's bedroom. B was taking a nap. She tried locking the door, but he forced his way in.

"I won't help you steal!"

B saw Boyd trying to shove his mother's shoe into her mouth. He leaped at Boyd. "Yer not gonna hurt my mother that way!"

Boyd swung around and hit B square in the face, knocking him against the wall. "No good dreamer!"

When B woke up, his head was one sharp pain. He was bleeding from the mouth and head. He rose and wiped the blood on a towel hanging on the side of the cabinet. The water

in the pitcher on the chest of drawers had been spilled onto him and the floor. The pitcher lay broken in pieces.

B looked around. He didn't see his mother and stepdad. He looked in all the rooms.

"Mom? Mom?"

He looked outside. One of the trucks was gone. His Mother's Buick was still parked by the side of the house. He ran out to the barn. None of the boys had seen his mother. For all he knew, Boyd had taken her out to bury her body. He bawled. The boys didn't try to comfort him. Instead, they riled him.

"Why does the cry baby need his mama?"

"You need some ninny?"

B yelled and attacked all three of them.

When TJ saw the blood on his face and head, he tried to stop the scuffle. "Hey, guys! Something real has happened here."

He took B aside. "What's going on? What happened?"

"Your father took my mother somewhere. I tried to stop him. He was drunk, and he had murder in his eyes."

B ran and hid from Boyd, leaving him to curse his head off. Later that day, B crawled out between two hay bails on a truck he knew wouldn't be disturbed and rejoined his stepbrothers. They were cutting out some calves to turn them into steers. He helped with that silently. They stared at him, sometimes smiling, but with the smile of a snake.

They were waiting for B when he came into the bedroom to get a change of clothes. He had planned to take a shower after a hard day's work. B started to reach for the light. He smelled dirt, sweat, and cologne as the door slammed. He tried to defend himself in the

darkness of the bedroom against three expert fighters. He felt fists hitting his face and back and stomach. He hit back, but there were too many of them. They exhausted him. He fell to the floor, and they left.

He rested only a moment.

Sobbing, B leaped out the window and ran.

He didn't know in which direction he ran, only that he wound up at a water tank at the bottom of a windmill. It was for watering cattle. B splashed the fresh well water onto his face. He dipped his whole head in, took it out, and shook the water from his hair. Then he saw the boys running toward him.

He put up his dukes, ready for another go at it.

TJ came up to him. "Relax. The fight is over. We come to join you. We're running away too."

They patted B on the back and they each hugged him.

"No hard feelings," Norval said.

"Naw," RJ said. "It wasn't our idea nohow."

"Dad put us up to it," TJ said. "You don't go against the old man."

The boys filled their thirst from the fresh water in the tank, sat around laughing and telling jokes. For some odd reason, B was pacified and enjoyed their company. He laughed with them. It was just one of those things.



Boyd took Agnes to a building site. Everyone had gone home for the night. He made her help him load the lumber he needed onto the flatbed truck. He threatened her with his fists if she didn't do it. She reluctantly and fearfully gave a hand.

Why didn't he get his boys to do this? Why turn me into a thief? I guess misery loves company.

Boyd got his shanties built. His boys helped him. These cabins were cheap, but he charged high rent, almost half of a person's paycheck. Agnes felt like she had married a shark. He wasn't the kind man she thought he was. Boyd was into making money, no matter if it hurt someone in the process. It was as though he had two different personalities. He could treat people kindly if they did what he wanted, but he turned into an angry bull if anyone challenged him.

Agnes learned to become timid and obedient, not expressing her own opinion, especially now that she was pregnant again. If Boyd was gone and someone asked her for money, she would stuff it into their hands and whisper, "Don't tell yer dad." She didn't smile much unless she was alone with someone. Then she could be her vibrant self.



There was trouble brewing with Maggie. She was developing into a young woman. She would walk from the shower to her bedroom in the nude, drying her hair. The guys would gawk. She would react with, "You don't have to look!" Agnes tried talking to her about it, but she would say, "I forgot." Then the boys had noticed that she wore no underwear. Well, that's the way the Singletons grew up in generations past. "Call me a hillbilly," Agnes would say, "But I don't bother with those things."

Whenever Agnes caught the boys teasing Maggie, trying to lift her dress and take a peek, she scolded them. "Fellers, don't be so nasty. You need to treat women with respect."

When she caught B and Maggie in bed together, even though they both had their clothes on and were only taking a nap, she decided it was time to send her away, especially when she remembered that B had the habit of pinching her bare bottom.

Agnes called her brother Ed's wife, Bart. Maggie called her Aunt B.

"Hello, B," she said when Bart answered.

"Hello, Agnes. How are you doing?"

"Oh, I'm fine. I just have a favor to ask of you."

"Ask away. You know me. I'm all hospitality."

"Well, Maggie's growing up around a lot of boys, and they're a rough lot. They never were taught how to treat woman-kind, not having a mother. And now I fear it's too late."

"I know what you mean. I've been over there. I've seen what goes on."

"I need yer advice."

"Sure. You send her on over here. I'll give her a job to cover up the fact that we're protecting her."

"Oh, thanks B. We love you so much. You're so kind-hearted and all."

"Oh, you don't have to say a thing. Just tell her I need some help, and that I'll pay her."

That didn't go well with Maggie. "You never pay me no mind anyway."

Maggie had been the mother ever since her father died. She had been taking care of little Dorothy, and now that she was leaving, she wondered what would happen to her. Maggie thought of one good thing. She wouldn't have to mother the Lost Boys (referring to Peter Pan) anymore. Agnes ceased being a mother when she married Old Man Frost. He had

the correct name for someone with a cold heart. She felt her mother adopted the same attitude. She didn't understand the hold he had on her mother.

The day Maggie left, Ed and Bart picked her up. Bart was so delighted with Maggie that she forgot all her bad feelings. She kissed her mother and Dorothy goodbye. Ed placed her suitcase in the trunk, and Bart said, "You will love it at our place."



Claude, Ed, Cordie, Bart

It was true. Maggie liked being in a more civilized home. Aunt Bart had decorated it to look clean and modern. They were only middle class, but it was a jump, not just a step, upward from the poverty she had experienced so far in her life.

Bart was the kindest woman she had met. Maggie remembered that whenever the family had visited in the past, Bart had brought out all the food she had to satisfy her guests. And now, whenever she ate, she could fill her stomach. Maggie often thought she might get fat living with her aunt. She hardly ever saw Uncle Ed because of his filling station at the top of Comanche Hill. He was always there, never at home.

"Don't you get lonely here?" Maggie asked her aunt one day.

"Well, if I wanted to see the man I married, all I have to do is go get my car filled up."

They both laughed.

Maggie didn't mind the work; she kept the house spotless and didn't get lonely much. She saw her family at church every Sunday, and they often would visit her family on Sundays. But one Sunday she noticed B and Dorothy were missing.

"Where's B and Dorothy?" she whispered to her mother right in the middle of the sermon.

"They're down in Dexter with my folks," she whispered in a high-pitched tone.

Someone in the seat behind them cleared their throat loudly to tell them to be quiet.

"They need a good education. There's a good school in Dexter."

Chapter Four

Living with his grandparents in Dexter had its advantages. B found a girl living next door, just across the drive to the east. He was sweet on her the first day he saw her.



The Singleton's House in Dexter

Living with his grandparents in Dexter had its advantages. B found a girl living next door, just across the drive to the east. He was sweet on her the first day he saw her. The girl stood on the porch behind the thick white square post with her arms around it next to the steps. She stared at him, and he winked at her as he lifted his luggage out of the trunk. She quickly went back inside.

A wooden fence separated the two back yards. In one slat was a knothole. B would go there every day to see if he could see the girl. One day he was startled while looking through the hole.

"What're you lookin' at?" The blonde-haired neighbor girl asked. Her breath caressed B's shoulder.

B jumped. He scratched his head. "I, I was looking at your mother hanging out the clothes."

"What're you interested in my mother for?"

"Why, I was lookin' for you."

"Well, here I am. What're you going to do about it?"

B laughed nervously. "Invite you over?"

"I'm already over."

B laughed again. "Yes. I guess you are." He smiled. "You go to the high school?"

"I will next year." She smiled, pressing her interlaced fingers down towards her legs.

"What's yer name? That's why I came over."

"My folks call me B."

"A bee?"

"No. It stands for Bradley. Dr. Bradley brought me into the world, so my mama just gave me his name. I guess she couldn't think of anything else."

"That's very upity for a doctor, saying 'I brought you into the world,'" she said in a low voice, "when it was yer mother that did it." She smiled, flashing her eyes.

"Want some lemonade or a coke?" B leaned up against the fence.

"Does your mama make good lemonade?" She bit her bottom lip.

"She's not my ma. She's my grandma."

"Oh. And does she ...?"

"She makes really good lemonade." B crossed his arms. "What's yer name?"

"Betty Lu."

"Oh," B said, his smile widening. "I thought it might be Goldie Locks with those cute curls."

"My mama likes my hair this way. She hasn't changed my hairstyle since I first had long hair."

“And we both have bees.”

“I guess we do.” She tried to curtail a smile, but she wasn’t quite successful. That made her look cute.

B’s heart was singing.

“How about that drink?” she asked.

“Oh, yeah. I’ll go get some.”

“Lemonade?”

“Yeah. Lemonade.” B pushed off the fence with his left foot and walked lankly to the back door and into the kitchen. He stuck his neck out the door. “You want to come in? I don’t think right all the time. It’s just the kitchen.”

“Okay.”

Betty Lu was a bit short, only coming up to B's armpits. Her blonde ringlets bounced as she walked. She wore a light green plaid dress with short puffy sleeves and a skirt that would stretch out if she spun around. Her eyes were blue, and she appeared to have the softest skin. B couldn't help breathing heavily when in her presence.

There was a table and chairs against the south wall, the sink under a window, and a counter on the east wall. The icebox and stove, on the west wall. The floor was a black and white checkerboard linoleum pattern.

Betty Lu sat at the table with her chair at an angle so she could watch B. He reached into the icebox and took out a pitcher of cold lemonade. He set it on the counter and retrieved two glasses from the cupboard. He filled the glasses and brought them over to the table and then went back to put the lemonade away.

Betty Lu squeezed her knees together and bit her bottom lip. She held her hands in her lap tightly clasped. She loosened up when she took the glass.

She sipped the cool yellow drink and said, "Ummm. I love lemonade."

"What does your dad do?" B asked as he took a seat, sitting cross-corner at the table.

"He's a teacher."

"Don't tell me he teaches at the high school."

"Yes, he does. He might even be one of your teachers."

"What does he teach?"

"English."

"I hope he's okay. I'm pretty bad when it comes to English."

"Well, he helps me a lot, and he's pretty friendly." She grinned as wide as she could, squishing her cheeks into two parentheses.

"Say, you want to take a walk?" B finished his drink in one gulp.

"Where to?"

"Downtown. My grandma said I should meet them downtown, and they'll buy me a treat. Maybe they'll let us go to a movie."

"I'll go and ask my mother."

"Okay. I'll wait outside."

B took her glass and his and put them into the sink. They went back outside through the kitchen door and walked along the fence.

"I'll be right back."

"Okay."

Betty Lu came back, leaned on the banisters of her porch with both hands, and scrunched up her face, shaking her head.

“Well, okay. I’ll see ya.”

“See ya.”

B walked on a cloud with his hands in his pockets all the way downtown. His heart fluttered all the way. He imagined slow dancing with Betty Lu, holding her tightly to his chest. She would lean her head against his shoulder. He would bend his head down and kiss her soft lips. His head was so far in the clouds that he walked right by his grandparents and Dorothy as they came out of the trading store, holding several bags of groceries.

“B! B! Where are you going?” yelled Dorothy.

Grandpa Sam just laughed. “He’s got his mind on that cute girl next door, I’ll bet.”

“B!” she called again. “Come over here and help your grandma and me with these bags.”

B turned with a surprised look. “Oh, here already.” He took the bags from his grandma. “Where’s the truck?”

“Yer durned grandpa parked across the street,” said Grandma Em.

“We went into the bank first, you know,” Sam said to Emma. “Then we walked to the five and dime and had a soda.”

“Well, you still could have grabbed the truck and parked it over here.” Emma stood with her hands on her hips.

“Don’t bother me none.”

“Don’t bother me none!” Emma mocked. “I’ll get that iron to yer bottom agin.”

The four of them walked in front of a car that honked its horn and up to the back of the truck where B, Dorothy, and Grandpa Sam deposited the bags of groceries. Emma stood by the door rummaging around in her purse for something.

"I'll get it," B said, opening the door for her.

"Thank you," she said, snapping her purse shut. "You'd think I married a gentleman."

B helped her up the giant step, let Dorothy jump in, and slammed the door. He jumped in the back.

They lived only a couple blocks away, but Sam drove slowly not to spill the groceries.

"Guess you met Betty Lu," Dorothy called out the window, whistling like a wolf.

"Heh heh."

"We had a lemonade together."

"Oh, we trust you, son," Emma yelled out the window across Dorothy. "We know yer a good Christian boy."

B gulped because his feelings toward Betty Lu weren't Christian. "Thank you, Grandma," he called back.

Sam pulled into the drive.

"You help us with the groceries," Emma said, holding B's hand, "and you can go see a movie."

"Thanks, Grandma."

"You know," said Sam, getting out of the cab, "if you get to know Sister Jones, she may let you take her daughter out once in a while."

That would be a tough task for B. He would rather just talk to the girl from across the fence than meet up with her mother. He might meet up with her father at school in the Fall. It might be easier to talk to him.

B and Dorothy helped their grandparents take in the groceries and helped put them away. Then Grandma opened her purse and gave him a dime.

“Dorothy? You goin’ with B?”

“No Grandma, I have things to do.” Dorothy disappeared down the hall.

“Grandma, can I have a quarter?” B asked.

“A whole quarter, huh?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Well, you’ve been such a good boy.” she reached back into her purse and pulled out a quarter. “Here. Have yourself a coke and some popcorn.”

“Thank you, Grandma.” He bent down and kissed her on the forehead.

“Don’t be gone too long.”

“I won’t.” B looked like he had lost his puppy and went to find him. “Goodbye.”

“Goodbye, dear.”

B went back downtown to the movie theater. He looked up at the marquee. It read “Charlie Chan in Egypt.” Shucks. It wasn’t a cowboy movie. He liked cowboy movies. What was this, anyway? He looked at the advertisement poster and the pictures along the side of it. So who was this Charlie Chan? He looked like an American with a Chinese mustache.

All of a sudden, B felt a familiar breath on his arm. She smelled of lilacs. He turned slowly and blinked his eyes.

“Betty Lu?”

"Didn't think you'd see me, huh?" She held her hands behind her and swung her body back and forth.

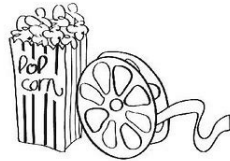
"Well, no."

"Shall we go in?" She grabbed his arm. "I can pay for myself."

"Swell. Then I have enough for some popcorn."

"Great." She smiled and took his arm, leading him to the ticket booth.

Well, B said to himself. I guess I'll enjoy the movie even if it isn't a cowboy one.



Betty Lu's mother visited the Singletons, asking them if her girl was over there.

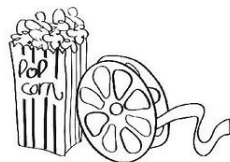
"She has disappeared," she said with a troubled look on her face. "I have an appointment. We were both to go to the beauty salon."

"No, Dear," Emma said, poking her head out the screen door. "Although I wonder. Our grandson was going to the movies, but he didn't mention anything about taking your girl."

"Well, if that's where she is, I'll have to tattle her little bottom."

"Oh dear," Emma said, putting her hand up to her cheek. "If you do find them together, tell B that it's about time for supper."

"Okay, Sister Singleton. I'll do that."



When B and Betty Lu, walked out of the theater, an irate mother greeted them. Betty Lu hung her head down.

"Young man," Sister Jones started in, "I did not give you permission to take my daughter to the movies."

B just stood there stiffly, but Betty Lu tried to exonerate him. "Mother, it was my fault. He didn't know I was going to show up."

"Mrs. Jones," B tried to explain. "We just showed up here at the same time. It was a coincidence."

"So we went in together," Betty Lu said, finishing the thought.

Mrs. Jones grabbed her daughter's arm, saying, "Didn't you remember our appointment?"

B listened to the conversation as they hurried down the sidewalk.

"I'm sorry. I forgot," she said with a sharp voice.

B snickered and continued on home.



Sunday, the Singletons and the Jones left their homes and arrived at the church together. Betty Lu smiled at B as she got out of her car, but as her mother grabbed her hand and walked ahead of the rest of the group, B didn't try to say "Hi," but Dorothy, who was a head shorter than B and with darker, bouncy hair, waved at her. Betty Lu waved back since they were in the same classes at school. Dorothy elbowed B as they approached the front door and smiled at him.

When the Singletons sat two pews behind the Jones's, Betty Lu got on her knees like a little girl, turned around, scrunched down, and smiled at B again. She waved and he nodded. Her mother swatted her on the bottom, making her sit down fast. Dorothy giggled.

B could have drilled a hole into Betty Lu's head with his stare. She couldn't concentrate on the preacher or the songs. Her mind was constantly on him, and she fidgeted the whole time because she couldn't turn around and stare back.

It was this way all summer. He only caught glimpses of her, or they talked through the fence or up on her porch where her mother could listen. They weren't allowed to touch. At least, that's what they assumed.

One day when they were sitting on the porch talking about cowboy movies, playing the game 'which one did you see,' Old Man Frost drove up, got out, and approached the two.

He ignored the girl, put his fingers into his jeans pockets, and asked, "When are you coming back to work on the farm?"

"I don't live there anymore," was all B could think of to say.

Boyd's fist became tight as though he wanted to hit the boy. "I know that, but I'll drive you there and back each day. We really need a trucker. I don't mean to drive, but go on long hauls, the law says you have to have two in the cab."

B didn't know if that was true or not.

"But anyway," Boyd said as though he could read B's thoughts, "It takes two to haul all that hay, load it and unload it, you know."

"I'll have to ask Grandpa."

"Oh, that old man?"

At that point, Mrs. Jones came out.

Boyd said, "Ma'am," tipping his hat and turning tail, driving off in high gear, throwing rocks everywhere with his wheels.

"Who was that guy?" Mrs. Jones asked, holding the top of her blouse closed.

"Oh him? Old Man Frost, my stepdad."

"Well don't go with him. He has an evil countenance." She peered down at her daughter. "Betty Lu, it's time to come in."

The daughter and her suitor rose. "See ya later," they both said to each other.

"Come, come," the mother said impatiently when Betty Lu hesitated.

Betty Lu gave B a fake smile, which said to B, "You know my mother," and went inside.

B scratched his head, yawned, and walked away.

Dorothy met B at the door. As she ushered him in, she asked, "What did Old Man Frost want?"

"Just to come back to work for him." B lay on the couch with his foot dangling in the air.

"Take yer shoes off," Dorothy scolded. "At least you can do that."

"You're beginning to sound like Grandma."

"I here'd that," Grandma spoke from the kitchen. "It's right good that she does."

B missed working on the farm, so he called up Old Man Frost and asked to work until school started. The old man agreed to pick him up each morning at five o'clock. The work was familiar, the same old hay hauling, loading, and unloading at different places around the county.

B saw Betty Lu intermittently. When he did, they sat on the porch with her mother not far away. Sometimes they played checkers or a board game called Prince Valiant while talking about what they wanted to do when they grew up. Right now, she wanted to be a movie star.

Chapter Five

B signed up for school. Some of the required classes were Social Studies, English, Math, and History. His elective was carpentry and cabinet making. His teacher for Social Studies was Mr. Jones. He wasn't teaching English, or maybe he taught more than just English. His English teacher was a woman, Mrs. Spiel. He didn't think he would like all his other classes as well as his elective. He might enjoy science if they included nature and the outdoors.

B always liked being outdoors, going up into the mountains, and hunting on the plains. He could always see the antelope miles off on a good day. His reveries were interrupted by someone grabbing his shoulder.

"Hey!," a big muscular boy with dark curly hair addressed him. "Aren't you one of the Frost boys? I saw you on my dad's farm the other day. My name is Jim Hawkins."

"Oh," B said. "They're my stepbrothers. I'm a Murdock. It might get confusing because I live with my grandparents who are Singletons."

"What's yer handle?"

"Everyone calls me B, short for Bradley. That was my mom's doctor who did the delivering."

As they walked along, they compared their classes to see if they shared any.

"Looks like we're both freshmen," Jim said, peering at both assignment cards.

B was looking around at all the students lining up at the different tables in the gym to see if he could see Betty Lu. Then he remembered she would be in Middle School down in Roswell. Everyone went down there to go to Middle School before they went into the

different high schools around the county. Some towns didn't even have a high school and the older students wound up in Roswell High. He didn't want to go to Roswell anymore. Betty Lu was here.

"Yes, but I don't know how that works," said B. "I thought maybe you would have to wait till the ninth grade."

"Maybe yer right. Maybe we're still in Middle School here until next year." Jim looked at his card that listed his classes. "Looks like we share English, Science, and Shop."

"Yeah."

"P.E. is my first class. What about you?"

Jim noticed B kept looking around. "Lookin' fer someone?"

"Oh, nothin.' There's this girl I like. I wish she were here, but she's in Roswell. I keep forgetting. She lives nextdoor, but she goes to Roswell."

"In the seventh grade is she?"

"Yes."

"I knew a guy that married a gal eight years younger than him. Imagine. When he was in High School, she was ... one, two, three, ... goodness. When he was a freshman, she was in the first grade!"

B snickered.

The bell rang, and everyone ran off to their homeroom for orientation. The two went to the same room. Jim waited for B, waving him in. They sat across from each other in desks that had inkwells and carvings. Each one of them had to lift the lid and look inside to see all the names written or carved.

"Hey," Jim said. "Don't go out for football like me. You're too tall and skinny. Be sure to go out for basketball."

"Okay."

"Class will come to order." Mrs. Spiel called out.



The school year was uneventful, except that Jim and B became really good friends. Their Saturdays were filled with going to the movies and visiting Jim's father's farm. Sometimes they would switch off and go to Old Man Frost's farm. At both places, they helped with hauling hay and feeding cattle. Sometimes they visited the reservoir on the east end of East McGaffey in Roswell, walking along the railroad. Then they would walk down the dirt street, talking all the way. One time Betty Lu joined them. She now was relegated to "Little Sister" by Jim. Dorothy wanted to go with them, and they wouldn't let her, saying they didn't want girls, yet, they let Betty Lu come.

"Where ya goin?" Betty Lu asked, hopping up on the tracks with B and Jim.

"We're just going down to Roswell," Jim said.

B and his girl smiled at each other after she put her arm in his. Jim grabbed her other arm. She smiled at him too, seeming to enjoy having a boy on each arm. But by his remarks, though, Jim may have been jealous.

Jim asked B, "You like girls, B?"

"Well," B responded.

"Don't you think they're a nuisance?"

"I think girls are swell," Betty Lu said, still smiling.

The sun beat down from a cloudless sky. A large dust devil to the west of them sent a breeze their way.

"I bet that's where genies came from," Betty Lu commented about the dust devil. "It looks just like what comes out of Aladdin's lamp."

"She's the one that reads," B said.

"Haven't you read *One Thousand and One Nights*?" Betty Lu asked, twisting her head toward Jim.

"I read about the knights of the round table," he said.

"I mean nights ... lights out type of nights."

"I usually work too much for reading," Jim said, looking starry-eyed into the sky.

"Don't have enough time. you get so tired, you can't even say yer prayers. You just go off to sleep."

"I read about Treasure Island," B said, trying to contribute to the conversation.

"That has nothing to do with nights," Betty Lu said, a bit irritated.

"Sailors sleep when it's night." B raised his eyebrows.

"If I were to turn around," Betty Lu said, "I would kick you. Now listen. This king stayed up night after night and listened to one of his wives tell stories. Otherwise, he would kill her. Her name was Scheherazade."

"He must have been a Mormon," Jim spoke.

"No," Betty Lu said, looking like a smartaleck. "He was a Muslim. They have more than one wife. The kings have harems. They could have a hundred wives or more."

"My mother," B started in, "knew a man over in Arizona who had two wives. She said he was one of those Mormons come up from Mexico to escape Poncho Via."

"I know him from school," Betty Lu said. "He attacked New Mexico in 1914."

"Why were Mormons down in Mexico?" Jim asked.

"They were running from the law in Utah," B answered. "That's what my mom said."

"I guess they would," Betty Lu said, kicking a rock.

B noticed that Betty Lu was wearing a white T-shirt with red shorts. "You want to go swimming? We're headed down to the reservoir."

"I'm not takin' my clothes off," she said with authority.

"Don't worry," Jim said. "You can go in just like you are. You'll be dry by the time we walk back home."

The water truck showed up just as they were walking down the dirt road of East McGaffey. Where a fender would have been, a pipe full of holes lay across the bottom below the tank. As soon as it drove onto the dirt road, water started pouring out of the holes, creating parabolas of gushing water. It dropped onto the dusty road, making great spurts of mud rings and dust flying up to meet the water. They had to jump aside. There was no sidewalk, and there were stickers near the fences.

The three kids took off their shoes, and carrying them, ran behind the truck, splashing in the water, all the way to the reservoir.

The truck turned left at the corner house, continuing its course. B, Jim, and Betty Lu ran into a square wire fence, which proved to be a ladder for the kids. When they used it they landed in the high weeds surrounding the reservoir. They climbed up the embankment,

viewed the man-made lake, and found a rotting canoe nearby. It looked like no one cared about its upkeep. It was no park after all.

They left their shoes on the bank. Betty Lu timidly put her feet into the water while the boys took their clothes off down to their skivvies and dived in. Everyone screamed and yelled and splashed each other. They couldn't go far unless they wanted to swim because the inner bank was steeper and deeper than the outer bank. When Betty Lu swam out to the middle, the boys followed.

"This is great!" she exclaimed and swam back to the bank. She sat there among the bulrushes to catch her breath. Her T-shirt was now transparent, and the boys could see her nipples. They snickered.

"What are you guys laughing at?" She opened the top of her shirt and looked down. "Oh, my!" Then she threw Jim's clothes in his face. B was too fast for her. He rescued his clothes before she could grab them. When she saw his bare bum showing through, she laughed uncontrollably.

Jim was angry because some of his clothes got wet. "If'n you were dry, I'd throw you in." He threw his clothes down on the ground. "I think I will, anyhow." Jim grabbed Betty Lu by the legs and shoulders and threw her in. Then he jumped in after her, trying to kiss her.

"All right," B complained. "Enough of that!" He stood there with his fists resting on his hips, a scowl on his face.

"Don't stand there, stupid," Betty Lu called, "Do something!"

B grabbed Jim's clothes and held them over the water. "They'll be dry by the time we get home."

"You wouldn't dare!" Jim called.

"Come get 'em"

Jim rushed back up the bank, slipping twice until he was muddy. B just laughed, took Jim's clothes, and ran down the side of the reservoir with Jim chasing him. Betty Lu decided the fun was over and walked back to the fence. She looked back. The boys were not forthcoming, so she climbed over the fence and left.

When Jim and B got back to the corner of the reservoir and found no Betty Lu, they scoured the lake. Still no Betty Lu. They looked at each other, fearing the worst.

"Wait a minute," B said. He ran and jumped over the fence while looking down the street. Using his expert antelope-finding eyes, he spotted Betty Lu far down the street near the Dexter Highway, walking slowly.

"There!" B ran after her. When he caught up to her, she was walking by the shanties his stepdad had built.

"Betty Lu," B panted. "Why didn't you wait for us?"

"Who said girls are a nuisance? I think boys are."

"I apologize for Jim. He gets so rambunctious sometimes. He can't control himself."

"He probably won't be able to control his liquor when he gets old enough."

B walked his girl home while Jim walked behind them two blocks away. They approached the steps of her house and held hands for a moment until Betty Lu was called in by her mother. B could hear her say, "Where have you been?" Betty Lu explained that she was just walking with B.

"What is his name, anyway?" her mother asked while B was standing right there.

"I think it's Bradley. Some people call him O.B." She looked back as she saw B leave.

"See ya, Bradley."

He waved.

Chapter Six

Jim became obnoxious. He kept teasing B. Sometimes it was about Betty Lu, but his jokes were about what B couldn't do or even what he could do. It all started the week after the reservoir incident. It was after school, and they were going to Jim's house to study. Jim said something and B didn't hear.

"B is sweet on a grade school girl, ha ha," Jim said in a sing-song manner. "He can't even answer his best friend because he had his head in the clouds over Betty Lu."

"I wish she was coming to this school," B said, "But she isn't. Not 'till next year."

"I told you so. It's all about that girl."

They passed the Five and Dime where B and Betty Lu were fond of going to get a soda to share. B imagined he was in there with his girl sipping through two separate straws from one soda. They both liked vanilla.

"Hey! B. Have you made out with her yet? How is she?"

B said, "Don't say that. She's not that kind of girl. She's a Christian." B slowed down a bit, perhaps unconsciously.

Jim turned around. "She's great in the back seat of a car."

B grabbed Jim's collar. "Don't you say anymore or I'll ..."

"Whatch you gonna do, B?" Jim laughed. B let go and Jim sassed him. "You yeller livered chicken!"

He had enough of this from his stepdad. "Go study on yer own!" he said angrily. B turned around and headed home.

As B walked, he started having doubts about Betty Lu. Having an overactive

imagination, he almost convinced himself he should stay away from her. *Naw*, he thought.

That's just what Jim wants me to do so he can have her all to himself

Jim told B not to join the band. "You'll trip over everyone trying to march on the field."

But B did join the band and found that he was good on the drums. He had hated percussion because when he was in grade school all they let him play in music class was two sticks he had to beat together. Now, it happened all over again ... percussion. But in trying out the drums, he became interested.

Jim told B not to go out for basketball. "Man, you're so clumsy, I'll be able to trip you up every time you turn around."



"What's his problem?" B complained to Betty Lu as they sat on her porch steps that night.

"It's jealousy ... just pure jealousy," she said, holding her hands together and extending her arms between her knees.

B took a deep breath and changed the subject. "Your dad's a nice teacher, but when I try to talk to him after class, he's always busy with someone else, or he leaves early.

"He has a night class he teaches at the Air Force base."

"Why is he teaching out there?"

"Haven't you noticed all the planes flying over? The Army Air Corps is setting up a base in Roswell. He's Army Reserve, and they need teachers. He didn't give me any details."

"Wonder what they're doing." B rested his head on his hands and thinking about Roswell, sighed.

Betty Lu copied his movements and rested her head on her hands. She turned her head to look at B. "What's ya thinkin'?"

"Well, yer dad did say there is a war starting up in Europe." B stretched his left leg.

"There you go. You'll be stretching the other leg and getting up." Betty Lou raised her arms above her head.

"Yeah. I'd better go. Have to get my homework done."

"Me too. I can feel Mother's eyes drilling into the back of my head."

B laughed and Betty Lu smiled. They both rose.

She took his hand. "Thanks."

"For?"

"For believing me."

"Oh, that. I'm sorry I brought it up. I know yer a good girl."

She winked, turned, and headed up the steps, across the porch, and inside. She peeked out the window to see him leave, but he was already gone.



Two days later, it was Teacher's Day at the high school, so after breakfast, B walked over to Betty Lu's house and knocked on the door. He thought today he could walk with her to her school. He waited for a couple of minutes and knocked again. He looked at the side of the house and saw no car. He noticed the front window had no drapes or they had been

pulled open. That was unusual for this time of the morning. When the drapes were pulled open, there was always a white sheer curtain parted in the center remaining. That was gone also. He peered into the window. All the windows were bare, and so was the living room. There was no furniture.

What had he missed? He didn't get to say goodbye or anything. He walked over to see his Grandma Singleton who was in the kitchen. Grandpa was still in bed.

"Grandma!" B exclaimed. "Did you know the Joneses moved? Betty Lu is just ... gone." He distorted his face and clenched his fists like a mad man. "She's gone."

"Sit down," she said. "I'll pour you some coffee."

B just stared at her as she gave him a cup and saucer and poured the coffee.

She sat beside him with her cup. "They told me not to tell you."

"I must have been arguing with Jim or something. I could have hurried home and said goodbye." He wasn't thinking straight.

B tried to drink his coffee. It burnt his lips and tongue. He took no notice. His heart was hurting.

"It's better this way," she said. "There won't be any tears, no embarrassment between you two."

Tears dropped into B's cup. He wiped his face with his hands. "It's not better. I don't know where she went. I can't write her."

"Maybe she'll write you." Grandma sipped her coffee.

"If her mother will let her." B gripped the handle of his coffee cup, but it felt too heavy to lift.

"You didn't ... ah ... you didn't have ..."

“Grandma! What’d she say? Does her mother think that Betty Lu and I ...?”

Grandma nodded her head.

“Well, it’s not true.” B thought a moment. “If anyone, it was Jim!” B stood as if to go somewhere. “I’ll have it out with him.”

Grandma reached around and pulled B by the shirt. He sat back down. She patted his arm. "No, you won't."

“Well, he’s been acting guilty enough. Ever since Betty Lu and I left him at the reservoir, he’s been angry and always picking on me.”

“That’s guilt all right.” Grandma put her empty cup down. She looked at B’s cup. His was still full. “Don’t want yer coffee?”

“Too hot, Grandma.” He pulled at his shirt collar and flapped it a bit. “I think I’ll go outside and cool off.”

“Okay, but keep away from Jim for a while.” B walked toward the living room. “Do you hear me?”

Dorothy caught his arm before he opened the door to leave. “I’m sorry.”

B walked out the door and let the screen slam behind him. He looked up at the sky. The clouds were billowing upside down and getting dark. *Looks like snow*, he thought.



There was basketball practice at the high school. Jim and B were on opposite teams. For some reason, Jim was not able to go out for football. Phil threw the ball to B as they ran toward their hoop. Jim intercepted by slamming into B with his shoulder before B could

dribble once. The ball found its way to the offense's hoop. B was becoming a liability. He was easily pushed around by Jim, so B's captain gave a nod of the head, and no one would pass the ball to him. He fought to get the ball away from one of the opponents near their hoop, but Jim, acting as a guard, stepped on B's foot and tripped him. B's quick action prevented him from falling. Instead, he twirled around with his hands out, and during a split second decided to form a fist because he knew right where Jim's face was. His fist slammed into Jim's face and broke his nose. B rocked back onto his left foot to stabilize his fall. Jim was flabbergasted, his eyes stood wide open, staring at B. All of a sudden, Jim laughed hard. That made his team laugh.

“Oh, B! That was great. What a play!” He patted B on the back and put his arm around him.

B was surprised at Jim's reaction. “It was all of a sudden, Jim.” B peered into his friend's eyes to meter his reaction.

The practice came to an end, and the coach jaunted over to determine the damage. He was ready to chew out B when Jim interrupted.

“Oh, I deserved that one, coach.” Jim smiled as the couch held a rag over his nose. “B's a great player. I couldn't trip him no matter how hard I tried.”

“Well,” said the coach, “you'd better take care of that nose. I'll walk you back to the dressing room.”

B stood there wondering about Jim's change of attitude. He couldn't believe he wasn't angry and cussing. He scratched his head and joined the others in running around the court. All of a sudden, everyone heard Jim cry out, causing greater laughter as they sped by the dressing room door. Bill called out, “The coach straightened him out.” Blaine yelled, “His

nose will be like a Roman statue, you can be sure.” Someone behind said, “Attaway to go, B.” The boys were slapping his back as they passed. B felt a bit proud.

Afterward, Jim met B outside the school. He had come down the steps and joined him on the sidewalk going to the street. "I didn't know you had it in you, pal," he said. "Friends at first are friends at last?"

“Sure.” B laughed. “You sure look awful.”

“I’ll heal.” They started walking home together.

“Say. I still have a question,” B said shyly.

“I know what it is, and I’m sorry I spread the rumor.” Jim stopped and put his hands on his hips. “Look. Betty Lu was a swell gal. They left because her father went back to his work at some university. She told me that it had something to do with the military and German infiltration.”

“Oh. I wonder why she didn’t tell me.”

“I think she was afraid to. She told me not to tell you. Tears and all that, you know.”

“Yeah. I know.”

Jim and B were always found together wherever they went after this indecent.

Chapter Seven

Agnes didn't see much of her children except Tom. He stayed at home. Boyd and Tom got along fine together, and he worked with the boys well. Tom just got along with everyone except B. Something was wrong with B. Whenever he walked up from Dexter, he came in to say hello to his ma or went out alone. Of course, during the summer, he worked with all the boys. He was expected to, but Agnes rarely saw him even then.

For a while, she moved into one of her rentals on the corner of East McGaffey and Hinkle, right across the street from the reservoir. The house had a porch on the front and south side which was shaded by a line of trees. Whenever B and Jim paid a visit to the reservoir, they brought Dorothy because of the absence of Betty Lu. It wasn't often, but when they did come. Jim visited with Dorothy and B helped his ma around the house.

Somewhere down the line, Maggie's name got changed to Madge, probably because she was no longer a little girl. She visited nearly every week when she had a day off. Agnes, Dorothy, and Madge usually went to church together. They referred to themselves as "Us girls." During the summer, they would have picnics together, trying to exclude all boys. A couple of times, B and Jim would come along so Jim could be with the two sisters.

Cahoon Park was central to Roswell with the Hondo River running through it, and the family would always go up there. It was the nearest civilized place to go. It had toilets made out of caliche rock, native to Comanche Hill. There was a slide, swings, and a merry-go-round for the kiddies and several picnic tables with bar-b-que pits on stilts. The river banks were lined with green grass accented with wild lilies.

The girls took the food out of the boxes B and Jim had placed on the red picnic table and distributed it so it was accessible to everyone. The fried chicken was fresh out of the pan and scented the surrounding air. The potato salad was freezing cold, packed in ice from the icebox. The buns were warm enough to melt the butter, and the green beans and bacon were snappy.

“Dig in,” Agnes said. “There’s apple pie afterwards.”

“How’s it going, Madge?” B asked. “Haven’t seen you in a long time.”

“I have me a beau,” she said, smacking her chicken leg.

“You seem all grown up.”

“Well so do you.”

Jim had the attention of Dorothy. “How is High School?” he asked.

“Oh, it’s quite different from grade school. I didn’t know you could choose your classes. It was exciting at first. Then ...”

“Yeah, then you get your nose to the grindstone.”

“Yeah. I’m glad for the summer though. You always get a break.”

Agnes listened to the conversations going on and realized there was no more chicken left. “I should have killed another one.”

“What’d you say, Mom?” asked Madge.

“Well, I’m almost ready for pie.”

“You make the best.” He turned to Jim. “She makes the best.”

Jim tried the pie. “It sure comes close to being second to my mom’s.”

In her wisdom, Agnes said, “Each mother’s pie comes in first place. That’s what having children does.”

“We love you, Mom,” Dorothy said.

The evening sky rolled in slowly as the kids swung on the swings and rolled down the grassy slopes of the riverside, sending laughter over the neighborhood. Agnes picked up all the leftovers. There was a lonely ache in her heart she didn't know what to do with. She patted her stomach. Edith was on her way. Clinton's moving back to Arkansas brought it on. What a time for a divorce. Maybe he had some floozy packed up in the woods back there.

Why did God take Ollie?

Now stop that Agnes! Dry up the tears. The children are gathering around.

“Mom,” Madge said, “let me drive everyone home. You must be getting tired. I’ll take you home first, then I’ll bring the truck back.”

“It’s not me getting tired.” She rubbed her belly. Everyone laughed.

At home, Agnes sat on the porch and enjoyed the evening breeze that came from the reservoir. The smell of alfalfa and the marsh around the pool mixed together and turned into reveries.

Louiese Goes Back Home

Chapter One



Slabs of caliche covered the house. It was common to Roswell. The Bonines had purchased it in 1940 when they moved from Artesia. Louiese had finished school and had no more excuse to stay in Pasadena. Having a lot of friends, according to her parents, was not a valid excuse. So she took a Greyhound bus to Artesia and stayed there only a couple of months before she had to gather her things again and move with the family to Roswell. The church helped purchase the house before they arrived. They were happy they didn't have to stay with strangers while looking for a house. Estel made trips to Roswell every week to establish himself as a preacher and a carpenter.

The Dennises had moved from Abilene to Artesia, so it was a relief to stay with friends while Roswell was "in the makings." There was a small branch of the Nazarene church in Artesia in which Pastor Bonine (Estel) could add his leadership to help the church grow there. Once he had taken charge of the branch in Roswell, though, they moved. The Dennises went with them.

Louiese remade lost friendships with the Dennis children. There was Bonnie, Jewel,

Bob, and the boy and girl twins, Glen and Dean who were Louiese's age. She hung out with Glen, Jewel, and Dean mostly. She had a crush on Glen and did everything she could to be with him. But there was a contender for later that year, Clarence Adams.

The Dennises helped the Bonines move into their house. You had to walk left and catercorner from the front door, through the living room to the kitchen. That was the first place Ruby went. Then on the left of the living room, there was a hall that went back to a bedroom on the other side of the kitchen, another bedroom up front beyond the living room with a bath between them. There were doors in the bathroom that led to each bedroom. Estel saw that the front bedroom was big enough for his desk and bed, and you could look out the window when visitors came in the middle of the night.

The girls picked the back bedroom, and Glen helped bring in their suitcases and boxes. "Put all my stuff back here," she said to Glen, pointing to a corner bed near the back window. She whispered in his ear, "You can visit me through my window at night." She laughed when he blushed.

Nellie exclaimed, "What a big closet."

"Not after I put all my dresses in there," Mimi said.

"Leave me room," Louiese said, shoving Mimi aside so she could inspect it.

After The Bonines were all moved in, they followed the Dennises truck to a little farm on the northeast of Roswell. It was a two-story stucco frame house with a giant pear tree on the north for shading. There was a place out back for their goats and chickens. Miz Dennis always had to have goat's milk for her digestion.

Her living room was on the right or south side of the house with the kitchen behind it. The back door opened to a screened-in porch as wide as the house. The girls grabbed the

downstairs bedroom in the back, giving their parents the one upfront. The boys were relegated to the attic which they accessed from the back porch. It was a farmhouse, after all, where the workers upstairs would have been separated from the rest of the family.

The girls had fun exploring the house. They especially wanted to see the attic to know how the boys would be living. It looked like a barracks, just one room that would fit several beds.

“Maybe we should move up here,” Jewel said, stroking her long auburn hair. “They have a lot more space than we do.”

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Her living room was on the right or south side of the house with the kitchen behind it. The back door opened to a screened-in porch as wide as the house. The girls grabbed the downstairs bedroom in the back, giving their parents the one upfront. The boys were relegated to the attic which they accessed from the back porch. It was a farmhouse, after all, where the workers upstairs would have been separated from the rest of the family.

The girls had fun exploring the house. They especially wanted to see the attic because they wanted to know how the boys would be living. It looked like a barracks, just one room that would fit several beds.

“Maybe we should move up here,” Jewel said, stroking her long auburn hair. “They have a lot more room than we do.”

“And look at the wood paneling,” Louiese said, rubbing her hand against the wall.

“And it smells so nice.”

“Leftover aftershave, I would say,” said tall and slender Dean.

Dean, Glen, and Jewel were all the same height and build, like their father. Bob looked more like their mother, a bit shorter and wiry.

From there, they went outside, letting the boys get their things situated. The outhouse where the goats and chickens were going to stay needed painting and cleaning. The girls had to hold their noses, it stunk so bad.

“They didn’t keep this place clean,” Louiese said, watching her step as she came out of the building. “There’s a lot of chicken manure here.”

Jewel stepped out. “Mom will be sure to keep this place Spic and Span spotless.”

The field out back was covered with alfalfa. A cool breeze blew across it, giving the girls some fresh air and a fresh scent.

“Plenty of space for a garden,” Dean said as she made her way through the tall undergrowth of weeds.

“Pa will have to get his lawnmower out here,” Jewel said, following Dean who made a path for everyone.

“A scythe is more like it,” Louiese said, scrunching her face at the touch of weeds.

Ruby swung the porch screen door open, and asked, “Why aren't you girls helping? We have a lot more work to do in here.”

Louiese sighed. It was so nice outside and they made her and Jewel scrub down the kitchen. It had a nice outcome though. Everyone was able to enjoy dinner in a clean room.

After dinner, Ruby kissed Miz Dennis. “It’s so wonderful to have you close by.”

“Thanks for coming over and helping us,” Miz Dennis said. “It’s so nice to have good friends.”

“I’ll come by and help with that tractor, Ben,” Estel said, wiping his greasy hands on his handkerchief.

“Well, I appreciate it, Pastor,” Mr. Dennis said. “We’ll get it all figured out. Can’t let that hay go to rot.”

“See you tomorrow,” Estel said as all his family piled into the car.

“I got a pear,” little Nellie said from the back seat, shoving her pear over the front seat for her mommy and daddy to see. “Miz Dennis gave it to me. She said I was a good girl.”

Mimi was silent, lost in her thoughts. She and Bob would get on all right.

Louiese whispered in Mimi’s ear, “Aren’t they just the cutest?” She meant the boys, of course.

The sunset before they arrived back at their new house.

Louise sat herself down on her bed. She sighed. It had been one busy day. “My legs and back. Oh they hurt.” She rubbed the small of her back.

“Mine too,” Mimi complained. “Cleaning up two houses in one day? Who thought of that anyway?”

Nellie jumped up and down, bouncing her long curls. “Where do I sleep? There’s only two beds.”

“You can take yer clothes off and hop in bed with me,” Louiese said.

“Help me.”

“Okay.”

As soon as everyone got in bed, their mother came in and asked, “Everyone had their

prayers? We'll have prayer together tomorrow," she yawned.

"I didn't," Nellie said. She hopped out of bed, knelt, and said, "Now I lay me down to sleep, and ask the Lord to keep. Though I die, I ask the Lord to keep. Amen." Then she hopped back into bed and hugged her sister.

"Something like that." Ruby laughed and said, "Night all."

"Night Mother," Louiese and Mimi said.



Church had been half a week away, and then, all of a sudden, it was here, and Louiese had to get herself out of bed. She yawned and said, "I bet most people enjoy Sunday mornings."

"Yeah," Mimi said as her heavy feet plopped onto the floor. She put her elbows on her knees and rubbed her eyes with her hands. "Most people sleep in on Sundays."

"Get up, girls. Nellie's already in the tub." Ruby's voice rang like a church bell.

"Hurry. I need one of you to start breakfast and one to iron my dress. We all need to use the bathroom."

And so it went every Sunday morning, everyone fighting for the bathroom, and all the kids sharing the same bathwater. It was so traditional that no one ever complained.

"I'll fix breakfast," Louiese said to Mimi. "You iron the dress."

"I always iron the dress," Mimi said.

"That's because," Louiese said, slipping on her bathrobe, "you don't know how to cook."

Breakfast was biscuits, gravy, eggs, and bacon. Ruby's dress was black accented with small pearl beads about the neck and where pockets would have been on the bodice.

As everyone sat down at the table, Estel said, "Everyone looks nice today," and then he offered thanks. After breakfast, Nellie had to go to the bathroom when everyone else headed for the car. Estel honked the horn with one impatient, short burst. Nellie came running and hopped in the back, and the race was on to see who could beat Miz Dennis's group. Of course, Mr. Dennis stayed home and enjoyed a long morning's nap.

It was summer, and Pastor Bonine had trouble getting people to pay attention to his sermon. It was difficult to get a single person to come to the altar and be saved. The congregation sang well, but as soon the back doors opened, it was like a fire raid, everyone running for the outdoors, anxious to get to the park and have a Sunday picnic. During the summer months, people rarely put money in the basket that was passed at the end of the service. That's why Estel became a carpenter. He couldn't rely on the church to support him and his family.

After Church, Glen, Jewel, Dean, and Louiese loitered out by the street, and Bob and Mimi leaned against the building next to the door. They were waiting for the preacher, his wife, and Miz Dennis. The Dennises had packed the lunch this time, and everyone's stomachs were growling already.

"We could all form a quartet like the Blackwood Brothers," Jewel said.

"Or like the Speer Family," Dean said.

“Oh, lovely. No thanks,” Glen said. “Try the Chuck Wagon Gang. Now they’re on fire.”

“Don’t pull my leg,” Louiese laughed. “Roy Rogers and The Sons of the Pioneers sing a lot better than anyone.”

“Well, they’re all Hollywood,” Dean said.

“Don’t tell my parents,” Louiese interjected, “but Uncle Dick and Aunt Leota let me go to the movies with them, and we saw Roy Rogers, and boy, is he handsome.”

“I’m sure Dale Evens loves him,” Jewel countered, “and here’s the but ... we’re not supposed to go to the movies or dance or wear make-up.”

Everyone laughed as though it was their secret. Their parents were not to know.

“They also took me to see *Gone With the Wind*.” Louiese pressed her folded hands to her breast. “Oh, the love story of Scarlet O’Hara and Rhett Butler. And then there was Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.”

Nellie showed up. “I can sing.”

Glen lifted giggling Nellie and tickled her. "I bet you're going to be a great singer."



Cahoon Park was peaceful even though it had the laughter of children running here and there, swinging, sliding, getting dizzy on the merry-go-round, and rolling down the hill toward the dry Hondo River. There was a cool summer breeze with thunderheads boiling overhead. Every picnic table was occupied as well as grassy spaces covered with blankets laid down by latecomers. The Dennises and Bonines were among these, but no one

complained, they were having too much fun.

There were two tables for the potluck dinners and desserts. The standard dishes were fried chicken, ham, potato salad, and green beans. There were as many variations of green beans and potato salads as there were families. One mother included celery in her potato salad. There were also several different kinds of buns and loaves of bread, cakes, and pies. The smell made everyone's stomach growl. Preacher Bonine gave the prayer over the food and everyone lined up, filling their plates to the brim and taking them back to their family's spots.

“Mama’s potato salad is the best,” said Louiese, who was leaning against Glen’s back, using him as a chair.

“And her fried chicken,” Mimi exclaimed, gnawing on a bone.

Both Louiese and Mimi took up their mother's habit of cleaning each leg bone of meat, sinews, and gristle.

“Glen,” Louiese put her head back onto Glen’s shoulder. “Where’s my tea?”

“Oh, here.” Glen passed a paper cup of tea behind him, over his shoulder. “Sugar? I have to have lots of sugar.”

“There’s plenty in the cup, thank you,” Louiese said with a grin.

“Come over tonight and I’ll give you plenty of sugar.”

All the kids say, “Oooooo.”

Louiese saw her mother and father give her a hard look. She ducked her head.

Every time Louiese tried to drink her tea, Glen moved his shoulders.

“Glennnnn!” she complains.

“Whaaat?”

“Be still.”

Glenn saw a girl from church. Her name was Kathleen. "Excuse me,"

Glenn said, rising, "I gotta get something."

“Stay right where you are.” Louiese was adamant.

Kathleen approached the two, holding something. “That’s all right Sissy,” she said to Louiese. Then she addressed Glen. “Here’s the book you wanted.”

“What’s that?” Louiese asked over his other shoulder.

“Wrong ear, Sissy.”

“Oh, yes.” She put her head on his right shoulder. “What’s the book?”

“The Undertaker’s Manuel. I got a job at the Ballard Funeral Home.”

Louiese objected. "It's not Halloween." Then her interest peaked. She turned around and said, "Let me see."

All the kids made a circle around Glenn as he showed them all the eerie and gruesome dead bodies in different stages of decay. Louiese had to stop looking. Her stomach rebelled against the ghastly things.

"I know I'm going to have nightmares," she said. She distanced herself from the crowd who were laughing at the dead. She went to one of the picnic tables and sat outbound so she could watch the group. What she saw caused a little jealousy. Kate and Glenn were looking googly-eyed at each other. But what could she do? She liked them both.



That night Louiese found herself at the Dennises. She approached Glen in the living room. She sat beside him on the right side of the couch. "You want to be an undertaker?"

"Yes. I think it's really interesting." Glenn sighed. He took Louiese's hand. "Besides, the Army rejected me because of my ear."

"Well, what gives them the right?"

"It's like this. What would happen to me if I couldn't hear someone sneaking up on me on my left side? I might get killed or something."

"Oh, I see. Well, still. Couldn't you do something that didn't require fighting?"

"It's all right. I have a good job, and they will pay for my education."

"I won't visit your job until I grow old and die."

"You're so sensitive."

Louiese rested her head on his shoulder. "Yes. That's me all over."

A new boy walked over and sat on Glenn's left side.

"Hi, Clarence." Glenn took his arm from around Louiese and shook his hand.

"I knocked," Clarence said. "I heard a crowd in here, so I just walked in."

"That's okay." Glenn realized Louiese was staring at him. "Oh. Sissy, this is Clarence. Clarence, this is Sissy."

"Hi, Sissy." Clarence reached over and shook her hand. Turning to Glenn, he said, "She doesn't look like yer sister."

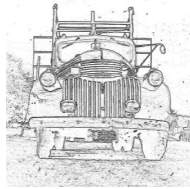
"Huh?" He pointed to his bad ear. "Deaf in this ear."

"Oh." Clarence raised his voice. "She doesn't look like yer sister."

"Her real name is Louiese. Everyone just calls her Sissy."

Louiese looked at him and shrugged her shoulders.

Clarence was shorter, more Louiese's height, and had lighter hair, sandy-colored. He had a tendency to take over the conversation, so the rest of the night, until Ruby and Estel decided it was time to go home, Clarence talked about his school, football, all the girls he knew, and how he could build anything from cars to homes. At present, he was working for the Jack Frost Trucking Company as a driver.



Louiese found herself strolling through town. She had left the house in a huff because Mimi said something awkward. She had walked down to the crossing of the Hondo River, crossed the bridge going west, and walked south down Washington Ave. She came to East McGaffey and turned east. This was known as the bad side of town. All the houses were old and rundown. Old women on porch swings, young women standing on porches and leaning against poles, smoking, children playing in the street, old men smoking cigars, all of them stared at her as she walked by. She passed a laundromat that looked new and smelled of bluing, a corner grocery with flashing liqueur signs, smelling like used tobacco and old paper, and a wrecking yard. Dogs ran to the closed gate and barked at her. She crossed the new railroad that passed through Roswell. *Now I am on the other side of the tracks for sure,* she thought.

As she daydreamed, she walked south to see if the cotton was ripe. She could smell the cotton seed from the mill to the north, and then a breeze drifted through the air that with the aroma of fresh alfalfa. She didn't know where her heart was taking her. As she followed

the railroad track, she spotted a large sign to her left, over a driveway, saying, *Jack Frost Trucking*.

Louiese was caught off guard as a truck came out of the drive. It turned north, stopped, and the driver slammed his hand on the cab door a couple of times. Her heart pounded hard. She didn't know whether to run or scream.

"Hey, Sissy," called the driver. "It's Clarence. Remember me?"

A great weight was lifted off her shoulders, and she relaxed. She smiled and waved.

"Yes!" she yelled from across the street.

"Where are you going?" he asked, yelling back.

Louiese looked both ways and crossed the highway.

"Nowhere," she said, walking up to the cab. "Just taking a walk." She breathed hard, trying to catch her breath.

"Want a ride? I'm going to pick up a load of cotton and take it to the mill."

"Yes, I'd like that." *Nothing better to do.*

Louiese trotted around the front of the truck and lifted herself into the cab, using a handhold to the left of the door. The truck smelled of dirt and old grease, and Clarence smelled like sweat and aftershave. As she seated herself, Clarence reached in front of her, caught the door handle, and slammed it shut. He shifted gears, the truck bucked, and they were off.

Clarence glanced over at her. "Where you headed?"

"Nowhere in particular. I thought I would just go see a cotton farm."

"What a coincidence. That's right where I'm headed." He turned east on East McGaffey.

"There's one way down this road." He stopped the truck as soon as he turned. "You thirsty?"

“I guess I am. It’s sort of a hot day.”

“What’s yer preference?”

“I’ll just have a Coke.”

“Be right back.”

Clarence left and jaunted over to the corner filling station, Lander's, which seconded as a grocery. Louiese studied the dashboard and floor. It was very dusty. It looked like the radio had been taken out. She wondered if he went on long trips and missed the music. A hula girl was stuck to the middle of the dash, and a pine-scented cardboard tree hung down from the rear view mirror. He came back with two Cokes in his left hand, raised them into the air to show her, and ran across the street.

He opened his door and gave Louiese both drinks. "Here take these." He slid under the over sized steering wheel and slammed the door, changed gears, and they were off again. Louiese handed him his Coke, and he took a swig. Dust flew up into the air behind them as they sped forward.

“Roswell’s a pretty little town, don’t chew think?”

“Yes.” Louiese guzzled down a third of her Coke. “My. I didn’t think I was that thirsty.”

They passed Agnes’s corner house and the reservoir. The dirt road was a bit bumpy, but the smell of the alfalfa fields made up for it. She could also smell the elm trees that lined the road because of the heat beating down on their leaves.

“So what were you doing alone way down here?”

"Oh, Mimi and I were arguing." She picked at her fingernails.

“It’s got to be about a man. When sisters argue, it’s always about a man.” He looked over and smiled at her.

She smiled back demurely. “Sort of.”

“About me, I hope.”

“Not exactly.”

“Ah hah!”

"You were mentioned, but it wasn't about you." Louiese bowed her head. "It was about Glenn, or rather, his new girlfriend. Mimi was trying to defend her. I saw him first. I mean, I knew him forever, since I was a little girl."

“I see, and now he has eyes for someone else.”

“Yes, so I started walking to clear my head a bit.”

Clarence pulled the truck into another dirt road that took them south, passing a farmhouse.

B looked at the truck from the roof of the house in which he was born. He stopped hammering the shingles for a chill traveled up his spine as he watched a truck carrying a young man and a girl speed down the access road. He shook his head and continued with the repair.

Louiese finished her Coke as Clarence directed loading the bails of cotton. She got out of the truck and went to the side of the road opposite the field and found a lone cotton plant that was forgotten. She plucked a dried branch with open pods in which the cotton had poked itself out like wild hair rustled by the wind. She brought it back to the truck and examined it as she sat in the cab. It was as though the cotton seed had popped out and brought parachutes of cotton along with them.

Clarence hopped into the cab and slammed the door, rattling the truck. "Here we go again." He gunned the engine and started down the road, found a place to turn around, and headed back to East McGaffey. He covered the field workers with his dust cloud. When he reached the corner with the farmhouse where a roofer peered at them from above, he grabbed Louiese by the knap of the neck, pulled her over, and kissed her. Letting go, he started down the McGaffey road, smiling.

"What was that for?" she asked.

"Oh, just because you are so cute." He placed his hand on her leg and asked, "You want to go home, or get a hamburger? I haven't had lunch yet."

She was so shocked at his hand on her leg, she said abruptly, "Take me home. Mama will be wondering where I am."

"Okay."

Too embarrassed to talk, Louiese sat silent all the way home. Clarence didn't say anything either.

He pulled up to the side of the Bonine house.

Louiese laughed as she opened her door. "Thanks for the lift."

"See you Sunday."

"Okay."

Mimi waited at the door and opened it for her. "Look at the little lost lamb."

"Hush or I'll swat you with my cotton balls." Louiese stepped through the door, trying not to touch her sister.

"You sure look dreamy-eyed. Who was that in the truck?" Mimi followed her back into the house, letting the screen door slam behind her.

“Clarence. He found me walking down on the Dexter Highway and gave me a lift home.”

Ruby came from the kitchen when she heard the voice of her wayward child.

“Louiese, wherever have you been?” she asked in a disgruntled voice.

“I had to go clear my head. I don't like arguments. I'm sorry I disrupted the house.”

Louiese headed for her bedroom. She held to the doorpost of the hallway and looked back to her mother.

Ruby had a plate and towel in her hand. “Did I hear correctly, that you went all the way across town and got picked up by a stranger?”

“Not a stranger, Mama, Clarence. He's a friend of Glenn's. He was at the Dennise's Sunday night. I just happened to walk by where he works is all. He offered me a ride home.”

“Well,” Ruby finished drying the plate, “I guess that's too close to Heaven. You could have gone to the park. I could have gotten a hold of you there. I need you here at home to give me a hand now and then.”

“If you don't mind, I need to take a nap.”

“You can take a nap later. Come in the kitchen and help me.”

Louiese groaned inside. It was more like her stomach growled. But she knew if she expressed a real groan, she would get slapped. So, not complaining, she went to the kitchen, following her mother.

“Just a second. I have to put this branch in a vase.”

Chapter Two

Ruby didn't mind that her daughter brought home a branch full of cotton balls, but she was vexed by her bringing home a boy at her age. He was twenty years old, and she was only sixteen. She could get married in another two years. Yet, Ruby was sure she would get ulcers by that time.

Louiese was a flirt. She made amorous glances at every boy within spying distance. Whenever one of her friends brought out a camera, she posed as a sexy model with her eyes half-closed, her shoulders brought forward and either leg crossed or her left heel up while leaning on a rail or chair. At other times, she would raise her skirt and show off her legs. When Nellie became a teenager, and she was presented with a Brownie movie camera, Louiese would walk slowly, patting her hair, as if she were strutting down a runway. This behavior always made Ruby cringe.

Talking to her didn't do any good. She just stared into the air and withdrew. Her eyes would go glassy, like when a kitten dies. When her father talked to her, she would cry, repent, and a week later, be her own sexy self.



Ruby and Estel didn't like Clarence right away, but after a few visits, he talked his way into their hearts, even though he talked like a hillbilly. He spoke with confidence and was happy-go-lucky. He showed interest in people and was very helpful around the house. He posed quite a different personality than when he was with kids his age.

Clarence convinced the Bonines that he was on their side and would treat Louiese like his own sister, so when he decided to take their daughter out with the Dennis kids on a group date, they let her go.

Clarence and Louiese hopped into a Chevy truck, belonging to Old Man Frost, and hightailed it out of there. Clarence started laughing as he approached the stop sign at Washington Ave.

“We’re not going with the Dennises, are we?” Louiese asked. She raised an eyebrow.

“Come on, Sissy, we’ll have some fun all by our little lonesome selves.” A light flicked in his expression. “You want an ice cream cone? Let’s go to the Dairy Queen, and I’ll get chew one.”



“Okay. I haven’t had one in a long while.”

Clarence changed gears and the truck lurched forward. “Then it’s the Dairy Queen it is. We can go to a movie afterward. There’s one at the Chief I think you will like. *Ma! He's Making Eyes at Me!*” He winked. “I think you’ll like it. It also has the Batman and Robin



series.”

As they rode up to the Dairy Queen, Louiese asked, “Who’s Batman and Robin? Sounds like a couple of loonies.”

Clarence got out and went up to her door and opened it. “The criminals they fight are. They’re in DC Comics.”

“Oh, a comic book,” she said as she jumped out. “I don’t read comic books.”

Clarence Slammed the door.

They walked up to the order window on the east side. “What do you read?”

“Anything that has romance in it.”

“Just like a girl.”

“I read the Bible too.”

Clarence put his hands into his front jeans pockets and looked away.

They had to wait behind an old slow talking farmer.

"Are there romances in the Bible?" Clarence asked. When Louiese frowned, he asked, "What would you like?"

“A hot fudge Sundae.”

The farmer left with a foot-high swirl of vanilla ice cream in a cone. Clarence stepped up to the window.

“What would you like, Sweetie,” the girl asked, leaning over to see out the window and showing her cleavage.

Clarence smiled as he looked her over. “I’ll have a tall one like the man before me. She’ll have a hot fudge Sundae.”

Louiese kicked his leg.

“Ow!” Clarence twirled around. “What’d I do?”

“She needs more clothes on!” Louiese grimaced and crossed her arms. “You’ll have tall one, humph!”

“Don’t kick me,” Clarence said, rubbing his shin. “Kick *her*.”

“She’s behind a brick wall.”

“Here ya go, Sweetie.” The cashier winked and reached through the window, handing Clarence his order. Louiese kicked his other leg.

“Ow! You want this down yer dress?” Clarence waved his foot-long stash of ice cream at her.

“You don’t have to look, and besides, you wouldn’t have any ice cream left.” Louiese took her Sundae.

“Maybe I’ll lick it off yer chest,” Clarence said, glaring at her, waving his head from one angle to another.

Louiese rolled her eyes and climbed back into the truck. By the time Clarence got in, half his ice cream was gone.

“What did you do?” Louiese asked. “Drop it?”

“I just sucked it up.” Clarence jumped in and slammed the door.

Louiese cracked the frozen chocolate shell with a plastic spoon she had picked up outside the window and scooped the shell and ice cream into her mouth.

“Mmmm,” Clarence said. “I wish I was that spoon.”

“Stop it. That’s not nice.”

“But you are.” Clarence put his arm around her and snuggled up as he sat there and gobbled up his ice cream cone.

When they finished, they went to the Chief Theater, bought tickets, and were ushered into the dark. The little usher boy, holding a flashlight, and wearing a round, flat military hat from the 19th century, showed them their seats. Right away, Louiese found that it was not Clarence's intention to watch the movie. She didn't know whether she was being mauled by a bear or had gone to a massage parlor.

“Stop it,” she whispered. “Go get me some popcorn.”

When they were finished with the popcorn, she said, “Go get me a Coke.”

Then she wanted a Mounds Bar, anything to keep his hands off of her.

After the movie, Clarence said, “You must be the hungriest girl I’ve ever taken to the movies.”

It’s the first time I’ve ever been run through a mill, she thought.

On the way home, he said, “You’re sure quiet.”

“I’ve had a hard day. I’m just tired.” *Tired of being molested. I feel so numb.*

When Clarence pulled up to Louiese’s home, he kissed her goodbye. It took twenty minutes, and she didn’t care after that what or where he touched. She was in love. When she left the truck, she was walking on air. She floated through the front door and ignored the inquisition from her mother. She went right to bed. Mimi and Nellie were already asleep.

Estel put his arm around Ruby’s waist. “I think this girl is going to be married soon.”

“You think so? Will that be wise?”

“If she doesn’t,” Estel said, wiping away a tear, “I’ll have to buy a shotgun.”

“Oh, Estel!” Ruby jabbed her elbow into his ribs.

“Oooo-kay.” Estel laughed, but then he became straight-faced serious.



Clarence was in church every Sunday, showing his Dr. Jekyll personality, sweet and charming. He sat with the Bonines and behaved himself. He seemed very religious, kind, and when the plate was passed, very generous. Louiese forgot the Mr. Hyde side of him when they mingled with the Dennises after church. He was the life of the party, always leading the conversation. He was always cheery and making people laugh. They would get together in the evening and sing popular religious songs at the Bonines or Dennises home. Even in that, Clarence was the lead singer. Then he said he would take her home.

Whenever Clarence and Louiese entered that old truck, God was left behind. She cuddled up to him and caressed his chest as he drove and nibbled at his ear. That made him laugh. They stopped in Cahoon Park but didn't get out. They always necked a while before he took her home.

Louiese didn't comb her hair this time. She walked through the front door as though she were hypnotized and all disheveled. If she had been wearing lipstick, it would have been smeared, but she didn't wear it on Sundays.

Ruby made a decision. "Come over here," she said, grabbing Louiese's arm. "Sit down." They sat on the brocade couch. Ruby held her hand. "I know what you've been doing, dancing with the Devil. Look at yourself. How can you continue going to church, acting like a saved person, and wind up like this every Sunday night?"

"I can't help it, Mother, I love him."

"I'm not sure what you're feeling can be called love." Ruby took a deep breath. "Look, here's what we're going to do. You and Clarence are going to get married. He seems to be a decent sort of boy, but when you two are together, it's hellfire."

Louiese didn't respond, except to shed tears. "I don't know. He hasn't asked me yet. And I thought I would wait until I finish school. I don't know."

"Your father will talk to Clarence. He might be out there now talking to him."

Estel came in and shut the front door. He laughed beneath his breath.

"What is it, Estel?" Ruby asked.

"Well," Estel said, putting his fingers up to his face, and not looking at anyone. "I gave him an ultimatum." He came and sat on the other side of Louiese. "It's on for next week. We'll have the wedding here at home."

Louiese cried on her father's shoulder.



The wedding was small and simple. Only family was there in the Bonine's living room and the groom with his parents. Mr. and Mrs. Adams seemed a little embarrassed to be there. Mr. Dennis tried to comfort Miz Dennis by patting her hand as they sat there on the couch with the Adamses.

"This is so sudden, isn't it?" Mrs. Adams asked.

"We didn't have time to prepare for this. Is anything the matter?" Mr. Adams asked.

Pastor Estel Bonine, Louiese's father in his official capacity, told both parents in a low voice that nothing was wrong. "It was decided we do this so nothing does go wrong. You see?" His smile was enigmatic.

The pastor stood and motioned the bride and groom where to stand so he faced the couch. Ruby and Nellie sat on kitchen chairs by the kitchen doorway. Mimi planted herself in her mother's big chair. Ruby had that stern look on her face. People would ask themselves was she trying to protect the cake, or was she worried about her girl getting married so young?

Now that everyone faced the pastor, he said, "Now we are gathered here to celebrate the union of this man and this woman." He followed with a lot of platitudes and advice for a young married couple. Then he pronounced the magic words, "Elva Louiese Bonine, do you take this man Clarence Siringo Adams to be your lawfully wedded husband?"

Louiese, almost fainting, whispered loudly, "Yes." She looked at Clarence and smiled, squeezing his hand.

"Clarence Siringo Adams, do you take this lovely lady to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

"Yes. I do."

"Then I pronounce you to be husband and wife until death do you part." Estel tried to smile. "You may kiss the bride."

A thrill passed through the soul of Louiese. She had a big grin on her face, showing her big horse teeth. Clarence gently wrapped his arms around her and was the perfect gentleman as he kissed her without passion. They let go of each other slowly, looked around as if to say, "Is that it?"

Ruby stood. "We have some cake and punch in the kitchen if anybody wants any."

Mimi stood up and said, rather surprisingly, "I thought the bride and groom were supposed to cut the cake."

Ruby moved the chairs back into the kitchen. The cake was a chocolate two-layer cake, sitting in the middle of a pretend marble table with flowing metal legs. She handed a butcher knife to Louiese. "Here, you do it."

Louiese thought there should have been music, but she was the piano player. She took the knife and cut the cake, handing saucers out to Clarence, Mimi, and Nellie to hand around to the adults. Other people would have danced and drank and had a lot of fun, but that was all against their religion. *At least*, Louiese thought, *Mama can make the best chocolate cake.*

After the Dennises and the Adams left, Ruby brought out some suitcases. "I packed all your belongings. You'll want to go with Clarence now."

"Oh, Mama," Louiese cried, embracing her mother. "I don't know if I'm ready to do this."

"You'll be all right. You just do what comes natural."

Louiese made the rounds of hugging and kissing everyone. Her dad said, "Be good now." She said, "I will." No one said, "Write," or "Come visit," because that was a given. After all, she and Clarence would be right there in Roswell. So she sighed, passed through the door with her luggage, and looked back at each person, Daddy, Mama, Mimi, and Nellie who waved.

Clarence put her luggage in the back of the old truck, they both hopped in, and they were off, dirt and rocks flying into the air.

The same thoughts settled in Ruby's and Estel's minds. Would they be happy? Would it last?



Chapter Three

Clarence's apartment, the north side of a duplex, was a simple plastered chicken-wire affair on the east side of town with green trim around the door and windows. There was a single step to the door which faced east. The inside consisted of a living room, a kitchen to the right, and a bedroom with a bath in the back. There was no built-in closet, just a chiffarobe, and it was pretty small and made of cardboard. The Bonine home was spacious compared to this dinky thing.

Louiese set her two suitcases down next to a recliner covered in a dark salmon textured chenille. The matching couch was on the north side with a picture window on the east between them. A small lamp table supported a cactus lamp in the northwest corner.

The kitchen, she noticed, had a small icebox, the kitchen sink with draining board, and a small lonely counter top filling up the west side. Green cabinets covered the wall above the sink, reaching the ceiling. She could almost reach the top shelves. A small table of imitation marble with metal legs and two metal chairs with flowered plastic seats stood in front of a small window on the east side.

Louiese sighed. She heard a noise coming from the bathroom. The toilet flushed. *I guess he's in there.* She went over to the icebox and opened it. It was empty but for a bottle of milk and some butter. It smelled old.

Clarence came over and kissed her. "We'll get groceries tomorrow. Let's eat out tonight."

"Okay."

Louiese suddenly felt alone and shy. She looked out of the corner of her eye and up to Clarence. What was she supposed to do now? Her whole life had changed. She would have to drop out of school. What could she do around here? It would take a whole day to get this place spic-n-span, and then five minutes a day to keep it that way. And what else would there be left to do? She could get bored.

"Come on," Clarence said, opening the screen door. "You can put yer things away when we get back. Where'd you like to go?"

"You're still hungry after you ate all that cake?"

He laughed and swatted her on the rear as she stepped out the door.

The young married couple wound up at a truck stop outside of town. It smelled of fried food, tobacco smoke, and old newspaper. Passing through a hallway with restrooms to the right, they could smell the toilets. A rough old truck driver passed them on the way and winked at Louiese. Her stomach churned. Her throat constricted. She hurried and sat down at the furthestmost booth she could find.

"There was a booth back there," Clarence said, sitting across from her.

"I like this one."

"Just like a girl."

"Well, it stunk on that end." She picked up a menu from a holder next to the window. She covered her face with it.

Clarence took his finger and pulled down the menu from her face. "Peek-a-boooooo." He saw a scared little girl looking back at him. Her lipstick and makeup couldn't hide it. "It's not as bad as all that, is it?"

"You take me to a truck stop on our wedding night."

"Well, you know, I don't get high wages. I'm lucky to have a job. Look at these men around here. Half of them come here just to talk to their friends."

"Well, I'm told the war is going to improve that."

"Now, I don't think Roosevelt is going to get us into that mess."

A waitress stepped forward and said, "I wouldn't count on that. A lot of military men come in here. You know they're building a base out there to the south." She winked. "What'll you have?"

"Chicken fried steak," he said.

"Make that two."

"Two steaks on the wing!" she cried out. "Two steaks on the wing," echoed the kitchen.

"Anything to drink? The young lady can't have any beer."

"No beer," Clarence said. "Just two Cokes."

"Two Cokes comin' up," the waitress said, turning away.

Louiese placed the menu back in its holder and started giggling.

Clarence smiled and blew out a single laugh. "What?"

"We're married."

"You like that?"

"I wonder what Glen thinks of that. He and Kathy."

"You still thinkin' about him?" Clarence slipped his shoe off, and he slid his foot up Louiese's leg. He smiled.

She slid her feet together. "They'll always be my friends."

"Yes, mine too."

"I love all the Dennis's. You know that."

"Especially Glenn."

"Well, what girl wouldn't."

The smell of the chicken fried steak made Louiese's mouth water, and she forgot all the unpleasant things in the restaurant and the words that had come from Clarence's mouth. After filling her stomach, she was happy again. Then she said, "I want a chocolate soda."

"I know a place that has good sodas. Not here."

He waved the waitress down and paid their bill, giving her a tip of a whole dollar. She winked at him again. Louiese couldn't help from giggling, for the waitress was an old woman.

When they hopped back into the truck, Clarence grabbed his new wife with his arm and started kissing her. She struggled against him. "Soda," she managed to get out.

"Oh, yeah." He started up the truck and turned it around to go back out to the street.

"You are so cute."

When they came to one of the downtown restaurants, known for its ice cream and sodas, Louiese said, "Now why didn't we come here before?" Clarence winked. When they entered, Louiese saw all her friends. She had to run and hug each one. The last person she hugged was Clarence. She kissed him and said, "Thank you so much! A little surprise party?"

"For the sweetest girl I've ever had," he said.

Everyone talked all at once, asking so many questions, but Louiese answered each one of them in the melee of words.



Louiese entered the bedroom with trepidation. Clarence placed his hand on her shoulder, trying to calm her.

She turned her head back and said, "Please leave me alone for a while." She turned around, her hands grasping each other and covering her heart. "I want to get undressed. I'll call you when I'm in bed."

"Okay." Clarence went to the door, turned, and was shooed away with tender fingers and puppy-dog eyes.

Louiese closed the door. If it had a lock she would have used it. She took a deep breath and disrobed but left her slip on. She pulled back the covers on the side nearest the wall, laid down with her back to the door, and covered up to her neck.

"You can come in now."

Clarence's father told him that most young brides were shy on their first night. Now he could see it with his own eyes. She had made her side of the bed into a fortress. He took off his clothes and threw them onto a straight-back chair next to the bed. He crawled under the covers like a prowling wolf and lay down against her warm body. Louiese's breath abated. He started caressing her shoulders and stomach. He tried to kiss her cheek.

She could barely speak, but she managed to say, "Please, not now. I'm really tired."

When he persisted, she yelled, "Clarence!"

"Okay. Do you want me to sleep on the couch or something? Maybe get a hotel room?"

"Don't do that. It's okay for you to stay with me, just let me sleep."

Clarence woke up to eggs, bacon, biscuits, and gravy. Louiese had arisen early and gone to the corner store. It was Saturday, and Clarence had slept in. She thought such a nice

breakfast might appease him for her reluctance to make love last night. When he came into the kitchen, he said, "Smells delicious," and he grabbed her and kissed her while she waved a metal spatula in the air.

When he sat at the little table, all set up like a restaurant, she served him his plate. He then said, jokingly, "What? No pancakes?"

"You want coffee on your head or in your cup?" She raised the coffee pot over his head.

"My cup! My cup!" he cried, covering his head with his hands.

After the blessing on the food, which she insisted upon, Clarence brought up the subject of what to do for the rest of the day.

"Hey, what d'ya say we spend the day out at the lakes?", referring to the Bottomless Lakes over Comanche Hill and to the east.

"I was planning on cleaning the house today." She took a sip of hot coffee.

"Oh, you can do that Monday when I'm at work."

"Okay."



Louiese made sure she spent the day lying in the sun, so at night she could complain of a sunburn. Indeed she did have a sunburn, and therefore couldn't make love to him. He intended to have a one-day honeymoon and make love to his sweet wife at night. She again wasn't in the mood.

Sunday morning came, and Louiese was sick, so they didn't go to church. Later that afternoon, Ruby showed up wondering why she hadn't seen them. When she saw the

problem, she immediately went home, got some calamine lotion, and returned to help her daughter. Having been a nurse, she knew exactly what to use.

As she spread the lotion on Louiese's shoulder, her daughter gave a sigh of relief.

"You should buy some. It's always good for a lot of things," Ruby said. "I told yer father that I needed to see you, but he said, 'Don't bother the newlyweds. They need time together. They'll be back next week.'" Finished with the right shoulder and arm, Ruby went around the bed and started on the left side. "I told him that may be so, but I got this feeling you needed my help, and you surely did." She carefully spread some lotion onto her face. Then she started on her legs.

"Thank you, Mother. That feels so good."

"Now yer old enough to know when to get out of the sun." Ruby screwed the cap on and slipped the bottle back into her apron pocket.

"It was such a nice day yesterday. I just wanted to lay there by the pool and soak up the sun."

"Up to the lake were you?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Well, that's nice Clarence could have a day off. Are you going on a honeymoon?"

Ruby sat on the bed next to her daughter.

"I'm afraid yesterday was it."

"I heard that," Clarence said, chewing on a toothpick and leaning on the doorpost.

"Don't worry. I'll get vacation time soon, and we can go up into the mountains. We'll have lots of fun. You just get better." He turned to Ruby. "I'll make sure she gets better."

Ruby got up, said goodbye to Louiese, and patted Clarence on the arm. She said, "I know you will."



After a couple of days using the calamine lotion, Louiese felt better and was able to get up and clean the house. It took her all day to scrub all the shelves, cabinets, stove, sink and icebox, walls and floors, and everything in the bathroom. Clarence came home with groceries and seeing all the work she did, volunteered to cook the dinner. He made meatloaf with peas in it. He said it was his mom's recipe.

When dinner was over, they went out to see a war movie. Afterward, Louiese asked if he was going to sign up for duty.

"Don't worry. President Roosevelt will keep us out of the war."

As he opened the door of the truck for her, she said. "I hear a lot of guys are going up to Canada to join their army so they can go to Europe and fight."

"Well, you won't see me doing that. I have a fine job, and I'll be home every night."

That's what I'm worried about. I couldn't take it every night. That's what he'll do to me, make love every night. I'll have dozens of children, and I'm only sixteen.



That Saturday night, Louiese complained that she had a headache and she was tired from doing all that work. Clarence fumed. He turned his back to her and they fell asleep angry at each other.

Louiese woke suddenly. She looked at the alarm clock on the lamp table. She had forgotten to set it. She quickly got dressed. Clarence continued to lie in bed.

"Clarence. Get up. We're late for church," she said while brushing her hair in the mirror.

"I'm not in the mood."

"Well, at least get up and take me. I can get a ride back home with my parents."

Clarence sat on the edge of the bed in the nude, sighing, yawning, and stretching. He rubbed his face.

She stood over him. "Hurry, please. I'm late."

"Okay. Okay. I'm up."

"What's that!" Louiese pointed to his groin.

He stood and shook his hips at her before pulling on his shorts.

"You're deformed!" She ran into the living room. "I don't want a deformed husband."

"You haven't seen a man's biology before?"

He walked into the living room and placed his hands on her shoulders. She shook them off. "Let's go."

"Maybe you can drive yourself." He pulled on his trousers. "At least, let me get dressed!"

Louiese waited a half minute while he finished dressing.

"Clarence!" She opened the door. "You know I can't drive that big heavy thing."

He passed by her in anger and out the door. She followed, stepped up onto the seat, and slammed her door. Now she was angry. Clarence started the truck. It lurched forward.

Louiese had to hold on as he raced out to the street and the church. By the time they arrived, she was wiping her eyes with her handkerchief.

She left without saying anything, went in, and sat on the back row.

After church, Ruby and the Dennis kids came up to her and asked why she was late and where was Clarence?

"I'm sorry, Mama," she said to her mother, "I forgot to set the alarm. I don't usually set the alarm, but I was so tired from cleaning that dirty old apartment."

"What happened to Clarence?" Ruby asked.

Louiese could tell from the sound of her voice that she liked him a lot. *Let her marry him.* "He had some work to do," she lied.

"You shouldn't work on the Sabbath," Ruby said. "Are you going to come with us to the park? We're having a picnic."

"I'd love to come, Mother." She answered like an adult. She never said "Mother" when she was in her little girl state.

Louiese went to the park and had a nice afternoon. She went home with the Dennis's. She slept on their couch when she arrived. When she awoke, everyone was singing at the piano.

Dean saw that Louiese was awake. "Come join us, girl. You need some life in you."

When she just sat there looking at everyone, Jewel sat down beside her. She moved close and whispered in her ear. "How's the marriage bed? Is that why you're so tired?"

"There has been no marriage bed. Keep that to yourself." She rose and went over to Glenn.

"Glenn, I'm sorry," she apologized. "Will you take me home? I'm just not feeling up to it."

"Okay. I'll go around and get the car."

She hugged everyone goodbye and left.

In the car, she noticed Glenn headed for Clarence's apartment. "No, Glenn, I mean my real home."

"Oh," he said, glancing at her. "You and Clarence had a disagreement or something?"

"Yes, or something."

"Then home it is."



It didn't surprise Estel and Ruby when their daughter showed up on the doorstep without any luggage.

Ruby opened the door for her, and Louiese turned and waved at Glenn. "Thanks." She turned to her mother. "I'll sleep on the sofa."

"You'll do no such thing." Ruby had such a disappointed look on her face. "You can sleep with Nellie. She's in your bed."

When Louiese was just settling down with Nellie at her back fast asleep, she heard Mimi giggling. "What are you laughing at?"

"You couldn't do it, could you?"

When Louiese didn't answer, Mimi asked, "Remember when Mama caught us in the red light district last month? She sure scared you."



At breakfast, Louiese was rolling out the biscuit dough. She said to her mother, "I want to go back to Pasadena. I'll get a job and pay you back."

Ruby didn't say anything for a while. She finally said, as she brought the breakfast of bacon, eggs, biscuits, and gravy to the table, "I'll let you know."

Everyone stared at each other except for Estel. He avoided their eyes, concentrating on dipping his biscuits into his gravy. His last biscuit got flooded with maple syrup. When he finished breakfast, he wiped his mouth on his napkin and said with a twinkle in his eye, "Let her go. I'll call 'Lidge and see if we can't set her up with a job. Then," he looked at Louiese, "you can go."

Ruby had nothing to say. No one bothered to get her opinion. She just collected the breakfast dishes. It took her five minutes to clean up.

The next day Louiese hugged and kissed her parents, Mimi and Nellie, and boarded the Greyhound bus. She waved from the window as the wind-swept transport pulled out onto Second Avenue.



Chapter 4

Ruby went every day to the mailbox next to the front door. Sometimes she would rush out and look around for the box next to the street, but it wasn't there. Then she would turn around, go back to the door and look at that square metal box next to the door. This day, there was a letter stuck in it with a couple of bills. *I'll never get used to this new mailbox. The mailman has to walk around instead of drive to each box. I guess he needs the exercise.*

She put the bills under her arm and opened the letter. It was from Louiese. She was safe in the arms of her sister Leota. No mishaps on the way. As soon as she walked through the front door and sat down in her big soft chair, she heard Estel's car turn into the driveway. She placed the bills on the arm of the sofa so he could look at them.

Estel came in through the kitchen. He saw her reading a letter. "Anything interesting?"

"It's from Louiese. It says:

Dear Mom and Dad,

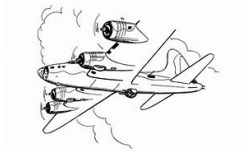
Had a lovely trip. Got to see cactus and lots of stars. I didn't sleep much. An old man was sitting next to me. I think he was Mexican. He only talked to himself, especially when he was sleeping, and he kept falling onto my shoulder. At least I had a window to look out of. I brought a Look Magazine and brought my little New Testament. I read the whole magazine by the time we arrived in Pasadena. It had a nice story in it about a girl on a dude ranch finding a boy she knew in the city. She didn't like him then, but now he seemed different and she fell in love with him. I think the scenery was more interesting.

Aunt Leota and Windy picked me up at the bus depot. It was great to see them. I was really tired and slept the afternoon until dinnertime. Wendy tells me there is plenty of

work for women in the airplane factory there, so I am hoping to get a real job tomorrow. I'll write again and tell you all about it. Wendy and a few of her friends work there.

I am tired to death, so I love you all,

Louiese.”



Ruby met Estel at the kitchen door. “Guess what?”

“I bet I can guess,” he said stepping inside and winking.

“Let me read it to you.”

"Just for a minute. I have to get a shower. I got my job at the Air Base. We framed our first house today."

"I'm proud of you," patting him on the back. "That won't hurt yer preaching will it?"

"No. I'll keep on preaching. You can bet on that."

“That’s good.”

They both sat down in a couple of kitchen chairs. Ruby flipped the letter open and started reading.

“Dear Mom and Dad,

“I got my job finally. It took several days.” Ruby stopped and said, “She doesn’t write it all at once.”

"Um-hum."

“We work in an airplane factory. I think they call it the B-17. They gave us a quick lesson on riveting and safety and set us off to work. Our unit boss is quite strict, almost Puritan in her manner, but I guess they have to be or our men wouldn’t be able to fly these

things. I never see a complete assembly. I only see parts. I work on one side of the fuselage, the same side of the same fuselage every day. It seems like the same one, and someone takes it apart at night, and I have to put it all back together the next day.

"I got interrupted. This is another day. I have never been so tired. We work all day with only two ten-minute breaks. Two of them. Just think. I used to have all the time in the world.

"We decided to go to the beach every Saturday. That's what today is. I just laid in the sun all day, soaking up the sun. I put lotion on so I don't get a sunburn. I ache all over."

Estel laughed. "She'll get used to it."

"I didn't see one boy. I think they have all joined the service. The ones I see are supervisors or too young and have small jobs such as soda jerks."

"I just want to tell you that Uncle 'Lidge takes us to church every Sunday."

Estel nodded his head.

"We sing a lot. They have a good preacher there that knows how to stir us. Boy, he sure can preach!"

"Well, I must buy some more paper before I write again. Love you all,

"Louiese."

"I think," Ruby said, replacing the letter into the envelope, "our young daughter is growing up."

The Cedar Chest

Chapter One

B finished with the roof repair, climbed down the ladder, bringing his tools with him slung over his shoulder in a canvas bag. He wiped the dirt and sweat from his face with a rag from his back pocket. He should have been wearing the rag over his nose, as the last truck picking up cotton from the field threw up a lot of dust. The girl in the truck seemed like she was just there for the ride. *Silly old girl anyway.*

B thought a moment as he approached his grandpa's pickup. She had made him feel giddy. He wanted to laugh, but he didn't. He had no reason on Earth to feel that way about a girl just driving past. *Humph!*

He took a long look at the house he was born in. Some stranger lived in it now, but Grandpa Singleton knew the guy and wanted to do him a favor, so he sent B to fix his roof. That house was the past. Now he was in High School and living in Dexter.

B drove back home, passing the old reservoir, then the corner store, and turning south, he passed Clarence turning his truck into the Jack Frost Trucking driveway. He recognized the truck. It reminded him of that silly girl. He couldn't get her out of his mind. What was he thinking of? He missed Betty Lu, and then this girl was trying to wedge herself in there and get in the way. He shook his head as though he could shake the memory out of his brain. It looked as though she already had a boyfriend anyway.

B stopped in front of his house, got out, slammed the door, leaving his tools on the seat. He glanced at the empty house where Betty Lu used to live. A pang shot through his

heart. He turned away and went through the kitchen door. Grandma and Grandpa Singleton were at the table having a cup of coffee. Dinner was in the oven and smelled delicious.

“I got it done,” B said, letting the screen door slam.

“Maybe you can look at our roof come next Saturdee,” Samuel said, taking a sip of his coffee.

“I got plenty of chores for ya, B,” Emma Jane said, “if ya have the time.”

“I’m sure I can make the time, Granny.” B smiled and shoved his hands into his pockets. “I’ll get washed up. Where’s Dorothy?”

"Oh," Emma responded. "She an' Madge are out gallivanting around."

B left and went into the bathroom, showered, and changed clothes. He and Jim were going out to the movies. He said he would bring his sister and her friend along. That made B a little nervous but excited also. He made sure he was well-groomed for the occasion.

“Ya don’t need to purty yerself up just for us old folks, B,” yelled Emma. “Dinner’s on the table.”

It was some kind of casserole with elbow macaroni, green beans, and cheese. There were chicken legs in there too. B gobbled up his dinner and washed it down with iced tea.

“Ya don’t need to eat so fast,” Emma complained. “The house isn’t on fire.”

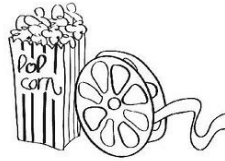
“Jim is picking me up in a jiffy. We’re going out to the movies with a couple of girls.” He rose, taking his plate and utensils with him, carrying them to the sink.

“Better be careful, now,” his grandmother warned him. “Don’t want you bringin’ home any sluts.”

"They're good girls, Grandma. It's Jim's sister and her friend. You've met them before." B swished his mouth out, spit in the sink, and set the glass down. "See ya both

later."

"Have a good time," Samuel said, as B fled out the door.



Jim sat in the dark with Lillian, and B sat between Lillian and Beatrice. Jim kept raising Lillian's dress to see her leg. B almost laughed. He grinned instead. He tried to act nonchalant, but when Beatrice kicked his ankle, he straightened up and watched the movie. It was a Roy Rogers chasing the outlaws on his famous white horse, Trigger. Beatrice reached over and held his hand. He wanted to laugh again. Silly girls embarrassed him to death. He didn't get very much out of the movie, but he got acquainted with Beatrice. He learned she was dating T. J. Frost. Now that may be a blunder. He didn't want the Frost boys after him again. Even though they would apologize later, they would beat the pulp out of him.

That night, B read the Bible, said his prayers, and wished he had a girlfriend all his own. He knew he wouldn't be seeing Betty Lu again, and Beatrice, though she was cute, she wasn't going to be his. Maybe someday.

B had another love. He took up cabinet making at school, and in his final year of Shop, he chose to make a cedar chest. Mr. Stanley helped him pick out the wood from a stockpile at the school. There was a lot of planing, gluing together planks, more planing to make the sides of the chests, and then there was the introduction to the lathe to form the legs of the chest. He decided the legs would act as the corners of the chest, holding up the sides. He was so elated at starting this project that the thought of girls completely left his mind.

The cedar chest was all he could think of, morning, noon, and night.

While he waited for the planks to dry, he took other planks to make the skirt of the chest. Mr. Stanley showed B a book of different designs he could choose for the corners of each skirt. He showed B how to carefully draw the design of the corners of the skirts onto graph paper, use a transparent artist's tracing paper to copy the design, and transfer the design onto the lower corners of each skirt. B covered the back of the paper with pencil lead and traced over the design as it lay on the plank. That left pencil marks on the wood in the form of his designed curves. B then took each plank to the band saw and cut out each corner close to the pencil design.

He then got instructions from Mr. Stanley on how to use the table router. He had used it before to plane bevels onto the edges of planks, but he needed to use different blades, set them for height and depth, and practice on scraps to become accustomed to making curves. He had to use one blade to cut the curve and another blade to cut off the edge of the curve on one side of the plank. After Mr. Stanley approved of his work, he was ready to cut his skirts.

The router hummed as B placed the plank up against the cutter on the routing table. He turned the plank and followed the lines. He did that for each corner of the four cedar planks, two short ones for the sides of the chest and two long ones for the front and back. He changed blades to cut off the edges. He cut each corner of the planks again.

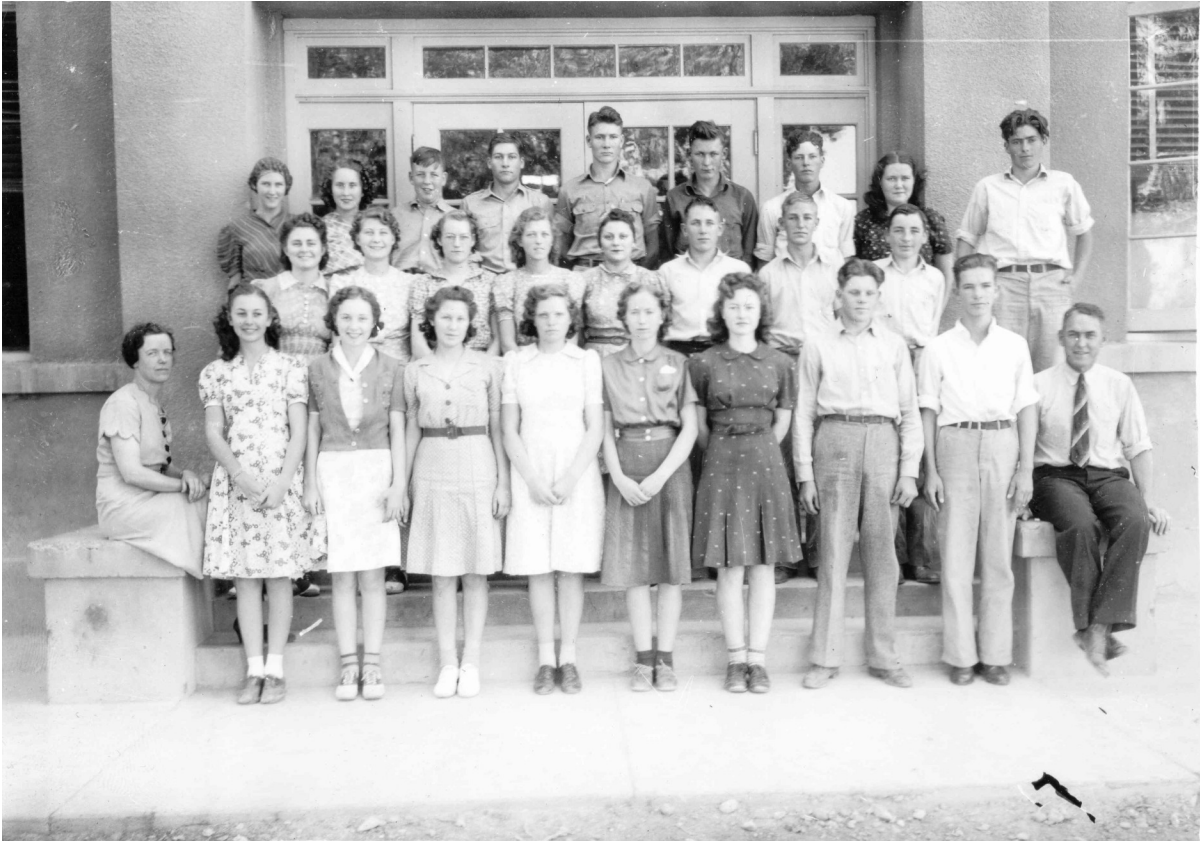
The smell of the cedar was heavenly. He didn't know any other smell unless it was pine that lifted his spirits so. Pine was his second favorite. Flowers were his third favorite smell, and of these, it was pine flowers that came out number one. It always came back to pine trees, the smells of the mountains, and the sounds of clear snow-melt flowing through the forests against the craggy rocks. That's what he loved most in life. It always brought him

peace when he went up into the El Capitan mountains to the west alone where he could meditate. But if he wanted company, he always took his friends to the Bottomless Lakes to the east on top of Comanche Hill.

The whole graduating class saw displays of the woodwork from the shop and paintings from the art class, and the thing they oohed and awed most about was B's cedar chest. It was his pride and joy, and he gave it to his mother to take care of. She had no idea what he had been doing at school except that he was doing well enough in his grades, and playing the bass drum, marching on the fields at football games.

B hadn't visited his mother much. He imagined the girls paid enough attention to her. He had estranged himself somewhat from her because he wanted to stay away from Old Man Frost, his stepdad. Now that he was graduating, and the old man had gone back to Arkansas, he paid more attention to her, but only when he had the time. He spent more time with Jim and his family than his own.

Graduation required a lot of group pictures and activities with the class. The day before graduation, all the graduates skipped school and went to the Bottomless Lakes. The air was cool, the sun hot, and laying in the sun was only for the sick and disabled, and that did not include B. They played water polo in the pool, swam and paddled in the lake, whistled at the girls if you were a guy, and showed off your legs and yelled at the boys while smiling if you were a girl.



(B is at the center on the top row. The tallest one there.)

B was happy and tired when he came home after midnight. He had a bit of a sunburn, but that didn't bother him. He would just let his skin peel. He liked pulling off the dead skin. Sometimes he let Dorothy peel him. He didn't bother to notice if his grandparents were awake or asleep. He looked in on Dorothy. She will have such a swell time when she graduates.

He went into his bedroom and carefully disrobed, pulling his shoes off with his feet. He sat on the edge of the bed and reviewed the day. It would probably be the last time he would get to enjoy himself for a long time. A lot of guys talked about going into the service because their families didn't have the money to send them to college. Others would simply find work. He would have to make that choice. He heard that if he went into the service they would educate him and give him a trade. He thought about that for a long time and started laughing.

His thoughts went to the lakes and the girls and what fun he had teasing them. There was one Jane Wells. She had cute dimples when she laughed. He might ask her out.

His thoughts settled onto the terrain, the cool breezes, and going off on his own to examine the rocks. More caliche.



B sat on the edge of one of the deserted smaller lakes. He meditated, throwing rocks into the lake when Jim showed up to rescue him.

"What're you doing out here?"

"Oh, just thinking." B looked up and then Jim sat beside him.

"I can guess what it is, too. It's our last day. Childhood's end."

Jim picked up some grass, stripped it, and put the sweet end in his mouth.

"Yeah." B threw another rock, skipping it across the water.

"Come on," Jim commanded. "The teacher's getting antsy. She wants to keep her eagle eye on everyone."

B lay down, but he couldn't sleep right away. He thought of all the episodes of his life. He judged that the good moments outweighed the bad; and that Old Man Frost wasn't a bad person. He treated everyone fairly, even though it wasn't always what B wanted. He decided he would go back to work for the Old Man Frost after all.

Chapter Two



Tom and B hauled hay south to Carlsbad, into Texas to Lubbock, and northeast to Clovis. Sometimes they went all the way to Fort Sumner. They followed the railroad north and south on Highways 285 and 70 and Highway 380 east. The hours were long, and they took turns taking naps in the cabin of their truck. That's why there were two of them. Singing proved better than talking for keeping each other awake. They often sang Eddie Arnold's song Bouquet of Roses. They made people laugh at one truck stop as they sang the song getting out of the truck.

“I'm sending you a big bouquet of roses,

One for every time you broke my heart,

And as the door of love between us closes,

Tears will fall like petals when we part.

I begged you to be different, but you'll always be untrue;

I'm tired of forgivin', now there's nothin' left to do,

So I'm sending you a big bouquet of roses,

One for every time you broke my heart.

I know that I should hate you, after all, you've put me through,

But how can I be bitter when I'm still in love with you?

So I'm sending you a big bouquet of roses,

One for every time you broke my heart.”

They started singing this song in the first place because they always argued.

“You never wanted to ride with me in the first place,” B argued.

“You never stay on the job,” Tom complained. “You’re all the time pursuing some gal.”

They were singing about each other, complaining they were being untrue to each other.

“You never played the games we played as a boy,” Tom brought out, “without changing the rules according to your whims.”

Then B countered by singing, “I’m sending you a big bouquet of roses ...” to apologize.



Tires can put people to sleep. B and Tom were listening to the whirring sound of the truck’s tires close to Artesia, south of Roswell. They heard a drumming sound.

“Hear that?” B asked.

“Hear something.” Tom listened carefully.

“It’s relaxing, isn’t it?” B took a swig of Coke from the green bottle he was holding onto from ten miles back.

“What’re you telling me?” Tom asked. “I thought something was wrong with one of the tires.”

“Could be, but I don’t think so.”

Tom turned on the radio. He winced at B’s illogic. The song coming out of the squeaky speaker crooned:

"O bury me not on the lone prairie

Where coyotes howl and the wind blows free

In a narrow grave just six by three—

O bury me not on the lone prairie."

No matter the screeching noise of the radio, Tom and B were too tired to stay awake.

The two brothers woke to the sudden sound of a thud that shook the truck and the bang-crash as the top half of a broken telephone pole landed across the windshield. Both boys were astonished and stared, blinky-eyed, at each other.

“You fell asleep!” B yelled. “I can’t believe you fell asleep.”

Tom, woozy from the crash, just wiped the blood from his forehead and laughed. "Are you okay?"

"Just barely," B said, looking around at the damage. "Mom must have been praying for us."

“Yeah. Someone was. We’re still alive.”

Leaving the cab, they walked with pained ribs around the truck to check the damage. Their awareness of their surroundings came back with a snap when they heard moaning coming from behind the truck. What they found sent chills down their necks. A wagon sat tipped over with all kinds of vegetables and fruits scattered over the highway. The horse that had pulled it struggled to stand. The driver lay by the side of the road in the high weeds. He mumbled something in Spanish.

Tom and B knelt beside him.

“You okay, old man?” Tom asked. “B. See if you can get the truck started. We got to get this old guy to the hospital.”

B took out his pocket knife and cut the horse loose. He held the reins to help him up. He tied the horse to a bush and Tom said, “The truck?”

The truck started slowly, but it started. After putting several bails of hay back into the truck and making a bed of it in the back, they lifted the Mexican onto the back and drove away slowly. An ambulance they weren't, or even could be. They couldn't get the truck out of second gear.

Arriving in Artesia, they pulled up to a filling station and asked for the hospital. The service boy pointed the way, and they were off again. They found the emergency entrance and parked on the road by the driveway. B stayed with the man and Tom ran to get a stretcher. He returned with two men in white smocks and a gurney. The old Mexican waved to the brothers as the attendants took him inside.

“We'd better go in and see to him,” Tom said, staring at the emergency entrance.

“Yeah.” B looked over to his brother as they walked to the entrance. “Our fault.”

After the two reported what had happened to a receptionist nurse, they found a

highway patrolman and his motorcycle back at the truck. He was walking around taking down the license plates and other notes.

“This yer rig?” he asked the two.

“Yes Sir,” responded B.

They told the patrolman the story of the crash.

“We were going back to clean up the mess,” Tom explained.

“Not yet, you don’t. It’s a crime scene. We need to get measurements and pictures. My partner stayed there. I’ll follow you guys back.”

After the patrolmen made their investigation, they wrote out a ticket to B and Tom, whereupon, the brothers cleaned up the highway. They worked on the truck until they could drive it back to Roswell, but they first paid a visit to the hospital and the old man. They paid his bill and brought him some flowers with their apology. After that, they called the office and reported to T. J. what had happened. He was in charge while his dad was in Arkansas. He told them to come on back, and they would get the truck repaired. Tom took a picture of the damaged truck.



Frost Trucking had a garage where they made repairs to their trucks. It took less than a week before the body looked new. Then they repaired the engine and transmission. No one

there blamed B and Tom for the crash, because they knew what it was like to lose a lot of sleep trucking.



After a month of trucking, B and Jim got their draft notices. The Japanese invaded U. S. holdings in the Pacific after bombing Pearl Harbor. It was time to bring down that big stick that the U. S. had been holding in the air since Teddy Roosevelt, and bring it down hard. All of Old Man Frost's boys got drafted, so he returned to run the company. One joined the Navy; the others joined the Army. B joined the Army Air Corps. A preacher named Bonine directed him in that direction. He told him they needed men to work at the Roswell Air Field, and if he joined, he would get to stay in Roswell after completing training in Amarillo. He went to the recruiting station at the airfield and was signed up as a special case, meaning he would be working at the Walker Air Force Base there in Roswell.

Tom received his "Greetings!" notice about a month later. He and a friend, Bert Stock thought they would return to Roswell, but no such luck. They shipped out to Sheppard Field near Wichita Falls, Texas. Tom had hoped to go to an airplane school like his brother, but no luck again. They sent him to a glider mechanic school.

Chapter Three

Boot camp took place in the Roswell Army Flying School. The airfield there was built in 1942, the same year B and Jim graduated from high school. It had taken 25 days to build the field, laying out the cement. The surrounding buildings went up as fast. B and Jim got to stay in Roswell where they learned about being soldiers, how to fight, fire an M-1 rifle, and how to march. Firing a rifle, of course, was not new to them, and they excelled in that. They were drilled each day, running through obstacles and going on long marches with a backpack loaded with stones. They were almost healthy enough to start out but wound up in top condition. When B and Jim were inducted, everyone in their company, the 551st Twin Engine Flying Training Squadron, was given what line of work they would be in. They would become airplane mechanics. After learning the ins and outs of the airplane engine, B was able to choose the B-29 school. That was located in the panhandle of Texas. Of course, Jim had to follow.

B immediately lost his appellation and was called simply Private Murdock. He arrived with Jim and others in an army green school bus they boarded at the Roswell Airfield. They entered a long building where they were stripped and examined from the top of their heads to the bottom of their feet. Everyone received an x-ray and a check with the dentist. They received their billets and chits for clothing and a bed in one of the many bunkhouses. They went through a line with a counter to their left and shelves of clothing behind all painted Army green. Everyone received a bundle of clothes and bedding and filed outside where they lined up in ranks. A sergeant marched them to their bunkhouses where they filed in to find their bunks listed on their chits. Placing their bundles on their bunks, they were

commanded to put all their clothing in the box on their bunk and get dressed in their army clothes.

“Your civies will be sent back to your mommy,” yelled the sergeant. “So if you don’t want to lose’em, make sure you write down the correct address on the box. Place the pencils back into the box on the desk in the back.”

After making up their beds to the specifications shouted out by the sergeant, they were marched out to another building where everyone sat at old-fashioned school desks, scars and all. No one was permitted to talk until they were thoroughly indoctrinated into camp life. Murdock found that everyone in the class was to be called the 551st Twin Engine Squadron. The teacher handed out packets, telling them their schedules, courses of study, rules of conduct, and what they could and could not do on the base. Then he proceeded to read the whole thing to them. They were excused and marched back to their bunks where they were left to themselves.

Jim sang,

“Yer in the Army now,

Yer not behind a plow,

You’ll never get rich

by diggin’ a ditch,

Yer in the Army now.”

Everyone laughed.

“Hey B,” he said, slapping B on the back. “I guess from now on I’ll call you Murdock.”

“I guess so.” B pretended to wipe the sweat off his forehead. “I guess we done it now.”

“We sure the hell did.”

The next guy nearest to them asked, “Where you guys from? Most people call me the Dane ... from Portales.” He reached his hand out and shook Jim and B’s hands. He talked smoothly like a greased wheel.

“Murdock,” said B.

“Hawkins,” said Jim. “We’re both from Roswell.”

“So, yer going to work back home, are you?”

“Yes,” said Hawkins. “We signed the special case clause. We were told they need mechanics there at Walker.”

“You guys mechanics?”

“My brother and I were truckers,” said Murdock, “and had to fix our own rigs.”

“I’m a farmer, so it comes natural,” said Hawkins.

“Me too. It comes natural. With the territory, they say.”

“A-ten-hut!” the sergeant called out. “Everyone form two lines. Everyone in front of their bunks. Roll call and inspection. Everyone that passes will form ranks outside and march over to the mess.”

The sergeant marched up and down the middle of the bivouac, inspecting each soldier and his bunk as he called his name, “Walker, Jones, Finnegan, McKay, Weiser, Thornton, Kaiser, Brannigan, Davis, Gallagher, Smith, James, etc.” The sergeant was shorter than most and had to lift his head back to see each face. Murdock had a temptation to spit on the guy’s

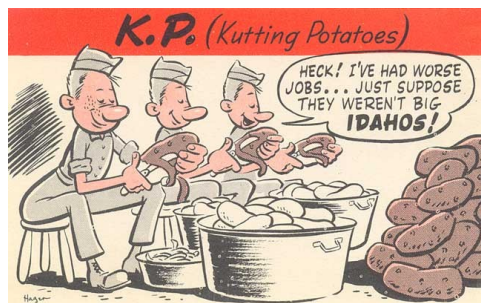
hat as he looked at Murdock's shoes. But he swallowed and stared forward. It was actually fun, he thought, to act like a soldier.

Hawkins and Murdock passed inspection, so they filed out with the others and marched over to the mess hut. Meatloaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, and green beans were the menu of the day. The menu didn't say that the gravy would already be mixed with the potatoes. The cook splashed the potatoes and gravy onto Murdock's tray. It splattered onto his new uniform. The meatloaf was just as juicy. The green beans had one drop of water on them.

Hawkins and Murdock sat near the windows so they could see their food. Both of them poked at the blobs on their trays.

"You think it's edible?" Hawkins asked.

"Well, if it ain't, they got two dead soldiers. I'm hungry." Murdock started gobbling down his food. "It's tasty enough."



On the first day there and Murdock was put on KP. The sergeant picked out all the soldiers with slop on their shirts and turned them over to the cooks. The rest of the troops went out to the field and marched. Murdock figured this was the way the cooks got some help. The soldier serving the food purposely slopped onto his shirt. The four privates were brought to the back of the mess building and were introduced to a twelve-foot pile of potatoes. They were told to peel them. Afterward, they were given mops and buckets and

were made to clean up the whole mess building, including the cement area out back where the potatoes had been.

That night, Hawkins and Murdock were able to take off their boots.

“Oh mio myo!” Murdock complained.

“You said it, brother,” Hawkins agreed. “They must have loaded those backpacks with stones.”

“Weighed a whole ton,” Murdock said as he lay back onto his bunk.

The Dane walked in and climbed to the top of his bunk. “You fellas okay?”

“I think I will just lie here and sleep,” Murdock said, covering his eyes with his arm.

“Demerits if you’re caught sleeping with yer clothes on,” the Dane said, chewing on his Double Mint gum. “You can’t just wad’em up either. They like nice, neat little bundles at the foot of yer bed.”

“What if you kick them off during the night?” Murdock asked. “You gotta train yerself not to move in yer sleep.”

Another soldier walked by. “Don’t give them any lip, Dane. You guys see that locker under the bed? That’s what it’s for. Put yer clothes in there.”

Murdock sat up and looked down between his knees. “Oh, there it is.” He was going to say thanks to the guy but he had walked on.

Hawkins growled at the Dane who chuckled. “Only kidding guys.”

“Hey,” Murdock asked. “How do you come in here all clean and relaxed?”

“Got me an office job.” The Dane grinned. “Actually, I’ve been here a while. I’m sure they put me and a couple of other guys in here to be the salt and pepper.”

“Well, right now,” Hawkins said, “You’re the pepper ... at-chew!”

The Dane only grinned, chuckled, and lay back on his bunk.

Sarge came in, and yelled, “Lights Out! Anyone caught moving an eyelid will be marching the field all night.”

I’m sure he is exaggerating, thought Murdock.

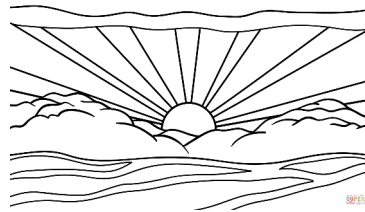
“But Sarge,” one guy down toward the door asked, “what if you have to go to the latrine?”

“Private Carter is it? Hop to!” Sarge yelled, raising his voice to a high pitch. “Hop! Hop! Out the door. Forward march! Run that track out there until I say drop.”

“In my skivvies, Sir?” The thin little guy complained, his eyes opening wide.

“In your skivvies. Hop. Hop. Hop.”

I guess he is serious, thought Murdock.



Every day of the first week of school was a copy of the first day ... marching and KP. It was as if they wanted to test who was physically fit and who was run down. By the weekend, most of the soldiers were breathing easier, even if their loads were not lighter. Only a couple of the guys dropped out. Every morning they marched and ran through obstacle courses. In the afternoon, it was hands-on training for the twin-engine plane.

Murdock ate it up. He couldn't get enough of what would happen if you tweaked this screw, turned this valve, or tightened this joint. The airplane engine was fascinating, how the pistons worked in a circle to pump the props.

After repairing and preening the engines, Murdock and others working on the twin-engine plane would take it up and fly it around the base to check things out. This time it was a Douglas B-18 bombardier trainer. They listened to the engines, the wings and tail stabilizer, and everything else in the plane. They checked all the different meters in the cockpit and all the oil lines. All the levers were turned in every degree of freedom to make sure the connections to the flaps worked.

Murdock was checking one of the lines along the wall and saw a smear of oil on the wall. He was investigating that, finding a possible leak, when the plane banked. He swiveled around on the heel of his right foot and was thrown toward the wide-open loading door. Without thinking, imitating a cat, he caught himself by his fingertips and the toes of his boots. The rest of his body hung out the side of the plane until the plane banked in the other direction, throwing him back against the other side. He grabbed the canvas straps used to hold cargo, stared at the blue sky, clouds, and the horizon, and laughed hilariously.

Mack, one of the pilots, walked back. "What are you laughing at?"

"I almost had to walk home."

The officer went over to the open door and took a leak. He laughed. "Naw. We've never lost one of you mechanics yet."

Murdock wiped his hand across his face. *That was a close call, God. Maybe next time.*

Having the door off and it laying on the ground was a common practice before takeoff. No one paid it any mind. Murdock thought that from now on, he would take all safety precautions before the engines revved up.



The next time someone took the door off one of the planes, Murdock was there to warn the crew.

"Hey, fellers!" Murdock called out. "Someone help me with this door."

"What's wrong with the door?" Bob Lancey asked, leaning to the side and sticking his head out.

Norval Frost stuck his head out and shrugged his shoulders

"Regulations. Help me reattach it."

"We can leave it. Get on board," Bob commanded.

"Not 'til we get the door back on."

"We'll leave and you'll get a demerit."

Norval added, "He's the boss," pointing his thumb at Bob.

The plane's engines started up. Murdock grabbed a red flag off the tarmac and raced to the front of the plane. He waved it wildly and waved his other hand as well. The soldier who was supposed to guide the plane with flag signals came over to Murdock cussing up a storm.

"What's the matter with you numbscull?" The flagman yelled.

"Safety regulations!" Murdock yelled back against the roar of the engines.

The flagman waved another red flag and the pilots stopped the slow forward motion of the plane.

“What?” asked the flagman.

“The door!” Murdock pointed. “The door!”

The flagman saw the door lying on the ground. He signaled the pilots to cut the engines by drawing his finger across his throat.

“Good thinking,” the flagman, a master sergeant, said. “Let’s get that door back on.”

“The trouble is, sir,” Murdock said as they both approached the door, “is that when we are all aboard the plane, there is no one left to put the door back on, so it’s just left there.”

“Well, it looks like you’ll just have to miss this one.”

The two reattached the door, and the flagman signaled to the pilot and gave him the okay. He then gave him the signals to proceed to the takeoff point.

Murdock was left scratching his head, wondering what the captain, his teacher, was going to say.

The flagman said, “Don’t worry. When I make up my reports, they will make sure you have help with the door next time.”

Murdock saluted and said, “Thanks.” He left and went back to the barracks to read a letter from Tom. It had been sent from Wichita Falls. He complained about not being in Roswell with him, but said, “Well,” speaking about the glider school he was in, “it’s a job.”

Back at the barracks, the guys that had gone up on the plane hounded Murdock.

“You got us into a lot of trouble!”

“What are you, a screwball?”

“He’s trying to lick the captain’s ass.”

Sarge came in and broke up the little rabble rally with "A-ten-hut!" He smiled at everyone, looking into each face. "Did you know the Captain is smiling on this lad? Is he the

only one that wants to save his ass and your ass? Cap says everyone will recite the safety rules every night for a whole week until we get to like the rules ... when we obey the rules."

Murdock was shunned, but by the time he was ready to graduate, he had those engines humming and several friends who aspired to be like him. He became an expert in engines and a natural leader. It earned him another chevron.

At the end of basic training and school, all the boys were called back home because Old Man Frost had come home and had a heart attack. Tom, B, Norval, RJ, and TJ all met back in Roswell at the trucking company's shack they called home. Tom and TJ were able to stay a week, but, RJ had to leave for the Pacific in two days. B and Norval had been coming home every night as though being in the Air Corp was an eight-hour-a-day job. The boys spent the nights with each other telling their stories, laughing, smoking, and drinking. By the weekend, Tom, and TJ packed their gear and boarded different buses, one going east, the other two going west. B and Norval just went back to the base there in Roswell.

Madge had been there to take pictures of the group so they could remember this solemn event. She said she would send the pictures along. Old Man Frost was able to come outside for a picture. He was feeling better as the week progressed, but he had to stay down for a month. He couldn't have any alcohol, tobacco, bacon, or butter. Agnes dropped by every day to feed and bathe him and retrieve anything he wanted. She wasn't supposed to, but she let him smoke. If she didn't, he would become very agitated and angry. So to keep the peace, she let him disobey the doctor in this one thing.

B had one more school to go to. He was chosen along with others who excelled in their training. They were to go to Amarillo.

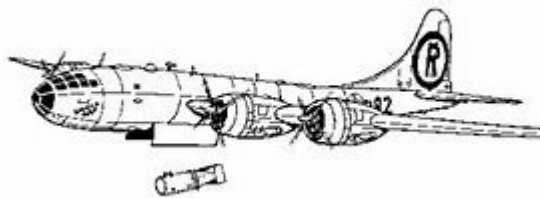


Chapter Four

Amarillo was a small town but harbored a huge airfield. It ran at an angle, pointing southwest toward Roswell. The main highway passing through was Route 66 which was used by tourists and truckers. Main Street displayed large department stores and banks. The truckers stayed on the outskirts where all the truck stops and bars were. With the arrival of the Army, dance halls sprung up like revival tents in the South, with no truckers allowed.

Murdock left Hawkins and Norval Frost back in Roswell. Hawkins went to bombardier school on the west coast. Murdock had received a letter from his brother Tom. He was being sent overseas, somewhere in the Pacific. That meant he would be dealing with the Japs. What an unlucky kid.

Murdock and Norval joined the 551st Double Engine Airplane Squadron. Lessons began the second week after they found out if each soldier was mentally, physically, and scholastically fit. It was all about the B-29 bomber. The drawings in the booklets they handed out showed a rounded face of square glass windows, a large tubular body, and four huge engines, two on each wing. It looked twice as large as her sister, the B-17, the Flying Fortress. It was a long-distance flier.



Murdock was interested in the specs page. His finger ran down the various general characteristics.

“Crew: 11 (Pilot, Co-pilot, Bombardier, Flight Engineer, Navigator, Radio Operator, Radar Observer, Right Gunner, Left Gunner, Central Fire Control, Tail Gunner)

Length: 99 ft 0 in (30.18 m)

Wingspan: 141 ft 3 in (43.05 m)

Height: 27 ft 9 in (8.46 m)

Wing area: 1,736 sq ft (161.3 m²)

Frontal area: 41.16 sq ft (3.824 m²)

Empty weight: 74,500 lb (33,793 kg)

Gross weight: 120,000 lb (54,431 kg)

Max takeoff weight: 133,500 lb (60,555 kg)

135,000 lb (61,000 kg) combat overload”

What was of most interest was the engines:

“Powerplant: 4 × Wright R-3350-23 Duplex-Cyclone 18-cylinder air-cooled turbosupercharged radial piston engines, 2,200 hp (1,600 kW) each

Propellers: 4-bladed constant-speed fully-feathering propellers, 16 ft 7 in (5.05 m) diameter”

But what could it do?

“Performance:

Maximum speed: 357 mph (575 km/h, 310 kn)

Cruise speed: 220 mph (350 km/h, 190 kn)

Stall speed: 105 mph (169 km/h, 91 kn)

Range: 3,250 mi (5,230 km, 2,820 nmi)

Ceiling: 31,850 ft (9,710 m)

Rate of climb: 900 ft/min (4.6 m/s)

Lift-to-drag: 16.8

Wing loading: 69.12 lb/sq ft (337.5 kg/m²)

Power/mass: 0.073 hp/lb (0.120 kW/kg)”

What about the armament?

“The Guns:

8 or 10×.50 in (12.7 mm) Browning M2/ANs in remote-controlled turrets.

2×.50 BMG and 1× 20 mm M2 cannon in tail position (the cannon was later removed).”

The Bombs: It could carry 89.

There seemed to be a regular plate and a Silverplate version which was to be produced in the future.

The B29 was designed to fly at 400 mph when it was not loaded. It was able to fly at 30,000 feet and carry a 2000 lb bomb load 5,000 miles. However, on smaller distances, the B29 was capable of carrying sixteen 500 lb bombs in its after bomb bay and another sixteen 500 lb bombs in its forward bomb bay.

Murdock whistled at the specs, the teacher cleared his throat, and Murdock sat up straight.

Murdock studied repairing the body of the B-29, but he excelled in engine maintenance and repair. He enjoyed taking an engine apart and putting it back together. It was like being at home in the garage at Frost Trucking, working on the truck engines. Only, the pistons in this engine were held within a ring, yet, they were all attached to the drive shaft that ran the propeller. He had learned the general characteristics of it in Roswell. That helped him understand this larger engine.

Saturday nights, everyone left the school and went dancing, even though all Saturday they had been training to be soldiers, marching, digging ditches, playing war games, regular Army stuff. On Main Street, near the center of town, there was a white building that looked like a fortress. It had medieval turrets on each corner and lots of steps leading up to the double doors. It was painted white. It used to belong to the Army was the story, but now it was a dance hall. *Most likely*, thought Murdock, it had been a lodge of some kind. Girls working for the USO greeted the men as they came in. Each soldier (or sailor ... there were a couple of them) would grab a girl and start dancing. Of course, some of the girls made the soldiers go by the rules and sign their books before dancing.

Murdock stood still and looked around when he arrived for the first time.

“Looking for someone special, soldier?” one of the girls asked him.

"No," he said, taking off his hat, folding it, and stuffing it into his shirt. "I don't know how to swing like I see everyone else doing."

“Didn't you go to high school dances?”

Murdock looked her over. She wore a white blouse and a full skirt filled with flowers. She was pretty well filled out, had blond hair, the bone structure of an Indian or German, high cheekbones, and a full bright smile trimmed with blushing red lips. She reminded him of his grandmother, only prettier.

She took his hand and said, “I'll teach you.” And she did. By the end of the night, he was swinging with the best of them. The last dance was a slow one. He danced with a slender brunette. Her name was Brenda. He didn't catch the other girl's name, and when he left that night, she was talking to another soldier, caught Murdock looking at her, winked,

and went on talking to her companion. They seemed rather close, so Murdock went on his way with his comrades.

He came back every Saturday, and the blonde always avoided him. When his time at the school was nearly over, he finally caught her, and she agreed to dance with him in the slow dance.

“Why have you been avoiding me?” he asked.

“You should know the rules by now,” she said, smiling as if she were a big tease, “The girls have to shuffle. They can’t stay with one guy. They’re supposed to move around, get to know all the guys.”

“But I see you with the same guy every time I come.”

“Well, he’s special. He’s my husband.”

“Oh.” Murdock’s face turned red.

“That’s okay. He comes just to keep me straight.”

Murdock thanked the girl whose name he found out was Sally. He didn't see her again.

There were a lot of the girls that didn't mind going out for a drink or going out to the edge of town and parking. One of the girls he went out with was a redhead named Sheela. She had a convertible. They parked on the south side of town, listened to the Glen Miller Band on the radio, and beheld the heavens in all their majesty. Murdock sat there for a while filled with the wonder of the stars. Then he felt a hand on his chest and a head on his shoulder. She kissed his neck. *Uh-oh, what's this?*

Murdock raised his eyebrow and put his arm around the girl. Then he started giggling. He tried to keep calm, but he was feeling a bit giddy and embarrassed.

The redhead withdrew, slamming his chest with her hand. "What are you doing? Don't laugh at me!"

Murdock sobered up. "I wasn't laughing at you." He held her hand. "I'm not very experienced with girls. This is a new thing for me. I was laughing because I was happy you liked me."

"Oh," she said, not knowing what to think. "You're different. I haven't been with a guy like you before."

"Then that makes two of us."

She laughed a little bit, and Murdock smiled.

"Aren't the stars wonderful," he said.

The girl looked up. "Yeah, I guess they are." She paused and stared at them. "I never really noticed. Whenever I've gone out with a guy, I've never had the time to look up." She turned and said, "By the way, my name is Sheila."

"Everyone calls me B."

"Just B?"

"Stands for Bradley. I was named after Dr. Bradley, the doctor who delivered me."

Sheila laughed. "I've never heard of that before."

The two sat there in the convertible under the dome of stars, talking about their lives, where they had been or not been, and what they had done and not done. Pretty soon, they started yawning.

"Better be getting back," Sheila said.

"Yeah. I'll be falling asleep in church tomorrow."

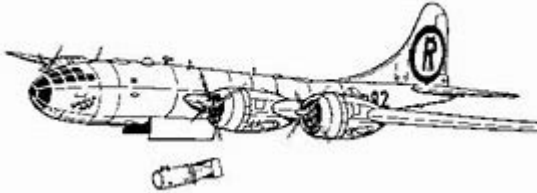
She started up the car. "You go to church?"

“The camp commander makes sure everyone does.”

She raised her eyebrow as she turned the wheel and got back onto the highway. Sheila took Murdock back to the base. They waved at each other. Graduation. Murdock felt like a man for the first time in his life.

Murdock didn't think he could learn the details of how everything worked on those engines within the allotted time, but he did learn a lot about girls.

His experience at the school earned him another chevron. He graduated as a sergeant and went back to Roswell Air Force Base where he expected to use this new knowledge, girls included.



Louiese

Chapter One

Louiese and her friends, Cleo, Wendy, Bill Ferris, Lilly Mae, Lucille, Bill Harden, Melba Jay, and AJ walked out of the theater laughing and talking. Louiese, Lilly, and the boys were slim and trim. The others were medium-sized.

“That was a horrible movie,” Melba Jay said. “That girl being run over by the train.”

“I thought the guy was going to rescue her,” Lillie Mae added.

“But the whole movie was pretty funny,” Louiese said, straightening her hair. “She had to die, or she wouldn’t have been the ghost.”

“The whole point of the story,” Bill Ferris said, completing her thought.

“Well, I still don’t like it,” Melba Jay said, frowning and slumping her shoulders.

“Cheer up, girls.” Bill Hardin smiled wide. “This is Halloween, and we’re going to celebrate the right way. Let’s go to the malt shop and load up on a lot of courage because we are going to the Haunted House.”

“Yeah,” Bill Ferris pointed out. “If that movie wasn’t scary enough, this place will do the trick.”

“I’m not sure, Bill,” Wendy said, hanging onto his arm.

“Oh, don’t be a spoiled sport. I’ll be with you all the way.”

Louiese grabbed Wendy’s other arm. “It will be fun.

At the malt shop, this fun-loving group of kids melted into the other groups of kids, all laughing and having a good time. Some got up and jammed with the jukebox, swinging with Glenn Miller, Count Basie, and Benny Goodman.

A full harvest moon flitted from cloud to cloud, casting shadows of ghouls and witches' faces onto the clouds and streaming long ghostly fingers across the landscape. Like a ship passing through boiling seas, the moon followed the car as it passed scarecrows exhibiting Jack-o-lanterns as heads, their jackets and pants flapping. The lone car raced down the highway, throwing laughter and screams into the wind. A faint train whistle sounded, adding an eerie feeling to the scene.

Two girls rode on the fenders and one on the right running board, having an exhilarating time and laughing. A train whistle, louder now, grew in intensity. Their route to the haunted house crossed the tracks. The passengers inside the car urged the driver on to race the train and cross the tracks before the train did.

“Come on, Bill. You can make it!” the other Bill called out.

The others chanted, "Come on, Bill!"

Everyone acted as though they were drunk, yet no one had tasted any alcohol. The excitement of the race did its worst in blinding the minds of the teenagers. Only Louiese felt a heaviness in her stomach.

The headlight on the train threw a cone of light along the tracks. The double headlights of the car beamed across it.

Slow down, Louiese shouted inside herself.

Bill Ferris turned sharply, the car bumped across the tracks, and Melba Jay was thrown from the right fender. Wendy, riding on the running board and holding onto the frame where the two doors came together, screamed! Bill came to a sudden halt as he slammed on the brakes. The train's shrill horn blew out a warning.

Melba Jay stood and brushed the dust off her dress. She laughed and called out, “Hey! You left ...”

Louiese, staring out the back window, fainted as the train slammed into Melba Jay.

There was another scream from someone.

The train made a heavy clipping sound as it passed.

Louiese, when she regained consciousness, drew her knees up to her chin, and held herself as she leaned against the right-back window. She mumbled, "No ... no ... no," and sobbed.

A. J. stayed with the body of his sweetheart while the rest of the group solemnly climbed into the car. Bill drove back to the nearest gas station and called the police to get help. After answering a bunch of questions, he took the girls home. He and the other Bill went back to retrieve A. J. and meet with the police and ambulance.



Wendy followed Louiese into her bedroom and watched her take her two suitcases out of the closet, throwing them onto her bed. When she opened them and started stuffing them with her clothes, she asked, “What are you doing?”

“I’m going home,” Louiese sniffled.

“What about your job? You can’t just leave. You need to tell someone.” Wendy crossed her arms.

"Damn the job. They can have their blankity blank job." Louiese stood up after she closed one of the suitcases and wiped the sweat from her forehead. As Wendy was standing next to her, she grabbed her best friend and sobbed on her shoulder.

Wendy gave her a big hug and shed some tears herself.

After the family talked Louiese into staying one more night, she got into bed and slept as though someone had knocked her out. Wendy had to wake her for breakfast.

"You look drained," Wendy said as she helped her cousin get onto her feet. She gave her bathrobe to her and said, "Come have some coffee. That will perk you up a bit."

Aunt Leota greeted her in the kitchen and hugged her. "I'm sorry for your friend, but you don't have to go home. You have family here."

Louise sat down at the table. "Her body was so mangled you couldn't tell who she was anymore."

Uncle Leige gave her a stern look, holding his fork in the air with the underside of the prongs facing her. "Now, we will not speak of it here at the table."

"I guess all we Bonines are alike." Her uncle wiped his mouth with his napkin and rose from the table. "Got to get to work." He walked over to Louiese. "Heard yer leaving?"

"Yes," she said with a shudder in her voice.

"Come here."

Louiese stood and embraced her uncle. "Uncle Leige. I'll be back." She looked him in the eye. "Unless you want to move to Roswell."

"Huh!" He smiled. "Too settled." He kissed her. "I'll miss you, Sissy. Take care, and God bless."

Louiese sat back down. She could hear conversations in the background. She poked at her eggs and bacon and ate a bite of toast. She sighed. She rose from her chair. "Can't stay."

"Your uncle will give you a lift," Aunt Leota said. "Give me a hug."

Louiese gave her aunt one more long hug and was out the door. Uncle Leige carried her luggage to the car.

Wendy escorted her. She hugged her cousin and kissed her on the cheek. Another car drove up to the curb. "Have to go. Take care. Love you."

"Love you too."

Wendy walked out to the car and crawled in.

One of the girls from her work called from the car. "Louiese! Aren't you coming?"

"Going home. Wendy will explain it."

"You'll miss your paycheck."

"Wendy will send it. Bye."

The girl waved out the window as they drove off.

As they set off for the train station, Louiese felt compelled to confess to her uncle. She told him the whole story of what had happened.

“We were all having such a gay time. How silly we were. There wasn’t enough room for all of us, and we all wanted to go to the haunted house. There was a girl on each fender and one on the sideboard. We were all yelling to Bill to go faster. It was a thrill. We would always do things for a thrill just to get the war off our minds, or in this case, try to cheer up Melba Jay.” Louiese sighed. “But we killed her.”

“Don’t you think Melba Jay was just as much at fault as anyone?” Uncle Leige said, not taking his eyes off the road. The traffic was heavy in the mornings, and he had to be careful.

“Maybe so, but I can’t bear to be here anymore with her ghost haunting the place.”

“I see what you mean. When you leave, remember to leave Melba Jay with us. We’ll take good care of her.”

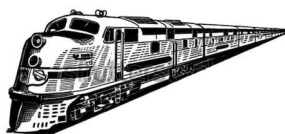
“I will.”

They arrived at the Union Station in Los Angeles, parked, grabbed the suitcases, and went in to get tickets.

“It’s all right. Foremen are always late.”

Uncle Leige gave her a kiss and a hug after he got her settled onto the train. They heard the all aboard call, and he jumped off the train, waving as it took off.

Louiese sat on her seat and stared out the window. She waved until she couldn’t see her uncle anymore and sighed. He was another departing soul.



Louiese read the magazine she had bought one day. It was full of pictures of the war. It wasn't very inspiring. When she laid it down, the woman across from her handed her a Bible.

"I think you will find this more interesting," she said. She appeared to be in her sixties with short, curly, graying hair from underneath her flat beige beret with a feather in it.

Louiese accepted the book graciously. She tried to smile, but she wept instead. The woman smiled and patted Louiese's knee.

As she read from the Bible, Louiese remembered her father. It made her even more homesick.

"Going home?" the woman asked.

"Yes."

"I thought so." She paused to do some more knitting. "It's always good to go home."

Louiese nodded. She kept reading until she dropped off to sleep. When she awoke, it was dark in the train car, and the Bible had fallen to the floor, or so she thought. She couldn't find it down there, so she moved her foot around to see if she could feel it. She accidentally hit the lady's foot.

The lady grunted.

"I'm sorry," Louiese said politely. "I think I dropped your Bible."

"My what?"

"Your Bible. The one you gave me."

"I gave you no Bible. I was asleep until you kicked my foot." The lady fluffed her pillow against the window, hit her head with it a couple of times, and tried to go back to sleep. Then Louiese found the Bible on the seat next to her.

The train passed a telephone pole with a light attached. It lit the lady's face. She was different, a little heavy, with round, hound-dog jowls that hung from her jaw. She clung onto a basket with overly large handles. She started snoring as the light passed back into the darkness.

Louiese gasped. She looked around to see if she could see the other woman with the Bible. She was not to be seen. She must have gotten out at the last town, she thought.

When the porter walked by, Louiese whispered, "What was that town we passed?"

"There was no town, Ma'am," he said as he bent down so he could whisper. "We haven't stopped since we left Pasadena."

"I was just wondering where the woman went to that was sitting in front of me. I want to return her Bible."

"There she be, Ma'am," he said, pointing to the heavy woman leaning against the window.

"I mean the other woman, older."

"No Ma'am. That's the woman that was there when you boarded."

"Hmm. I'm sorry. I must have been dreaming."

"Yes'm."

The porter continued walking down the car, leaving Louiese puzzled as to who gave her the Bible. She put her legs up onto the seat, took the pillow the porter had previously given her, leaned against the window with it, and went back to sleep.

The next morning, Louiese opened the front cover of the Bible. She thought she could see if it had the name of the lady. Instead, she read, "To Louiese, with love, Melba Jay." She dropped the book like a hot potato. Then she took it up and held it to her bosom and sobbed.

Louiese spent the day searching her scriptures to find what she could about angels.



In a couple of days, she arrived at Deming where she transferred to a Greyhound bus. It wasn't long before she was in Roswell, the flickering landscape still running by her in her mind. She staggered as she stepped off the bus. The bus driver caught her.

"A little car sick, I think. I'll be all right as soon as my brain calms down."

"Staring out the window is hypnotizing," he said. "You'd better sit down over here."

"Okay. Thank you."

"Ticket? I'll get your luggage and bring it to you."

"Thank you."

After Louiese caught her breath, she carried her bags inside and went to a phone booth.

Louiese fed the phone a nickle and dialed the long-familiar number of home. There was a click and her mother's voice, "Hello?"

"Hi Mom, I'm here at the bus depot."

"Okay. I'll get Estel to come and get you."

Ruby couldn't drive. She'd never tried to learn. Maybe it was her generation. It was funny that a farm girl never learned to drive. *I guess she always had someone else drive her.*



Estel made quick time getting there. He tended to drive over the speed limit. He was surprised at Louiese quitting her job and coming home a spinster. He was hoping she would meet some lucky guy and marry him. Maybe she still had a bad taste in her mouth from the last marriage. It was his own mistake thinking she could marry and settle down. She had proved to be too young. *Maybe she will grow up soon.*

Chapter Two

Louiese woke up the next morning wondering where she was. She looked around. *Oh yes. My old bedroom.* She heard someone in the kitchen. Maybe it was only her parents. As she sat up, her yawning was interrupted.

“If it isn’t the new girl in town,” Mimi said, barging into the room.

“Oh, control the volume, will you?”

“You don’t have a hangover, Sissy,” Mimi said, rummaging around in her drawers.

“You don’t even know what that is.”

“I’ve seen it in the movies.” Louiese stretched as she rose.

“Better not let Mom and Dad hear you say that.”

“I know. They’re against movies, dancing, and swearing.”

Mimi, holding the clothes she found, gave her little sister a hug. “But we don’t tell about those things, do we?”

“No. All your secrets are kept locked away in my heart.” She kissed Mimi.

“Welcome back.” Mimi opened the bedroom door as Louiese slid into her bathrobe.

“You taking a shower?”

“Yes.”

“Mind if I join you?”

“The more the merrier.”

Louiese didn’t like sharing the shower. It wasn’t like sharing the tub when they were little. But at least she got her back scrubbed and her hair washed. She returned the favor and

washed Mimi's hair and back. They took turns rinsing off, and Louiese stepped out and dried herself. She left Mimi in the shower and slipped into the bedroom to get dressed.

Louiese meandered towards the kitchen. She slumped down into a kitchen chair made of metal tubing and placed her hands on the matching table as if for inspection.

"Coffee, black please."

"You usually put a ton of sugar in yer coffee," her mother said, pouring coffee into a cup. She brought it over to her returned prodigal. "Here you go, dear."

"I don't feel very sugary this morning."

Ruby sat down beside Louiese, bringing her own coffee, her second cup for the morning. "Did you know her parents?" She took a sip.

"No. She was just a school friend." Louiese sighed.

"I heard there is a job down at the bank. They're looking for a secretary."

Mimi came in, drying her hair with her towel. "I know a job just right for you, Sissy."

"What?"

"Telephone operator. I know one, a customer of mine at the Beauty School. She said there are always people quitting. A large turnover."

Mimi sat down and let her mother comb her hair and make curls with bobby pins.

"Maybe in a couple of days. I have to get my land legs." Louiese stared at her coffee.

"What's land legs?" Ruby asked herself out loud. "I know. Leige used to speak of that when he was in the Merchant Marines. He said after being out at sea for a while when he came ashore, his legs would wobble a bit."

After a few strokes through Mimi's hair, no one said anything in response, so she asked Louiese, "You said in your letter you were dating a sailor."

“Andy Purse.” Louiese giggled. “He was a thrill, always joking and laughing.”

“I imagine he could swear like they all do,” Ruby said, trying to get a tangle out of Mimi’s hair.

Mimi winced. “Use a comb, for Pete’s sake.”

“Now that’s almost the Lord’s name. Not quite, but almost,” Ruby warned.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t worry,” Ruby said. “You’ll look cute for school.”

“Anything to eat?” Louiese asked.

“Got your appetite back? That’s good. You’ll have the strength to go apply for that job.”

Louiese rose, saying, “Oh, Mother.”

The telephone office was a thin two or three-story, but the white marble facade prevented one from telling. There were three-dimensional stripes near the center line that ended in a two-tier gable. Two dark windows in the center of the facade stared down at people as they came up the marble steps, shaped as descending concentric arcs.

Louiese hesitated at the large double glass doors. A woman hurried out the door almost bumping into her. The door closed slowly, inviting Louiese to step through, which she did with butterflies in her stomach.

There was a receptionist straight ahead. She walked over slowly and grabbed the edge of the tall marble desk for support. “I heard there was a job opening?” she asked.

The girl handed her an application. “Over there.” She pointed with her nose. “There are pencils on the table.”

Louiese saw a couple of tables near the window on the north side of the door. There was another girl filling out her papers. She sat across from her and read the application in a couple of glances and then quickly filled in the blanks. For experience, she made sure she wrote down “receptionist.”

Taking the paper back to the desk, a tall skinny woman with her long hair up in a bun approached her. “I’ll take that. Follow me.”

The lady glanced at the application, walked down the hall, and opened a frosted glass door. “In here.”

Louiese was ushered into a small room with a desk and two chairs, one on either side of it. The lady sat in the one behind and motioned her to sit in the other.

Glancing again at the application, this time, more carefully, she asked, “Can you start right away?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

The lady wrote something on a small piece of paper, handed it to her, and said, “Show this to the girl on the other side of that door. She’ll take you to the prep room.”

Louiese took the paper from the lady and looked at it as she walked over to the north door. The paper had a four-digit number on it. Nothing more. *Must be in code.* She went through the door and found a waist-high, dark wood, desk with a girl sitting behind it. She gave the paper to the girl. She glanced at it, rose from her stool, grabbed a packet from some metal shelves behind her, and said, “Come with me.” By this time, Louiese was feeling like a commodity.

She was taken to a small classroom where there were several girls waiting at old wooden desks. She was told to sit down and wait. After

a while, other girls showed up, and then a teacher walked in and wrote on the blackboard. “Mrs. Walker.” Louiese recognized her as the first woman she met.

After two hours, Louiese knew to say “ny-yawn” instead of “nine,” “yellow” instead of “hello,” and other pronunciations that befitted a telephone operator. The packet had been full of explanations of how to use a switchboard, what to say to people on the line, where to plug the jack, which hole to plug it into, and what the little codes were that appeared below each hole. One of the students, a tall girl wearing glasses and short hair commented in a whisper behind Louiese, “You plug the male end into the female end.”

Louiese grinned.

After class, the girl behind her introduced herself. “I’m Madge. Short for Margaret.”

“I’m Louiese. Everyone I know calls me Sissy.”

“So ... what-d-ya-think?”

“Well, I’ve been a receptionist before. I guess this is the same setup, just more complex.”

“As far as them treating you as a human being, it will be a step down, I believe.”

There was a tap on the teacher’s desk. “Before everyone forgets anything, let’s proceed to the next room where you’ll practice what I’ve gone over with you.”

The girls filed into another room where there was an old-style switchboard at which they would spend another hour.

“I’ve got to take a potty break,” Madge whispered to Louiese.

“I don’t see one,” Louiese said, looking this way and that way.

“Everyone take a seat. This is real life, girls. You won’t have a break until you’re through here.”

The girls learned how to be nice to irate callers, and anyone who couldn’t get the jack in fast enough and in the right place was let go. Mage and Louiese passed the test with ease. Maybe they thought if they could go fast enough, they would be able to get a break soon.

After all the tests were over, there was a long line at the restroom. When Madge and Louiese exited, Madge said, “Am I ever relieved!”

“Me too,” Louiese laughed.

Arriving at the front door, Madge couldn’t help crying out, “Have I got a boy for you!”

“What?” Louiese couldn’t believe what this girl was saying. She felt she hadn’t known her long enough for such a conversation.

“Not what. Who.” Madge shoved the door open and led the way out. “My brother. Not the young one ... my big brother. Not that he’s older than me, just taller. He’s in the Army Air Corps right here in Roswell. He comes home every night, not like the regular Army, staying at a barracks and all that. He’s really neat. You need to come over and meet him. He’s just right for you.”

The two started walking down Main Street towards the south of town.

“How’d we get on *this* subject?” Louiese asked.

“The first time I saw you, I knew. I just knew. You two are made for each other.”

Louiese stopped before they came to the corner. She laughed a little and said, “Well, I guess we’ll be working together.”

“Yes sir. I think we’ll be good friends, too. I like you.” She reached over and pinched Louiese’s bottom. “And I know my brother will too.”

Louiese didn’t know what to think Madge. She was a bit forward, and she felt a bit invaded. “I guess I’ll see you tomorrow. I live in the opposite direction. I was just tagging along like a puppy.” She laughed suddenly and said, “Bye.”

“Bye-bye. See ya tomorrow.”

The two girls parted, and Louiese’s step seemed lighter somehow. As she walked along and came to the city park where the Hondo River divides the north and south parts of town, she thought of the idea of meeting Madge’s brother. A chill ran up her neck. She stopped and put her hand behind her head and just held it against her neck. *What was that all about?*

Louiese walked into the front door of the caliche rock-covered cottage. Ruby sat in her comfy chair knitting. “Well? Did you get the job? You were gone the whole day.”

“I won’t be here tomorrow either. I’m now a stamped, registered, and trained switchboard operator.” She threw her purse onto the couch and sat down. “I met a weird girl named Madge. She wants me to marry her brother. He is probably someone the family wants to get rid of.”

Ruby laughed. “Probably is an old bachelor.”

“Yeah.”

Louiese didn’t tell anyone that she felt like her life had taken a turn. She wondered where she was headed. She almost felt like reading the Bible.

“Yummy. Something smells good in the kitchen.” She sat on the end of the couch close to her mother.

“A couple of women from the church came over this morning after you left. They gave us a roast. It’s been cooking all day.”

“I’m so hungry ... and tired. I wasn’t tired until I got home.”

Mimi came through the door, letting the screen door slam. “I’m home, family.”

She sat down next to Louiese, smelling like chemicals. “Sissy. Let me do your hair tonight after dinner. I learned a new hairdo at school.”

“Not in the mood right now.”

“After dinner?”

“Oh well. Nothing better to do ... if it’s not outlandish.”

“It’s cute. You’ll be surprised.”

Ruby laughed again. “I hope she won’t be too surprised.”

Mimi grinned, stood, and gave her mother a mock mean look. “Oh, I’m sure.”



Old Man Frost acquired his name about the time he had his heart attack. He was living in the office of his business at the time. Agnes moved back with him to take care of him. She felt responsible since she was still married to him. He couldn’t hurt her while he was lying down. After moving in, she rearranged the furniture and turned the office into a home. The house was set up like a trailer home with not much more room. Starting with the east end, there was a workroom, two bedrooms on the south side of the hall, a kitchen in the middle and on the north side with the bathroom south of it, a dining room into which Old Man Frost had put together a picnic table which took up the whole the room, a living room, and then the master bedroom on the west

end. It had a door to the outside. The workroom had a door on the east side, and the entrance was in the middle with access to the bathroom, kitchen on the left, and the dining room on the right.

B and Norval slept here at night, while working at the airfield during the day. So when Madge asked Louiese to meet her brother B, this is where they met.

When Louiese first met B, she and Madge sat for a long time on the sofa. She listened to endless one-sided conversation until B walked in with his friend from High School days, Jim Hawkins. The friend had come home from the war in the Pacific. Louiese noticed he had lost his right leg. He told her later that he had stepped on on a mine. He walked with crutches, but that didn't deter him from flirting with the girls. B proved to be shy when he was with Jim, so he let his friend take over the conversation.

“Love the Army,” Jim said as he sat next to Louiese on the couch. He put his left arm around her. “They give you such an opportunity to meet pretty nurses. I think they do that to perk you up. And when they want to get you out of bed, they send in the bugle badger. I call her a bugle badger because when she comes into the ward, her voice sounds like a bugle, and she acts like a badger.” He laughed. He made Louiese smile.

During the long one-sided conversation in which Jim talked about the war and the Japs, Louiese caught herself glancing at B who sat there on the other side of the small room in his mother's big chair, smiling.

Madge had been in the kitchen fixing dinner all by herself. She came in and announced, “Dinner is ready. I'm sorry there's no dinner table. You'll have to eat at the picnic table if you can fit.”

Madge served fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and Mexican-style beans. B had sat opposite Louiese. Madge sat between Louiese and Jim since Jim had to excuse himself. He said he had to wash his hands, but he was in the bathroom a little longer than that.

“I’m sure I’ve seen you before,” B said to Louiese after gnawing on a chicken leg.

“Small town.”

“Yeah.”

Jim tried to butt into the conversation, but he couldn’t get Louiese’s attention, so he turned to Madge. Then there were two independent conversations.

The next day, Madge met Louiese at the back door of the telephone building where they let the workers in.

“Well? Do you like him?” Madge asked enthusiastically.

Louiese blushed. “He is cute.”



Madge hit Louiese's ribs with her elbow. “You love him, don’t cha. Come on, tell me you love him.”

Louiese repeated, shyly, “He’s really cute.” She giggled.

As they were let in, the sun started its journey across the sky, slowly peeping through the window, spreading its bright orange blanket down the long hallway.

The two friends headed to the elevator and then to their switchboards. “Come on, tell me you love him,” echoed against the walls.

“It’s too soon to tell. See ya at break,” she whispered loudly.

Chapter Three

The first date with B was at the Dairy Queen. They sat outside the little white building next to the west wall at small red picnic tables licking their ice-cream cones. Louiese had previously dated Jim just to be kind before he had to leave to go back to the west coast to get a prosthetic. She had called him Jimmy on the second date, and on this first date with B, she must have not noticed it was a different guy. She slipped and called him Jimmy. B stared at her at first, but he didn't defend himself, he just let her call him that name. He wasn't offended; he may have thought it was strange, but he soon forgot it and just stared at the most beautiful face he had ever seen. At least, she made him forget all the other beautiful girls he had dated since he entered puberty.

“Been to the Bottomless Lakes?” B asked, biting into his cone.

“All the time.” She glanced at him with smiling eyes. She licked her cone to get the drips off and then bit into it.

“How do you get there?”

“I go with the Dennis's.”

“Who are they?”

“Family friends from my dad's church.”

“Your dad's a preacher?”

“Yes. He's also a carpenter. He works on the base.”

“What's his name? I've heard of a preacher/carpenter there on the base building housing.”

“Estel Bonine.”

“Yep.” B licked and ate more of his cone. “Why haven’t I ever seen you at the Bottomless Lakes before?” B gave a mock smile.

“I don’t know. I have been in California for a few years.”

“What did you do there? Go to school?”

“No, worked in an airplane factory for the war effort.”

“Oh, then we have something in common. If I see a fault, I’ll know where it came from.”

Louiese slapped his arm. He laughed. “I’ll tell the guys my girlfriend didn’t know how to put in the rivets.”

“Girlfriend?” Louiese asked, tilting her head, sticking her tongue out into a point and into the bottom of her cone.

“Yeah.” He smiled shyly. He looked at her tongue in her cone and commented, “Bottomless Lake?”

She stuck her face out and grinned.



Glenn Dennis and his girl Kathy picked Louiese and Jim up at his mother’s place on the Dexter Highway. They headed out to the Bottomless Lakes to meet up with the rest of the Dennis family. Madge was also invited, and she didn’t say no. Her transportation had been limited, and anytime she could go to the lakes, she went. It was *the* place to meet boys.

The shower rooms were all rock walls and cement floors and smelled like chlorine. You were required to take a shower before you went to the pool. If you came out dry, you were sent back in. There was also a small

wading pool filled with chemicals at the exit. As you stepped outside, you washed your feet. If it was in the evening or you didn't want to go into the pool, you took your towel with you and quickly dried off.

But if you stepped into the cold pool, you had to be prepared for it with a cold shower. It was different in the natural lakes. The water was a bit warmer. They were out in the sun and absorbed the heat.

The Dennis kids dove into the pool one by one, swam to the other side, and went to the neighboring lake. They went two by two, boyfriend and girlfriend, and got into boats or water bikes that you could peddle. The exception was Bonnie and Jewel. They liked to go together.

Louiese and Jim were too late to get a boat, so they went swimming in the lake. Instead of swimming, which she was proficient at, Louiese just lay on her back and floated. She could use her arms and hands as oars to move from place to place. She would go out to the string of floats, hang on and look around or talk to the family as they passed by in their watercraft. She stayed in the area roped off for swimmers.

Among the background of laughter, a few screams and a rumble of conversations, Glenn and Kathy peddled over to Louiese.

"You and Jim want to ride?" Glenn asked. "Kathy and I want to go lounge around at the pool for a while."

"Come on," Jim said enthusiastically as he swam up to Louiese's side. "Let's go."

They ducked down under the rope of floats and grabbed hold of the water bike. Glenn and Kathy jumped off into the water and swam under the rope.

"Thanks, you two," Louiese said, turning around to wave.

Jim climbed aboard and tried to help Louiese on, but the water bike started tipping.

“You stay on that side of the bench,” Louiese directed. “I can climb aboard then.”

Jim grabbed her arm as she climbed aboard. She had to lean over into his lap to get herself on, and he kissed her as she did. She didn’t react, and he just smiled and laughed with his mouth closed with a little “humph.”

“Here we go,” he said.

Looks like it, she said to herself as she thought about the kiss. She stared at the side of his face. He looked forward, not saying a thing. They held onto the steering bar and peddled as fast as they could. Jim eventually put his arm around her when they arrived in the middle of the lake. It was surrounded by a dark cliff of caliche as though the hill was throwing its arms around the lake.

“Want to see the lake bottom?” Jim challenged.

“I thought it didn’t have a bottom.”

“Oh, it’s got a bottom all right. It’s filled with all kinds of trash from thousands of miles away in the ocean.”

“What makes you think that?” Louiese took her swimming cap off and put it on again to get all of her hair in.

“It makes you look bald,” Jim said with a wide grin.

“Well, that’s flattering,” she said derisively.

Jim dived down under the water bike and shook it.

“Don’t you do that!” She screamed as though he could hear.

Louiese must have sat there alone for about three minutes or more before Jim came up about twenty feet away. He swam back to the bike, huffing and puffing.

“Didn’t know I could hold my breath that long,” he said as he climbed aboard.

“Don’t you ever do that again!”

Jim saw tears covering her face. He slowly put his arm around her, wiping the tears away with his rough hand. “I’m sorry. I was lost. I couldn’t find my way to the surface.” He laughed. “Thought I was a goner.”

Louiese looked away. “Take me back.”

“Come on,” he asked. “Let’s both have a dip. You can hold onto the bike if you like. It will be fun. Just look down into the black hole.”

“I don’t want to look down into a black hole. You’re crazy. I didn’t know what had happened to you, whether you were alive or dead. I didn’t want to see your dead body float to the surface. I couldn’t stand it.” She peered out towards the buildings. “Take me back.”

When they got back, Louiese went to get dressed.

Jim went up to Jewel. “What’s with her?” He explained what had happened.

“She just recently lost a friend,” she said, holding onto the ends of her towel wrapped



around her neck. “It was out in California. She hasn’t really gotten over it.”

“I’m sorry. I guess I need to be careful.”

“Don’t do that. Better act natural. She’ll know you’re bluffing.”

The ride back to Roswell would have been long and silent if Glenn hadn’t pulled into the filling station at the top of Comanche Hill. A couple of other cars followed. Jim opened the door and planted his big feet onto the cement and stretched. The Dennises didn’t know that the owner was Jim’s Uncle Ed. So when he came out and greeted Jim with a slap on the back,

they were surprised.

“B! How’re ya doin’?” Uncle Ed grabbed Jim’s hand and shook it rapidly.

“Fine.” He turned to Glenn who came out also. “Glenn, this here’s my Uncle Ed Singleton. Uncle, this here’s my ride for the night, Glenn Dennis. He and Kate there,” he said as Kate waved from the shotgun seat, “are friends of Louiese, my girlfriend.”

Uncle Ed looked toward the back window where Louiese sat, but she slunk down, not wanting to be in the limelight. He didn’t pursue the matter.

“Been out to the lakes, have ya? Y’all look sunburnt.” Ed stood by the gas pump and grabbed the handle. “What’ll it be?”

“Just fill’er up with Ethel,” Glenn said.

“Too bad she can’t be here tonight,” Ed said, poking the spout into the car’s receptacle.

“You say that every time I come up here,” Glenn said with his hands in his pockets, shuffling his feet.

“Know yer face. Know yer face,” Ed said with a friendly smile. “Never forget a face.”

Jim sauntered into the little store and looked around. While everyone was getting themselves a Coke, he was looking for a little gift for Louiese to cheer her up. He saw a round basket of crystals at the cash register with a sign over it: "Pecos diamonds." There was a card underneath it that read, *The Artesia Group is also known for small, doubly terminated quartz crystals found in the gypsum outcrops of the Seven Rivers Formation. These unusual crystals range in size from microscopic to 6.5 cm in length; the average length is 2.5 cm. The crystals vary from transparent to translucent, and the translucent crystals are white to red and yellow to nearly black. The crystals are found in the vicinity of the Pecos River; the northernmost locality is at Overton Ranch near the community of*

Dunlap in De Baca County and the southernmost locality is near Artesia, a north-south distance of about 110 miles. These crystals are most likely formed by low-temperature solutions that permeated the gypsum beds and replaced the gypsum with the silica in the fluids. The morphology of the crystals from simple prismatic to rhombohedral shapes is consistent with a replacement origin. Most of the crystals have incompletely developed facets that also indicate a replacement origin. Well-formed dolomite crystals also grew in the Seven Rivers Formation.

Jim saw some simple necklaces hanging above the basket. They had pendants made of the Pecos diamonds. He took a couple of Pecos diamonds from his pocket and put them into the basket, grabbing one of the necklaces in exchange.

As everyone was saying goodbye to his uncle and climbing back into their cars, Jim said, showing his uncle the necklace, "I upped your supply."

"That's all right B. You take care. Give my love to my sis when you see her."

"Will do, and thanks."

As they were driving back, Jim took the necklace out of his shirt pocket and let the pendant drag over the bare part of Louiese's shoulder towards her neck. She jerked.

"What the ...!"

Jim held up the necklace. The full moon outside was at the right angle to shine through the translucent Pecos gem. She turned her back to him. He thought she was still upset at him.

She pulled her hair to the front. "Well?" she asked. "Aren't you going to put it on me?"

Jim's heart turned a hundred pounds lighter. He carefully put the pendant in front of her and brought the two ends of the necklace around and clasped them

together. She turned around and kissed him.

“Thank you,” she said, examining it in the moonlight.

Jim put his arm around her. She put her head on his shoulder.

“Jewel said she explained about my feelings.”

“I am sorry, you know.”

“Yes, I know.”

They settled into each other and enjoyed the nice ride home with soft music coming from the radio. Kate’s head was on Glenn’s shoulder also. The bright moon followed the car. There was a sigh in the back seat. All was well.



Jim and Louiese dated regularly, whenever he could get off the base. There was a rumor going around the base that President Truman was going to bomb Japan. They would use B-29s to do it because they were long-distance bombers and some of them would require maintenance as they stopped over here in Roswell. Therefore, they needed Sergeant Murdock to work long hours. He did get every other Sunday off, however, and he and Louiese spent a lot of time at the Dennis's and the Bottomless Lakes. Since movies were forbidden by the parents of the clan, they would also hang around the Dairy Queen. But the war news was shown in the theaters, and sure enough, not telling Mom and Dad, they saw President Truman announce the bombing of Japan. They had more news about what Harry Truman was doing for America than Japan, and decades would pass before Jim would find out that he was related to the guy. One of those long-lost cousins.



Jim found himself spending most Sundays at the Bonines for Sunday dinner and the evenings at the Dennis's. There was one Sunday the Dennis's were out of town, so Louiese and Jim stayed "home" that evening. It did feel like home to Jim. He felt comfortable with Reverend Bonine and his wife Ruby. They did not act self-important. One wouldn't know he was a preacher unless you saw him at church.

Dinner was always fried chicken with potato salad in the summer, and mashed potatoes in the winter.

Rev. Bonine didn't talk much at the table, but smiled and looked into Jim's soul. Jim didn't have a lot to feel guilty about, so he got along fine with the Reverend. Of course, Jim didn't talk a lot either unless he had to answer a question.

"Where did you come from?" Estel asked, grabbing another biscuit.

"I was born right here in Roswell," Jim said, grabbing his iced tea as though the table were going to shake.

"You got folks here?" Ruby asked.

"Yes," Jim answered. He took a gulp of his tea and said, "My grandparents are down in Dexter. My mom owns some houses in East McGuffey. She lives in one of them, my grandparent's former house next to the reservoir. There's farmland back in there that both my parents and grandparents worked."

"Yer lucky," Estel said, pouring molasses onto his biscuit.

"Why's that?" Jim asked, digging into the other chicken leg.

"Yer working at the Air Force Base, aren't you?" Ruby asked, taking over the conversation.

"Yeah." Jim smiled and sighed at the same time.

“Well, a lot of them soldiers would like the setup you have.” Ruby spooned more potatoes and gravy into her mouth.

Louiese wanted to kick Mimi’s leg for making googly eyes at Jim but she was too far away, sitting right next to him. “Jimmy’s going to take me out to the lakes afterward. We won’t be gone long.”

“First I heard of it,” Jim whispered to himself.

“It’s gettin’ dark soon,” Ruby suggested.

“Mama,” Mimi interjected, “they want to be alone for a while.”

Estel smiled. He knew what was going on.

Everyone rose from the table, making the dishes, forks, and spoons rattle. Louiese grabbed Jim’s arm and dragged him out the door. Estel, Ruby, and Mimi stood in the doorway, watching the two love birds leave in one of Old Man Frost’s trucks.

“Wonder if she’s going to pop the question,” Mimi said, giggling.

“I wonder myself,” Ruby said.

“Don’t know,” Estel commented. “He seems to be too shy to do so.”

The tires squealed as Jim pulled out onto the street. Jim and Louiese faced Comanche Hill before they knew it. The truck’s long pointed shadow preceded them up the hill. Louiese cuddled up against Jim, holding onto his muscular arm.

The sun was setting at the Lakes, turning the surrounding cliffs red. Jim took the truck to one of the northern lakes away from the crowd. The truck stopped near the edge. It seemed to be a round hole cut into the earth and filled with cool water. The diameter was no more than five hundred to eight hundred feet max, butting up against the curved red caliche cliff. Mesquite trees

dotted the landscape with a few cholla cactus here and there. The dirt was sandy.

Jim looked into Louiese's dreamy eyes. "Got that old army blanket we used last time at the picnic. It's in the back."

Louiese just nodded.

Jim retrieved the blanket and placed it on the shore of the lake facing the cliff. Louiese opened the old door. It creaked. She slid out onto the sand and walked over to the lake. She slipped her shoes off. The water felt refreshing in the sweltering heat.

"I wouldn't go too far," Jim said, standing near the blanket. "You'll plummet ten feet or more."

Louiese stared at the stars blinking on, one by one, as the earth's shadow engulfed the landscape. All of a sudden, she heard a splash.

"Last one in is a monkey's uncle!" It was Jim. He was in the water and bare naked.

Louiese laughed hilariously. "Wait for me!"

She stripped, threw her clothes onto the blanket, and dove in. "I don't have my swimming cap!"

"You don't have your bathing suit, girl."

Swimming circles around him, she paid him no mind. They both swam to the cliff edge where the water was deep and stared at each other, giggling.

"Come on," Jim said. "I'll race you back."

Jim touched the shore first, lifted himself out, and reached for Louiese's hand.

"Not yet." She stayed in the water and did her floating trick.

Jim jumped back in. The water felt good in the hot weather, but it was getting colder. He tried to float like she was, but his bottom sank.

“How do you do that?” he asked.

“It’s easy for a girl. They have a layer of fat men don’t.”

Jim moved up close to her. “I guess that’s what makes you so soft.”

She splashed water on his face. He dunked her, and when she came up, he grabbed her and held on. Louiese gently put her head on his shoulder. A long time passed as they stood there in the water upright and floating.

Louiese stared into Jim’s eyes. He smiled and kissed her. Without thinking, they moved to the shore. He helped her out, and they got dressed in silence. They sat on the blanket.

“It won’t be long before we’re dry,” he said.

She sat between his legs and let him hold her. They watched the stars.

It was late when Louiese tip-toed in. Her mother was asleep in her big chair near the couch. She closed the door without any noise, but as she walked carefully across the carpet to the hallway, Ruby woke up.

“Louiese?”

“Yes, Mother.”

“Come over here, darlin’”

“Is Daddy awake?”

Louiese sat on the sofa next to her mother’s chair.

“No. He’s asleep.” Ruby took her daughter’s hand. Louiese had been in trouble all her life. “Maybe it’s my fault. I’ve always wanted my girls to be good girls. I ...”

“Mother, don’t. You have nothing to worry about. Nothing happened. We just sat and watched the stars. He kissed me. That was all.” She would not mention skinny dipping.

Ruby looked into her eyes in the lamp light. She knew she was holding something back, but she would be patient, even though she felt like shaking the truth out of her. She patted Louiese’s hand.

“Mother. We want to get married. He hasn’t said anything, but I’m going to see him tomorrow at his sister’s house. He said he would be there.”

“Are you sure it isn’t just you that wants to get married? You know you weren’t ready the first time.”

“Mom.” Louiese squeezed her mother’s hand. “I’m ready this time.”

Chapter Four

Louiese decided to walk to Madge's. It wasn't time for Jimmy to get off work. She strolled down Washington Avenue, crossing the Hondo River Bridge and down to the Dairy Queen to have a small ice cream cone. She took her time to get to the east side of town, strolling downtown, licking her ice cream, past the county courthouse with its green dome, the Yucca and Pecos movie theaters, looking at the cowboy movie promotional photos, the alabaster bank and post office. When Main Street split into Main and Highway 285, she turned onto East McGaffey. She wound up at a cheap plaster and chickenwire house with simple red trim.

Louiese stepped up to the door and went in. The screen door slammed behind her. The couch had its back to the front window. Jimmy was sipping a Coke. From the sounds coming from the kitchen, Madge was in there. From the voices she heard, Dorothy was with her.

"Well," Louiese said, approaching Jimmy. "All we need now is your brother Tom."

"Oh!" Jimmy stood and sat his Coke down on the coffee table.

"No no, sit."

Jimmy didn't say anything, just stared at her. He sat down and she lighted upon his lap.

"I think we ought to get married. Don't you?"

"Well." Jimmy's face flushed. "You don't smell drunk." Jimmy smiled and wrapped his arms around her. "You smell nice."

She put her face down into his. "Well? Shouldn't we?" she asked softly. Her breath smelled minty.

“Uh, I guess so.”

Madge came in with coffee and a platter of sandwiches and Lorna Doones. “Did I miss something?”

Louiese and Jimmy squeezed each other and giggled.

“Are you two?” Madge said, standing there with the platter and her mouth open.

Louiese nodded.

“Dorothy! They did it. They’re getting married,” Madge announced with her loud squeaky voice. She set the platter on the coffee table as Dorothy entered, drying her hands on the dish towel.

“And when did this happen, you two?” Dorothy asked, grinning, with a sparkle in her eyes.

“Just now,” Jimmy announced, smiling widely.

“Come here, you two!” Madge commanded.

Louiese and Jimmy slowly rose from the couch. Dorothy and Madge grabbed them, kissing them, in a group hug.

Louiese called home and said she wouldn’t be back tonight, that she would be staying with Madge and Dorothy. “They’ve invited me to dinner and to stay over.”

“All right, Dear,” Ruby said. “Please be careful, and have someone drive you home in the morning.”

“Yes, Mama. Yes. Mmm humm. Goodnight. Love you.”

“Love you too, Dear.”

Louiese put the phone down slowly. She walked over to her fiance. “We can be together tonight. We can go somewhere if you want.”

1. “Naw. Let’s stay here with the girls.”

“Okay.”



“Estel!” Ruby called. “She did it.”

Estel strolled into the living room from the kitchen. Mimi followed. She was beside herself, giggling, hugging her dad from behind.

“So,” was all he had to say, but he grinned.

Estel told Mimi, “That’s enough now.” He didn’t hold to having affection from women. He stood next to Ruby and held her hands. He told Mimi without looking at her, “Go finish the dinner. I’ll be in there to help in a minute.”

“It reminds me of us,” Ruby said.

“Yes. I know.”

Standing there, looking deeply into her eyes, Estel sang:

“They say, ... Ruby, you're like a dream ... ,

Not always what you seem ... ,

And though my heart may break ... when I a - wake ... ,

Let it be so ... ,

I only know ... , Ruby, it's you ...

They say... , Ruby, you're like a song ... ,

You don't know right from wrong ... ,

And in your eyes, I see ... heartaches for me ... ,

I hear your voice ... and I must come to you ... ,

I have no choice ... what else can I do ... ?

They say ... , Ruby, you're like a flame ... ,

Into my life you came ... ,

And though I should beware ... ,

Still, I don't care ... you thrill me ... so ...”

Mimi stared from the kitchen, leaning against the door-post, tears dripping down her cheeks.



Mimi heard a car door slam. Then the screen door slammed. She intercepted Louiese in the living room. The orange glow of the rising sun gently glided through the window.

“Did you really ask him?” She gripped her hands together.

Louiese grinned and nodded her head.

“Oh, I’m so happy for you!” Mimi gave her a hug. “Wayne and I are getting married too,” she whispered into her ear. “Don’t tell Mom and Dad. We’re going to elope.”

“No yer not,” Ruby said, coming into the living room from the hall. “Go into the kitchen and finish things up.”

Ruby was still in her bathrobe. “Good morning, Dear. You okay? Did you have a good night?”

“Yes, Mama. I’m all right. I know you worried.” She hugged her mother. “Nothing happened. I slept with Madge and Dorothy.” She smiled at her mother. “Jimmy slept on the

couch, but we talked most of the night.” Louiese yawned. “I don’t think I got enough sleep, but everyone got up. They had to go to work early.”

“Didn’t you have to go to work?”

“On Sunday?”

“It’s Saturday, Dear, and I slept in. Your dad and I didn’t get much sleep either.” She looked demurely at her daughter. “We were worried about you.”

“What’s going on?” Little Nellie came in rubbing her eyes.

“Yer sister is getting married.” Ruby ran her fingers through her long curls, trying to straighten them.

Nellie hugged Louiese around her hips and kissed her stomach. Louiese kissed the top of her head. She still smelled like a little baby.

Mimi poked her head out the kitchen door. “Come and get yer pancakes and eggs.”

Estel sat down to gaze upon his brood, then said grace over the food.

“I hear yer getting married?” he asked, digging into his eggs. The yellow yolk spread over his pancakes. “Can I have some syrup?”

“I know what’s in yer mind, Daddy. Of course, you’re the one.” She meant that he would be the preacher to marry them.

He smiled. Someone passed him the Log Cabin syrup, and he poured it generously over his pancakes.

“When’s the date?” Mimi asked.

“November. I guess that’s when he can get away for furlough.” She took a sip of coffee. “We want to be able to have a honeymoon.”



The waning months passed slowly. There were long walks together, swimming in the lakes until the water got too cold, and picnics in the park. As the weather got colder, they would stay inside, visiting Madge and Dorothy or the Dennis's.

Mimi still dated Wayne Taylor. He was a womanizer she was told, but she wouldn't believe anyone. She was too much in love to listen.

The day they were waiting for came. Snow was on the ground. Jimmy was in his best-pressed uniform, showing off his added chevrons. He was a master sergeant now. He took off his cap as he entered the door of the Bonines' home. He brought his good friend Von Litchfield to be his best man. He was from South Carolina and had a deep Southern accent. Jimmy thought he would introduce him to Mimi.

Louiese had gone to the hairdresser. She had two fist-sized curls up front above her forehead with the rest of the hair combed back and curled under, resting on her shoulders. Her bright green rayon dress shimmered. It was short-sleeved, had a long square cut for the neck, and fanned out from her tight waist to reach just below her knees. She stood by her dad, waiting for the tardy groom.

As Louiese approached her father and Jimmy, her mother whispered to her, "Mimi couldn't make it. She has disappeared." Louiese knew where she was. She and Wayne Taylor eloped and were on their honeymoon. She had promised not to tell.

Estel and Jimmy, with Von Lee behind him and to the left, stood near the west wall of the living room. Estel was in his dark blue suit with a white carnation on his lapel. Jimmy and Von Lee stood at attention in their newly

pressed army uniforms, their caps flattened and tucked into the left strap on their shoulder. They were surrounded by flowers on each side, making the scene look more like a funeral than a wedding, Jimmy thought, and broad green leaves on the wallpaper became the backdrop. Sister Nelson from the church played Mendelssohn's Wedding March on the piano with great pomp and circumstance. Louiese, accompanied by Bob Dennis, because her father couldn't give her away, marched from the hallway, turned right, and across the living room. The Dennis's were all seated in folding chairs lined up to face the preacher, while Madge and Dorothy sat on the couch with Glenn and his wife, Kathy. Agnes was conspicuously absent. She always felt second class in front of the Bonines.

Louiese remembered her previous wedding with Clarence. It hadn't been the same as now. Clarence had been wild and fun-loving with a spirit of adventure. Jimmy was stalwart and just loving. That was it. There was a spirit of love in the air, a love she had not felt before. She believed Jimmy was the right person. She could feel it in her gut. She was doing the right thing, and now, she could rest. Rest in his arms, that is. She could never rest with Clarence. All he wanted was to make love. Jimmy was kind and patient. He would never force her. She was ready to say "I do."

Of course, she loved Bob too. She patted his hand on her arm, glanced up at him, and smiled. It was a smile of gratitude. Of course.

Bob handed her to Jimmy, and they both faced the Reverend Estel Bonine, while Bob sat down next to Ruby. He smiled, but she ignored him. She was still upset at Mimi going off as she did.

Louiese concentrated on the sound of her father's voice. It was very kind and loving, almost hypnotizing. She was off in dreamland when he said, "Do you take this man ..." and had to be nudged with an elbow before she woke up and said, "I do."

"You may now exchange rings," Estel said ceremoniously.

Jimmy placed the tiny wedding ring on her finger, and someone gave her his plain gold ring to place on his finger.

Isn't Jimmy supposed to say "I do?" I didn't hear him say "I do."

"Aren't you supposed to say I do?" she whispered to Jimmy.

"I did, and I do," he whispered back, grinning.

"Oh." Louiese placed the giant ring on his thick finger. She giggled and grabbed him and kissed him.

"You may kiss the bride," Estel said, belatedly.

Everyone clapped and got up to congratulate the newly married couple. There was no waiting to stand in line. Ruby looked at Estel and shrugged her shoulders. He smiled and led her to the kitchen. They brought a card table, laid a white table cloth on it, and put the cake on top. The white iced cake was small, two-tiered, with piping around the edges. It appeared to have been made of two cardboard tubes, one sitting atop the other in a single step fashion. Louiese stared at it. She wouldn't be able to see it again, unless, "Someone take some pictures," she cried out.

"Cut the cake," someone else said.

Flashes went off as pictures were taken.

Jimmy helped Louiese cut through the white apple spice cake, winking at the blinding light. He shoved some cake into her mouth and she did the same to him, smearing icing onto

his face, giggling. They both laughed with their mouths full.

After this, Jimmy and Louiese disappeared into the bedroom and changed clothes. Without saying goodbye, they fled out the door with everyone throwing rice at them. Jimmy had bought an old black Chevy, and the kids had decorated it with ribbons and tied tin cans to the back bumper, so they rattled as the car scurried down the street.



Chapter Five

Everything had been planned out. They headed west on Second Street for the El Capitan mountains, a small bump they could see on the horizon. The bags with everything they needed for their honeymoon were in the back seat. The food and tent were in the trunk.

Soon, Roswell could only be seen in the rearview mirror. Louiese was content with her arm around her he-man. He smelled of old spice and sweat. They were both silent for a time, staring straight ahead.

“You all right?” he asked.

“Wonderful.”

There was silence again until they reached the low hills surrounding the mountains. He pulled up to a fruit stand that was still open. “You want apple cider or cherry cider?”

“Apple cider,” she said, lazily.

Louiese reached back and grabbed her coat and threw it over her shoulders. They both got out of the car, she, hanging onto his arm, and entered a small open shed with boxes of apples tipped up and tiered in three layers. There were jugs of cider on the floor, along the walls, and lined up in front of the table. Jimmy picked up a jug of apple cider and took it to the cash register on the north side of the table. Louiese picked up an apple and started eating it.

“And one apple,” he said.

“I couldn’t resist,” Louiese said, wiping away the juice that ran down her chin.

“Been good weather,” Jimmy told the woman in a red dress behind the counter. He took his wallet out and slammed four dollars onto the counter.

“It’s been good for us.” The cash register clanged as she handed him back some change. “Have a good honeymoon.”

Jimmy glanced at the car with its decorations and blushed. “Oh yeah. Thanks for reminding me.” He immediately went out and removed all the paraphernalia from the car, placing it in the trunk, as he saw no garbage can.

Louiese settled into the front seat, crunching down on her apple and waited for Jimmy. It only took a minute. He climbed in and placed the gallon jug onto the floor, slammed his door, and started the engine. Backing up the car, they were soon climbing the winding highway toward the El Capitan and the camping grounds.

“I’ll show you the sights where I worked back in the thirties with the CCC,” Jimmy said as he rounded a corner.

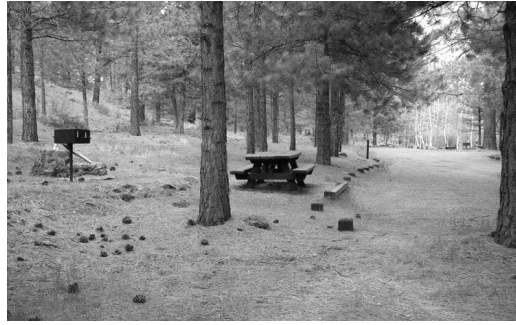
“Weren’t you too young back then?”

“I was fifteen, it was summer, and we all had a great time.”

They soon came to the campground that Jimmy had worked on. There was a clearing with picnic tables and an outhouse back in the woods. He pulled up to one of the tables.

“We’ll camp here,” he said, looking around as though he were searching for something. “Looks a little different, maybe not so clean. Not new.” He grabbed his red and black plaid coat, stepped out, put his coat on, shook it, and zipped it up.

“Well, I’m sure it’s been well used by now.” Louiese got out, arms folded as though her coat didn’t keep her warm enough.



The air was chilly, and there was snow less than a hundred feet up. Jimmy walked around a bit and looked under the table. “Yup. Thar ‘tis.” He turned to Louiese and bent down again. “Looky here. My initials.”

Louiese got down on her knees and looked up. There were the letters B M carved into the wood under the corner of the table. She rose and hugged Jimmy.

“I’m cold.”

“I’ll start a fire. We can gather up some wood and put it in this stove. No. Let’s get some rocks and make a campfire between the table and the car.” After a while, Jimmy had a roaring fire next to the table so his bride could sit on the table bench and warm herself. He sat down beside her.

“Are you hungry?”

Louiese nodded.

“I have some hamburger in the car. We can make some hamburgers and hot dogs.”

They covered the hamburger patties with slices of onion and then with tin foil and threw them into the fire. The hot dogs were poked through the long end with green sticks Jimmy cut off a nearby bush. Filling the hot dog and hamburger buns with catsup, mustard, and pickle relish, they added the hamburger patties and blackened hot dogs. They laughed at the raw hamburger and burned hot dogs and then, after stuffing their stomachs, laughed at the sprouting and burning marshmallows on sticks.

They sat shoulder to shoulder next to the fire. They felt comfortable and satisfied.

Jimmy kept adding wood to the fire and poked it now and then as they told ghost stories. He told one story he got from his grandmother.

“She was a Cherokee Indian. She visited me one time before she died, or maybe Mom took us to see her when she was dying. Can’t remember.

“She and her people were walking a long way. It seems they were too poor to ride in a wagon. Others had wagons, but they were all filled up with their things or with family. Grandma was getting tired, and her mother was too tired to lift her up. She told her to be brave and keep walking. Grandma said that the asgina were spirit beings that used to live on the earth. The important ones were warriors who had died in battle. They were the givers of courage. Well, Grandma Murdock, as she walked the trail as a little girl, was tired and scared. One time she just lay down to sleep and people kept kicking her. Her mother took her by the arm and was dragging her when a man wearing lots of feathers and a painted face came and picked her up. He chided her mother and made her cry. She already had two babies to carry, one on her back and one in her arms. The man took up my grandmother, and he let her sleep in his arms as he walked along, talking to her mother. After she was rested and woke up, he let her down and disappeared. It scared her mother. One of the old women came up to her and said it was an asgina.”

Louiese didn’t know what to think of that, she didn’t relate very much to Indians. To her, it seemed that Indians were just for decoration. You see them as painted images on things in the home, like a lamp shade or a knickknack shelf. You have things made by Indians, you don’t associate with them. You see them by the side of the road selling things like pots or rugs. She never thought of what their lives might be like, but she put that aside

and thought of another ghost story.

“Our family is full of ghost stories. Everyone has one. My mom was going down the road in Abilene, looked out the car window, and saw her great grandparents standing out in this vacant lot.”

“What’s so amazing about that? Did they live nearby?”

“They were dead. They had been dead for several years.” She punched him on the shoulder, and he just grinned. “It’s not funny.” She smirked back at him. “Let me tell you another one. I always loved this one.”

“Little Sally Anne and her brother were sent out into the dark forest near their house to gather firewood. As they were walking along, loooong arms strettttched out from behind a treeeee and snatched the little boy up.” Louiese grabbed at Jimmy’s arm, letting it go. She put her hands between her knees. “Sally Anne was so intent on not losing her way that she didn’t notice her brother was gone. She was picking up some sticks when she noticed she was all alone. She called his name several times, getting angrier all the time for him leaving her out there and going back home. When she did arrive home, her father asked where her brother Tom was. She said she didn’t know. All she knew was that she was going to slap him good the next time she saw him for deserting her and leaving her to do all the work.

“Days went past and Tom didn’t show up. Months and then years went by and no Tom. Sally Anne grew up to be a beautiful maiden, but she had a bit of a temper. Every time she would go out into the woods to gather firewood for her aging parents, she would mutter and mumble about Tom leaving her alone.

“One evening as she was gathering firewood, Tom was by her side gathering with her. It seemed so natural that she was not startled until he disappeared, letting the firewood drop

at her feet. Then she started to tremble. She picked up as much firewood as she could carry and started home. Then from behind a treeee, long arms strettttched and grabbed Sally Anne!” Louiese grabbed Jimmy’s arm and startled him. He laughed and was going to say something, but Louiese shushed him. “Now that night, Tom came home with a load of firewood he carried in a sack on his back. It seemed so natural to his aging parents that he should be there that they asked Tom where Sally Anne disappeared to. He didn’t know. He didn’t even seem to care. When they asked him again, he said, “Who’s Sally Anne?” Then they saw something squirming inside the bag of sticks. He lifted up the bag and poured it out. A girl fell out and landed on her bottom with sticks falling all over her. She asked, “What was that for?” She looked around and saw an elderly couple and a young man about her age. She said, “Well, help me up. Aren’t you the gentleman?” So he helped her up, and the two of them gathered the sticks and placed them near the fireplace. The parents were all smiles, saying, “Now we have enough wood to last us the winter.” All of a sudden, two sets of hands appeared, one from behind the couch, and one from within the chimney. They streeetced and grabbed the children, and they have not been seen since.”

Jimmy laughed and Louiese with him. They hugged each other. Jimmy stirred the fire again, adding some little logs. The sparks flew up like fireflies. They didn’t mind the acrid smoke. Jimmy took a faggot from the fire and lit his cigar. Louiese rested her head on his shoulder and they watched the fire hypnotically.

Jimmy and Louiese started falling asleep sitting on the picnic table’s bench. They were avoiding the inevitable. Louiese was the one to suggest they get into the tent they had so much fun erecting earlier. Jimmy quenched the fire with a pitcher full of Kool-Aid. They didn’t like it anyway. He crawled into the tent.

“The foam rubber feels okay?” Jimmy pressed down on the pallet. “I borrowed it from a wrecked plane they have on the base. I’m sure they won’t miss it. Other guys have taken things from that dilapidated thing.”

“I was wondering what it was.” Louiese opened the covers to allow her new husband to enter. “It feels a lot better than the hard ground.” Then as an afterthought, she said, “I don’t think people should be stealing things just because other people are doing it.”

“Don’t worry. It was just trash. It was in the garbage dump.”

“Big piece of garbage.”

Jimmy crawled in to be next to the love of his life. They embraced.

“You feel better than the foam rubber,” he said softly.

She giggled as he kissed her.



Louiese woke up to the smell of coffee, bacon, and eggs. She yawned, grabbed her clothes and dressed under the covers. She crawled out of the pup tent and over to the fire.

“Humm,” she said. “Smells good.”

“Coffee always tastes best in the mountains in the Fall.” He poured some into a tin cup and handed it to her.

The cup warmed her freezing hands. She took a sip. “You’re right. It is good.”

“Want to eat at the table?”

“No. I’ll be fine right here. Right by the fire, by the heat.”

“I thought you were pretty hot last night.”

“Well, you had something to do with that.” She grinned.

He handed her a plate with the bacon and eggs. “Salt and pepper?”

“Yes.” She sat her mug onto a rock next to the fire to keep it warm.

As they ate, Jimmy suggested an itinerary. “I brought some rifles along.”

“Borrowed them too?”

“One of them is my own. The other is Litch’s.” He took a sip of his coffee. “I thought we could go shooting today. Maybe we can find some dinner.”

“Getting tired of hamburgers already?”

“No, no, if you want some.” He sucked up his fried eggs with the help of his fork. “I just thought some sport would be fun.”

After breakfast, Louiese and Jimmy strolled through the woods, each holding their rifles pointing down.

“You’ve shot a rifle before?”

“Oh, I know how. Don’t worry about that.” She looked around and picked up a tin can. She placed it on a log. “Look here.” She raised her rifle, released the lock, cocked it, and slowly squeezed the trigger. The tin can, catching a bullet in its belly, flew off into the bushes.

Jimmy raised his eyebrows and smiled. “Who taught you that?”

“My Uncle ‘Lidge in California. Spent some time working at Boeing as a riveter. Had to have some kind of fun on the weekends. The kids I hung out with were all proficient.”

“Looky thar!” Jimmy pointed to a tall tree to the left of them.

“What?”

“A porky pine up in that tree.”

Louiese squinted, raising her hand above her eyes. “I don’t see it.”

“Third big limb next to the trunk.”

The porcupine was the color of the trunk, but she spotted it, looking like a burl, a rather large knot on the tree.

“I see it.” She raised her rifle again, aimed, cocked, and shot. The giant rodent fell into the bushes below.

Jimmy ran over to find it. He looked everywhere under the bushes and around the tree.

“You missed.”

“I couldn’t have.” Louiese joined the search. The bushy thing wasn’t around.

Jimmy found a hole in the ground and poked the butt of his gun down into it. They heard a hiss.

“It’s in there.” He took his gun and was going to shoot it down into the hole.

“Don’t do that. He deserves to live, outsmarting us that way.”

“Okay, but the next one’s dinner.”

“I don’t think you can get it out of the hole anyway.”

“I guess not.” Jimmy kicked dirt into the hole.

The two hunters kept strolling, but this time, they glanced up into the pines.

“There’s another one,” Louiese said excitedly. She was about to raise the barrel of her rifle when Jimmy lowered his hand.

“This one ‘s mine.” He slowly raised his gun, took a deep breath, pulled his mouth

into a grimace, and pulled the trigger. The porcupine dropped as the other had. The two rushed to the scene and found the dead ball of needles at the foot of the tree. A small trickle of blood oozed from the side of its head.

“Good shot He-Man.”

After that, not being satisfied with one for dinner, they found four more and shot them. Jimmy picked up the last one and gutted it. He brought it back to the camp and hung it up for later.

Sitting at the picnic table, watching the gruesome work, Louiese said, “I would like to find a motor inn tonight and sleep in a real bed.”

Jimmy’s feelings took a downward turn. He enjoyed the outdoors away from civilization. “You can’t breathe the fresh air in a motel room.” He took a deep breath, held it, and exhaled with great exuberance.

“I know, and I enjoy it too, but I don’t have very much padding on my bones.”

“Okay.” He tied the porcupine onto a low enough branch, the height of his reach. “That will keep it away from the dogs at least. I doubt it would be a bear, though. We won’t be gone long.”

“Where we going?”

“To find that motor inn you were talking about. I know where it is. We can go pay for a room and then come back here.”

“Okay.”

Getting back into the car, it wasn’t an hour before they found a motel that had cabins in the shape of teepees painted white with a wide red jagged ring around the middle. Jimmy went into the office to get a key. When he got back into the car, he noticed Louiese was not

there. He looked around, and then she walked up to the door from the shadows.

“Aren’t we going to look inside?”

Jimmy got out. “Want to get back while we have light,” he groaned to himself.

“It won’t take long.”

They went to cabin 3. Jimmy put the key into the door, turned it, and opened the door. It didn’t squeak. The paint seemed fresh. There was the smell of pine inside. There was a double bed before them, a night table to their right with a lamp covered with a skin lamp shade sewed together with sinew. On the other side of the bed was a small ice box and a hotplate on a small round table. To the right of the door was a coat rack.

As Jimmy was taking inventory, Louiese lay on the bed and stretched out.

“Oooh, this feels wonderful.” She looked at Jimmy and smiled. “Come here, big boy.”

Jimmy raised his eyebrow and frowned. Louiese motioned with her forefinger.

Jimmy’s frown turned to a smile as he lay beside her. They both sighed and started kissing.

She started unbuttoning his shirt. He laughed. They didn’t come out of the cabin until dinner time.

As Louiese put her clothes back on, she said, “I’m hungry.”

“We can go back and eat that porky pine. It would be a shame to waste it.”

“No. I’m hungry right now.” She came over to him, wrapped her arms around him, and lay her head on his chest.

“I’m trying to get dressed.”

She bit him softly on the chest. “I’m hungry.”

“Well don’t eat me. I’m sure the food here at the cafe’ will be more tasty.”

She looked up at him. “I doubt it.”

They left the cabin, locked it, and sauntered over to the cafe'. They ate chicken fried steak and French fries.

As they finished their coffee, the waitress, a girl in her thirties, with red lipstick and dark auburn hair tied in the back, said, "You on your honeymoon?"

"Yes," Louiese answered. "How can you tell?"

The waitress grinned. "Oh, I can always tell. It's how you look at each other. Better enjoy it while it lasts. Or you can have some cherry pie or apple pie."

Louiese rubbed her bare foot over Jimmy's shin. "I think I'll have cherry pie."

"Well ... I guess," Jimmy said, distracted, "I'll have apple."

The waitress brought their pie and added more coffee to their cups.

As Louiese ate her pie, she lost one of her cherries. It slipped down and dropped to the floor. She started giggling.

"What're you laughing about?" Jimmy asked.

"Never you mind," she said. Then she whispered, "Can't tell you in public."

"Oh." Jimmy started laughing with apple pie in his mouth. He had to cover his mouth so he wouldn't spit pie all over the place.

That night, the two love birds slept soundly, more than any other time in their lives. They had no worries and nothing to think about except each other. They dreamed of Indians.



The next day, they both were still yawning as they climbed into the car. They went

back to the mountain camp and found that the porcupine was gone. The part of the cord that Jimmy had used to tie it onto the tree was still hanging there.

“Bear got it,” Jimmy said. “Look at the tracks.”

“Should we stay here?” Louiese crossed her arms and shuddered.

“Well, I’d like to look around a bit. I can take my gun with us just in case.”

Louiese closed her hands around his arm and leaned up against it. “I could stay here.”

“It wouldn’t be safe.”

“I could get in the car.”

“Aaaw. Let’s spend some time together. I want to look at some rocks.” He gave her a little hug. “Besides, we might find some really good ones.”

Louiese agreed, but the day in the mountains ended at noon. They ate the rest of their sandwich-makings and headed back home. Jimmy could have been disgruntled, but somehow, he was too tired. It was all he could do to keep awake on the road. One thing that helped them wake up was that they stopped at the little fruit stand they had come across the other day and bought some more apple cider. The other bottle had become fizzy, and Louiese didn’t want to drink it. Jimmy stored it in the trunk of the car to drink later.

By the time they got to Roswell and to the little chicken wire and plaster home they had rented before the wedding, they were all worn out and went to bed. That night, wide awake, they went out to the bottomless lakes and went skinny dipping in the moonlight. They came home with goosebumps and a lot of laughter.

Chapter Six

Several months slipped by. Louiese enjoyed keeping house, cooking breakfasts and dinners, going to church, and visiting with family. That lasted for three months. By the end of the third month, she had been visiting family more than staying home. When Jimmy got up early in the morning and went to the base, she walked across town and visited with her mother and Mildred, who had married Jimmy's pal Lee Litchfield from South Carolina.

Louiese became depressed and didn't want to go back home to dirty dishes and clothes that needed to be washed. She would always stay too long when she visited. Her mother had a little talk with her one day when she found out what was taking place.

"Louiese," she said. "You are married now. It comes with responsibilities."

"I know, Mother, but ..."

"But nothing. You get off your seat and get on home. You just get in my way here anyway. You don't give me the chance to get my work done."

Ruby hugged her delinquent daughter, remembering all the times in her life she had gotten in trouble. She recalled the lying she had to deal with when Louiese was a child. Then there were the boys as she grew older. She just knew that she and Mildred would be the death of her. She was so afraid that one day either of her girls would come home pregnant. Nellie was such a gentle little soul, a delight to behold. She woke up from her daydreams and realized she was hugging Louiese.

"Uh-hum." She let go and pointed her finger into the air. "Now you get along."

She ushered her daughter to the door, Louiese stepped out into the blinding light with a little resentment toward her mother, and then a thought came to Ruby. "Wait a minute,

Darling.”

Louiese turned, Ruby put her hands on Louiese's shoulders. “When is the last time you had your period?”

“Well. I never thought of it. Not for a long time. Why?”

Both women’s eyebrows rose, but Ruby got in the first word. “My dear, you’re pregnant.”

Louiese covered her mouth with her hand and started laughing. The ill feelings she had toward her mother vanished. They both started talking at the same time, Ruby giving advice, Louiese planning how to design a living place for her new baby. Both women slowly found themselves going back inside, the day’s work being ignored.



Jimmy came home to another dirty house. Neither the dishes nor the laundry were washed. He didn’t mind the rest of the house, it just looked lived in, but he would have liked the bed made. He did that himself. Where was Louiese? He didn’t have to guess. He knew. She would be over at her mother’s or at Mildred’s. After doing the dishes he decided to retrieve her. He had to put his foot down and stop this irresponsible behavior. He raced out to the car and sped out of the yard.

By the time he got to the Bonine’s his temper had cooled a bit. Estel met him at the door. Jimmy didn’t have to say anything. Estel knew who he had come for.

“They went over to Mimi’s,” he said with a sober face.

Jimmy turned to go back to the car.

“Jimmy,” he called.

Jimmy turned around.

“Don’t be hard on her.”

“Hum?”

“You’ll understand when you get there.”

“Okay.”

Jimmy’s curiosity was piqued. By the time he pulled into the Litchfield’s, he wasn’t angry. Lee was out in the yard puttering around with a hoe. The two men pointed at each other and smiled.

“Hear congratulations are in order.” Lee greeted him with a handshake and a squeeze of the arm.

“Huh?”

“Boy, are you in the dark?” Lee chuckled. “You’d better go inside.”

Jimmy walked into the little chicken-wire and plaster house. It was clean inside, he noticed, and the smells of roast beef drifted from the kitchen. His stomach churned. Mimi and Louiese were sitting on the couch, talking to each other like two mother hens.

The two women turned to Jimmy.

“Guess what?” Louiese said a bit loudly. She was excited about something, just sitting there with her sister, smiling from ear to ear. Both of them were smiling, and they both spoke at once.

“We’re pregnant!”

“Well, I’d dy be.” Jimmy stood there scratching his head, not knowing what to say.

Jimmy and Louiese were invited to stay for dinner. Jimmy was happy about that, though he didn’t know what to think about having a child. He just wanted a girlfriend,

someone to take care of him. But he conceded that life must go on. He would try to be a good father.

After Jimmy and Louiese returned home, Jimmy treated his wife like a queen, not letting her do anything.

“You’ve got to be careful now,” he said. “Don’t worry about the house. I’ll help out. I’ve helped my mother when she was sick.”

“This isn’t a sickness, silly,” she said, reaching into the cupboard. “I’ll make some coffee. Then we can talk.”

Plans were made over a cup of coffee at their small kitchen table. They would go shopping and get a bassinet. One of those fancy ones, white and woven.

“Our bedspread,” Louiese said. “is too big for our bed. I can cut the bottom off and use it in the bassinet.”

Jimmy almost had an argument about using such a fancy name. He would have said crib. But tonight, he wanted to be nice to his wife.

She told Jimmy she would rearrange the furniture and put the bassinet in the corner away from the window.

“I’ll move the couch for you. I don’t want you to get hurt,” he said softly and protectively.

All the arrangements were made for the new arrival, with Louiese making an appointment with Mimi’s doctor. Sometimes they went together. The month was going well. Louiese was happy now. All the depressing drudgery turned into “whistle while you work” fun. Knowing she was going to have a baby brought light into her world.



When Jimmy arrived at work that morning, he had a surprise waiting for him.

“Hey, Murdock,” he heard the major call. “Get yer crew over to building 15-A. You will be getting your orders of the day there.”

“That’s ordinance,” he said with his eyebrows raised. He walked up to the major.

“New regulations. Classified info.” The major winked. “You’ll need it.”

“Yes, sir.”

As Jimmy gathered his crew from the barracks, he became excited. It could mean advancement. Working with classified material could be that he would be working with new machinery. He was a quick study. It also meant that the B-29 had been upgraded. There had been several B-29’s in and out of Roswell, but this might mean, and he felt it in his gut, the war was drawing to a close.

It was a lecture and a film. He and his crew sat down at the desks that filled the room. They stared at the projector and screen before them. There were papers to be filled out laying on their desks. The lights dimmed, and a newsreel blasted in their ears. They saw the atrocities of Pearl Harbor being attacked, the Philippines being attacked, and different islands in the Pacific under attack. It was nothing he hadn’t seen in the theater downtown. But then there was President Truman as big as life telling them that it was time that Little Boy visit Japan. The atomic bomb. They saw footage of the bomb being dropped on Hiroshima. Jimmy raised his hands to his head. He grabbed his short hair with his fists. His hat fell to the floor. He picked it up, still staring at the screen. Then they were given time to

fill out the paperwork that allowed them access to classified information. The instructor told them by name what their different duties would be. The plane they would be working on was the Enola Gay. It was due to leave in three days.

Leaving the building, Jimmy's crew marched to the hanger where the now famous bomber lay secluded in the dark. When they arrived the lights were turned on, and the men gasped. The plane looked like a silver bullet. Jimmy had to touch it. He was assigned the engines with their reversible pitch propellers that gave more braking power on landing. Before he gathered his tools, he went up the ladder to the door and wiped it with his hand.

When he got home, Jimmy looked proud and whistled. "You'll never guess what I worked on today."

Louiese left the kitchen, wearing an apron and wiping her hands on a towel. She was beginning to show.

"What did you work on that makes you so excited?"

Jimmy embraced his wife and kissed her. While still embracing, he said, "I touched the end of the war."

"What do you mean?"

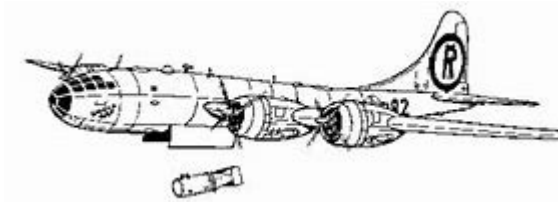
"I'm not allowed to tell you until you see it at the movie theater, but I'm sure Japan won't be able to fight after Little Boy."

"Don't talk in riddles. Tell me."

"Let's go see a movie. It should be announced there."

At the Pioneer theater downtown, Louiese saw a mushroom cloud in the newsreel and heard the name *Hiroshima*. It told of the utter destruction, and the news caster said, in exaggerated speech, "If this doesn't end the war, what will?"

“That B-29 bomber there,” Jimmy said, pulling his wife closer, “is the one I worked on today. The Enola Gay. She’s a beauty.”



About the middle of the fourth month of their marriage, a bomb dropped into Jimmy’s own life. He came home to a dirty house. The dishes hadn’t been washed, the bed hadn’t been made. It was the same thing all over again.

Louiese was sitting on the couch staring straight ahead, not moving. She looked pale. He had to go to the bathroom and found it in a mess. There was blood on the toilet. He came back into the living room to see what the matter was. Her dress was bloody. She stunk. Jimmy carefully sat next to her. He put his hand over hers.

“What’s wrong? What happened?” She didn’t move or say anything. “Louiese!” He turned her head with his big, broad hand. “Wake up. I’m right here. What’ wrong?”

He shook her. She seemed to wake up then, and tears streamed down her cheeks. She moaned. “Oh, Jimmy. Jimmy!” She turned and beat on his chest with her fists. He embraced her. She sobbed into his chest, “I’ve lost the baby. I flushed it down the toilet.” She sobbed for a long time while Jimmy tried to take it all in, not knowing what to do but just hold her. Eventually he convinced her to go to the doctor she had been seeing, but when he found that the bleeding hadn’t stopped, Jimmy called the doctor to see if he could come over. It seemed to Jimmy that it took the doctor over an hour to get there. By then, Jimmy had put Louiese in bed with towels and a shower curtain under her. She looked white now, more than ever.

Jimmy sat beside her, sweating and humming, and caressing her hand. His face was calm, but his gut was tied in knots. The doctor showed up, entered the little home.

“In here!” Jimmy called.

The doctor entered the bedroom. He peered at Jimmy. He said, “You are as pale as she is. Are you feeling dizzy?”

“No.”

The doctor examined her, making Jimmy wait in the living room. When he came out, he said, “I’ve given her two shots. One will stop the bleeding. The other will let her rest. Do you smoke?”

“Yeah, a little.”

“Here.” The doctor pulled out a thick cigar. “Smoke this. It will calm yer nerves. But do it out in yer car. She won’t need you for a while. Give her some chicken broth when she wakes up. She’ll need to regain her strength.”

As the two went out the door, the doctor said, “If the bleeding starts again, get her to the hospital on the double. You’re in the Army. You know what that means. On the double. She may have need of an operation. You get that?”

“Yes, sir. On the double.”

“It’s bed rest for her. At least a week. Don’t let her get up unless she has to go to the bathroom. Make sure you keep her anti-septic. You understand? Anti-septic. Clean up after her. We don’t want her to get an infection.”

“Yes, sir. Anti-septic. I’ll do that. But I have to be at work at the base every day.” The doctor lit up the cigar and offered it to Jimmy. He took it and puffed on it twice.

“You be sure you have someone to take care of her. You got family. Ask them.”

The doctor opened his car door and looked back at Jimmy. He winked at him.

“Everything is going to be fine. Go smoke your cigar.”

As the doctor drove off, Jimmy said to himself, *I thought cigars were given out if the child was born.*



Louiese healed readily. She was up on her feet in no time. She felt better about keeping her home clean and neat. It was actually a visit from her mother that set her on that path; her mother came over and cleaned up so fast that she left Louiese embarrassed. She swore she could do better than her mother and not take so many shortcuts. Not that her mother made shortcuts, but it was easier to imagine that she did so she could put herself to the task. Competing with someone sometimes can help the engine start. It helped Louiese get back into the habit of housekeeping.



Jimmy was getting ready for another graduation. The war was over and he didn't have any further use for the army. He was studying weather forecasting in his spare time, but his father-in-law, the Reverend Mister Bonine convinced him to join him building homes. The home building market was exploding as soldiers started coming home from the war. Estel told Jimmy that there was going to be a great need to build homes everywhere, even here in Roswell. The work was going to open up and keep on going during the next decade. He would have work for his future family for a long time.

Jimmy thought it would be a good idea to improve his relationship with Louiese if he

worked for her father. She could feel secure at not having to leave home and family. If he stayed in the army and went to school somewhere, she would have to leave Roswell. It was only fair for Jimmy not to pursue the weather forecasting, she said, which didn't seem important to her anyway because she had to give up art school for him.



Leaving the Army Air Field, becoming a civilian, and the end of the war was going to be celebrated at the New Mexico Military School for Boys there in Roswell. There would be a big parade in the square. There would be marching soldiers, bands playing, saluting the flag, and certificates handed out, ending in a big picnic for everybody.

“Hurry up, will ya?” Jimmy said, straightening his tie in the living room mirror. He had gotten that mirror from his grandmother after she had moved in with his mother. It was a two foot rectangle framed in dark carved wood.

“I’ll be just a minute,” came a voice from the bathroom.

“I can’t be late.”

Louiese opened the door and turned her back to him. “Zip me up, will ya?” she asked, mocking his hillbilly language.

“Need yer coat?” he asked, opening the front door for her.

“No. It’s warm outside.”

The two rushed out to the car and zoomed off to the parade. Unbeknownst to them, and invisible, there were four little kids in the backseat. Anne was the oldest, she was about five, then Bradley, about four, Sherry, about three, and then Tim was the baby. He was the most vocal.

“It was my turn. I was supposed to go first.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Anne said. “You’ll get another chance.”

They were all blonde except for Tim. His hair was rusty brown. He also had two crowns. He was just that kind of a guy.

“Yeah, Tim. Don’t worry.” Sherry said, patting his hand which he abruptly removed. “You wouldn’t want Mommy and Daddy to hear you.”

Anne’s eyes were slanted like Jimmy’s grandfather. They looked more slanted when she smiled, and she was smiling now because she knew she was next to be born. Her Dutch boy haircut with its broad bangs perfectly framed her smile.

Bradley sat between the girls, not saying a word. He was more interested in what was going to happen. He wanted to see his father-to-be march in the parade.

After a minute or so, they arrived at the parade ground. Jimmy and Louiese got out first. Jimmy rushed off to be with his departing company. Louiese joined the crowd that lined the viewing area.

“Hurry up you guys,” Sherry said excitedly.

Anne helped each one out of the car. She picked up Tim and carried him. They ran to catch up with Louiese.

When their mother-to-be stopped and looked around for Mimi, she felt someone take her hand. It was Anne. Louiese looked around to see who took hold of her. There was no one there. Chills caressed her neck. She put her hand back there and wondered. *Who walked across my grave?*

“Don’t worry Mommy,” Anne said. “I’m coming soon.”

Louiese saw Mimi who was carrying her first. She joined her and laughed.

“Why are you so happy?” Mimi asked, shaking her baby gently.

“I don’t know. But this seems to be the happiest day of my life.”

“I think you’re going to have another baby.” Mimi smiled. “You look so ... vibrant.”

Louiese felt a contentment she had never experienced before. “Yes. I think so.”

The End