LIZZIE'S STORY: SCENES
FROM A COUNTRY LIFE

THESIS

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By

Linda Brown Chalkley, B. A.
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An episodic novel set in rural north Texas in the 1920s, this thesis concerns the life of Lizzie Brown and her son Luke. Suffering from a series of emotional shocks combined with a chronic hormonal imbalance, Lizzie is hospitalized shortly after Luke's fourth birthday. Just as she is to be discharged, her husband dies unexpectedly. Viewed by society as incompetent to care for Luke and operate her ranch alone, she finds herself homeless. She returns to her brother's home briefly, but eventually is declared NCM and institutionalized. The story also concerns Luke, his relationships with his father and other relatives who care for him in Lizzie's absence. As he matures, he must deal with society's attitudes regarding mental illness and orphans. The story ends with Lizzie's funeral when he is twenty.
"You really were a hero, Papa."

"No." Luke looked up from his newspaper and across his kitchen table at his elder daughter.

"No? Why not?"

Luke watched her thumb through the thin, blue book she'd just found again in his bookcase, a history of U.S. Army campaigns in northern Italy. He looked at her son, his grandson, seated nearer the TV, engrossed in the adventures of Captain Kirk. He noticed the dark shadows under her eyes, the triangular family resemblance which vaguely reminded him of his mother. He explained,

"No. Doin' what you have t' do in order t' stay alive isn't bein' heroic."

"But your batallion history says so, right here. You stood on a hilltop in northern Italy, waving your pistol in full view of the Nazis and encouraging your men to move ahead! Like John Wayne or somebody."

"Yeah, it wasn't much of a movie." Luke shifted restlessly. He wasn't entirely comfortable with this subject, even with his daughter.

"What did you do?"

"We were supposed t' take this hill 407. The Germans were dug in behind some pretty dense rocks. Our artillery had already been poundin' th' area a good bit, but up in th' saddle of this hill, th' Germans had a place where they
could see all our territory an' our maneuvers down below 'um. They'd been directing their artillery an' mortars an' machine guns from up there, an' we were workin' our way up. Every company around us was havin' th' same problem."

"So, you were stuck?"

"That's right." He frowned in remembrance. "Nobody could advance with that nest of Germans up top. We got up to about 50 yards of their gun emplacements, an' some machine guns off t' th' north started firin'. We lost a bunch of men an' had t' pull back under th' south crest of th' hill."

"Did it take a long time?" she prompted. Conversations with her father on this subject usually didn't last this long.

"Several hours. I had t' send some men down t' get more rifle ammo an' some grenades. We were pretty damn tired so we rested as much as we could with th' Fascists snipin' at us out of a cave off t' one side. When they got back, we got a howitzer trained on th' hill. That knocked out enough of 'um so we could get over th' top."

"Couldn't you just stay under th' crest of th' hill until your artillery finished knockin' out their gun emplacements?"
"No. We were too close t' th' top of th' hill. We had either t' move an' maybe get shot, or stay put an' get shot for sure."

"Well, th' book says this was where you got th' DSC so somebody thought you were a hero, Papa."

Luke shook his head, "Yeah, well, that somebody wasn't there."

* * * *

"Papa, did you go visit your mother in th' hospital much?" she asked him on another evening around the kitchen table after supper.

"No, not very often. Uncle Henry took me up there a couple of times, and she came home once or twice. It didn't seem t' matter much t' her one way or th' other."

"Why did she have t' stay there so long? Didn't she ever come home?"

"I don't think she really wanted to."

"Never?"

"Not that I knew of."

* * * *
His mother stood at the counter next to the pump preparing a chicken for supper. The boy Luke, barely three, sat on the floor watching in fascination that spring afternoon as she skillfully chopped off the wing tips and feet before plucking and singeing off the remaining feathers. Only a few minutes before he had watched through the screen door as she caught the young pullet, wrung its neck, and gutted it in back of the farmhouse. It was a chore she did every Saturday, a common enough farm chore, unremarkable really. Except today she was strange again, and the boy was subconsciously aware of the difference as he watched her working. The difference made him uneasy.

She was taller than average with dark eyes and heavy hair, what people in those days thought of as handsome. Today her eyes were troubled, and the shadows beneath them were darker than usual, giving her eyes a slightly bruised appearance. Taking a momentary rest, she rubbed her lower back and groaned softly. Her body was attacking her somehow, she felt helplessly. Deep down, in those female areas she little understood, something was wrong. This wasn't the way things were supposed to be. Her mother and sisters didn't have these agonizing pains that nearly doubled her over with their intensity. Oh, the doctor had said she had "female troubles" and they would get better
when she finally had children. That had taken a long time, longer than usual.

She glanced over at the boy. He was still playing quietly in the corner with his wooden spoon and bucket. His hair and eyes were as dark as her own. Now she had Luke, but the problems hadn't gone away. In fact they were frighteningly worse. Pain and blood, sweats and chills came even more frequently, and the doctor could do nothing. She was constantly afraid of what the pain might mean, and she had little patience for herself on these bad days, much less for the mischievous little toddler playing in the corner.

She hated the weekly mess of the chicken. It reminded her too much of the mess of herself. Luke, seeing that her back was turned to him, scooted craftily over to the kitchen table, reached up, and grabbed the cloth to steady himself as he stood up. The cloth slid toward him and dumped the bowls of milk, eggs, and flour Lizzie had set there for frying the chicken. Startled, Lizzie cut her thumb. She turned, furious and bleeding, to the flour-covered child.

"You! Why are you always so much trouble?"

She snatched him up, smearing his powder-white arm with her blood. Disgusted she dumped him in the corner of the kitchen farthest away from table and counter. The pain in her back suddenly seized and jerked her into irrationality.
Looming over him, her hair in wildest disarray, her eyes black with pain and anger, she waved her blooded butcher knife threateningly.

"You stay in this corner until I’m finished or I’ll... I’ll do... I don’t know what I’ll do!" Shaking in anger and fear, she turned her back on him.

It was an image the boy never forgot.

Shortly afterward she withdrew to her room and a year later left the family entirely. She never returned, but the boy was taken to see her from time to time. When he later had learned to read, he vaguely understood the sign on the hospital to read: Texas State Hospital for the Insane.

* * * *
That evening after he’d been put to bed, the boy could hear his parents murmuring together in the kitchen. The light spring breezes cooled the house, and the voices sang counterpoint to the rustling of the rose of sharon and crepe myrtles outside the windows. Though he strained his baby ears, he couldn’t quite understand their words.

"Oh, Harry, today was so bad."

"I gathered as much when I saw th’ mess in th’ kitchen. What happened? Th’ pains again?"

"Yes. Th’ doctor thought this would stop when Luke was born, but it’s only gotten worse, if anything. Today I could hardly concentrate on what I was doin’. I wanted to get th’ chicken fried early so th’ kitchen would be clean an’ cool by th’ time you got home this evenin’.

"What’d Luke do t’ upset you so?"

"Not anything so very terrible actually. He just pulled himself up on th’ tablecloth an’ dumped everythin’ onto th’ floor. It wasn’t his fault really. It was th’ pain. It was so bad an’ I was startled by th’ falling bowls an’ Luke’s hollerin’. I cut myself, an’ then I lost control, Harry. I really lost control, an’ I nearly cut him with th’ butcher knife. I really wanted to kill him, for th’ briefest instant. It scared me so bad t’ feel that way, t’ think I might lose control an’ really hurt him, hurt one of th’ people I love more than myself even. I think I must..."
be crazy t' feel like that about my own son. I don't know what t' do. I don't ...."

Harry looked at his quietly sobbing wife. He went around the kitchen table and took her in his arms. What would I have done myself, he wondered, if you'd hurt my son? What control would I have had then? And he was filled with fear for all three of them. Again he saw the kitchen in shambles with the milk, flour, chicken pieces scattered across the floor, and Lizzie, her finger bleeding, staring horror-stricken at Luke. What would he have done if it had been Luke instead of the chicken? Could Lizzie do that? Surely not. But he wasn't sure.

* * * *


Lizzie walked down the aisle near the end of the line of her alphabetically sorted classmates. Their friends and families nearly filled the school auditorium, and Lizzie could feel the seven sets of eyes of her immediate family members who were watching her as she glided gracefully down the aisle. Mamie's children were here, too, but they were too young to watch attentively. It was quite enough that all the adults were present to hear her valedictory. Not that she hadn't practiced this walk and this speech several hundred times in the barn and at least a million times in her dreams.

She was tall, graceful and striking. With her lush, dark hair piled up high and dressed in her best white dress, its puffed sleeves and high collar covered with the white silk embroidery she'd done herself, she was regal and rather forbidding. Chris sighed as she passed. He secretly loved this elegant daughter more than the others. She was the quietest and most particular of his daughters, and she was going to be the hardest to find a husband for as well. She was smarter than most of the men Chris knew, and miles ahead of her older brother Henry. He felt only a special man would be able to appreciate her wit and accept her special silent nature.

Lucy looked at Lizzie with worry in the corner of her mind. Please God the pains didn't interrupt this most
important moment in her daughter's life. Lizzie would probably be the only one of her six living children to graduate from high school. Lucy was proud; all her family in Germany, although mostly small businessmen, had been educated people.

Mamie eyed her younger sister enviously, as did Annie. Childbearing had already destroyed what figure Mamie had had, and Annie, although pretty enough, was dumpy in comparison to Lizzie. Ida and Pearl, younger and pretty themselves, gave only a passing thought to their sister. Their minds were on the Luther twins across the aisle, and they whispered and giggled at regular intervals, as they flirted mercilessly with the boys.

The graduates reached the stage and filed across it to their seats. The boys tugged at their ties and stiff paper collars while the girls pulled their skirts smooth and prepared to sit through the ceremony. They represented the largest class the school had graduated to date, sixteen, mostly girls. None of them would receive any additional formal education. This was a farming community; their families had made sacrifices to get them this far. Two of the boys would read law with a local attorney, the rest would either be given some land, inherit it, or work for their fathers until they could buy some of their own. The girls would work the land beside the men they married.
The minister had spoken the invocation; the class salutatorian had greeted the audience. As the school principal rose to welcome the assembled friends and family, Lizzie felt a characteristic, shooting pain in the small of her back. Not now, dear Lord, she prayed, knowing well what would follow. At least she was already in town. At least she wouldn't have the long, jolting wagon ride to the doctor's office.

Lucy looked at her daughter, watching as the color paled in her cheeks, her eyes darkened to black, the violet hollows under her eyes appeared. She knew what Lizzie's pain could do and wondered if the girl would get past the rest of the ceremony before it went beyond her control. She hoped no one would witness her proud daughter reduced to spasms and tears.

As Lizzie rose to speak her short oration on what the future might hold for those who dared reach beyond apparent limitations, she wondered if she could physically meet the challenge she'd just issued her listeners. She had studied Thoreau especially hard, reviewing his words again and again as she wrote her speech. She knew her audience of mostly German immigrants would approve his message of unadorned self-sufficiency and self-knowledge. While the pain rose in red waves around her words, she hoped she would be able to stand on her feet long enough to finish the short ceremony.
Lucy’s concern grew as she watched Lizzie’s eyes become
darker and darker. Others in the audience noticed an
unusual wildness about her they hadn’t seen before. Mamie
touched her mother’s arm. Only the family knew of her
problem; only the women even partially understood it.

"Do ya think she’ll get through?" Mamie whispered.

"Yah. She has an iron will, but we had better be ready
for what will follow the ceremony." Lucy laid her hand on
her husband’s and whispered, "Liebchen, Lizzie will faint
after this. You und Henry be ready."

"Yah, I can see it coming."

Lizzie returned shakily to her seat, and the minister
rose for the benediction. The graduates rose and filed past
the principal to receive diplomas and congratulations before
they left the auditorium through the rear doors. Her name
called, Lizzie stood and stepped firmly forward, all her
concentration focused on the principal’s outstretched hand.
She heard his slight gasp as he felt the ice of her hand.
She descended the stairs, and started up the aisle. She saw
her father rise and felt his arms catch and lift her as she
began to lose consciousness. She knew she would wake in the
doctor’s examination room. She knew she had passed a major
step in her life. She was a woman, but whether she could
reach beyond all that meant in her case remained to be seen.

* * * *
Lizzie sat in the kitchen rocker in front of the stove. Harry had built a roaring fire before he left to do his morning chores around the ranch, but she was only vaguely aware of his absence. She felt dense and numb, both heavy and light at the same time. She knew the feeling well. She rocked herself slowly and closed her eyes. Her head and back hurt as usual, but she'd learned to block that pain by concentration.

When Harry entered the kitchen with the morning's milking, she didn't open her eyes. Looking at her, he wondered what to do. Lucy had told him she had trouble sometimes at her monthly times, but she'd been embarrassed, or cautious, about relating the details to her daughter's new husband. Now he was learning firsthand about those troubles. They'd started yesterday when Lizzie had awakened in a pool of blood. She'd gotten up, pulled off the sheets, and cleaned the mattress as best she could. Then, she'd sat in the kitchen rocker and shivered continuously. He'd built a fire then and left her to do his chores. She was still there when he returned, just as she was now although the shivering had stopped. Then, she seemed unable to do much of anything, so he'd put the sheets into the washtub to soak, but she hadn't scrubbed them. Last night he'd done it himself, fixed supper himself, and gotten them both back to bed. This morning had begun the same way.
Tonight she was clearly exhausted, and the appearance of her houseshoes indicated she could have walked for miles. She looked extremely pale except for the purple hollows of her face, and her eyes had a wild look in them. They reminded him of the eyes of a seriously wounded animal searching for a place to hide. A haunted and haunting look. Worst of all, she wouldn't talk to him, wouldn't respond to his questions or words. She had evidently taken herself to the outhouse while he was gone, but as far as he knew she'd only eaten what he'd almost had to force down her.

Lizzie sensed Harry's worried presence, but she wasn't able to reach out of her fog of pain to him. She didn't understand why she had this problem, why so much pain almost every month. She didn't know why she felt compelled to walk and walk and walk insanely until she dropped in her place. She'd done that again today as soon as Harry had ridden down the road to check the cattle in a pasture. She'd paced the house in her robe and houseshoes. Then, she'd paced the barnyard and part way down the road which Harry had taken. Finally, when she'd exhausted herself, she'd returned to the house and fallen into a leadened sleep. Perhaps by tomorrow the pain would be gone again.

A day or so later when Lizzie had recovered and was temporarily free from the pain, she tried to explain the problems to Harry herself. She'd never been able to predict
which months would be the worst, when the pain would turn her totally inward, unable to reach beyond the red blur. Gradually, however, he became able to accept those bad times, and when they came, he altered his routine so he could stay nearer the farmhouse. Sometimes an urgent chore would prevent it, but he was usually able to monitor her discreetly, and they grew both close and apart.

* * * *
"What did the doctor say this time?" Lucy asked, her German heritage coloring her speech as usual. She stood in the barn doorway, watching her daughter climb down from the buggy and unhitch the horse. After turning the horse into the lot and hanging up the harness inside the barn, Lizzie walked with Lucy through the wooden gate and up the path to her mother's porch, the pain in her abdomen making her hunch slightly as though to protect herself. Thank God she could leave forking hay for the horse to her brother.

"Nothing different. He can't understand why I have such pains every month. Everything looks fine, he says. He also doesn't understand why I'm not pregnant. I don't believe he understands very much at all about women's matters. A good cow doctor could probably tell me more!"

Lucy turned on the porch to look back at Lizzie's buggy, imagining it full of children. There could be at least four in that buggy, she thought. Four grandbabies to cuddle and bounce on my knee, sons to help Harry with the ranch, daughters to help Lizzie, with even enough left over for me, too.

Lizzie watched her mother, thinking how transparent she was. Her longing for continuity shown in her eyes as she stared at the buggy. It didn't matter that Mamie already had several children. Lucy loved babies, particularly grandbabies.
Lizzie would spend the night with her parents, who lived closer to town than she and Harry did. It was almost dusk and too late for a lone woman, even a farm woman, to take a buggy the rest of the way. Harry wouldn't really expect her tonight since these trips to the town doctor and overnight stays with her parents were getting to be more and more routine monthly occurrences. It seemed to Lizzie that her life had grown increasingly more painful physically as her joy with Harry had increased. Oh, she'd had the pains all her adult life, but never before like they were now. She had once believed that her graduation day had been the worst.

"Mama, the doctor did say he thought I'd have less pain if I could get pregnant."

"That is strange. Why? Did he say why?"

"No, just that the womb sometimes would fix itself, if the woman could get pregnant." The two women went through the porch screen door to the kitchen.

"I never heard of such a thing in all my life."

"No, I never did either."

"Well, I am making kolaches for you, and it is time to start your father's dinner. He and Henry will be in soon to milk and finish the home chores. Come sit here in the kitchen rocker while I work. You can snap the beans while I slice the ham and make the cornbread."
Lizzie sat in the kitchen rocker, snapping the beans into a pan on her lap and throwing the stems into her apron. She was grateful for the cushion in the chair against the small of her back. Every little bit of softness and ease seemed to help, but the pain was worse, nauseating her slightly, and spreading tension up her spine and into her head. She leaned her head back as she finished the beans, resting a minute before she carried the stems to the hogs' bucket and the pan to the kitchen pump. It was nice to have an indoor pump. Harry had promised her an indoor pump after the calves were sold this fall.

As she stirred the cornbread batter and poured it into the cast iron skillet, Lucy watched her daughter washing the beans at the pump. Lizzie was the smartest and most worrisome of all her children. That one's mind would never stop questioning, and that pain and its strange wildness troubled her. So much to live with and so much discontent. Maybe if she could have a baby, she would be able to be calmer, more secure. Maybe the womb could heal itself and leave her with less pain and moodiness. Please, God. Harry is a good man, but not even a good man can really understand that kind of pain, what it can do to a woman's mind to know that every month it would come inescapably, unavoidably to interfere with, sometimes even prevent anything else. Lucy had been watching Lizzie cope with this for fifteen or
sixteen years. It never had gotten better, only worse. Now, this doctor and his "just get pregnant." Men just didn't understand this sort of thing and had no sympathy for it either. Lucy wished again, as she had when her own babies had been born, that she could talk to her mother's midwife back in Jagsthausen. Luisa Scheer had known about women's troubles.

"Go lie down on the bed until dinner is ready, Lizzie. Go und ease your back a little while. I can easily finish this alone. After all, I have been doing this by myself for years, ever since Pearlina got old enough for school. Her bus will be here soon und she can help me if I need it."

Lizzie handed her the beans. "Thank you, Mama. These are ready to cook, but I am a little dizzy. Maybe lyin' down will help."

"I wonder how you manage at home alone sometimes."

"I wonder, too...sometimes."

Lizzie lay on the old quilt on the bed of her childhood, the bed she'd shared with Annie and Ida, and Pearl after she was older. By then Mamie had been married for years and had several children already. Lucky Mamie. All those children and no problems having them. Harry would like that.

Lizzie heard the door slam as Pearl came in from the bus. Out back the cows were lowing, ready for milking. The
late July afternoon lull was over and the animals were responding to the cooler hour and the call of night. Pearl went out to feed the chickens, and her father and Henry would soon tend the cows. The pain seemed to dissolve in the peace and lassitude of the hour as Lizzie drifted in half-awake dreams.

A picture of Harry, laughing Harry, the-devil-in-his-eyes Harry, came to her. She recognized the look. She had it trapped in the picture he had had taken in St. Louis two years before they had married. He’d hinted at some of the wild things he and Dave had done there that April. He had seen the big city and done it, too, he had said. Whatever that meant. She shut off her imagination from that and just remembered the look. He looked at her that way sometimes, too, almost always before they loved each other. Once, one morning early as they’d walked along the creek not long after their wedding....That look had been in his eyes then, and in hers, too, probably. Now, he was often too tired. If only he had a son to help him. Yes, the doctor was right. A baby would mend a lot of things.

"Lizzie, supper’s ready." Pearl poked her long brown braids around the door frame. "Mama said to come eat."

Lizzie hugged her baby sister as they walked down the hallway to the kitchen. Papa and her older brother Henry were already at the kitchen pump, washing their faces and
hands and joking as always about some cow or other. They turned to hug her as she entered the kitchen, their coarse beards and hands rough on her skin. The pain came rolling back, heightening all other sensations.

Chris looked at his daughter, recognizing the problem but not understanding the source. Lucy caught his eye and stopped his question. Henry squeezed his sister and they all sat together at the old kitchen table. Pearl bubbled through the school day, and the men related the troubles and humor of the cows.

"Lucy, guess where we found that ol' crooked horn cow this time."

"No telling. Where?"

"She got her head through the gate to the alfalfa patch and got so much wire wrapped around the horn she pulled up a gate post getting free. It took us almost two hours to get her out of the alfalfa and repair the damage. The last time she got loose, it was the windmill pump. One of these days I think we will just have to tie her down and saw off that horn. At least she is gentle. I will hate to saw on that horn though because it might ruin her good nature."

Pearl laughed, "She does cause you a lotta trouble with that horn. How'd it get t' be so crooked."

"God just grew it that way, my girl. How else to explain such things. If she did not drop such fine calves,
I would sell her at once und avoid all this work she causes me." Chris buttered his cornbread and chuckled, "Still, she makes life interesting. I never know what I will find when I go over there to check that pasture. How is everything over at your place, Lizzie? Will Harry get another cutting on his hay, do you think?"

"Everything’s fine, Papa. Th’ spotted sow you gave us last year dropped her first litter, fourteen piglets, an’ promptly squashed six of ’um. Th’ hay’s comin’ on, but it needs a little rain. I don’t think th’ second cuttin’ will be a very good one otherwise. Still, Harry feels we’ve got enough even if it doesn’t make good a second time. Harry’s very optimistic, but he knows what he’s doin’. He’s a good rancher, Papa. You’d be proud of how everythin’ looks. All cleaned up an’ runnin’ right."

"I knew that sow was crazy when I gave her to you. Watch that she does not kill the others. You ought to take them out und feed them yourself, some of them anyway."

"She seems okay now, Papa. Harry thinks, und I agree, that she won’t hurt the rest of ’um. One of th’ new cows has a white patch on her neck looks like a map of Texas, Papa. Strangest thing."

"Leave it to you, Lizzie, to see something like that on a cow’s neck. Is she a good cow?"
"I guess so, Papa; she was th' first one bred by that bull Charlie lent Harry. The way she's built, there'll be no trouble with her calvin'. And, at least she doesn't pull down gates an' windmill pumps," Lizzie teased.

Chris looked at his middle daughter fondly. Her quiet humor had always made her his favorite, but her troubling, incomprehensible problems sat heavily in his mind whenever he thought about her. He'd always figured she'd be an old maid. She almost was too, didn't marry Harry until she was twenty-seven. Though she was normally a very quiet person, she was a little too smart for most men, too quick to tease. Of course, Harry Brown was that way, himself. Lizzie was the only woman who could keep up with Harry, and she'd waited for him, let him go off to St. Loo and sow some wild oats first. He'd let Lizzie know who was boss all right. Have to admire a man who knew what he wanted and took the time to get it, Chris thought. Harry was a good man.

"I'm goin' t' bed, Mama. I want t' be home in time t' fix Harry's lunch tomorrow, so I'd better leave by seven."

"It's time anyway. How do you...?"

"Better. By mornin' I'll be much better. Some days I don't think about it. Maybe tomorrow will be one of those."

"Please, God."

"Yes, Mama. Please, God."

***
Lucy stood in the front doorway watching the road from town. The early June sun was still hazy with heat in spite of the lateness in the day.

Her husband came through the house to change shirts before dinner. "Any sign of her yet?" he asked.

"No, Chris, nothing and it is almost dark. Do you think you should ride up the road and check? Maybe her buggy lost a wheel."

"I will ride to the crossroads. Perhaps she just went on home. The doctor probably did not make her wait for him as long as he usually does." They walked back to the kitchen together where he left her before going to get his horse.

Lucy watched out the kitchen window as her husband saddled his big bay gelding and rode off up the dirt road. She walked anxiously back to the front windows of the house and watched until he disappeared over the dusky hilltop. Then she returned to her kitchen chores. No sense in wasting the time with worry. Still, while she stood by the pump and peeled the potatoes for supper, she couldn't help wondering why Lizzie would break the almost invariable monthly pattern of riding past her parents' ranchhouse in the morning on her way to the doctor's and returning that same evening to spend the night before going on back to her
husband. She'd indicated no change in their usual routine when she'd stopped on her way in to town that morning.

She heard Chris's horse turn into the barnyard before she realized she'd been musing for almost half an hour. He'd gone and come back more rapidly than she realized.

"Two sets of buggy tracks in the crossroads, Lucy. It looks as though she went straight back home. What do you suppose that means? Did she ever do that before; do you remember?" He sat in the kitchen chair to remove his boots.

"No, never, that I can recall."

"Well, she went on home. I will ride over tomorrow, or you can take the wagon over if you want." He set his boots next to the kitchen door.

"We can decide in the morning. Go und wash up now. Supper is almost ready."

Meanwhile, Lizzie had passed the crossroads to her parents' farmhouse without even turning her head or slacking the mare's gait. The horse sensed her urgency and stepped along smartly. Even the jerking of the buggy, usually so painful at this time of month, didn't cause Lizzie to check the pace. The mare wanted her barn and oats; Lizzie wanted Harry, wanted him with more intensity than she had ever felt before.

It was still very early in the afternoon, and he'd gone to help the Wynns cut hay. Fred would be coming to help cut
hay in their fields next week to pay back the favor. She had no idea when he'd be home; she just knew she wanted to be there with his dinner hot and ready for him, and then she could tell him. Not before. Not before he was fed and cooler. That was the right time.

She held the secret tight inside and nourished it. She could almost feel the edge of the butterfly's wing brushing against her there. It was such a pleasure to hold she almost didn't want to tell it, even to him.

As the buggy rose over the last rise before home, Lizzie saw Harry in the barnyard unharnessing the mules. He looked up in surprise. She could tell even at that distance that he was startled. His shoulders jerked, and he pushed his old straw hat back as though the act would clear his vision. She stood up and waved like a kid but sat down quickly as the hungry mare sensed that her oats were waiting and picked up her pace. Harry turned his dusty team into the lot, closed the gate, and started across the yard toward her. The mare was loping now, jerking the buggy awkwardly from side to side, in and out of the ruts. Lizzie could not, did not want to slow her, and she raced fifty yards passed Harry up to the barn door, shocking him into a run as well. As the buggy lurched to a dust-filled stop, Lizzie laughed hysterically and fell off the buggy seat into her husband's arms.
"Lizzie, what th' hell?"

As he collapsed into the dust of the yard under her unexpected weight, Lizzie screamed with laughter.

"Are you crazy?" he laughed, giving way to the moment's contagion.

"Is that any way to talk t' th' woman who's carryin' your child?"

"No!" his disbelief clear in the single word.

"Yes!" with a smile.

"When?"

"Christmas, or just after."

"My God."

"Yes, indeed."

* * * *
Haying time was past. The doctor had said that her troubles and pain would end once she got pregnant, but they hadn’t. He’d said that before, before she’d lost the other baby. But that earlier pregnancy hadn’t lasted nearly this long. Lizzie fretted; she hated lying in bed with nothing to do all day but idle needlework. It was too soon to begin knitting baby clothes or stitching little nightgowns. She still had three months to go, and besides, she had four sisters and a mother, not to mention Harry’s women kinfolks. There would be ample baby clothes when the time came. Oh, she’d make some herself, but there was no rush. An infant didn’t need much. Since it was October, at least there wasn’t as many chores to get done.

Being pregnant is hard work; it makes a person tired. Lizzie drifted in and out of sleep. Harry drove the buggy up to the back gate. He wanted to go for a ride. It was Sunday afternoon, a good time for a ride. The doctor had said she could from time to time, if she felt like it, and if she had no pains. Harry helped her in, tucked pillows behind her back, and lay a quilt over her lap.

The buggy moved with astonishing smoothness. In fact, it began to soar. Lizzie looked out to find the road. Rather surprisingly it no longer existed; they apparently were traveling cross-country. Harry smiled at her, and
Lizzie relaxed. The landscape sped by rapidly, but Lizzie recognized none of it. How curious, she thought.

Looking down she saw a large, strangely shaped stock tank. It was almost square, like the cup of a huge dipper with a short handlelike creek coming away from one corner, but it lost its unusual appearance the closer they drew to it. Soon the buggy came to land a slight distance from the tank, and they climbed down to rest. Large unfamiliar varieties of trees shaded the tank on three sides, and the grass beneath them appeared to be as carefully manicured as the lawns of a king's estate. As they walked along the tank's handle, Lizzie looked down. In the clear water swam the most bizarre fish she'd ever seen. They were very large, almost three feet long, and long-bodied like gar. Except they weren't gar. These docile fish wove in and out of their school gently like enormous goldfish, caressing each other with diaphonous fins and tails. They lacked the sharp, wicked teeth of gars as well. Lizzie looked up, saw the shade under the trees, and urged Harry toward it.

As she rounded the corner of the tank, an immense, tawny lion came out of the trees. When it saw her, it began pacing slowly in her direction. Icy panic gripped Lizzie's throat. She stepped back toward the handle and the fish. Harry edged to the side of the tank and away from her, waded into it and began to swim for the other side where the buggy
waited. Oddly, the horse grazed quietly and seemed to be unaware of the lion's presence.

The lion shook its mane and came forward, silently stalking her, waiting for the right moment when Lizzie would stumble or turn to run. Harry shouted from the opposite shore, trying to attract the lion to him, but it would not leave its prey. He climbed in the buggy and drove the horse up the other side of the tank toward the handle. He and Lizzie were on opposite sides of the handle, but it was narrow enough for her to jump in this emergency, especially if he were there to catch her.

She could scarcely breathe; her heart pounded. Her legs almost froze with her terror. She glanced to see how far away the handle lay. As her eyes left the lion, she felt the beast crouch to spring. Lizzie leaped at the same time and fell into awareness. The coverlet had twisted around her. Harry watched from the door and crossed the room to untangle her legs.

"What is it, Lizzie? What's troublin' you?"

"Oh, Harry, such a dream!" She laughed in relief. He had caught her after all.

* * * *
Lucy sat in her daughter's kitchen. She had ridden to Lizzie's house in an unprecedented uproar, raging for the entire time it took the horse at a fast trot to pull her buggy over the dirt roads. Lizzie set a cup of coffee for her mother on the table and took the four-month-old baby out of his grandmother's arms.

"Now, Mama. What's brought you all this way in such a huff? Is Papa on one of his wild rampages again wandering about th' countryside, or is it just that you were dyin' to see your darlin' grandson again?"

"It is your brother, Lizzie, your impossible brother!"

"What's Henry done, Mama, t' upset you so?"

"He has decided to get married!"

"Henry? Never! He's too old an' set in his ways. Who'd have him anyway?"

"That little Borgman girl."

"Not Elsie. She's just a child! He's twice her age. She's barely eighteen."

"Yah, und the spoiled baby of the entire family. Oh, she will run him a merry race all right. They intend to come live with us as well! Can you imagine? Und me with your Papa to manage. I had to get Tom's wife to come sit with him today while I am gone. He forgot what he was doing last Saturday und wandered off on foot. He could not find the way home again. It took both of the hands two hours to
find him. He was going to the mailbox at the end of the road, he told them. They found him down by the new tank, four miles in the opposite direction. Cold lost, is what he was. Him that paced every inch of that land with the surveyors! I hardly recognize him as the man who left me in Germany while he went off to conquer the new world so long ago. I don't know what I'm going to do with him, und with her in the house, too. God in heaven!"

"Well, there's one good thing, Mama."

"What is that? I see nothing good in it."

"She'll be well trained. The Borgmans are good people, good farmers. You won't have t' teach her how t' do anything. She can take over some of th' chores from you. She can cook for th' hands an' churn and such. That much is very good."

"That is true, but it is also true that all those Borgmans are the stubbornest people on the earth. She will do those chores, but she will do them her way, not mine. Well, that house is still my house, und I will still be in charge. Henry will have to understand a few things. Just because your papa cannot be the master any longer, und Henry now runs the ranch does not mean that Henry's wife will run the house. Not while I am still able, und that will be a long, long time, my daughter!"
Lizzie shook her head, smiling at her adamant mother, "I hope that's so, Mama. I wouldn't like for you t' resign from your house an' home. Henry will adjust an' so will she. She has always been friendly t' me whenever we meet in town or at church. She will make Henry a good wife, Mama; you will see. When will they marry?"

"After haying time, but they have not yet picked a day. It will depend on her father. He has not yet given consent."

"Surely he wouldn't refuse Henry. They're old friends. Henry told me once that he stopped there frequently on the way in to town."

"Yah, und now we know why he stopped so frequently!"

The women laughed. Lizzie knew her mother had suspected every girl who had ever seemed interested in Henry of being greedy for his money. Not that he had a lot, but the family had plenty of land, thanks to Papa and Uncle Johan's good management. When Johan had died unmarried and childless, his share of the land had gone to Henry, the closest thing he had to a son. No, she doubted that Mr. Borgman would refuse to allow even his pet to marry Henry. He was too good a catch, even if Elsie would inherit plenty herself when the time came. The wonder of all wonders was that her shy older brother had managed to enter the world of
women long enough to find one. Lizzie had always assumed that he would be like their uncle and remain a bachelor.

Lizzie took the sleeping baby and put him in his crib. "Mama, Harry'll be home for dinner soon. Will you stay and have biscuits and green peas and ham with us?"

"Yah, I will shell the peas. You make the biscuits. Yours are better than mine."

Together they worked, amiably chatting about the mundane details of their lives, similar variations on all the routine activities life on a farm provided. When Harry arrived for his noon meal almost an hour later, he found them together in the kitchen, clucking over the baby as Lizzie fed him. He recognized the noises as the same ones they made as they served him his dinner. Harry had to laugh, but silently. No point in antagonizing his testy mother-in-law if it could be avoided. Besides, he liked Lucy.

"Harry, guess what Mama says Henry is about to do!"

"Get married." He grinned at the two women.

"How did you know?"

"Henry rode by th' Triangle this mornin' while I was settin' th' new gateposts an' asked us t' stand up with 'um. The Methodist minister's back from his circuit, an' Henry was goin' t' find out when he expects t' be home again after hayin'. I told him I was sure you'd want to. Lucy, he said
they were havin' a private ceremony because you an' Elsie's father don't approve. Frank Borgman thinks Henry's too old for his baby, I guess. He won't stand in th' way of their marryin', but he won't provide for a big weddin' either. Besides, Henry don't want t' wait. He's afraid of givin' folks time t' plan a big chivari, I 'spect. He says maybe they'll have a big party later on after they get settled."

"I suppose that is for the best. He told you right. Elsie's mama hasn't been gone all that long either. It wouldn't be very respectful to have a big, fancy party this soon. They buried her Palm Sunday; you remember, Lizzie?"

"Yes, Mama. It was a big funeral. Everyone in th' county must have come. You're right. It is too soon after for a big weddin' party. Maybe they can give a harvest dance in th' fall when th' weather turns."

Finishing, Harry wiped his mouth and moved to the kitchen rocker to put his boots on. He rose and walked to his son's crib, leaned down and stroked the soft black hair. "I 'spect they'll want t' go in about three weeks. Our hay'll be done by June first. Lucy, your crews should be through around about then, too. Why don't you buy yourself a new dress, Lizzie? If you don't have enough saved back in your sewin' basket, I have a little put back. We can spare it. The hay crop is doin' well, and so are the calves."
"That's nice of you, Harry. Have you been peekin' in my sewin' basket? How did you know I've been savin' some money there?"

"Lizzie," said her mother softly, "don't look the gift horse in the mouth. We can go in to town tomorrow. I am halfway home from town. Can you manage the trip to und from my house with Luke in a basket? It would be nice to shop together und visit our friends a bit. I might even be able to recover from Henry's bad news if I could go to town und spread the word myself."

Harry kissed both women and walked out the door chuckling. It eased every pain a woman had if she could gossip about it to another woman, he thought. Lizzie could use the break. She hadn't been able to go to town much with the baby, even if it wasn't that far away. She could show Luke off, buy her new dress, and visit her friends. Supper would be cold, but his welcome home wouldn't be. That was a fair trade, a damn fair trade.

* * * *
Lizzie guided the mare pulling the buggy over the rain-rutted pasture track. She could see the hayfield through the early June morning haze. Harry had ridden the team over earlier and was talking to Fred Wynn, who would help stack up the first cutting of what everyone believed would be a bumper crop. The spring had been wet, and the hay had been left to dry a few days before the men built the stack lot. Lizzie would drive the buck rake and gather the hay. Next, one man would toss the hay onto the stacker which would lift it to the other man who'd then place each clump properly on the stack. First fill the rake, then unload it, toss up the hay, and then stack it, over and over again until the stack was built. Finally they would build a fence to keep the cattle away from the stack. When winter came and the cattle needed the hay, Harry could simply take down the temporary wire enclosure.

Fred would probably work up on top of the stack since he was smaller than Harry. It would be a hot, dusty day's work. Lizzie looked down at the basket safely tucked in the well of the buggy beside her feet. Luke was awake but quiet, his eyes taking in everything around him as usual. He wouldn't be hungry for a while. She could pick up several rows of the field before she'd have to stop and nurse him. Harry opened the wire gate into the field for the team to pass through.
"How'd Luke take t' buggy ridin' cross-country?"

"Not a complaint, he just looked at everythin' around him just as he always does. I don't want t' leave him in th' buggy while we're workin'. It's too hot t' cover up his head, an' th' sun could burn him later on. Besides, th' air' can't circulate around him with th' buggy blockin' it."

"What about puttin' him under th' oak down yonder where th' creek crosses th' bottom of th' field? It's shady, an' it'll almost always be in hearin' range since we pick up th' windrows north t' south. We can have lunch there, too. That'll be cooler than up here by th' stack."

Harry gestured with his hands, and she could see his idea made good sense.

Lizzie drove the mare to the tree. It stood apart from the creek a little, and nothing else grew near it since the hay had been cut. She spread the blanket she'd brought for lunch time and set the baby's basket and the food basket down. She studied the sun for a few seconds, shifted Luke into the deepest shade, and moved the food so it wouldn't block her view of the baby from the field. Then she unhitched the mare from the buggy and put her on a tether closer to the creek and away from the baby. After checking the sleeping baby once more, she gathered up her skirts above her boot tops and hiked back across the field to where the men were hitching the buck rake to the mule team.
Lizzie climbed into the seat, evened the reins, and started the team across the first windrow. As soon as the rake filled, she drove the team back to the stacker. Raking hay was familiar work; she'd done it for her father before she'd married. After the haystack had grown taller than the men could reach, Harry unloaded the hay from the rake into the stacker, and Fred's mule team provided the power to lift the hay up to the top of the stack. There Fred took the hay and lay the bunches on end. After he had laid a row one way, he turned and laid a second vertical row so that any rain which fell on the stack would not form puddles but would soon run off onto the ground. The hay would come off the sides in bundles and never put the stack in danger of falling down. The process would eventually make the haystack nearly twenty feet in diameter. The hay was both fragrant and musty, a good smell that could easily make a farmer sneeze in protest to its intensity, and the men had put their bandannas over their noses. Soon Harry had emptied the buck rake, and Lizzie went back for new load.

After Fred took each load from him, Harry walked around the growing stack, moving any rocks or limbs that might destroy the symmetry of their project. While Fred and Harry worked at the stack, Lizzie drove the team across the field to bring another load of hay. It didn't take long for them to establish a rhythm to their movements.
The regularity of the well-established routine and the increasing heat of the day lulled Lizzie into a mechanical reaction to the team's movements and left her unprepared when the tooth of the rake uncovered the rattlesnake's nest. The mules, however, reacted instantaneously to the warning sound which would freeze any farmer's marrow. They jumped both sideways away from snake and forward, jerking the reins from Lizzie's loose grip and almost tossing her over the back of the rake onto the ground.

Spooked, the team took off at a dead run straight for the oak and Luke, throwing hay right and left and breaking the forward-facing teeth of the rake. Lizzie stared at the tree, petrified and clinging to the seat as the rake bounced and cracked over the field. The reins flapped to the ground, cut to ribbons by the mules' flying hoofs; theirragged ends flaying the flanks of the mules and urging them on even faster. She clawed at the edge of the seat, but every time she tried to force herself to jump clear of the rake or try to catch the ends of the reins, Luke's growing basket dragged her eyes back. Finally, more by instinct than by conscious act, she reached for one of the reins and hauled the off mule's head toward his right shoulder, forcing the team to veer away from the baby. They seemed to respond to the strong, domesticating drag and forgot their fear. Blowing hard, the mules slowed to a trot, then a
walk, before they ultimately stopped near the fence line at the end of the pasture.

Lizzie slid from the rake’s seat and collapsed onto the ground, and when Harry finally caught up with the heaving team, he couldn’t rouse her. He pulled her away from the broken rake and into his arms, then he carried her while Fred led the mules by their considerably shortened reins to the oak. The men lowered Lizzie carefully to the quilt, and Harry bathed her face with creek water. She lay inert, responding only to some inner motivation. Luke, suddenly aware of the activity around him, woke up, lunch time announced by his internal clock. Lizzie heard the baby’s cries and roused. Sitting up, she braced her back against the oak, took Luke, and put him to her breast. Finally she lifted her head and saw Harry kneeling before her, his face filled with love and concern. Silently her eyes brimmed over. Silently the tears washed the baby whose instinctive routine had suddenly become so vital and so precious.

* * * *
"Lizzie, are you ready yet? I see Henry an' Elsie's buggy comin' up th' road."

"I'm just changin' Luke right now. We're ready. Would you get that new Bible from th' parlor. I want to be sure th' minister signs th' marriage certificate. Henry won't think of it, so I got th' Bible as a weddin' present for them. Look in th' box on th' table."

Lizzie carried Luke into the kitchen just as Harry entered with the Bible. She slipped it into the picnic hamper. They'd stop at the creek to picnic on their way back from the ceremony. She hoped Henry and Elsie would spend the night with them rather than riding on back to his house, but she rather doubted it. She had changed the bed linens just in case and had told Harry to offer the idea to Henry privately. Lizzie wanted married life to begin well for her brother and his bride. Glancing again in the mirror, she smoothed her hair and straightened her collar. The eyes looked out at her calmly. She was grateful that although the pain was still intense each month, she seemed to be able to control her wild moods better. Luke's demands helped. He kicked in his basket to remind her of his presence but didn't complain. He was a good baby. A very precious baby, she shuddered as she remembered that day in the hay field.
Harry went out the front door to greet the couple and helped Elsie down from the buggy while Henry tied up the horse. Elsie bustled into the house. Lizzie could see Harry pull Henry aside to keep him from rushing after her and whispered the offer of their bed for the night. She greeted Elsie, and Elsie tickled the baby and admired the picnic preparations. She had brought things, too, she told Lizzie. They would have a regular banquet. She seemed happy as though there were no dissatisfactions on anybody's part about her marriage. She's making the best of everything, thought Lizzie. The only way to go ahead under the circumstances. Lizzie admired her, and she could understand why Henry was taken with her. She was little, blond and pretty, full of cheerful energy.

Henry stamped his boots on the doorstep and entered the parlor. Lizzie went to hug him. He was smiling broadly, full of his own happiness.

"Henry, I'm so glad for you. You look wonderful. We're ready t' leave if you'll carry th' picnic basket. Harry, will you carry Luke's basket? I'll get his diapers and things."

Henry set the horse off down the road at a good clip. They chatted amiably and scarcely noticed the hour's ride to the minister's parsonage although they did pick their picnic spot on the way past the creek. The fields and pastures
spread out on either side of the road. Long rolling prairie land broken into sections marked by barbed wire fences. Every so often they passed a wooden farmhouse accompanied by its adjacent barn and sheds, chicken yards, and various pens and lots. Wooden windmills pumped water for these farms. Along the creeks grew tall oaks, elms, and pecan trees. In June the plant life was still green, but by the end of summer everything would be burned crisply yellow by the dry heat of July and August. This day was warm and sunny, and Luke seemed to enjoy the rhythm of the buggy as it jounced down the road, and he slept most of the way. Lizzie fed him shortly before they arrived. The minister and his wife were expecting them, of course, and the ceremony served its necessary purpose with good Methodist efficiency. They soon left for home.

Stopping by the creek, the women spread their quilts under the elms, and the men unhitched the horse to let him graze and rest while they did. They chatted about the changes Henry had in mind for the house once he and Elsie were established. He recognized that he would have a few problems with Lucy, but most of what Henry wanted were details which would modernize the old house. Lucy wouldn't complain about those if she didn't have to pay for them, Lizzie knew. The only real question was what would happen about Papa. Henry couldn't ask Elsie to be a nursemaid to
him, and Lucy didn’t always have the strength to keep up with him if he decided to take off on his own again. Of course, if things got really bad, Elsie usually could ring the bell and call one of the hands up from the barn.

Dinner over, the men lay back on the grass while the women played with the baby. Harry joined the women in admiration of his son. He wasn’t afraid to show his affection, thought Lizzie. That’s good. It took us a long, hard time to get Luke here. Harry should admire him.

The men rehitched the buggy, and they were soon on their way back. As they drove up to the front of the small farmhouse, Lizzie looked at her brother questioningly.

"Will you stay th’ night? We’d love t’ have you."

Henry smiled at her. "No, Sister, though I thank you for th’ kind offer. I’d rather get on back. Elsie an’ I discussed it before we got here, but we decided home was where we wanted t’ be tonight."

"Will you come in an’ rest a bit before you go on?"

"No, I want t’ get back before dark. Mama will need help puttin’ Papa t’ bed. He’s havin’ one of his weak spells. It will be best if we go right on."

Lizzie kissed them both good-by and handed Luke down to Harry. She took the hand he offered and stepped lightly down herself. They stood on their porch, Luke in Harry’s arms, and waved as the buggy rolled steadily down the road.
Harry rocked Luke in the kitchen rocker while Lizzie set out a cold light supper for them. They ate in silence and put Luke to bed together. Later they lay curled in each other's arms.

Just as sleep began to take them they heard a shout and the jingle of harness. Then the noise began in earnest. Someone was banging a washtub, shotguns and rifles cracked in a random pattern, and shouts poured in from all sides of the house. Harry sat up in bed.

"That's Jake, by God. Jake an' Charlie's older boys an' th' Lord only knows who else. They think Henry's here, I'll bet."

"What do we do?"

"Well, if we can keep Luke quiet an' stay quiet ourselves a bit, we might buy a little time for your brother. All he needs is a good chivari tonight. I ought t' go tell on 'em though. Serve him right after th' one he gave us. I'll bet he let on he might stay here t'night, an' knew Jake an' Charlie'd never dare disturb Lucy an' Chris at home after they'd come by here. They wouldn't believe that Elsie'd put up with her in-laws on her weddin' night. Henry's pretty smart. I have t' give him that."

"Do you think they'll stay here if we get up an' let 'em in for a drink or something? I've got that cake I made just in case Elsie an' Harry did stay. We could serve 'em
that an' a couple of drinks apiece. We've got plenty of cider. Maybe they'd get satisfied temporarily an' not ride over to the home place until tomorrow night."

"Might work. It's worth a try. I'll go out an' josh with 'em till you can get your clothes on. We'll try t' fool 'em into thinkin' Henry an' Elsie are here, at least for a while."

"Get the cider out of th' root cellar first."

Harry opened the trap door into the root cellar and carried up jugs of cider to the kitchen by moonlight. Then he lit the kitchen lights and opened the door.

"Come on in, boys. After all that whoopin' an' hollarin', you must be dry. How about some cider? Or do you want somethin' a bit harder?"

The men stood around joking loudly, intent on embarrassing the newlyweds with their raucous and rowdy behavior, delaying the honeymoon if possible. When Lizzie entered the room, the men took off their hats and stopped their tumult.

"Gentlemen, you're welcome. Would you care for some weddin' cake with your drinks?"

The men mumbled their acceptances while Lizzie set out plates and forks, and Harry began pouring cider. Lizzie handed plates of cake around, and the noise softened while the men ate.
"Where's that Henry? Git him out here, Harry. No sense leavin' him t' have fun on his weddin' night. Roust him out." Jake knew that his brother-in-law would forgive him for taking liberties when he'd hold a grudge against some of the other men in the group. Henry'd done too much chivaring not to have encouraged feelings of revenge.

"Well, now, Jake. You remember how you felt on your weddin' night?"

"That didn't stop any of you, did it, from drivin' me crazy with your noise 'till dawn."

"You already were crazy, Jake. Nobody had t' drive you there."

Jake laughed. They continued to reminisce about the chivaris each had experienced through several more mugs of Harry's hard cider.

"Okay, he's had plenty of time t' git his pants on. Git him out here, Harry. We want t' throw him in th' wagon an' ride him 'round town a couple of times. We'll bring him back 'bout dawn."

"Would if I could, Jake, but the truth is, he isn't here."

"Not here? Harry, you ...." Jake bit his tongue.

"I'm sorry, Lizzie. I fergot you were standin' there. Where is th' son-of-a-buck?"
"I 'spect he's been home an' in bed a good while now, Jake. You thinkin' t' ride over there this late?"

Jake laughed. Harry knew him and had him this time.

"Not likely. I don't believe I'd care for a dose of Lucy's tongue this time of night. We'll just pay 'em a little call tomorrow evenin'. At least we'll git a double dose of refreshments that way. Might even make this extree night worth th' trouble. G'd night, Lizzie."

"You're a good man, Jake. Give my love t' Annie."

Lizzie hugged her brother-in-law briefly and left the room to the men. She could hear them filing out, mounting, and riding off into the night. Harry came and slid into bed beside her.

"Were they really angry, Harry?"

"Naw. They're a little likkered-up, and stoppin' here took just enough steam out of 'em for this night anyway. Henry's accomplished what he set out t' do. They won't embarrass either of 'em tomorrow night. I'd bet Elsie'll have some fine refreshments for 'um, too. I might just ride over myself for that. She's as good a cook as you are. That's why Henry married her, you know."

Lizzie laughed. "And that's why you married me, too."

"The whole county knows it. Besides, you asked me to."

"Of course. Wasn't I smart an' aren't you glad I did!"

* * * *
Lizzie sat on the kitchen floor beside the tin bathtub, towels, rags and soap in neat piles on the chair she had pulled up. On the stove steamed kettles and tubs of water heating. The week was over; church and social life tomorrow demanded clean bodies, part of the weekly ritual of life. The light of the setting sun caught the naked eighteen-month old boy in its spotlight as he toddled around the kitchen giggling. He liked water.


"No." He headed out the kitchen door for the parlor. "No, no, no, no!" He ran headfirst into his father's knees.

Harry scooped up the squirming child and tickled his feet. "No, no, no, my foot! Try, 'Yes, yes, yes,' you little rascal." He lowered him carefully into the tub.

Lizzie laughed at her two men, Luke standing in the shoulder high tub trying hard to cry and Harry standing over the two of them trying not to laugh.

"Look, Luke, a boat." To distract the angry boy, she set the cup on the water and gave it a gentle push. It floated toward the boy. She gradually eased him down into a sitting position. "Here's a little man to ride in your boat." She handed him an empty spool. "Put him in his boat, Luke, and give him a ride. What's he doing? Is he goin' fishin'?"
"Goin' fishin'." Affirmatively.

Harry sat in the kitchen rocker beside the stove watching her soap the boy while he played and fought her all at the same time. He enjoyed the play of her imagination with Luke.

"Oops, look what happened! Th' boat turned over," she said as she brought the cup up full of warm water and poured it over the boy's head. "Your little man got his head wet, didn't he? You'd better rescue him quick!" She handed the sputtering boy the cup and quickly wiped the water out of his eyes. Distracted, he hunted for his spool-man while she soaped his hair.

"Time to swim like a fish." She lay him back in the water and put the cup on his fat tummy which rose above the water level. She bounced the spool up and down on his abdomen. "See, th' boat is on an island now, an' th' little man is walkin' around explorin' for good fishin' holes. Oh, he found one!" She put the spool on Luke's navel and began to wash the soap from his hair with a rag full of water.

Luke tried to turn over, but she held him while she rinsed off the soap, telling him about the little man's adventures. Handing him the spool and cup, she stood him up in the tub and began to towel him off.
"I'll set some more water for you an' me t' heatin'." Harry spoke as she lifted Luke from the tub and began to stuff him into his pajamas.

"That'd be a real help, Harry. Thank you."

He poured the kettles from the stove into the tub and resettled its sheet liner. Refilling the kettles from the bucket, he set them back on the stove to boil again. He could hear Lizzie rocking and singing Luke to sleep as he returned from the pump with more water. Diluting the steaming tub water with the cool pump water, he made one more trip out. He didn't want to go back out after his own bath.

Quickly removing his boots and clothes, he stepped into the tub just as Lizzie returned to the kitchen. She avoided his eyes out of habit, making him chuckle under his breath. Her modesty was a learned behavior and amused him because it hid her more passionate nature. He remembered when other men had thought her prim to the point of prissiness. They hadn't seen past her quietness, her often intimidating intellect, and her father's land. He had learned better and enjoyed his secret still.

Lizzie lay another piece of mesquite in the stove before lifting a whistling kettle. "Is the water hot enough?"
"It could use a little heatin' up, for sure." He pulled his knees up closer to his chest, and she poured the boiling water into the foot of the tub.

"Scrub my back where I cain't reach?"

Lizzie replaced the refilled kettle and knelt beside the tub. He leaned forward as she filled a wet rag with soap and began to massage his back. She made small circles up one side of his spine and down the other before she began to wash his neck and ears. He caught her hand and changed position, leaning back in the tub with his head just over its rounded rim. He closed his eyes as she washed his face.

"Wet your head and I'll wash your hair." He obediently ducked his head into the water and sat up, then rinsed it when she finished. "Here's the rag and soap."

He took them and the hand that held them. Looking in her eyes he guided her hands to his chest. "You missed a few places."

"So I did." She smiled and lathered the rag. She began to soap his chest in slow circular movements. The sun had died. Harry's skin gleamed in the light coming from the wood stove. He felt anticipation stirring in his loins. Up and down she stroked his chest and stomach. The ache in his muscles vanished and he sighed with pleasure.

"Good Lord, I'm tired."
"You hauled an' chopped an' stacked a great pile of wood today."

"I sure hope it's enough t' get us through till 'bout September. I hate cuttin' stove kindlin' in th' heat of summer. Maybe we can get us a bottled gas stove by this time next year."

Lizzie rinsed the washrag and squeezed water over his chest. "You're 'bout done."

"I could set 'n stew here all night if you'd keep rubbin' me."

Lizzie laughed. "An' we could have you with th' stewed prunes for breakfast, too."

Harry laughed with her and rose to take the towel she offered him. She turned away to the stove while he dried himself off. He stepped out of the tub, wrapped a towel around his hips and spoke, "Want me to fill th' tub for you?"

"No, it's all right like it is. You can go on ahead t' bed. I won't be long. You can dump it out in th' mornin'."

"All right." Harry picked up his clothes and went out.

Lizzie poured in more boiling water and set an extra kettle on the floor beside the tub. She sat to removed her shoes and stockings. She folded her dress and undergarments and laid them on the chair. Standing in her chemise, she tested the water before stepping in. She slid down in the
hot water and began to relax. Harry startled her when he returned to the kitchen a few moments later. She looked a question, and he smiled. He hadn’t put on his nightshirt yet and still had the towel wrapped around him.

He crossed the room and knelt next to the tub. He put his hands on her bare arms and stroked them up and down. The roughness of his calouses was returning as his hands dried out. He kissed her cheek and gently turned her around. He slid his hands down to her hips and began lifting the skirt of the chemise.

"We got t’ wash your back."

"Oh."

Gently he soaped and stroked her back. He moved to the foot of the tub. Lifting each of her feet in turn, he washed each leg from ankle to thigh, caressing her, taking pleasure from the smoothness of her skin. He lifted each of her arms and washed it from wrist to shoulder, then her breasts and stomach while she lay back, eyes closed. He knew from the pulse in her neck and her rapid short breaths her own anticipation was rising; he smiled at her response to him.

Taking her hand he pulled her up from the water and wrapped a towel around her. She stood and began to dry herself as he put a towel on the floor in front of the stove.
"Don't. Let me." He took her hand and led her to the stove. Taking the towel from her hand he began to dry her body. Up and down he stroked her, the rough towel stimulating the nerves in her skin. He dried her back, her neck, her breasts. Kneeling, he dried her feet and legs carefully. She stroked his face and hair. On his knees he kissed her gently as he continued to rub her hips and thighs with the towel. Holding the towel against her back, he rose and slowly kissed her breasts. She held his head in her hand. He pulled the long hairpins free, and her thick black hair tumbled and uncoiled over his encircling arm. Then he lifted her and carried her to their bed.

* * * *

Lizzie sat in the front pew of the church as still as the body of her mother which lay in the coffin before the altar. The four-year-old boy watched her carefully, waiting for the signs of her strangeness, but none came. He noticed again that she seemed to be getting fatter in the middle. He gripped his father’s hand as he heard the voices of the minister and the singers coming out of the cloud of early autumn flowers in front of the church. He was familiar with this cool place, coming regularly to sit and listen and sing, but today his mother was different. Usually she held his hand and sometimes even showed him how to draw the letters of his name on an old envelope and let him copy them, quietly praising him when he turned the L in the correct direction. Not today. He might have well not have been sitting next to her for all she knew. He had been told that his grandmother had gone away; he didn’t know where, but he could see her now, sleeping in that brown wooden bed in front of all these people. He knew she wasn’t sleeping really, but the adults had said she was, so evidently this was a new kind of sleep. Adults had odd ways of talking sometimes.

The music ended, and all the family in the front pews rose together. His uncle and aunt supported his grandfather as they filed out. His father picked him up and followed his mother to the front of the church. She stood beside his
grandfather, looking down at her mother a moment, then bent gracefully and brushed a kiss on her forehead.

"Good night, Mother."


Harry bent forward, lowering Luke until he could reach his grandmother's face. She smelled of rose petals and something unrecognizable and unpleasant. Luke shut his eyes and pecked rapidly at his grandmother's cheek. Harry lifted him quickly and his lips just missed her. He looked his question at his father. Harry smiled slightly and nodded. It was okay. He'd done what his mother wanted. His daddy always knew what that was even when no one else understood.

The family passed the coffin and went on into the church parlor to receive the sympathies of those friends and family members who had attended the service. Luke watched as familiar faces from both sides of his family came to speak to his grandfather. His father carried him from one group to another, greeting everyone quietly. He missed his mother suddenly, and he anxiously began to search turning his head this way and that even when the adults were speaking to him.

"Don't worry, Luke. She's sittin' in th' minister's study restin'. She'll be all right. Too many people upset her sometimes." Harry accurately read his son's anxiety.
In a while he saw her emerge from the doorway at the far end of the parlor. She was very erect, walking stiffly, her eyes wild and burning in her white face. People turned to her as she passed them, but she acknowledged no one, and the look in her eyes silenced them as she crossed the room to stand beside Harry. When she placed her hand on his arm, he excused himself from Cousin Herman and crossed the room with her to where Chris stood guarded by Henry and Elsie.

"Henry, do you need me t' ride over in th' morning t' help you with her things?" Henry nodded at Elsie, but she shook her head negatively. He spoke to his father-in-law then, "Chris, I'm goin' t' take Lizzie home now. She's exhausted, and Luke needs dinner and his bed. I'll be over t' see you soon as I can. You take care."

Chris looked at his daughter, momentarily alert, concern modulating his grief. "Yah, I will. God go with you." He brushed his beard against his daughter's ivory cheek quickly.

"And with you as well, Chris."

Later that night, when the house was dark, Luke awoke. The moonlight leaked around the bedroom curtains tracing fairy-paths across the quilt. Walking his fingers along the pathways, he lay a moment in his little bed in the corner of his parents' bedroom, trying to decide what had awoken him. Then he heard the creak again. Silently he went to
stand beside his sleeping father. His mother was not in the bed. When the faint creak came again, he walked toward the sound unafraid. It came from the front parlor. He stood in the doorway watching his mother. He could see the long dark braid of her hair resting on her shoulder as the moonlight surrounded her in luminous outline. She sat with her back to him, rocking. Satisfied, he turned away, leaving her there in the shimmering dark, alone.

* * * *

Lizzie felt hollow and numb. All she could think to do was sit and rock. Days passed and her grief fell into a routine. Harry would wake in the morning, rouse her and watch her numbly dress herself and go through the motions of getting him a simple breakfast. At noon when he came in for lunch, she would dully go through the motions of making him a cold meal. Four-year-old Luke sat with her for hours in the front room, building houses with the dominoes or playing with imaginary friends. Harry's return from the fields before he milked the cow each evening was her signal to begin the evening meal. The rest of the time, unless he gave her a specific chore to do, she remained seated in the rocker without motivation. He talked to Mamie who told him with German stoicism to give her time to mend her grief. So he waited and worried that Luke would get into trouble. He began to take the boy with him when he could, but usually
the demands of the farm work prevented it. Fortunately it was late autumn, and the winter wheat was already planted. Most of the beef cows had already dropped their calves, and those that had been sickly because of the screw flies and such were on the mend. The first frost would take care of the flies. So the only problems were keeping the windmills pumping, watching the fence, yoyoing cockleburs and other pesky weeds in the wheat, and doing the normal maintenance of the barn and equipment. At least it wasn’t so hot.

Autumn brought rains alternately with clear blue skies. If Lizzie weren’t so distraught, they would attend church socials and take Luke to the creek for late afternoon picnics. Not now. Perhaps Mamie was right that she just needed time to get over her mother’s death.

Today he had to ride over to the pasture next to the town road to mend the blades on the windmill. Luke clearly couldn’t go along. Harry couldn’t leave him sitting in the wagon; he simply wouldn’t stay. He couldn’t take the boy up on the windmill platform, a five-foot square twenty feet or so above ground level. There wasn’t room for a grown man to move about easily. He’d have to wrap his legs around the windmill braces while he replaced the blades. He couldn’t be holding on to a wiggly, curious boy as well. Lizzie would just have to manage.
"Lizzie, take Luke into the front room with you this mornin’ while you’re rockin’. I cain’t take him with me. The windmill down by the highway is busted, and the blades are floppin’ loose." Lizzie nodded and took Luke by the hand.

"Wash up the breakfast dishes first."

She nodded again, dropping Luke’s hand. Harry touched the boy’s dark head as he kissed her cheek on the way out. He walked thoughtfully to the barn to gather his tools and saddle one of the team. It would be too awkward to carry the wooden blades in a saddle bag so he’d lash them behind the saddle, but the screws and tools would fit in the bag just fine. He had decided against taking the wagon because he could travel faster on horseback in any case, and he wanted to be back home by noon. He mounted and rode down the road. Looking back as he passed the front of the house, he saw a family portrait in the window frame. The house was flanked on the south by a large bois d’arc. In the dim background Lizzie rocked in her chair. More clearly Luke waved to him from the window, and he lifted his hand in acknowledgement of his small lively son.

Lizzie sat in the chair. Her back was hurting again. She didn’t like this particular pain; she hadn’t had one like it since this pregnancy had begun. The anxiety brought her to life, clearing some of the wildness from her eyes.
"Luke, could you bring me the blue pillow from over there on the settee?" The boy turned from the window and fetched the pillow for her, stumbling over the corner of the rag rug as he always did.

Lizzie took the pillow and tucked it under her, padding her aching lower back from the hard wooden rocker seat which normally wouldn’t have bothered her. She picked up her mending basket. The pain was so distracting that she forgot the loss of her mother, and she was able to focus on the life around her for a while. Luke played with her china darning egg while she turned the collar on Harry’s old work shirt, tucking in the frayed edges. The collar would be slightly darker than the shirt and a little shorter than it had been. Harry wouldn’t care if she took the collar off altogether. He wouldn’t care until the weather turned colder, and he wanted to button the shirt up tight. When she finished the collar, she traded Luke a large threaded needle and her button box for the darning egg. As he began to make the buttons into a necklace, she pulled off his small right boot and sock and darned its raggedy toe. His feet were growing again, and the socks really were too small. Darning the toe would be a very temporary measure. She needed to make him some new ones or give him an old pair of Harry’s and make Harry some new ones.
"Luke, I'm through mending. If you'll bring me th' Bible, I'll read you a story before Daddy gets back for lunch."

The boy laid his button string and needle precisely inside the box and handed it to his mother before he rose to take the family Bible from the table in front of the settee, carrying it carefully to her and hobbling from the naked foot to the booted one. She pulled him into her lap, put the darned sock back on his foot, and pulled his boot back on. Then she took the Bible from him.

"See this old pressed white flower? It came from my bridal bouquet. Your daddy picked those roses himself. They came from his mother's, your Granny Em's prize rosebush. Did you know she puts well water on that bush every day that it doesn't rain?" The boy nodded wisely; after all he'd helped tote the water. The rose smelled musty and looked like it would crumble away. The skin around her eyes looked just as fragile.

"Look, Luke. Here is the Sunday school certificate I got after I had memorized a hundred memory verses. I had t' recite 'um to my teacher each Sunday. Then, when I did another hundred, she stuck this gold star on th' certificate. When Promotion Sunday came, we received our certificates after church services. The preacher called our names, an' we walked down th' aisle in front of th' whole
congregation. He called us his 'Christian soldiers.' When you’re old enough t’ read, you’ll probably do th’ same thing. You have a good memory, so it’ll be easy. What story do you want t’ hear? Samuel or David an’ Goliath?"

"Davidungliuth!" The boy squirmed in pleasure; it was his favorite story.

Lizzie read a bit, then noticed that Luke was saying the words with her. He had the story memorized. She asked, "Then what did David do?"

"Took th’ sheeps up on th’ hill."

"An’ there he played his harp for them an’ sang songs of praise t’ God. Some of those became th’ Psalms in th’ Bible. An’ every day he practiced throwing stones with his slingshot."

"An’ killed a lion an’ a bear an’ saved his sheeps!"

"That’s right, Luke. Then one day th’ Philistines crossed th’ border into th’ mountains of Judah an’ seized a position from which they could attack th’ heart of th’ country. King Saul led a great army out to oppose ’um. Th’ two armies occupied th’ hills on either side of this valley. One morning a giant Philistine named Goliath challenged Saul’s army t’ send a man t’ come down into th’ valley t’ fight him. Goliath was as tall as our barn door. If th’ Judean champion could kill him, he said, then th’ army of th’ Philistines would surrender to th’ army of Saul. That
would end th' war, and no other soldiers would die. But no one dared t' meet Goliath in single combat. Day after day Goliath challenged th' Judean army, daring them t' fight."

"Now all of David's older brothers had been summoned t' fight in King Saul's army, an' David's father Jesse got worried because he hadn't hear from 'um for a long time. Finally he decided t' send his youngest son David to th' valley to see if he could find out about his brothers. He gave David corn an' bread for his brothers an' a present of ten cheeses for their commandin' officer. Imagine how good those cheeses would have tasted t' someone who hadn't had any good meals in a long time. David left early in th' mornin' an' arrived at the valley just as Goliath was roarin' out his daily challenge.

'Who is this Philistine,' demanded David in a loud, clear voice, 'that he should defy th' armies of th' livin' God?' And then what did he do, Luke?"

"He killed th' giant with his slingshot. He hit him on th' eyebrows and broke his head! He was brave."

"Yes, he was, Luke, but God helped him because he honored God."

"Yes, Mama," said Luke, uncertain of what it meant to honor God but delighted with his mother's liveliness. "Let's go fix your daddy's lunch."
Luke slid to the floor as Lizzie rose and replaced the Bible on the table.

"Mama, what's that?" Luke pointed at the blue cushion in the rocker.

"Oh, God, no." Lizzie felt the rise of the annihilating spasm in her womb. She grabbed up the boy and a handful of clean rags as she passed through the kitchen. Almost running, stumbling she fled from the back porch into the yard. Crossing past the pump she reached the outhouse, Luke squirming to get loose from her crushing grip on his chubby midsection. She slammed the door shut and put him down. The acrid smell of urine irritated his nose, but he barely noticed. Tears ran from her irrational eyes as she turned the wooden latch locking him in the cramped little room with her. She lifted her blood-stained skirts to sit. Luke slid down and sat on the floor next to the door watching his mother slowly lose control. She stared at her hose and petticoats, then leaned sideways against the wall of the outhouse as the cramps hit her and the inviable foetus aborted itself into oblivion. His mother began to cry out.

"So much loss, so much loss." Over and over again.

"Mama? Mama!"

She didn't answer him, couldn't answer him. So much pain and loss frightened her and sent her inward to a place
where nothing could reach her this time. The boy put his arms around her, trying to comfort her.

"Lizzie?"

Luke heard his father calling. Lizzie began to sob hysterically.

Finally the boy became frightened. Even Little David had God's help. "Daddy," he screamed, "Daddy."

Harry banged on the door of the outhouse.

"Open th' door, Lizzie." But Lizzie couldn't hear him from the place she'd gone.

"Luke, are you in there?"

"Yes, Daddy. Please let me out. Please, Daddy. Mama's hurt, Daddy. She's cryin' so much. An' bleedin'."

Harry jerked hard on the door, pulling loose the wooden latch and the strap hinges.

"It's okay now, Luke," he said, putting the shocked boy out into the cooler, fresher air. "I'll take care of Mama."

Harry looked at Lizzie collapsed against the wall of the unpainted shed. Not this time, he realized. I can't take care of her this time. She needs more than I can do.

"Lizzie, get up and let me take you inside." Lizzie didn't seem to hear him. He pulled her up and out of the building, then lifted her in his arms and carried her to the pump. He lowered her to the ground gently and leaned her against the pump housing.
"Luke, I’ve got t’ get Mama some clean clothes. You sit her by her and keep her company, okay? Can you, son?"
"Yes, Daddy... but hurry!"

Harry gathered up Lizzie’s nightgown and some rags she kept for her monthly use. He didn’t know exactly how she kept them in place. He knew he needed some help, but he couldn’t ride for Mamie or anyone just yet. He’d just have to manage without help. He returned to the pump. They were just as he’d left them: Luke holding his mother’s hand; Lizzie crying mutely.

Gently he unbuttoned her dress and slid it down. He held her with one arm as he untied her petticoats and let them fall. He pulled off her dress and petticoats, then her shoes and bloody stockings and bloomers. Vaguely he wondered about the effects of all this on the boy. He tried unsuccessfully to be reassuring about the blood, the lost baby, how nature had to do some things that humans didn’t understand. Pumping furiously he pulled the water into the basin and lifting her shift, he began to bathe her with one of the rags. He sheltered her nakedness from the boy with his body. She didn’t even flinch when the cold pump water touched her skin. He washed her legs and hips with delicate care and tied a clean rag around her, diaper fashion. Not knowing what else to do, he then tucked extra rags under the diaper. He didn’t know what she’d have done under normal
circumstances. He raised her shift and let it fall to the
ground as he dropped her gown over her almost naked body.

"She'll be all right, Son. We'll take her in t' th' doc in th' mornin' if she's not better. Maybe Granny Em'll come help tend her. You'd like t' see Granny wouldn't you?"

"Yes, Daddy," responded the tired little voice.

"Can you bring Mama's clothes into th' kitchen? Can you carry 'em for me?"

Luke nodded slowly.

Harry lifted Lizzie and carried her into the house, aware that Luke was following slowly behind. Placing Lizzie on the bed, he went for another sheet. He folded it several times until it was the size of a pillowcase. Raising her hips, he slid the folded material beneath her. Then he pulled up the covers and looked at her. Lizzie remained silent, her now vacant dark eyes staring at the ceiling. Harry turned, suddenly realizing that Luke had not come as far as the bedroom. He began to look for the boy quietly. He walked past the darkening front room and into the silent kitchen. Luke lay curled in his father's big rocking chair, sound asleep. Both of them had escaped.

* * * *
A few weeks later Harry looked at Lizzie as she sat, still stonelike in her parlor rocker. The doctor had examined her, finding nothing physically wrong. He was at his wit's end and felt he needed help from someone who knew more than either the town doctor or himself.

"Lizzie? Lizzie, Ma will be here in a little while. I'm goin' in t' town t' talk t' th' doctor again. I don't know whether I'll be back 'fore dark. If I cain't, I'll prob'ly stay in town at th' hotel. You know how t' reach me there, if you need to."

Lizzie's eyes flickered only slightly, but enough. He knew she'd heard and understood him. At least she was still reachable when she thought she was being left behind, Harry suddenly realized. He heard the buggy wheels in the yard and turned to go to the back to greet his mother.

"C'mon, Luke. Granny's here." The active four year old jumped up from his mother's button box, scattering the contents across the rag rug and onto the wooden floor. "Leave 'em. We'll come back an' pick 'em up when we get Granny Em's bag unloaded an' her horse unhitched."

Lizzie heard the two of them walking off, hand in hand, the boy chattering about buttons and grandmas. Oh, she heard everything. Most of the time it wasn't worth answering; it only opened the door to more hurt.
"Lizzie? How are you, daughter?" Lizzie's mother-in-law had entered the room so soundlessly that she startled Lizzie by speaking, but Lizzie made no acknowledgement of her presence or her words.

"She stays that way all th' time, Ma. In th' mornin' if I wake up, an' she's already out of bed, I find her sittin' in this chair. Lunch time, I come in an' she's there. She takes care of Luke all right, because he's fed an' washed an' dressed an' watched over, but she doesn't talk t' him or me. At noon I fix lunch an' go back t' work. Evenin's are th' same. At Luke's bedtime I pack him off t' bed an' tell her it's time t' go t' bed. She comes an' puts on her gown an' gets under th' covers. Never says a word t' me. Like a dog, she is, an obedient dog."

"Well, I suppose she'll come an' go if I tell her to?"

"Oh, yes, I 'spect so. She knows you; she just won't speak t' you. Luke, let's get those buttons up."

"Cain't, Daddy. They're awreddy up."

Harry looked at the parlor floor for the first time since he'd entered the room and begun speaking to his mother. No buttons. He looked at Lizzie and back at his mother again, shaking his head.

"Never mind, son. You go on in t' town an' see what Doc says t' do. Maybe he's found some suggestion or t'other in those medical books of his. Luke an' I'll fix you some
sandwiches t' take with you while you saddle your horse. Put my ol' roan in the lot. He don't need t' graze. One look at his big ol' grass belly'd tell you he needs t' starve a few days. Could use some oats, if you can spare a little."

"Thanks, Ma. I'll take care of Red."

"Granny, canna spread th' mu'tard?"

Lizzie listened as the three of them went back to the kitchen. She listened to Luke telling his grandmother about the buttons, the baby rabbits, the mustard, the bread, and whatever other silly stuff entered his restless mind. Lord, that boy could chatter when there was someone to respond. She knew he missed her words, but somehow she could give him none. She heard Harry return for the sandwiches and finally trot off down the road that passed in front of the house. He turned to wave. He knew she was watching him leave.

"Lizzie, come eat a sandwich with Luke an' me."

Silently Lizzie rose and went out to the kitchen.

* * * *

Harry rode up to the doctor's office in town, tied the horse to the worn hitching rail. He looked over at the town cars. One of these days he'd get one; he longed for one now, but horses in the country were much easier. Faster to get to town on, too, sometimes.
"Afternoon, Miz Custer. Doc in?"

"Yes, Mr. Brown. He’s with a patient right now. Are you sick or is it about Mrs. Brown or your boy?"

"It’s about Lizzie. I want t’ talk t’ him about Lizzie. How long do you think he’ll be? Does he have some spare time this afternoon? I could go do some chores at th’ store an’ come back later."

"Oh, he doesn’t have anybody else this afternoon that we know of. Course, somebody could drop in with an emergency, but I think he’ll be able t’ talk t’ you in about fifteen minutes. Why don’t you just sit down an’ read th’ paper for a little while. By then, he’ll have tended th’ Johansen boy’s croup an’ sent him an’ his momma home with tonic an’ terpenhydrate."

Harry grimaced at the thought, picked up the paper, and sat in one of the office’s three straight-backed wooden chairs. He hoped the doctor wouldn’t simply prescribe karoid and bile salts. Lizzie needed to move mentally, he thought wryly, not physically.

He rose as Mrs. Johansen and her son came out of the doctor’s office. The doctor spoke to him immediately.

"Come on in, Harry. What’s th’ problem?" Harry stood and nodded soberly at the grinning doctor, whose smile faded in acknowledgement of Harry’s solemn face.

"Have a seat an’ tell me."
"It's Lizzie again, Doc. She's not sick, but since her mother died an' she lost th' baby, she's just turned inside an' won't talk or nothing. She still just sits in her rocker all day long. Oh, she takes care of Luke an' watches him, but she doesn't even talk t' him much an' even less t' me. I'm gettin' t' be afraid she might get so innerd she'll forget about him one day, an' I'll come home an' find a disaster."

"She ever get right after her mama died?"

"Well, not entirely. She got up an' about an' did her chores an' stuff, but it was like some of th' spark had left her with Lucy's dyin'. Then when she lost th' baby, well..." His voice dwindled off.

"Harry, I think she needs more help than we can give her, but you can try some home remedies if you want t'."

"What'da ya mean, more help. If you cain't help her, ain't no doctor can, can he?"

"She seems t' be having a mental problem, don't you think? Don't seem t' be any physical symptoms? Sometimes women get strange after miscarriages, an' no medicine can do 'em much good. Maybe some specialist could help, somebody in Dallas or Fort Worth. I know a couple from med school that I could write, if you want, an' describe her symptoms an' find out what they know, if anything. Then you could decide what you want t' do about it."
"You do that, Doc."

"Meantime, you just get your mother t' stay a while t' keep an eye on Luke an' her. Your brother Louie'll be glad of a break. Your ma's a handful for a man with a family th' size of Louie's, not t' mention a man with a wife like his. They'll all be glad of th' vacation."

Harry finally grinned. "Huh. You're probably right."

He was still grinning about his elder brother's discordant household as he left the office, mounted and headed toward the general store. He'd pick up those steeples he needed for the north fence of the Thompson pasture and some peppermint for Luke and get back long before dark. Maybe the doctor could get some help from that specialist.

* * * *

A month later Harry was back in town buying the family's weekly list of staple foods and supplies. He looked up to see the doctor crossing the street and walked outside to meet him.

"Harry, I'm glad I ran into you. I was thinkin' of riding out t' your place if I didn't see you in town soon. I got a letter back from that Fort Worth specialist I told you about. It's full of questions he wants answered 'fore he'll make any suggestions. Can you come by th' office later when you're through here?"

"Sure, Doc. Did he say anythin'?"
"Yes. He wants her t' come t' Fort Worth for some treatment, dependin' on th' answers to th' questions."

"Fort Worth. Somebody'll have t' take her. I'll have t' get some help if she has t' go there."

"You know Henry'd help, an' so'd Louie, if it came down to it. Or your brother Frank could send his boy Rankin over. Lots of help. Come on over t' th' office in a bit."

"Okay." Harry watched the doctor walk away, both curious and troubled. He knew something was awfully wrong with Lizzie, but did it need such a long trip, he wondered. Henry'd drive them in to the train, he was sure, but it'd still take almost all day to get there, and he'd have to spend the night. He supposed between Rankin and his mother, things would be safe. Still he had heifers ready to drop calves, and they were sure to have trouble. Rankin wasn't fifteen yet, and pullin' calves was hard enough for a grown man. A thousand things to worry about. Maybe that would keep his mind off Lizzie and those questions.

* * * *

Harry walked out of the doctor's office shaking his head. Lizzie wouldn't talk to those Fort Worth doctors either. Of that Harry was certain. This Dr. Smallwood would have to be some kind of witch doctor or medicine man and work a spell on her. That'd be the only way he'd get past her silence. He'd answered the questions honestly, but
he wasn't sure Lizzie'd be any better off if he did take her to Ft Worth, far away from her people and her familiar things.

He mounted and headed south for home. And, what about me, he thought. I'm better off with Lizzie just as she is than with no Lizzie at all. And Luke, too. Oh, Ma will stay and Rankin will come and Henry will drive. That's all easy. What about winter nights and just me and Ma and Luke? He remembered life before Lizzie and Luke. He'd had enough of that life.

* * * *

Lizzie saw him coming up the road but made no gesture or sound. Luke looked up, sensing his mother's sudden interest in what she saw out the window. He could sometimes still reach her, and she him, though unconsciously.

"What is it, Mama?" He went to stand beside her so he could look where she looked. Then he saw his father and ran out to the kitchen to tell his grandmother. He was glad his father would be home to have supper. The table was too quiet with just Granny and Mother. Granny couldn't tell him what the cows had done that day, or how the fences looked, or show him some seed or leaf or berry. Granny couldn't give him farm lessons. If I'm gonna be a farmer some day, I need farm lessons. Papa does that better'n anybody.
"Papa! Papa!" the boy shouted as his father dismounted. Racing out the door, he flung himself against his father's legs, nearly throwing them both off balance. Harry finished tying the horse and reach down to swing the exuberant boy up onto his saddle. He pulled the reins loose and walked horse and boy to the barn.

"Okay, Luke, get th' brush an' let's put this mare t' bed." Together they brushed the horse, Luke using the old brush and Harry a tow sack on the places the boy couldn't reach. They turned her into the lot and poured a nearly full bucket of oats out for her and his mother's roan. The old gelding nickered as the mare entered the lot but ignored her as soon as the oats appeared.

Together the man and boy returned to the warm lights of the kitchen to tell the waiting women the word from town.

"So, what'll you do, Harry? Take her t' Fort Worth?"

"Not yet, Ma. But I do want you t' come stay here a while, if you think Louie won't object."

"Not likely." His mother grinned at her son. "Your brother Louie ain't th' most tolerant man in th' world, an' he's gettin' less tolerant by th' day. I could do with a vacation from him and his tribe of wild Apaches. He don't make 'um do a thing, an' when their ma tries, all she gets is noise an' sass. He comes home an' wades into 'em for not doin' what she tells 'em, but he won't tell 'em himself.
He's funny like that. Never does th' same thing th' same way twice. And argue. Lord, he likes t' argue."

"Luke an' I'll take you over tomorrow. We'll have t' take Lizzie with us, I suppose, though I hate t' put her through Louie's tribe's eyeballin' ."

"Let me ride on over by myself, or take Luke with me. You'd like that, wouldn't you, Luke. Go see your cousins and ride with Granny in th' buggy?" The boy nodded dutifully. "You and Lizzie can come an hour or two later. By that time Louie'll be in for lunch, an' when he sees Lizzie an' how she acts, he'll see you really need me. That'll give him th' excuse not t' complain when I go, but I think secretly he'll be glad t' get rid of me for a while. You won't have t' stay as long that way with Lizzie."

Harry could see the sense in this; he didn't like his sister-in-law any more than his mother did, and she was right about Louie's kids.

"Okay, Ma. We'll do it that way. Bedtime, Luke, if we're gonna get up an' go t' your Uncle Louie's tomorrow."

* * * *

Later, the boy stood in his parents' bedroom doorway, watching his grandmother pack his mother's things into various suitcases. He looked into the parlor where his mother sat, her back to the doorway, rocking and rocking slowly. He knew she was going away, but he didn't
understand why or where. Just because she wouldn’t talk to them? She talks to me, he thought. She doesn’t say words, but she talks.

"When are you goin’, Papa?"

"In the mornin’ when your Uncle Henry gets here with th’ car. Luke, would you go get your mama, please? Tell her it’s time for bed."

Luke turned to follow his father’s request and saw that his mother had already risen and was headed out the kitchen door.

"She’s going outside, Papa."

Harry walked quickly to the kitchen door, watched Lizzie enter the outhouse, and waited. Always, he’d told her to go. This time she’d gone on her own. He knew she went to the outhouse, had to when he wasn’t there to tell her. He waited several minutes more. When she didn’t return, he went to the outhouse door and called her. The door opened; she came out and walked past him with no sign of having heard. Harry shook his head, then took advantage of his own proximity to the outhouse. When he got back to the bedroom, she was already in bed, with Luke curled up on the bed beside her sound asleep. He lifted the boy and placed him on his cot in the corner. Since his grandmother had arrived, he slept in his old little bed in their room.
He’d probably let him stay there after Lizzie was gone.
Company, for me, Harry thought, if not for him.

* * * *

The next morning the boy stood beside his grandmother as Henry and Harry carried Lizzie’s cases out to the car. Then he turned and went to her in the parlor where she sat, rocking. Big as he was, he crawled into her lap, and they held each other until his father came for her. Harry almost cried when he saw them there together, but he steeled himself and lifted Luke down.

"Let’s go, Lizzie. If we don’t start now, it’ll be dark when we get t’ Fort Worth. We want t’ find a hotel before it gets dark. We got t’ allow some time for flat tires and such, too. Get your sewing basket and your Bible, if you want t’ take ‘um with you. No tellin’ how long that doctor will want you t’ stay visitin’ him." Luke hovered at the edge of his mother’s vision.

Lizzie did as she was instructed, then turned to the boy. She looked at him solemnly for several minutes, memorizing his shape and expression. He came to her slowly, and startling her husband with her awareness, she bent to hug him for a moment. She rose and walked out, Bible and sewing basket in hand. She walked straight to the car and climbed in as Henry opened the door for her. She never looked back at the observant boy. But he watched her,
watched the black car roll away down the dirt road, watched until he could no longer see the dust rising with the passage of the distant car. It would be almost a year before he saw her again.

* * * *
Lizzie lay in a land of snow, warm snow, clean and white. Looking up she saw a grove of trees, trees that shimmered bluish gray. Oh, yes. I know where we are now, on the way to the picnic in the Grove. She looked over her left shoulder. Yes, there were Ida and Annie, crammed into the back seat of Henry’s new car with the picnic gear, and there she was up front, for the first time, with Henry. The others were in Uncle Johan’s car, behind far enough to avoid their dust, but they’d be along. The whole family was meeting the others for the Fourth of July celebration. It was a new century, and everybody from the whole southern part of the county would meet on the church grounds of the new Methodist Church to picnic and dance and hear the many speeches and debates. Lord knows who all will be there, for sure the Browns, and the Capps, and the Childs. She shut her eyes and listened to Ida and Annie yammering happily like geese after corn. She was glad they’d beat Mama and Papa, even if their parents did have the food. She wanted to pick their place herself; that was why she’d put the quilts in the turtleback of this car, not Papa’s. She smoothed the skirt of her new white dress and reached back to tweak the bow straighter in Ida’s hair.

"Oh, smile, Ida; you’re much prettier when you smile."
"I cain't bear th' thought that that awful Childs boy will be at th' picnic. He'll pull th' bow outta my hair just like he always does an' make me cry."

"Well, just sit with me an' be a lady. He won't dare come on our quilt t' pull your hair, not with Mama present."

"You an' Mama an' everyone will go visit. You watch. You'll see what he does. He'll just wait till everyone's not lookin."

"Ida's sweet on Jimmy Childs," teased Henry, winking at Lizzie.

"Am not!"

"Are, too!"

Ida squirmed at her brother's words and poked Annie.

"Sisters, be still an' don't get wrinkled. We're just about there."

Henry turned the car into the grove of postoaks that gave the little community its name. The girls could see that other families had already arrived and were laying out their quilts close to the raised platform which had been built for the orators. Those who chose to stand would not crowd in front of the quilts, but still it was best to get a place laid out for the ladies who might grow faint in the heat of the July afternoon. Fortunately the day was cloudy, but that wouldn't stop the heat in the afternoon. Lizzie could see her older sister Mamie and her husband waiting
near a spot just to the left of the stand. Lizzie and Annie took their quilts and lay them under a good-sized tree just to the left of her oldest sister's quilts. She hugged Mamie.

"This is a good spot. If Papa wants t' watch th' speakers' faces while they talk, he'll have a good enough view, an' th' shade will be valuable after a while. Oh, you have a new white dress, too, Mamie. How pretty you look!"

"A present from Husband Charlie, Lizzie," she said, smiling at the stocky German American beside her.

Just then Lizzie's parents drove up. Charlie and Henry went to meet them and help carry the picnic baskets while the girls stood and waited in a dignified attitude. Lucy looked at her four daughters, all in their white summer dresses, puffed sleeves, tight waists, ruffled bodices as crisp as starch and a hot iron could make them. As cool as snow on cedar trees in January, white with the green life glowing through. A pretty view, thought Lucy proudly.

Lizzie looked at her stout mother, knowing her thoughts and her pride. Like a goose hen with her fledglings, thought Lizzie somewhat irreverently. Mama wouldn't want to be called a goose, but she walks like one and puffs up like one. Lizzie loved her mother dearly but couldn't avoid the comparison as she watched Lucy waddle across the picnic
grounds, baby Pearl in tow, their white clothing adding to the image.

"I hope there’s a photographer here today, girls. You are all such a picture in your dresses. Pearlie, you stay clean. At least until the picture is made."

Lucy unpacked the table linens from the picnic basket; only the family would use those. Then, she carried the basket full of food to the tables that had been set up on saw horses. She and the other women began setting out the food, covering it with cloths to keep away the flies and shooing the younger children away. Lizzie moved to help her mother and watched herself laying pieces of fried chicken and rabbit onto her mother’s largest white platter. Soon the table was so overloaded the boards began to sag, and the women quickly summoned the minister to say grace so they could all begin the picnic.

Lizzie looked around the picnic grounds at their friends and neighbors. Soon Pearlie was up and running to play. Sure enough, there was the Childs boy eyeing Ida’s bow. He’d be up to no good given half a chance, Lizzie thought. Three men mounted the speaker’s platform. A debate. The third man would referee and time the debate after he selected the judges.

"Lem, you and Brother George are judges. And you, too, Chris." Lizzie was delighted. There was nothing her father
loved more than a good argument, unless it was to judge one.

"The subject of this here debate is 'Resolved: The Negro does not have a soul.' Mr. Worsham'll speak for the issue; Mr. Sudderath'll speak against. Mr. Worsham, you begin."

Oh, goodness, thought Lizzie. At least they're debating a topic of intense interest. She remembered her father and brother arguing this very idea not more than a week ago after they had read an editorial in the weekly *Independent*. The debaters would have no trouble holding their audience with this topic.

Lizzie looked at the snow again. She felt vaguely disoriented. Surely, this is the picnic grounds, she thought, but somehow the snow and the picnic and the Fourth of July and being fourteen didn't match up correctly.

She looked again at the debaters. The audience was applauding, and her father and the other judges were in a heated consultation over their verdict. I've missed the whole thing, she realized. Where did I go? She watched her father take the verdict to the referee.

"Ladies and Gentlemen. The judges have agreed that both sides have presented such logical arguments that they declare the debate a tie. They therefore judge the Negro to have half a soul."
The audience laughed and applauded wildly. Both debaters were popular men locally, and the decision was certainly the most tactful one the judges could possibly have reached. Nobody really wanted any controversy at this picnic. Lizzie rose with the others to meet her father as he returned to their quilt. Other men came over to congratulate him, and he turned away from his family.

Off to one side the photographer was setting up his camera. "Come, girls, we will have a photograph to memorialize this day," Lucy said and waddled off, goslings all in a row following obediently after her. After waiting some time for their turn, the girls arranged themselves on the rocks and Lucy smoothed their hair and plumped their skirts. Then, she had her own picture made. She gave the photographer her name, and he wrote it in his notebook, handing Lucy a piece of paper with some numbers on it so she could claim her pictures the next time she went in to town.

Lizzie walked with her sisters back to their quilt. Miss Anna Nichols, the first piano and voice teacher to come to their community, had just risen and gone to the stand to sing the national anthem and other patriotic songs; she would be accompanied by Rusty Connell on the violin and another man on guitar. The audience had grown quiet, and some of the smaller children began to doze on their mothers' laps. Lizzie leaned against the tree. Her back had begun
to ache strangely, and her head felt light and empty. The music grew livelier, and the audience sang with Miss Anna. She sang some old German folk tunes which many of the audience recognized. They clapped and swayed to the music. They seemed to shrink as the pain in Lizzie's back expanded; she could hear the throbbing of the pain in her ears, keeping time with the guitar as it thumped out the rhythm.

Miss Anna began her finale, "Dixie" followed by "The Star Spangled Banner." The audience whistled and clapped along with "Dixie." Many were singing loudly, but their voices were far, far away. Slowly, surrounded by warm, white snow, Lizzie watched her fourteen-year-old eyes darken and become irrational; she saw herself sink to the ground. Watched the startled look on her mother's face. Watched Henry swim through the mists to find her father. Lizzie knew they would carry her to the car and summon the doctor. She knew the doctor would order her to bed for a few days. Can't be fainting all the time and falling down and hurting myself. Can't be bleeding like a slaughtered hog.

That's why I'm here now, thought Lizzie, in this warm snow bank. Not like the snow at home, no grass showing through, no branches, no red barn. No Mama, Papa, sisters, Henry. All gone.
A face materialized out of the glare of the snow. A snow woman said, "Mrs. Brown, Dr. Smallwood would like to see you now. He has a letter for you from Mr. Brown."

Lizzie rose from her bed and followed the nurse down the hall to the doctor's office.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Brown, how are you feeling this afternoon?"

Doesn't he know? Lizzie wondered. He's the doctor; doctors are supposed to know. That's why I'm here. He's supposed to know what's wrong.

"Mrs. Brown, you have a letter from your husband. Would you like me to read it to you?" When Lizzie didn't respond, Dr. Smallwood began to read:

Dear Wife,

Brother Henry took a notion to come to Ft. Worth for the big cattle auction week after next. He wants to buy some Hereford cows, and I thought to take the opportunity to do same. We will arrive Monday evening and go to sale Tuesday morning. Am bringing Luke. Will come visit Tuesday afternoon, if Dr. Smallwood will permit.

Please advise by return mail.

Your loving husband,

W. H. Brown

"Would you like that, Mrs. Brown? Good, I'll have Nurse write Mr. Brown a quick little note telling him to come at 2:30 p.m. Of course, he may bring your son, but you will have to sit up in the solarium. We cannot permit children on the wards, you know. Too noisy. You'll be perfectly strong by then. Nothing to worry about. Nurse,
here is Mr. Brown's address on the envelope of the letter. You spend a few moments with Mrs. Brown and compose a note together. I can make the next few rooms without you."

"Yes, Dr. Smallwood."

Lizzie looked back at the snow banks. She knew the nurse was speaking to her, but somehow it didn't matter. She would write the letter, say the right words regardless of what Lizzie did. The snow bank was warm and white and peaceful. The only sound was the slight scratch of the nurse's pen on the paper of the card. The only disturbance of her peace occurred when the nurse held her hand to sign the card. I used to do this every week. I used to write cards to Harry every week, remembered Lizzie, but that was before Luke, before everything was lost.

"I'll see that your card gets posted, Mrs. Brown. You rest now."

Lizzie closed her eyes as the nurse left the room. What was it about Harry and Luke? Have they been found? It is much simpler thinking about the snow. I'll do that now.

* * * *
It was not quite dawn when Harry stepped into the kitchen, but his mother was up before him as usual.

"I think I'll take Luke along with me this mornin', Ma. Give you a day off an' him some fun. Okay?"

"Why, Harry, that's an excellent idea. I can use th' day to wash curtains an' such as I cain't do when I'm mindin' him. Be good for him t' go with you, too. Get out of th' house an' do some man's work with his daddy. Yes, I can manage without him today. For sure." Emily smiled at her blue-eyed son, examining the sun-blond ends of his brown hair and noticing the gray starting to come there, too. The lines at the corners of his eyes weren't caused entirely by squinting into the bright sun either. How old are you? Thirty-eight this May, and the boy is five. I don't wonder; this ranch to run and a crazy wife and a son to raise alone.

"Except for you, Ma." Harry read her mind sometimes.

Emily realized she was sometimes transparent, but she forgot how well her middle son knew her mind. It always startled her when he spoke her thoughts aloud.

"Luke," Harry called, stepping down the hall toward the bedroom. "Luke, come t' breakfast an' hurry up. You an' me, we're goin' ranchin' today. C'mon. What'cha doin' piled up in th' bed with your boots on?"

"Jus' restin'. Where we goin'?"
"To th' Brush if you get t' movin'." As he left the room, Harry smiled, knowing what would happen next. He heard the pounding of the small boots on the floor and felt him fly past and into the kitchen. As he walked into the kitchen, he saw Emily placing Luke's plate on the table in front of him, and the boy attacking his eggs. That boy can move when he's inclined.

After breakfast they saddled their horses together. Luke could barely reach the sides of the mule to curry off the grass and stickers, but he tried. Harry lifted Lizzie's smaller western style saddle to the mule's back, and let Luke try to pull the cinch tight. The mule filled his stomach with air, fighting the tightness all he could. Harry stepped away, letting Luke manage the belly band and the check strap himself. Saddling his own mare, Harry realized the boy was growing rapidly. Already tall and skinny. He's takin' after my side. Good. Better tall and skinny than short and chunky like Lizzie's menfolks. Strange how Lizzie didn't tend toward heaviness like the rest of her family. At least he's got her hair. Her beautiful, heavy dark hair. Harry quickly stepped back to the mule's side and gave the cinch another jerk. The mule, caught unaware, filled its stomach again, but too late. The saddle was firmly attached.
He handed the mule’s reins to Luke who led him out into the yard next to the lot’s wooden fence. Climbing up on the bottom rail, Luke tried to reach the stirrup and horn to pull himself into the saddle. The mule stepped sideways to avoid the boy. Harry laughed and handed Luke a bucket.

"Here, stand on this. That mule sure is ornery this mornin’." 

"Guess he don’t want t’ go t’ work today."

"Prob’ly not. It’s a long jog to th’ Brush. Your fanny’s gonna feel every mile of it t’night."

"No, it won’t. I’m big enough t’ ride that far."

Harry smiled. "Well, mount up an’ let’s get goin’. Head on out down th’ road. I’ll catch you soon as I get th’ doctorin’ kit. We got a cow with th’ foul foot. We’re gonna paint her hoof...if we can catch her."

The boy was already past the house and down the dirt road when Harry returned with his kit. Holding it in one hand, he mounted the mare and sent her after Luke while he attached the bag to the ring on the skirt of the saddle. It didn’t take much time for the longer-legged mare to catch the mule, which was ambling its way along snatching mouthfuls of grass from the roadside. The Brush pasture was about eight miles away. An hour’s ride, more or less.

The two animals jogged along side by side until they reached the wider but unpaved highway into town. As the
mare started to cross, the mule balked at the relatively unusual wideness of road.

"He's never been on a road this wide afore, Luke. It's too open an' scary for him. Let me have th' reins; I'll have t' lead him. If he acts like he's gonna balk again, you spur him real hard right before we get into th' intersection. Th' faster he crosses, th' less time he'll have t' think about it."

After they crossed the highway, they rode the last two miles facing into the rising sun. "Daddy, why're mules so stubborn?"

"Oh, I dunno, Luke. Why're boys so muleheaded? You think maybe it has somethin' to do with bein' different from th' rest of their kind? Maybe they have t' fight harder t' keep up?"

"Maybe. But this mule's sure hardheaded some times. I like him, but I wish I could ride a big horse."

"Won't be long afore you can. Look, there's th' gate to th' Brush."

Luke could see where the pasture got its name. Clumps of mesquite and postoak nearly covered the area just past the gate. A road led into the pasture, but even it had small trees trying to take hold of its median. Wild briars, poison ivy, sumac and other smaller plants grew under the
trees, but these gave way to the grasses of the natural meadows as the riders rode into the interior of the pasture. Here the native side-oats grama and little bluestem thrived, and the cattle grouped into small herds of fifteen or twenty animals each. Lovegrass and switchgrass took over in the sandier places. The cows liked the lovegrass best. Luke could see that it had been grazed off more than the others, though many of the purplish panicles still swayed gently in the early June breeze.

"She ain't here, Luke. We'll ride over past th' ol' slough. Maybe she's on th' back side today. Coupla days ago she was here on th' front when I noticed her sore hoof."

They crossed the top of the highest hill in the pasture. The trees and undergrowth weren't quite as thick here, and the grass was as luxuriant as the rainfall would permit. Without the competition from the trees, the dark, fine-leaved buffalograss formed a dense, matted turf. At this season of the year it lay like a thick, grayish green carpet under the horses' feet. In the fall it would turn to straw-tan.

"See this buffalograss, Luke? It's good it grows on this hill, else we'd have a bunch of erosion here."

"Why's that, Daddy? Don't they all grow th' same?"

"Not this 'un. It's got a bunch of hairy roots that cling to th' soil, an' it sends out runners that form new
bunches of roots ever' so often. After a while it makes a pretty tight clump of roots an' soil that rain cain't wash through. Th' leaves are tender, but th' roots are so tough th' cows cain't pull it up either. It's a real good grass t' have here."

Still looking down at the grass, the riders crested the hill and started down toward the slough. The change in landscape was a little startling. Here in the bottom of a relatively large creek was a pond. In the rainy spring and early summer, water moved through the creek and effectively flushed the pond. In high summer and winter, the creek went dry and water stood in the pond, eventually creating a mud-filled and nearly stagnant slough which attracted and bred all sorts of insect and plant life. The seven o'clock sun glowed through the tops of the taller cottonwood trees on the opposite side of the slough, just beginning to warm the water. As the riders neared the pond, they heard a loud, trumpeting cry. A huge white bird flapped its enormous black-tipped wings and rose out of the water straight into the sun, trailing long legs behind it. It momentarily formed a striking black image across the orange face before it disappeared from sight.

"What was that!"

"A whooper, prob'ly. They sometimes come here t' hunt frogs in the slough. He's a big crane. Legs like stilts."
He wades out in th' water t' hunt for his dinner. 'Bout as tall as I am. Wings spread out nearly eight feet wide. Supposed t' be good luck t' see one, you know? Wonder what he's doing here now. Rest of his tribe went north in early March. Maybe he got hurt an' stayed behind t' recuperate. Who knows?"

The boy stared off into the sky where the bird had flown. It had gone south instead of north. Possibly it would come back after they had gone. He looked at the slough.

"Too bad he don't eat mosquitoes."

"Yeah. That'd be a big help t' th' purple martins an' whipper-wills. Take too many t' feed him, I 'magine. C'mon, we got t' find that ol' cow."

Once they climbed out of the depression which helped to form the slough, the trees thinned into meadow again, and there they found the cow, limping along, her three-month-old calf frisking around her. Now and again she'd drop her head and snatch up a mouth full of grass. Snatch, chew and limp along, snatch, chew and limp along. Her movements had a rhythm which tried to match that of the others in the herd.

Harry watched her move for a moment before he untied the kit and retied it to Luke's saddle horn. He shook loose one of his ropes, recoiling it into his left hand.
"You stay here an' wait. These cows're gentle enough t' let me ride through 'um nice an' slow. Two horses make too much fuss. Just wait an' bring me th' kit when I call you."

"Yes, Daddy."

"If I start t' get outta sight, you follow me, but don't get any closer than you have to. Okay?"

"Okay."

Harry eased the mare into the open meadow and rode slowly through the herd. They moved aside as he approached, but none of them ran off. Only the calves jumped around playfully. The bull bawled at him, nothing much, just noticing the human's approach. The lame cow moved more slowly than the other cows, letting Harry get in close enough. The mare could sense Harry's tension as he prepared to toss the loop; she readied herself to jump forward after the cow, if he should spur her. It wasn't necessary. The first loop settled around the cow's neck, and the mare quickly backed to tighten the noose. The cow bawled and swung her head, trying to shake free. Harry gathered in the rope and started to pull her towards a fairly large oak tree. The cow planted her feet, resisting as best she could, but her sore hoof worked against her. Harry soon had her snubbed up to the oak. He waved Luke over and shook out his second rope. Dismounting, he handed
the mare’s reins to Luke, watching as the boy wrapped them around his saddlehorn.

On foot Harry walked up to the cow. Jerking up her tender hind foot, she tried to avoid him by moving around the tree. As she lifted the foot, Harry slipped the second noose around her leg, quickly pulling the rope tight so she couldn’t step out of the noose. He walked back to the mare and tied the rope to his own saddlehorn.

"Now, Luke. When I tell you to, you lead th’ mare off that way just a little bit. We want t’ make th’ cow lift her leg, not pull it off. See, if her sore foot is up, she cain’t kick me with th’ other one, can she? You got that?"

"I think so, Daddy. Will you tell me when t’ stop?"

"Use your eyes, boy. You can tell when she lifts her foot up off th’ ground. Let me get th’ kit an’ get back by th’ cow first, then you move th’ mare."

The boy twisted around in the saddle to watch as he led the mare off a few feet farther. He stopped. His daddy called, "Perfect. Now, don’t let th’ mare move atall."

Turning the mule sideways, he could see his father open the kit and take out a jar of brownish gooey resin, an old paintbrush, and a bottle of an unrecognized liquid. As Harry waited for the cow to calm down, he stuck the brush into the jar of goo. Then he seized the cow’s sore leg near the hock. Quickly he straddled her leg, facing the hoof and
holding her leg firmly between his thighs. She tried to shift her forelegs, but her balance was too precarious to allow her much movement.

Harry first poured the liquid onto the frog of the hoof. It boiled while it purified the infected area. Next, he used the paintbrush to lay several applications of the goo onto the hoof, both the bottom and the sides all around. The cow jerked her leg, tugging on the rope, but she soon settled down as she realized that the human was not hurting her. Harry finished the job quickly. Harry released the hoof, recoiled the rope and walked to the mare. Taking the reins from Luke, he rode to the tree, leaned down and unwrapped the other rope. Before the cow could move away, he had the rope snubbed around the saddlehorn again. He pulled the mare along with the cow for a little bit, drawing her in closer to the mare. When the moment was right, he shook the rope and reached down to flip the noose off her neck. The cow didn’t realize she was free until Harry turned the mare away and back to Luke.

"See, that didn’t take long, did it?"

"Nope. Daddy, what was that boilin’ stuff you poured on her hoof?"

"Peroxide. Maybe it’ll kill th’ foul-foot. Then, th’ pine tar will seal up th’ hoof till it heals up. Least we hope that’s what’ll happen. I’d feel better if we could
walk her back t' th' barn so I could do that tomorrow, but I doubt she would even walk as far as th' gate without quittin' on us. That hoof hurts her pretty bad right now. It's keepin' her from eatin' right. See how thin she is now. She ought t' be fattenin' back up after droppin' her calf by now, but she ain't. Got t' be th' foul-foot. She don't feel like eatin' much. We'll come back an' check her next week. If she can walk, we'll try t' drive her back to th' house. It'll be a long, slow ride. You want t' come along again?"

"Yes, sir. I sure do. What'll happen if she don't get better. Will she die?"

"I don't think so, but she might go lame permanent. Her hoof don't seem so bad, so maybe th' peroxide will work. We'll give her another dose next week if we cain't get her t' th' barn. Course, she'll be wise t' us if we have t' do that. She'll know about th' rope. Be harder t' catch her."

They rode back out of the pasture by a different route, almost straight west. The sun was nearly at its zenith.

"Almost dinner time. Your granny'll be wonderin' whether we'll be home in time t' eat. Think you can stand t' trot a little. Is your fanny sore yet?"

"I ain't sore, Daddy. I can ride all day. Let's hurry up; I'm gettin' so hungry I could eat that ol' lame cow all by myself."
"I just bet you could." Harry laughed. "I just bet you'd try even if you couldn't."

He dismounted and opened the gate to the pasture. The boy rode through as his father carried it out of the way. Harry turned his back to the boy to replace it. The boy kicked the mule into a slow canter and was well down the road by the time his father had wired the gate shut. Harry laughed, mounted, and rode off easily. There was no need to hurry. Luke was a good rider on a reliable mule, but he'd never cross the highway without the mare. No way to get lost; he could just follow the dirt road home. They'd done a good morning's work, and they'd be home in time for a tasty dinner. Ma would see to that. The sun was hot on his back. He watched his boy down the road disappearing in a small dustcloud. Sometimes, just ev'ry now and again, he thought, life is pretty damn satisfyin'.

* * * *

Six weeks' later Harry entered the hospital with the five-year-old boy in tow. He had tried to describe the building to Luke as he remembered it from his previous visits with Lizzie. He had told Luke about the white uniforms, the white walls, the solarium, and Lizzie. He had tried to prepare him for Lizzie's silence, but the boy was too excited and too young to understand much.

The young nurse at the reception desk took his name and rang Dr. Smallwood. In a few moments the dapper little man himself appeared with his nurse and ushered Harry and Luke into the cheerful solarium. The sun was shining through the windows as it usually was when Harry visited, and he and the doctor exchanged pleasantries.

"How is my wife?" Harry finally nerved himself for that question's answer, as always expecting the worst.

"I have nothing new to tell you, Mr. Brown. She is extremely well-behaved. She sits here in th' solarium daily with th' other ambulatory patients, yet she speaks to none of them. Unlike many of them she will do whatever tasks of sewing and such as are assigned to her with no argument. She simply does as she is told. She looks at me or th' nurses intelligently as though understanding what we say, but she makes no reply whatsoever. She does not even cry out in pain each month when I am sure she is in pain. At those times her face appears pinched and pale, so we know
she is experiencing pain. She is a model patient; I can find no explanation for her silences, nor any reason to keep her here much longer. I feel she will do better in the midst of the love and safety of her family. Her monthly problems may require medication but that is easily handled by your local doctor, and that is the only reason that she might need to see a physician regularly. So, you may take her home as soon as it is convenient."

"But she'll still need supervision, constant supervision, won't she, Doctor?"

"As long as she remains silent, we cannot be sure of what goes on in her mind. She is docile and harmless, but it is true that she will need an adult to watch her. She is not a baby; she can care for herself, as you know, but we cannot be sure of her reliability until she chooses to speak again. Still, surely your mother, who came before...."

"Yes, my mother could come t' live with me. I'm sure that my brothers would be glad of that. She lives with one or th' other of us as it is now. She has spent a good deal of time in my house, carin' for th' boy, but most of her things are still at my brother's house, an' they'll need t' be moved for her t' come more permanently. It'll take a little while t' arrange things, an' this is th' busiest season coming up now, what with th' branding, then haying,
an’ then sendin’ th’ calves t’ market. It’ll be August afore I can have things in order for her t’ come home."

"That will be satisfactory. We will need a little time to prepare her to make the transition back home as well. August will give us almost three months. Most satisfactory, I think. Now, I will send the nurse to bring her to you here. I think it best not to tell her now that you will be taking her home soon. Time here is vague and difficult to count. It will seem much longer to her if you tell her now. I would think a month in advance will be sufficient. Perhaps you will come again before she leaves us. We will wait until then to tell her."

"Whatever you advise, Doctor, we’ll do."

"Good. I’ll leave you now and expect to have word from you when you know the date more definitely. The doctor turned away and spoke to the nurse behind him, "Mrs. Scott, will you bring Mrs. Brown into the solarium?"

Harry took the boy’s hand. He’d been walking around the room while his father and the man in the white jacket been speaking. He had seen the garden from every angle, seen the men in their coveralls working in the big flower beds. He had never seen grown men crawling in the dirt before. It was a little startling.
Harry walked with Luke to the windows. He wanted his back to the light so that he could see Lizzie’s face when she came in. He wanted to see her reaction to Luke.

The nurse entered first, turned, and allowed Lizzie to pass in front of her before she seated herself near the door. Lizzie walked straight ahead and stopped in front of her husband. Her black eyes were vague at first, but cleared when she looked at him and Luke. She seemed to recognize them, but Harry couldn’t be sure.

"Let’s sit down, Lizzie. Here, on the wicker divan. Luke can sit beside you, if you like."

Lizzie sat and Luke clambered up on the cushion beside her. He took hold of her hand and pulled to get her attention. When she looked at him, he crawled into her lap. Nothing else. Neither said a word. Lizzie held the boy, rocking slightly as though she sat in her chair at home.

The boy seemed to need no words; Harry was grateful for that. He talked to Lizzie about the ranch, the cattle, his mother’s visits, the boy’s increasingly longer stays with his mother at his brother Louie’s house, the chickens, the barn cats, anything he could think of that she would understand. He asked her opinion on new curtains for the parlor, new fence along the town road, a new horse for the buggy, asked but got no reply, expected none. It didn’t matter. He talked to fill the silence, to reestablish their
connection. And she listened. He was sure of that. After a while Luke talked about his new puppy, and that subject seemed to interest her. She watched the boy closely while he talked, his baby lisping almost gone. She watched and nodded while Luke explained how he was training the puppy to fetch a stick and not to chase the chickens. Harry tried not to become too hopeful. He felt glad that he had dared to bring the boy. It had been good for all three of them.

The nurse rose, a signal that visiting hours were coming to a close. He had to get downtown to meet Henry. He took Luke’s hand, and together they walked Lizzie to the door. Luke still held his mother’s hand tightly. Both kissed a cheek and hugged her before she followed the nurse down the hall. She paused a moment halfway to her room and turned back. The boy slid free of his father’s grip, ran to her, and flung his arms around her knees. Kneeling, she held him a moment longer until Harry could reach them. As soon as he put his hand on the boy’s shoulder, she rose and walked quickly away without looking back again. Yes, thought Harry. Yes, a good visit. August 15th. That was the last shipping day for this year’s calves. He’d have money; he could bring her home on the train, home in style.

* * * *
Lizzie lay in her bed, savoring the comfort, the warmth of the warm snow bank all around her, and remembering the kiss of the tall, dark-haired man on her cheek. His eyes were still the clear blue she had remembered. She looked at the snow and saw dancers whirling to the tune of a fiddle and the command of the caller.

The fall rodeo was over; it was time for the dancing. Her whole family had come to town that day. They had spent the entire day visiting friends on the courthouse lawn, eating a picnic dinner. Tonight they had gone with everyone else, the entire population of the county with very few exceptions, to the last night of rodeo to watch the local cowboys compete for boots and saddles and a silver buckle. The tall man with the clear blue eyes had asked her father to let her attend the dance. He would surround her with every care, he had promised Papa, and see that every propriety was observed. Her father had decided to guarantee that himself, and here they all were at the dance, the entire family, even fourteen-year-old Pearl.

Not that there had been any danger to her reputation, Lizzie thought. The rodeo dances were held every year and were always properly chaperoned. Besides too many of the older folk like to dance as well, her parents included. Lizzie knew that was the real reason her parents were
present. For that and to see the inside of the new hotel ballroom.

The tall man materialized in front of her as the band began the schottische. They joined hands, right to right and left to left, as they lined up side by side in a giant circle with the others. Soon they were skipping and swaying gracefully in time with the other dancers. Harry was a good dancer, and Lizzie tall enough to be elegantly graceful herself. They were a handsome couple, not the best, but good enough to capture their share of admiring glances.

The music changed to a polka, a romp really, which left them both breathless and laughing. Lizzie watched herself laughing and smiled at the memory. Those days had been full of fun. Even when Harry left her and went to St. Louis for three weeks, she had been full of joy and confident that he would come back to her. And he had. It had taken a certain amount of persuasion and insistence from her; he had enjoyed the wild-oat fields of St Louis, it seemed. Once or twice she had wondered.

But here he was again before her, drawing her out for a waltz, whirling and sweeping the floor with her long skirt caught up in her hand to maximize the effect. The room was hot, even with every ceiling fan going. It was unseasonably warm for late September, probably the last truly warm spell before winter.
"Miss Lizzie, would you care for some punch. Let's have a cup an' walk a bit t' cool down." Lizzie nodded her acceptance.

Harry took her arm and guided her past the other dancers and into the next room where the refreshment tables were set up. He handed her a cup and took her arm as they walked and sipped. Harry talked about his ranch, a farm really compared to her father's, but she didn't care. She enjoyed the sound of his voice and liked the way he described the outbuildings he'd built and the cows he'd recently purchased. She watched him over the rim of her cup. His eyes really were the clearest blue, beautifully set off by the dark tan of his skin and his sunbleached, light brown hair. They had reached the end of the hallway and turned to go back to the ballroom, their punch gone. Harry looked quickly down the hall before bending to kiss her lightly on the end of her nose.

She shut her eyes to receive the kiss. When she opened them, Harry was gone and she'd returned to her snow bank. She shut her eyes again and touched the tip of her nose, then her cheek. Oh, I remember, she thought in amazement. I didn't lose him after all. I didn't lose either one of them, in spite of everything.
The nurse looked in, assumed her asleep, and turned out the light. It's just as well, Lizzie thought. I see better with my eyes closed anyway.

* * * *

Dear Mr. Brown,

It has been a week since you and the boy visited Mrs. Brown. I have seen her and talked to her every day except Sunday. Each time I have talked about you and the boy and I continue to ask her questions concerning her life with you on your ranch. As usual she looks at me with her eyes full of intelligence and understanding, but she says nothing. I am hopeful, however, that your visit here with the boy has stirred her memory, her positive memory, enough to help her overcome her hysteria and to begin to reach out to life again.

As an aid to encourage this improvement in her, would you be so kind as to write me descriptions of your home and environs. In addition, would you describe to me any positive memories you have which Mrs. Brown might share. Perhaps by talking to her, as you did, of those familiar surroundings and events, I might be able to stir her interest in them. Please continue your letters to her and make them as full of the details of your daily life as time will permit you. I feel that every effort we make to place her in contact with the real world will have a beneficial effect on her psyche.

Encourage her other family members to write to her as well. Their letters need not be long, but they should be positive in nature, welcoming even. The more happy contact she can have with all of you there the better. In particular, mention the boy. If he is able to print a few words, you would do well to include them in your letters, or if he should be artistically inclined, you might permit us to have some samples of his artwork to pin to her wall.

I remain very truly yours,
Robert A. Smallwood, M. D.

* * * *
Lizzie stood with Harry at the edge of a canyon which she didn’t recognize. Little clumps of prickly pear and dry sand were all she could see in the moonlight. It couldn’t be close to home; the plants and earth were all wrong. This was a place she’d seen only in geography books. The Sahara maybe. New Mexico. How had they gotten to this place?

The wind blew stiffly from behind them, driving them to the very edge. Dust and brush swirled around their feet. Harry was holding her, pointing and trying to show her something, but she couldn’t hear his voice over the roar of the wind. The wind blew harder and harder, whipping her hair loose from the pins, jerking the clothes from her body. Harry held her hand, and he was naked, too. She could see the line where his workshirt had stopped his suntan. The irrational wildness of the place frightened her.

He pointed down into the desert canyon, at something she couldn’t see way down in depths of its black bottom. He wanted to go there; she could tell from his manner that he intended to go there. The wind whined like a ravening beast. Suddenly a strange crack appeared in the dense blackness. She thought she saw a narrow, winding creek and a bit of green grass and trees shimmering through a rainbow’s haze. Harry dropped her hand. He leapt over the canyon’s rim and soared out on the wind, spiraling silently like a
great hunting hawk, down and down. She screamed his name and sat up.

The desert had vanished, and she was surrounded by a vast field of snow, blinding white snow. The sun came on, and a woman dressed all in white spoke calmly,

"Mrs. Brown? It's all right, Mrs. Brown; you're just having a bad dream. There's nothing here to harm you." The woman sat beside her and rubbed her shoulder sympathetically.

Lizzie didn't hear the voice. She felt the bite of a familiar pain in her pelvis and heard the blood pounding in her head. An almost overwhelming sense of loss struck her hard, a blind panic and crushing loss. Harry? Where was Harry? What could she do? How could she find him? Tears stung her eyes.

She looked down. The sheet around her was bloody.

"Oh. Come on, Mrs. Brown. Let's get you up, and you go put on a nice clean gown while I change the sheets on this bed. Then you can go back to sleep."

Still surrounded by terror and loss, she dumbly did as she was told.

* * * *
Lizzie walked to the window of the solarium and stared quietly at the sunshafts gracing the ground through the thick leaves of the overhanging elm trees. No trees like these at home, she thought dreamily. I'm not at home. Where am I? She swam up through the haze in her mind to surface in the realization that this was home now. No Luke, no Harry, no farm, no chickens, no garden, no fear, no sorrow, no nothing to touch her here. Nothing for her to touch either. Only clean white sheets, clean white walls, clean white smocks, clean white pills to take each day. Except this room. This room has color, inside and out. Safe inside she could look outside and see all she needed of sun and green and gold and gray as the days passed, all the same with no pressure to do or be what she no longer could do or be. What had finally forced it? She swam some more in the stagnant slough of her memory, searching for the islands of clarity she occasionally found on her lucid days. Oh, blinding pain forced it, her mother's loss and blood, her new life passing out of her and into the pit of the outhouse. She no longer wanted to swim or to remember. Everything was a loss; she could hold on to nothing.

"Mrs. Brown?" Lizzie turned to the voice. "Mrs. Brown, Doctor Smallwood would like to see you in his office. Would you walk with me or would you rather have a chair to ride in?"
Lizzie started down the hall, and the clean white nurse followed her silently. She knew the way quite well. Doctor Smallwood talked to her daily in his office, trying....She didn’t know what he was trying. Sometimes he read to her books which made no sense, but sometimes he read letters which made too much sense and sent her into the slough again. She hoped today wasn’t one of those letter days.

The nurse knocked and opened the office door. Dr. Smallwood’s body and name were a pair. He was a short, tanned man whose hair was almost the same color as his skin. He worked in the flower gardens outside daily with two of his male patients, probably just because he liked doing so. Lizzie liked him when he didn’t read letters, when he just talked to her. She didn’t talk to him; she felt no need to talk. He knew what she thought anyway.

"Mrs. Brown, you’re looking well today." He was always polite. Lizzie saw the letter in his hand and shut her mind to him. She knew he saw her do it.

"Sit down, please, Mrs. Brown. We must talk." Lizzie’s mind opened slightly, its petals welcoming the sun’s first rays like a morning glory.

"I’ve heard from your brother, Mrs. Brown, some bad news. Your husband...." Lizzie looked out the office window at the tall field grass yellowing in the extreme August heat. Harry was riding the mare across the field
toward the office. What was he doing here? He was carrying his old satchel. Oh, an animal was hurt or down in the pasture. The satchel contained all of Harry's tools and remedies for animal ailments. It must be a calf. He wouldn't go alone with only horse and rope otherwise. He'd take Henry or somebody along. There! It was a newborn calf with flies. Lizzie hated the flies that left their eggs to infest the navels of new calves. Awful, hateful flies could kill a little calf in a few days' time.

Lizzie saw the cow, then the calf. At least it was out of the sun. It struggled shakily to its feet, a little bull-calf, his navel black and oozing. Harry rode close to him; he was too weak to go far. He roped the calf anyway, even though he probably could have just walked up and pushed him over. The cow hovered nervously and called repeatedly to the little bull. He mooed frantically, but she was too frightened of the man to come any closer. Harry moved quickly to peg the calf down and clean his navel with a piece of flour sacking dipped in turpentine. He poured the purple colored jimson violet into the raw sore. Lizzie knew he'd have to repeat the procedure several times more if the calf were to survive. She knew what he would do tomorrow and the day after and the next day as well, in all probability, until he was satisfied with the calf's condition.
She watched as Harry loosed the rope from the neck of the calf and untied the pegging string. The little beast struggled shakily to his feet and staggered off to his mother, burying his pink nose in her udder for comfort. The cow licked her baby's side contentedly. God's in his heaven; all's right with the world again. Harry grunted contentedly, wiped his hands on his dirty jeans, and mopped his brow with his bandanna. He didn't look well. In fact, it occurred to Lizzie that he seemed feverish and very uncomfortable.

Still he gathered his remedies and tucked them back in the old satchel before he hung it on the saddle horn for the ride home. What was wrong with him?

She heard Dr. Smallwood again. "He was suffering from a fever and a stomachache. The local doctor treated him and sent him home. The fever and pain went away, and then... well, apparently it was appendicitis, but the local doctor didn't know. He was out in the pasture when it ruptured. The pain must have been intense, and he probably passed out while riding home, because the horse came in alone. Your brother isn't sure when. He rode over last Tuesday and saw the mare grazing outside the barn, saddled and bridled with the reins all broken off. When he couldn't find your husband anywhere, he rode to your father's brother's farm. Your mother-in-law and Luke were there and said they hadn't
seen him for two days. He apparently wasn't expected until Thursday anyway. Mrs. Brown knew he was ill but thought it was caused by something he'd eaten. Then your brother got a group of men to help him ride the pastures. The mare's condition told him that Harry had gone out to treat a sick animal because she was carrying an old satchel full of tools and medicines. When they found him, he was already gone.

I'm so sorry, Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Brown?"

Lizzie looked out the window into the shimmer of the August heat. Through the golden haze she saw Harry, laughing Harry, smiling and waving for her to come to him. You go on Harry. I'll be along before too much longer. It's a good place there, Harry. Clean and white and no pain.

* * * *
Lizzie woke that late September morning with the blinding glare of the snow in her eyes. She was going away today. Away from the snow. Henry was coming for her. Why do I remember that? Why should I care where I go now? Will I see Luke? Where is Luke now? Not with Harry. Suddenly she remembered Harry walking through the heat of August toward the window of Dr. Smallwood’s office. No, Luke is not with Harry. Luke is with Mother Brown, a good and safe place to be.

The nurse entered Lizzie’s room. "Mrs. Brown, your brother is coming to take you home today. Do you want me to help you pack?"

She liked this nurse who smelled of lavender and starch. She didn’t respond to the nurse’s words, but she rose quickly from bed and went to wash her face and hands. The staff of the sanitorium were accustomed to Lizzie’s silences, and the nurse had already pulled out the old suitcases when Lizzie returned.

"Why don’t you dress while I finish waking the patients in this wing? I’ll come back then and help you pack. We should be able to finish before the breakfast bell."

As the door closed, Lizzie began to dress. She tried to remember what Henry looked like. It’s been two years, she thought, since I’ve seen him. Lizzie brushed her long, black hair back and up into a knot on the top of her head.
She buttoned up her white blouse and slipped into her gray traveling skirt. She sat to put on her stockings and shoes, then folded her nightgown and picked up her slippers. Laying them beside the two open suitcases, she began to empty the drawers of her dresser, stacking and sorting her things neatly on the bed. When the nurse returned, she had already folded up everything except for her coat. It lay with her hat, purse, and gloves on the chair in the corner of her room. As the young woman entered, Lizzie began laying the heavier articles in the bottom of the larger case. With the nurse's help, she quickly packed everything she had into the two suitcases.

"You look ready to go already. Shall we pack your brushes and toilet articles now, or wait until after breakfast?"

Lizzie reached for the things which lay on top of the dresser and put them in the smaller case. Everything, everything now, she thought. I suppose I'm eager to go home. No, I'm eager for Luke. She closed the cases and buckled their straps.

The two women went out to breakfast when the bell sounded. They met the other patients and staff in the dining room where everyone sat together as in a boarding house. They were about half-finished when the receptionist
entered and whispered to Dr. Smallwood. He stood and walked to Lizzie’s chair.

"Mrs. Brown, your brother is here." When Lizzie stood, he placed his hand on her shoulder. "No need to leave your breakfast. You have a long train ride. I will go to greet him for you and tell him you will be out shortly."

Lizzie looked at the doctor gratefully as he turned away. After eating she went to her room. She put on her hat, coat and gloves before slipping the handle of her purse over her wrist and grasping her suitcases firmly and lifting them down from the bed. She stood before her mirror. I don’t know myself like this, she thought. I don’t know who I am right now. Maybe going home will help me to know. She walked down the corridor and into the reception area where Henry waited.

Dr. Smallwood was chatting with Henry as she came up to them. "She’ll be able to do anything you want her to do around the house," he was saying, "only just don’t...Oh, there you are, Mrs. Brown. All ready to go? I was just telling your brother that you’re not accustomed to being all alone and that he should allow you to do anything around the house that you feel like doing. You should be able to help your sister-in-law with some of the household duties. And you certainly can care for your son. You’ll enjoy that, I’m
sure. Your brother has been telling me about your new
nephew. That will be a pleasure for you, too, to have a
little one to help look after. I'm sure you will be able to
give them all a great deal of assistance."

Lizzie looked quickly at the doctor and Henry, then she
ducked her head and stared at Henry's boots. They were
dusty boots, his work boots. She could see traces of straw
and manure in the instep. He hadn't worn his best to come
get his crazy sister, she thought. I wonder how they all
feel about my coming home.

"We have a ten o'clock train t' catch, Dr. Smallwood."
Henry encouraged the doctor to dismiss Lizzie rapidly. He
didn't want to give her a chance to back out of going home.
She looked at him so strangely that he was afraid she might.
He shook the doctor's hand and reached for the suitcases.

Together Lizzie and Henry walked down the steps of the
sanitarium. Lizzie didn't look back; she would remember all
she needed to remember without a backward glance. Henry
waved to a taxi which came and drove them to the depot. He
said very little of importance, chatting idly about the
routine events of ranch life: how many calves had been born
so far, which of the many fences needed mending, why her
windmill didn't turn properly, how much he'd been able to
get from Charlie for the lease of her property. Then, out
of the blue:
"You know we sent Chris to Terrell?"

Lizzie looked straight at Henry. His question startled her, mostly because she hadn’t thought about their father in the time she’d been at the sanitarium.

"He had a stroke about a year ago. I guess nobody told you. It was right afore Harry an’ I came last spring for th’ sale. He’d been gettin’ more an’ more doddery an’ undependable anyway. You ‘member that? He had another stroke an’ couldn’t move. Elsie was expectin’ by then, an’ I didn’ want her t’ lose another baby, like she had th’ others. She jus’ couldn’t handle Chris, little as she is an’ him so heavy. I had t’ come in from th’ ranch every hour or so t’ turn him an’ such. Had t’ put diapers on him. She had t’ feed him an’ doctor him. Couldn’t nobody do much for him. He couldn’t talk or nothin’. Had t’ have him declared nincompoop so they’d take him at Terrell. Wasn’t no place else for somebody bedridden like him. He didn’ know th’ difference anyway. I wanted t’ tell you first thing so you wouldn’t start expectin’ t’ see him."

The depot appeared in the frame of the taxi’s window. Henry paid the driver and carried her cases in to the ticket window. He purchased two one-way tickets and said, "We’d better get right t’ th’ platform. Th’ train leaves in about ten minutes. Do you need anythin’?"
Lizzie said nothing so he turned and started off toward the trains. Lizzie had to hurry to keep up, but he never looked back to see if she followed him. What is the matter with him, Lizzie wondered. What hasn't he told me yet?

The porter took the cases and showed them to their seats. Lizzie sat by the window and watched the rush of the final passengers. The train slowly backed away, clicked onto the switching tracks, and wove its way out of the yard. Before long it left the city behind and began the steady rhythm of the journey home. Lizzie thought she should be glad, but she wasn't. She was too nervous, too insecure about what lay ahead.

"You haven't asked me anythin' about Luke. I thought you would, but you're silent as ever. He's livin' at Louie's with th' Browns. As soon as I'm able t' get free from work, I'll drive you over t' see him. They thought he'd be better off with them until you get settled."

Lizzie looked at him questioningly. "Where?"

"At th' home place. You cain't go live in Harry's house. You cain't live there by yourself, just you an' Luke, an' there's nobody can live with you. Emily's too old an' feeble; there'd be nobody able t' do th' heavy chores. Luke's nearly six an' a half now. In a couple of years, maybe he'll be big enough t' do th' chores. Besides, th' house an' land are both leased right now, house t' th'
Shipmans, land t’ Charlie. You’ll just have t’ stay with Elsie an’ me for the time bein’.”

Lizzie stared silently out the window. She remembered the last years of her mother’s life in the house with Elsie. Not much time lapsed between Henry’s wedding and Lucy’s abdication. Elsie was twenty-four, had been total mistress of the house since she was twenty. She wasn’t about to be lenient in any way to any other woman, even if she was fifteen years her senior. Particularly to one whose sanity was in doubt. Where will I settle; where will home be without Luke...and Harry? Lizzie felt tears stinging in her eyes. She counted the telephone poles that ran beside the tracks until she could regain her self control. She counted the number of black cows she saw. She counted the number of times the turkey buzzards circled in the distance. Anything to keep from thinking about the future. Finally, several million posts later, the train pulled into town. Henry collected their three suitcases.

"The car’s down at th’ hotel. I’ll call Ham an’ get him t’ send th’ taxi over. Come sit inside."

Lizzie ignored him almost entirely. She stood in the late afternoon sunlight. It was warm but not unpleasant. Henry went in to call, then stood in the door, watching her and wondering. She could sense his uncertainty. It
unsettled her a little. Lizzie saw a hawk diving, a small red-tailed hawk, the kind that took chicks from hen yards. The small ones are the fiercest, she thought. The hawk struggled up with a rabbit in its claws just as the taxi arrived. Lizzie went down the steps to meet it. She was already seated inside when Henry arrived with the luggage and told the driver their destination.

* * * *

Elsie heard Henry’s car approaching near sundown and went out onto the porch to meet them. When Lizzie stood before her, Elsie hesitated before embracing her and kissing her lightly on the cheek.

"Welcome home, Husband. Was your trip eventful? Lizzie, come in. Are you hungry? Supper’ll be ready soon. Henry, put her cases in Lucy’s room. Lizzie, you ’member which one was Lucy’s room, don’t you? Do you want t’ go freshen up?" Elsie bustled even when she talked.

Lizzie left her energy gratefully, climbed the stairs, and entered the room which had been her parents’ as long as she could remember. It was the same as always, the same ivory-colored crocheted doilies and antimacassars. The same hand-pieced quilt on the bed reminded her of the times her father had bounced her there as a child. Elsie hadn’t changed much in this room. Lizzie wondered why not, as she sank into her mother’s rocking chair. Closing her eyes, she
heard the old German lullabies Lucy had sung to her and she had sung in turn to Luke. The old memories hurt, but the newer ones couldn't be remembered safely yet, maybe never. She rose and went out to the top of the stairs.

"She's so strange, Henry. Her eyes looked right through me an' she didn't even say a word. It's like she's deaf an' blind an' dumb. Was she this way on th' train?"

"She never even asked about Luke. She only asked where she was goin' t' be settled. I don't know what's in her mind, but then I never did. She could talk when she wanted t', but she never wanted t' talk t' me very much. She always would listen, ask a question or two, an' not say much else. I don't suppose she seems so very different. Except she just looks, stares really right through things sometimes."

"Well, I don't know how we're going t' manage, if she can't be trusted alone or with th' baby. Did th' doctor say she could be left alone? Can she be trusted in th' kitchen or in town?"

"He said t' watch her, t' supervise her activities until we could see what she would do in th' new situation. He said he'd had no reason t' think she would do anything harmful t' anybody. She just won't answer questions. He seemed more 'fraid of what she could do t' herself."

"You mean suicide?"
"No, I don’t think so."

Lizzie coughed loudly and started down the stairs, making as much noise as possible. The voices below stopped for a moment. Henry rose as she entered, escorting her like a guest to her chair at the table. Supper was a cold, silent, watchful business, and afterwards Lizzie helped Elsie clear the table and wash the dishes. She worked rapidly and efficiently as always, the routine coming back to her easily after the two-year vacation from household chores. It felt good to do something so normal. She soaped each dish and utensil carefully, then rinsed everything with clean, hot water waiting on the back of the stove. Elsie dried each thing and showed her where it was kept in the kitchen. Clearly she was eager for Lizzie to know her way around the kitchen, and she took care to explain her cooking routines as she worked. I’m to be the household help, Lizzie realized. I’m the cook they can’t afford. I have no place unless I earn it. No place. No choice. Just do. And make do.

* * * *
Lizzie tried to fit into the routine of life Elsie had established at the home place. It wasn't her own, but Lizzie could see the logic to it, and Elsie wasn't overly demanding. Still, she missed Luke horribly and feared that she would never see him, that her son would belong to someone else—his grandmother, maybe—instead of his real mother. Early in the morning almost daily she stood in her bedroom, looking down the road from her window in the direction of Louie's house and Luke. She imagined what he must be like now at age six. She let herself dream his image there on the rock road running toward her, his boots kicking up the red dust in little rusty puffs.

She roused herself and went down the stairs. Time to fix breakfast, she thought. Elsie wasn't well; this new pregnancy wasn't going to be successful, Lizzie sensed. It's one of those things that seem to plague us farm women. If we did everything we had to do to keep the home running properly, the garden growing, the hands and husbands and other children going, then there was no energy left for a baby growing inside. Particularly since the babies came so close together. Lizzie knew Elsie would lose this baby like the others; she felt it. She had too much to worry about with the live nine-month-old one she had already. Entering the kitchen, Lizzie began mixing flour and baking powder for biscuits. She kneaded and rolled the dough, then cut the
squares. She had had round biscuits at the sanitarium; they had a cookie cutter like Mama used to have. Where was Lucy's cookie cutter? Lizzie wondered if it had gone when Elsie had imposed her own brand of law-and-order on the house. She set the biscuits in the oven and began slicing the ham. Elsie entered the kitchen, looking pale and ill-humored.

"I don't believe I can tolerate ham again this mornin', Lizzie. I'd better just have buttermilk an' biscuits."

Lizzie ducked her head and went down to get the milk. She poured Elsie a glass, gathered the butter and jam up and started out for the dining room to set the table.

Returning to the kitchen she finished slicing the ham and put it in the skillet to fry. Henry entered and poured himself coffee. He glanced at Elsie, who had huddled up next to the stove feeding their eleven-month old son.

Turning to his sister, he said, "Two fried eggs this mornin', please Lizzie, with th' ham an' biscuits. Elsie, stomach actin' up again? Why don't you go back up t' bed?"

"Cain't, Henry. We got to can th' beans today. They're picked an' ready. Cain't wait."

"Lizzie can do that without you, Cain't you, Lizzie?"

He waited a moment for Lizzie to acknowledge, took her silence for acquiescence, and rushed on. "Besides, this
baby’s more important than those damn beans, you know. Go on back up t’ bed."

Elsie looked at him gratefully, then left the kitchen.

Lizzie took the biscuits out of the oven, finished the eggs, transferred them to a plate, and carried them in to Henry in the dining room. Next she carried in a plate of biscuits, some ham, and her own plate. She sat beside her brother and ate in companionable silence.

"You never was one t’ talk much, Lizzie. Cain’t, for th’ life of me, understand why it bothers Elsie so that you don’t talk t’ her. Most women chatter like mockin’birds. It’s real restful t’ sit with you."

Lizzie half-smiled at her brother’s compliment, knowing her silence gave him more time to hear his own words. Soon he left the house, and Lizzie was relieved. She felt good, calmer and freer of fear than she had for some time. She was pleased that her pains seemed better under control; she hadn’t had to go in to the doctor’s office yet. Henry’d be gone all day, and Elsie would be in bed for most of the day. She could do what she liked. What she liked most was holding Elsie’s baby and pretending he was Luke. She climbed the stairs and tapped at Elsie’s door. When Elsie called out for her to come in, she entered and went directly to the crib. The baby was fussy. Wet, probably. Lizzie changed his diaper and lifted him into her arms.
"Take him away, Lizzie. Take him off till he needs t' eat again. I don't know if I can bear t' look at him. He reminds me of all th' trouble I'm havin' with this new 'un." She shut her eyes as Lizzie took the baby and left silently.

For a long time Lizzie simply sat in Lucy's rocking chair and rocked the baby, then she lay him on a towel in the middle of her bed. He was soundly asleep, his little fist poked into his mouth. He was teething. Lizzie remembered the trouble Luke had with that. His teeth came late, just like this one's.

Walking to her window, Lizzie stared down the road toward Louie's house. It was too far to see, of course, almost seven miles, but she could imagine her six-year-old son getting ready for school. It was Monday; he'd be going out to catch the bus for the first grade. I wish I were there to pack your dinner pail, Luke. I wish I were there to press your shirt, to check your hair and teeth, to hug you good-by, to hear your lessons tonight. You're growing up without me. She stared hard at the road again trying to compress the distance. She knew she'd see him Sunday, but that wasn't soon enough, not nearly soon enough.

* * * *
On a Saturday morning early that fall, the first grade teacher Miss Lula watched Luke and his uncle weave their way through the mix of Model T's, roadsters, wagons, and horses to cross the street to a group of men sitting on the green benches of the courthouse lawn. Here the men waited while their wives and daughters tended to the weekly shopping at the general store, catching up on gossip and other farming news. Looking at her cheerful, plump face and tidy, matronly figure, the ignorant observer might take her to be just another housewife going about her Saturday chores, and so she was. What that same observer would not see was that beneath her small, round exterior, Miss Lula was made of cast iron. She had to be. She guarded the flame of literacy in a rural community where by tradition every hand was needed in spring and fall to insure the family's survival. She fought a running battle to keep the younger children in school. In her dedicated way, she was about to beard an infidel in the center of his court of fellow heathens.

The men stood and doffed their hats as she bustled into their midst. Though most had attended grammar school with her, she could make them all feel like naughty schoolboys with one of her imperious stares. They wondered which of them would feel the lash of her tongue this time. Since
they were all fathers, most of them had experience with Miss Lula of one sort or another.

"William Louis, I'd like a moment of your time please, if you can spare it, of course." Louie Brown stiffened, but the relaxation of tension in the others was so obvious that even Miss Lula sensed it. She smiled secretly, enjoying her reputation.

"Yes, Miss Lula. What can I do for you?" The politeness in his voice surprised those who were accustomed to his usually brusque manner.

"Walk a spell with me. Not you, Luke, just your uncle this time." She smiled at the boy, who ducked his head, embarrassed to be so favored with her benevolence, even if temporarily.

"Luke, you wait with Henry. Tell your aunt he's with me if she comes lookin' for him."

The boy nodded and moved behind his Uncle Henry. Miss Lula moved away from the men with Louie in tow.

"William Louis, I want to know what you are doin' to that boy out at your place. He's not been in class for over a week, and he needs to be. You can't possibly be needin' a six-year-old boy when you've got those three big boys of your own. Why hasn't he been in school."
"Now, Miss Lula, you know how hard it is t' get in t' town. I cain't be bringin' that boy in every day. It's just too far."

"William Louis, I'm not goin' t' let you deprive that boy of his education. His mother wouldn't want that an' neither would his father, if either of 'um could say so. You let that boy come in t' town. He's one of my best pupils, as quick as he can be with his numbers. Let him stay with your brother Frank durin' th' week. He'll be closer to th' main road, an' he can take th' school bus from there an' come home to you on th' weekends. You know your mother wouldn't object to havin' him, an' neither would Frank. I'll talk to 'um if you'd prefer me t' make th' arrangements." She gave him her steeliest smile. Louie could just imagine what she would say to his mother. He capitulated to her blackmail.

"No, no, Miss Lula, that won't be necessary. I'll see to it that Luke gets t' town for school. Leastways till they open up th' new school out by us."

"This whole year, William Louis. I want him for the entire school year. Let me get him well established in his fundamentals, then you can send him to th' new school. If it ever opens."

"All right, Miss Lula, have it your way."
"Thank you, William Louis. You are gettin’ more agreeable in your old age."

"Yes, ma’am."

She favored him by taking his arm and gently turning him back in the direction of the waiting onlookers.

Smiling up at Louie, she said, "That Luke is th’ most lovin’ child I have ever taught. After we got acquainted, he wanted me t’ hug him every day, first thing in th’ mornin’ and last thing before he left in th’ evenin’ an’ sometimes in the middle of th’ day. It’s as though he’s starved for huggin’. He misses his mama. Is there any chance Henry’ll be able t’ take Luke t’ live with him so he can be with his mama more?"

"No, ma’am. I don’t think so. There’s just no place for ’um both t’ go together. All of us got growin’ families. Frank’s got room for Luke, maybe, in his attic, but he’s got no room for Lizzie. She cain’t go stay at Harry’s homeplace, not by herself. Luke ain’t old enough t’ manage farm chores alone an’ look after her, too. ’Sides, cain’t nobody predict what she’ll do next. I try t’ take th’ boy over t’ see her regular, or Henry, he brings her t’ see him at my place. I ’spect Luke’d just got back from one of them trips when he first come t’ your class. She just sits an’ hugs him th’ whole time they’re together."

"Well, you tell your wife t’ hug that boy some, too."
Louie laughed, "Shoot, she don't even hug her own boys."

Miss Lula dropped his arm as they rejoined the men.

"May I take Luke with me for a while, William Louis? I'll bring him back in a half-hour."

Louie looked at Luke who stared up at Miss Lula, his eyes big with concern. Louie figured Luke was next in line for a tongue-lashing.

"Fine with me."

"Thank you. Come along, Luke." She took the boy's hand and walked away from the men. As she and the boy reached the curb, she said, "Gentlemen, Luke, offer their arms to ladies whom they escort across a street. Older ladies sometimes feel faint, you know. They sometimes aren't as steady on their feet as men are."

Luke dutifully stuck out his arm, silently praying that none of the town boys would see him. He liked Miss Lula, but there were well known limits to his tolerance for teasing. He didn't want to add fuel to his growing fire.

She continued, "I spoke t' your uncle concerning your attendance this year. I believe he will permit you to continue th' school year with me. He intends t' make arrangements with your Uncle Frank so that you will live with Frank during th' week and take th' bus into town for
school. It is a long ride, but you can manage that, can't you?"

Luke pushed his thick brown bangs out of his eyes and looked at her with a shy smile on his face. He nodded slightly.

"Where're we goin', please, Miss Lula?"

"We are goin' to the soda fountain at the drug store. I am about to die for an ice cream soda. Of course, it would be very impolite of you to let me eat one alone. I don't suppose you could manage a small soda, could you? Just to keep me company?"

Luke grinned, "A gentleman has t' have good manners with a lady, don't he?"

"Doesn't he. Yes, Luke, that's the polite way to behave."

They entered the long, narrow store. First established well before 1900, the drug store was older than many of the town's residents. Backed by an elaborate mirror with wooden cabinets beneath it, a marble-topped counter extended halfway down the left side of the store. Round stools stood next to it. She spoke briskly to the two boys seated on the stools. Across the shot-gun aisle were counters containing cigars, candies, and notions. Miss Lula bustled past these fascinating display cases, her hand still on Luke's arm. The "ice cream parlor" was behind the half wall at the back
of the store. Furnished with small marble topped tables and chairs, this room usually catered to adults only. Boys alone certainly weren't welcomed; however, under Miss Lula's aegis, anything could happen.

While Mr. Howard, the owner, danced about, Miss Lula selected a table. She turned to Luke. "Now, Luke, a gentleman would pull out th' lady's chair an' hold it steady while she seated herself." Mr. Howard jerked his hands away from the chair, and Luke slid it out from the table. When Miss Lula had arranged herself, Luke sat across from her. She continued her lesson in manners:

"Luke, I'd like t' see th' menu, wouldn't you?"

Mr. Howard handed them both a sheet of cardboard.

"Luke, I believe I'll have a cherry phosphate. You decide what you want an' give our order t' Mr. Howard. The gentleman always orders for th' lady.

"Mr. Howard, Miss Lula would like a cherry phosphate, an' I'll take a chocolate milkshake."

"Right away. Won't be but a minute."

"Now, Luke, on Monday when you come back t' class, I'll have some work for you t' do to make up for th' days you missed last week. There are some addition problems, an' I want you t' practice your alphabet several times on your slate before you make a perfect copy on paper. Be sure t'
take your school supplies to your Uncle Frank's house when you go to stay with him."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Does the school bus pass near to your Uncle Frank's house?"

"Yes, Ma'am. Just down at th' end of th' lane is th' crossroads. It picks up most everybody west of the Grove. I can walk it in 'bout five, ten minutes."

"That will be fine, then. I am so glad you will be coming back to school."

Mr. Howard set their order down. He waited expectantly. Miss Lula looked at Luke: "Luke, can you tell me how much we owe Mr. Howard for these treats?"

Luke looked at the prices on the menu.

"It says five cents for the cherry phosphate and ten cents for the milkshake."

She handed Luke some coins: "Count out the money an' pay Mr. Howard, Luke. A gentleman always treats a lady when he takes her to th' ice cream parlor. What is th' total?"

Luke added silently. "Fifteen cents?"

"That's right."

Luke showed her his hand which held two nickels and five pennies. She nodded and he gave the money to Mr. Howard, who left quickly to wait on other customers. Luke handed Miss Lula back the change. When he had finished his
milkshake, Miss Lula said, "You'd better go on back to your Uncle Louie now. Your aunt will be about finished with her shopping, I expect. See that you don't let that milkshake spoil your dinner. Most of the time a gentleman would escort a lady back t' her residence, but in this case we must make an exception. I have not finished my own Saturday shopping yet."

"Yes, Ma'am. Thank you for th' milkshake."

"You are quite welcome." She offered her hand to Luke who shook it gingerly. "I will see you on Monday morning."

"Yes, Ma'am. Good bye."

She smiled as Luke took off at a run the minute he left the parlor section of the drug store.

*  *  *

On Monday when the bus children arrived, Luke was the first one to enter her classroom. Miss Lula stood writing the day's arithmetic problems on the chalkboard. Luke wrapped one arm around her waist before quickly sitting down. She turned and handed him a slate full of addition problems.

"When you've finished these, put th' slate on my desk an' take th' other one. Perhaps you can finish your sums before th' town children arrive. You won't be behind th' others in today's arithmetic if you do." Luke nodded, his heavy dark hair falling in his eyes as usual.
When the opening bell rang, Miss Lula called the roll:
"John T. Andrews?"
"Present."
"Mary Louise Bachman?"
"Present."
"Bernice Barger?"
"Absent." Miss Lula looked up.
"Wasn't she on th' bus?"
"No, ma'am."
"Very well. Harry L. Brown?" A snicker came from the back of the room. Miss Lula looked up from her roll book.
"What was that? Luke, did you say something?"
"No, Ma'am."
"Then answer the roll call, please. Harry L. Brown?"
"Present." Another snicker.
Miss Lula stared at the larger town boys in the back. Her mouth tightened and her eyes flashed. They were instantly silent and still. She finished the roll call.

Thirty minutes later Luke had finished the problems and was practicing his alphabet on his own slate. He carefully copied the uppercase letters from the charts which hung on one wall of the classroom. He practiced each letter until he had it mastered, then he copied the entire twenty-six uppercase letters on a sheet of paper. He lettered his name at the top and raised his hand. Miss Lula left the boy she
was helping, looked over his paper, corrected two mistakes, and returned it to him.

"You've done very well. Now practice those two again on your slate, and redo 'um at the bottom of the page. When you finish that, put the paper on my desk. It's almost time for recess."

Just as Luke finished his corrections, the principal rang the big bell for recess. The class lined up and filed out the door. One of the bigger boys pushed Luke, causing him to stumble into the girl ahead of him in the line. Miss Lula turned around.

"John T., stay behind the others. I want to talk to you." The others filed out, breaking and running in all directions the minute they cleared the building. The first graders all went to the swings. Luke began to swing higher and higher.

One of the teachers called, "Luke, you're going too high. Give someone else a turn, please."

Reluctantly Luke gave up the swing to one of the little girls. He pushed her twice and stepped back.

"Hairy L. Brown. Hairy L. Brow...n."

Luke turned, pushing his hair back from his eyes.

"Brown 'n hairy L. Brow...n."
He saw John T., the older boy who had pushed him, and another town boy leaning against one of the trees which supported the swings. He turned away.

"He's so brown 'n hairy, cain't even see t' fight. Course, he won't, cause he's yellow. Hair shoulda been yellow, all the way down his brown an' hairy back."

"Whadaya expect from a crazy's kid? Course he's brown 'n hairy an' prob'ly crazy, too, like her. Know what she does?" Luke bunched his fists.

"What?" Any falsehood invented would ignite the fire.

"She locks him in th' outhouse with her an' braids his hair. 'S why they call him 'hairy' Brown."


"Look, ol' brown 'n hairy Brown's mad. Look out. Oooh, ol' crazy brown 'n hairy's mad. Suppose his back ain't yellow?"

"Naw. He's too much a baby."

Luke ran, head down for the older boy. Before John T. could brace himself, Luke butted him in the stomach, knocking him breathless to the ground. He turned to the other boy, who stood loosely waiting. It didn't matter that the older boy was thirty pounds heavier and several inches taller. Luke went in swinging wildly. By the time the teachers had crossed the playground, Luke was flat on his
back with a bloody nose, the beginnings of a black eye, and his first lesson in playground fighting under his belt.

Miss Lula grabbed him by the arm. "Young man, there will be some explainin' to be done here, but first let's go get that nose cleaned up. John T., th' principal wants you in her office, you an' Jarvis both. You had better be there waitin' for me when I finish with Luke. You'd better have an adequate explanation why it takes two second graders t' defend themselves against a first grader."

The older boys visibly wilted and trudged off toward the main entrance to the school building. Miss Lula pulled Luke into the side door after her. She took him into the teachers' washroom, handed him soap and made him wash his hands first, then his bloody face. When she tried to question him, he refused to answer her. As soon as his nose had stopped bleeding, she took him to the principal.

"Mrs. Goodnight, he absolutely refuses t' tell me what happened."

"These two won't not explain either. They leave me no choice. Since I cannot properly assign blame where it belongs, I am forced to punish them all equally. Luke, surely you can explain th' problem here."

Luke ducked his head and stared at his old shoes.

"Very well. Miss Lula, you take John T. an' Jarvis into the outer office please. I will attend to Luke first."
While Miss Lula stood with John and Jarvis, they all heard the loud smacks of the principal's strap. Luke came out of the office, his eyes moist, but deliberately pushing his hair back, he stared at the older boys defiantly. Miss Lula caught the look and began to understand better. She waited until John T. came out of the office. Looking at the two of them, she said,

"John Tweegles Andrews, let me introduce you properly to Harry Lewis Brown."


"You boys go on back to th' room. Work on your sums until I get back. I am goin' t' wait for Jarvis. John T., Luke, I'd better have heard th' end t' this nonsense."

"Yes, Ma'am," they whispered together.

She could hear them as they went back down the hall.

"Boy, are you gonna have a shiner!"

"Yeah? Well, back of your head don't look none too good where you hit th' ground either."

"Think you'll get a lickin' when you get home?"

"Well, prob'ly. How 'bout you?"

"Depends on if Miss Lula sees my mother or not today."

Their voices faded as they left her behind. Miss Lula smiled. Luke had found a new friend and partner in misery.

* * *
That Sunday after church Lizzie stood in the window, watching the white dust trail of the approaching car, waiting for Louie to appear out of the haze with Luke. Like the snowstorms in her room at the sanitarium, everything seemed white, colorless, except for what she was straining her eyes to see. Finally the car reached the front of the house and parked at the gate. Lizzie could see Luke’s thick, black hair, coarse as the mare’s tail and probably cut with barn shears. Louie wouldn’t spend any money on a barber for a child of his own, much less one not his. She moved out of the room and down the stairs. She could hear Louie and Henry talking in the parlor. She entered the room, and the boy turned to greet her. Louie hesitated, but Luke didn’t. He met her halfway across the room, throwing his arms around her waist. How tall he is! He didn’t reach my waist the last time I felt his little arms around me. She sat in a chair and pulled him next to her. She couldn’t take her arms from around him. She wanted to hold him in her lap, but he was definitely too big for that. He stood awkwardly, chin down, scowling at his uncles, and refusing to meet her eye, but he didn’t try to move away. He seemed to defy the whole world to move him from her side.

"I tol’ you he’d be trouble if he went in t’ town school. You an’ Ma had t’ insist. He has t’ go in t’ school, you said. Well, he’s been fighting. I tol’ you he
wouldn’t get along with th’ town kids. I’ve had t’ give him lickin’s twice already because of th’ bad reports th’ teacher had sent home. What do you spect me t’ do with such a wild boy?” Louie spoke to Henry, not to her.

"Oh, I don’t know as you an’ I was much better, Louie. I ‘member real well you fightin’ an’ carryin’ on a good bit durin’ school days.” Henry laughed. "I’d say he’uz normal for his family. His daddy was a scrapper, for sure."

"Well, Miz Lula sounds like she’s had her fill of him. Says first day she calls roll. Says ‘Harry Brown.’ No answer. Says, ‘Harry Brown’ again. Has to say it three times ’fore he speaks up. An’ what does he say? Does he say ‘here’ like he’s s’posed to? Naw. He pipes up an’ says, ‘Luke,’ big as you please, in spite of th’ fact that I’d tol’ him th’ night before he had t’ answer t’ his daddy’s name since it’s his Christian name, too. That ain’t all neither. Seems he just had t’ get into a fight. First day of school, he has t’ fight. She don’t know what th’ problem was; she just separated ‘em and took ‘em t’ th’ principal. Well, you ‘member Mrs. Goodnight. She licked ‘em both an’ sent ‘em back t’ class. Well, he done it again durin’ bus recess. Different kid this time. That Chiles kid what goes into town like he does. Ain’t as if they’s strangers. We known th’ Chileses all our lives. I asked him what he was fightin’ for, but he won’t tell me neither."
I whipped him for that sass, too, but he's so mule-headed, whippin' don't make a dint in his goldang stubbornness."

Lizzie looked at Luke. "Why are you fightin', Son?"

"I don' like it when they call me Harry, Mama. They call me brown an' hairy Brown an' laugh at me. I had to fight 'em to make 'em stop laughin' at me. They laugh at you, too, Mama. They say you're crazy, an' I'm crazy like you. They ain't gonna say that no more, Mama. Not 'less they like havin' their noses bloody. No more."

His defiant glare softened as he looked into her eyes. She held him tightly against her side and looked directly through Louie who turned his eyes away from her glare. Both men were silenced by the cruel truth of Luke's words. Both knew the fate of children who had no parents to defend them. Luke would have to be tough.

Louie gave in. "Well, I guess they deserved what they got, Luke. I won't lick you no more, but you try not t' fight 'less you have to. You promise me that? An' you come tell me if they's any more trouble."

"I promise, Uncle Louie. I'll try not t' fight, but they better not say nothin' else about Mama."

"No. We don't want no more of that."

Lizzie took his hand and rose. She walked into the kitchen and poured four glasses of lemonade. Handing two to Luke, she carried the others to the waiting men. Luke
followed her, but after taking her glass from him, she led him out to the porch swing. Together they sat in the swing and glided back and forth, sipping on their drinks. The men could hear the boy talking on and on, more words pouring from him at one time than either of the men could ever remember. He talked about school and Granny Em and chores and softball, his favorite part of recess.

"I didn't want to say this in front of Lizzie, Henry. Miz Lula said she's havin' other troubles with Luke, too. He won't let her get nothin' done. Seems he wants her t' hug him all th' time. He won't let her walk past him without tryin' t' hug her. He hugs her when he gets t' school an' when he leaves. She calls him love-starved. Won't let his grandma or his aunt hug him, but wants teacher t' hug him all the time. She's talked t' him about it. Explained he has t' share her with th' other children. He's better, she says. Still, he's damned strange some times. Works hard though. He's pretty good at arithmetic."

"Give him time, Louie. It ain't easy, the life he's gotta live. Leastways he won't be startin' from scratch when he's grown. Lizzie's got land from Lucy, same as all us did, and Harry's land will be his, too. We just got to teach him how to run it. You're doin' your part takin' care of him. I'm tendin' Lizzie and the land. 'Tween us maybe
we can have somethin' for him when he's ready. We owe his
daddy that much."

"Well, I'm tryin' to see he learns about stock and
crops. He's quick and seems to like learnin' about the
land. At least he ain't a dummy or crazy. I don' think I
could manage him otherwise. He's already tried t' fight my
boys when they tease him. I tell 'em t' lay off, but boys
will tease partic'lar when somebody's quick-tempered.

Louie rose. "Gotta be gettin' back. I hate to bust up
their reunion, but we got cows to milk. Bring her over
Sunday next. I'll tell Virgie t' plan on ya-all for lunch."

Lizzie rose and extended her hand to Louie. "Thank you
for bringing him, Brother Louie."

Louie nodded before he turned to the boy. "Time t' go
home, Luke. We got t' milk th' cows. Kiss your mama
good-by. Maybe she can come visit next Sunday, if you don'
get into no more fights at school."

Luke looked tensely at his mother, relaxing when he saw
the warmth in her eyes. Arm in arm they followed the men
out to the porch. He hugged her hard and hopped down the
steps and into the car. Louie followed more slowly, cranked
the motor, jumping behind the steering wheel as the motor
turned over and began to rumble. Luke swiveled around in
the seat to watch his mother until the car went behind a
hill, and he could no longer see her or the house.
Henry put his arm around his sister's shoulders and guided her into the house. She slid away from him, climbed the stairs quickly, and stared out her window until the horizon was totally clear of the car's dust before she went down to fix their supper.

* * * *
Early that October morning Lizzie stood at her window, looking across the pasture west of the house. One fence ran east-west along side the dirt road which passed about a half-mile from the house; a second fence, also made of barb-wire, ran north-south and formed a corner with the first fence at the place where the farm's lane turned off the dirt road. That corner was the last place she could see Luke when Louis drove him back to his farm. She had stood at her window many mornings remembering his thick, straight, black hair hanging down as he alternately had waved good-by and wiped away a stray tear. Not even Louie's black Ford was as dark as that boy's hair was on those days.

This cool fall morning, however, something else was happening at that corner. A group of about twenty men, strangers, were helping Henry and the hands unload large rolls of chicken wire from one truck and a stack of 1 x 4's from another. While Lizzie watched, the men began sorting the lumber into two piles, one pile containing longer pieces than the other. Shortly afterward the men began nailing the lumber into large rectangles. Henry and the two fulltime hands he'd recently hired broke away from the group when Elsie rang the iron bell for breakfast. Lizzie, startled by the lateness of the hour, hurried down the stairs. Elsie had fixed breakfast alone; she would be unhappy about that.

Lizzie reached the kitchen well before the men. She
began carrying plates and mugs to the table. Quickly she
lay the tableware at each place. She and Elsie would eat
later, after the men were fed. Elsie was making pancakes,
so Lizzie took the crock of molasses from the pantry and
spooned it into a pan to heat. She melted a pound of butter
as well. She handed her year-old nephew Carl a spoon with a
little molasses on it.

As the men entered and sat at the kitchen table, she
began pouring coffee. After setting the platters of bacon
and sausage on the table, she poured the heated molasses and
melted butter into pitchers. Taking a platter of pancakes
from Elsie, she handed it, then the butter and molasses to
Henry. The assembly line from stove to table ran smoothly
until the men were satisfied.

The two hands ate quickly and left to finish whatever
they were building. Henry, enjoying an executive privilege,
lingered over a third cup of coffee. Elsie handed Lizzie a
plate of pancakes and sat next to Henry.

"What on earth is goin' on at the corner?" she asked.

"Buildin' a fence for th' rabbit drive. Be done in 'bout
an hour, then you'll see some action. Early mornin's th'
best time for a rabbit drive."

"What kind of fence, Henry?" Lizzie asked quietly, but
she startled her brother merely by asking. She didn't speak
to anyone much these days. Even after a month in this
house, she seldom joined their conversations. She saved her words for her private moments with the baby Carl, who sat gleefully playing with a cold pancake, and Luke.

"Well, Lizzie, I guess you was already gone t' Fort Worth first time we had a rabbit drive round here. They're nailin' 1 x 4's into a frame three feet by ten feet. Then they'll stretch chicken wire over th' frames an' make two wings. One to go 'long th' inside th' road fence; t'other'll come up toward th' house inside th' pasture. Make a V-shaped trap, sorta. You'll see. We should catch a lotta rabbits. Well, I'd best be gettin' on back t' work."

"Henry, do we fix dinner for all these men?"

"Just our hands, Elsie. Others'll take th' skins an' go on t' town, soon's they break down th' wings. Have t'get th' furs outta th' sun, an' collect th' bounty on 'em. We might even get done well 'fore dinnertime anyway. Depends."

Henry left the kitchen to the women who washed up the dishes and pots quickly. Elsie picked up Carl, who was covered with stickiness, and carried him to the pump. He squirmed and fussed, but she scrubbed him clean and set him down. He ran to Lizzie babbling. Lizzie smiled at him.

"Why don't we take him an' go up to see what the men are doin'? You want to go up there and watch?"
Lizzie nodded in agreement, and they each took one of Carl's hands. They would swing the heavy toddler between them and let him walk as far as he could.

The wing running toward the house was already in place, and the men had nearly completed the second wing. Each roughly built piece was about twelve hundred feet long. Two-inch wire mesh covered the entire length of the wooden frames which had been set end-to-end, forming an effective barrier for any varmints which might run into it.

By the time the three spectators reached the trucks, the men had finished assembling the trap. They stood around waiting in their heavy leather work gloves; some held crude walking sticks about six feet in length. Henry handed each man an old, metal pie pan from a stack in one of the trucks.

"You women need t'stand down there at th' end of th' wing so you don't spook th' rabbits outta th' trap. Don't move up until th' men start walkin' up closer to th' corner. You won't spook th' rabbits thataway."

Lizzie picked up Carl and trailed the men with Elsie down to the end of the wing. The men crawled through the barb-wire into the lush pasture. They went out in a line through the tall, brushy grass, forming the base of a pyramid whose sides were the two wings. The twenty-three men spread out along this base about sixty feet from each other. When Henry gave the sign, the men began to bang the
pie pans against their legs, making a loud racket and hollering meaningless words.

After several moments of this racket, Henry began stomping his feet and walking very slowly forward toward the corner. As he moved, he swept the tall grass in front of him with his stick. The racket caught Carl's attention, and he watched the action expectantly. He began to toddle up the road as the men moved toward the corner, causing Elsie and Lizzie to hurry to catch his hands before he could get into trouble.

As she reached the boy, Lizzie noticed that the grass ahead of the shouting men had begun to wave. She could hear frantic scurrying of animals who were trying to move away from the noise. As the men advanced toward the corner, the scurrying and rustling in the grass grew more frantic. The two men nearest the outermost ends of the wings began bringing some of the mesh together, forming a circle from the ends of the wings. Some of the men began reaching over the three-foot tall fence. Seizing the skunks and possums by their tails, they flung them quickly over their shoulders, back into the pasture. They were interested only in the rabbits, which ate the grass and brought a bounty. The skunks and possums would be tolerated because they usually ate insects instead.
Finally when the circle was as tight as the rabbit population would permit, Lizzie could see the jack rabbits trying to leap over the mesh. The men began to select some of the cottontails out of the bunch and stuff them into tow sacks. These they would kill and eat fried like chicken. The rabbits cried in fright, reminding Lizzie of human infants. She dropped Carl’s hand and froze. As he began to jabber excitedly, Elsie grabbed up the toddler and headed back to the house. Vaguely Lizzie heard his frustration growing fainter and fainter.

While she stood staring, the men grabbed the jack rabbits, bashed their heads against the boards, and tossed them over the fence. She could not turn her face away from the pile of jack rabbits which grew steadily, their blood and brains oozing into yellow halos on the sand of the road. Stupidly she remembered the words to the lullaby she had sung to Luke and later Carl so often and so mindlessly:

By-O, Baby Buntin’,
Daddy-boy’s gone a-huntin’
To get a little rabbit’s skin
To wrap his little baby in.

When more than a hundred dying rabbits lay twitching at her feet, two of the strange men climbed the fence and began stomping the heads of the ones which still screamed and moved. Again and again big boots crunched down on the fragile bones of their skulls. Their long legs flopped
loosely. Lizzie stood paralyzed by the blood and screams and crunch and flop of the macabre dancing on the carpet of rabbit corpses. When the men took out knives and began to skin the rabbits and cut off the ears for the bounty, the hot blood and bowel smells filled her nostrils and stung her out of her stupor.

In shock Lizzie turned and ran. She fled breathlessly past the house and into the barn. Throwing herself into the tack room, she latched the door. As her eyes grew accustomed to the musty darkness around her, she slid into a corner and leaned her head wearily against her knees. Silent tears ran down her cheeks as she rocked herself and sang the lullaby to Luke over and over.

When the men, who had organized a search, came for their saddles and had to pry open the tack room door, they found her exhausted but still rocking and singing softly. She scarcely noticed when they carried her to her bed and left her there, smelling faintly like worn leather and horse sweat.

* * * *

Lizzie lay comfortably in the soft grayness of early dawn in late November, suddenly awake. Something was happening. She felt it. Then she heard the low moaning which had awakened her. Elsie, Elsie was moaning, and
Lizzie could hear her all the way down the hall. She got up and began dressing quickly. When Henry knocked on her door, she was ready.

"Lizzie, get up. Elsie needs you. I got t' go call th' doc; I think she's gettin' ready t' miscarry." He looked startled when she opened the door and he saw she was already dressed. "Would you go set with her 'till I can make th' call? Maud may not be on the switchboard 'cause it's not quite five yet."

Lizzie turned up the hall toward Elsie's room as Henry went downstairs to the telephone. Elsie sat in a rocking chair wrapped in a sheet and her shawl. The big featherbed was a mess. Lizzie shrank back from the sight, then when Elsie moaned she touched her shoulder sympathetically. The baby Carl slept soundly in his crib, oblivious to his mother's distress. Lizzie took old muslin sheets from Elsie's linen chest and folded them into a thick pad. She helped Elsie to stand and lay the pad in the seat of the rocker. Elsie sank back into the softness of the sheets just as Henry reentered the room.

"Operator just come on duty, and we caught the doc goin' out th' door, Elsie. Shouldn't take him more 'an a half-hour t' get here. You best get back t' bed. Lizzie, can you change th' sheets?"
Lizzie had started out the door, but she didn’t stop when Henry spoke to her. She went downstairs to the kitchen, found the gray zinc washtub and filled it with cold pump water. She stoked up the fire in the stove and put a kettle on to boil. Then she turned and went back up to Elsie.

"Lizzie, I done wrapped the baby up in this clean pillacase. Think I’ll go lay it in the parlor. We’ll probably bury it with th’ others later this evenin’"

He turned and headed down the stairs with the bundle. Elsie’s eyes filled with tired tears, and Lizzie’s filled with shadows.

Lizzie mechanically stripped the sheets and quilts from the bed. She rolled the feather mattress over on itself and slid the stained side down against the slats. Then she automatically put on clean sheets and made a second pad from another old sheet. This she lay on Elsie’s side of the bed. After replacing the quilts on the bed, she took feminine supplies and a clean gown from her wardrobe. These she put at the foot of the clean bed. Taking the soiled sheets, she went downstairs where she dumped them in the washtub, filled a basin with warm water, and carried it back to Elsie. She helped Elsie to bathe, change gowns, and get back into bed, just as the November sun began to redden the sky.
Lizzie was adjusting the quilts over Elsie when the women heard voices below; shortly after Henry and the doctor came into the bedroom. As the doctor began his examination, Lizzie fled down to the kitchen. Pushing up with her cuffs, she began to scrub the sheets soaking in the cold water. It had turned reddish, and the stains were stubborn. Her eyes refused to focus, and she felt nauseated by the thought of the loss that she was trying to scrub away. She drew back from the tub and sat in a kitchen chair next to the old table, resting her forehead on her right hand. Opening her eyes, she noticed that the wash water had stained her cuffs red-brown. The stain made her feel queasy. Her mind filled with vague impulses and strange voices, Harry's, her mother's maybe. "Come," the voices urged. "Leave it behind."

Lizzie rose and walked out onto the kitchen porch. "Come away," the voices ordered, more insistent now. She walked out from the house and across the pasture, headed east. Sticktights and other grass seeds clung to her long skirts. She stumbled rather unconsciously over broken bits of mesquite branches and the irregularities of the ground, engrossed in the sound of the voices. She climbed a small hill and looked down through a clump of oaks into a tank Henry had created by damming up a small spring-fed creek. The sun had risen well up in the sky, bouncing in shimmering
waves off the water’s face, and she was beginning to sweat in the late autumn heat. The water smiled its invitation. "Come, come now," they coaxed. "Come wash away the loss."

* * * *

Henry and the doctor descended the stairs slowly.

"Now, Henry. I’ve given her some medicine that’ll make her sleep for th’ rest of th’ day. Let her sleep until she wakes up naturally, and try not to worry yourself too much. She’s healthy enough and should recover her strength in a few days. Call me if she doesn’t. Just don’t let her get up an’ do too much heavy work for a coupla weeks. As far as I can tell, it’s really just too soon after Carl for her t’ be carryin’ another baby yet. You let her be for a while. Practice a little patience, man."

Henry ducked his head and nodded, mildly embarrassed by the doctor’s scolding. He glanced the white bundle in the parlor as they passed out to the front porch where the doctor’s car waited. The men shook hands, and Henry cranked the car so the doctor could head off down the road to his next patient.

Henry walked out to the barn and called up to the loft window where one of the hands stood, pitchfork in hand. "Miss Elsie’s lost th’ baby, Joe. When ya get a minute, knock together a little coffin outta that new pine lumber we got in last week. After ya get that done, take a shovel up
t' th' postoak grove and dig a little grave by them others. You an' Tom'll have t' tend th' milkcows. Lizzie'll need t' stay with Elsie."

"I'm real sorry t' hear that. I'll take care of th' cows." Joe touched his hat brim and went back to forking hay out for the horses standing in the lot next to the barn.

Henry trudged back to the house and up to Elsie. He sat for a few minutes in her chair. The baby stood up in his crib; seeing his father, he began to fuss hungrily.

Now, why hasn't Lizzie tended to you? He picked up the wet boy, grimaced and headed down the stairs, talking to his son, but holding him away from himself. Lizzie wasn't in the kitchen, nor the backyard. Henry wrinkled his nose over the sharp ammonia. He took a clean diaper from the laundry basket and a cold biscuit from the back of the stove and headed to the parlor. He sat in a good chair, lay Carl on the rag rug between his boots and handed him the cold biscuit. While the baby gummed the biscuit, he changed the diaper after a fashion. Returning to the kitchen with Carl tucked under his arm like a chubby floursack, he tossed the dirty diaper into the bucket on the back porch, looked again for Lizzie, and stomped back into the kitchen. He dumped Carl in his highchair and handed him another biscuit. He brought up the sweetmilk from last night's milking and put some of it on the stove to scald.
"Now, wonder where Lizzie's got herself off t', Carl."

The baby watched alertly. Henry ate a biscuit himself while he stirred the milk. When it was scalded, he poured it into mugs to cool. He put coffee on to boil and sliced ham for himself and the two hands he'd hired recently. He diced up some for the baby. Tucking a piece of ham into a second biscuit, he pulled the highchair next to the table, and sat down and gave Carl some cooled milk. He set the minced ham on the tray in front of the baby. Suddenly he heard shouting. Joe ran into the kitchen.

"Henry, you better come see."

"See what? Where?"

"Down t' th' tank by th' oak grove."

"What is it?"

"Miz Lizzie."

"My God! You better stay here with th' baby. Where's Tom? Is she dead?"

"Barn, milkin'. Dunno. Floatin' out in th' middle of th' tank though. Ya better take some rope mebbe."

Henry ran for the barn. "Tom, saddle a horse quick an' ride t' th' spring tank. Lizzie maybe drowned herself. Hurry."

He was gone before Tom could respond, but on horseback the hired man caught him just as he crested the hill overlooking the tank. They both could see her floating face up
in the middle of the tank some thirty feet from shore. Henry shouted at her but got no response. Shedding his boots, he waded out chest deep. The agitation of the water increased the speed at which her full skirts were absorbing liquid. They began to pull her down. Tom rode around to the opposite side and into the deep tank. The horse began to swim, its hind feet occasionally touching bottom, enabling Tom to reach her skirts and pull her to him. Henry climbed out of the tank; Tom lifted Lizzie above the saddlehorn and turned toward the closer shore. As his boots cleared the water, he turned her face down over his knees. She began to stir and cough up tank water. Henry slid her down off Tom's lap to the ground, and Tom dismounted. Rolling her face down, they took turns trying to force the water from her stomach and lungs. Henry mounted the horse, and Tom lifted her into his arms. Together they walked back to the house with Lizzie's unconscious but living body.

"Tom, when we get t' th' house, you go call m'sister Mamie. With two women down an' a baby, I need female help. Whatta mess!"

"Yep."

* * * *

Luke got up that Friday morning in early February and immediately noticed the temperature. It was chilly, but too warm for the season. Farmers were weather sensitive,
probably from birth, possibly from genetic memory, and Luke was no different. He pulled his overalls on over his longjohns, picked up his boots, and tromped down to the kitchen. Aunt Edna had lit the fire and started coffee already. He poured half a cup and sipped it, mostly to warm up, while he laced up his boots. He watched his aunt slice bacon a moment before he stood up to pull on his coat.

"Put somethin' over your ears, Luke. Wind's fierce. It'll give you earache today."

"Yes, Ma'am." He pulled up the collar of his coat.

"No," she stopped him. She took an old muffler and tied it around his ears, holding his head in her hands briefly before turning away. Luke nodded. He liked this aunt. Like his mother she didn't say much, but she tended to his needs in a gentle, kindly way. She wasn't much for hugging, but she gave him quick pats of affection and approval when she passed him while doing a chore. Luke was running late; she had already begun frying the bacon as he grabbed his buckets and went out to the barn.

Luke's morning chore was milking his aunt's one cow. Uncle Frank raised beef cattle and farmed some on the side, mostly oats or wheat for feed. His aunt's cow, chickens, and truck garden in the spring provided most of the family's food. Luke's job was to do whatever she needed to be done. In the time left over after those chores and school, he
could help Uncle Frank. Given a choice he'd have gone with Frank, his father's younger brother, who would sometimes tell him stories about seeing Quannah Parker or other Indians, but he was still too small to be much help with ranching chores. Frank and his son Rankin, ten years older than the seven-year-old Luke, were already in the barn, loading hay into a wagon.

Frank looked up as Luke shut the barn door: "You're runnin' late this mornin'. I done let th' cow in an' give her some hay 'long with th' team. Looks like it might snow so I'm gonna take a load of hay over t' th' rick north of th' creek after we eat breakfast. We might not can get out in th' mornin'."

Nodding, Luke picked up the milking stool and a bucket and began talking softly to the brown Jersey before entering her stall. She turned her head as far as the check rope would allow and watched him set the stool and pail down at her flank. Luke walked to her head and scratched her ears a minute before he moved down her side, petting her back and talking softly the whole time. She was sociable and gentle if he handled her properly. His aunt had taught him her tricks.

The cow pulled another mouthful of hay from the rack and chewed thoughtfully. Luke knew she was ready for him to begin. He set a bucket under her full udder and moved the
stool up closer. She stepped away. He moved the bucket and stool. She stepped away again; this time her off flank touched the side of the stall. It was part of a morning’s ritual. Luke put the bucket and stool in their proper places and waited, warming his hands in his armpits. The cow would jerk away if his hands were cold. She shifted her weight and swished her tail several times. Luke sat down, quickly leaning his forehead against her warm belly. The rest of the barn could sometimes be quite chilly, but not the milk cow’s stall. He blew on his fingers, grabbed a teat in each hand, and began the rhythmic movements which would strip the udder of the milk produced during the night.

The skin along the cow’s belly shivered. Luke shifted his head slightly; his breath was tickling her. She switched her tail, catching him across the cheek with its tip. One of her little tricks. The barn cat put in his morning appearance and sat patiently beside Luke. He obliged the tiger cat by squirting it in the face with milk a couple of times. Just as the level of milk in the bucket neared the top, the cow lifted her off rear hoof and the cat jumped away. Luke grabbed the bucket and heaved it out of the stall before she could kick it away. Sometimes she forgot that part of the ritual, but it didn’t pay to be overly trusting of the cow’s good nature.
When she had settled back down, Luke took the other bucket and filled it as well. The cat moved up near the cow’s head and began to bathe himself. When she lowered her head to look at him, he washed her nose. They were old friends. Luke set both of the full buckets near the barn door, returned to the cow and untied her. He led her through a side door in the barn and released her into the large trap next to the barn to graze. In the evening at milking time, she’d be there outside the door waiting for him. He lifted the buckets and headed back to the house. Uncle Frank and Rankin had already gone in to breakfast. He set the buckets beside the kitchen door and covered each one with a clean cloth. His aunt would skim the milk and churn the butter later.

"You’d best hurry an’ eat, Luke. Edward’ll be along sooner’n you think."

After breakfast she handed him a bar of soap and pumped the cold well water while he washed his face and hands. He went to the room he shared with his cousins and put on a clean shirt over the longjohns, tucking in the shirttails. He grabbed a clean handkerchief, his slate and other school supplies, and went back to the kitchen to put on his jacket.

"Take th’ muffler and these ol’ mittens of Rankin’s. If Frank’s right ‘bout snow, you might just need ‘em ‘fore you get home this evenin’. Here’s your dinner pail."
First grade had settled into a routine for Luke, not dull, but very predictable. Arithmetic and writing before recess, then reading and geography until noon. He and John T. took their dinner pails back to the coatroom before the noon recess. As they filed out, they realized the sky was falling.

"Snow!"

They raced to the swings. While he pumped the swing to send it higher, he stuck out his tongue. He looked at John T., who was imitating him.

"Bet I can catch more'n you!"

John T. laughed. "How'll you know?"

The snow was falling heavily, and the teachers began calling the children indoors. Luke and John T. were among the last to go in. The snow clung to their eyelashes and mantled their shoulders, adding to the puddles forming on the floor as they brushed it away.

Miss Lula responded to the stimulus of the snow by passing sheets of brown paper and chalk to the students. She explained:

"Today, in response to th' snow, which we see only two or three times each winter, we will have 'art' instead of 'spelling.' We will draw pictures of snow scenes on our paper, using our pencils and chalk to fill in the snow."
While the students were busily creating masterpieces of primitive folk art, the principal came to the door of the classroom. Miss Lula went to talk to her. Luke, seated near the door, could overhear their whispers.

"Early dismissal...unusual blizzard...heaviest snow south...snow ten inches deep already...blowing."

Miss Lula turned to the students: "Boys and girls, as soon as you have finished your pictures, place them on th' reading table and put th' chalk back in th' chalk box. School is going to be dismissed early, in about fifteen minutes, to insure that th' country children and those town children who walk can get home before th' snow gets too much deeper. We are apparently in th' midst of a blizzard. Most unusual weather, I'd say."

Luke, noticing the concern in her voice, frowned. They'd had snow before; once last month it had snowed during school. He wondered what was different this time. The students, hearing the dismissal bell ring, rose to follow Miss Lula's instructions.

They filed into the coatroom and begin collecting their belongings before going out. Uncle Edward's car was waiting, a large touring car, several years old, equipped with canvas side flaps against the bad weather. The car, carrying nine students belonging to four families, served as the school bus which went north of town. Luke's uncle
normally drove his three children, along with Luke and Frank’s two among others. The car didn’t have a heater, didn’t need one with that many children packed under lap robes. Edward, his father’s oldest brother, lived closer to the town than Uncle Frank. After driving the bus route, he’d return to his farm chores until time to return the children to their homes. The school paid him to drive the route, and the principal could usually reach him by telephone for an emergency like this one.

Luke heard the gasps from the students going out the doors ahead of him. As soon as the icy air hit him, he understood. The temperature which had seemed so mild that morning was now bitingly cold. The wind had risen and was blowing the heavily falling snow sideways across the open school grounds. The visibility was still good, but even though inexperienced, Luke realized that if the snow began to fall any faster or heavier, no one would be able to see anything at all. He pulled the muffler tighter around his head and ran to the car.

The ride out to Uncle Frank’s house normally took about forty-five minutes. Edward let his children out at his house, as well as the others who lived closer to town, before driving on to Franks’, his last stop. The snow drove across the road in front of the car. Luke, sitting between his cousins, was warm, but he couldn’t see the road ahead.
His cousins talked about other snowstorms they remembered, none as severe as this one.

When the car stopped at the end of the half-mile lane which led to Uncle Frank's house, the daylight had faded to dusk. Edward lit the car's lights and turned the car around before speaking:

"You children find your way home okay?"

His two younger cousins nodded and started running up the lane. By the time Luke had gotten out of the car and adjusted his coat and muffler, they were more than a hundred feet ahead. The snow, falling thicker and faster now, blocked them from sight almost at once. Luke crossed the dirt road and entered the lane. He ran, face into the blizzard, for only a few seconds before he had to stop. He looked back but could no longer see the car. He yelled at the others, but his words were lost in the wind's whine and whistle. Sleet mixed with the falling snow, and the icy particles cut at his cheek. Tucking the loose ends of the muffler into the front of his coat and lowering his head into the wind, Luke began trudging up the road. When he finally looked up, he could see no recognizable landmarks. He looked for his cousins' footprints, but the snow had already obscured them. He crouched down to stay as warm as he could. He felt disoriented and wanted to think.
Closing his eyes he remembered the first time he had walked up the lane coming back from school. His cousins always ran on ahead of him, but usually he could see their backs. He imagined the hot sun and autumn colors of that first day. The grass had been tawny then, the roadside weeds full of yellow seed pods, the sunflowers facing west. The fence had been covered with dead grasshoppers stuck on the barbs by greedy butcherbirds. The fence.... The fence should be on his left.

Luke looked to the left but couldn’t see the fence. He looked to the right. Nothing. The falling snow blocked everything. He moved toward the left, counting his steps. When he reached eight, he stopped. Nothing. He took two more steps. Nothing. Better go back, he thought. As he swung out his arm in turning around, he snagged his sleeve on the barbed wire of the fence. He almost cried in relief. He knew where he was now.

Holding the wire loosely in his left hand and stopping regularly to unsnag his mitten from the barbs, he moved on up the road toward the ranchhouse. The fence ran past the house and into the side of the barn. Luke knew he could get into the barn and wait until the storm stopped if he couldn’t see the house. He trudged steadily forward, head down, trying to see where to put his feet. Several times he
stumbled over rocks lying along the fence row. He was becoming very tired, but he knew he mustn't stop.


Luke shook his head negatively and relaxed. He was safe.

Frank kept him tucked tightly under his arm as they crossed the yard and stomped into the light of the kitchen. His aunt pulled him over to the stove and pushed him into a chair waiting in front of it. She had the wood fire roaring inside its iron belly. She took his mittened hands and held them until the feeling began to return to them. She held his frozen muffled ears in her hands for a few minutes before she poured him a cup of hot cocoa. After putting it into his hands, she began to unbutton his coat and unwrap the muffler from his head.
She glanced up at Frank: "Where'd you find him?"

"Along the fence just 'fore you get in t' th' yard."

She looked questioningly at Luke.

"I couldn't see nothin'. I could feel th' fence, but I couldn't see it. I just followed it, but it took longer cause I kept gettin' caught on the bob-wire."

"Your cousins come in more 'n half an hour ago. When you didn't come on right after 'em, your uncle decided he'd better go look. I guess you didn't need findin' after all."

His uncle spoke, "You was right smart t' think of th' fence, Luke. You could of just set down an' froze t' death. We wouldn't of found you till th' storm let up. I sure am glad you used your head an' figured out what t' do. I'd hate t' try t' explain t' your Granny Em how you got lost on the farmroad an' died."

Luke grinned at his uncle. His grandmother's tongue was sharper than a snake's tooth, and she wouldn't hesitate to punch her grown sons with it if she thought they needed it.

"I guess I'd rather be dead 'n do that, Uncle Frank."

"Me, too, boy. Me, too."

* * * *

The following February, less than a year later, Henry sat at the table while the judge's bailiff finished instructing the six jurors in their duties. Some of the men
he recognized; all of them had been standing around the stove in the barber shop when the county judge had decided to hear the case of the State of Texas against Mrs. Lizzie Brown. He required a petit jury and had sent his bailiff out to fetch one, the first available six good men and true. That meant they were adult, white, and sober. Not much else mattered for a non compos mentis and guardianship hearing. He'd been thinking of doing this for some time, since the rabbit drive and Elsie's miscarriage and other such incidents. Lizzie couldn't be depended on not to do something hurtful to herself. He came out of his reverie when the judge charged the jury.

"Now, gentlemen of the jury, there are seven special issues you must decide in this case. You will find 'um listed on the sheets you hold before you. Read along with me. You must answer each of the following questions:

"First, is Mrs. Lizzie Brown, the defendant, of unsound mind?

"Second, if the defendant is of unsound mind, is it necessary that she should be placed under restraint either for her own good or to protect other people?

"Third, if you answer both the foregoing questions in the affirmative, then what is the age and nativity of the defendant?"
"Fourth, how many attacks of insanity has she had, and how long has the present attack existed?"

"Fifth, is insanity hereditary in the family of the defendant, or not?"

Henry was startled. He hadn't been aware that the judge would require evidence on that question.

"Sixth, is the defendant possessed of any estate; if so, of what does it consist and what is its estimated value?"

"Seventh, if the defendant is possessed of no estate, are there any persons legally liable for her support? If yes, name 'um."

Henry thought. That's me. I'm liable if keepin' her in th' hospital uses up all her money. Good thing her land is leased out at a goin' rate. The judge called his name.

"Yes, your honor?"

"Come on up here to th' witness stand and let th' bailiff swear you in. You're th' principal witness."

"Yes, sir."

"Place your hand on th' Bible. Do you promise to tell th' truth, th' whole truth, and nothin' but th' truth, so help you God?"

"I do."

"Fine, you can sit now."
"Now, Henry," said the judge who was an old friend, "you just tell us about Lizzie's behavior in your own words. Just take your time."

"Well, Judge, she's been gettin' more an' more unreliable for some time now. Harry, 'fore he passed, took her up t' Fort Worth t'a private clinic. That 's where she was when he passed. The doctor there, he wrote me t' come get her after Harry'd gone. Said he couldn't do no more for her there, said she wasn't sick enough t'stay there. He thought she'd be all right at home with her loved ones."

"An' wasn't she? All right, I mean."

"Oh, she was okay for a while. She never did talk much, but we were used t' that. She never talked much even as a kid. Didn't think too much 'bout that. She did her work, helped Elsie 'round the house, took care of th' baby. She'd have a hard time every time she seen her boy, Luke, that is. He stays with his Gran'ma Brown a good bit now over t' her son Frank Brown's house. Elsie an' me didn't feel like we could keep 'em both, on account of not bein' sure how she was gonna act an' havin' a baby of our own, too."

"Could you describe some of her unreliable behavior?"

"Oh, yes. One time was last October; we were runnin' a rabbit drive. Jack rabbits'd gotten so thick they were eatin' more grass than th' cattle. Worse'n goats. Anyway,
she an' Elsie walked up t' watch th' goin's on. Elsie took th' baby back t' th' house when things got rough, all bloody, ya know. But Lizzie, she just stood there, frozen-like, starin' at th' men killin' th' jacks. I noticed she looked kinda upset, but I couldn' leave th' men t' tend her right then. Finally, she just run off down th' road toward th' house. Well, I thought she'd just took off t' th' house. When me and th' hands went in for dinner, Elsie said she hadn't come back from th' drive. Took us all afternoon t' find her. Oh, she waddn't hurt; she was just hid out in th' barn. When we thought we was gonna have t' ride th' pastures for her, we found her hidin' behind some saddles. That was 'bout a month after I brought her back from th' clinic."

"An' when did she come back t' your house from th' clinic?"

"That was early in September, th' month after Harry died. Took me a little while t' get his estate in order, t'get the boy settled an' such. Then, I went up t' Fort Worth an' brought her home on th' train."

"So she was manageable until th' rabbit drive?"

"Well, sir, she's always manageable. She does what I tell her. That ain't th' problem, really."

"What else happened?"
"Well, sir, 'bout six weeks after th' rabbit drive, Elsie lost a baby. She was always delicate like that. Anyway, Elsie had t' take t' bed while I went t' call th' doctor. Takes little bit less'n un hour t' get t' th' house from town, so I called th' doctor an' tol' Lizzie t' sit with Elsie an' help her if she needed anythin'. I took th' dead baby down t' th' parlor, then I went t' th' barn an' tol' Joe an' Tom t' milk th' cows an' build a little coffin an' dig a little grave in th' oak grove. Th' doc showed up 'bout then. We went up t' Elsie, an' I thought Lizzie'd gone t' th' kitchen t' fix breakfast. When th' doc left, I discovered th' baby was still in his bed, wet as sop, an' Lizzie was gone. I carried him down an' changed him. Figured I'd try to set things up so's Lizzie could manage in the kitchen by herself when I got back. She'n Elsie usually make breakfast for me'n th' hands afore they tend th' cows an' so on. Just as I was gettin' ready t' feed him some breakfast, Joe come runnin' with th' news that Lizzie was floatin' in th' tank. Looked like she'd tried t' commit suicide. We saved her, course, but that was th' thing that made me know I needed t' put her some place safe."

"Why do you think she ran away?"

"Well, she's lost three babies herself afore Luke was born, an' she always had female problems, even 'fore she got
married. Rememberin' those dead babies mighta been th' reason this time."

"Then, these weren't the only times she had run away?"

"No sir. She run away a different time after her boy'd been over t' visit her, but we just figgered she was missin' him too much. We found her walkin' up th' road toward Louie's, but she come right on back with us real calm that time."

"But, she wasn't calm this time your wife miscarried?"

"No, sir. Least I guess not. She'd sometimes get in a kinda trance watchin' things dyin' sometimes. Like th' rabbits, an' once two months ago when we butchered th' hog. She'll stare an' stare an' then run off right when she's most needed t'help. Cain't nobody stop her an' usually cain't nobody leave to go catch her either right then."

"What steps have you taken t' insure her safety? I mean where is she right now, an' how do you take care of her now?"

"We had t'lock her in her room. She'll mind me if I tell her t' come t' th' table an' eat or somethin'. She ain't dangerous t' nobody. It's just you cain't be sure when she's gonna take off or where she's gonna run to when she does. We're 'fraid she's gonna really hurt herself one of these days. Plus, Elsie's 'fraid she might take our boy Carl with her. He's near sixteen months now an' Lizzie's
his best playmate. She's real good with him, but Elsie don't trust her. She wouldn' hurt him none, but she might take him off 'n forget about him."

"All right, now, Henry. Are you th' sole support of your sister, or does she have some means of income in her own right?"

"Oh, I provide for her shelter, but legally she has her own house. Th' one she inherited when her husband died, but it's rented. Besides, she couldn' live alone there, just her an' th' boy. An' she has land, some she inherited when our folks died; some she inherited when Harry died. Near two thousand acres. Some of that I got leased myself; some's leased t' other folks. But, it's all out at fair market value. I set that money aside t' pay for her keep, an' I give Louie some for th' boy. Th' rest goes in on th' upkeep of th' land for th' boy. She ain't hurtin' for money. It waddn't a matter of money made me take her home from Fort Worth. This ain't a money matter really."

"That's all right, Henry. We know you're doin' right by your sister. No cause t' get riled now.

"Now, Henry, I need t' ask you a question concernin' Lizzie's family, your family."

"Yes, sir. What is it?"

"Do you have any reason t' believe that Lizzie might have inherited this insanity she seems t' have? Has there
been any other incident in your family’s history that would indicate th’ source of her problems?”

“Well, sir. Our father. We had t’ send him out t’ th’ state hospital at Terrell. Course, he was a good bit older than Lizzie when we did that, but he got like her. I mean, he got real senile an’ wandered off all over th’ place. An’ he got where he wet on himself an’ couldn’t feed himself. My mother was already gone, an’ Elsie couldn’ lift him an’ take care of him proper like that by herself. We had t’ have him declared non compos an’ send him t’ th’ hospital there ’cause his mind went. He was worse’n a baby really. He’d a hated bein’ like that. I was glad he didn’ know what he was doin’ by that time.”

“I see. Do you have any witnesses who have seen this behavior of Lizzie’s which you have described to us?”

“Oh, yes, sir. There’s Tom McAlister an’ Joe Simmons, my hands, over there in th’ gallery. An’ you could send for th’ doc. He’s known Lizzie a long time. Knows all about her trip t’ Fort Worth. Wrote letters t’ th’ Dallas an’ Fort Worth doctors for Harry. I suppose my wife could come in t’ testify, too, if need be. Some of th’ men at th’ rabbit hunt, and th’ Campsey boys who live on th’ place durin’ sale time, they’d all testify, too.”

“I don’t think that’ll be necessary. Gentlemen of th’ jury, do you have any further questions for this witness?”
The six men looked at each other. Finally the one designated as foreman said, "No, your honor."

"Do you wish to call any of these others as witness?"

Again, a pause as silent messages passed back and forth. "No, your honor. There ain't no reason why we cain't accept th' word of this witness."

"Are you ready t' begin deliberations then?"

"Yes, your honor."

"Very well." The judge went on to remind the jurors of their duty regarding the rights of citizens under the law before dismissing them to begin their deliberations in private. Henry wondered how long they would take. For a while he paced in the hallway outside the country court. Then he went in to tell the bailiff he'd be in the hotel coffee shop if the jury came back before he did.

After eating a sandwich and drinking his coffee, Henry went back to the courtroom and sat in the gallery again. Tom was still there asleep in his chair. Tom could sleep anywhere, in the saddle, under a mesquite in the middle of a pasture in July, sitting beside a tank fishin' on a Sunday in March, even in his bunk. Henry saw the judge come in from his chambers. He rose and walked forward to the front row. The judge motioned him to come forward to the bench.

"Henry, the jury's comin' back now. You sit there at the plaintiff's table."
Henry went to the table as the six jurors filed in and sat in the jury box. The judge began questioning them concerning their findings.

"An' do you find that Mrs. Lizzie Brown, th' defendant, is of unsound mind?"

"We do, your honor."

"And do you find it is necessary that she should be placed under restraint?"

"For her own sake and her family's sake, we do, your honor."

"What is her age and nativity?"

"She's thirty-nine years old, your honor, and a native born citizen of this county."

"To the best of your abilities, can you determine how many attacks of insanity she's had an' how long the present attack has continued?"

"Your honor, we believe she's had one attack, an' it's lasted for more'n two years since 'fore her husband died. We believe she's still sufferin' from th' same attack he took her t' Fort Worth for."

"Very well. Is insanity hereditary in th' family of th' defendant, or not?"

"Your honor, we believe it is. Her father looks like he was insane at th' time he was taken out t' Terrell."
"All right. Now concerning th' estate of th' defendant. Is she possessed of any estate an' of what does it consist?"

"She is, your honor. She has a house an' ranch land. We place its value at approximately $15,000.00."

"Do you find any person legally liable for her?"

"No, sir. Ain't nobody else legally liable for her."

"Thank you, gentlemen. You are dismissed. This court finds that th' said Mrs. Lizzie Brown is a lunatic, an' it is ordered by this court that she be conveyed to the lunatic asylum at Wichita Falls, county of Wichita, for restraint an' treatment, an' that th' costs of this proceeding be adjudged against Mrs. Lizzie Brown Estate. It is further ordered that th' jurors of this case be allowed th' sum of fifty cents each, for which let script be issued."

With that the judge banged his gavel and dismissed the court. Henry stood up and stretched. It had been a good morning's work. Lizzie would go to the state hospital as soon as he could get her up there. Wasn't so far he couldn't take Luke up to see her from time to time. Was a safe place for her, really, and it wouldn't drain Luke's inheritance away. In another month he'd have the final guardianship settled, and he could complete the land deal. Lizzie'd be cared for, and the boy'd have somethin' left when he got grown. That was th' way Harry and Lizzie'd both
want it if they could say. Lizzie wouldn' want for nothin';
he'd see to that, but that boy, now. That boy, he was the
future. All that Lizzie and Harry'd ever have. That was
what needed doin'.

* * * *
True to his word to Miss Lula, Louie had let Luke stay with Frank until school was out for the summer. After Lizzie had gone to the hospital in Wichita Falls, Henry took him occasionally to see his mother, but she grew more and more withdrawn and strange, even to Luke. He moved back to Louie's house and attended the second grade at the Grove school. Now summer had come again, and he was to spend part of that summer with Henry and part with Louie, wherever an extra set of hands was needed. Even though at age eight he wasn't big enough to do a man's work, he could fetch, relieve a grown man of the barn chores, help on a haying crew, and ride dragline when the time came to move the cattle to the railhead for shipping to Fort Worth. There was plenty to keep him occupied. He liked staying with Henry better because he was more generous with the boy. Since he had been appointed Lizzie's guardian, Henry managed her property and nearly always found an extra bit of money to put in his hands when they went into town on Saturday mornings.

"Luke, tomorrow we got a chore t' do 'fore you start runnin' all over th' place."

"What's that, Uncle Henry?"

"No need t' discuss it. You just don't plan on doin' nothin' else till we get it done. We'll let your aunt an' Carl out at th' store, then you an' me'll go on t' th' sale
barn. Claude Rice's got some stock for sale, an' I want t' take a look. Be good you go along an' see, too."

"Yes, sir. I'll be ready. I told John T. maybe I could come by an' play a little softball while we was in town, but we didn't set no time for it. Do you think there'll be time after th' sale for me t' go on by his house?"

"Prob'ly. We'll see when we get done. You go on up t' bed now so's I can get you up bright 'n early tomorrow mornin'."

"Yes, sir. Good night, Aunt Elsie. Good night, sir."

"Good night, boy."

Luke didn't lie awake long wondering what his uncle had planned. He probably wanted to teach him some more about buying cattle. Luke knew that he tried to explain things the way a father would to his son. It was the family's responsibility, his uncle had told him once, to teach an orphan what his parents would have taught him if they could.

The next morning as soon as the breakfast dishes were washed, the four members of the family loaded themselves into Uncle Henry's car and headed into town for the week's marketing. Henry stopped the car in front of the general store.

"Elsie, We'll be back t' get you soon's I get done with Rice. If he's got th' stock he says he does, won't be
more’n an hour t’ hour an’ a half. That oughta give you plenty a time. Think?"

"Henry, you just take all th’ time you need. I’ll just sit an’ talk to Maybelle over at th’ cafe if you don’t get back ’fore I’m done. If you don’t see us here, ask Mr. Jamison for th’ boxes of th’ groceries, an’ come on t’ th’ cafe after you an’ Luke get ’em loaded up. We’re gonna eat dinner there anyway. After dinner I want t’ go by Mamie’s an’ pick up some patterns she’s been promisin’ me. She invited us for dinner, but I told her I couldn’t say how long your errands’d take today. She’s not expectin’ us till early afternoon."

"That’s just fine. We’ll meet you an’ Carl there."

As they drove away from the store, he looked at Luke. The boy had taken out his pocketknife and was twirling it on his left palm. He glanced up at his uncle.

"We goin’ t’ buy some calves t’day?"

"Nope. We’re gonna look at horses. We need another horse. Ain’t got nothin’ for you t’ ride ’cept that ol’ mare of your papa’s an’ she’s gettin’ too old for regular cowboyin’. Carl’s ain’t big enough t’ help yet, but it won’t be long for he’ll be wantin’ t’ ride, so we need another good horse can tolerate rambunctious boys. Rice told me last Sat’rday he thought he’d be gettin’ in some horses end of this week. We’re gonna see what he got."
The car turned into the dirt yard in front of the tin sale barn. Pens of cattle in back stirred up the dust, but Luke couldn't see any horses.

"I 'spect he put th' horses inside in th' box stalls. Go 'long and see if you can find 'em. I'll go hunt Rice. He's prob'ly in his office 'bout now. Auction don't start till after dinner."

The barn had two parts. The left part, which was closer to the road and entrance, contained a small pen with gates to the rear of the barn. Into this pen Rice's assistants would turn the animals to be sold, either singly or in groups. Horses were usually sold individually, but the cattle would be sold in groups unless they were prime breeding stock. Those didn't usually make it to a sale barn anyway. The potential buyers would sit on the rails of the fence or stand behind it and bid on the animals. The auctioneer stood on a platform on one side and called out the bids which his spotters, standing in the pen with the cattle, helped him to see or hear. The buyers moved very little during an auction: even innocently scratching an itching nose could purchase livestock under these conditions. Henry found Rice in his office, which was located just inside the main entrance. Luke went on past the pen and into the right half of the barn. It didn't take him long to locate the horses.
The right half of the barn contained ten box stalls, five on either side of a central alley, which led to more pens located outside the barn. In these stalls and pens Rice kept the stock which would be sold individually. These animals were halter broken and more docile than those sold in lots. They were also more valuable. Luke began looking in the stalls at the horses. He had no idea what his uncle wanted. Most of the horses kept for children were animals which had proven themselves reliable. Their owners usually didn’t sell them until the children were too grown to use them anymore. By that time only the glue factory usually wanted them. It was a fact of farmlife accepted by most of the children, and they didn’t make pets of their horses.

In the first stall Luke found a handsome bay gelding which stood, head up and restlessly moving his hind quarters from side to side. His hackamore lead had been tied to a ring near the feed box, indicating that he was highstrung by nature. Not a good horse for children.

The second stall contained a mare with a six-month old colt. The pretty sorrel mare stood quietly. The colt was weaned, but evidently they would be sold together. Luke wondered if his uncle would buy a colt that later would require breaking. It would be fun to train his own horse. The mare turned to watch the boy, and Luke saw the fist-sized swelling on her neck. Lumpy-jaw. Too bad. They
were nice looking animals, but Uncle Henry wouldn’t buy an animal that might die on him, even for the colt. In any case he needed a usable horse right away, not in a coupla years or so.

The third stall contained a herd bull, a massive red Hereford with magnificent horns tipped with lead weights to curve them safely downward. Fortunately the animal had been halter-broken; he clearly weighed nearly a ton. Someone had curried him recently, and the white strip of hair which ran from his white forehead down his neck to his red shoulders had been parted and lay in little curls. All the burrs had been brushed from the white tip of his tail, and the dark red hair of his body still showed the lines left by the teeth of the currycomb. News of this bull would attract many important buyers to this afternoon’s sale. Such an animal could produce major improvements in a small rancher’s stock. Luke now understood why Rice had talked to his uncle last Saturday.

Luke heard his uncle and Rice approaching and climbed down from the stall gate.

"Find anything interestin’ yet, Luke?" His uncle smiled at him, clearly in a benign mood.

"A nice sorrel mare, but she’s got lumpy-jaw. Got a nice colt, though."
"I guess you'd like a colt t' train. Huh? Trouble is, who'd train it when you go back t' Louie's? We want one don't need that much attention. One you can ride now, not in two years. Right?"

"Right." Luke grinned. He was getting to where he could predict his uncle. He liked the sense of power that gave him.

"Henry, that pony I told you 'bout's in th' last stall this side. Let me lead him out where you can get a good look."

Rice opened the gate of the fifth box and led out a small pinto horse, almost a pony really, barely fourteen hands tall. He was beautifully marked, with a brown head and white nose. Rice led him in a circle, and Luke could see the muscles of his shoulders, neck and hind quarters were well developed. He would be a strong pony, able to carry an adult man as easily as a boy.

"Now, Rice, you know I don't like white feet on a horse." His uncle always began the bargaining process with a negative comment, a gambit well known to the trader.

"Luke, boy, you come lead this here pony around so's your uncle can see how gentle he is. This here geldin' belonged to Miz Schultz up at Byers. She's done got too old t' ride an' wants a car anyway. Sides, she's got that mare.
Cain't exercise 'em both, she says. She's throwin' in th' saddle. Got no use for a pony's saddle without th' pony."

"Looks bowlegged. Forelegs ain't straight. Lead 'm up here, Luke, an' let's have a look at them front legs." His uncle bent down to feel the horse's forelegs. They were perfectly straight; the game continued.

"Look at those quarters, Henry, an' th' depth of his chest. This horse'll go all day long an' only be a little tired. Good sturdy horse for man...or boy." Rice winked at Luke.

"Prob'ly ain't worth ten dollars, Rice. God knows whatall spoilin' that woman done. Prob'ly bite th' boys th' minute they turn their backs on 'm. You had that hackamore off him?"

"No, I ain't, Henry. All I can say is I ain't had no trouble out of him, an' I had him out t' ride yesterday afternoon after they brung 'm in. Handles real nice. Gentle. Stands still when you saddle 'm, too."

"Well, that's good. Boy'd have trouble saddlin' a restless nag. Looks rough though. He's a little short in th' fetlocks. Prob'ly trots rough as a washboard."

"Why don't you try 'm out. Luke, look there in th' box an' get his bridle."

Henry scowled, but smiled inwardly. The pony looked better than he'd hoped. If he could keep Rice under forty
dollars, the horse would be well worth the price. A bargain even maybe. He kept a straight face. Rice would kick the price sky-high if he looked the least bit interested. Luke came out of the box with the bridle. Rice reached for it but took back his hand when Henry spoke again.

"Let th' boy do it. He'll be th' one t' take care of him. Let's see if th' horse'11 tolerate his messin' with him."

Luke took the lead rein from Rice. He brought the pony's head down and petted him on the face and neck. Unbuckling the cheek strap on the loosely fitting hackamore, he slipped the bit gently in the pony's mouth and the head straps under the hackamore and around the horse's head. Removing the hackamore entirely, he buckled the bridle and straightened the chin strap.

Rice brought the saddle and blanket from his tack room. Luke dropped the reins to the ground, and taking the blanket from Rice, he shook it free of loose dust and grass. The horse stood quietly while the boy lay the blanket on his back. Rice lifted the saddle into place and stepped back again. Luke, watching the horse's ears, brushed his belly clean of straw and burrs before lacing up the cinch. He pulled it tight steadily, reached up and yanked on the saddlehorn, then tightened the cinch down one more notch.
Picking up the reins, Luke led the horse in a circle around his uncle and Rice. He handed the reins to his uncle.

"You check him out for me, Luke. Take him out back in that lot an' let's see how he rides."

"He's got a tender mouth, Luke. Ride him with a loose rein. He's been trained right. Grady had him for three months breaking him, Miz Schultz said."

Henry grunted his satisfaction, and the boy led the pony out of the alleyway and into the large lot behind the barn. The few calves which stood in the far corner of the pen bunched up and milled around as he entered, but he and the pony ignored them. The horse watched the boy; however, Luke was calm and comfortable around horses, and this one's quietness encouraged his confidence.

Luke began to talk to the horse as he lay the right rein up and over the horse's neck. Holding the ends of the reins loosely together in his left hand, he stroked the horse's neck and patted his shoulder as he began to mount. He had to stretch a little to reach the stirrup and use the saddle strings to help pull himself up, but he did it smoothly. Feeling him in the saddle, the horse moved forward toward the calves. Luke evened his reins and gently pulled him to a stop. The horse watched the cattle. Luke looked back at his uncle.
Rice spoke, "Henry, I ain't tried him with stock yet. Hey, Luke, see if he'll cut out that black calf. See what he does 'round cattle."

Luke touched his heels to the horse's sides lightly and reined him toward the calf. The horse, watching the calf constantly, lowered his head and began to edge the black calf away from the others. When the calf stepped ahead, the pony picked up his pace slightly and forced the black calf to the left while the others turned to the right. The black calf panicked and tried to run back to the others. The pony lowered its head again, watching the calf and shifting its weight right and left again as the calf tried to slip past. Luke let the pony work a minute or two before he lifted the reins and guided the horse back to the gate where his uncle stood.

"Didja see him work that calf, Uncle Henry? He's a real cow pony! I didn't have t' tell him nothin'. He knew just what t' do."

"He's got th' instinct, boy; I'll say that much for him. Rice, okay for th' boy t' take him into th' pasture? You don't want him t' run these calves."

"Sure." Rice entered the pen and crossed it to the outside gate. "Bring him through here, boy. Get him out there where he's got room an' put him through his paces. Let your uncle see how he trots an' runs."
The boy rode the pony up and down in front of the two men, first at a trot, then a canter, then a dead run. The pony responded readily to the boy.

"I knew it, Rice! That pony trots stifflegged. I'd hate t' ride him very far in a trot. Luke, pull up. Let me give him a try."

The boy dismounted and handed his uncle the reins. While he stood with Rice, his uncle rode several hundred yards out into the pasture and back. Suddenly the pony jumped sideways, nearly unseating his rider. They could hear Henry swearing and looking back at something as he returned to where they stood.

"Damn kingsnake lying up under a stump back there. I never seen him, but that horse did. I guess he'll keep th' boy safe if he don't throw him off. He's damn quick."

He dismounted and handed the reins to Luke. The two men started off for the barn. Luke mounted and trotted up just as they reached the pen. Luke rode through and they let him back into the barn alleyway. He put the pony back in the stall.

"Don't unsaddle him, Luke. C'mon. We got t' talk business with Rice here. See what kinda highway robbery he's gonna try t' pull."
The three walked back to Rice's office, speaking to the men who were beginning to come in for the sale and wanted a closeup of what would be auctioned that day.

"What'll you take for that horse an' his gear, Rice? Bottom line."

"Now, Henry, I got t' make a little profit, you know. I was thinkin' of askin' forty-five."

"Forty-five! Shoot. Ain't worth but thirty. Saddle's old, 'bout wore out. Blanket's gone for sure. Bridle's okay, but needs a new cheek strap an' buckle. Cain't nobody but children ride that horse. He's too small, an' trots too rough for wimmen. Might pull a school cart, but he's got t' be broke to it. Sorta limited use for a small horse."

"Henry, thirty ain't enough. You know as well as I do that saddle's worth near ten all by itself. Horse's at least worth thirty. Make you a real good deal. Forty even, an' I won't charge you for th' two days I boarded him."

"Thirty-eight an' you got a deal." Luke's eyes began to shine. He hoped Rice'd let his uncle have the last word.

"Done. Let's get th' papers tended to. I got t' get ready for th' auction. You need t' go to th' bank?"

"No, I got th' money right here. I figured we could do business today. You generally are right reasonable under a little pressure."
Rice laughed. "You always do manage to show up when I got 'bout thirty irons in th' fire at once. Nevermind. I'm always glad t' do business with a man who trades in cash. Here's th' bill of sale. You want t' leave that pony here till later? It's okay by me."

"No, I think Luke'll prob'ly want to ride that horse over t' John T's first thing. Then, he's got a long ride home ahead of him. I spect we'll send him on his way right after dinner. By now Miss Elsie's gonna think you done sold us at th' auction an' we done been hauled away t' th' renderin' plant or somethin'. She's likely t' start lecturin' th' minute she lays eyes on us. Course, Luke ain't gonna notice. Are you, Luke?"

"No, sir. Can I really ride him over to John T's?"

"After dinner. Go get him an' take him out front. Leave Rice th' hackamore. That ain't part of th' deal. Rice an' me, we gotta fill out th' bill of sale here."

The boy was already out of the office. He met his uncle and Rice shaking hands next to Henry's car.

"Ride on over t' th' cafe, Luke. I'll be there by th' time you are, if not 'forehand."

The boy mounted and took off at a trot.

"That boy know his name's on th' bill of sale?" Rice asked.
"Not yet. I thought I'd give it t' him after dinner. It's time he had his own horse."

"He gonna go back t' Louie's?"

"Yeah, in a couple of weeks."

"I spect Louie'll charge you for th' horse's feed an' such. He won't feed him out of th' goodness of his heart."

"Well, neither would I. I'd better get on over t' th' cafe 'fore Miss Elsie sends out th' rangers lookin'. See you 'round, Rice. Hope you do right well this afternoon."

"Been a pleasure, Henry. Come back anytime."

Henry fired up the car and drove off. He smiled. Everybody'd come out ahead on this deal. Luke most of all.

* * * *

Luke was riding out on the farm road again. Time had come to gather the fat calves then to send to Fort Worth. Louie needed him and everybody else who could come for a few days. Henry had sent him after the heat had let up this afternoon. Luke would spend the night at Frank's, and Louie and his hands would come over early in the morning. They'd all meet at Frank's, the homeplace where most of the cattle waited. It would take most of the day to ride the homeplace pastures and push the cattle out of the mesquite and postoak groves to the trap pasture behind Frank's house.

Early the next morning they'd drive the herd down the dirt roads to Louie's house, some six or seven miles, to
pick up more cattle there. Together they'd drive the cattle into town to the railroad. The Fort Worth train would come through that evening and take them off. Uncle Louie would go with them to the buyer in Fort Worth and return the next day after he'd been paid. Sometimes the buyers came with the train, but not this time for some reason.

It wasn't a true cattle drive. The land was mostly fenced in now, and the cattle traveled down the country roads fairly calmly. It was still a hot, dirty chore to trail the cattle to market and keep them out of the fences and creeks along the way. The touchy part was penning them in the stockyards at the depot in town. Sometimes a yearling would get loose and eat up some citizen's daisies before they could corral it. Luke was excited. It was his first trip in on a drive, and John T had promised to come down to the depot to watch.

After that, he wouldn't see John T for a while. He wouldn't be coming in to the town school this year either. The small rural community at the edge of Frank's homeplace had built a schoolhouse and hired a teacher the year before. School would start in two weeks. Then Luke would see John T only on the weekends, if he was lucky. Like everything else in life, this had its good side. At least he would be going to school with the children of the families in his social group. He never saw those town kids anywhere but school.
These country kids he saw during family and church socials on Sunday afternoons. He liked the idea in spite of the fact that he'd missed John T...and Miss Lula.

Luke rode into Frank's barn yard and on into the barn. His uncle knew he was bringing his own horse this time and had left a stall open and ready. He set his bag of clothes outside the stall, unsaddled the paint, and slipped a hackamore over his head. Tying him in the stall, he took a pitchfork and started moving hay from the stack in the corner over to the pony's stall. When he had the hay almost knee deep on the horse, he put up the fork and took a bucket for some oats which he poured into a feedbox nailed on the back wall of the stall. Then he fetched a bucket of water. He untied the rein and unclipped it from the halter before he allowed the horse to drink his fill from the bucket. The horse turned to the feedbox, and Luke took a burlap sack and rubbed him down while he ate. Satisfied that the pony was well tended, he closed the stall and headed for the barn door.

His grandmother Emily stepped inside at that moment. She was a tiny woman, not quite five feet tall, with black hair and Indian eyes. Luke didn't have to stretch anymore when he pecked her cheek.

"There you are, boy. I thought I heard you ride in. I need some help with th' eggs. You spare me a minute?"
Luke nodded. His grandmother now shared a house with Frank and his family, an arrangement which kept her constantly occupied by grandchildren and baking, but she always made time for Luke whenever he stayed there, too. She made chores together special. Tonight as they gathered the eggs, she let Luke tell her all the details of the pony’s purchase, his ride from town to Henry’s and later from Henry’s to Frank’s. He gave her all the details he could remember, trying to describe things so that she could imagine how they looked herself. If he did a good job, she would be reminded of something that had happened when she was a girl. Then she would tell Luke a story of her childhood, passing down family lore in the form of an entertaining story. His grandmother was a wonderful storyteller.

"That bull you saw up t’ Rice’s, Luke. That bull reminds me of a herdbull your granddaddy brought home one time not too long after we married. We had a little herd then, just twenty cows maybe, an’ he wanted t’ build it up. Bought this herdbull hadda ring in his nose an’ he could lead him with a rein clipped on th’ ring. Man sold him t’ L.B. said not ever t’ take th’ ring off him, even when he turned him out in th’ pasture. You ever see one of them nose rings?"

Luke shook his head.
"Well, they got a sort of a screwed on part. If you unscrew that just right, you can get th' ring off, but nobody'd really ever want to, so most folks don't. Anyway, that bull was a mighty fine animal. Right manageable long as he had his ring on.

"One day L.B. decided was time t' take th' bull down th' road t' a pasture where he had th' cows t' breed. He clipped th' lead rein onto th' ring an' started off t' th' cows. Hadn't been gone too long when a coupla Indians come ridin' toward him an' th' bull. They'd seed that nose ring and wanted it for theirselves. They tried to make L.B. give it to 'em. Your granddaddy wasn't sure which he was scared of most, th' Indians or th' bull without his ring. He tried t' make th' Indians understand he couldn't manage th' bull 'thout the nose ring, but they got angry an' L.B. was 'fraid they'd kill him an' th' bull both t' get th' ring.

"So, your uncle said, 'okay,' an' got one of th' Indians t' hold th' lead rein. Then, L. B. clipped another lead rein on th' nose ring an' got th' second Indian to stand on th' opposite side of th' bull and hold that. After that, L. B. walked over t' th' bull an' started unscrewin' that nose ring. Th' minute that ring come loose, your granddaddy run over t' his horse an' jumped on his back. That bull, when he figured out he was shut of that nose ring, he tossed his head an' bellered. Th' Indians were
tryin' t' unclip th' lead reins from th' ring. They hadn't noticed what th' bull was doin' an' 'bout that time he charged 'em. They took off runnin' an' dropped th' ring. They caught their ponies an' raced off with th' bull on their trail. Your granddaddy just set still on his horse. Once th' bull had run off, he picked up th' nose ring an' set out after th' cows."

Luke and his grandmother had finished gathering eggs and had started back toward the house.

"Why'd Granddaddy want th' cows if he didn't have th' bull no more?"

"Figured th' cows'd catch th' bull. An', sure enough, they did. L. B. drove about five cows across th' pasture in th' direction the bull had gone. That bull was too big an' heavy t' run much after fast Indian ponies. Fortunately, the Indians give up on th' idea of havin' th' ring. Well, when he saw them cows, that bull knowd he's in bull heaven. Your granddaddy just kept drivin' those cows toward th' house, an' that bull forgot about bein' angry at th' world. He just followed those cows all th' way back like a coon hound trailin' a coon. Nothin' woulda stopped him. When th' hands saw him comin', they opened up th' corral gates an' run got horses t' help get th' cows an' bull penned up. Took 'bout an hour all tol'."
"How'd Granddaddy get th' ring back on th' bull's nose?"

"Oh, that was th' easy part. He just let him stay in th' corral with th' cows till he got wore out. Then him an' Jakie got ropes on his horns an' snubbed him up against th' corral sides. Once they got him trapped like that, L. B. could reach through th' corral an' put th' ring back. After that, th' bull was gentle as a lamb. We got five of th' prettiest little calves out of them cows. Your granddaddy said we oughta thank them Indians, but me, I never wanted t' try."

They reached the porch before they realized Luke had left his bag next to the stall. He smiled as he ran for the barn. He'd never know how much of what she said was truth, but it somehow just didn't matter.

* * * *
Lizzie waited in the garden for Luke and Henry to come. She could see the nurse hovering in the background, watching for her to do something. What? Lizzie wondered. What does she think I might do here? She knew that Luke and Henry were coming. Luke had written her one of his rare letters, little short letters. He was never going to be much of a letter writer. Like his father. No patience with pen and paper. Lizzie smiled to herself in memory of those stiff, formal postcards she and Harry had sent each other when they were courting. Three or four lines: Arrived here yesterday. All the family well. They send greetings. Home next Saturday. Yours truly. Only what you didn’t mind the postman and everyone else reading. Luke put his letters in an envelope, but it didn’t matter. Here the doctors read everything before they let the patients have their mail.

Lizzie looked across the garden at the two men who stood talking to the doctor. Two tall men and one was Luke. Tall and skinny, he looked at her, his dark eyes reaching across the grass to see into her mind. Slowly the three men approached.

"Mrs. Brown?" The doctor spoke in reassuring tones. "Your son and your brother are here for a visit." As if she were blind as well as crazy!

Lizzie looked at Luke, not bothering to acknowledge the others.
"Sister? How are you?"

Lizzie reached for Luke. He took her hand and sat on the grass beside her chair. Certain now that Luke was real, she turned to her brother and nodded. He sat in the chair next to hers.

"I'll leave the three of you together now. The nurse will be near to help you if you need anything."

"Thank you, doctor. Luke an' I can see t' her for th' time bein'."

"Mama, how are you t'day? Didja see th' bluebonnets in th' garden, Mama? They was comin' up all long th' highway."

Lizzie looked at Luke and smiled. She squeezed his hand. He remembered her love of the wild field flowers. Keeping up a lively chatter, he was working her back into his life as usual.

"Mama, I'm goin' in t' th' town school next year. Teacher says I need another year of high school before I go down t' A and M. I'll be graduated, but I don't have enough credits for college. I'm gonna live in town with one of th' cousins, I guess, or board with Miss Nellie or somebody."

Lizzie looked at Henry. "That's right, Lizzie. He's gonna stay in town 'cept when Louie or I really need him. He's gonna have t' do chores 'n such t' help pay his way, but we're gonna get him ready for college. It's th' best thing t' do. He cain't run your place yet all by himself."
A an' M's got th' best animal husbandry course in th' world prob'ly. He'll learn enough so's th' bank'll believe in him and 'll lend him enough t' buy cows an' get started on his own. He'll be of age when he gets out, too. He already knows ever'thin' Louie an' I can teach 'm."

"Mama, we're startin' up a baseball league this spring. We've been practicin' over at Fields' place ever' Sunday after church. Maybelle's mama fixes up lemonade and ever' body else brings fried chicken an' such. They set up tables on th' shady side of their barn. I been playin' catcher an' I made th' team."

"Luke, you sit here with your mama. I'm gonna see if I can find that doctor an' get a report on how she's been doin'. Give you all a little time alone t'gether, too."

Lizzie smiled at Luke. The boy continued, full of baseball visions.

"Mama, we're gonna get uniforms, too. Just like th' big city leagues have. We already chose our colors, blue and white. Last Sunday, Mama, Pearl and Annie brought their families. Th' cousins played ball, too, but Pearl says John's too old. He's got too many chores. I think he'd rather be talkin' t' th' girls anyway."

"Don't you like t' talk t' th' girls, too?" Lizzie's voice felt rusty.
Luke looked slightly startled by his mother's question. "Oh, sometimes. Maybelle Fields asked me t' help her carry stuff an' we talk. She's nice, I guess."

"Your papa was like that, too. He always preferred doin' things with th' other boys t' talkin' t' girls. He wasn't bashful. Girls just bored him at your age. Later was different."

"Later? Mama, what happened later?"

"Oh, after he got up in his twenties, he got t' where he liked girls a lot. Even when we were courtin' seriously, he never stopped flirtin' with other girls. One time he 'n Dub Jones went off t' St. Louis...."

"When was that, Mama? How old was he then?"

"Oh, that was about 1911. He was 26 an' we'd been courtin' about two or three months. He couldn't make up his mind t' get serious. Told me he felt penned up, never been anywhere or seen anythin' in his whole life, he said. Then Dub--he was two years older'n your papa--he had th' idea t' go t' St. Louis an' see th' big city. Fort Worth was too dull, I guess, for Dub. He'd been there; so had your papa. Several times. St. Louis was just far enough away t' be an adventure. Anyway, they saved their money an' right after Christmas they took th' train t' St. Louis. They had t' be back t' start plowin' for spring plantin' so they had t' go then or not at all. It was terrible weather. Snowed all
th' time they were there. He sent me a picture of 'um. They got all dressed up an' had it made on a postcard, an' he sent it. It just about scared me t' death."

"How could a picture postcard be scary, Mama?"

"Your papa had an expression on his face, Luke. I don't know. It just scared me that he might not be comin' home. Later on, after they got back, Dub told your Uncle Henry that Harry had been gamblin' an' chasin' after three different women. Henry told me after we got married. I was glad I didn't know what he was doin' at th' time. I really might have worried seriously then."

Lizzie smiled at Luke. "Lookin' at you now reminds me of your papa. He could get that excited look just like you do talkin' about baseball. When he talked about St. Louis or th' farm, he'd get that look sometimes, but he told me he'd sowed enough wild oats t' last him. He never acted like he wanted t' go again. Once we got married, he was always content t' stay home. We both were."

"Didja get married after he got back?"

"Not right away. He couldn't make up his mind what he wanted t' do. He'd come t' see me every Sunday, an' we'd go t' th' picnics an' whatever t'gether with Pearl or Ida an' their beaux. He wasn't courtin' anyone else, but he just didn't seem t' feel th' need t' settle down. Your grandpapa even told me I was wastin' my time. I knew part of th'
trouble was he didn’t have much money an’ he could see what
I was used to havin’, but that wasn’t all of it. He just
wasn’t ready, an’ when your papa wasn’t ready t’ do
somethin’, twenty mules couldn’t budge him."

"But, you finally got married."

Lizzie looked out across the garden. Harry stood under
the red oaks, watching their conversation, a quizzical smile
playing across his mouth. Lizzie smiled in reply.

"Mama?"

"Yes?"

"But, ‘you finally got married,’ I said."

"Yes. I think what finally did convince him it was th’
thing t’ do was my trip t’ New Orleans."

"When was that?"

"About a year after he went t’ St. Louis, my cousin
Eugene’s wife came down with pneumonia. She went t’ th’
hospital, an’ Eugene couldn’t afford t’ hire somebody t’
keep th’ kids. He wrote Mama an’ asked if Ida or I could
come stay until she was well enough to manage again. Ida
didn’t want t’ go, an’ I decided I might as well since your
papa was so unpredictable. He wrote me postcard after
postcard. They all said th’ same thing: Planted wheat, or
whatever chore he’d done that day. Am fine. Hope you are
well, too. Your friend, H. Brown. After I received six or
seven postcards like that, I knew he was missin’ me even if
he wasn't sayin' so. I wrote him regularly, too, so he knew I was thinkin' of him. Well, after a coupla months an' sixteen postcards, Eugene's wife was well enough so I could go home. Your papa proposed th' next Sunday."

Luke grinned, then sobered. "I miss you, too, Mama. I wish you could come home now."

"There's no place t' come now, Luke. You know that. Everything Henry said about college an' th' bank are true. Banks don't lend money t' boys and widows. It's just not good for their business."

"Maybe someday you can, Mama."

"I don't think so, Luke. This is a good place for me."

Lizzie looked at her son. How little he could understand. How little she could explain to him her inability to deal with life and death. She didn't want him to understand about loss the way she did. Henry and the doctor were returning. She looked out across the garden. Sometimes Harry waited until she was alone and spoke to her out here, but today he'd gone inside already. He'd ask her about Luke when he came to her tonight.

Lizzie smiled at Luke. "Don't be sad, my son. I'm happy here--and safe. You know I love you wherever I am."


"It's time t' go now, Luke. Th' doctor says your mama is doing just fine. Her arm was numb some time back."
That's why she didn't write you for a while. Ain't that right, Lizzie?"

Lizzie looked at Luke memorizing his growing-up face; she didn't have time for Henry's questions even if ignoring him did make him angry. She had to remember all the details for Harry. Luke bent and kissed his mother's cheek, squeezing her shoulder gently as he did. Then he turned and walked away with his uncle. Lizzie could hear them as they moved toward the parking lot.

"Did she talk t' you any this time, Luke. Did she say anythin' sensible?"

"Oh, she mostly just smiled and squeezed my hand, Uncle Henry. She never says much."

* * * *

"Hey, Jim. Yeah. My uncle. He never writes; wonder what he wants."

"Well, I got t' hand out th' rest of these. You wanta go for a beer later?"

"Yeah. Come get me when you're done with mail call."

"Okay. See ya."

Luke scanned the letter. His uncle's crabbed and unfamiliar handwriting gave him some trouble. Something about a lease. Yes, the next page of the letter was the lease form. He'd been able to raise the fee. Good, I could use the extra cash. New water well on the Mund Gross. Good. Wheat didn't make a good crop. At least that's not my problem. Lizzie. Stroke. Mama has had a stroke. Bedridden. Need to come but not emergency. Damn. Now, how am I gonna do that? We're due to report for summer camp in four days. That'll mean the end of July before I can go. That's almost two months. Is there that much time? Won't matter anyway. She won't know the difference. None of the guys here know about....I'll call Uncle Henry and see.

The door opened. "Brownie, let's go swimmin' and then get a beer. Some girl from town called Jack and invited us t' meet her and some other girls at th' pool. Interested?"
Luke looked at the letter. I can't call until tomorrow anyway. Nobody will be home till Sunday evening. "Yeah, sure. Let me get into my civvies. Meet ya, your room, ten minutes?"

"Okay."

* * * *

Luke had looked out the window of the bus at the flat West Texas desert. They had reached the base soon. Quite a switch from the relatively lush countryside around College Station or even the drier range land of home. This was barren almost. No trees except the large sage and creosote bushes around the dry creekbeds. Once they had reached El Paso the cadets had loaded their gear on this bus and headed out for six weeks at wonderful Fort Bliss. Army training. Cavalry. For an army which didn't use horses any more. Luke rode like an Indian, played polo, jumped in tournaments. That was his Corps unit. Cavalry. That probably would mean tanks and armored troop carriers in the real army. Hitler's real armies were moving in Europe. Wonder if we'll become a real army. Luke had been a little surprised that there'd be horses at summer camp, but this was only his freshman camp anyway. Rumor had it that upperclassmen studied the real stuff. All he'd been doing for a week was drilling on horseback when he wasn't pulling latrine duty and drilling on foot.
They'd been in field camp about a week now, practicing field maneuvers on horseback and on foot. It's supposed to make us follow orders better, Luke thought. Evenings had been the best time of all. The guys would sit around out front of the six-man tents, drinking coffee and telling stories about this girl or that. The officers were all upperclassmen and kept to themselves so the talk was free and easy as they sat under the lantern light.


"Naw. I had a coupla dates with her last winter, Jim. She drinks gin like a fish drinks water. Can't afford t' take her out. Why? You interested? Go 'head."

Jim chuckled appreciatively. "Naw. It's just I heard Tommy Simpson had gotten, you might say, too chummy with her. Least she claims he's th' one."

"I haven't been out with her since 'bout middle of January. Franco had a turn after me. Didn't ya, Franco? She pregnant?"

"Prob'ly not," Jim looked at Frank as Jack went inside.

"I took her t' th' last dance. That was March. She was datin' Tommy then, too, 'cause he got mad that she went with me instead a him. I asked first was all. She spent as much time dancin' with him as with me, but that was okay, I
wasn’t in love with her. I was already in love with Jimmy’s date. Remember that redhead, Jimbo?"

Luke stood up as Jim nodded. "Let’s go over t’ th’ mess tent an’ get some coffee." He called into the tent, "Jack, you an’ Earl an’ Joe want t’ go?"

"Sure. Let me get my smokes."

Jim and two of the others walked off. Frank stayed seated.

"Think I’ll pass, Brownie. I got t’ write my girl. Drink a cup for me."

As soon as the others were out of sight, Frank walked over to his bunk which occupied a corner of the tent. He looked at Earl, who lay on the end bunk trying to read by lantern light. Reaching under his own bunk, he took out a large, muddy flour sack with a piece of string holding the open end shut. "You don’t see nothin’, Earl, remember."

Earl smiled, "Right. Didja find a big one?"

"Big enough for this job."

As he lifted the sack gingerly by the tied end, the contents slid heavily to the bottom and undulated slightly. Moving across the tent to Luke’s bunk, Frank grinned. He lay the sack on the floor and pulled out the neatly tucked-in covers at the foot of the bunk. He untied the sack and shoved the open end between the two sheets of the bunk. He began working the contents of the sack up to the
opening by feeling through the blanket and top sheet. Gradually he slid the sack out of the bunk and tucked the blanket and sheets back in squarely. The lump arranged itself and grew still and flatter. Frank looked around. In the lantern light, everything looked orderly and normal. He put the sack in his duffle bag and picked up a pencil and paper. When the others returned, he was halfway through a letter to his girlfriend.

"How was th' coffee?"

"Thick enough t' spread on toast." Jim looked at Frank, "Get your letter written?"

"Just finishing. You guys ready t' turn in? It's almost 'leven." Frank nodded imperceptibly to Jim.


The other men looked at each other and silently chuckled. By the time Luke and Earl had returned, they were already in their bunks or sitting on them waiting. Luke slid between the sheets as Earl turned off the lantern. The silence in the tent coiled tighter and thicker as the five waited. Even the crickets listened.

Luke lay curled up on his side thinking of his mother, trying to decide how he felt about her. The doctors said she was crazy. Non compos mentis. Wasn't mentally
competent to take care of herself. She hadn’t seemed crazy the few times he had seen her, just strange and silent. Watching for something all the time. The kids at home had teased him until the teachers had made them stop, but he’d gotten used to being an orphan in their eyes as long as nobody mentioned her. Uncle Henry had taken him to the hospital occasionally, but he hadn’t really wanted to go much. It hurt to see her, and it hurt to leave her there. He wanted...what did he want? The white image of her seated under the elm trees in the hospital garden hovered and faded as he dozed. He drifted gently, floating in a golden haze. He saw a pond surrounded by willows and larger trees, shady. Good for swimming. Naked, he walked closer; there were large fish in the pond, rising to the surface and feeding. As he sat on a log at the water’s edge, the bullfrogs ignored him; they were the kings of this pond anyway. He felt thirsty and wondered if the water were drinkable. He looked again into the depths, watching the fish. Their mass opened and closed, giving him glimpses of a bronze bellshape at the bottom of the pond. The bell began to roll toward him; it unraveled into a large watersnake which rose to the surface of the pond. Luke stood up and stepped back. Water moccasins were notoriously hostile and aggressive. This one might do anything. The snake glided rapidly to the pond’s edge and slithered out. Coiling herself, she looked around
and tested the air with her tongue. She captured and held Luke's gaze. He grew rigid with fear as he stared into the golden rim of her awful slitted eyes. Her flickering tongue and fangs stood out clearly against the cotton color of her mouth. She hissed and swayed before him, her muscles rippling smoothly under the natural beauty of her muddy-colored hide. She was powerful, she could be deadly, but she wasn't evil; no countryman would ever think her so. She too had her place in the balance of things, but it wasn't here like this.

Luke struggled to look away.

"Lisssie...lisssie...."

"Wh...at?" Luke looked back at the snake, but she had already returned to the pond and, gliding through the weeds growing along its edge, had begun to stalk a small bullfrog. He watched transfixed as the snake seized the frog and gulped it down live and whole. He suddenly felt as if he and the frog had something in common, but he wasn't sure of the nature of their relations. Something slid over his naked foot and wrapped itself around his ankle. He looked down and saw...

"Son of a bitch!" Luke leaped from his bunk, drenched in cold fear.

"Light th' damn lantern, Earl. There's a goddam snake in my bunk! Hurry up!"
He jumped about frantically searching for some matches, his pants, a stick, his rifle. In the dark the others began giggling. He could hear their stifled snickers and Earl’s deliberately slow attempts at getting the lantern going. When it was finally lit, his tent mates had raised up on their elbows, grinning like possums in a persimmon tree and Earl stood by the smoking lantern. Luke was shaking still, but in anger now. He began to tear the covers off his bunk, but the snake had already disappeared. He searched the tent for it, while the others looked sheepishly at each other.

"You s.o.b.'s, which one of you put that rattler in my bunk?"

The others stopped grinning. Turning from the lantern, Earl looked at him, beginning to regret their joke.

"For chrissakes, it was only a kingsnake, Luke. Besides, smart snake, it's gone now. Go back t' bed."

He gave Luke a few minutes to remake his bunk, then turned out the lantern. Soon the others were breathing heavily. Luke lay on the outside of his covers, still dressed in his pants and his anger. For several nights after, the dream recurred and he woke in a sweat, but eventually it faded into his subconscious.

* * * *
Almost a year later Luke sat in his room trying to study for spring finals. The dream still recurred, but only rarely. The weather was too balmy, and he wanted to go outdoors. He only had one more test to take, but it was English, his worst subject. His head hurt from butting the brick wall. It was the literature. He'd never understood fiction or the language most of it was written in. The Romantic poets had some strange notions about life, and only an Elizabethan could ever have understood Shakespeare. He'd failed freshman English twice already, but he hated failing worse than he hated English. His head dropped forward onto his book, and he began to doze. Out of the words of the *MacBeth* text, the now-familiar form slipped. She coiled neatly and gripped him with her unblinking eyes. He remembered the little frog as she had gulped it down.

"Lisssie...lisssie...," she hissed.

A rapping at the door dissolved the snake.

"It's open."

"You got uh telegram at th' desk, Luke," the freshman cadet said.

"I'm coming." He grabbed up his blouse and cover, buttoning as he headed out the door. They went downstairs quickly. Approaching the front desk, he saluted the officer of the day.

"Telegram, corporal. Sign th' receipt."
"Yes, sir.' He took the telegram, saluted and turned back toward his room. He knew without looking what it said so he waited until his room door closed behind him before reading it. He tore open the envelop,

May 14, 1938

Cpr. H. L. Brown
Darcy Hall
Texas A. & M. College
College Station, Texas

Regret to inform you Lizzie died today 4:15 a.m. Stop. Second stroke. Stop. Services Friday, 3:00 p.m., Church. Stop. Notify if unable to attend. Stop.

Uncle Henry

Luke stared at the wall opposite. For some reason all he could think of for a moment was the hissing snake. Then he realized what she had told him. Odd, the date was May 14th. My father’s birthday. She died on Daddy’s birthday. A wave of release washed over him. Only formal duty was required of him this time. He’d drive home immediately after his last exam tomorrow. He went down to request a five-day leave to go home for the funeral.

* * * *
The mourners followed the closed wooden coffin out the door of the simple country church and across the road to the small old cemetery. Though the community was a small one, the living tended the graves of their loved ones carefully. The grass had been cut recently, and the offensive weeds regularly pulled up. Nearly every grave had a marker of some kind even though most were not carved granite. Some graves were marked with a stone urn or a small statue. Some had only a wooden plank which had been carved with a name and relevant dates. One or two of the oldest were covered with fieldstone cairns to protect them from the excavations of wild animals. Some of the graves of wealthier dead had short wrought iron fences surrounding them, but the majority were marked in much simpler fashion with a natural stone at the head and foot.

Large trees were spread through the cemetery, the oaks and pecans shading the graves and mourners with their new leaves. Here and there were empty vases to accommodate the flowers brought by the living when they came to visit the dead. Only the spring songs of the resident mockingbirds disturbed the ageless calm. Toward the back waited an open gravesite and toward it the small group proceeded.

Luke walked among his mother’s brother and sisters, their spouses and children following close behind. His mother’s youngest sister had taken his arm to steady herself.
across the uneven ground. She was the only mourner who dabbed a tear or two away. Luke realized that most of these people hadn’t seen his mother in twelve years or more; some of the children had never met her at all. Many attitudes are conveyed by funerals. This was a service of respect for the family, not an expression of grief for the loss of the loved one.

The pallbearers set the coffin at the edge of the grave on the ropes which they would later use to lower it. The minister prayed for the souls of the dead woman and those who survived her, then he opened his Bible to read. Luke stood at the graveside listening to the scripture, the words of the old liturgy designed to help the living through their grief. He felt only relief that his mother was free and at peace finally. He looked past his aunts and uncles and cousins who had clustered there with him and into the haze of the adjacent pasture which was filled with the yellow and white field flowers of mid May. The green of the plants and trees reflected the intensity of the clear blue sky.

He watched the wagon stop in the pasture, saw the tall, laughing driver jump down and tie the horse to a willow tree before helping the smiling, dark-haired woman from the wagon. He felt the driver’s strong arms lift him to the ground and take his hand. His mother smiled at him. His parents’ joy surrounded and filled him. Hand in hand the
three of them floated, dancing almost in the springtime haze through the field of glowing flowers.

When he heard the scrap of the ropes as they were drawn out from under the lowered coffin, he stooped and picked up a handful of the red clayey soil. The moment had come for him to complete his part of the ritual.

"Dust to dust."

Gently he dropped the earth into her still-open grave. Then, filled by the comforting certainty of his parents' presence, he lifted his eyes again to the sun-reflecting flowers.
SOURCES CONSULTED

While this story is chiefly fiction, it is based in fact. Although I have taken liberties with history in some respects to make it fit the purposes of my narrative, the main characters were real people who participated in the events described or in events similar to those described. I have tried to reproduce the quality of their lives as accurately as I can. The sources for the factual material, besides stories told me by my father and other family members, include the following books, records, and people:

County records for Clay County concerning the estates of Harry L. Brown and Lizzie Sanzenbacher Brown.

Census records for Clay County for the 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, and 1920 censuses where available in the UNT library.


Krueger, Max A. Second Fatherland. College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 1976. Max Kreuger wrote, "No obstacle is too great but that it can be overcome with courage, perseverance, and the use of those gifts which the creator has implanted within us." (1) This is a statement which Lewis Brown's life exemplified.
Oral History Sources: Lois Loftin Brown, Helen Ashton Lyles, John Thomas Lyles, Elsie Borgman Sanzenbacher, who are all citizens of Clay County, Texas, and who knew Lewis Brown personally.

