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## THE LIGHTS ABOVE ROSWELL

### CHAPTER ONE

Jack Barrows got out of the gray '43 Dodge pickup, and looking back into the cab said thanks to his father-in-law and boss, Lionel Borden. Turning around and bending down low, he picked up the Roswell Daily lying on the drive. Lionel backed out slowly down the hill and into the street and drove away. As Jack ducked underneath the carport and entered the side door, his wife Emma called out from the kitchen in the north west corner of the house.

"Isn't Daddy coming in?"

"No," Jack called back, forcing out his deep voice as though he hadn't talked in years, and then he coughed. "He had to go to the store."

He threw the paper down onto the coffee table and walked back into the kitchen passing through the dinning room.

Jack kissed Emma and patted her on the behind. She blushed slightly and poked him in the ribs. With a jerk he pulled away. He smelled freshly brewed

coffee and went to investigate. He lifted the lid of the coffee pot. It had stopped percolating.

"It's fresh," said Emma, "You don't have to look at it."

Emma was short and stout but not heavy. Her square face with its button nose and broad smile was framed with auburn hair down to her shoulders. Two giant curls adorned her forehead. She had a bite in her temper which she let loose on those that disturbed her work in the kitchen. When Jack headed for the stove, Emma yelled at him to get out of her kitchen and proceeded to shove him out.

"I thought it was your mama's kitchen," he called back. He poked his head back in and said, "Where is your mother?"

"Oh she's in there," she said, pointing to her mother's bed room in the back, "piddling around. Wants to go back to Abilene."

"Where's the kids?" He asked, not out of personal interest in them, he just wanted to read the papers in peace.

"Janie is outside somewhere. She found some abandoned kittens. Jimmy is upstairs sleeping in the bassinet."

Jack turned away from the kitchen clamor of dishes and pots and pans being put away. He didn't want to stay there. Emma would put him to work helping her. He didn't want to be caught helping. Emma was wishing he would, but she had already thrown him out. She wanted his company, but not his infernal poking into things and "instructing her" on how to do things.

Jack mumbled something about reading the newspaper. Emma asked, "What did you say?" but she never got an answer.

"RAAF Captures Flying Saucer On Ranch in Roswell Region," read the headlines in the Roswell Daily. It was Tuesday, July 8, 1947. Jack's eyes skimmed the paper. "Security Council Paves Way To Talks On Arms Reduction...Some Soviet Satellites May Attend Paris Meeting..." His eyes caught hold of the next heading. "Roswellians Have Differing Opinions On Flying Saucers."

Well, there was a doctor talking about it. Says its a condition of the eye, how people think when they see them. It's some deficiency, just an obsession. Here's another person that thinks its some experiment, either of some tactical branch of the armed services or some private individual. "No one," the paper said, "gave evidence that anyone believed that the craft was of another nationality."

Jack was mumbling all this to himself, and Emma couldn't stand it. She called out, "I can't hear you when you mumble!"

Before he could answer her, a storm blew in through the door. It was little Janie, three years old and already a terror to the household. She ran and jumped up into her daddy's lap, smashing the newspaper into his face, yelling, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" He never did get to finish the article.

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It was Saturday. Jack didn't buy his luncheon meat or his bacon at Furr's last night like most people. He liked to stop at Lander's where he could fill up his car and see his meat sliced. It was on the way to his mother's place on the old Dexter highway. He pulled up to the pump and came to a stop. The place was a small white stucco building with just enough overhang for one car. Emma complained at not being told they were going to stop.

"I thought we were going to your mother's place!"

"I'll only be a minute," said Jack, slipping out of the car as though the act of it were really important. "Have to get some baloney," he mumbled.

At the same moment, Fred Lander, the owner's son had come out and was saying, "Hi Jack," and little Janie was jumping up and down in the back seat shouting "I want to get out! I want to get out!"

"No, you stay put," Emma called back to her. "Just hold your horses. Daddy will be back in a minute," she said, trying to cover up the big ninny little Jimmy was sucking on. Fred was staring right at her.

"I want to go with Daddy! I want to go with Daddy!" Janie kept yelling and jumping, holding onto the front seat and to her mother's hair.

"Janie! stop that and sit down!" Emma yelled.

Why did Jack have to always embarrass her like this! She just didn't know. She didn't want to go over to that filthy woman's house anyway. She didn't even wear a bra. She's so shameless...and she at over sixty years old, anyway! Emma kept it up, thinking of all the things that was wrong with Jack's family that made her sick...especially that step dad of his...a common criminal...in and out of jail all the time.

Fred yelled into the car, "How's the family?" Emma didn't answer. She just sat there pouting.

"We got three little kittens I found," Janie called to Fred, sticking her whole body out of the window. She kept him busy while he filled the car up. She just talked and talked and made funny and frowny faces at him.

Inside, Jack had to bend down to look into the meat case. It was a white enameled refrigerator counter having a window on the customer's side to look into and with a sliding window on the other side for the cashier. Jack figured that if he looked long enough, someone would come and wait on him. While he waited, he overheard Mr. Belmont, a local contractor he was acquainted with, talk to his friend about that flying saucer that had been in the paper.

He said, puffing on a cigar and waving in the air for explanation, "It was five feet by twenty, I told the reporter. My wife and I told the reporter. My wife and I both saw it from our front porch. You know where our house is down on South Penn, don'tcha Ed?"

"Yeah, umhum," replied the man inspecting a can of beans. He rolled it in his hand and put it back on the shelf.

The shelves in the store ran its length and made the store look longer on the inside than it really was...long and thin...just like Jack.

Jack perked up his ear and tilted his head towards the two. He grinned inside, wishing he could be in on the conversation. Flying saucers! Humph. What do they know, anyway?

"We ran out onto the lawn when we saw it, you know, to get a better look," Mr. Belmont said.

"And what did it look like," asked Ed.

"Didn't you read the paper? It glowed in the dark," Mr. Belmont gestured.

"Probably streaked through the sky pretty fast..."

"We looked at it for a good fifteen seconds before it disappeared down south of Six-Mile Hill or thereabouts. The trees in the front yard got in the way."

"Shore it warnt a spotlight on them trees, now, Mr. Belmont? Heh, heh," interrupted the owner Mr. Landers.

Mr. Belmont stuck out his chin and bottom lip. They stuck out so far, they matched his pouch of a stomach. He just walked on down the isle with Ed Woodburn who had also been quoted in the Daily, and they continued their important conversation out of earshot.

"Well, Jack, what will it be for you?" Mr. Landers turned to Jack who was still stooped over.

Jack got out his wallet and looked at his money. "Well," he said, "I'll have some of this," he pointed to the baloney, "and cut me up a pound of this bacon...like usual...not too thin.

"You got it...comen right up," Mr. Landers grinned as he grabbed the meat. He plopped the baloney onto the slicer, cut off a square of white freezer paper, put it on the other side of the blade and let the slices fall onto it. He was saying something Jack couldn't hear, his back being turned to Jack. Jack, of course, didn't answer. Mr. Landers turned around and placed the meat on the cylindrical scales. He read the numbers stretched out underneath the long bead of glass and read out the price. At the same time, he wrapped up the meat and sealed it with a long strip of wet paper tape.

"That woll be thirty five cents," Mr. Landers slapped the package down onto the counter, grinning.

"And the bacon?" Jack reminded him in a low timid voice.

While Mr. Landers was getting the bacon, Mr. Belmont and his friend Ed were coming back with Ed's little shopping cart full to the brim. They pulled up behind Jack busily talking, not paying any mind to him or Mr. Landers.

"...naw, couldn't be a gov'ment project, they would never've leaked it to the papers," continued Mr. Belmont. "Besides, that general up in Oregon said they had no such experiments going on."

"Maybe so," Ed rejoindered. "They wouldn't tell the public no how, would they? No, it was only a mistake it got in the paper. Watch'em. This thing will be hushed up so fast! Next week they'll deny the whole thing."

Jack paid Mr. Landers, said thank you, and tried to stop the grin coming over his face. Walking out the door, he thought what he would have told those guys if he had been in on the conversation. Working out at the base had its advantages. Someone out there had seen the creature, one of them, anyway, that had been taken captive. He wanted to tell those guys, but since he wasn't invited, he took his secret out the door with him. Jack laughed within himself, snickered, and focused his stare on the ground to get himself back in control. The screen door slammed behind him and all thoughts of flying saucers.

Jack looked up astonished to see Fred staring him in the face and that the car was there with his family, all ready and waiting on him.

"Look under the hood for ya, Jack?" Fred yelled as if Jack were hard of hearing...had been one of Jack's high school buddies and always laughed at Jack...thought he was a dumb fool.

"Aaa...not today," Jack mumbled.

"Sure is a nice looken Buick. Looks like she'll take right off into the air," Fred said with some enthusiasm, slapping his hands.

"Yea. Aaa...look, put that on my ma's bill. She'll pay for it."

"Sure thing...guess it's her car, ain' it?" Fred said with a blank face looking towards the door. He had wanted some cash. He hated credit paying customers. They usually didn't pay on time.

Jack dropped into the car and slammed the door. As they drove off, Jimmy started crying. He just wasn't getting any milk out of that ninny. He couldn't understand why she wouldn't give him anymore. Emma's face screwed up into a frown. She was trying hard not to be upset, but she couldn't help it. She just knew the next words Jack was going to say. He was going to complain about her not feeding the baby.

"Aren't you starving him?"

"He's fine," she said as she held him close. She rocked him, pronouncing little hush-hushes.

"He's skinnier than a rail. You should go see the doctor or something or get him a bottle."

Emma gritted her teeth and held the baby closer. Little Janie bounced up and down on the back seat, they passed the little white square houses covered with plastered chicken wire to their left, a train wailed down the tracks towards town to their right, and they pulled into the gravel drive to Jack's mother's. Emma was glad to get out of that car. She felt so stifled! She tried to hurry into the



house, but Jack was right on her tail still barking.

"There might be something wrong with your...you know!"

"The way you touch'em you wouldn't think so," she barked back.

Going through the white picket gate Emma almost ran into Old Man White. She hadn't noticed he was there. He was standing so still. He turned around and grinned slowly, showing his yellow teeth. By his graying beard, she could tell he hadn't shaved in a couple of days. As he turned, she saw that he was holding his "thang."

"I've been watering the flowers," he said in a crusty voice that stank of stale beer and rotten chewing tobacco.

He put his "thang" back into his trousers.

Emma caught her breath, turned red, slammed Jimmy into her breast and hurried into the house. Little Janie was laughing at the funny thing when Emma poked her head out the door and shouted, "Emma Jane! Get in here right now!"

Jack, upon seeing his step dad, said, "Hi Pop," and then told Janie to go on into the house calmly, as though nothing important had happened. He followed her in, and Old Man White followed Jack.

Jimmy's attention had been arrested when his face had been shoved into his mother's breast. He tried desperately to tear into her clothes to get at that nipple. Then terror struck. Giant hands grabbed him and an ugly face yelled at him, "Why, Jimmy!" He stiffened and gave out a loud scream.

"Jimmy!" yelled Old Granny White again holding him out at arms length. She never could see things up close. "Got good lungs, he does!" She could hear alright,

but working with cattle most of her life, she always yelled.

She held jimmy to her breast, but since her ninnies hung like watermelons about her waist, all Jimmy could feel was her bony chest.

Emma rescued him, and he sobbed into his mother's breast, clinging tightly with hands and feet like a little monkey.

"Well, let's have some tea and go into the dinning room there," squealed Granny White. Her voice scrapped against Emma's already peeled nerves.

Granny motioned down the hall to the next room while she went in the opposite direction around the corner to the kitchen. The house was a long white patch of plaster up against a dirt drive that cut off the old Dexter highway. It had a long hallway inside with the kitchen to the east and stopping at the dinning room to the west, with the parlor and master bedroom farther on. The hall led to four bedrooms on the south side with a bathroom behind the kitchen and then to the greenhouse on the east end.

Emma went down the hall that opened into the dining room and sat down on the outside bench of a large picnic table aligned north and south. Janie went through the parlor, through the master bedroom and on out the front door into the front yard. There, she played in the sprinkler and tried pushing the wheel barrow. Emma just watched her go, staring at her absent-mindedly, heard the screen door slam and then called back toward the kitchen, saying that she really didn't want tea.

Granny answered, "Wall, I got no tea anyhow. How about some coffee?"

"That will be fine Mom," Emma said exasperated at this whole affair. They had come to ask for money. It wasn't being a very pleasant experience.

All three of the White family came plodding along in their slow country way. Jack came in first and took a seat in front of Emma, leaning his back against the wall as though he had been to work for 16 hours. He put his coffee cup down on the white table cloth. The dark wood could be seen through several holes in the designs of cut work around his cup. Granny White came next carrying two cups of coffee with saucers. She gave one to Emma, reaching over her shoulder. Old Man White came in and sat on the other end, leaving the old woman to fight the table cloth with her feet as she tried to climb over the bench. Her two big water melons plopped down onto the table as she sat down, and as she hit the bench, Emma almost spilled her coffee. She felt extreme disgust over her mother-in-law. She glanced at Old Man White...disgust over both in-laws. When Granny White finally settled down, she began to talk in her high pitched witch-like cackle (Emma imagined).

Jimmy was tearing at Emma's clothes again. She didn't feel like she had any more milk left, but Granny seemed to have the most startling effect upon her. Granny's figure looked like one of those old Amorite fertility goddesses she had seen in her Bible study class at Church, and when she said in her loud screechy voice, "Open up that tit for that poor child...no need to be ashamed. You're among kin folk here," Emma felt her breasts fill up. Granny just smiled content at seeing Emma open up her red cotton dress exposing a great big ninny filled with milk. Jimmy grabbed that ninny and started sucking like he would suffocate without it.

He sounded like he was suffocating with it. Emma looked at Granny. Maybe she is a witch, she thought. She looked at Pop and the way he stared at her. She blushed. She sat there bewildered and embarrassed...doubly embarrassed because of coming here to asked for money.

Emma turned her attention to the conversation that was going on and noticed that her husband was the only one in his family that didn't drink their coffee out of the saucer. The Whites had this awful habit of tipping their coffee cups and letting the coffee spill out onto the saucer, and then they would drink out of the saucer. The importance of this ancient shadow of family tradition escaped Emma. It irked her good sense of etiquette and manners. This family was so uncouth and ill mannered. They even pick their noses at the table which would almost make Emma vomit. She knew people who would use a spoon to blow at their coffee to cool it off, but never pour it into their saucers. Now Jack had an admirable quality. He would drink his coffee from his cup no matter how hot it was. That was one of the traits that had attracted him to her. Yet, he picked his nose like the rest of his family. Why had she ever married him? Now she had to perk her ears up again to get back into the conversation to see if Jack was going to ask for the thirty five dollars they needed.

Pop was saying, "Well, how much money do yer get from that job, anyhow?"

"Well, I uh," Jack hesitated.

"Not mor'n sixty a week, I'll bet," Pop said with his face all screwed up.

"A little more than that," contributed Emma.

"Not much," said Granny.

"Not much attol," replied Pop. "Not as much as you could be maken worken for yer ol' pop."

"I already got a job...worken for Mr. Borden."

"Yeah, but it ain't much, and I'll betcha he's asken fer most a that back in rent now, ain't he?" the old man scowled.

"We have to pay utilities...it's only fair," defended Emma.

Old Man White leaned over to look at Jack to get Emma out of his face and said as politely as he could, "You start trucken fer yer ol' man agin an' you'll be maken a lot mor'n yer maken now. I'll even let yer live in one o' my cabin fer free." He leaned back and added, " a trucker makes a lot mor'n a framer...I know!"

"I won't live in a shack!" Emma said with disgust under her breath.

"I won't be insulted in my own house," Old Man White said sternly, leaning forwards to look at Emma.

Just then, Emma heard a yelp from little Janie and then the sound of crying and the slamming of the front screen door. The crying ran through the bedroom and then through the parlor.

"Janie?" Emma cried. She quickly got up and left the room, intercepting her little girl in the parlor. Jimmy had rudely been interrupted and was now crying in his mother's arms. Emma had tried to shut her dress as she got up, but it wouldn't shut. She had two crying babies to contend with and her nipple was still hanging out, so she scolded Janie and shook Jimmy. She saw Janie's hands being held up, that they were covered with cactus needles, so she tried to take them out, but

wound up putting Jimmy on the couch, shutting her dress with one hand and taking out the stickers with the other hand, and she was about to scream!

Jack was telling Old Man White that he wasn't seeking a raise in pay, but that he just needed some extra money for right now.

"Yer don't have no good head on ya, boy. Yer should take my offer."

"Listen to yer pop, son," Granny said between sips from her saucer.

The friendly smell of coffee had gone sour. Now the room filled with the stench of an old cigar that Old Man White lit. It was the signal to clear the room and head for the door. Jack and his old man heated up the conversation in the doorway while Granny cleared the table as though this kind of noise was the normal thing at their house. Indeed, it used to be this way all the time until all the children moved out. As she put the cups and saucers in the sink, she noticed that Emma had only touched her coffee. Some shadow passed over her...maybe an ancient memory, but it made her have pity on the girl. She went to her purse and took the money out and put it into her fist.

Jack kept on refusing to drive for his old man, so Old Man White started bringing up past insults, saying, "that's right, yer can't stay awake on the're road nohow! Yer ruined two o' my trucks already. Yer and yer god damned brother! Yer get liqueured up an' expect ta drive an' stay on the road! Yer a jackass fool fer not taken this job!"

"I got a good job out there at the..."

"Yer got a job! Yer got a job! Yeah! Yer sucken that ol' man preacher, an' when yer job pitels out you'll be comen crawllen back..."

"Shut yer mouth, Pop! You don't know..." Jack was yelling when his old man grabbed Jack by the shirt and was shoving him out, saying, "Yer wanna try an' make me, boy!"

Emma, seeing what was going on, slid past the ruckus and scooted the children into the car. She got in and started honking the horn to get Jack to come.

Granny tried to come between the old man and Jack, so Pop shoved Jack and took a swat at Granny. She ducked and raced around the car. At the same time, Jack came racing around, ducking into the car. He knew exactly what to do. He had repeated this scenario a dozen times or more. He stretched his hand out through the window as soon as he had slammed the door, and Granny shoved the money into his hand while he started up the car.

Pop saw this and yelled at Granny, "Whataya give'im? Ya give'm the money?"

He started shoving Granny. Jack popped out of the car with one foot on the ground. He yelled back, "You hurt my mother and I'll come back and break yer neck."

Pop raced toward the open car door. Jack jumped back in, closed the door and revved up the engine. Pop beat on the windshield. "That's my money yer stold!" he cried. "Ah'll git the law on ya!"

"You go on!" Granny yelled. "I'll be alright. I'll call the po-lice myself!"

Pop was still beating on the windows and cursing, scaring Emma and the children. They were in the seat with Emma crying.

"Get out of here!" Emma cried.

When Jack heard that Granny had gone to call the police, and for him to go on, he put the car in reverse and slammed on the accelerator, throwing the old man off the car. He turned the car around in the wide drive way and sped out towards the highway. Old Man White being sprayed with dirt and gravel cussed louder, shaking his fist.

"I got the money." Emma asked in a subdued tone.

"Good!" barked Jack.

"I don't ever want to go over there again!"

Emma turned herself to comforting the crying babies. She started humming a tune and rocking them.

"I was never liquored up in that wreck," Jack started. "Neither of us was. It was him! He drove us so hard! We never had time to sleep. We come back from one trip and had to go out on another."

"That's right," Emma said, cooing her children.

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Lionel Borden was a retired minister now working as a contractor, building houses for the Roswell Army Air Field. He had hired on his sons-in-law Jack Barrows and Larry Hatch just out of the Army Air Corps. They were good workers...made up the best part of the crew. He liked Jack because he could be persuaded not to drink and smoke and become a good Christian. Between Lionel and his daughter Emma, Jack was persuaded right nicely to go to Church and live a clean life. Larry, on the other hand, was totally different. He would just laugh



and make jokes when Lionel would approach him, but there was a good side to Larry. He didn't deride people. In fact, he was totally charitable and would give you the shirt off his back. He took good care of Lionel's other daughter, Millie. Larry didn't believe in Christ, but he did believe in people and had strong convictions. Jack was a different story altogether. Although he was proving to be a good church-going Christian, he was too easily persuaded. He didn't have a backbone of his own. He would get angry too easily and blame others when things went wrong. He was always finding fault and arguing with Emma. Lionel hadn't approved of their marriage from the beginning. Jack was a sour note, but tolerable, and he was making progress, though, slowly. He was sure that Emma had married Jack solely for his good looks and muscular build, and for the fact that he was the only one in the world she could wrap around her little finger. They deserved each other. She was Miss Priss, and he was her big He-man. Both of them were irresponsible.

Lionel was now on his way to the store to get that baby a bottle and some formula. She was starving his grandson.

Lionel pulled into the parking lot of the new Furr's grocery located over on West Second. It was a pretty large square building with ample parking space. Lionel wondered why they had to take up half a city block just for parking. Why, he thought, they would never get that many people in there at one time. He got out of his pick-up and walked over to the door. It was under what looked like a giant chimney with a neon sign on the east and west sides saying "FURR'S."

Finding the right aisle in this large of a grocery store was troublesome for

Lionel. It's what they called a super-market. It was much too large for this community. It got his temper up just a little higher. When he found the baby section, he had to scratch his balding head because of so many choices of baby formula. Deciding to look at the prices instead of what was in them, he chose the cheapest one, a can he could just barely fit his fat hand around. Grabbing two of them and a baby bottle with a nipple, he headed for the counter...one of the many counters he had seen.

There were some cashiers waiting for customers, but Lionel chose to stand in line where there were people. Besides, as he approached, he saw a couple of familiar faces. One was the cement contractor he knew by the name of Belmont. The other was a church brother, Pete Vargas, a Mexican, but a nice guy.

"Well, well," Mr. Belmont said, turning around, "if it isn't the Preacher."

"Hello Mr. Belmont," said Lionel, and turning to the other man, greeted "Brother Vargas."

"Hello Pastor Borden," called Mr. Vargas.

All three men started off in a cheery mood, discussing how work was going and the weather and different things, but when flying saucers was brought up, Lionel's face became stone. He looked straight ahead in order to change the subject. He took off his wire rimmed glasses as if to clean them, stared into the air for a second and put his glasses back on. He smiled.

"Business is picking up in Texas again. Think I'll take Pearl back to Abilene when this deal with the Army is done," he said.

The others took the hint. This Borden fellow, thought Mr. Belmont, didn't

take things off the wall. "Yep," replied Mr. Belmont, "things are getting a bit slow here in Roswell."

Lionel said goodbye to the two men as they left the cash counter and he himself was back in his own truck in no time.

Night had fallen with a sudden swiftness. There had been some daylight left when Lionel had entered the store. Now he drove up Washington Avenue in the dark. His headlights bounced off parked cars and stop signs and the white lines rolling along in the middle of the street. He switched the radio on to some ball game ...a fly to the left field...but he didn't listen ...just a noise drifting into the night.

Lionel thought himself to be a good Christian father. He never understood why his daughters had turned out living in sin. Well, while under his roof, they won't, nosiree, he told himself. And it's a sin to be irresponsible and not take care of his grandchildren. He was going to make sure that baby got fed!

Emma wasn't a sinful creature like her older sister Millie; she was just worldly. He hadn't been able to keep her from wearing make-up or modeling herself after movie stars who were all harlots. At least she didn't turn out to be a harlot like her sister. He knew that Ester had been caught in bed with some guy at one of her friends' house by her mama before she had married Larry. He had tried harder with Emma after finding out about all this trouble with Millie. It had been hard to stave off the wicked influences of Emma's school mates, but at least she was married now...not to his choice. His choice hadn't worked out, and that was troublesome. Jack was her second husband. Charles had lasted only three months

when she left him and moved back home. There would have been no children from that marriage, the way Emma was acting. It had to be annulled. Jack wasn't all that bad...just bad family. If they stuck it out, there marriage could improve. They might make it, but he would have to ride shot-gun over this marriage.

Emma was sitting in the large easy chair of her father's trying to nurse little Jimmy when her father came in with his surprise package. She had run out of milk too early and Jimmy was crying. He would suck a moment until he realized there was no milk and then start crying. He would grab his mother's ninny and try again, only to cry some more. Switching sides didn't work. Emma was feeling very low at this point. What was wrong with her? Her mother had nursed all her kids and more. Mama, her grandmother, had nursed all her kids. All the women she knew nursed their children, except Millie. It must have been her smoking and drinking that stopped her milk...big boobs and no milk. But I've kept myself clean, she thought. She was on the verge of crying when a big paper bag was plopped into her lap. She looked up to see her daddy.

"What's this?" she croaked.

"Feed that baby!" he said. "You're starving him." That's all he said and left the room.

Emma looked into the bag as tears formed in her eyes ...formula and a baby bottle. Her tears flowed. She got up, almost throwing screaming Jimmy into the chair. She came back with warm formula in a heated bottle. This was it. She was no good as a mother. Her gut hurt at that accusation. Jimmy took the bottle readily because it was warm and sweet, but when he found that it wasn't his

mother, he wailed again. A locomotive wailed somewhere off in the distance towards the middle of town as if in answer to little Jimmy's woes.

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Jimmy reacted violently against the formula. His mother had to hold him down with his arms held so he couldn't use them and force the bottle into his mouth. He wouldn't swallow the foul smelling stuff, and each time it would run out his nose. He would scream and cough. After a couple of days of this, Jimmy was terrified. Each time Emma would approach him with the bottle, he would scream. She even tried cow's milk. That wasn't much of an improvement. What little he did take in gave him diaper rash.

A neighbor gave her the idea of goats milk. She got some from a family friend, Mrs. Davis, who lived outside the city limits and had a couple of goats. (It had been Mrs. Davis's son, the town coroner that had told Jack about the aliens and the three small hermetically sealed coffins for the Army.)

That goat's milk was a little improvement, but she didn't want to go out there all the time, so that didn't last long, and she went back to the formula. Jimmy took it just out of plain hunger and exhaustion.

Jimmy was heart-broken. He lay in his bassinet with his fists in his mouth and whimpered. He hurt deep inside his little self. He wanted his mommy back. When he slept, he dreamed of those comforting ninnies and the warm mother's milk. Deep down inside himself he decided on a way to get his mommy back. One morning, he didn't wake up crying. He lay limp in the light blue bassinet under a single blanket. It was blue. He was yellow.

When Emma picked him up that morning, she wondered if he was still asleep, but his eyes were open...and his color was wrong. She didn't have to hold his arms this time. When she tried to put the nipple into his mouth, it wouldn't open. His jaw was clamped tight. He wanted his mother back.

Jack and Lionel were just going out the door to work. Emma ran down the stairs with Jimmy in her arms and stopped them with two words.

"Some thing's wrong!" she cried in tears, holding the baby out to Jack.

"He's sick," Jack said.

"Let me see that baby," Lionel said as he shut the door. "Couldn't you get that formula down him?" He felt a little guilty. For all he knew, it might have been the wrong formula.

"Let me see that baby," said another voice from the kitchen. Mother Pearl came down the hall wearing her red and green flowered apron. She grabbed the baby out of Emma's hands and took one look at him. "That baby's got jaundice! Get him to Doctor Bradley right now!"

Emma went white in the face and tried to grab Jimmy back, but before she could get him, Jack had grabbed a blanket off the big chair, grabbed Jimmy and was out the door with him before she could blink.

"I'll drive ya," Lionel followed. His face was grim.

"Wait!" called Emma. "I'm coming," and she grabbed her coat out of the coat closet and left.

"You're not dressed yet," called Mother Pearl out the door at her.

"It doesn't matter, mother!" Emma called back. "Wait!" she called to the

men as they started driving off. Lionel slammed on the brakes and Emma jumped in.

Doctor Bradley's office was a large square building with a small pyramid of steps leading up to a portico. The dark wood door with cut glass windows was surrounded by two flat Greek columns supporting a plain triangular pediment. The heavy door squeaked as Lionel turned the large brass doorknob and opened it. The three of them walked over black and white diagonal tiles into a cold foyer. Cold marble benches sat against white-washed walls. At the end of the foyer at the intersection of another hallway, a receptionist sat behind a glassless window. As Jack rested the baby on the counter, he wondered why there was no glass there. The three of them looked anxiously at the receptionist who paid them no mind.

Lionel spoke up, saying, "We have a sick baby here."

She looked up from her paper work, smiled, recognizing Mr. and Mrs. Barrows, greeted them and said, "I'll tell Dr. Bradley you're here." Then she walked away somewhere to the left.

Emma felt sick in the pit of her stomach. She trembled out of fear for little Jimmy, plus she was about to faint at the smell of hospital alcohol, so she leaned heavily on her daddy.

"Now, you should have stayed at home," he said gently. "Look at you. Stand up. You're hurting my bad shoulder."

Jack walked over to the couch in the right wing of the hallway. The other two followed him. Dr. Bradley dressed in a white frock came walking pretty fast from the left wing. He grabbed the baby from Jack, unwrapped it and took off with it

without saying a word. Emma jumped up and followed him. It was evident that the nurse had told him something drastic. He looked very angry. He entered a white and spotless room and laid the baby on clean white sheets. Without stopping, he spoke to Emma. Little Jimmy barely whimpering in the background of the doctor's voice.

"You gonna faint? Sit down."

"No," she answered, sitting down in a black leather chair made of steel tubing.

She watched the doctor undress Jimmy and it appeared that he was shooting water in Jimmy's back with a giant shot needle.

"Why on the earth did you wait so long? Didn't you know this baby was sick?"

Emma could hear the anger in his voice and she cringed. She could hear gurglings coming from Jimmy. She covered her face to stifle a whimper.

"I didn't know he was sick," she managed to say. "I thought it was his formula. It's hard for me to get him to take it."

"Can't you nurse him?" he asked as he shot something into the baby's jaw and loosened it with his fingers. With that, Jimmy let out a wail."

Emma jumped up.

"Sit down," the doctor commanded.

"No," she said, sitting gingerly onto the chair. "I can't nurse him. I'm drying up."

Jimmy finally started sucking on the doctor's finger. He put a yellow powder



on his finger and let him suck on that. That was the bitterest suck Jimmy ever had. He cried, and to Emma, he sounded like a newborn baby again.

Lionel could hear Emma getting bawled out by the doctor as he marched her all the way down the hall. He felt it was his fault. He shook his head sorrowfully.

Jack was reading the newspaper he had found on the couch. It was talking about the Army Air Command and that flying saucer they had found. They were denying it completely. They even had one of the security officers holding up the pieces of a weather balloon. The caption under the picture read "Major Scott Reynolds holds up remains of flying saucer hoax, says he never told reporters it was a disk. Farmer Burns next to him says balloon fragments found on his ranch." The headlines read, "Flying Saucer, A Hoax." He read on. The newspaper wrote out a full apology, saying they mistook a joke in the office of the 509th Bombardment Intelligence Division as a statement made by the Major.

Jack just "hump"ed. How are they going to deny that picture he saw a few days ago of the Major handcuffed to a little space creature? It had been passed around at the air base. That wasn't even mentioned in the article. I'll get that first paper tonight when I get home, he thought. It should prove to be a collector's item. Anyhow, didn't Denton out at the funeral home say that they told him to keep his mouth shut about the three small coffins the Army wanted? They said they would take him out and shoot him if he ever said a word. Must not be too scared, he told Emma and me.

Emma arrived red-faced and in tears, carrying Jimmy in her arms, hugging him close to her heart. She was saying softly, "I'll take care of you." A shudder

came from her voice, and she repeated, "I'll take care of you." She had been crying. She walked up to Jack and showed him the baby. He took him and wrapped him up in the blanket again. He put little Jimmy back into her arms and put his arm around her.

"Where did Daddy go?" she asked, looking around.

"He went on to the job site...said he'd be right back."

"Oh."

Emma took out the prescription the doctor had given her and showed it to Jack. Plenty of sunshine was part of the prescription.

"You got that thirty five Mom gave you?" Jack asked warily.

"No, I don't," Emma said matter-of-factly.

"You what!" Jack whispered rather loudly. "That money was for bills! What did you do with it?"

"Well, Mother had to have her hair done."

Little Jimmy began to whimper, so she shook him gently.

Jack grabbed her elbow and took her briskly to the front door.

"That money wasn't for your mother! You should have saved it! We have an emergency here!"

"Don't you talk to me that way! Anyway, how was I to know Jimmy would get sick?"

Jack just fumed and rubbed the back of his head and then put his hand on his trembling mouth. He didn't want to be angry at a time like this, but he was.

"How in tar-nation are we gonna get the money? I'm broke!" He whispered

rather loudly again.

"I'll ask Daddy."

Jack's insides churned at the embarrassment he was going to have to face. He kept rubbing his mouth.

Lionel found Emma and Jack arguing at the door to the doctor's office. That made him mad. He grabbed Emma by the elbow and commanded abruptly and sharply, "Come on. Get'n the truck!" That made Jack silent. He clamped his jaw shut, and his stomach knotted up. He hated living with his in-laws, but Emma wouldn't have it any other way. What could they do anyhow? They didn't have any money to get a house of their own.

Little Jimmy was comforted all that day. His mother never put him down until it was time to go to bed and his daddy was shaving in the bathroom. She had sat with him in the big easy chair in the living room holding him close, rocking him, and singing to him "this is how little cowboys do." She had fed him as often as he wanted and had given him his medicine every four hours. He was too weak to quibble about ninnie or no ninnie. At least he could feel his mother's breasts and know he was close to her. He felt that he got his mommy back. It was a learning experience for both of them. Little Jimmy had learned deep down inside how to get his mommy when he needed her, and Emma learned that she was not separated from her children. This is what is meant by being a mother..."blood of my blood." Her children and she were of one flesh. Wasn't that in the Bible somewhere, she thought?

Months of care went by that seemed like years, and one morning, Little

Jimmy Barrows woke up feeling the sunshine warming his little body. He looked up at the bright light through the venetian blinds and smiled and kicked his little fat legs. His fingers ran across the rough white weave of what had been his sister's bassinet. He ran his hand back and forth, back and forth against the weave, kicking his legs in the same rhythm. His fingers found the little tufts of yarn that dappled his bed spread. They were soft like himself, and they were part of his mother's bed spread. It connected him to his mother. His mother had been pretty smart to tear off some of her bed spread to give to him. He looked through the cracks of the bassinet to his mother's bed worshipfully. He then twisted his head up and around and looked at his daddy's chest-of-drawers where he would put the jingle jangle things from his pockets every night. His daddy put things where his mommy would change his diapers. His daddy was connected to his mommy who was connected to him. He looked up again at the light shining down through the venetian blinds. This was his world, his bed, his light, his mommy and daddy, his mommy and daddy's things...his things. And here was his mommy! He greeted her with a big toothless smile.

"Well," Emma said, picking him up. "You woke up in a good mood, and oh, are you wet! Yes you are." And she put her face right next to his. "Yeas you are. Yeas you are. You are all wet." She made him laugh and laugh, playing with him as she changed his diapers on top of the chest-of-drawers.

Jimmy loved the nice warm wetness of his diapers, so he would usually cry when the cold air hit him as the diapers came off, but this morning was different. Everything was warm. His whole world seemed wrapped up in a warm wetness. It

was like being back inside his mother. He kicked and kicked with effervescent joy.

Breakfast was not visited by the normal screams and fights. Jimmy ate his banana pabulum with delight which delighted Emma. Breakfast was over with in less time than usual, and the sunshine invited everyone outside. Little Janie was peculiarly quiet this morning and kept to herself, not bothering Jimmy at all. She went outside and played with the cats out in the flower beds, and in the vacant lot on the south side of the house. Emma took Jimmy out into the back yard and put him in his wind-up swing. She wound up the little crank and left him, knowing he would be satisfied just swinging by himself for a long time. He would sit there for hours at a time staring up at the blue sky. Emma went over to the fence and started talking to the neighbor. She was doing her wash in a large tub and hanging her clothes on her clothes line.

Rebecca's hair was rolled up around her head and tied into a bun in back like Emma's except that her bun was quite larger. Rebecca had longer hair and was tall and slim. That made Emma a little envious. After she had all the clothes on the line, she walked over to Emma and leaned her long bare arms along the top of the woven wooden fence. As they talked awhile, Rebecca noticed how long Jimmy would stare at the sky and smile his toothless smile.

"What do you think he could be staring at so long?" she asked.

"Oh, he just stares at the airplanes up there," replied Emma.

Rebecca placed her hand over her eyes and looked in the direction Jimmy was staring. She said, "I declare I can't see one, you know."

"Oh, they're too small for us to see. Babies have much better eyes."

What ever that means, Rebbecca said to herself. She wouldn't address anything weird, so she changed the subject.

Little Jimmy Barrows continued staring at the sky, smiling. He enjoyed the little points of light darting about in the deep blue sky. Sometimes they would come closer and smile at him. Sometimes he would rise up out of his swing and visit the people inside the light. His joy was full.

The breeze stirred the leaves in the trees and brushed little Jimmy's thin blond hair. The women continued talking, and the sound of the cars going up and down the street sung little Jimmy to sleep. He dreamed of the light.

## CHAPTER TWO

Mother Pearl was the fastest dishwasher ever. After breakfast, she would be in and out of the kitchen before Emma could clean Jimmy up and take him out of his high chair. It was morning and Emma felt like she had stayed up all night. She was not quite awake. She went into the kitchen to help with the dishes, but Mother Pearl's face shined as she showed that she had already done them. Emma said that she would dry them, but he mother said, "No, just let them drain," and rushed off to do something else.

Emma went upstairs, helping little Jimmy up each step. He had started walking all by himself. He could just reach the next step by holding onto his mother's hand and she lifting him up a little. When she reached the bedroom, she saw her mother putting the finishing touches on the bedspread. A pull on the corner and a hand to smooth out the wrinkle did the trick, and she was off again.

"Mother!" Emma called out, "I'm perfectly capable of making my own bed!"

"Just straightening up," she said as she hurried past, looking at Emma with those puppy dog eyes. As she hobbled down the stairs, she mumbled, "You have a baby to take care of," loud enough for Emma to hear.

"Come on, Sonny Boy," Emma said as she started down the stairs. She went down a couple of steps to where Jimmy was waist high and picked him up, putting him on her hip. "Let's go see what we can do."

Emma was so exasperated with her mother she thought she would explode! Her mother had started taking over all the house cleaning since Jimmy was sick,

and she never let up. That was months ago. She wouldn't let Emma in the kitchen anymore to cook dinner, and she loved so very much to cook for Jack.

Jimmy held on tight to his mother like a little monkey and buried his face in her bosom. He thought he would never ever let her go.

Mother Pearl started up the vacuum cleaner before Emma reached the bottom of the stairs. The loud whirring sound was coming from the back bedroom, so she avoided that area. She took Jimmy into the living room where Janie was banging on the piano.

"Janie!" Emma called out above the noise. "Stop that racket! Go outside and play." Janie hesitated. She really wanted to play on that piano. "Go on...right now, or I'll spank."

Janie hurried toward the side door, opened it, and turning around slowly with an exaggerated grin on her face, asked, "Can I play with Jimmy? Can you bring him outside?"

"Scoot!"

Janie's mouth opened into a circle, and her little slanted Indian eyes she inherited from her daddy opened wide. With that expression, she twirled around and slammed the door. She was gone like a sprite.

Emma put Jimmy down and told him, "sit on the floor, and I'll see what I can do to clean up the living room."

Emma no sooner took the blanket off the big chair than a loud whirring sound entered the living room. Here came Mother Pearl with the vacuum cleaner.

"Mother!" Emma became so exasperated that she laughed. "You're going



to..." She thought to say "drive me crazy," but she finished by saying,"...vacuum Jimmy's britches right off ' him!"

Mother Pearl came right after him with the wand of the vacuum cleaner. He sat up with the soberest expression on his face that even she had to laugh.

"You had better take'im outside and put'im in the sun," she laughed, "or I'll run'im over."

Little Jimmy could run after a manner, and Janie had fun today chasing him around the yard...with a water hose, letting the water pour out over his head. The morning was really hot, so Emma didn't mind. She had been watering the flowers and had laid the water hose down to go change the pressure. Janie picked it up and started chasing Jimmy with it. Before that, she had just been chasing him and laughing. Janie kept pouring water over Jimmy's head, soaking his shirt and diapers. He was running after his mother, but she kept backing up with her arms outstretched, calling to him. She didn't want to pick up this funny wet baby. His cries soon became serious, but she kept backing up, making him stroll over the whole back yard. Jimmy got tired of this game and started screaming.

Suddenly, Janie gave out a scream, dropping the hose. That brought the comedy to a halt. Emma turned around and saw Janie staring at Mother Pearl who was standing in the back doorway. Emma looked at her mother. Mother Pearl's body sagged. The wrinkled semi-circles under her eyes were filled with water. Her face was all wrinkled up with worry...her mouth, half open. Was it a trick of the sun, or was her hair grayer all of a sudden? Little frightened Janie

ran back to her mother and hid behind her skirt. She didn't recognize her Nanny, as she called her grandmother. It was an old hag, maybe a witch. She peeked out from behind her mother's skirt and winced...yes, it was her Nanny, all right, but something was terribly wrong!

"Papa's dying," Mother Pearl said dully. "I've got to get to Abilene. It may be the last time I get to see'm. Sis just called long distance."

Little Jimmy stood horror struck as he stared at this visage in the doorway. He was sure it had hurt his sister, and now it hobbled down the steps towards his mother. It was going to get her. He wailed. No one, though, paid him any mind. When it touched his mother, he fainted and fell back onto the soft green grass. He saw the light up in the sky. It comforted him. They were friends.

Jimmy woke up and jutted out his two bottom teeth and growled in the deepest voice he could muster. He reached out for Janie and she squealed in delight and ran, already forgetting the monster that had walked back into the house with Mommy. Jimmy got up and ran after her as best as he could, chasing her all over the back yard. She was having fun, and he was growling and laughing, and chasing after her. It was his way of telling about the monster at the door that had tried to get them. This is what monsters do. They growl and chase people. It was just the way Mommy had shown them so many times before. So, he trotted on with his little heart at once broken, and at once mended by the man in the light.

\* \* \*

Jack wasn't quite ready when his father-in-law bowed his head and started

praying over the food. He was saying something he had heard at work when he was cut off. Lionel always did that. It was really irritating.

"Lord, thank you for this food, and bless it Dear Lord that it may nourish and strengthen our bodies to do thy will, and make us mindful of all our blessings, Amen." He said that with Jack in mind. "Now pass them vittals," he said with a smile. "Now what's this gloom and doom I see over every body's faces?" He would rather face that than the flying saucer stories he was going to hear from Jack.

"We told you," Emma said pouting, her eyes peering out their corners.

"Papa's deathly sick," Mother Pearl started in. "Sis called long distance."

"Now Mama," said Lionel, "that doesn't mean we need to go all the way over to Abilene. Sis has been taking care of Papa and will continue to do so with great care."

"Pass the beans," said Jack who could care less about arguing about a trip to Abilene. "Janie, hold your fork like this," he called across the table, holding his hand up to show her not to hold the fork with her fingers wrapped around it.

Emma, sitting next to Janie, didn't pass the beans, so it never got around to anyone. She was too busy fighting with Jimmy sitting on her lap. He wanted to feed himself, but she had to hold his hands back and try to force food into his closed mouth ...and it was becoming very frustrating. He was bouncing his stomach up and down and out and twisting his head back and forth, and trying to grab the spoon when he could get a hand out, determined to have his own way. Emma was just as determined to have her own way. Jimmy would scream, but

every time he opened his mouth, Emma would shove something in it.

Mother Pearl, watching this struggle, thought she herself was suffering enough without having to worry about Emma and Jimmy and her Papa too, so in a spurt of defiance at all this trouble, she shoved the beans at Jack, almost violently. The beans slammed into Jack's plate. That made Lionel, sitting at the head of the table, look down at the marble-looking metal table. He had to bite his tongue. He wouldn't show anger in the presence of others. He had to show an example. He stared at the marbling of the table. It was white and bluish gray. He missed the old wooden table with its dark mahogany, but Pearl had to have modern furniture when they built this new house.

Ten year old Fanny had just come back from visiting her Aunt Sis in Abilene. She stared at Jack. He was taking all the baked beans, and she liked those best of all. "Uncle Jack is taking all those beans!" she blurted out.

"Daddy," said Mother Pearl blankly. "You could take me to Abilene, and we could be back Sunday Night."

Emma added, "I could go with you and help with things."

Little Jimmy now started choking on forced food. It had just become a habit now with Emma, and she didn't notice. Jimmy burst out crying and spit that forced food all the way across the table at Fanny and Jack. Fanny fell over backwards; Jimmy dropped to the floor and started screaming, and Jack coughed and wiped his face. Janie got down and grabbed Jimmy and scooted protectively into a corner. Fanny ran over to them to see if they were all right. Emma got up and grabbed Jimmy out of Janie's elastic grip and said with a bit of exasperation, "Get back to

the table."

Emma sat back down with Jimmy and he immediately started grabbing food off his mother's plate. He wanted to feed himself.

Lionel viewed the eruption with cool authority and commanded Fanny "Git back to the table!" using his nose to point as if Fanny didn't know the way. He would be very strict with Fanny. She was getting spoiled by everyone. He didn't want her to turn out to be a tramp.

Jack felt guilty for eating through all this commotion. After all, that's what they were at the table for, wasn't it?

Mother Pearl was almost in tears as she said "I won't git ta see Papa ever ag'in. He's gonna up and die."

"Daddy..." started Emma.

"Now see here!" interrupted Lionel. "I just got back from Abilene picking up Fanny here, and I don't aim to go back at the moment. I have a job to do out at the air field and mouths to feed." He showed his teeth, trying to smile. "I can't just pick up and go any time you please." End of discussion.

Everyone was quiet for about five minutes and then Mother Pearl started up again. Though she was talking, her dear husband wasn't listening. He was eating, his mind off somewhere else. He had changed the subject in his own mind and would not return to it. He turned everyone off as with a switch.

"You know," Mother Pearl said, throwing out a hook for anyone that would listen, "Sis said some other things over the phone. She told me something Sally saw on here way back from school."

"What did Sally see, Mother?" asked Emma. "Sally is Aunt Sis's girl," she told Jack. "Same age as Fanny." She wiped her plate with her biscuit. "Well, Mother, what did she say?"

"Yes, please tell us," interjected Fanny who had already heard the story.

"Well, okay," Mother Pearl said as she piddled around with her food, feeling too sorry for herself to eat it. "Sis said," and she looked out from beneath her bony eyebrows to see if everyone was listening. "She said it over long distance, you know..."

"Yes, we know," said Emma and Fanny in concert as Janie climbed into Fanny's lap.

"Yes, we know," echoed Janie.

"Sis said that as Sally was walking home from school...you know that pond in that vacant lot near their house where you turn the corner? Well, Sally was walking by that pond ta git home. It was late...I guess she had ta stay after school for something. Well, she had this feeling like somebody was watching her. She said that the hairs on the back of her neck raised up. She turned slowly back toward that pond where she knew she would see something. She saw what appeared to be a man and a woman astanding on the top of that water like it was solid ground."

At the sound of someone walking on water, Lionel's eye's popped up. "What happened?" he asked.

"She ran home and got her mama. She brought Sis back but they were gone. Sis sent Sally on home, but Sis remained there. With Sally gone,

she said, to figure out if this was real or not ...because she felt something, when she lifted her eyes to look on the pond again, she saw them. She recognized them from Papa's old pictures. They were were Grandpa and Grand mama. They had come for Papa. She just knew it! I want to bring him here where they can't touch'im!"

Lionel couldn't help slipping something into the conversation to change the subject of going to Abilene. He smiled that self-interested half smile of his, putting his hand up to his chin, saying "You know, my pappy had a queer experience, heh, heh. He and another feller knew this nigger that would always walk through the grave yard to git home from work...as a short cut, you know."

Everyone stopped what they were doing and stared at this grand daddy who wouldn't talk very much except at the pulpit. They all wondered what he was up to, but they were in the mood now, and invited another ghost story.

"They had this idea. They would hide out in the grave yard and scare this nigger as he walked by. What helped set up the condition is that a fog crept up from the river. Well, when this guy come along, they raised up from behind the grave stones covered with sheets, screamen and holleren, heh, heh, and that nigger kid, heh, heh, I bet he out run any thing in that county. But that's not all. When my pappy and his friends were all together laughing at seeing that nigger turned white, one of them said `we shore scared him, didn't we?' When they got to counting, they found that there was one more of them that they had before, and by the time they got to asken where the extra had come from, that extra had disappeared. Each one of them reported of some friendly man having a hand on

his shoulder, and he had spoken to them, but when they had looked to see, there was no one there. They all high-tailed it out of that grave yard and over took that nigger, leaven him behind."

Jack had his mouth full and trying not to laugh, but not succeeding, jerked his head sideways, tried to say something, but got kicked in the shins by Emma who said, "that's not funny." She was being in sympathy with her mother.

Mother Pearl looked at him grimly and said, "You're tellen a story if I ever heard one."

"That's not all. On they way home, it still bein' foggy and all, Pappy had the mind to scare this other feller comen down the road. When he turned to his pal and asked about it, he said `what feller?' and my pappy, he turned white. He said later that it had been one of his uncles that had died recently."

Emma and Mother Pearl knew that he was just making fun of what she had said, but Fanny was enthralled. She asked, "What happed to him?"

"Oh, he just kept on walking into the fog until he couldn't be seen."

"I mean, what happened to your pappy?"

"Oh, he and his friends high-tailed it out of there and swore never to do that again." With that lesson taught, Lionel continued with his dinner, lifting his fork just barely enough to come up to his mouth, having injured his elbow in World War I.

"That was nothen," Jack retorted. "Wait till you here this one."

But no one waited.



"Well, I'll get started on the dishes," said Mother Pearl. "Guess Papa's gonna die an' I won't git to see'im." Then she started picking up the dishes, pouting.

"I'll help you, Mother," Emma said as she got up. She put little Jimmy on the floor. All he wanted to do was to play with his food. Janie hopped off Fanny's lap. She wanted to play with Jimmy.

"No one's letting Uncle Jack talk again," said Fanny matter of factly. She looked at Uncle Jack. They were both putting Jelly on their biscuits. "Uncle Jack," she addressed him intently, "You can tell me what you were going to say."

Jack ignored Fanny, and leaning back, decided to tell his story just out of spite. He was going to tell it whether anybody listened or not.

"My Granny Sinclair had an experience nobody would believe. Wasn't in any graveyard, but I suppose it should have been. It was right in her own back yard. One cold night in late October, she had to go to the outhouse really bad. She was half asleep, she told me, so she didn't notice until she got right up to them. There was a bunch of skeletons dancing around in a ring, and they invited her to dance."

"Sounds like witches to me," said Lionel, sipping the last dregs of his coffee.

"Well, it wasn't. It was just skeletons. She didn't dance with them because she would pee on herself." (With that, Emma, overhearing, grimaced at the vulgarism, and Fanny laughed.) "She said she got to the outhouse, and there she sat. She knew they were out there waiting for her, 'cause she knew she was awake. She got up and went outside and they still wanted her to dance. She didn't remember much after they grabbed her, but she knew when she woke up in her

bed she had seen them and they spoke to her. She could still hear them out there clicking their bones dancing. She would tell you herself if she were here today."

"She is here today," came Emma's voice from the kitchen.

"Well, she's only half here, even if that much."

Jack leaned back and raised his arms over the top of his head and stretched. Fanny crawled onto his lap and brought his arms down around herself. Jack felt her nice warm body and took comfort in it. He had expected some applause, but they were the only ones left at the table. Even their plates were gone. He didn't even get to finish his coffee. He grimaced.

"Gee, Uncle Jack," said Fanny, flopping her long blond curls against him, "tell me another one."

With a flash, Mother Pearl was out of the kitchen, the dishes having been done, and said to Fanny, "Don't ever say that word again. And git down off his lap! You're not a little girl any more. And he isn't your uncle."

"Well, what is he?"

"He's your brother-in-law."

Fanny hopped down, and Jack gave her a swat on the be-hind as she trotted off to find the other kids. Mother Pearl gave him a sharp look like daggers as if to say "don't you be touching my girl," and went back into the kitchen. Jack jerked his head and straightened his shoulders as if to say, "what did I do!"

Fanny found the other two in the living room playing a new game. Jimmy was waddling around chasing Janie with his mouth wide open, ready to bite with his new front teeth. He was half grunting, half laughing, trying his best to growl.

Janie was running around screaming, so Fanny joined in, both of them screaming and chasing the other two, growling, roaring and screaming until Jack came in saying, "Hold it down!"

Little Jimmy didn't know any difference with all the other growling going on, so when he saw his daddy and heard him growl, he thought he had joined in the game. As soon as Jack sat down, Jimmy went over to him, and seeing a non-moving target, sank his two sharp little teeth into his daddy's leg. Jack grabbed his son and shouted "No!" and proceeded to spank him. Janie tugged on her daddy's leg, crying, "don't hurt Jimmy, don't hurt Jimmy!" and Jimmy just howled. His world had fallen apart at the seams. He didn't know what had happened or why his daddy was hitting him. His little heart was broken. He went into shock, assumed the fetal position on the floor where Jack placed him, sucked his thumb and sobbed heavily. Fanny had disappeared into the kitchen.

"Take him upstairs and put him to bed," Jack commanded Janie.

Promptly, Janie took Jimmy upstairs, struggling with the weight of him.

Emma, upon seeing Fanny rush into the kitchen and hearing Jack growl again, went into the living room, drying her hands on the dishtowel. She had been drying the dishes.

"What's all the racket," she asked.

"The little bugger bit me!" Jack said, still in a state of surprise.

Emma laughed.

Janie could hear her mother laughing from upstairs. She pouted, puckering

up her face as angry as she could. She put Jimmy on the floor, pulled a chair over to the bassinet, put Jimmy on the chair, climbed up ,and lifted him up to her face. She stood there and smothered him with kisses. After plopping him into his bed, she petted him as he lay there sobbing.

"Don't worry, Jimmy," she said, "I love you."

Jimmy sobbed himself to sleep.

Janie left him, scooted the chair back and went to her own bedroom where she slept with Fanny. Fanny didn't come up for a long time, so Janie was able to crawl into bed and sob herself to sleep, only, she sobbed silently. No one, she thought, loves anyone around here.

Lionel had walked outside into the dark. He had a lot to think about. He loved his wife. Going back to Abilene would be a major sacrifice. He might loose his contract with the Air Force. He walked down the hill to the street and leaned against one of the elms he had planted there years ago. They were getting pretty big. Anyway, he would make sure that someone was still doing the work, even if he had to sell the contract to someone else. That would be a lose of money for sure. He might have to stay in Abilene long enough to procure another contract. On the other hand, he could just send his wife on the bus, but it would be cheaper to drive there. He could leave someone on the job to look after things while he was gone. Larry would be the man for that. But leaving the job to someone else would be irresponsible. Maybe he would just take Mama to Abilene over the weekend, pick up Papa and bring him back here. He would have to fix the upstairs room first. Maybe he could get Jack to do that. Why should he have to go in the

first place? Pearl's sis can take care of their papa just as well, and is doing that just now!

He would be traveling on the Sabbath. That's a sin. He loved his family. He shouldn't be so selfish. Family comes first, but he had to provide for his family. He found that out being a preacher. No one is going to do it for you...and if by some unforeseen event he had to stay...he couldn't make this decision on his own. He started to pray..."Oh Lord," but before he could continue, he smelled a dark figure on the other side of the tree. Had he been there all this time?

The stench of cigars and drink was on the other side of the tree. He didn't look at him, even when, out of the corner of his eye he saw the flare of a match and smelled the fresh smoke as the guy lit up again. In a half smile, he began to talk to the guy. He was one of God's sheep that needed tending to.

"Fine night to be out on a walk," Lionel said.

"Might be," replied the shadow. When he puffed on his cigar again, the red glow of it revealed his scrubby face for a second.

Lionel had met Old Man White only once when the old man had brought Jack's mother around. They had parked on the street instead of coming up the drive. He had gone down to greet them, trying to be polite and all, but when he got there, they were arguing. The old man was letting out all the cuss words he knew. The meeting had left a very bitter taste in his mouth, but he was a child of God in need of being saved. He treated him well then, and he would treat him well now.

"What brings you up this way, Mr. White?" he asked, waiting to see if Old

Man White recognized him.

"Nah I musta lost m'way," replied the old man. "I thought I knew ma way to a certain whore's ho's. You know'er name maybe."

"I think you are quite mistaken, Mr. White," Lionel stated with an air of authority. "I fear that the Devil has a great hold on you Mr. White."

"Hell! he shore does, an' what a treat! Haven't had so much fun in all my born days," he chuckled.

That response jolted Lionel, but he rejoindered with kindness, saying, "Mr. White, you must give up this wickedness. The Devil will drag you down to Hell with all this liqueur and tobacco and women. Come join us this Sunday and we can fight off that devil together."

Lionel stood there staring into the night sky, looking into Heaven for strength.

"Nah what would I git fom bein' saved, Mr. Reverend, Sir?"

"Wy, you'd get a crown in Heaven and peace...a peace you've never known before."

At this point, Lionel's heart actually ached for the man.

"What about yer daughder?" Old Man White almost whispered. "Wouldja gi'me yer daughder if I come ta church wif ye?"

Lionel turned white and then red with anger. "Emma is a married woman!" he gasped.

"Naw, not Emma, Mr. Reverend, Sir," the old man smiled, angling up his cigar and scratching his grizzled chin. "I'm thinkin' o' your whore Millie."

Lionel turned on the man and grabbed his shirt.

"That business is over with, Sir!" he said in all his glorious anger. "You had better leave well enough alone!"

Old Man White drooped. His cigar fell from his mouth. He shrugged and threw up the palms of his hands.

"Now, now," said the old man timidly, "I don't really want yer Millie, I was only teasin'. I wouldn't even bother my in-law Emma."

Lionel, disarmed at seeing such a sorrowful creature, let the devil go, but as he turned away, the devil was at his back, placing his head on Lionel's shoulder to whisper in his ear.

"Naw yer lille'un, Fanny is she? She would make a nice bed warmer. You send her over to ma ho's, an' I'll go ta church wid ye come Sundae."

Lionel stiffened. His face went white. His decision was made. He would leave for Abilene with his family in the morning.

He marched up to the house like a soldier shining like an angel of wrath. He had moved so suddenly that Old Man White toppled over to the ground as if he had been struck. Thinking he had been, he got up and ran down the street, thinking that Mr. Borden had gone in to call the police.

When he came inside, Lionel met Mother Pearl getting ready for bed.

"Mama," he said in a huff, "pack your things. We're leaving for Abilene in the morning!"

Mother Pearl just beamed. With curlers in her hair and dressed in her bathrobe, she stayed up all night with Lionel packing and putting their belongings into the back of the pick-up.

Before Jack went to bed, Lionel instructed him to build some stairs onto the south side of the house going up to Fanny's bed room and to cut a doorway into the wall there. "Close off the door that leads into the hall and use that door for the one outside," he said. They would be putting Mother Pearl's papa up there...he will be sick, so he would have to be isolated. It would be quiet back there if the children couldn't get in.

Goodbyes were said quickly the next morning. Little Jimmy wouldn't let his Nanny kiss him goodbye. He squealed like a baby pig when Mother Pearl put her arms around him, and like a greased pig, slipped right out of her arms. He would have plummeted to the ground if Emma hadn't caught him.

"Don't know what's gotten into him lately. He's become a little monster," Emma apologized.

Jimmy was sure that his Nanny was the monster that was trying to get him.

"Don't worry honey," Mother Pearl replied, "it's just a phase," and with that summing up of behavior, she kissed Emma, said "Goodbye" and got into the truck.

"Nanny! Nanny!" little Janie cried, jumping up and down, trying to reach the cab window.

Emma lifted Janie to the window, and Mother Pearl reacted with a put-on surprise, saying, "Oh! Did I for get my Jannie?"



"Yes!" squealed Janie with laughter, squinting her slanted eyes. Mother Pearl gave her a big hug and a kiss and dropped her back into Emma's arms.

Lionel hollered at Jack as he left down the drive way that he would call Mr. Hodges and apologize for not coming in Monday. He would write a letter of explanation to the Air Force, and that he (Jack) should charge all the supplies they needed at the lumberyard to his name. He would pay them when he got back.

Jack's little family stood there at the top of the hill looking like a still-life picture as the grandparents drove off toward Center Street. That would take them directly out of the valley, over the hill, up onto the Plains, through Lubbock and onto Abilene.

Jack was an expert carpenter. He and Lionel alone had raised the roof of their house so Jack and his family could live there...had built all the upstairs. Lionel was the genius, though. He had figured out how to build the roof without it being permanently attached so they could raise the roof later. Jack had learned much from Lionel as they had worked together through the years. He took pride in his work, and now, his pride was boosted higher by the trust Lionel had placed in him. He believed that he was finally getting a good father-son-in-law relationship. Of course, if Lionel had had time enough to think, he would have put Larry in charge of things. And if things didn't go right, Larry would be in charge anyway. Authority always seemed to slip onto Larry somehow. Oh well, he liked Larry.

Living under a preacher's roof had been hard. You had to be at your best, but taking orders from his father-in-law rubbed him the wrong way, especially when he was raised by a step dad that beat him and kicked him if he didn't obey.

Authority just ate at Jack's flesh. He had always had a stomach ache when he was with Lionel. Maybe now, the relationship could improve if everything went well at the job while Lionel was gone. Jack had learned to be rebellious and lazy, always fighting off his step father in imagined scenarios. Then he would blow up at Emma and the kids, trying to "instruct" Emma as well as the children on how to do things the right way. Emma would blow up at him until Lionel stepped in, controlling the situation simply by saying "that's enough!" and that would be enough to bring peace back to the house hold. At work, Lionel simply had to stare at Jack and that would be the end of that. Maybe things would change now, thought Jack. Maybe things will get better at the job and he will be proud of me.

Jimmy and Jannie couldn't figure out what their daddy was doing, but he was building something, and that made them happy. They became more active in jumping around and singing and asking questions. Their daddy was constantly shooing them away or giving them to their mommy who would then get the bombardment of questions. What was Daddy doing to Fanny's bedroom? When was Nanny and Granddaddy coming back? Why is Daddy locking himself up in Fanny's bedroom and making a lot of noise? Jimmy's questions were just two or three words like "Where Daddy?" or "Hear bang! Bang!" pointing up-stairs, but he was just as loud and jumpy as Jannie, and Emma became very sharp with him.

Neither could Emma stand Jack locking himself up in that bed room every night making noise loud enough to make her want to scream. She got to the point of screaming once after he had the door unhinged, but when Jack got the hallway door plugged up with studs and sheet rock, that took some of the noise away, and

she could calm down some. It was even nicer when he took the door and his tools outside and cleaned up the upstairs hallway.

Having their daddy working outside, the kids were sure to follow. They had to watch their daddy build the outside stairs. That gave Emma a little more relief. Whenever they were sent back inside though, she didn't stop them from going back out.

What fascinated Jimmy the most was that hole way up on the side of the house where a window used to be.

Mysteries and wonder filled the children's minds. Their daddy had built a wall upstairs at the end of the hall where Fanny's door had been and had stuck that door into the hole on the outside of the house. The window wasn't there any more. What was most remarkable was the stairs outside that went way up into the air to that new door. Later, a screen door covered up the new one and made it look dark and dirty.

Janie enjoyed climbing up the stairs and looking down on the surrounding world. There was the vacant lot next to the house, the street that went up the hill to the airport, and the little white church across the street. Then looking down the stairs, there was the street in front of the house and the little grocery store across at the corner where they bought candy. Beyond that, through the trees, she could see the cement bridge they had to cross to get to First Church, but they didn't usually attend that one (but she did go to Bible School there). They went to the one clear across town where Granddaddy sometimes preached, and where they passed to get to Granny's house.

Jimmy was too scared to go up there, so Janie had to tell him all these things. Janie wished Fannie could be up here, way up in the air, with her. Jimmy wasn't any fun to play with. There was something wrong with him. She couldn't get him to climb the stairs. Every time she forced him onto the stairs, he would just scream and run away. Then Mommy would scream at her and spank her bottom if she kept doing it, but she had to keep doing it. It just annoyed her that Jimmy wouldn't go up there...and mother's are so troublesome.

Lionel and Mother Pearl stayed in Abilene longer than anyone had expected, but it gave Jack and Emma time enough to get the upstairs bedroom ready for Papa. Jannie got to see Daddy paint the room, paint Fannie's chest-of-draws, paint her bed, put on a new mattress, and she saw Mommy put on clean sheets a new blanket and a new bedspread. She saw how grand they cleaned up the room. She even got to help take down some of the trash. Some of the trash stuck to her arms and hands. Daddy called it tape, but it wasn't clear like the kind Mommy had.

Jimmy wouldn't go up and look. Just because Daddy had covered the hole in the house with a door didn't mean it wasn't there any more. He could see it well enough when someone opened the door. It was a dark hole, a black hole. He knew it would swallow him up like a mouth if he went into it.

Jimmy had been upstairs when Nanny came back with Papa and Granddaddy. He was no longer wearing diapers, and he was a little taller. He wanted to show them his new shorts. He ran down the stairs...something he had never been able to do when they were here before. Granddaddy, he had been told, had decided to stay in Abilene for awhile and buy a house there. But the weather

was damp, so they finally decided that Roswell would be better after all for Papa who hadn't been getting better. Jimmy danced around everyone in nothing but his shorts and t-shirt, enjoying their voices once again. He had been asleep upstairs on his mommy's and daddy's bed, and had heard the familiar voices downstairs. Their voices sounded like Christmas time, but it wasn't snowing outside. He noticed that they had just arrived. Outside was their truck loaded just as before, but there was also a new black car. "Come take a look at it," Nanny said to his mother. They had been eating breakfast. The eggs and sausages smelled so good. Nanny and Mommy got up from the table, then Daddy and Granddaddy. They all strolled out the side door onto the carport followed by Jannie. Fannie was nowhere to be seen.

Something moved in the big chair. A tall white haired man with an ugly face smiled at Jimmy. The hairs on his head went straight up. His eyes rounded as he scooted backwards between the door and the screen, hypnotically looking at the man in the chair. He hung onto the doorknob for only a second more before he swung open the screen and ran outside.

Everyone passed the loaded pickup and milled around the new black dodge sedan. It looked like it was whizzing through the air just standing still. Jimmy was getting cold. He grabbed his mommy's dress, and she picked him up.

Jimmy still wouldn't go up those outside stairs especially after they moved Papa up there, yet, he would allow himself the luxury of sitting on the lower section. All day Jimmy watched everyone go up and down the stairs and in and out

of the new doorway where that black awful hole was. His granddaddy though, had to unload the truck and put things away. Sometimes he would watch him instead and help carry little things in little boxes and trail after his granddaddy. Late in the evening, he watched his Nanny take a plate of food upstairs through the black hole. He guessed it gets hungry and needed to eat.

Janie tried for days to get Jimmy to go upstairs and go through the door. She got him close to the door one time, but he ran back down. She said there was an old man up there and that he was awful looking. That scared Jimmy enough. He would not go up there. He didn't know what an old man was and he didn't want to know. But now, he knew there was an old man (what ever that was) in the black hole.

Sunday came. Jimmy could tell because Mommy put him in his new suit, and everybody else was getting all dressed up in their pretties. They would be going to Church...a long ride in the warm car, a time when they set on a bench and played with Daddy's fingers and went home again. There would be a man talking and shouting up at the front, and there would be singing. He liked that part, but it was more fun to ride in the warm car and go to sleep.

Everyone went outside, so Jimmy followed. They went up those stairs, and each one disappeared into that dark hole. It wasn't but a moment when they started coming down again. Janie came bouncing down first in her beige felt coat and her long blond curls springing about her face each time she jumped from one step to the next. Then came Mommy and Daddy with solemn faces, both wearing long camel hair coats. Mommy's coat was red, matching her red lips. She also had

on a red hat that cupped across her head from ear to ear with a net veil springing out above her face. Granddaddy followed in his dark gray suit and tie. Then came a figure of horror.

Nanny came stepping down. She seemed to be talking to Gran daddy. She wore a black coat. She looked too young. There was something frighteningly wrong with her! That was not his Nanny!

It was something stark and mean and glaringly bright. It was the black hole come to life.

Jimmy stepped back as Mother Pearl approached the bottom steps. Over come by fear, he raced back behind the black sedan. He watched the thing come nearer. Emma grabbed him saying, "Stop playing around and get into the car." Emma held Jimmy by the wrist, and he was dancing around as though she were switching him on the legs. He started crying and screaming in a broken way like skips on a scratched record that was in cadence with his dancing. "What's wrong with you! Get in the car!" She edged him into the back seat. Once he was in, he sat on Emma's lap, holding on for dear life, looking out the back window. He could not face the monster in the front seat.

Church service put Jimmy to sleep, and he slept all the way home. He woke up still dressed up on his mommy and daddy's bed.

After the fried chicken dinner, curiosity took Jimmy by surprise when everyone had gone outside and disappeared. For when he looked outside to see where everyone went to, there was nobody. The car and truck were there, so they didn't leave that way. He looked up the outside stairs at the black

hole. He had a feeling they were up there. He didn't want to be alone, so, somehow, he made it up to the black hole and looked in.

There was a yellow light from a little paper lampshade on the other side of a bed throwing a dirty orange light against the wall, the bed and the people standing around. Jannie opened the screen door and caught Jimmy by the hand.

"Come see Papa," she said as she brought him inside.

There in the bed covered by a blanket up to his neck was the old man. His face was all wrinkled with a mouth that seemed to melt across his face, and his hair was pure white, not balding like his granddaddy's. His eyes were teary and red and sagged into his sockets. His nose was small, like his mother's. He was the longest man he had ever seen, longer than Daddy, and his feet hung off the bed some distance. His feet looked too big, like his daddy's, but they were covered up. He couldn't be sure.

Jimmy felt the heavy darkness that was in the room, in the old man whom he now knew was Papa, in Nanny and in Mommy, in Daddy and Granddaddy, but not in Jannie. Somehow, it didn't get into her. She was lively and talked and talked to Papa in a cheerful way that brought a light spot into the dark room. He moved closer to Jannie and held her hand tighter.

Papa looked straight at Jimmy and tried to smile. His giant hand moved toward Jimmy to pet him on the head, but Jimmy's hair stood on end, and he let go of Jannie and ran out the door and down the stairs. Papa laughed lethargically. Next thing Jimmy knew was that he was outside lying down on the grass next to the gas meter looking up at the black hole. He never did get the courage again to



go up those stairs until Papa had been taken back to Abilene and the room was empty and white.

## CHAPTER 3

Mother Pearl, back in Abilene again, sent a letter to Emma and Jack asking them if they would please move out. The house was to be rented to a Pastor Simmons and his family. She and Lionel had met them at a conference in Abilene where it was decided that Pastor Simmons was to be sent to Roswell to preach. Mother Pearl had quickly volunteered their home in Roswell for the Simmons's since she and Lionel were not there...it being the Lord's work and all. When Emma read the letter, she was flabbergasted, that is to say, pretty angry and in shock that her own mother would throw her out of her own home! She went through the rest of the day storming through the house with the letter in her hand as though she were looking for something...looking for her mother to cry at her "How could you!"

Little Jimmy followed his mommy around for two hours until she yelled at him "Don't follow me around like a little puppy!" and he just melted onto the floor and bawled...as though he had never been yelled at in his whole existence. His mouth opened wider and wider and made the sound of a police siren. His face flowed with tears, drenching his t-shirt. Emma bent down and tried to apologize and to comfort him all the while telling him to shut up. It didn't work. She took him upstairs and put him to bed. She always put her children to bed when things didn't work out.

Jannie had watched timidly from a corner. She knew something terrible was happening. She couldn't tell what. She finally sniffed, got up and went outside to

play with her cat. What could she do anyway?

When Jack got home, Emma broke down into tears, yelling at him, telling him they had to get out, they didn't have a home anymore, and how heartless her mother was, making excuses for her daddy, that he wouldn't have done something like this. His only weakness was that he couldn't control Mother.

Jack came home expecting the usual friendly atmosphere, the good smells of dinner cooking in the kitchen, a nice wife to pat on the butt, and "pop" goes his dream bubble with Emma's jabbering and crying. He looked around. The house hadn't been cleaned. The kids hadn't been bathed. He walked into the kitchen. There was no smell of coffee. He lifted up the coffee pot lid. There was this mornings grinds in the filter. He bit his lower lip in a wide grin and rubbed the stubble on his chin. He lifted the lid of a pot on the stove...some of last night's green beans. He grinned a little more...jerked his head as if pointing with his chin and asked, "Where's dinner?"

Emma blew up. She accused him of not having sense enough to provide them with a good home. He said that it was her idea to live with her parents until they could afford one. She struck at his family and how ignorant they were and how dirty they were and how did she ever wind up being married to one of them? This started an all night quarrel.

Dinner didn't get made that night, and the children were forgotten. Jannie, already becoming timid, seeing her parents fighting again, withdrew in silence, stole a Ritz cracker from the kitchen and went to bed. She nibbled on the cracker until she fell asleep.

Jimmy woke up in the night, hearing his parents fight. He went downstairs to the kitchen and stood as a silent witness to the argument going in rounds of sobbing and chest beating, his mommy screaming and beating on his daddy. She had to make him stop being such an insensitive brute! Make him listen to her needs! All he could do was to pick, pick, pick at every little thing she did, just like his grandma Sinclair. All his criticism was driving her mad!

"Well, what's wrong with cleaning up the house and fixing dinner and taking care of the kids?" was the question that showed he didn't listen.

Jimmy pushed his Nanny's little step stool up to his parents. His Nanny used it to get things up high. He knew that if he kissed his parents, things would be okay. He would kiss them and make it better. They would love each other and love their children. He stood up on the stool. If only he could reach them...! Jimmy's plan back-fired. He fell head long into a dog and cat fight, toppling him and his parents over. Did they start beating him? He couldn't remember. All of a sudden he was upstairs shaking in deep spasms and in shock. He didn't think. He wasn't aware of anything but the deep and overwhelming surprise at the pain...more pain than he had ever experienced. He clutched his covers and stared out into the darkness. He fell into a fitful and dreamless sleep. He had been so utterly powerless to help.

Jack had now become motivated to go out and get his family a home of their own...partly because he felt guilty for having argued with his wife all night, partly because he was used to having a fist tell him what to do. Growing up with an abusing stepfather, he had learned to obey if he didn't want a fist in his face, but

that taught him also to be helpless. He couldn't do anything for himself or for others unless he was pushed, resolving the conflict. On one side, the fist in his face, that authority that he needed to be motivated and on the other side, that anger that made him rebel against that authority, making him helpless. When ever he went into Sears and no one waited on him, he would stand around not doing anything until he got angry enough to walk out. He never bought anything unless he was waited on. He couldn't. He was only lucky that at the lumberyard or at Lander's they were eager to serve. He never would hurt anyone unless pushed too far. He once in high school punched a bully in the nose right on the gym floor. That bully never bothered him again. But he normally wouldn't fight. He had enough of that growing up under the iron will of his step father, Old Man White. Therefore, to get him to do something that was not in his direct path, or to get him to go out of his way, to get him to do something against his own will or something that he hadn't planned on doing, he had to be beaten down by something...by some circumstance or by some- body to lower that threshold of stubbornness he used to guard his anger. Once that anger was reached, he could be persuaded. Emma had reached that anger last night. The anger then turned like a coin to sorrow and then to love for Emma. So, before going home from work, he had grabbed a lot and gone to the bank to purchase it with a G.I. loan. He had done it in anger, but he did it for his family. He felt angry at Emma for making him do it, but he also felt proud of himself so he wouldn't have to give Emma the credit. It felt as close to love as he could get. But he neglected to tell Emma when he got home.

\* \* \*

Old Man White was not at home. He had business in Arkansas. Granny White said that he had some sweetheart there, and he would stay there until that blows over. Having told her their situation with the Borden's, she said that of course, they could stay with her until they found them a place or until the old man came back.

Granny's place was a place of power. Little Jimmy was half asleep when they moved in, and when he woke up the next morning on a strange couch, he felt that power. He smelled oldness...old furniture, old walls, old pictures on the walls, an old clock ticking. He looked at the oval portraits staring down at him from the walls. He could feel kinship. As he sat up, a book on the coffee table caught his eye. It was the biggest book he had ever seen. He reached over and took hold of it and dragged it onto his lap. It was a little bigger than his lap. He opened it. It was filled with tiny words with a dividing line down the center of each page. It had fascinating little pictures here and there...no colors though. There weren't enough pictures, so he knew it was an important adult book. He reverently sat it back down among the clutter of papers.

Jimmy looked around. He could see no one else in the room or in the lighted doorway that led out. There was another doorway into a dark room behind the couch. That must be where the other people sleep, he thought. There were more messed up covers at the end of the couch. He could faintly remember Jannie sleeping down there and kicking him during the night.

Through the lighted doorway before him came the aroma of coffee and eggs. He got up and walked over to it. He looked around the corner to an empty but

large table...a picnic table he had seen at the park. There was the evidence of breakfast already over. He wondered where Mommy was so he could eat.

From outside came a very loud and deep horn which he recognized, having heard it before, but only at a distance or while in the car half asleep. There was a rumbling of wheels of steel. Jimmy forgot about food and rushed to find a door. It was between the dinning room and kitchen, a light shining in the darkened hallway. He darted outside to see across the street the huge cars moving down the railroad tracks. He had never known that trains shook the ground, having seen them only in cars before. It was like seeing one for the first time. He stood transfixed on the gravel drive, watching it until he saw the caboose disappear into the city.

"Jimmy!" Emma called out, running to get him.

"Mommy!" he cried. "Train!"

Emma swooped him up and swatted his bottom. "Don't you ever go out into that street!"

Jimmy covered his eyes with his tiny hands and gritted his teeth, holding back a cry. He turned the cry into "I'm hungry!"

Another sign of power was a giant red flat-bed truck they walked by that smelled of dirt and grease and alfalfa hay. Jimmy pointed to it. "Mommy! Truck!" he cried.

"Yes, yes," remarked Emma impatiently. "Let's go get you some breakfast."

This was indeed a place of power and mystery. Things here were big, loud and smelly. It filled his little head with wonder. What would show up next?

When they entered the kitchen, Granny White was there making cinnamon toast. She would cover each slice of bread with oleo, put lots of sugar on top and sprinkle a huge dose of cinnamon on it from a big cinnamon can. Putting several on a cookie sheet, she put them in the bottom of the gas oven to broil under the huge blue flames. Jimmy saw all this and smelled the big sweet buttery smell. His mouth watered. He knew he was going to like it.

Granny greeted him with her usual loud squeally voice, but this time, Jimmy wasn't so much intimidated as annoyed by it. She fit right in to the big everything, even her big bosoms. He felt a little big himself this morning. With this new confidence, he asked for "That!" as Granny pulled out the cinnamon toast from the broiler. Granny won his heart by handing him one of those toasts. She would always be known for the different ways she could make butter and bread.

Of course, Emma had to interrupt because it would be too hot for him, and as she took it, Jimmy started crying angrily and reaching for his toast. He thought she was taking it for herself, and when she finally got him into the high-chair and put it on a saucer, it was cool enough to eat. He gave her an angry glance as she handed it to him, continuing to frown at her as he ate. She and Granny just laughed.

"Pickled as a pie," laughed Granny.

Jimmy jerked around and looked at his granny. They grinned at each other.

"Likes my cinnamon toast," Granny bragged.

"Well, I know what to feed him when I don't have banana pabulum," replied Emma. "That's what he usually likes."



Emma wished and longed for a kitchen of her own. She lived at her mother's home and could never do what she wanted. Now she had to put up with Jack's mom and her ways. She would talk to Jack tonight and tell him that staying here would just not do.

Jimmy, after he ate his cinnamon toast, drank his milk and ate a bite of scrambled eggs, was being prodded by Jannie to go down that long dark hall-way. She wanted him to see the indoor garden out back, but he didn't want to go passed that door where the black hole was. There was something old and frightening in that dark room in the middle of that long dark hallway. He backed up and held onto his wooden high chair. He felt the smooth lacquered finish. It reminded him of home, and he was comforted by it.

Jannie, finding that she couldn't persuade Jimmy in that direction took him through the house in the other direction, through the dinning room, the living room and through Mommy and Daddy's bedroom, finding another front door there that led to a little yard of grass next to the highway. There, they found a small green wheel barrow that was just the right size for a little body to push. Jimmy got a lot of rides because, as Jannie found out when it came her turn to ride that Jimmy could only push against it. It wouldn't go for him, so she spotted the water sprinkler. It was ring-shaped and also painted green, but where the paint was peeling off, a shiny metal shone through, the color of water pails. Jannie got out of the wheel barrow and went to turn on the water. Jimmy, still trying to push the wheel barrow, succeeded pushing it a little, it not having a load now.

"You're too small!" shouted Jannie. She rushed over to him and pushed him down. She never got a ride!

Jimmy grabbed the nearest thing in reach to hit Jannie with. It was the sprinkler, but he didn't get very far with it. Jannie grinned, turned on the water and then laughed. Jimmy got all wet. He gasped in surprise. It was cold! He turned it on Jannie and she screamed and ran. Jimmy dropped the sprinkler and ran after her. She ran around and back through the sprinkler. Jimmy ran through too and by that time, his sense of humor came back and he laughed too.

Jimmy remembered the time when Jannie had chased him with the hose, so he picked up the sprinkler and started chasing her. She screamed in delight. Jimmy felt the greatest joy, because now it was his turn to get her all wet.

When Emma found them, they were sopping wet and shivering, but screaming and laughing. She dried them off and laid them down on the couch to get warm. It was noon, time for their lunch. What was she to do with these rascallions?

Jimmy woke up in the late afternoon. He was alone again. He looked at that fascinating book on the coffee table again. It was so unintelligible and mysterious, but he liked the little pictures. He put it down. He was hungry. He found his granny and she gave him a butter and sugar sandwich. He stared at the black hole down the dark hall-way as he sat in his high chair and ate. Granny and his mommy were talking about it.

"Is she any better today," his mommy asked.

"Naw," replied Granny. "But she's better off sleepen all the time."

Granny said "time" in one syllable like a Texan. Emma always said it in two syllables like "ti-am" like a telephone operator. She was a telephone operator when she met Jack, and her speech was marked there after.

All of Grannies family and Jack's real father's family had come from Texas. The Barrows were all tall Texans. Granny White even towered over the old man. Ma Sinclair, her mother, the one in the back bedroom that was dying, was a first generation Texan, the Sinclair having come from Mississippi when Ma Sinclair was a baby. She had outlived old Pa Sinclair by ten years. He had been a true caricature with a long white beard, bent over, walking with a cane.

Mr. Barrows, Jack's real father had died when Jack was only four years old back over in western New Mexico. He had been a half-breed Cherokee Indian and would have brought up his children in the Indian ways had it not been for his death. He used to sing old Scotch and Indian folk tunes to his children and teach them the Indian lore that his dark mother had taught him. Jack had seen his old Indian grandmother only once, and that was at his dad's funeral. He said that she was very dark, sitting with a shawl over her head, never moving from the corner.

There was a cactus bed surrounded by red caliche rock in front of the north side of the house. It extended for some twelve feet east of the front door. It's back wall stood about thre0e feet into the air. Behind it was a side walk that ran the length of the house. In line with the back wall of the cactus bed ran a white picket fence that started from the rock wall to surround the western half of the house. The rest of the fence beyond the cactus bed had not been finished by Old Man White. At the front door there was a single step and then a sidewalk that ran

through the white picket gate into the gravel drive. When little Jimmy heard a deafening rumble outside, he ran out the door, through the gate and held on with one hand to the rock wall of the cactus bed, almost losing his balance, almost falling into the bed as he looked up into the sky.

Flying right over the house on a low approach to Walker Air Force Base to the west was a B-36 bomber. It had its six props on the back of the wings. Chills reverberated up and down Jimmy's little body. It was a thing of power. It was an angel from God spreading its wings of power over him and speaking with the voice of thunder. It shook everything. Little Jimmy was awe struck. He lifted his hands to the sky. He felt one with the power. He worshiped it. He stood transfixed for a long time, staring at the airplane until it had disappeared down the horizon. Tears filled his eyes.

Bringing his hand back down to touch the wall again, Jimmy missed and touched one of the desert apples instead, receiving a shock of pain that brought him back down to earth. He turned around. The cactus leered at him menacingly. He looked at his hand and touched it gingerly. Some of the quills from the cactus were sticking out of it. He felt the meanness that was earth-bound, a power, but bad and hurting. Some kinds of power was awe-inspiring, some kinds were mean. He wondered.

Before he pulled the quills out himself, he wanted to show his mother what he had discovered. He found her and Granny and Jannie behind the house in a garden all covered with windows. It wasn't in the house, and it wasn't outside ... somewhere in between, all mysterious like. In raising his hand to his mother, he

received another shock. Instead of being treated with tenderness and interest, she became angry and grabbed his arm, almost yanking it out of the shoulder. His little heart swelled up and pushed the tears out his eyes. He started crying. She thought, because of the quills. She was saying nice words, but she had a scowl on her face, spitting the words out in anger. He wanted to give her a hug and a kiss to make her feel better, but after she had pulled out all the stickers, she stood up. All he was able to hug was her legs.

Emma stumbled and cried "Get off me! Go outside and play!" She was too busy talking to Granny about important things.

So, Jimmy looked at his hand and fingers. The stickers were gone, but they seemed to be sticking to his little heart. Jannie seemed to notice and got him interested in looking at the flowers. They had fun looking at all the beautiful things. There were bright pink hollyhocks and giant yellow chrysanthemums, red roses and purple bells and more than they had ever seen before.

Everything though, came to a halt when he saw a strange buzzy bug in one of the flowers. Jimmy reached in and grabbed it. For a split second, there was the joy of the little wings beating against his hand, but it stung him, and he let out a wail. His emotions burst open like a dam holding back too much water. He had lost his home. He had lost the love of father and mother. This new and powerful place had all of a sudden become a place of terror.

Emma looked over at Jimmy. She felt very sorry for the way she had just treated him. She took Jimmy inside, got some medicine and a bandage from Granny and sat down in a big rocking chair in the living room, letting Jimmy crawl

up onto her lap. There, she pulled out the sting and dressed the wound. Jimmy's wail had crossed a threshold in her heart, and she turned motherly again. His cry she calmed with cooing words of comfort. He cuddled against her soft breast, and she rocked him, singing softly,

"This is whaaat...little cowboys dooo...

Riding all day lonngg...atop a buck-a-rooo..."

After he went to sleep, she put him on the couch and covered him up. With the baby asleep, conversations resumed with Granny, and her mood changed again, thinking how much she wanted a house of her own.

Emma started right in on Jack as soon as he got home. She wanted a home of her own. She was already tired of living with Granny. She didn't want to be thrown out of her home again. What if Old Man White were to show up suddenly? Where were they to go? She wanted to move into a place of their own. Then Jack started edging his way into the one-sided conversation. Did she think him stupid or something? Didn't she give any consideration to his feelings or to his intelligence? He put his hand in the air when she wanted to counter attack.

"Now just slow...down," he said. "I'm one step ahead of you. I've already picked out a lot. It's over by the airport where they're putting up some new houses. It's a good place over there. You'll see."

Emma lit up like a 500 watt light bulb. "Let's go see it right now!" She jumped up and down like a little girl and threw her arms around Jack.

"First things first. I'm tired and hungry and need a bath. Where's dinner?"

Jack looked around. They were standing in the kitchenette (it was too small to be called a kitchen, really) since there was no room to stand any where else at the moment. He could see that there was no dinner fixed. Then Granny came in from her mother's room. She and Emma had been talking all day, so she felt it was her fault that there was no dinner. She spoke up.

"You two lovebirds go on, an' when ya git back, dinner'll be ready," she said in an unusually low tone. "Go on...git!" She swatted both their hips with the newspaper she carried.

"Thanks Mom," Emma called back from the door as she scooted Jack through it.

"A man should be able to rest when he comes home from work," Jack mumbled as he was gently pushed out the door.

They took his mother's black Buick. As they headed out the gravel drive, Jannie and Jimmy who had been playing near the flat bed trailer, started chasing them. Panic struck their little hearts at this desertion. Just then, the roar of a giant B-36 bomber overhead shook their senses. Chills ran down their spines, and they stopped in their tracks to look up. Everything shook. Granny stepped outdoors and called to them, not because of the bomber, but they didn't know that. They ran and grabbed hold of Granny's legs.

"Where is Mommy and Daddy going?" Jannie asked in a baby voice.

Granny White laughed. "They'll be back. They just went for a drive."

Granny hadn't felt like a mother hen since her brood was little. It had been back west a ways near the Arizona boarder. That was back in Twenty-Four when

Obee died, leaving her with  
four young'ns.

"You can see the airport from there...and the training school," Jack said after a few minutes of pouting. It took him the length of East McGaffey to where they turned up Washington Avenue to get interested or to even say anything.

North Delaware was almost deserted, and it was true that you could see the airport. It was right across the street to the west. There was a shiny D-6 just landing. But the way houses were going up on this street, Emma knew that it wouldn't be long before all you could see of the landings would be the airplanes going through the tops of the houses, so-to-speak.

"Oh, look!" said Emma pointing over the roof of the car. "You can see El Capitan from here."

Across the vast plain far into the distant horizon stood a lone blue peak, looking like the nose of Mother Earth. Other smaller mountains were evident. Last year, there had been a fire on the El Capitan. A little singed bear cub was found still alive and clinging to the charred remains of a tall pine tree. The rangers took it and cared for it, calling it Smoky.

Emma now looked at the lot and its surroundings. It thrilled her to stroll along the ground. Jack showed her "over here" and "this line there", the dimensions where her own home would be. Emma studied the lot. The kitchen would be over here...there, by the back yard...the living room there...then the bedrooms on the south. She told Jack she wanted the master bedroom to be facing the road. Family usually arrived at night and came from long distances. She



would be able to see anyone who came up to the front door.

Emma was feeling romantic thinking of her own home. She drew Jack towards her and gave him a hug and kissed his funny flat mouth. She felt his whisker stubble scratch her lips and chin. She felt the muscles in his protective arms and shoulders and the rest of him that was so masculine and huggable. She felt the stiffness in her own belly she hadn't told him about.

"What's that?" he asked, surprised.

"As if you didn't know," she chided and giggled.

"Well, rubbers don't work, do they?"

"No," and she poked him in the ribs. He jumped.

"Let's go to Millie's. I want to tell her and Larry all about the house."

"I already told Larry about the house, so Millie knows."

"I want to tell them about the baby."

"Ahhh, Honey, I'm tired. I want to go home and eat."

She poked his nose. "Tonight," and she swung around him as if he were a May pole, poking his nose, pulling his ears, poking his ribs until he laughed, intimidating him to move him over that emotional threshold, as if to say, "If you love me..." He finally consented with a frown and a mock whistle, just puckering up and blowing air.

The sky was still clear, and the air smelled clean. You could see two hundred miles across the plains, so why, Jack asked himself, didn't he feel free?

Larry and Millie occupied the Borden's old house on the west side of a hill that overlooked the Hondo River to the east. The old house was just up the hill and

east from the new house. (The hill was actually a bench, but everyone called it a hill.) Both houses were spared from the occasional flash floods that tore away other houses from their foundations. That was due to Lionel's common sense. Lionel based his common sense in Bible teachings and always sought out a home built on a firm foundation. He followed the parable about one man building his house on the sand (Lionel said that was near the river) and the man who built his house on the rock above the river. During one flood, Lionel was found singing to himself, "...and the rains came down as the floods came up, and the rains came down as the floods came up."

Both Millie and Emma were married in that old house. Lionel had married them. He wouldn't let them be married in the Church, he believing as he did that his daughters weren't clean enough for a church wedding. Millie had played the whore and Emma had been divorced from her first husband. Their marriages had been somber occasions. There weren't many friends invited, just a couple of close ones and no other family members except those that lived there in Roswell. There weren't any other Bordens and none of Larry's family, and only Jack's mother was invited from his family even though the town was filled with his relatives. What people were at either wedding were sociable enough and laughed enough, but Lionel's stone face had put a weight on each occasion.

He had wanted at least one daughter to go to college. Emma was an artist and could have gone to any one of a number of colleges to become quite professional. Millie didn't care about education, wanting only to play around and socialize, but she did attend beauty college for a couple of weeks. She could fix

women's hair and was satisfied. She could do that in her home or her patrons homes. Emma still painted pictures, but she was always interrupted and couldn't do as much.

Lionel had wanted a boy, but he wouldn't say so. Maybe, he had thought, he would be like Abraham, not getting a boy until later in life, but after Fanny came when the other girls were already grown, he gave up wishing. He still had hopes for Fanny. He would make sure that she would attend college. Not having sons, he became grateful for Jack and Larry. He treated them like sons and tried to raise them as his own. Only Jack responded to his preaching and attended Church. He gave him his home and tried to be as Christian as possible, but he let his presence be known. Jack felt that presence as he approached the old house where Larry and Millie lived and his stomach churned.

Larry, they could see, was in the back yard as they pulled up to the north side of the house. Jack never parked in front or ever went in the front door, thinking that was only for strangers.

Larry was working on his sleek new black and streamlined Buick. He was polishing it with paste wax, when, the day before, it had been as shiny as it was the day he bought it. When kidded, he would say, "An' I'm goin' ta keep 'er that way too." He treated it like a pretty lady.

"Looky yar!" Larry called out as Jack and Emma got out of the other Buick in town. Jack and Larry pointed at each other.

"Twern't mor'an hour ago," Larry said, alluding to having seen Jack on the Job.

"Yeah, I guess so. Seems longer, though," Jack said, a little embarrassed at coming over in the middle of the week.

Those two started up a conversation so Emma went in through the back screened in porch to find her sis.

"Well, Sissy," said Millie (she was right there in the kitchen), "just in time for supper." Millie's eyes showed disappointment, but her wide smile showed approval. She had a round face and a little round body to go with it. Her hair was bleached out and her lips, red.

"No," said Emma, "We're only staying a minute. The kids are at home."

"Well, I'll set down two more plates just the same...You look like you could use a break...Here, take a cup." With that, Millie handed Emma a cup of coffee, and they sat down at the table to talk. "I know Jack won't mind stayin' ta eat," Millie took a sip of her coffee and added, "and that granny of theirs can feed the children."

"Ronnie!" Millie yelled into the living room. "Tell those guys out there it's time ta eat!"

A tall and skinny five year old with a burr haircut came running through the kitchen like Dennis the Menace, stopped and said "Hi Aunt Sis!", gave her a hug and ran out the back.

"Why, Millie, he's growing so tall!"

"I know it. And he's gotten to be such a trouble," Millie said, blowing the hair off her forehead as if to cool the trouble off.

"Speaking of trouble..." Millie started to say, but looking in her sister's eyes,

a light lit up in them both.

"You're pregnant!" they said together.

"You too?" they both said and then laughed until they almost rolled onto the floor.

Larry came in the door first, rubbing his balding head. His hair was black and his skin tanned, even on top. His day old beard made him look mean. "What's this?" he said, holding the door open for Jack. "What's all tha laughta. When women laugh ta getha, they's usually laughen at they men folk."

The two women looked at their husbands and started laughing even harder.

Jack had his supper earlier than he had expected and had an enjoyable time talking of the house he was to build out on North Delaware. Emma and Millie talked about setting up nurseries, what they would get at their baby showers, and Larry orchestrated all their conversations with his own injunctions.

Larry offered to help build the new house on some evenings and on the weekends. After all, what was family for, anyhow? His truck could haul all the materials and he knew the contractors better than shy Jack did. Everything was settled over cups of coffee. They could finish the house in a couple of months if all went well.

Emma's new house would be white with yellow trim, having a new style car port instead of a messy garage, but with a storage shed at the end of it for Jack. Besides, that would be less expensive. Emma said that she had talked to Mama over the phone yesterday. She said that they would be home pretty soon. Daddy could help pour the cement for the foundation and drive.

"I thought that pastor what's-iz-name was coming to live there," Jack said indignantly.

"Look's like they'll all be living there," Millie replied.

As they were saying goodbyes, Larry blurted out, "Say Jack," he leered. "Heard yo pappy is comin' back too. Talked to a friend had business wif 'im."

"Thanks for the warning," Jack said as he slunk down into the car. Jack's food became unsettled and remained that way the rest of the night worrying about Old Man White.

When Emma and Jack returned to his mother's house, the children were asleep on the living room couch. Jack's mother was sleeping with the old woman. Everything was dark with strains of country western gliding through the house on the night breezes. There was a faint hint of cigar smoke in the air. Emma went to look on the children while Jack sneaked around to see if he could spot his old man.

Emma went into her bedroom. Jannie woke up and followed her, crawling into bed with her. Jack came back latter when Jannie had fallen asleep. "No Pap," he said. He saw Jannie and frowned, rubbed his finger over his chin and picked up his little girl. As he put her back onto the couch and tucked her in, she wrapped her arms around his neck. They kissed goodnight and he walked away. A train whistle cried out from across the street, sounding like some banshee calling for the dead. Its whine vanished into the south and into the night. All became silent.

Jimmy had gotten tired of waiting for his mommy and had fiddled with the radio setting near the window. Jannie had already gone to sleep, and so had

Granny. So he was alone and wanted the company of the radio voices. He found a mystery theater on a local station that held fast his attention. Mystery radio hours would in future years always bring him back nostalgically to his granny's home and the time when he was young. He was fast asleep by the time the show was over.

Bob Lakely had murdered someone in the railroad yard, as the story went. He had put the body on the tracks to make it look like an accident when the train hit it and so the body wouldn't be linked back to him. But old Bob had caught his foot in the track. When the train came roaring down the railroad track. He fell backwards, trying to avoid the train. His foot was cut off after having broken his leg at the knee. If it weren't for his scream, he would have bled to death. Some railroad workers found him and his friend, whom he said, didn't make it across to save him.

Old Bob was taken to the hospital where they tried to repair his leg, but it would be stiff at the knee, and he would have to walk on crutches for the rest of his life. He never did get the money he was supposed to get from his dead friend, so he couldn't get an artificial foot. He was too poor. His job situation deteriorated. He had started drinking on the job as well as off the job to get rid of his nightmares, and he was fired. He dreamed every night of a train crashing through his house and killing him.

It is said that tornadoes often sound like locomotives. According to the story, one night, while in a drunken stupor, Bob Lakely's dream became a reality. He heard this same locomotive sound coming right for his house. Even drunk, he knew he was awake. But what he saw, being drunk, was a train coming down the

tracks right into his house. The tornado hit with such ferocity that old Bob's house was busted into smithereens and Bob was carried off into oblivion.

Trains passed through the night and into little Jimmy's dreams. There was one very long train that came through the house, curved and sinewy like a snake. It's whistle, screaming away into the distance. It went through the living room and on through Granny's house, carrying him with it into the black hole somewhere down the hall.

Jimmy woke up the next morning to find everyone outside in the drive milling around a strange looking car that was white and long...a very long car with a red light on top. It was blinking. There was a door opened at the end of the car. It was the black hole. They were putting the old woman into the black hole.

Jannie noticed Jimmy standing by the door. She raced up to his side and held his hand. "It's an ambulance," she said.

Jimmy raced back into the house and down the hall to where the black hole had been. It was gone. There was just an old bed with a lamp, and everything smelled musty and old in the dim yellow light. Jimmy raced back to Jannie's side and held her hand again.

Emma spotted the kids and told them to go inside. As Jimmy went through the screen door, he heard his granny say, "...died in the night..." as she was talking to someone. The old woman was gone, leaving the odor of death in the house...musty and orangey yellow...like someone who smells sort of acidy from never taking a bath.

The little ones fled from the smell of death. They went outside through the



back, out through the greenhouse to play. They made their way around the back side of the house. It was a green lane about the size of a sidewalk bordered by a white picket fence. There was a row of elm trees on the other side of the fence that separated the house from an alfalfa field. When they reached the front yard, Jannie noticed a train standing still on its tracks across the highway. They took little notice of the white ambulance driving away.

Trains fascinated Jannie as well as Jimmy. They knew that going across the highway to visit the trains, whether they were moving or standing still, was forbidden. But going across the old Dexter highway didn't seem to be a problem for Jannie. She could dash across really fast. She would wait until there were no cars, of course, and today, she thought she would take Jimmy with her. Mommy never caught her. Mommy was too busy to see, anyway. And little Jimmy was naive. He just did whatever Jannie told him to. If she said climb up onto the flatbed truck, he would find a way.

When the children got across the highway, there was a ladder low enough for Jannie to reach. With a lot of struggling, she got Jimmy up the ladder first, and then she went up. The rocks near the ladder helped. Jannie had fun climbing all the way up the ladder to the top of the train and ran around on the roof. She went down the ladder and made her way into the interior where she saw Jimmy already playing.

Emma called out for Jimmy and Jannie. It was near lunch time now, and she had been so engrossed with the business of Grandma Sinclair that she just now noticed they were gone. Mothers are tuned into their children like

radios. They always know what they're up to, and they can generally spot the direction their children are in. Emma had a built in children finder. After they didn't answer, she looked straight at the rail car they were in. They looked like little monkeys climbing all over that rust colored car, or like white moths on a dark tree.

Emma screamed and running, called their names. Granny raced out the door, and with a woman's instinct, she knew immediately what was taking place. "Lordy!" she gasped. Emma almost got hit running across the highway. The car's horn echoed her scream as she ran up the embankment of crushed rock. She grabbed Jannie off the ladder and Jimmy out of the door of the car just as the car gave out a thunderous chug and lurched forward. It lurched forward again with a terrifying sound of thunder. The train whistle blew as Emma raced down the embankment with her heavy load. She almost fell. The train gained speed and chug-chug-chugged down the track to the south.

Jannie got really worried. She knew she was going to get a switch on her legs. She started a whinny protest. She knew that Mommy was going to grab a branch off the nearest bush and strip the leaves off of it and switch her with it. Jimmy had a frightening enlightenment as he saw the train leave. For the first time, he knew he had been in mortal danger, and his mommy had rescued him. He hugged her neck and wailed, echoing the wail of the leaving train. Emma was mad and she was crying. She had almost lost her babies. She whacked each of them on the bottom as they held onto her like little monkeys. As she whisked them across the dangerous highway, she yelled through her tears, "Don't you ever do that to me again! You hear? Don't you ever do that to me again!" They both

splashed their mommy with tears and she splashed them with tears as she kissed and hugged them.

Emma forgot to spank the kids that day, and they didn't miss it at all. In fact, Jannie thought that for once she had gotten away with something. She became ever watchful of a time when she could do it again. Jimmy had other troubles. After lunch, they went down for their regular naps, but Jimmy woke up in a cold sweat. He had dreamed that a train had crashed into the house and had taken him away from his mommy. He clutched his cover and sighed deep sobs. Emma was talking to Granny in the next room, having a cup of coffee with her when she heard the sobs. She went in to investigate. She took Jimmy up in her arms. She sighed also, remembering that she had almost lost him.

When Jack got home that evening, he found Emma sitting with Jimmy in the old rocking chair in the living room. She was tickling him, making him laugh, repeating a little rhyme.

"Jimmy lost his britches  
on the rail road tracks,  
and alonnnng came a choo-choo,  
choo choo choo,  
and split Jimmy's britches  
half in two."

Next morning came too early for Jimmy. After breakfast, he noticed that everyone except himself and Jannie were dressed for church. Sunday must have come awfully fast this time. Maybe they were going to have Sunday twice this

week. Sometimes the family went to Church in the middle of the week at night, but this was morning...and they weren't taking him and Jannie.

Someone new arrived, Jimmy observed from his high chair. There was a grown up that looked like his Dad and a girl with her. The girl looked grown up too, but he could tell she was a lot younger than grown-ups. This was too much change all of a sudden, and Jimmy's stomach started feeling sick.

Maggie was the grown-up's name, he heard someone say, and Alice was the girl's name. He heard Granny say, "...and Alice can stay with the kids."

Everyone piled into Granny's black Buick and headed down the road. Jimmy had crawled out of his high-chair, and he and Jannie were left at the door staring at Alice. She was blond and blue-eyed, having noticeably slanted eyes. She was almost as tall as Mommy and wore a blue cotton checkered dress. She was skinny with knobby knees. Somehow, to the kids, she was a giant.

Alice stared back and asked their names. Jannie answered for both of them. They went outside, and Alice sat on the cactus bed without getting hurt. That opened little Jimmy's eyes some. Alice immediately started in on story telling, and then came wheel barrow riding and visiting the calves out back, fixing sandwiches and then nap-time.

Jimmy wasn't told about funerals and never knew that any such thing ever existed until he was six years old. Such things were kept away from little children, at least on the Bordon side of the family, and Emma just went along with it. Granny went along with it by instinct, not wanting to topple over the apple cart, and so, the children weren't told. They had to find it out for themselves. Jannie

found out just from listening, and so she just assumed little Jimmy knew about it too. It was a complete mystery to Jimmy what was going on. But he accepted mysteries as just a part of life.

Aunt Maggie had come to town for the funeral, but was planning to come anyway while her husband Bob was overseas, so everyone slept there at Grannie's place. The day after the funeral, Alice walked the kids down the street to Lander's little grocery just across East McGaffey. They bought ice cream sundaes on a stick. It was their first, and it sealed their relationship to Alice for life (or at least, until Alice grew up, got married and slipped away). From then on, every time they saw Alice, they would scream her name and run and grab her skinny legs, jumping up and down, not minding her feet. Sometimes Jimmy wanted Alice all to himself, so he would hit Jannie as she approached. She would start hitting back, and poor Alice would get embarrassed and would have to calm them down, reminding them of all the good times they could have together, suggesting they all go outside and play together. The third day after the funeral, Jimmy became so aggressive that it frightened both Jannie and Alice.

That day, Jimmy and Jannie were out back where the men were doing something to the calves. Jimmy knew it was something bad. The calves had to be caught and tied up, and they were crying and yelling and moaning, while the men were laughing and joking. There were about three or four men there (Jimmy didn't know for sure) against lots of calves. There was a hot fire going, making the air hotter than it was already. Daddy and Uncle Larry would throw the calf to the ground and tie it up, while one of the other uncles would poke it with a red hot

poker which they kept in the fire. It made the air stink like burnt hair. It made the skin and hair hiss and smoke. Old Man White was there cutting out things between the legs as big and round as the scared calf's eyes, and then he threw them into the fire where they crackled and spit. There was blood on his hands, and it made Jimmy feel woozy to watch. They all laughed as they offered each of the children one of the roasted balls.

Jimmy felt faint as one was offered to him. His ears buzzed loudly as if one of those cicada bugs had crawled right inside his head. It finally dawned on him what was happening to the calves. He could only stand there and stare at the grizzly thing offered to him. Their laughter made him very angry.

Jannie and Alice each ate one of the roasted balls, and then they started laughing and taunting Jimmy, poking him between the legs, saying they were going to cut his balls out. That's when Jimmy went into a rage. He picked up the nearest thing at hand, which was a pitch fork, and lunged toward the two girls. They ran back, screaming, so he ran after them. Jack, when he saw what was going on, jumped up, and in three strides, had grabbed Jimmy, took the pitch fork from him and welted his behind with his hand. Jimmy ran away screaming with tears just raining back into his ears.

Jack threw down the pitch fork and took a deep breath, blowing out slowly as he gripped his teeth with his lips. He had hated doing that. What had gotten into that boy? The other men were all laughing, and Jack felt embarrassed. Jack had to laugh too as they told him that boys will be boys. They said that someday he would be chasing the girls with flowers and candy in his hands instead of pitch

forks and not to worry. Jack agreed.

Jimmy ran on inside the house and buried his face in the pillow on the couch, holding his little heart which was bursting. He sobbed huge dry sobs and bawled into his pillow, sobbing himself to sleep, forgetting his mortification.

Funerals were just an adult thing, just like eating dinner at the table in the dinning room, leaving the children to themselves in the kitchen. Emma never thought to tell Jack not to show the funeral pictures to the children. She thought he would just act along with the rest of the adults, but he didn't. It wasn't a tradition in his family to keep anything from the children, so Emma became very surprised that day when the pictures came back. They were all sitting around the table looking at the pictures, and after all the adults had seen them, he handed them to Jimmy. She got quit upset and took them away from him. Jimmy became bewildered and wandered away from the confusion.

Life has a way of beating down a child's resilience. No one ever thought that a simple picture could do that, but the picture of Daddy's Grandma had that effect.

After the pictures were viewed by the solemn assembly, Jack took the pictures and left for the back room. No one questioned him even though Emma thought it an odd thing to do. What he did was to find Jimmy and let him see the pictures. It was like us men have to stick together kind of thing. Jack found Jimmie in the back room where Granny White did all her sewing and washing and button making. She was an avid button maker, having several large oyster shells or clam shells with Mother of Pearl inside them and a machine that punched out holes in the shells. Jimmy was fingering one of these shells, putting his little finger through

the holes when his daddy walked in. He immediately dropped the shell back onto the desk, and, grabbing the back of his pants, backed up, waiting with his mouth open to wail. He knew a spanking was coming.

"I want to show you something," Jack said in a loving and caring tone.

Jimmy smiled with relief, quickly forgiving his daddy for the previous spanking.

Mommy was always taking pictures of people. There was Aunt Maggie and Alice by the front door. There was Jimmy sitting in his high chair. There was Alice and Granny sitting on a bench near the back door. There was Daddy's hand hugging Jimmy tight, showing him the pictures, and Jimmy being happy. There were the people at the funeral, coming out of the Church. It was the plain white one they go to every Sunday with the steeple over the south west doors.

Then there were the pictures of Jack's Grandma. Emma couldn't fit the casket into one picture, and wanting a close-up, took three pictures, all close-ups, one of the head and shoulders, one of the abdomen, showing the arms and hands, and one of the legs and feet. Everyone had laughed at seeing themselves and each other, but they had become solemn as pictures of Jack's Grandma was passed around. Jack had talked of his teenage years that he had spent with his Grandma, so when he had gone out of the room with the pictures, they thought it natural that he might want to be alone with her pictures and his memories.

Jack now thought of the fun times he had spent with his grandpa back in Dexter as he showed the pictures to Jimmy.

What Jimmy saw was three black and white photographs that were bigger



than **his** hands, but not bigger than his daddy's. The photos had white scalloped edges and felt funny as he tried to hold onto them.

"Don't touch the pictures, son, just hold the edges...like this," Jack said, as his big fingers pinched the edge of one.

Jimmy tried to copy his daddy, but the pictures didn't hold up. Jack finally got him to use both hands, and that worked.

It took a moment for Jimmy to recognized what he was looking at. He then saw an old woman lying down in a fancy lace-lined box, similar to his bassinet, except larger. He recognized that it was the old woman they had taken away in the ambulance.

"That was my grandmother," Jack said. "They called her Grandma Sinclair, or Grandma Clair."

She was the one swallowed up by the black hole. She looked like she was only sleeping, but more empty somehow. Looking at the second picture, he saw more of the body, but with arms and hands. Looking at the third picture, seeing the legs and feet, he wasn't sure anymore what he was looking at. He took the three pictures away. Jack had an anxiety attack, but seeing that Jimmy was only laying the pictures on the desk, he breathed easy. Jimmy was simply putting the pictures in order to make a complete person, like a simple puzzle, or so Jack thought. But one thing bothered Jimmy because he saw something that only a child could see. He saw that someone had cut the woman into three parts and had placed each part in a different bassinet.

Slow shock enveloped Jimmy as he came to realize what they had done. He

turned and gave his daddy a blank stare. His world was cruel. It was just like when the men were cutting things out of the baby cows. He tried not to think about it. He would have given his daddy a hug, but he forgot and just walked off to the living room to bed. He even passed his mother on the way but didn't see her or the others in the dinning room. He just blankly went to bed. It was too much for him to have someone cut up like that.

Jimmy's little mind was in a rage that even he didn't know about. He had no defense against adult cruelty unless it was to blank it out of his mind. But he couldn't blank it out of his heart. He always felt that, as he felt it now climbing onto the couch to go to bed, but he didn't understand it.

Jack got up and left the pictures on the desk, left the pictures of his Grandma just as Jimmy had arranged them. He was disappointed that Jimmy didn't seem to care. He went in and joined the others.

Next morning, Jimmy was going out through the back room and came upon the pictures. Someone had stacked them up and put them on the sewing machine lid (he couldn't understand why the sewing machine was upside down underneath the desk). He climbed up onto the sewing chair and took the pile of pictures. He separated out the three of this great grandma and again put them in order...one of the head and shoulders, one of the arms and hands and one of the legs and feet. He was very careful not to touch the tops of the pictures. Each of the three parts he saw as in his bassinet. "I guess they didn't have something big enough to put her in," he said softly.

He wanted his bassinet. He missed it. He wondered if that was his bassinet

in the pictures. Getting down out of the chair,  
he went out into the world a little more defensive, and little more frightened, and a  
little more aggressive.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Emma was happy, and she was excited. Her father had come back from Abilene again just in time to assist Jack and Larry pour the concrete for the foundation. Every time she visited the lot, something new had been added. She wondered why the plumbing had to be put in before the concrete, and then she laughed at how silly she was. She saw one wall and then another go up, then all the walls were up. They started on the roof next. The place smelled of freshly cut pine. She especially loved that smell on Jack. The smell of pine and sweat and house were all rolled into one in her mind. And there was the baby. It seemed that the baby was growing as fast as the house. This was a proud moment in her life.

Jimmy loved to visit the site too. He didn't know this was to be their future house. Even after it was finished, he didn't put the memory of the frame with that of the house. Everything to his mind was always new. All he knew when he came to the site was that it was Daddy's work. He didn't pay attention to anything above the height of his head. He saw the concrete slab and the wooden blocks that Daddy cut from the big timbers (to him they were big). The buzz saw was loud, and whenever Daddy cut another block for him, he had to cover his ears. It screamed louder than a train, and louder than the mighty plane that shook the ground at Granny's. Teeth of the buzz saw chewed through the wood so fast it scared him. He wouldn't go near the thing no matter how tempted he was to touch it. Janie touched it once and got scolded. She couldn't get him to.

Jimmy had this great feeling inside him that these were his blocks, that this

was his daddy's work, and that his daddy cut these blocks especially for him. All this building and work was for him...his daddy, his mommy, his place in life, and that everything done was for his happiness. So, when Janie tried to collect some of the blocks to play with, his whole existence was threatened. He had to protect his world, and thus, every time Janie tried to play with "his" blocks, she got "bonked" on the head. She naturally wouldn't obey him, so he could only hit her to make her obey. He had to have order in his world. So, he ordered it the best way he could, and from a gut level. He was gathering or putting together a big picture that made up his world. And if something didn't fit, he found that he could fix things by screaming, getting sick, or by biting, scratching and hitting. And when things got put in order, and he knew at a gut level that he did it, it made him feel powerful like that big airplane at Granny's that shook the ground.

Consequences of wrong doing hadn't dawned in little Jimmy's mind. Whenever he got punished with a switch for hitting Janie, he would get sick or mess in his pants, and he would wind up in his mother's lap. She would sing lullabies to him, and he would again have her all to himself. Janie would just go outside and pout.

As Aunt Maggie and Allice took up residence at Granny's, Jack, Emma and the kids were given one of Pop's shanties, the ones he had built down along the highway between Granny's place and East MacGaffey across from Lander's. Each house was a one bedroom affair covered with chicken wire and plaster and whitewashed. They were the bare essentials. None of them had a toilet, but Pop pointed out that each one was equipped with a shower, and that was more than he

had when he was growing up. The toilet was out back. The eight cabins had to share three out houses. When that was pointed out to Pop, he said, "Oh, don't worry about that. The city's bringen in some plumen any day now. Yes, any day now."

It wasn't the city that was bringing in the new plumbing. They had already laid out the sewer line two years ago when they had extended the city boundary, and Jack knew it. His old pappy was trying to get away with as little as possible, and hoping that Jack would put in the plumbing. He would have to put in a toilet for Emma, but he would get out of it if he could. He didn't want to add onto that shanty just to put in a toilet.

Jack and Pop had an argument one night in which Pop tried to badger him into putting in the plumbing of all the cabins. That argument ended several nights of Pop coming over after they had moved in and saying "Say Jack, when are ye gonna help me put in some plumen?" If he was going to put a toilet in for Emma, he couldn't work there and work on their house on Delaware, and if his old pap saw that he stopped work on his own house and put in a toilet in this one cabin, he would have him do all the cabins. Larry would be left working on that Delaware house, and he would quit. So after having told his old man, "Sorry, I don't have time right now," and "Can't today, I have ta work at the lot today," it ended in a big argument that almost went to blows.

Pop had called out, "The lot? The lot? Oh! Ye have time ta build yer own house, but when it comes to helpen yer ol' pap that raised ye! Gave ye life itself. That's whot I done. Gave ye life itself. An' what would yer mother and yer guys

had done if'n I hadn't stepped in an' helped. Why, yee'd a starved like niggers. That's whot!" And he began listing all the things that he had done for his mother and him and his brother and sister. He kept badgering Jack, calling the Borrowers names, saying that was what its like being a Borrowers. He kept at it until Jack got in his mother's car and drove away, saying, "Yea, and ya made us live like niggers!"

On the days that Jack left Emma at home to go work on the lot, Old Man White would come over and argue with Emma and yell at her, warning her that he would throw the whole lot of them out if he didn't get some respect around here, making the babies cry.

Emma became very anxious for Jack to finish the house. She would pester him every day with suggestions of how to go faster with the building. He told her she didn't know what she was talking about, and each day ended in heated arguments about any little thing. The day came that he blew his top and she started bawling, confessing that his old man was coming over every day hounding her to be nice to him or he would throw them out. When that truth came out, and he realized what all this arguing was about, Jack softened up, hugged his wife, kissed her, apologized, and felt very sorrowful. Since it was easier to cower and beat himself down, calling himself stupid, and the such, instead of confronting his pop, he started taking Emma and the kids over to her mother's on his way to the lot every evening after supper. Emma and the kids didn't mind this a bit. Emma was back home, and so were Jimmy and Janie. It had been their beginning.

Nanny's kitchen always smelled of tea and Ritz crackers. Whenever they

went over to their Nanny's, Jimmy and Janie would head for the kitchen and the Ritz crackers. Jimmy could smell them out, locating the very shelf they were on. No one could hide them from him. He would get Nanny's foot stool, carefully unfold its steps that were stored between the four legs, scoot it over to the shelf, climb up, open the door and hand the box down to Jannie. She would make sure they weren't all eaten, hand out two to Jimmy and three to her (because she was older), and put them back up, leaving the foot stool for someone else to put up.

Things between Jack and his old man came to a head when he and Larry showed up at the lot one evening and found several walls torn down and some lumber missing. Jack just walked around with his mouth open, shocked that anyone would do such a thing. He would heft a downed wall with his foot and say, "My goodness!" at one wall and "I'm gonna get somebody!" at another. He thought perhaps that kids had done this, but upon realizing the truth, he said, "Hell and tarnation!" It couldn't be anyone but his old man! It was his specialty. He had built those old shanties he was living in by stealing from other building sites...had gone to jail for it. Jack told Larry, and they immediately went to Jack's to get his grandpa's old shotgun.

Emma was home this night because Jimmy was ill with a fever, and she was overloaded with laundry and ironing. She locked the doors to keep Old Man White out, and almost didn't let her own husband in. The old man had come in earlier, threatening her, so she had shoved him out and locked the door. When she heard someone beating on the door again, she wouldn't open until she heard Jack's voice. She folded her arms as he entered, put a scowl on her face and said, "Your



good-for-nothen Pop has been here again! He raised the rent to seventy-five dollars!"

"That does it!" Jack exclaimed, slamming the closet door against the wall. He grabbed his shotgun. "He stole lumber out of our lot and tore down some of the walls!"

"Oh no, Jack!" cried Emma as she saw the gun. "What're you gonna do?"

"Looks like," Larry remarked rather coolly, scratching his noggin, "some old bird's gonna loose some feathers tonight."

"It's not loaded," Jack reassured Emma. "Even if it were, it would most likely blow up and hurt me instead of Pop. But Pop don't know that, and," and Jack grinned..."I bet it'll scare the pants off o' him."

"I'm coming with you!" declared Emma.

"No...better stay with the kids," Jack said, peering out the screen door. Looking back now at the wife would be a show of weakness.

Larry touched Emma's shoulder tenderly, saying, "Sissy, you oughtn't. Tis heah's man's business. Don't worry, I'll look aftah Jack."

Emma 's fists were up in the air. She wanted a fight. " I wish I could do something to him!"

Larry followed Jack out the door. He turned and told Emma it would be alright. They would get him for her.

Moon shine from a full west moon made the shanties shine like ghosts in the dark night. Larry and Jack with his gun looked like two specters from a graveyard drifting through the black night from a dark past. Another ghost flitted past. It was

Emma. The screen door at Granny's slammed. Emma and Granny could be heard talking. Granny's high pitched voice tore through the still air like a banshee.

"What'n tarnation's goin' on?"

Chickens scatted and cackled, cussing a long streak at Jack and Larry's boots as the two men approached the truck shed out back. It smelled of dirty oil and grease and hay. A cow moaned in the distant darkness. They opened the small door to the side and followed a light shining from some back corner. Hammer blows and the smell of pine wood told them where to find the old man. Old Man White could see two giant silhouettes lurching forward. There was the sound of a hammer banging against a wall and a shuffling of wooden studs. A back door slammed. The two silhouettes scrambled. One went out the back door, the other went around to the front and out. The old man cussed like a chicken being chased by a fox. He ran right into Larry's arms.

Jack caught up to them and slammed his accusations into the old man's face. "Where'd ya get those studs? Ya got them from our lot, didn't ya!"

"I bought that wood!" he said, struggling against Larry's hold. "Hey! What is this?"

"I say ya stold them from our lot!" Jack yelled.

"Why yee son-of-a-bitch!" And with that, Old Man White broke free of Larry who was much surprised. All of a sudden, the old man was on top of Jack with all fours going, saying, "I whupped ye when ye were a yungin, an' I'll whup ye now!"

Jack fell backwards to the ground with the old man on top of him, beating him mercilessly. The gun had been thrown into the air, and Larry caught it calmly.

He jabbed the end of the barrel into the old man's neck. He talked to the old man calmly and smoothly with his South Carolinian accent.

"Slow down ol' man afoe this heah gun takes a bite off o' you."

Old Man White turned from Jack's bleeding face and faced Larry. "Huh? Oh, that ol' gun? 'Tis most likely my old gun I gave ta Jack here. It's broke."

"Prob'ly, prob'ly not. Now back off o' him. This ol' gun can bite one way or ta otha."

Old Man White backed off Jack. Jack sat up on his elbows feeling numb. He got to his feet and wiped his bloody face with his handkerchief. The taste of blood filled his mouth. He felt all his teeth with his tongue. They were all there. Larry saw the same mean hatred in the eyes of both Jack and Old Man White.

Jack reared back with his fists, saying, "Let me hit him once!" as though he knew that Larry was in charge, and that he had to have his permission. But it was true. Larry was in charge.

Larry laughed gently, saying, "You just had yoah pride hurt. You okay? Now let's get that lumbah."

Larry turned to the old man and said, "Nah we is just gonna borrah yoah truck theah an' take ah lumbah back to tha lot."

"I won't! Ye can't!" resisted Pop White. "Yur thieves! An' die'll call the police!"

Jack butt in, saying, "Tell Larry how you built those cabins...how you made Ma steal for ya, and how you'd beat on 'er if she didn't!" He turned to Larry. "He stole most of the material ta build them..."

"...and dure not gonna stay one more night in 'em neither!" retaliated Pop.

"He went to prison for it and Ma almost lost us kids, but the police let 'er keep us."

"But them cabins..."

"Shanties! That's all they are!"

"But them cabins'er all mine now, an' you an' yours won't live another day in 'em!"

Larry butted in and led Jack away before there was another fight. He had to stick the barrel of the gun up old Pop's nose before he would give him the keys to the truck. After piling what was left of the studs onto the flatbed, they rode off in a huff and a cloud of dust.

Jimmy tasted of the grease and dust that sped by. He had seen it all. He always had this knack of being in the thick of bad things. He had left the house and gone over to watch, trying to find his parents. Jannie ran over to be with her mother. Jimmy had seen the fighting. Jannie ran from it. Jimmy stayed and saw his daddy on the ground and bleeding. He watched there in the dark ... dumbfounded. There was no outward emotion, but the inner hurt was unmeasured.

Seeing Jannie, Emma ran outside seeking Jimmy. What she saw made her scream. Jimmy was a dark silhouette in front of the two bright head lights of the truck. He had been standing there as if dumb and deaf, staring at the lights. Emma's scream had thrust her forward, and she swooped him up before the truck hit. The truck stopped for a second, and Larry called back out of its red cab.

"We'll be back directly," he said matter-of-factly, as if nothing had happened. He was doing man's work.

Latter that night after the kids had been put to bed, Emma cleaned the blood and dirt off of Jack's face. He had a black eye, his nose was swollen, and his lips were cut and swollen. He winced at each touch of the cold wet wash cloth.

"Did you punch him for me?" asked the irate wife and mother.

"Naw. He got be. Larry wouldn't...ouch!...let be bunch him. Ouch! You're hurten be. We gotta be outta this blace tobarra. Don't want to be ovah heah one bore day!"

"What do you mean? We don't have any place to go!" Emma said with the backs of her hands on her hips.

"I'll take off tobarra and look for a blace...ouch!"

"I wish our house was finished! We'll just have to live at Mama's until we can find a place."

"If I don't find a blace tobarra."

Little Jimmy lay in bed in shock. He stared up at the darkened ceiling and sobbed body shaking sobs. His daddy was hurt, and so his whole world had collapsed. He was terrified, and they had just put him to bed and never-you-mind.

Next day Jack cruised the town looking at houses for rent. Emma took down addresses and telephone numbers while the kids romped and screamed in the back seat. When they came up to Thirteenth, they drove past three rock houses. One of them was for rent. Emma yelled, "Stop here." Everyone piled out of the car. There was no telephone number on the "For Rent" sign, so Jack asked a

neighbor. In an hour, they had themselves a house. The rent was cheap. Only seventy five a month. Jack didn't like that, but it was a step up from that white ghost shanty, and he didn't have to put in a bathroom and toilet. Everyone loved the red caleche limestone that covered the house. Jimmy wouldn't be eating the plaster. They spent the rest of that day moving and cleaning up the new place.

They weren't out soon enough for Pop White. When they got back to the shanty with Lionel's truck, the old man was throwing their things out into the yard. He had broken the leg off the big cedar chest that Jack had built at Dexter High School when he lived with his Grandpa Sinclair. It had become Emma's pride and joy. Jack ran from the truck and punched the old man before he had time to say a word.

"We're gotten out right now!" Jack yelled. "Leave us alone!"

Pop White ran when he saw Lionel get out of the truck. He didn't want no fight with no preacher.

Jimmy couldn't be persuaded to enter the new house until it was dark and it was supper time. He didn't know how to tell them that it had a black hole in it. He didn't know what it was...just something dreadful. He liked the outside of the house and the prickly rock, and Jannie had persuaded him to eat the dirt around the cement foundation. She also showed him the little crawly bugs in the dirt and the little roly bugs that made themselves into a ball. Then there were the bugs that made little funnels in the dirt. Daddy had shown them to her one day. They made little funnels in the dirt and sat down underneath at the end of the funnel with their mouths wide open to catch anything that fell down there. She couldn't

persuade Jimmy to eat the bugs, but she bet he ate some accidentally when he ate the dirt.

Jimmy stayed outside as much as possible while they lived at this house. There was a scary dark thing that lived inside it. At night, he cuddled up to Jannie, never sleeping alone, something he had never done before.

Work on the new house on Delaware slowed down as Jack had to work for his mother. She had several houses on East MacGaffey which she had acquired from her mother after she died. Granny would live in one of them, the end house by the big reservoir. It had been her mother's and still had some of her mother's things in it. Emma and the kids went with Jack one Saturday to look at the house before Granny moved in. They were supposed to clean it up for her and get paid for it. Emma latched onto two china dolls she found in the old chifforobe in the back bedroom. When the kids got hold of them, one of them broke, so they wound up being given back to Granny.

Granny was giving up living with Old Man White. Now that she had land and houses of her own, she would be rid of the old man and live by herself. Of course, Maggie and her Alice would take one of the houses. All the property in Dexter had been sold, so Granny had money and rental income. Old Man White would be left to himself and his trucking.

Emma never liked being around crude and unclean people, and that meant Granny White. She didn't wear a brassiere nor a girdle, and she picked her nose. As the black sedan drove up into the gravel drive, she felt a sickness growing in the pit of her stomach. It wasn't the baby, but being pregnant magnified that

disgust she had for the woman she thought to be quite sleazy.

"You sick?" asked Jack as he stopped the car at the front gate.

"No," groaned Emma.

"You look sick."

"I'll be alright. You just go over there to work. I'll walk over there after a while. It'll do me some good."

As they kissed, Jannie groaned in her high pitched voice, said, "Oh no!" and the kids followed their mother out of the car. Jimmy and Jannie caught sight of Alice, and ran straight to her, hanging onto her skirt, jumping up and down, shouting her name, "Alice! Alice! Alice!"

"Jim! Jane!" called Jack. He hated unruly kids.

"Oh, leave them alone," said Emma as she peered back into the car. "Go on and get to your work."

Jack scowled and drove away. He would really have liked to be working on his own house instead of his mother's. That's what bothered him.

Granny stood at the front door to greet everyone. Alice, Jimmy and Jannie ran passed her as she gave off a shrill gasp.

They disappeared into the menagerie of things about the house.

As Emma approached, she screeched out, "Well, lookie who's here! That baby's about to pop out!"

"Any day now Granny," Emma said with difficulty, as she crossed the threshold.

The screen door slammed behind her. The house was hot inside and smelled



of fried potatoes and cabbage and stale grease. That made Emma gag. She knew she was going to throw up and the baby would come out her mouth.

"Got some hot coffee here in tha kitchen," Granny offered. "Do you some good."

"Thank you, Granny." Emma went into the dinning room and sat down at the big wooden table on the west side and leaned up against the wall. "I need some." She hadn't noticed the smell of the coffee. Now, she did as Granny brought it in...must be the baby, she thought. It smelled and tasted good as she sipped a little, just black.

"I guess we'll never get that house built," Emma said to Granny as she sat down opposite Emma. "Thank you," she said again, to be polite. She didn't want to be here.

"How's it comen?" Granny asked, trying to stay away from the confrontation. She needed Jack working for her right now. She knew that he couldn't work on both houses, but she needed to get out of Pop's house as soon as she could. He had become intolerable to be around. She felt guilty about taking her son away from doing for his little family, but there was no one else to turn to. Her other son simply wasn't a carpenter. What else could she do?

"Oh, the roof is going up, but there is nothing on the walls," Emma grunted her words as she tried hiding a labor pain.

"Well, they don't start the sheet rock and chicken wire until they have the roof on."

"Oh, we're not plastering the outside...(pain). We're putting up siding."

Emma almost spilt her coffee. She was really frightened of child birth. She couldn't keep the pain out of her face, nor the fear. She noticed that Granny just sat there and stared at her.

"How far apart are they, girl?"

"Are what?" Emma groaned.

"You know, the labor pains."

"Oh, do they show?"

"Like lightnen, girl, like lightnen."

"Oh...(pain)...every now and then," Emma said, putting her cup down. She trembled as she held her side.

"Honey, that's mor'n ever now and then."

Granny leaned over as though Emma couldn't hear her already loud voice. "Does Jack know?"

"No. I haven't told him. I'll be alright. I can wait until he's finished."

"I think we'd better tell him now, girl!"

"I don't want to tell him."

"Don't want to?"

"We can't afford it!" Emma cried bitterly.

Granny got up and went around the table to help Emma to her feet.

"No Granny! I don't want it to come right now!"

Granny grabbed her arm but didn't lift.

"Honey, that baby's comen whether you want it to or not."

"I don't want to go to the hospital!" Emma shouted. She wasn't half as

scarred of the doctor bill as she was of the pain she expected. She was in labor so long with Jimmy that they had to put her out. She didn't want to face unending pain again.

Jack had come back to see if he could find a longer plain for the doors at his grandma's old house. When he the heard yelling and shouting, he knew it wasn't the kids. He ran over to the house expecting to stop a fight between his mother and

Emma. As he barged in, Granny yelled, "She's in labor an' she doesn't want to go to the hospital. We c'n have it right here!"

"No, we'll take'er over to Dr. Bradley," Jack responded rather calmly. "That's where we planned it...Mom, you phone'im, and I'll take her. Take care o' the kids."

He went to help Emma up. She started beating him with her fists, crying, "I don't want to have this child! I don't want to have this child!"

Jack grabbed her up and held her close so that she could only beat on his back. She screamed as a labor pain seized her.

Jack placed her in the back seat so she could lie down. He left in a cloud of dust.

No one saw Allice holding the children who were sobbing. They didn't understand and thought that Granny and Daddy were hurting Mommy. Allice tried to explain that they were only trying to help.

"Your Daddy is taking your mommy to the doctor so she can get better," Allice cooed.

"Mommy's going to get better, isn't she?" sobbed Jannie.

Emma's marriage had been one long pregnancy with three miscarriages

already. When she first got pregnant, she thought it would be fun. But when the pain came, and the miscarriages came, she learned to be terrified of giving birth. Facing Dr. Bradley now, she was scarred stiff. She wouldn't let go and let the baby come out by itself. Dr. Bradley had to give her a shot in the arm to relax her. But that made the delivery harder, and she screamed anyway. Now, she wouldn't push, and Dr. Bradley, the nurse and Jack had to push for her, pressing down on her stomach in pulses, on the doctor's command, and when the baby came out, the little girl had a tough time breathing. She was as drugged up as her mother. Doctor Bradley smiled proudly after having spanked the baby and given it to the mother. This one, she could keep.

Mother Pearl came by after having received word from Granny White. She wouldn't go in to see her, though. She sat out in the hall on a bench, asking questions of whoever passed by. She was like her daughter and couldn't face birthing. After it was all over, she and Jack talked awhile, and then she left. Lionel was home listening to a ball game, saving a seat for her on the sofa.

Jimmy and Jannie spent the night at Granny's, sleeping on their usual couch, except, this time, they slept cuddling each other for comfort. Mommy was sick, and they were afraid. They had heard whispers about Mommy and how bad it was going to be at the doctor's. Janie was afraid that she wouldn't get to see her mommy any more, and Jimmy was afraid that the doctor would cut her up into three pieces and put her in three separate caskets just like they did to his daddy's grandma. Alice had put them down to bed, but she hadn't stayed to comfort them. No one came to comfort them. They sobbed in their sleep in each other's arms.

Early in the morning, Jimmy and Janie were half aware of being taken out to the car. They were also half aware of Mommy holding a little baby. It was dark and cold inside the car, so they cuddled up to each other, laying on the back seat, holding each other in an embrace. Daddy had put his coat over them, and that was nice. It was almost like having his arms around them. When they got home, Jack carried the little sleepy heads into the house, having first to shoo away a large black lab that had parked itself on their front step. Emma dragged herself and the new baby into the house, went straight into the bedroom and crawled under the covers very gently, still holding onto the baby. Jack came in and took the baby, opened the bottom of the chest-of-drawers, put his pillow in the drawer and put the baby on his pillow.

For Jimmy and Janie, the night had been one single dream. Waking up as the sun lit upon their cherubic faces, they set up in bed and looked at each other in surprise with their eyebrows raised. Had it really been a dream? They felt that something new was in the house. They jumped out of bed to go and find it, whatever it was. It felt like Christmas morning with the expectation of great surprises.

Janie found it first, but Jimmy was right behind her. After looking in the living room and kitchen and noticing that Daddy had had breakfast and was gone, they went into Mommy and Daddy's bedroom. Janie's mouth dropped open as she saw her mother propped up on pillows with a baby sucking on her big ninny.

"Bay-bee!" she exclaimed, mocking a one-year-old, putting her hands to her cheeks.

Jimmy copied her in mock surprise.

"Her name is Mary Lee," said Emma smiling.

"Oh boy!" cried Janie, "A baby sister! Yea!"

"Shhh!" shushed the mother.

Jimmy copied Janie, and they both jumped up and down, hopping into the living room. They looked at each other again in surprise, for that's not all they remembered. They realized that there had been a dog outside last night! They raced for the front door and had to push ever so hard to get the screen door open, as there was a big black dog in front of it. He was forced to move and stand up. Facing the children as they fell out of the front door on top of each other, he received lots of hugging and kisses and petting plus some slapping from Jimmy. He stood there, taking it all in with his large pink tongue hanging out of the side of his mouth, panting rather hard and wagging his long black tail lazily. Janie called him Blacky.

They had lots of fun with Blacky, chasing him and being chased, throwing sticks for him, and always giving him lots of loving, but when they went to ride him, he always sat down.

As lunch time came around, they wanted to feed Blacky. Mommy wouldn't let them give it milk, and bread being the only thing they had, she let Janie give him some bread. Blacky ate so fast that Janie wound up feeding him the whole loaf before Emma could stop her. Emma set out a pie pan of water for him which he also devoured. After that, everyone had fun feeding him a few stale biscuits. Emma remembered she had stored some from last weekend in a large bowl she kept in the cupboard. She would toss them into the air, and he would jump really

high to grab them.

Jannie asked if they could keep Blacky, but Emma said Daddy would have to find the owner and give him back. Not having a collar, they didn't know if the dog had had its shots. He could be sick. She explained this to Jannie, but Jannie insisted that it was her dog because she had named him. Emma simply said "We'll see when Daddy gets home."

Blacky stayed about a week before the owner showed up. Jack had asked around the neighborhood, taken the dog outside the city, but he couldn't get rid of the dang dog. Darkness came early the day that man showed up. Jack had come home late, the man had called over the phone. Clouds covered the sky. It was snow clouds. There was a bitter chill that took the place of the sunlight. The children wouldn't come in to play, so they had to wear their heavy coats and hats. They were out playing when Daddy drove up into the driveway. They yelled and screamed and jumped up and down in the bright beams of the headlights. When he stepped out of the sedan, they ran and grabbed hold of his legs, yelling, "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!" Jack was trying to make it to the front door with two little kids riding on his legs, joking with them and petting the dog when the dog jerked away and barked friendly like...one bark, wagged its tail and whined a long wanting whine. The dark sky turned blacker. A thick shadow moved over each figure and covered each heart in turn. They could feel the shadow inside themselves. Jack grabbed his children on instinct. Blacky moved away towards a tall man wearing a heavy overcoat. His face was hidden by his hat brim.

Jimmy and Jannie froze in terror. Jack became shy as the man talked to him.

Jimmy watched. The man had no face. He was the black hole that Jimmy felt was inside their house. He felt the connection between the man, the house, and the dog. Jannie cried out as the man attached a collar and leash to Blacky's neck. "He's taking Blacky! He's taking Blacky!" Jack had to hold her back. Blacky looked at the kids and said "Goodbye" with one bark, turned away and walked down the street with his master.

"It's his dog, Jane. It's name is Inferno. They used to live here. The dog is old. He ran off. He ran to his old home. He just forgot, that's all," Jack said with all the love in his heart, responding to the queer feeling from that man.

It wasn't enough for Jannie. She ran into the house and told her mommy that Daddy had given her dog away. Jimmy just stared into the night. Jack had to swoop him up and carry him away from the darkness. "Come on, Sonny," he said. Jimmy looked into his daddy's eyes. There was light there.

Jack, nor anyone else who had seen the man couldn't shake off a queer feeling of darkness and sadness. Supper seemed to be a solemn occasion that night. Jack had shrugged his shoulders at those feelings, throwing it off to his imagination. Everyone else was quiet for the evening. Jack read the papers. Jannie played quietly in a corner with paper dolls. Emma ironed.

Jimmy didn't sleep well that night. He kept dreaming of the man without a face. His face was just a black hole. He kept putting a collar and leash on Jimmy instead of the dog, leading him away from his family. He would stand there by his daddy watching the man put the collar on himself that was a separate Jimmy. His other self beat on his daddy because he just stood there and wouldn't do anything



to save the Jimmy that was being taken away. He had this dream several nights in a row. He grew irritable and wouldn't play with Jannie or be around his mommy. She was too busy with the baby to pay attention to him. Finally, the dream drove him to be sick. He wouldn't eat. He only cried. And Mommy put the baby down and picked him up and rocked him and sang to him. He felt a lot better then, but he was still mad at her for having a baby. That was his darkness and his sadness.

## Chapter 5

Snow came and stayed. It wasn't a hard blizzard, but it was continuous, and it was hard on the building trade. Jack got laid off. He would look in other cities. He couldn't look in Tucumcari or Hobbs, the snow there was just as bad. Portales was okay, but there wasn't any work there. He would have gone to Amarillo, but Lionel sent him to Lubbock to work on a church school. He would be building cabinets inside the apartments and doing finishing work. Lionel would call ahead. He knew the contractor.

Worried about losing their new house on Delaware, Jack was able to borrow some money from his mother. She was receiving lots of rent money now. She said that she owed it to him anyway for working on all those houses on East McGaffey. She also gave him a month's rent on the rock house. If things came to worse, she said that they could always move into one of Pop's old shanties again. It wouldn't be bad for a short time, but Emma rejected the idea by almost throwing up. She had a good home now and a better one in the making. That house on Delaware was her whole life and future and hopes and dreams. She couldn't lose that, and she was very grateful to Granny, but she wouldn't go back to that shantie.

Emma didn't want to live like trash like Granny. Her father had been educated in a college, and the whole family was brought up with good Christian manners, unlike Granny and her family. Granny was just a country hick...but, she was a good woman. After all, she was very charitable. She had just been beaten down by a hard life, especially while living with Old Man White. Emma would have

her own home in a good neighborhood, her own good furniture that wouldn't smell like Granny's, and she would never have to be embarrassed whenever company came over.

Jack was having to work sixteen hours a day, and come home only on Sunday's for a short visit, but Emma was glad he was working those long hours for the money's sake. But week after week of not having him home made her quite lonesome. Since Jack had taken her daddy's old truck, she got to drive Granny's car. So, one Saturday morning, she piled the kids all into the car and went off to visit Jack. It wouldn't be long, and she had some of Jack's money, so she did it. The children were happy when they found out. They made their usual HURRAHs, and they were off. The baby would be no problem. Emma fixed a pallet down on the floor of the car on the passenger's side where the baby slept most of the way. If need be, she could nurse and drive. She'd done it before.

Taking the eastern highway out of Roswell, they climbed up Comanche Hill. It was long and steep. It was the first time Jimmy and Jannie had seen it.

"This is Comanche Hill," Emma announced to her two little twits who couldn't keep still.

They oohed and awed and commented on how big it was and how awful it would be if they fell off. As they came to the top of the hill, they saw a tall radio tower to the right with a little building at the bottom of it.

"What's that!" asked Jannie with Jimmy repeating.

"That's the new Channel Eight television station," Emma responded, pointing out the window.

The kids responded with "Ooohh," as if they understood.

"It's taken the place of you're daddy's cousin's gas station. Used to be there. But we'll find another up the road."

"Ooohh," they pretended.

Their little minds caught onto the sights out the windows with deep gullies giving way to open plains and other hills in the distance. Emma explained that Comanche Hill wasn't really a hill, but just the western slope of the Great Plains where a river valley ran through it. They didn't understand that either, but they had lots of interesting things to look at. Mostly cactus.

Down the road, Emma spotted a filling station that was still in business. It was just beyond Bottomless Lakes State Park which she had to yell out to the kids as they passed the entrance. As she pulled into the station, she was still thinking of the time she and Jack went skinny dipping under the stars in one of the "ink wells" at the park before the children came. It had been a magical moment. That's why the children came.

The station was white stucco with a metal roof over-hang where the pumps were. They were the old round pumps. Someone came out of a green screen door. Emma noticed the pop machine next to the door. It was a short metal ice box with a lid on top. She knew that inside that box she would find cold wet bottles of soda pop bathing in ice. The man that had come out of the building was now at her window asking, "Filler up?"

"Yes, please, with ethyl," she said.

Jimmy and Jannie were already out and looking into the pop machine. They

had seen one at the store across the street from Nanny's and at Lander's down from Granny's. They were fascinated at the rows and rows of soda pop all lined up so neatly, hanging from their racks down into the ice slosh. They were trying to get one beyond the metal gate when Emma joined them.

"Won't come out," grunted Jannie.

"Well, you gotta put a nickel in, Sissy," Emma replied. "Move away. Let me put the nickel in."

She put the nickel in the slot by the gate while Jannie was poking her hand in saying, "Let me do it! Let me do it!" Emma took the bottle out, opened it on the front of the box and gave it to Jannie. "You share with Jimmy there."

"Mm...mmm," Jannie said, sucking on the bottle while lifting it into the air. It had a berry flavor. She took the bottle and carefully tried to pour some into Jimmy's mouth. She hurt his teeth, but he ignored that and sucked down cool heaven.

Emma pulled out a Coke for herself.

They all went around the building and went potty and then went back and piled into the car. The man came back to the window after having washed the front and back windows.

"Check yer oil?" he asked.

"No," said Emma.

"That'll be \$3.50 then."

"That's a little high, isn't it?" she asked under her breath, giving him a five.

He gave her the change with "Thank you Ma'am, and come again."

Before they got to Lubbock, Jannie and Jimmy had to have a nap, each taking turns at using each other's bumpuss or stomach as a pillow. They ate egg salad sandwiches after that, Emma serving and driving at the same time. She nursed Mary for a long while. The truckers that passed honked.

Jack was surprised to see his little family when they drove up. He was a little upset at the interruption, but he didn't show it. What would his boss think? He had been fired for lesser things, like telling the boss he had made a mistake. He was always sensitive about bosses. He didn't like anyone to boss him in the first place, thinking himself an equal. He had one talent that Emma admired. He could control his thoughts to such a degree that he could fit in well with any work gang, church group or family group. She knew that her marriage was always safe when he was around beautiful women. Now that his children were running towards him shouting "Daddy! Daddy!" he didn't like it, but he didn't show it. Emma smiled really big, holding Mary in her arms. He stuck out his tongue at them.

Emma and Jack talked awhile. Jack went ahead and took his lunch break. Emma told Jack how much she missed him, and he played with the baby while he ate.

Jannie and Jimmy were all over the place, exploring all the rooms, the wooden blocks to be played with, the tools, except for the power saw. They were afraid to get cut. They smelled the fresh pine smell and the chalk from the gypsum boards on the new walls. When they needed to go to the bathroom, they found an old dirty toilet that didn't work. There was no water, but there was a roll of toilet paper. Daddy had to fill up a bucket of water from a hose and pour it down the

toilet every time they went. They were so amazed that Daddy could make a broken toilet work, but he told them that it wasn't broken; it just wasn't hooked up yet. And they gave him one of their Ooooh's. Jimmy started pouring several buckets of water down the toilet, but it didn't work too well. He could only lift a coffee can that was nearby that smelled like pea.

The children had just started playing with the wooden blocks when lunch break was over. Emma called them back to the car, but they had to give Daddy a big hug goodbye first. She wanted to get home before dark. Jimmy wanted to pour more water down the toilet, so Emma had to chase him all over the building. She caught up to him as he jumped into the back seat of the car.

They were off again, going down the lonesome highway. Everything was flat out there.

Night came too fast and the drone of the car put the children to sleep on the back seat. Jimmy was awakened by the feeling of going up and up and up. Were they on Comanche Hill again? He looked up out of the window. He could barely see, but he knew that it was some kind of hill, but the surroundings were different. There were big pieces of metal sticking up like braids, and they were climbing very steeply, more so than they had on Comanche Hill. He hadn't remembered this part of the road. The car was pointing straight into the air, he thought. He was scared it would topple over. He sat in the corner of the back seat with his fingers in his mouth, wrinkled up his face and started to whimper. Jannie was leaning onto the front seat. She turned around and said, as if it were nothing, "Oh, we're just going over a bridge. Nothing to be scared about." She was having a thrill.

Suddenly, the car coughed, stalled, and started sliding backwards. Jimmy gave out a startled scream. Jannie screamed too. Emma's nerves collapsed. She melted inside and thought, Oh, my babies!

"Oh God! Oh God!" she cried out. "Help me not to have a wreck!"

"Mommy! Mommy!" Jannie cried, and Jimmy just cried. Mary was sound asleep.

Bright lights appeared behind them...blinding lights, and the car was caught by something big and heavy. The car was let down to a level place. A strange man appeared at the window, masked by the blinding light.

"Everyone okay in here?" he asked, peering into the open window.

"Yes, yes, thank you," answered Emma. "I must have run out of gas."

"Your car should start now, Ma'am. Be careful going over metal bridges."

With that, the strange man was gone and so were the lights. They were left alone to wonder what had happened.

"What was that Mommy?" asked Jannie. "Who was that man?"

"I don't know, Jane...an answer to prayer."

Emma started up the car. She looked at the fuel gauge. No, she hadn't run out of gas. The car went okay across the bridge. The rest of the trip home was unnoteworthy except for the sky full of stars. There was a falling star, and it didn't seem to fall right. It was slanted somehow, but she soon forgot it. The kids were fast asleep when she reached home.

It was the darkest part of the night when Jimmy got up to go to the bathroom. He stood in the hallway by the bathroom looking into the black pit that



was his mommy's bedroom. He stood there terrified, his little body stiff, all his hairs standing on end, his eyes open wide, staring into the blackness. There was a stranger in bed with his mommy. Daddy was gone, so it was a stranger. He couldn't see, but he knew. He stood there for such a long time, frozen in fear, that he wet his shorts. The warm liquid running down his legs woke him up. At the same time, a black figure in the black pit moved, and Jimmy ran into his room and hid under his covers. He screamed, but no sound came.

Dreams came. He was in the car. It was pointed straight up into the sky, climbing up the pavement that fled from the earth. The pavement looped around. No one ever fell, but it was sheer, freezing terror. He dreamed of wetting his diaper. The warmth of it was comforting. But it had been his bed. In the morning, it was wet and cold, and he woke up in a terrible mood, hating the morning, hating the bed. He took off his clothes and crawled into a corner and whimpered.

Jannie got up and said, "Aw, you wet the bed!"  
She went and told on him.

Jimmy thought Mommy would never come. He had stopped crying a long time ago by the time he saw her. She came into the living room bare breasted. He could see her from his room. He watched her put on her brazier. He felt a longing as he stared at her naked breasts. He felt as though she had stolen something from him. Her ninnies, as everyone called them, were never there anymore to comfort him. She always gave them to that baby. He hated that baby! There had been times when Mommy would let him sit in her lap, and he would lay his head on her ninnies with half-forgotten memories of being a baby, and she would

comfort him, but not any more...not since that baby came!

When Emma came into the bedroom and smelled the urine, she said, "What on Earth!"

Jannie also knew there had been someone in the night. She was running around from room to room saying, "Where's Daddy? Where's Daddy?" She finally went to her mommy and asked "Where's Daddy?" pulling on her mother's skirts.

"He's at work," she responded with some irritation.

Emma went into the bathroom and ran bath-water for Jimmy. She put him in the bath and washed him up before the tub was ready. Jannie was taking off her clothes. Emma made her put them back on.

"I want a bath!" Jannie cried. "I want to be clean too!" She stuck out her bottom lip and folded her arms, mocking her mother.

"Later!" Emma said. She almost swung at Jannie, but stopped herself short.

"I want breakfast!" Jannie said, stomping out of the bathroom, bottom lip forward.

While Emma was drying and dressing Jimmy, she could hear the noises of plates and pans and dishes being banged around in the kitchen. Her anger was rising like red mercury in a thermometer. When she went into the kitchen, there was a sudden crash to the floor of her best mixing bowl. It was yellow, made of white glass, and now it was scattered all over the floor with flour and wet dough on the floor, on the table and sink counter and all over Jannie and her clean dress.

"I just ironed that dress last night!" cried Emma. "Sally Jane!" Emma screamed as she swung at Jannie to hit her behind, but Jannie twisted around

somehow and caught her mommy's hand right in the face!

Jannie screamed and ran through the house and out the door to hide. Emma ran after her. She never made it beyond the front step. She yelled "Jannie," and then she sat down on the step and bawled like a baby.

Jimmy stood behind the screen door not knowing what to do. Jannie ducked out from behind a bush and approached her mommy carefully, ducking down just in case. She sat down beside her mommy and stroked her back.

"I'm sorry Mommy," Jannie half sobbed with her lips sticking out.

"Oh, Jannie," her mother sobbed, grabbing her. "It's not you, it's not you. I've done wrong! I've done wrong! Oh! How I wish your Daddy were here!"

Jimmy didn't understand. He also wished his daddy were here.

## CHAPTER SIX

Daddy had come home to stay, and it was Christmas time. It was the first real Christmas for Jimmy. He was too young to remember any other. Magical things began to happen. Mommy and Daddy put up a Christmas tree with big colored lights hanging around it. It was covered with pretty balls and sparkley tinsel and other little pretty things. Mommy and Daddy popped popcorn on the stove using a stainless steel skillet, shaking it back and forth with one hand and holding the lid with the other hand. It smelled so wonderfully delicious. They gave Jimmy and Jannie some, but they strung most of it on long strings and tied them together and hung them on the Christmas tree. Jannie helped, but Jimmy just stood by and watched the goings on with awe. All of this was familiar to him. He remembered the smell of pine, of apples and oranges and the sweet hard candy and the taste of the colored lights.

The popcorn strings reminded him of Nanny somehow. All of this, and yet, it was all new to him, and he was excited.

Jimmy picked up a stray cone-shaped red colored light bulb and stuck it in his mouth, but Mommy came and took it away. That's what he used to do with those lights. He could also remember the taste of what's inside the sockets. He stuck out his tongue and held it with his thumb and forefinger.

It was a time of expectation. He could feel it in the air. Something magical was going to happen. Jannie kept asking for dolls and make-up and a tricycle for Christmas, and little play sets, whatever that was. And what was the tricycle?

Mommy and Daddy were also talking of the things they wanted for Christmas. What did they want them for Christmas for? Why not just want them?

Mommy was busy all the time, making cakes and cookies she wouldn't let them have. She stored them away and said they were for Christmas! What was this Christmas? He guessed it was an adult thing, and children couldn't have any, and it made him sad.

One night, when it was all snowy and frosty cold outside, everyone piled into Granny's car and drove down town. There was a light snow falling. When Daddy parked the car on a side street, everyone got out. A snowflake landed on Jimmy's nose. It was like ice. He stuck his tongue out and tried to catch a few more snowflakes, but Mommy pulled him along, making him walk too fast. It was difficult to catch one while walking too fast. Mommy was saying, "Come along."

There were bright and big green tinsel wrappings around the light poles with big Christmas lights in the shapes of candy canes, Christmas trees and Santa Claus faces hanging down from them. Jimmy didn't know who Santa Claus was, but Jannie had shown him his picture several times, and he knew he had tiny deer that flew down into the town of His-toe-ry from a song on the radio. Jimmy looked again and he could see the strings of tinsel running high in the air across the street from pole to pole. They had big colored lights in them too, glowing like bright colored stars.

There was a surprise in the store windows. As they walked along Main Street, they looked in the brightly lit windows and saw the funniest things. Little dolls in some windows and big dolls in others all singing the songs that Jimmy

remembered are sung only once each year. There were dolls swaying to the music with their mouths as dark ovals singing Christmas carols. There were little elves making toys in Santa's workshop singing Christmas carols. There were carolers riding in a one-horse-open-sleigh, and there were carolers around the Christmas tree. There was a big Santa Claus saying "Ho Ho Ho," and then Jimmy saw a little baby surrounded by animals and a Mommy and a Daddy with hay all over the floor. Mommy said it was Baby Jesus. He had seen Baby Jesus in the pictures at Sunday School. The whole effect of this little walk was to make Jimmy feel like he was floating as in a dream. He felt wonderful and warm inside.

Everyone piled into the car again and went down Main Street. The sounds of "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" and "Jingle Bells" followed them down the street. They came to a dome shaped building with lights all over it. Some were colored, some were white. Jannie cried out, "Mommy! What is that?" "The courthouse, dear," she responded. Looking out the window, Jimmy was amazed at all the magic. As they sped home in the dark, he got glances of other lights around town and saw Christmas trees shining from people's windows. There was a haunting song he had heard that echoed in his mind: "Silent night...Holy night. All is calm. All is bright." And there was the snow that lay a soft blanket on the city, putting little Jimmy to sleep in the cozy warm car.

That night ran into the next night as if it were one day. It was Sunday, and they were at Church. Everyone was singing Christmas carols like in the shop windows. Jimmy liked "Away in a Manger, no crib for his bed," and "Silent Night, Holy Night."

Little Jimmy felt somehow that he was near the baby Jesus, and he was looking down upon the smiling baby. He felt such a warm light inside himself from the baby. Then he found himself in the car bumping across a railroad track. Car lights and street lamps flashed into the car and put little Jimmy to sleep. The next thing he knew, he woke in bed to the smell of apples and oranges and the fruit flavors of ribbon candy. This must be Christmas, he thought. The magic was here in his own home.

Jimmy crawled out of the bed slowly and approached the door. He could see into the living room. It was filled with the lights of the Christmas tree and the smell of pine. Underneath the Christmas tree was more magic. They had appeared by themselves overnight...shiny silvery and red and green packages with bright red and gold ribbons. And right before his vision sat two brightly painted red and white tricycles. One was big and one was his size.

Into his vision of wonder jumped Jannie, jumping up and down and screaming, "That's mine! That's mine! That's mine!" and laughing.

Mommy walked in wearing just her bathrobe, carrying Mary. Daddy walked in behind her with just his pants on, showing all his he-man muscles. His feet were big and naked like always. They were proud of this Christmas, even though Larry and Millie had a lot to do with it.

Everyone tore into the presents like little savages. Paper was still scattered everywhere after they had eaten breakfast, and Jimmy and Jannie were riding their tricycles over the whole area, bumping into each other. Emma was raising her voice some to get them to stop or slow down when Larry and Millie walked

through the door. Jack was calmly reading the newspaper. He looked up, smiled and pointed at Larry. The tricyclers zoomed out the door.

While Emma and Millie were hugging and kissing and chatting, trailing off into the kitchen, Jack and Larry talked about their cars and work. Emma and Millie came back and loaded Jack's and Larry's arms with Christmas goodies that had been fermenting in the kitchen for several days. Jack joked with the "Ho-Ho-Ho's" while he set everything down and put his coat on. Emma had to rescue the children from the cold and put their coats on them. Even Mary had wandered out into the snow. She was turning quite blue.

Emma had glanced at the shiny black car. It was different. She thought that perhaps it was Millie's Christmas present. She opened the door to the back seat and got the children in, and the others came out of the house all loaded up with the cakes and candies and cookies. Millie gave Emma her coat, and just as she was about to get in the back seat, Larry handed her the car keys, saying, "Here's the keys Sissy. You drive."

Emma looked around. Granny's car was gone. Larry only bought Buicks like her mother-in-law. This was a Chevy. Her dad's truck wasn't here.

"Oh!" Emma's mouth went round like one of those choir dolls in the store windows. She clasped her hands really tight. There was a moment of gut enlightenment inside that red coat of hers. No one could keep a secret from her. "It's mine! It's mine!" she screamed. She jumped onto Jack smothering him with kisses. He said, "Go kiss Larry. He had a hand in it." She charged at Larry, screaming his name. Larry put up his arms in a cross and ducked his head. Millie



gave a hearty laugh. The children knew. They were jumping up and down in the back seat.

Emma was proud to be driving her own car into her daddy's drive-way. The car wasn't new, but it was bright and shiny and clean inside. Everyone had to come out and see it. Emma enjoyed the ooohs and awhs. She had to keep Fannie from bouncing on the seats and honking the horn. She enjoyed her daddy's smiling face as he inspected everything in the car and under the hood. All the men had to inspect under the hood. Of course, they already had seen the car when Larry and Millie dropped Ronnie off. Ronnie was under the hood too, and kicking the tires, learning that he liked cars.

No one had seen that Jack had brought the tricycles and had given them to the kids. No one paid much attention to them. But when something bad was going to happen to one of her kids, Emma knew immediately. Jannie had decided to go rolling down the steep slope of the driveway with little Mary standing on the back board. Emma happened to glance in their direction. They were heading straight into the busy street. Emma screamed! "Jack!" Jack's long stride got him in front of the tricycle in two seconds flat, just before they would have entered the street. He caught the handle bars and grabbed Mary in one motion. Mary, startled, started crying. Jack swatted at Jannie's bottom, but caught it on the metal seat and said, "Dang!"

"I was gonna stop!" Jannie said in great disappointment that a good thrill had to end like this.

"Get those kids in the back yard and close the gate!" commanded Emma.

"Go on. Get up there," said Jack to Jannie. I'll bring the trike."

Emma turned to Larry, and said, "Maybe tricycles weren't such a good idea after all."

"Ah, Sissy. Young'uns have to grow up. How's they gonna do that without a few scrapes now an' then?" he answered.

"They can't grow up lying dead on the streets, now, can they?"

Lionel just chuckled and shook his head. Jack had talent, he thought, referring to his long arms and legs. He followed Larry into the house. Mother Pearl tried to comfort Emma, saying "Kids is rough on women folk, but not as rough as men sometimes. The car's really nice."

Emma grabbed Jack's arm after he came back putting the children in the back yard. "I wish you hadn't brought those tricycles. They're just going to be a pain! I know it!"

"They'll be alright," Jack tried to comfort her.

"I hope so."

Emma looked at Fanny just as she opened the door to go inside. "Fanny," she said, "you stay out here with the kids. Make sure they stay in the back yard."

"I don't have to. You're not my mama!" replied Fannie, and she stuck out her tongue at Emma and ran inside.

"Why you little...I'm gonna hit her along side the head!"

Lionel was standing nearby. He interrupted. "Now we'll not have any of that on such a fine day."

Christmas dinner was very pleasant once everyone settled down to the table.

But Lionel asked the blessing before anyone was ready to duck their heads, as usual.

Throughout the day, Emma couldn't keep those tricycles off her mind. She knew they would prove to be a trial to her. The men in her life didn't seem to care what could happen to little children, and her mother seemed to support them. When she said something at the dinner table to her mother, she completely ignored her.

She had been right. When late Spring came, They started wondering farther and farther from home. By the time summer came, Jannie had found her way to the park on one side, and to her Nanny on the other side. Jannie would be off on the big trike with little Mary riding on the back-board, and Jimmy would trail behind on his little trike.

Aunt Sally was a gregarious person. She was Jack's aunt, and was much older than his mother. She was considered to be the black sheep of the family, but according to the Borden's, all of the Sinclairs were black sheep. When Aunt Sally was young, she attended all the road houses instead of church. She had to find extremes in all the areas of her life, having or going to wild parties, climbing mountains, racing horses. Everything was an adventure, and she was always happy. Unlike her sister, she never worked. While she always looked for extremes, she never experienced any real hardships like her sister did. Granny White lived the extremes through hard work that never panned out and getting mixed up with abusive men, that is, after her first husband died. Aunt Sally lost only one husband, but she never settled down to being a widow. She still had a lot of men

calling on her, and she was in her sixties. She had gotten too heavy for mountain climbing, but she did a lot of good fishing. When she wasn't at home, she was fishing.

Aunt Sally had attended college. She had a mind of her own, and no man would stay with her for long because of that. She was very sociable and was always inviting Jack and Emma over for dinners, but Emma was too attached to her folks and had rather eat her mother's cooking, so they rarely accepted. Whenever they did show up though, it was a feast. She would have every kind of meat and fish and all the vegetables, both rice and potatoes and several pies and cakes for desert. It would be like having Thanksgiving several times in one year. They would wind up taking most of the food home.

Jannie loved Aunt Sally and couldn't see enough of her. She wasn't loud like Granny White, but she laughed so much, she could be mistaken for a female Santa Clause.

Now that Jannie had wheels, she never stayed at the park. She fled all the way to the south end of Roswell to her Aunt Sally. The children ate to their heart's content of the pies and cakes and ice creams that she fed them. They drank lots of milk and waited for their parents to pick them up, which was usually late at night.

Summer was pressing against the wings of Springtime in May when the children first ran off. They rode their tricycles to Calhoun Park which was just up the street to the west and down the hill. How they navigated that hill, Emma never knew. She could just see them crashing and tumbling down the hill into the river or into the street and getting hit by the cars...and little Mary hanging

on for dear life. Not that she thought of them very often, she was always busy with the house work or trying to figure some way of making a little extra money, having house parties to sell things.

Emma had called them to lunch, and when she looked down the street and didn't see them, she knew immediately they had gone to the park. She marched down there and spanked their bottoms with a switch all the way home, all the time explaining to them they could have fallen into the river or been killed by a car. But all their little minds could think of was the pain she was inflicting. Mary got carried up the hill, so she wasn't spanked. It was a double burden. Emma had to carry Jimmy's tricycle as well. Jannie had the double burden of being spanked and pulling her tricycle up the hill. When she got to a level spot, she sped away from her mommy and got home first and hid under the bed.

Because of her mommy being so busy, Jannie thought she might as well take care of her brother and sister. Mommy sure wasn't doing it, so she fed them (between meals) and clothed them and changed Mary's diapers whenever Mommy wasn't looking. After all, she was five years old. She was a grown-up girl now. She had decided that the first day she had taken the children to the park. After all, it was just right over there. She did this several times even though she got punished for it; but she didn't consider this punishment. All it really was, was a troublesome mother.

There came a day of forgetfulness in the warmth of the sun. It was much too hot to do anything but to day dream and pretend. The children's daydreams carried them to the park on their tricycles.

There was no mommy this day to spank their bottoms with a switch. Emma was too busy getting ready for a Stanley Party to sell brushes and things. She didn't even notice the children were gone until after her friends had left.

Jannie and Jimmy played on the swings and slide and merry-go-round, leaving Mary to cry and get all wet and dirty. They got enough drinks at the water fountain to fill the toilets in the rest-rooms several times. It was made of the same red qualeche their house was made of. After tiring of the swings and slides and merry-go-round, they rolled their little bodies down the grassy slopes of the Hondo River. There was no water in it, so they couldn't drown, but their clothes and knees turned green from the grass.

On the spur of the moment, maybe because of hunger, their daydreams turned them south towards their daddy's Aunt Sally. Jannie made sure they crossed the streets when there were no cars coming, and she knew from observation that you crossed the busy streets when the light turned green. They recognized Center Street where there was ice-cream cones somewhere. They recognized Second Street where there was a little filling station that had been closed down and boarded up. They played there a while until they figured out that the driveways were too crumbled up to drive on. Realizing that, they went on to East McGaffey. They instantly knew the street. It was where Aunt Sally lived!

Aunt Sally was busy ironing, staring out her living room window, when she saw two tricycles speeding down the sidewalk from the west. She put her iron down as they turned into her walk way. She covered her mouth as she recognized the children. "Oh my..." she said. She went to the front door and opened the

screen.

"My my!" she said. "Where have you children come from?"

"We went to the park!" cried Jannie.

With that, Jannie and Jimmy got off their tricycles. Mary got bumped off and slowly sank into the grass. She started crying out of pure exhaustion. When Mary raised her legs, Aunt Sally could see that the little girl had lost her diaper somewhere. (It had been soggy, so Jannie had taken it off in the park and left it there.)

"Where is your mother?" Aunt Sally looked around slowly to see if she had missed something.

Jannie put her little hands protectively on her behind and said, "At home!" Then she smiled really big, squinting her slanted eyes, and said, pretending, "But it's okaaay!"

"Well, come on in here, children. And pick up your little sister. Here, let me help." With that, Aunt Sally went down her steps and picked Mary off the grass. She fell into a deep sleep as soon as she felt the nice big warm bosom and the comfort of Aunt Sally's arms. The big woman gathered in the children as a hen gathering in her chickens under her wings.

Once inside, she lay Mary down on the couch under a folded towel and treated the others to a tall glass of milk. They gulped that down in a hurry and asked for more. She gave them each a piece of apple pie served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream along with a refill on the milk. While they were busy eating, Aunt Sally went to the phone and called Emma.

Emma's party friends had just left. The last girl had gone out the door when the thought "where are the kids?" entered her mind. She looked around the house and outside. She noticed the tricycles were gone, anger flared and then the phone rang.

"Yel-low," answered Emma, using her customary telephone operator talk which she had picked up working at the telephone office.

"Emma? This is Sally."

"I'm afraid I haven't time now..."

"Your children are here!"

"What?" Emma was in a state of shock. This couldn't possibly be true. She must have said something else. She must put the phone down and go hunt for her children.

"Here at my house."

"I'll...I've...At your house?"

"Yes. They're ready for a nap. They just had some pie and milk."

"I had a Stanley Party."

"That's okay. I'll keep them until you can pick them up. I'll call when they wake up. Maybe you and Jack can come over for dinner."

Jack took the car today. The truck went back to Daddy, Emma thought.

"I'll have to wait 'till Jack gets home. Those kids! They're going to drive me to ransom. They're either running off or tearing up the place. All I do every day is put the house back in order. I wish they had never gotten those tricycles."

Aunt Sally started laughing. "You need a break. Prepare to eat when you



come." Her word was final and Emma was too tired to refuse.

Emma wiped the sweat off her brow with the back of her hand. "Okay, you win. I'm all tired out. I hope they're not any trouble."

"Oh, they're no trouble a'tall."

"Thank you."

"When does Jack get off?"

"He'll be home at Six. He'll be upset."

"My cooken will fix'im."

"Okay, Bye bye."

"Bye, Honey."

That was the first time they ran off to Aunt Sally's. After a couple of summers of that, their tricycles stayed at their granny's. The incident that brought on that decision is when the police got involved in their little escapades. After picking them up three times, they said not any more and for Emma to do something about it.

This last time, the children didn't even wait for lunch. They would eat lunch at Aunt Sally's. That was Jannie's idea. Not even saying "goodbye" to their mommy, who was busy cleaning up the house, they jumped on their tricycles and headed out. They didn't even stop at the park for a swing. They made a stop though, on Second South where the little boarded up filling station was. Not having any fuel, they felt all tuckered out, stopping there to rest.

When the officer saw them, he knew who they were and where they lived. He had taken them home twice before this summer...in the same month. He

slowly pulled into the broken up drive.

"Hi Mister Policeman!" they all shouted. "Hi!"

"Hi kids," he called out of his open window. He was a little heavy and didn't want to get out of the car. He had a big nose and a big smile. When he took off his cap to wipe the sweat away with his arm, you could tell he was getting bald under his graying hair. He reached into the back and opened the door. "You kids pile in the back. I'll put your trikes in the trunk."

"We're going to our Aunt Sally's," protested Jannie.

"Come on, and I'll get you all an ice-cream cone on the department."

They all shouted "Yea!" and got into the back seat. The officer got out and shut the door, opened up the trunk and put their tricycles in and slammed the lid. The car shook and the children all laughed and shouted. He took them down to the Dairy Queen and got them all a five cent cone and drove them home. He gave his report over the radio to the dispatcher as he drove...picked up three little blondies...the oldest, about six years old, wearing a red plaid dress, the boy, about three or four, wearing beige shorts and a tee-shirt, the baby girl, just in her panties. The dispatcher agreed, that's them all right.

"You know your mother's worried about you, don't you?" asked the officer.

"No," said Jannie frankly, licking her ice-cream cone.

Emma got bawled out by the officer. The children laughed and screamed and ran and hid from the policeman. They found a new game called "running away from the police." Emma spanked each one of them with her hand this time after the police had left. She locked up the tricycles and the next day had Jack take

them to his mother's. There was crying all around, but Emma would have some peace.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

With much pushing, pleading and shoving from Emma, Jack and Larry put the finishing touches on the new house. It was ready to move into by the end of Summer. The house was a simple block shape with a carport to the north (left, if you're facing the house). It was white with yellow trim. The kitchen door was under the carport. There was a storage shed at the end of the carport, and beyond that, was a big back yard that needed grass. The front door was directly between a big picture window to the left and the master bedroom window to the right with its yellow shutters.

Jimmy ran from room to room, watching Mommy and Daddy put up beds and furniture and unpacking numerous boxes. The furniture was new except for Mommy and Daddy's bed and Daddy's cedar chest. Jimmy found that he and the girls got the back bedroom. He ran down the hall from his bedroom to his Mommy and Daddy's bedroom, passing the bathroom, landing on their bed and then back to his bed. He would hug their bed and feel the cotton nobbies on the bedspread and then hug his bed as if measuring the distance between loves. It made him feel safe, making sure that Mommy and Daddy would be only a short distance away. He was getting his bearings.

Running back and forth, passing the bathroom, he saw his parents hanging shower curtains that smelled with a bite in it. That is what plastic smelled like. It bit your nose. Mommy put fuzzy pink covers on the toilet back and seat with a matching rug on the floor. It was just like his Nanny's bathroom that always

smelled of farts and lavender soap.

The living room couch was being bounced on by Jannie and Mary. When Jimmy joined in, Emma shooed them off. Jimmy went to the big window behind the couch and looked out. He could see all the houses in the neighborhood. Some were still being built. He tried to stick his head out the front door to get a better look, but he almost got run over by Uncle Larry coming in with more boxes.

"Whoa!" cried Uncle Larry.

Jimmy raced into the kitchen to the other outside door, but instead of opening it to look outside, his attention was caught by the tall white ice box standing at his right. He reached out and touched it. There was a clean white stove next to it. There were cabinets built into the wall in the north-east corner with a white speckled counter top. A white round table was next to the glass doors that led out to a patio. Daddy wouldn't let anyone open it, not even Mommy because there was no grass outside yet. Jimmy imagined a giant rug could cover the dirt, and then they wouldn't need grass. He tried telling Mommy, but she ignored him. He watched her put away the silverware and cooking utensils in the drawers and the pots and pans in the cupboards, and then came the boxes of groceries.

Mommy kept getting bumped by the kids, so she shooed them all out onto the carport. Outside, they found a wadding pool. It smelled worse than the shower curtain. It also bit your nose, and tasted just as bad. (Jimmy had to taste everything.) Getting Daddy to blow it up and fill it with water was hard to do, but he was told by Uncle Larry that it would keep them busy, so he did it. They stripped themselves down to their undies except for Mary, she was already

stripped. After they got all wet, Jannie introduced the hose. She turned it on them and on everything under the carport, including adults. For this, they got put in the back yard as a last resort where they made lots of mud. They began looking like little aborigines. Their underwear was a dark earthen color. Their hair was all muddy, and by the time they decided to investigate the alley, they were all crusty.

The back yard was surrounded on two sides by chain-link fence, but out by the alley, it was horizontal wooden slats with a gate in the middle. After figuring out how to open the latch, they entered the wonderful world of weeds and big oil drums where people burned their garbage. The smell of burnt everything filled the air. Underneath their feet were stickers. They couldn't go very far without having to pull out the stickers. Therefore, they couldn't run away from Emma when she opened the gate and said, "Get back in here!" There was an old man looking in the garbage cans. She swooped Mary up protectively. The dirty old man grinned, showing his yellow teeth amongst his graying week-old beard. Mary got a swat on the bumpass for having taken her panties off.

"Go on in there!" she had to yell at Jannie and Jimmy. They couldn't go fast because of the stickers, so she had to swat them to in order to drive them through the gate.

Emma found it humiliating, having to clean her kids off with the hose, not because of the hose necessarily, but because she wasn't inside helping put things away the way she wanted them. But after the day was over, she was so happy about her new home that she forgot all about the embarrassing incident (embarrassing because her in-laws had been there to make jokes of it). All the

children got sung to sleep that night.

Jimmy found many new things in his life now. His mother was happy all the time. She even began painting pictures again, smelling up the house with turpentine. Daddy bought everyone swimming suites so they wouldn't have to be outside naked and for going down to the Bottomless Lakes Park. Jimmy got to go down town every weekend for haircuts with his daddy and run along his side holding on to his big finger while he went to pay his bills. That finger was just the right size for his little hand, and he didn't mind the running. He was with his daddy.

Occasionally, Daddy would let Jimmy sit in the barber's chair and get a haircut. The barber would sit him on a padded red leather board that stretched across the arms of the red leather and ceramic chair. The place smelled like hair cuttings and rose tonics. He would come out smelling like powder and roses. He usually fell asleep in the chair, except for one time, when the barber cut his little ear. Daddy got mad at the barber and used a few sharp words. Jimmy liked feeling the prickly hairs behind his ears. It was the high-light of his life. It was another strand in established his relationship with his daddy. It was worth having that scary buzzing machine run across his head.

Life in the new house seemed to be easy and beautiful for a change, maybe, because everything was new. But the old shadows they thought they left behind in Old Man White's shanties and that old rock house started creeping over them ever so slowly. Those shadows followed them to their new house on Delaware. It began as a heavy weight bearing down on Emma and Jack. Old Man White had been off

trucking, but was back in town again, saying that they owed him money, that they hadn't paid their rent yet, complaining that he had to live in an old shanty while they lived in a mansion. Jack was faced with heavy bills for the house, the furniture, the new fridge and range. That lessened his ability to control his temper. Emma's and Jack's relationship began to boil.

It happened that Granny thought it better to live with her old man and have an extra house to rent to bring in some more money. The old man had belittled her into it so he could have the money. She felt she had to do it anyway. She was married to him. It would have been nice for Emma if Granny would live alone, as was the plan. She needed Granny to baby-sit sometimes or just to go over and visit to relieve some of the pressure at home, but Old Man White was usually around, and he would stand outside and simply stare at her. It was as if he were looking right through her dress to her naked skin. It made her nauseous.

This one Saturday, she and Jack took the kids over to Granny's to look after them while they went shopping. She couldn't stand one more day of kids fussing and fighting, especially at the store. She had it in the back of her mind that she shouldn't leave them over there because of that dirty old man, but her mother worked now sewing drapes for Sears. She didn't know anyone else well enough to leave them with or nobody else would take them. Millie was too busy doing hair, and Aunt Sally had dirty old men over there all the time. She might even be seeing Old Man White over there. So, it was Granny.

When they picked up the kids, Emma found Jimmy with his thang out, going to the bathroom on the flowers. The girls were laughing at him. She yelled at him



and swatted his behind, picking him up and almost throwing him into the car. Then she yelled at the girls, and they scurried into the car. As they drove off, Old Man White was grinning at them. Emma felt so sick inside at the sight of him!

"He gives me the creeps!" she said.

"We'll take the kids over to your mom's," replied Jack.

"Mama's got a job sewing for Sears. She doesn't have time."

"You think my mom's got time? She has things to do too, you know."

The argument went on all the way home, but it was finally decided that they would still let Granny take care of the kids. Nanny would be a bad choice anyhow. She would just let them run around, not noticing anything until they got into something or destroyed something, and then she would only say, "You kids!" Granny, on the other hand, would interact with them, take them places, feed them, etc. Even so, Old Man White would be there.

Emma started dinner, and Jimmy was wondering around not doing anything. When Emma saw him playing with his thang, she exploded.

"I'm going to take you to the doctor and have him cut that thang off if you don't stop that!" she yelled.

Jimmy melted. He shrank back and started that dry sob that's sort of like hick ups. Emma was ashamed she said what she did, but she was too upset by Old Man White to comfort him. She picked him up and sat him at the table.

"You sit here and be still," she said instead.

After he quieted down, he and Jannie ran off to play. Jack wandered into the kitchen and they started discussing Old Man White, why he was the way he was,

and what to do about him.

Old Man White kept his eye on his step son. He was outside in the alley now, just staring at the house and the children playing in the back yard. He could see his step-son through the glass door. He was the only one that ever interfered with his life. He interfered when he had to give a licking to his wife or any of her children. He back-handed him and it was no good. He would sick his sons on him and it was no good. He was just a no good, rebellious step-son that never obeyed his rightful and lawful pop. Jack even got the old man's own sons to run off with him one time. He and his brother Matt still owed him for a truck they crashed while sleeping on the job. They were supposed to be delivering a load of hay down in Hobbs when they both went to sleep and drove off the road. They were probably drinking. They say only drunk people could have survived that crash up. That truck was wrecked up pretty good, and you couldn't use it any more. He took that lumber for partial payment, and they even stole that from him. He knew how to get back at people. Look at his trucking business. His brother Morris had owned it, but gave him a bad deal once. Now it belonged to Old Man White.

There was another fellow that didn't pay his bills, so Old Man White took it out in some lumber and tin to build those shanties on the old Dexter highway between Lander's and the house. The law shouldn't have interfered. He suspected it was one of the Barrows that squealed to the police. Jack's ma and him both got the better side of his hand because he had to spend some time in jail.

Jack owed him for raising him and taking care of him ... giving him food to eat, clothes on his back, and a roof over his head...all his family...his ma and his

brother and sister...and what did the old man get? Disloyalty, laziness, sassing back. You don't sass your pap! Nosiree! There ain't nothen Jack owns that don't rightfully belong to his old pap, thought the old man peeking through the back fence. I have it comen to me. And Jack has it comen ta him for being so disobedient. He would watch for the day. Then he would settle the score. It might not be in merchandise. It might not even be on him. It might be on his wife or on his kids...one way or t'other...made no mind to him.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Summer was over, but the heat remained. It remained all the way through October. Emma had Jack put in a swamp cooler from Sears. That brought some relief so they didn't have to suffer inside. She couldn't believe it was sweltering in October.

Halloween crept into Roswell. Jannie and Jimmy didn't know what it was except that the stores were decorated with black and orange streamers and paper jack-o-lanterns and witches and grinning skeletons. Mommy bought them a bag of candy corn at the five-and-dime. Jimmy didn't want any plastic skeletons. He saw enough skeletons at night. Jannie had tried to give him one when Mommy wasn't looking while in the store. This was all they ever noticed of Halloween.

A cold front did blow in at the end of October. Everyone enjoyed that. Now that they had to turn the cooler off, they had an expense they weren't even using. Emma had to go back to the phone company and work as an operator to cover all their expenses. Jack couldn't make all the payments on his salary... \$78.00 a week. She enjoyed being at work. She had worked in an airplane factory in San Bernardino during the war. When they moved back to Roswell, it was the telephone company that needed operators. That's where she met Maggie, and Maggie introduced her to her brother Jack. So, work had its benefits.

She loved Jack, but she didn't like his family. They were country hicks, never mind that her ancestors had been country hicks. They disgusted her. She never showed it though, and Granny White always thought of her as a friend. She

couldn't help show her disgust around the old man, though. He was an obstacle. But she had to work, and that was a fact. Her mama didn't have time for the kids, but it was mostly Fannie's complaints of the children breaking her things that had made up her mama's mind. Millie fixed hair. She went over this again and again in her mind. It had to be Granny or a maid. She might have to get a maid. Maybe with her working, they could afford a colored maid. It would only take about ten dollars a week. One thing for sure, as long as Old Man White was around, she would not go back over there. Perhaps Granny could come pick the children up, but Granny would be too lazy for that. Emma was sure.

It didn't work out that way. The kids were at Granny's again and she had to go and pick them up because Jack had to work late tonight, and she didn't want the kids over there at night with that old man drinking the way he does. She would make dinner and then go and pick them up. So, it was dark by the time she went over there. As she drove along, she wondered how Jack could work out there (it was south of town where the new houses were being built). It was dark now. Maybe he was inside and had a lamp. He did build cabinets too. Yes, she remembered going down there with the kids to visit him one evening. He had a single bulb hanging from the ceiling.

Granny's house looked spooky in the moonlight. It looked like a ghost glowing in the darkness. She remembered that there was a spook hanging around there. It was Old Man White. After pulling up to the gate, Emma hurried into the house so she wouldn't have to encounter the old man. He usually hung around the outside drinking. Granny had a way of shooing him outside when he was drinking.

She didn't want to spot him or to be spotted by him, and she did mean soiled! She said a quick "Good bye" to Granny who wanted her to stay, but she explained that supper was on the stove, and so she had to hurry home. But when she fled outside, she had forgotten her purse. She put the kids in the car and turned around to go fetch it.

Old Man White appeared out of the nowhere darkness, and he was upon her. She choked and gagged and turned white as the moon that was shining down upon them. His hands were up her dress and down her dress. She didn't remember how she managed to beat him off. Maybe Granny was there too. It had been so confusing, but when she got into the car, with him banging on the car windows, she burned rubber and spewed gravel getting the car out of there. The children were screaming and crying, asking "Mommy! What's wrong!"

Emma sat on the couch with her elbows on her knees and her hands cupping her face, waiting for Jack to get home from work. Tears flowed down her face and down her wrists. The children played out back to keep away from the embarrassment in the living room. Emma shuddered to think that she was almost raped! The house was clean enough. Dinner was warming in the oven. They would have dinner after Jack got home. That would comfort her... everyone sitting at the dinner table together, having a nice time.

Larry pulled up into the drive and let Jack out. They didn't talk much, but said a short goodbye. Both of them were tired and famished. It had been a 16 hour day. Jack dearly wanted nothing more than to relax, eat supper and let his motor run down. He was still going inside, restless, but extremely tired. He needed

sleep. He was dearly hoping that Emma had taken care of the kids and put them to bed and that he could eat by himself in peace. He smelled the dinner as he walked in the front door.

Emma grabbed him before he could set his tools and coat down, crying, "We just half to have a maid!"

Jack dropped his tools onto the floor and threw his coat onto the couch, and answered with that grin that means "what's going on?" He said, "You leave the kids at Ma's every morning. What's wrong with that?"

"It's your dad-blasted Pop!"

"Can't cha just ignore him?"

"Ignore! Ignore?" Emma beat on his chest once for each word. "How can you ignore this?" and she grabbed his pockets with her fists, "if you're a woman!"

Emma started sobbing on his shoulder.

"Where was Ma all this time?" he asked.

"I don't know! He tried to rape me!"

Jack didn't want this to be happening. All he wanted was to be left alone, eat and rest up for another hard day tomorrow. He tried to be loving, but he was too tired to think. With a surge of frustration, Jack threw his wife onto the couch, grabbed the keys out of Emma's purse and raced out the door. He had it with his wife and with his pop. Now it was his turn to burn some rubber. He got into the car and shrieked out of the car port. The children saw him go. They huddled next to the kitchen door afraid.

Jack had it and had it with his pop! He had seen enough beatings of his

mother and his brother and sister, and he would get him for beating himself. Now it was his wife he was working on. He had raped his sister once. He would get him for that too. He would get him for everything! He would, of course, rather fight a mad bull or a giant bear, but he had to put a stop to this mad man once and for all! After all, he had to stick up for his wife. What was he doing anyway? He didn't want to fight anybody. But he had a duty to perform. He was very very tired. but his motor was running, and he couldn't stop it. He motor was now running down the Dexter Highway and into his Ma's drive.

Jack heard the gravel crunch underneath the tires. He looked into the beam of the headlights and saw his pop staggering around drunk. Slowly coming out of his car, he stood to his full height. He saw his pop go into the house. Jack's feet crunched in the gravel until he reached the gate and walked up to the house on the short sidewalk. It felt funny knocking...he practically grew up in this house...hardly a teenager when he left to go down to Dexter to live with his grandparents. Life had been too hard in this house. His ma opened the door.

"Where's Pop?" he asked.

"Well, come in! Come in!" Granny said in surprise. "What'er you doin' knockin' on the door like a total stranger?"

"I come to see Pop," he said, not entering. He just stood there in his full height.

"Well what you want with'im this time a night?" Granny knew he wanted to fight him. She didn't want that to happen. She was stalling.

"Come to talk to 'im," Jack said with jerk of his head.



"Well, come in and I'll git 'im."

"No...I've come to call 'im out...out here," Jack said, standing his ground.

"Oh My!" Granny raised her eyebrows and covered her mouth. She turned and called, "Hey Pop! Someone come ta see ya!" She looked at Jack again. "You be careful. Even if he's drunk." Then she shied away from the door. She didn't want a beating afterwards from the old man.

Old Man White stood in her place.

"Jack!" he said, half expecting him. "Weel, ye decided ta change yer mind? Decided to go trucken wiff yer ol' man?"

"No."

"Weel, come in. Le's have a cup. We'll have a cup and talk things over."

Jack knew that if he didn't act now, he would be at Pop's mercy. Pop was just talking to get him off his guard. He knew how that worked. He couldn't risk that. So, pretending to come in, he opened the screen door, saying "Okay," but lightening fast, he grabbed the old man by the neck and pulled him outside, throwing him to the ground. Pop bounced back up like a rubber chicken, only to meet with Jack's fist.

"You leave my wife alone!" Jack barked. "Don't you ever put yer paws on her agin!" he warned. "I'm fed up with you always hurting! Always destroying and stealing! Everthang you touch festers into a sore! I'm sore and my wife is sore...and...and I'm just fed up with you! You hear! Just fed up!"

Pop jumped back up. Two bulls collided head on, grabbing each other's throats.

"Fed up?" Pop responded. "Ye don' know what fed up is until haven to live wiff the likes a you!" And the old man forced out of his throat all of Jack's faults. But Jack didn't get angry until the old man started in on his wife, Emma. "Whores! the lot of'em. She an' her God damned sister...both of'em living in a whore house!" Both bulls shook each other, tightening their grip, shaking the earth beneath them, letting out little devils out of the cracks in the earth. "Who da ya think I visited more often than yer sister-in-law? 'Twas your bitchen wife! Livin' with whores, she was. And whood ya think had her with ye gone of late? Before Christmas it was," Pop choked out the words.

Jack was through with this hold. He let go with one hand to pop the old man in the face, but Pop got him between the legs and Jack reeled back. Pop swung also, but Jack just calmly let it pass by and swung himself again, hitting Pop square in the nose with all his force. He heard his scull crack at the blow. The old man slunk down, and Jack was on top of him, beating his fists into the old man's face, letting out twenty years of anger.

Pop rolled out from under Jack and was on top of him like a monkey, beating him with a rock. Jack turned over and caught the rock in full force with his hand. It made it go numb, but he was able to take the rock and slam it into his pop's head. That got him off. Jack stood up half conscious. Pop stood up too. They grabbed each other's shirts again and spit blood into each other's faces.

All the fight was out of Jack. He wailed, "I don't believe your lies! And don't you ever touch my wife again. Next time...I'll kill you."

"Ye son-o'-bitch can't do it!"

Jack threw the old man to the ground and left.

"I'll get chew fer this!" the old man cried.

Jack sped out of there, throwing gravel at his pop, and fled home.

"That bitch and him deserve each other," Old Man white mumbled as he crawled toward his whiskey bottle.

Granny White had been watching the fight from the kitchen window. She had squeezed her hands to her bosom at the thrill of it. She had laughed and giggled at the old man getting his come-up-ins, at him being thrown to the ground by her son, left to shudder in fear of what might happen next time. But as her old man made his way back to the house, she slunk away into the shadows to hide.

Jack felt awfully proud of himself for finally standing up to his old man. He licked the salty blood from his numb mouth all the way home. It tasted of sweet revenge. He was sure this bully wouldn't bother his wife or family any more. He had done the same thing in High School when a bully kept bothering him, always asking for a fight. He only had to hit him once on the basketball court in order to get his respect and the respect of all the other boys. Emma would be proud of him tonight. Even though he was tired before, he felt like making love. He was sure she would accommodate him tonight. Yessiree! She will be right proud of him tonight. She will treat him like a king.

After Jack left, Emma had to turn into a mother again. Jannie brought Jimmy in her little arms. He was getting too big to carry. She looked as though she were carrying a hundred pound bag of potatoes. He was that heavy and that limp. She grunted, and taking quick short steps, dropped him at her mother's feet.

"Oh, goodness! What are you doing?" cried Emma, for Jimmy looked quite dead, all crumpled up on the floor. His skinny arms and legs were flung in all directions.

"He's burning up," answered Jannie, hands on hips, and tilting her head smartly.

Emma bent down and scooped Jimmy up into her arms. "He's got a fever," she said as she sat down with him in the big chair. Already filled with emotion, tears started flowing down her cheeks. She felt like such an awful mother. No one had eaten dinner yet, and little Mary was crying. She instructed Jannie to give Mary her bottle that was in the ice box and to fix her own plate of the dinner that was in the oven. Jannie came back and complained that dinner was in the oven and that it was too hot. She would burn herself.

"Oh, all right!" Emma said angrily. "You take care of Jimmy. I'll fix your plate." She stomped out of the room and into the kitchen.

"Okay!" Jannie retorted, stamping her foot.

Emma appeared in the doorway with a big wooden spoon, holding it like a scepter. "Don't you sass me, girl!"

Jannie winced and slid into the chair underneath Jimmy, settling him on her lap, as if to say, "don't worry, Jimmy, I'll protect you from this awful monster".

Jack arrived home, found that supper had already been eaten and found himself back on the road with a sick boy. Well, this night didn't turn out right! he pouted. He never got anything to eat, and now, he wasn't going to get any sleep, either. He sure wasn't being treated like the king he thought he should be. When

he told Emma that he threw his old man, she just said "Good!" and shoved him and Jimmy out the door. She had only shown disgust at having to hear about it. She had just shoved him out...shoved him out, just used him and was through with him. Emma had misread his anger. She thought he was angry at his old man. It never dawned on her that he was angry at her and the kids.

At the last second, Emma dragged the kids out of the house and put them into the car and slid into the front seat to hold Jimmy. Everyone pouted silently all the way to the hospital.

Dr. Bradley was at the hospital. He saw Jimmy, slipped a thermometer into his little rear and subsequently found an ear infection in his left ear. He took one look at the children who hadn't been bathed and gave Jack and Emma a long lecture on cleanliness. The doctor noticed Jack's battered face but just thought the worst of him.

Emma was insulted, even if the excuse was that there was too much impetigo and ring worm going around. Well, at least Jimmy didn't have typhoid.

Dr. Bradley gave Jimmy a shot of penicillin in the bummbass and then gave Emma some oral penicillin and orange flavored baby aspirin plus ear wax remover for Jimmy.

They left the hospital full of sleepy children they deposited in the back seat of the car. As they drove home, Jack and Emma were numbed by anger and fatigue. It was after 1 A.M. before they got to bed. Then Jack had to wake up at 6 A.M. to go to work. He didn't have a very good day that day either. Neither did Emma with crying kids.

## CHAPTER NINE

Saturday was the next day, and it was Halloween. Children all over the neighborhood were putting on their store-bought masks and costumes or make-up to look like skeletons, ghosts, pirates, movie stars or tramps. Old sheets had to be brought out and eyes cut out for some as the ghosts of the neighborhood. When they started trick-or-treating, they found the Borrowers not at home.

Jannie and Mary and Jimmy were being driven around to all their relations to pick up bags of candy. They little understood why. They went to Nanny's first where Fanny put her black mask over Jimmy. It smelled like old canvas. He grabbed the broom and galloped all over the house, pretending to be the Lone Ranger...at least everyone said that he was. They listened to the Lone Ranger every Sunday afternoon on the radio...at least at home they did. Lionel wouldn't allow it at his house. (Only ball games or wrestling.)

Aunt Millie's was next, Aunt Sally's, Uncle Matt's and then at last Granny's, the place the children loved best. The sun was down, and Emma didn't want to go over there. She would get sick! Jack assured her that everything would be all right. His ma had something for the kids.

Old Man White was nowhere to be seen, so Emma felt comfortable about having a cup of coffee inside. All Granny could do was to talk about the night Jack whooped his old man. Emma thought she was going to get sick anyway, even if the old man wasn't there. His name repeated over and over was enough. Jack couldn't understand what was wrong with her. She kept trying to change the

subject. She said that she just didn't want to hear about a fight, for goodness sake! He said that he had done it all for her! What was wrong with that! She stared into the air and drank her coffee.

The children had been forgotten until Mary found a bowl of candy in the living room. Granny White heard the little fingers unwrapping the cellophane.

"Oh, here!" Granny said in her high tenor voice, just in time to stop an argument. She got up from the big table and went into the living room. "Let me give you some of this Trick-or-Treat. Where's Jannie and little Jimmy?"

"Oh, they're outside, as usual," replied Emma. "I'll get them."

Emma got up from the table, leaving Jack sipping his coffee out of his saucer. He did it just to spite Emma. At home she made him drink out of the cup like a civilized person.

Emma went to the door and called out, "Jannie! Jimmy! Come get your Trick-or-Treat! From your granny!" She turned back to address Granny and Jack. "They're going to be so sick with all this candy...They've found their tricycles." Then she poked her head out of the screen again. "Jannie! Jimmy!"

Jannie arrived. She wanted to drive her big-wheeled tricycle through the door. Emma made her park it. She ran inside to get her candy from her favorite grandmother. Emma called Jimmy again. He's always a slow-poke, she thought. When Jannie came up to the door, she assumed that Jimmy would follow, but he wasn't around. She yelled out, "You won't get any candy!" as though he hadn't been eating it all evening, and then she went inside.

But Jimmy did come to the door. He didn't want to come inside though, this

was his great opportunity to ride the big wheeler. He got off his little one and got on the big one with joyous glee. Off he sped onto the gravel drive and then back onto the side-walk (it was a little easier there).

Jimmy was the driver of a big army tank in the war. He was on his thirsty horse, riding across the desert plains. He was in the big bomber that shook the earth over Roswell. His engines made it thunder terribly!. He was on his motorcycle fleeing the giant monster. It was huge and dark with red glowing eyes. It's dark image eclipsed the great orange Halloween moon climbing into the dark mass of sky.

Dark hands reached down and stopped Jimmy in his play. The monster smelled so strongly of ash trays and bitter tobacco and sweet beer that Jimmy choked. Jimmy looked at the black silhouette against the bright orange of the moon. The glow of the moon came right through the monster's eyes. The thick black hands brought Jimmy up to a mouth howling with rage and the gnashing of teeth.

My tricycle, thought Jimmy as he glanced backwards, seeing it fall into the cactus garden below. He's knocked over my tricycle! My tricycle! I've got to get back to my tricycle! But his little arm reached out in vain.

Time stood still. The monster had jerked Jimmy up so hard and fast that he seemed to faint upwards. The fainting came with the pain of his insides tearing. The fainting became a motion upwards, as if the monster had thrown him up against the rising orange moon. He rose up and up, out of the hands of the monster, out of sight of the monster...far above that lonely tricycle leaning against



the broken cactus. The black monster became a small thing. Granny's house became a small, small little box. The bright orange moon exploded into a bright white, like the sun, only, the light was easy to look at. The light engulfed everything, and then, all there was, was a cloud of brightness.

Within the bright whiteness was something even more bright, as if the brightness was coming from him. Yes, it was him. Jimmy felt at once that he had come back home, and that this was his father. He ran to him, filled with joy, having seen his best friend once again. The Light lifted him up into his arms and kissed him. Jimmy sat on his father's lap for the longest time and they talked and talked. Jimmy told him all about his life on this planet and how exciting it was to him...all the adventures he had gone through...all the wonderful things he had seen and all the wonderful people he got to be with.

"And what about your mother?" he asked.

"She's alright," said Jimmy. "She doesn't pay as much attention to me as I would like. She spans me sometimes. She seems troubled about something."

"She's doing the best she can, Jimmy," he said. "Love her."

"I'll try harder."

"Will you do it for me?" he asked. "Sometimes she won't let me near her, but you can be there when I can't be. Okay?"

"Okay."

"That's good then."

Jimmy remembered the black monster down below. He looked down and saw the black shadow of a man holding onto a little boy as though they were both

statuary in a dark museum.

"What's that!" he asked, rather startled at a show of darkness in this place of light.

"That is your brother," his friend replied. A tear ran down his cheek. "A brother who has been sorely hurt."

"What's he doing?" asked Jimmy, all excited.

"He thinks to cover up his pain causing more pain in revenge and hurting someone who can't defend himself."

"Is that little boy...me?" Jimmy asked timidly.

"Yes, Jimmy. That little boy is you."

Jimmy felt something wet spill upon his cheek and upon his arm. He looked up and saw his friend crying.

"Don't be sad," Jimmy cried. "I'll be alright as long as I'm with you."

Jimmy hugged his friend warmly.

"You are precious to me, Jimmy. I came the moment I saw this happen and lifted you up because it was going to hurt you a lot...not just now, Jimmy, but this is a hurt that will last most of your life time. But when you remember me, I will heal you. You will remember me, won't you Jimmy?"

"I will remember you always."

"Go now. Go to your mother and tell her what happened. And remember," Jimmy could hear him say as he descended back down into the darkness, "remember to love your mother."

"I'll try."

And "Remember me" got faded out as he entered back into his body. His body veiled the sweet memory after a few seconds. He descended into the darkness, vaguely remembering what had taken place, and when the pain came into his little bottom, all he knew was the pain and the fear.

Something was jabbed into his bottom and then into his mouth, and the monster threw him into the cactus bed. The monster left. Jimmy's friend took his memory from him, so he thought he had only fallen into the cactus garden and hurt himself. He got up and walked into the house. His mouth tickled like when he would eat a fried egg. He needed to go to the bathroom, but his bottom hurt too much, and his bottom was full of stickers.

Jimmy was whimpering until he saw his mother, then he bellowed.

"What happened to you?" she cried.

"I got something in my bummbass! Waaaagh!"

"Come here. Let me look," Emma said, getting up from the bench.

Emma bent down and examined Jimmy's britches.

"My goodness! You're full of needles!" she said. "What've you done?"

"Lord'a'mercy!" cried Granny.

Jack chuckled. Emma turned around and said, "Stop that. He's your own boy." He just grinned. Turning to Granny, Emma asked, "Do you have some tweezers?" but she was already getting them, lifting the heavy load of herself off the bench.

"Sure thang. Come t'here into tha liven room," said Granny. Emma took Jimmy into the living room. She sat down on the big chair and pulled Jimmy up

across her lap. When she pulled down his pants, there went most of the stickers, and Jimmy's skin stung. He sobbed loudly. Another thing was revealed.

"I thought so," said Emma. "I could smell it. You did a jobbie in your pants."

Jimmy wailed at the embarrassment, but Granny stuck a sucker into his mouth, and gave the tweezers to Emma. He started sucking and blubbering on the sucker. The sucker was red, raspberry flavored. It soothed and calmed him.

"Poor little fella," said Granny above a sudden wail as Emma pulled out a rather long one. "He couldn't help hisself. With all these stickers and all...here, gimme those britches. I'll clean'em up for ye."

As Granny left with Jimmy's pants, Emma called, "I'll need some toilet paper!"

"Oh...kay," Granny called back.

Granny came back with the toilet paper and handed it to Emma. Emma wiped Jimmy's bottom gingerly, trying to avoid the cactus needles, but Jimmy moaned, "Oh..ohoooo," anyway. Tears ran down his little cheeks. "I'm sorry," Emma said tenderly. She started pulling out more stickers, and Jimmy whimpered in between stickers and sucks on his red sucker. Presently, he said, "the man put someting in my bumpass."

"I know," Emma replied. "The doctor put a thermometer in it to take your temperature so he could make you all better."

"There was a monster outside," Jimmy said as importantly as he could, but it sounded funny to Emma.

"Did the Boogie Man come get you?" Emma asked, tickling Jimmy's sides.

All Jimmy could do was to laugh and cry at the same time. Every time he tried to tell her about the monster, she would tickle him. He pushed at her hands, but she tickled harder. Soon, she started reciting "Jimmy left his britches on the railroad track" and all memory of the monster settled in as a small ache in his heart. Little children just can't talk to big adults about important things. Children don't have important things to talk about...how foolish of them. Tickle them and make them laugh. Jimmy lay across his mother's lap sucking on the sucker, making it go in and out, in and out, like the monster's thang. He concentrated on the softness of his mother and drew comfort from her and her picking out the stickers. Mommy's laps had enough softness to make the pain inside subside. Jimmy sighed.

Time went too fast. It was nearing midnight when Jack and Emma carried their sleepy children out to the car. Mary was out completely on Emma's lap. Jannie and Jimmy cuddled up against each other on the back seat, using each other as a pillow. They slept all the way home. Part of the Halloween Night broke off from the rest of the darkness and became a shadow that crept into the car. It entered Jimmy's dreams. Jimmy shuddered, making Jannie readjust herself against him to get comfortable. Jimmy's sleepy little mind had recognized the dark hole. It went home with him.

Sometime in the night, Jimmy recognized that he was in his bed. The room was dark, but he noticed that in the corner of the room, something else was darker. A black hole stared at him from the depths of his terror. It was the monster. He shuddered wide-eyed, screaming a silent scream only God could

hear. He hid under the covers, shuddering, waiting for the long night to end. Some time in the early morning, he fell asleep.

Night after night, it was the same terror, but each night, he became a little braver, sleeping ever closer to the edge of the bed, silently screaming for his mommy. One night, Jimmy fought with all his will, the will of a little boy wanting his mommy. The strangle hold of the blackness was loosened. He moved inch by inch to the side of the bed. He put one leg over the side and then the other. Both feet were on the floor. They ran thud- thud-thud-thud, thud-thud-thud-thud, down the hall and landed him on top of his mommy whom he crawled over. He snuggled down in between his mommy and his daddy.

Jack woke up immediately and thought "what the...!"

"Honneeee..." grumbled Emma.

"Go back to bed, Sonny," Jack requested.

"Emma...take him back to bed," Jack groaned.

"You take him," said Emma, rolling away from the commotion.

But when Jack tried taking Jimmy back to bed, he held on so tenaciously to his mommy, that the harder Jack pulled, the tighter Jimmy held on. Jack had to carefully peel each finger of Jimmy's off her arm. When he finally got him off her, Jimmy was stuck to him like glue with all his feet and hands. It was like trying to get a giant crab off. He was trying to be gentle with him, but he decided to use force. He gave one jerk, and Jimmy was off, arms and legs straight out in the air, and he screamed. The moment Jack got him in bed and covered up, Jimmy stopped screaming, grabbed the covers tightly around him and went fast

asleep. Jack bent over him and kissed him "goodnight."

This same scenario happened night after night, Jimmy trying to get to his mommy. The night finally came when Jack lost his temper and yelled at Jimmy before he gave up and went back to bed. Jimmy tried one more time and got a spanking. From then on, Jimmy would scream and sob in silent terror, alone, under the covers, feeling the dark monster staring at him from the corner of the bedroom. Not one little finger ever escaped from under the covers for fear of being hacked off or yet, eaten.

Each night, Jimmy slept in a cold sweat without dreaming. Out of curiosity one night when Emma had to get up to go to the bathroom, she looked in on her little Jimmy. He was stiff and shuddering, cold and wet. The next day when Jack came home, he found that Jimmy's bed had been moved into the master bedroom. He asked Emma about it. She only said that Jimmy was afraid of the dark, it would only be for a short while and not to talk to her about it again. The bed stayed, but each night, Jimmy could still see that black hole in his bedroom staring out through the door way. He never would let any of his fingers out from under the covers for years, no matter how hot it got. His spunk and aggressive spirit never showed in his face again. He became very timid.

## CONCLUSION

Emma did get that colored maid she said she would get. Her work at the Telephone Office brought in enough money to pay the maid's wages, and she could work with less worry now that the children could stay home. The maid's name was Big Jane, and she was big. She weighed over two hundred pounds and was very intimidating to little Jimmy. The girls loved her and got along fine with her. Jannie especially loved that she had the same name as herself. They were always helpful, showing her where things went and how Mommy does things and playing games with her. And, they were mostly obedient.

Jimmy cried every morning when Mommy left for work. Then he spent most of the day hiding from the black giant. He was sure that she was part of that black hole into which all things fell and into which he found himself drowning. She even talked differently. He could barely understand half of what she said. He concluded that people with fat faces didn't have enough room on their faces to move their lips. He used this as one of his excuses not to mind her. Whenever he didn't mind, or whenever he would hit one of his sisters for not doing what he wanted, he was sent to bed.

The monster in the bedroom had taken the physical form of Big Jane. Jimmy was sure that she was part of that Halloween that had been sometime last year. She was the meanest person. She would pull down his pants quit often. Mommy never pulled down his pants to spank. She preferred the switch anyway, and would just roll up his pants legs if they were too long. But usually, he wore shorts, and in



the summer time, just his underwear. After Big Jane spanked him, came nap time just to get rid of him, he was sure. Well, he was glad to be rid of her too for a time.

Jimmy started pulling down his own pants under the covers during these nap times to rub his sore bumpass. This brought a new found pleasure to his life. He liked to feel naked under the covers and found that caressing himself between the sheets was as comforting as being at his mommy's breast. All his troubles with the girls of the house seemed to just melt away.

Jimmy's relationship with his mommy deteriorated rapidly. It was a Saturday. Mommy stayed home all day. Jimmy was standing in the kitchen by the round table and the big glass door watching Mommy cook dinner. He started rubbing his thang again out of habit. Emma saw it and turned pale. It made her sick. The thought of men's things between their legs made her want to throw up. She gaged and then turned red-hot angry. She approached him with the butcher knife in hand.

"Jimmy!" she growled between her teeth. "Get out of here!" Jimmy left startled and bewildered. His insides seemed to freeze. She had treated him as an outsider as when she would make disgusting remarks about strangers on the street or even Old Man White. He tried to understand that maybe she was just tired, but the hate made him dizzy. He had to go lay himself down. He never did find out that something was evil or bad until after he had done it, and this was one of those times. He felt heartsick and guilty, and the only thing that helped was to pull his pants down under the covers. That made his heart burn even more. He

became angry at his mother to tears and learned from then on never to trust her.

Loneliness set in. He would always hear the girls in the other room with Big Jane laughing about him. Sometimes he could hear Big Jane ask, "I wonda why yo brotha don' like ta play." Jane would respond with, "I guess he's contrary." "I guess so," Big Jane would answer. At this, Jimmy would sink further down into the sheets, comforting himself, feeling the sheets with his bumpass. It was the only comfort he got nowadays.

His mother was never home, and when she was, she was too tired to fool with him. He only saw his daddy on the weekends, and that would be colored by heated arguments with his mommy. Every night like these nights, he sobbed heavily, sobbing himself into unconsciousness with heart tugging sobs. Anytime he struck out in anger at his family, he would be spanked. He comforted himself continually by rubbing his bumpass between the nice soft sheets of his bed.

Jannie and Mary made friends easily. They had made good friends with Big Jane, and they also found a girl friend that lived down the street. Her name was Barbra Jean. She had a little sister named Toni. They had just moved down the street after their house was finished. It was yellow and had a car-port like the Barrow's, except it was on the other side of the street. From their back yard, they could watch the airplanes coming and going at the airport. Big Jane would not let the girls go over there to play at Barbra's house, but she could come over to their house and play (they would usually play house, and Jimmy never wanted to play that). So, when Big Jane left and Mommy was home, they would run down to Barbra's house. Emma never really was sure where they were, she just called

them when she wanted them to come home, and they obediently came home.

It wasn't many days that Jannie was able to persuade Jimmy to come along when they went to Barbra's. He found that she had store bought toys. Granny had bought them little airplanes one time, but Barbra had a big airplane that had to be held with two hands. She also had a big boat and a big top that wound up by pushing a screwy stick down into it. Jimmy loved to watch it spin around, wondering why it stayed on its point. She also had a toy wagon and a tricycle just like Jannie's, but the girls hogged those bigger toys and wouldn't let him play. He had to be content to play by himself. Little Toni would play with him, but he ignored her until she went away. He simply did not like girls.

Jimmy's favorite toy was the airplane. He flew and flew that airplane, all over the yard, pretending he was the pilot. The sky had always fascinated him, and much more, the man-made things he had always beheld in it. Now living near the Roswell Airport, he saw the small piper cubs and the larger DC-3's quite often. He would sit some time each day watching the planes take off and land. He couldn't see the runway unless he went down to the corner. There were houses everywhere now across the street. Sometimes he contented himself watching the planes come in and out of the houses, as he saw it. He could have watched them in Barbra Jean's back yard, but he didn't feel safe unless he could see his own house.

He loved making the toy airplane go where ever he wanted it to go. Sometimes, he imagined that he himself was the airplane and could fly to distant lands like Texas or Carlsbad.

Jimmy sat for hours in that girl's carport just flying that airplane with its four engines and three tail fins. (It was the latest design.) He never noticed that it was dark outside until someone turned the porch light off. Then he would look around slowly, put the airplane down carefully and then run home. Mommy would usually bawl him out for not coming when she called. There came a time that was different. Again, he never heard his mommy calling him, and no one came after him like Jannie would sometimes do. When he went to run home, he was so worried that he passed it by. There had always been the problem of crossing the street without Jannie, but he always had the courage and bolted across. This night, though, his courage waned. Tears ran down his little cheeks. He waited a long time before he ran across the street, even though there were no cars coming. He then ran from house to house. None of them looked familiar. It was dark. They all looked strange. Maybe if he could look inside each house...He tried several doorknobs. None of them would open. Every time he stopped, he could feel the darkness close in around him. He would try just one last doorknob. He would ask the people inside where his mommy was. The door knob wasn't in the right place. It was on the corner of the house. He could just barely reach it. He tried turning it. He felt a blanket of darkness spread around him. His arms slunk down, sliding slowly down the door. Jimmy melted onto the cement steps. He cried out, but no sound came. He cried out as loud as he could, but no sound came. There was this dark blanket around him and he screamed this soundless scream. Jimmy blacked out sometime in his sobbings and long lonely vigil on that strange door step. He had screamed for his mommy, and she never came. He had screamed for his

daddy, and he never came. He screamed for Jannie and Marry, but they couldn't hear him.

During the late night, Jimmy was awakened by bright lights in the sky. He watched them dance and hover and speed across. He watched them for a long time, and was comforted by their familiarity. He fell asleep watching them descend. He was faintly aware of being lifted up and carried.

Jimmy woke up in his bed the next morning, not knowing how he got there. He only remembered that he had a bad dream. No one in his family ever mentioned the fact that he hadn't come home last night. No one even noticed that he had been gone. No one had missed him. No one greeted him when he got up. No one ever called his name.

Jimmy climbed up to the breakfast table where an empty bowl had been placed. When he told his mommy that the lights came down last night, she ignored him.

"Eat your breakfast," she said. "We're moving."

She hadn't heard him. A great lump rose up in little Jimmy's throat. He couldn't eat very much breakfast. No one gave him any. He looked over at Jannie. She ignored him too.

Unconsoled, little Jimmy Barrows stared out the plate glass door, looking out into the blue sky. He watched with interest the little lights darting to and from the bright cloud covered sun, the dancing lights above in the Roswell sky.

THE END

