

# **Stories From the Back Forty**

*A compilation of short horror taradiddles from the homestead*  
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Cover art by Farely Heath Designs

This is dedicated to all my homesteading friends whom I respect and treasure.  
And to my handful of friends that pushed me along.

# **The Tales**

The Scarecrow's Daughter

Snowbound

A Controlled Burn

Coming of Age

Brush Hog

Alone on the range

A Mind Ordered Bride

A Homesteading Neophyte

*~ The scarecrow fails to scare anything but the over imaginative. ~*

## The Scarecrow's Daughter

The new scarecrow was only slightly disturbing to Jeanne. Her father had fashioned it from some of the old clothing that he couldn't bring himself to throw away. Jeanne's mother had died a few years ago, and her father, in good intentions and from his love, could throw none of her things out. Over time, he had given some of it to Jeanne to use, with the instructions to be very careful with them. Jeanne understood the feeling of finality that came with burning old, but cherished items. She remembered burning some of her oldest toys, it was painful to watch.

Looking back up at the scarecrow that had been erected in the middle of her garden, she could see the clumsy stitching of a man whose hands were rough from working on a farm, and was never taught how to sew. Her mother's torn blouse was sewn together, the pearl colored buttons that had once graced the thin cotton shirt were missing. In their place was heavy brown twine that stood out starkly against the delicate pink color of the fabric. With the same twine, Jeanne's father had attached a light-green broom skirt and a soiled apron. The one that her mother always wore when gathering eggs. Yellow from broken yolks was still caked onto the red apron. It had never been washed after her death. Jeanne watched as the skirt wiped about violently as a gust of wind assaulted the garden.

Jeanne wiped the tears that formed away from her eyes, and forced herself to look up at the face of the scarecrow again. Its head was made out of a off white colored cotton flour sack. Jeanne didn't understand using a white cloth, when the dirt would only soil it. To her it seemed like a waste of a good flour sack.

The scarecrow's face was made up to look like a woman. Her father had used her mother's old crumbling makeup. Her lips were a pale pink, the nose and eyes drawn in brown eyeliner. Eye shadow colored the pupils green, and the lids another shade of light pink. Rouge highlighted imaginary cheekbones. Jeanne shivered, was there a point to giving a face to a scarecrow? The makeup was applied roughly, not just as though it was done by someone that wasn't used to using it, but as though it had been done in anger. The lips were too large, and small chunks of lipstick clung to the fabric. The eye shadow was crumbling with age, but the way it was smeared on seemed forced. Yet the outlines, the ones done it the eyeliner pencil, were done carefully, almost seemed loving.

On the top of the scarecrows head, sat one of her mother's bonnets. The ones she would wear when in the church's Easter play about pioneer women and God. The brown twine could be seen stitched into the scarecrows head. Long strings of hair poked out from under the dark brown bonnet, placed here and there to make it look as though hair had slipped out of their binding. Jeanne found herself staring at those hairs in shock. It was the same color as her mother's had been, and from that distance, the hair looked real. *Could father have kept mother's hair?* Jeanne felt her stomach churn. Not only would this scarecrow keep birds away, but her as well. Jeanne wondered what had possessed her father to make it look so much like mother. She hoped that it

hadn't been intentional, yet she had some doubts.

Four years ago, Jeanne's father, Barrett, had found his wife on their kitchen floor. Dark blood pooled around her, staining the already dark wood. Barrett felt lost at that moment, a feeling that had never left him. The Doctor told him that something had gone wrong with the pregnancy, and she had bled to death. Barrett couldn't understand why his wife hadn't gone for help, or called out for Jeanne, who was eight-years-old at the time. Without her, he barely made it through his days. Stumbling around, doing chores and working the fields on automatic. He had been that way until a few weeks ago. Jeanne had noticed it immediately. He began to shower more often, and leave a little earlier for the local diner. When Jeanne had asked him if the coffee was actually drinkable now, he had blushed slightly. There was a new waitress working mornings. Barrett had assumed that she had been working there at night, and had a shift change. The men that he met with every morning, told him that she had just moved into town. A young widow of twenty-three, she had a seven-year-old girl of her own. Barrett was taken by her. So much like his beloved wife.

Yet now, now there was this scarecrow that looked exactly like a morbid version of Jeanne's mother standing a little too tall out in a small, child cared for, garden. Jeanne turned her back to the thing, and pulled the evading weeds away from her country fair prize winning carrots. They were grown from her grandmother's heritage seeds. Generation after generation of Gwin women had cultivated and saved their own seed stock, producing the best tasting vegetables in the state. At twelve years old, Jeanne made good money from her garden. She set up a vegetable stand along the road that ran past their property. People came from all over to buy her produce. Still, she could not bring herself to make the garden larger. That would mean even more work for her, and she already had too many chores.

Jeanne thought about what her days were like and began comparing it with the village children's. They slept until after the sun had rose, while Jeanne had milked two cows, gathered eggs and was waiting for the bus by then. Barrett would come in from tending to the horses and they would have breakfast of eggs, bacon and pancakes, or whatever Jeanne decided on preparing that morning. The children in the village ate instant breakfasts, that was heated in a toaster, or just a bowl of sugary cereal that their parents gave them. Jeanne would then walk down the mile long drive way to wait for the bus, in the dark. It was a two-hour bus drive. During that time she would play word games in her head until it was light enough to read. The children in town walked, or their parent drove them to school, fifteen minutes before the first bell rang.

Jeanne ignored the rustling of the broom skirt as the wind picked it up again. After school, where she spent much of her time alone, it was another two-hour ride back home. There was always an apple waiting for her in the mailbox, she would grab it and the mail that it sat on, and walked back down the long drive way. Barrett was usually working horses or tending to cattle when she got home. Eating the apple, she would do that day's homework before heading out to feed the pigs and look for the sheep. Other children watched television and played with their friends. Jeanne angrily yanked the weeds from the ground. *It wasn't fair, how come I can't have friends?*

"You pulled up a carrot." A woman's voice informed her. Jeanne jumped, startled by the invading voice.

"Mama?" She whispered and slowly turned to the scarecrow. Instead of seeing it, a dark-haired woman stood before her in tight blue jeans.

"No" She giggled down at Jeanne. "Maybe someday, but right now, I am just the girlfriend." It

was the waitress from town. The one Jeanne's father was dating.

"Oh, hi." The child mumbled before turning back to her garden.

"Is that all you have to say to me?" The woman asked crossly. Jeanne's mind made a witty remark, but she was not brave enough to repeat it out loud. She wiped the dirt from her hands onto her loose-fitting jeans, before standing to face the woman.

"Sorry, I am not feeling to well today." Immediately the woman bent over and placed her hand on Jeanne's head, checking for a fever.

"You are slightly warm, but that might be because of working so hard out here." She grabbed hold of the child's hand. "Come back to the house, Julia is up there waiting for you." Jeanne wasn't able to do anything but allow her to drag her along.

Julia was the waitress slash girlfriend's daughter. She was a seven-year-old know-it-all going on thirty. Her mother, Hope, allowed her to wear all the popular clothing. Jeanne thought it looked odd for a seven-year-old to wear belly shirts and hip huggers, not to mention the caked on make-up. They were city girls. People not known to wear things appropriate for a hard country life. And as long as they lived in the town that wouldn't change too soon. Jeanne was a little envious that she wasn't able to wear such things. It could make school life easier. But it didn't make sense to spend so much money on so little of clothes. *Besides, wasn't it a sin to expose so much flesh?*

"Your father asked me to come out and check on you. He has to go into the city for the night, and Julia wanted to ride the pony." Hope said matter of factually. Jeanne didn't respond. The woman wasn't here to check on her. She had been left alone many times in the past. Hope could have just left a message telling her that her father was going to go out all night. She was here only to indulge her daughter. The pony that Hope was referring to, was an eight-year-old working miniature horse. He pulled the small plow for Jeanne's garden. Jeanne had broken him to the plow. He was stubborn and didn't like children. He was not known to be passive when it came to allowing people to ride him, but the plow, the plow seemed to make him happy. Whenever Jeanne showed up with his bridle, he would dance around a bit, making all different types of joyous noises, before prancing up to her. Today he was in for a nasty surprise.

Julia stood on the rotting back deck. Her bloated little stomach stood out between her belly shirt and low rider jeans. Her small arms crossed defiantly as she stared Jeanne down with her well-known hatred.

"Am I riding that stupid pony or not?" She demanded to know.

"Of course you are darling." The cowering mother replied. Jeanne shuddered, she found this child vile. Without speaking, she motioned for Julia to follow. *Maybe Camus will throw Julia.* Jeanne almost giggled.

"What kind of stupid name is Cam-moo?" The child spit.

"You wouldn't understand." Was Jeanne's eye rolled reply. Camus was the author of the first book that her mother had given to her, and the miniature horse was the first working pet Jeanne's father had given her. It just felt right to name him such. But none of that would have mattered to Julia, it still would have been a stupid name.

Jeanne helped Julia mount Camus. He had never been under a saddle, and he wasn't going to be forced to wear one now. He fidgeted and snorted in protest. Jeanne whispered softly into his ear,

"I won't blame you if you threw her." With that, she released Camus, and he ran as fast as his short legs were able to carry him. Jeanne suppressed a smile as she watched him gallop and buck,

snort and stomp.

“I told you he didn’t like to be ridden.” Jeanne called out to Hope. Hope’s face had gone white. “GET HER OFF!” Hope ran in a panic toward the horse run. “Get my baby off that beast!”

Jeanne called out gently to Camus, trying to calm him. Quickly she ran into the stable, and came out carrying a bucket full of sweet feed. She held out a palm full between the wooden fence. Camus ignored all of her attempts, and as feeble as they were, she wasn’t surprised. Julia began screaming, as Camus ran faster and in tighter circles. He tried to throw her off, but the young girl clung to his mane, tearing hairs from his neck. The light brown and white pony squealed in disgust, and tried bucking harder. He felt her slip slightly, and it encouraged him. Suddenly he stopped running in circles, and shot straight forward. If Julia’s eyes had been open, she would have seen the fencing they was approaching, and could have jumped to safety. Instead she had squeezed her eyes shut, trying to block out the spinning sensation. Pony and child hit the wooden fence in a hard run. The old wood splintered sending its thick fragments into both of them. Camus continued running for a few more feet before he tumbled to the ground. Julia clutched tighter to his beige colored mane as he rolled over the top of her. Hope was screaming in the background.

Jeanne watched in dread as her beloved work pony ran through the fence and tumble upon the ground.

“CAMUS!” She wept as she ran toward him. Something sharp tore into her shoulder, before she was spun around. Hope’s long manicured nails punctured Jeanne’s flesh.

“You.” She snarled. “You did this.” She then released Jeanne and ran to her daughter. Jeanne stood watching. How was this my fault, she wondered. She had told them the first time they came out that Camus was not a ride able pony. They were the ones that had been persistent about riding him. Camus did what he had to, to remove Julia from his back.

“Call an ambulance!” Hope ordered her. Her voice cracked with panic. Jeanne nodded and ran into the house. Hope looked down at her daughter, too scared to move her. The young girl’s clothing was torn, and pieces of wood protruded out from her chest and neck, while the bulk of the horse crushed down on her leg. Julia made gurgling sounds as she tried to speak. Blood dribbled around the stopped up puncture wounds. Her whorishly done make-up was smeared, causing her face to look as though it was done up like a circus clown. The blood loss paled her face, Hope shivered as she looked at her child’s death mask.

Jeanne approached the scene. Her thoughts ran wildly. Not only had she called an ambulance, but had contacted the vet to tend to Camus. The work pony lay on his side. His breath labored as the piece of wood embedded in his other side shook nervously.

“My poor Camus.” Jeanne cooed as she bent down to brush his bloody neck. Hope grabbed the older child’s arm, and yanked her about. Jeanne cried out in pain as her shoulder disconnected.

“Stay away from her!” The banshee screamed. “YOU DID THIS! YOU KILLED HER!” Jeanne’s hand turned purple and swelled as the blood was cut off from it. Her eyes filled with tears from the sharp intense pain in her arm. The Earth spun under her feet, and then everything was dark. She didn’t feel the ground as she fell on it, nor could she feel the kicking and punching that came from the waitress slash girlfriend.

Jeanne woke up cold and alone. Her surrounding unfamiliar. Something beeped in a low tone behind her, and the room smelled of disinfectants. It took her a few moments to realize that she was in the county hospital. An I.V. burned in the back of her hand, and she could hear whispering out in the hall. She thought about what was happening with Camus as she fell back



into a deep sleep.

Something was gently pushing on Jeanne's belly. She heard a low male voice, whispering. Slowly she pulled herself out of sleep. A man in a white coat, loomed over her, his clammy hands pushed gently on her exposed abdomen. His head was turned as he spoke to someone just out of her sight line.

"Good, you're awake." He smiled when he noticed her stirring under his hands. "I was just checking your belly, just in case you were hurt there as well." Jeanne nodded at him. The crinkling of the paper pillow under her head seemed louder than it should have been, and that's when the pain hit her. Her hands quickly reached up to touch her head, and her left shoulder screamed in pain. She cried out, not knowing what to do to stop it. The man in the white coat gently pulled her hands down, and told a nurse to go and get him something. Jeanne didn't know what they were saying, too much pain erupted inside of her. She wasn't aware of how much time had passed as she withered about the bed. A new sensation pulsed through her hand, sending a small fire through her arm, and then the pain was gone.

"Feeling better?"

Jeanne giggled at the doctor.

"I guess you do. Do you remember what happened?" She did and she was suddenly reliving it. She could see the horror on her horse's face as he plowed through the wooden fence. She could see all the blood that seemed to pour out of him. She smelled his fear.

"Yes, I remember Camus getting hurt."

"Do you remember what happened to your sister?" Jeanne thought about her sister. She had died before birth, so much blood on the floor. *Mommy wasn't moving.*

"My sister died." She told him.

"Yes, I am sorry. You live too far out, and the ambulance was unable to reach her in time." He squeezed Jeanne's small hand in sympathy. "Do you remember what your mother did to you?" Jeanne then thought about her mother. "She combed my hair and braided it. She baked us cookies and sang while she washed clothing."

"Do you remember what you mother did after your sister got hurt?"

"Mama didn't do anything. She was dead too."

"No your mother didn't die. She hurt you."

Jeanne shook her head. Her sight spun for a moment. "No, my mother died when my sister died." The doctor mumbled something over his shoulder.

"Who is Hope?"

"Hope is a waitress slash girlfriend."

"Not your mother?"

"No." Again the doctor said something to the person behind him.

"She says she is your mother, and that you murdered your sister."

Jeanne broke out into laughter. She knew it was the wrong thing to do, but at that moment it couldn't have been helped. It wouldn't stop coming, and she could see the doctor eye her curiously. She raised her hand, pointing her index finger up to indicate that she would stop after a moment.

The laughter finally did die down, and Jeanne attempted to sit up in her bed. Her arm gave out from under her and she fell back. She had to be content laying down to tell this doctor what she did remember.

"I was eight when my mama died. She was pregnant with my little sister, but something went

wrong. She died on the kitchen floor. Hope, Hope is the waitress slash girlfriend my father met a few weeks ago. Julia is her daughter. She is not my mother. She isn't my stepmother. Julia wanted to ride Camus, my miniature pony. I told her many times that he doesn't like to be ridden. He likes to pull the plow. But she wouldn't listen to me, neither would Hope." Jeanne looked past the doctor, trying to remember why it was that she had allowed Julia to ride Camus that day. "Hope kept telling me to let Julia go for a ride. She didn't believe that a pony could cause problems. She doesn't know the difference between a miniature horse and a colt." She shrugged. "I don't know why I finally agreed. But I took Julia and put her on Camus, and let go. Camus did what I told Hope he would do. He ran and tried to buck her off. I called to him and tried to get him to notice the bucket of sweet feed. The next thing I know, Camus runs through a fence and falls. Hope screams at me and I go call an ambulance. When I went back outside, Camus was laying on his side. I could tell he was scared and I went down to pet him." Jeanne turned her head slightly to face the young doctor. "I don't know what happened after that."

The doctor stared at her for a moment before asking where her father was now. Jeanne could only shrug painfully. Then she heard a man yelling in the hallway and a woman sobbing. Jeanne smiled, her father was there. He came bursting into the room, his overalls reeked of pig blood. He must have come straight from the slaughter house, she thought. Hope was trailing behind him, her eyes full of tears.

"You!" He pointed accusingly at his only daughter. "You killed Julia!" His voice boomed off the vacant walls. Jeanne was only able to lay there and stare at him. Her father, of all people, should know better than that. Yet there he was blaming her. He was taking Hope's side, when he should have been there for his daughter. When Burnett saw that his daughter wasn't going to react. He turned quickly on his heels and stormed out the way he had come in. Hope still stood in front of Jeanne's bed, continuing to weep. The young doctor had to escort her out.

Soon a sheriff's officer came and talked to Jeanne. She told him the same thing that she had told the doctor. The Sheriff seemed fine with the story and left to talk to Hope for a third time. He never came back to re-question Jeanne, she was relieved of that. Burnett stayed away from the hospital for a few days. When he did finally return, he entered the room in tears. Jeanne was frightened. She had never seen him look like that.

"I am sorry dumplin." He sat heavily down on the chair next to Jeanne's bed. "I shouldn't have blamed you. The police said it ain't your fault. It was Camus."

"My horse! How is he?" She pleaded for an answer.

"He died." Burnett looked down at his feet.

Jeanne moaned loudly at her lose. "I hate Julia."

"Don't say that." He father snapped.

"Why? She's the one to do this. I bet she is sitting at home right now laughing about it. She hates me!"

"No Jeanne." Burnett vehemently shook his head. "Julia died with Camus." His country accented thickened with grief. Jeanne stared up at him, unsure if this was some kind of cruel joke, or maybe his way of punishing her for allowing Julia to ride Camus.

Without noticing the look his daughter held on her face he continued, "the funeral was yesterday. She is in our family cemetery." He paused waiting for her to say something about that. When nothing was forthcoming, he continued speaking. "Me and Hope thought that since we are gettin' married, that that would be a good place for 'er. After the service, the police came and took Hope to the station to talk to 'er. They says to me that it aint' your fault, and I ought to see

you.” He looked away from his feet into the astonished face of his daughter. “The service was real pretty. Many of the town kids were there. The preacher had lots of kind words.” His voice trailed off into a whisper. “The doc says that your shoulder came out of its socket and that you had a crack in your head, and a rib was broke. He doesn’t know how it happened. But I think the police do.” He picked up her hand, and kissed her knuckles. “Do you know how it happened? Did Camus run over you?”

Jeanne shook her head. Camus would never hurt her. Then something crept into her thoughts, a subtle memory of what had happened. Hope had beaten her.

“No daddy, I don’t remember what happened.” She lied. She knew exactly what the waitress slash girlfriend had done, and she realized that the doctor did as well.

Jeanne spent a full week and some extra days in her hospital room. The doctor acted as though he was afraid to release her to her father. But Jeanne was itching to leave. Something about that scarecrow tugged her thoughts. Soon the doctor had to release her, and the next day she found herself in front of the garden’s scarecrow.

“What should I do?” Jeanne slumped on the ground crying. She sought revenge on her future stepmother. But how? Grabbing her birth mother’s skirt that adorned the scarecrow, she rubbed the cloth ferociously against her wet eyes. She thought she could hear her mother singing a lullaby. The same one she use to sing whenever Jeanne had trouble calming down as an infant. “Oh mama, why did you have to leave me?” The child asked, looking at the scarecrow’s harshly made up face. “You left me to her!” She growled between her clenched teeth. Not only was she angry at the waitress slash girlfriend, but she was angry about the town’s children. She was jealous of them, and horrified how they were going to treat her when she returned to school. She could hear them in a sing song voice, mocking her and making up rhymes about how she was the one that killed Julia. Jeanne shook the town’s children’s voices from her head and tried to concentrate on the song that the scarecrow sung. Jeanne was soon asleep, laying on the cool dirt. A small grin could be seen as she dreamed of her revenge.

Hope was nervous about venturing out to Barnett’s homestead. She did care for him, more for what he meant to her life than for whom he actually was. He meant stability in her life. A constant flow of income, and no more running from an abusive ex-husband. And with Julia gone, there would be no competition for his affection. Hope hadn’t planned on Julia dying. It was saddening that she had to go in such a harsh manner, but lucky to Hope that she would no longer be in the picture. She had never really cared much for the child and had tried to leave her behind when Hope ran. Hope never liked children much. They were too clingy, too needy for her personality. Unfortunately Barnett’s child was still around. She would be a problem for her, as she would take up most of his time. Killing the child was out of the question. Hope didn’t have that desire, but she did need to get her off the homestead. Maybe staying with a family in the city to get a better education than what could be offered in that small Podunk town. Hope decided to try that first, and started to gather information on city schools and host families. *This was brilliant.*

Barnett found his only daughter and carried her back into the house. Her white cast was dirty from the dust blowing up under her T-shirt. He was grateful that she hadn’t been the one to die. As sad as he was over Julia’s death, it wasn’t as emotional as it would have been if it had been Jeanne, she was all he had left that really reminded him of his wife. Barnett was confused about Hope though, he figured she would have left after Julia’s death. Instead she insisted that they get married sooner than they had originally planned. Burnett tucked Jeanne into bed, and left

her to go work in the fields.

Hope arrived later that day, In her hands she carried all the information she could find regarding schools in the city, and host families. She planned to convince her fiancé that Jeanne would be better off away from the homestead. She hoped that he would think that because of Julia's death that it might be safer for his only daughter.

Hope walked into the kitchen, allowing the squeaking screen door to slam behind her and announce her arrival. She was greeted with a tired looking Jeanne sitting at the kitchen table, drinking her father's darkly brewed coffee.

"Where is your father?" Hope asked trying to not show her contempt for the child.

"Barn." Was the quick reply. Hope looked over her shoulder and shuddered. Barns scared her. It was irrational, she knew, but was unable to control the sinking feeling she had every time she looked at one.

"Could you get him for me?"

"No, he is working. Either wait or go out there."

Hope looked terrified as she stared down at the girl.

"I will go out there with you." Jeanne offered. Hope sighed in relief. And quickly accepted the offer. Jeanne exaggerated a groan as she rose from the chair. She tried to glance at Hope's face, looking for any kind of regret for what she had done. There was none. Hope allowed Jeanne to lead the way to the barn. The afternoon sun had just started to center itself above the land.

Chickens squawked after the pair as they walked by the pen. Other livestock ignored them when they saw that neither of the females carried feed. Jeanne opened the small side door. The inside of the barn was dark. Slight slivers of sunlight filtered through the cracks in the wood. Hope peered in over the child's shoulder. Farm equipment was scattered about. Strange, deadly looking instruments were strung up by their handles, swaying in an unfelt breeze.

"Barnett?" Hope cautiously called out into the meekly lit barn.

"He's in the back of the loft. He won't hear you." Jeanne entered the barn, not caring if the waitress slash girlfriend followed.

The low ceiling had antique farm equipment dangling from hooks. There were sickles, shears, and something that looked like leg shackles. The barn was lined with buckets of poisons, feed supplements and portable corral fencing. The large combine was missing, but the ancient looking brush hog and swather sat quietly, dust mites twirled above them in a sliver of light. Hope could see the outline of pails and shovels as well as a potato fork and several pitchforks. Then there were the things in the shadows, items that Hope was unable to identify. Those things scared her even more. She started having second thoughts about marrying into all of this.

Jeanne stopped at the foot of the stairs. "You first." She motioned with her hand for Hope to continue up the stairs.

"Are you sure he is up there?"

"Yes, I can hear his radio." Jeanne replied. Hope strained to hear something, anything. All that was audible was the creaking of the old wood. She hesitantly set her foot down on the first step. And with a deep breath, continued to the top of the stairs. Jeanne followed closely behind.

"There's no one up here." Hope remarked, a little cross with the child. She turned to face Jeanne and screamed. Jeanne rushed forward, her hands wielding a large pair of sheep shears. They looked like grossly disfigured scissors.

The small child leapt up onto Hope's chest, sending her down onto the floor with a loud thump. The loft shook under the sudden, and violent shifting of their weight. Jeanne took the

shears to Hope's mouth, cutting into the inside of her cheeks and removing part of her tongue. Teeth that were in the way shattered and fell back into Hope's throat. She gurgled as she tried to breathe. Unable to scream, and barely able to breathe with the shears in her mouth, Hope scratched at Jeanne. Her long manicured nails broke off deep into the child's face. One came very close to taking out an eye. This enraged Jeanne even more and she plunged the shears deeper into the waitress slash girlfriend's throat. Hope's eyes rolled back, revealing the blood shot whites. Jeanne giggled as she use to when playing with one of the puppies. Hope's body violent twitched under Jeanne's weight. Then suddenly it stopped. The child looked down into Hope's face. A rush of foul-smelling air emerged from the woman's mouth, and into Jeanne's nostrils. Leaving the shears in place, the child stood and climbed back down the stairs of the loft. Her father's sledge hammer sat in its place next to the back entrance. Jeanne struggled with its weight, but was able to raise it just enough for a decent swing. She brought the hammer down into a termite-infested beam. The weight of the loft increased the speed in which the pole disintegrated. Jeanne ran from the barn and watched in awe as an explosion of beginning of time dust came from the barn's door. The loft had never been repaired, and was no longer used because of the possibility of it collapsing. But Jeanne never imagined that it would come down so easily. She turned and ran out to her garden.

Jeanne looked up at the scarecrow, and in the excitement and immense pride she felt for what she had just done, she told the scarecrow everything. She didn't feel the finger nails that were imbedded in her face. She laid down in the soft bed of carrot tops and listened as her mother sang to soothe her.

"I did good, didn't I mother?" Jeanne asked. Her mother told her she had.

No one knows if it was the head injury that caused Jeanne to change so. Maybe it had always been something there, and the scarecrow dressed like her deceased mother set it off. No one can say for certain, but what everyone does know, is that as Jeanne laid there, basking in her revenge, the scarecrow told her daughter that the town's children needed to learn a lesson as well.

*~ To love your child is superb. To roast her with a hint of rosemary is divine ~*

## Snowbound

My name is Brenna Sarah Blair, and as I write this I am twenty-three-years-old. I am the only one in my family that survived the blizzard of 1996. It has been ten years since this happened, but I feel that I should share everything about that awful winter. It's time.

I had six sisters and three brothers. The ten of us, along with our parents, worked and lived on a two hundred-acre homestead in Wisconsin. The land has been in the Blair family for generations. At one time it had been thousands of acres. But like so many farmers, land had to be sold because of debts and forced government buy outs. When the land was no longer turning a large profit at farming, my grandparents turned the land into a self-sufficient homestead. We had everything we needed to live. Of course things like toilet paper, and imported spices weren't available. And to be able to pay for those items, they sold hogs and homemade cheeses.

We didn't have electricity until I was five-years-old. I remember that day vividly. My father laughed and teased me as I flipped the over head light switch on and off for over an hour. It was intensely fascinating, as well as unreliable. The power to the house was out more often than not. It was a novelty to us rather than a necessity.

We lived a very isolated life. My parents home schooled us, and our closest neighbor was more than ten miles away. And they were not people that my parents wanted us to associate with.

For as long as I can remember, we relied on no one but ourselves. We had been through many floods and winter storms that kept us from living the homestead. Yet even when we had a clear pass, we rarely ventured off land. It didn't matter much if there were others outside of our property, we had each other, and rarely felt the need for more. Even when my older brother and sister turned eighteen, they built small homes on our property. Still worked the land and reaped the benefits of the family's homestead. Our father paid them a small sum for their work, allowing them to buy a truck together. Eventually my sister met a boy in town. They married very quickly, and he moved into my sisters small cabin a few acres from the main family's.

I liked her husband. He was a town boy, but was able to pick up on our ways soon. He worked happily beside my father and brothers. Rarely did anyone bicker. Within a year of my sisters marriage, she birthed a little girl. She was a joy to behold, and we took to her as though she was a sibling. It was my job to watch the younger children since I was the oldest still living in the main house. My niece was part of that job, and I remember her and her bubbly laugh to this

day.

My oldest brother never got the chance to marry. I thought him a handsome boy, though had no one but my family to compare him to. He spent his days in the fields with the small group of livestock he had acquired. I never knew if he had any want for a family, he seemed content.

I hesitate with the story here, for things become ill quickly. Maybe it would be best to tell you a little about each of my siblings, so that you can know them as people. Just as I knew them.

My mother was fourteen when she married my twenty-four-year-old father. There was nothing strange about that in the area where we lived. Her family was dirt poor and did not have enough land to support their large family. It was in everyone's best interest that she marry my father. They lived under the same roof as my grandparents, until their death five years later. By then, my mother had birthed her first three children.

My oldest sister, Margaret, was born early, and breach. It was a difficult delivery for my mother, but a successful one. Margaret was too small to nurse from our mother, so she was nursed with a sugar tit. They placed her in a shoe box and kept her warm near the wood burning stove. Margaret grew strong, and tall. She was the rough and tumble type, unafraid of a fist fight with one of the boys. She married later in life, she was nineteen, to a town boy named Jacob. I have told you a little about him, and their daughter Chloe.

The second born was Matthew. He had a full head of thick curly blonde hair right at birth, and it never went away. He was determined to be his own person from day one. Mother said he was a quiet child, never called out for anything. She feared that he might have been deaf. But the Doctor said he was a fine, healthy boy. He didn't start talking until much later than the rest of us. And even then he never had much to say. Once again my parents talked to the Doctor, worried that he might be a retard. But they need not have worried, for he was doing the books by age ten.

I was the third one brought into this world, four years later. I was born blue. No breath or sound came from my tiny body. My grandmother smacked me a few times, trying to get me to cry. But it was my mother and her gentle caressing that got me to flee death.

Next came Lilly. She was born both healthy and easily. She came to us on a day where the snow was slowly melting off and spring flowers began to emerge. My father declared this a good sign. Her personality was as fragile and frilly as her name implied. As she aged, she became obsessed with brushing her long straight blonde hair and hand washing. I caught her several times counting out the silverware as she did dishes. She became the house cleaner. Even when we helped, she would re-wash anything that we had done.

Carla emerged during a frog strangler. The flood water had ruined our fields and killed a few sheep. Just as the dark, polluted looking water began to seep under the door, Carla screamed out. Mother bled for a long time after her birth. We feared she would die. Yet Carla seemed to ensure that death's hand stayed at bay. My mother's will is very strong, but Carla's seemed stronger. She had a dominating personality, everyone had to live only for her if she was to be happy. There were times where I wish she had been thrown out into the flood waters.

Brian and Elizabeth graced us with their presences soon after Carla. A surprisingly easy birth compared to what mother had already been through. As they grew, they stayed close, creating their own language and ignoring the rest of us. They were darker in color than their fair-haired siblings, causing a slight rife in my parents lives. They frightened me at night. Not the boo I got you type fright, more like the shivery, sinking feeling of impending doom.

Next came Michael. He died of a crib death a month after God gave him life. He was born healthy, but I guess he just didn't feel he wanted to stay with us. I don't blame him.



Another set of twins arrived a year later. The last of my sisters. Mona and Joan. In the five years I knew them, they hated each other. They were night and day. Mona was fair haired like us, while Joan was darker like Brian and Elizabeth. Mona turned into a tom boy, loving to wallow in the mud and never hesitated when it came to working hard with our father. Joan was quiet, but not withdrawn. She liked the lacy dresses that our mother made for her, and was learning how to cook when she died.

Oh yes, we have come to that story. They died. All of them died. If it had been a normal occurrence, I would not be sharing my story. This is something that might show up on the talk shows and tabloids. Who would actually believe any of it? I survived. I lived through this, so I am the only one that knows the truth. The local papers said I was in shock and suffering hypothermia, and that my statement to the police was incoherent, and the rantings of a lost child. The autopsy reports said that everyone but my father had died of starvation, or an accident. And that our dogs had ate some of their flesh. They said I killed my father because I was hallucinating. The courts deemed that I was temporarily insane due to the circumstances, and served no time for murder. No one believed my story.

It was early October, and we were getting ready for a hard snow storm. When you live out in the country long enough, you notice the subtle changes, and can pretty well guess what might be coming. We all agreed that what was coming, was approaching fast and hard. We penned the animals, strung a new line between the house and the barn, heated up the livestock's water and mush. That helps in keeping them warm at night. Food was brought out from the cellar, enough to last out a week, while fire wood was cut and stacked closer to the house. When we had finished, we warmed are red fingers close to the fire, as mother made us hot chocolate to push out the cold. We were cozy in our little cabin, even Margaret and her family had decided to keep house with us that night. Matthew wanted to chance it in his own cabin. I watched as the sun was slowly being consumed by the heavy looking clouds. I prayed he made it safely.

My father settled down in his overstuffed chair and opened up his Bible to read to the youngest of the children. Margaret, Lilly, me and mother sat next to the fire, each one of us was doing some sort of stitching, and listened quietly as father spoke.

He was a very soft spoken and gentle man. He never raised his voice unless we were in danger. He was nothing like the loud men that would show up on our homestead to buy our hogs. I could never see any of those men reading from the Bible, out loud to their children. I adored my father, and he in turn loved all his children. He took his time when dealing with a frustrated child. He never shied away from a hug, and was always ready with praise. Brian was the only one that ever suffered a spanking, and that was only because he had grabbed for the hot wood stove. Father was quick to apologize and then told him why he had been spanked. Mother, however, could be short tempered. All of us had suffered at her hands more than once. But I can't blame her. She was young and overwhelmed. Stress can cause those things to happen. She would always break down in tears after she thrashed us. Telling us she never means to do those things, and that she did love us. Mother rarely smiled. We loved her all the same.

We were laughing and joking with each other when the wind shook the house. We paused a moment to listen, and then resumed our jocularly. The storm had arrived. At that moment none of us knew how long the storm would take to pass, none of us really cared. We were warm, we had food, we had each other.

Days passed with no signs that the storm was going to let up. We did what we could to keep ourselves busy. Father was the only one to venture outside, and that was only to fetch more

wood for the fire. We ate large hearty meals to keep us warm and our spirits up. Father even touched up our hot chocolate with whiskey. It wasn't until a week passed that we began to worry.

Our supplies ran low, and father had to dig a trench to exit the front door and get to the cellar. We had to bring in snow in large pots, melt them over the fire, and pour the steaming water over the cellar door. It had frozen shut. Father was concerned about Matthew. So after the supplies were brought in, he followed the line out through the violent whipping snow, and hooked a pair of horses to a sled. The snow swallowed him within a few feet of the house. We had no way of knowing if he had made it to the barn, let alone all the way out to Matthew's place.

We fretted and worried over father as another week passed. We had never seen a storm not let up like this before. Two full weeks of relentless white, and never once did it show any signs of slowing down. This time we were more cautious about our food. Our meals were demurred, and no hint of whisky in our chocolate. When that food stuffs began to thin, Mother made an attempt to dig her way to the cellar. She collapses without making much of a dent in the snow. Jacob, Margaret's husband, brought her back into the house, and took over the digging. Now that mother was in a forced sleep, she could not object to Jacob doing the work. He did succeed in getting to the cellar, but all the hot water we poured on the door, didn't help. We were frozen out of it. Jacob thought it would be best to go out to the barn, and slaughter one of our hogs. He grabbed the same line father had, and soon he too was swallowed by the storm. Unlike father, Jacob returned a few hours later. He had a thick rope tied to his waist, and he struggled through the hard packed snow, pulling the carcass behind him. Margaret rushed out to meet her husband, ignoring the fact that she was not bundled against the cold. I followed, and together we helped the fatigued Jacob into the house.

We placed Jacob in father's chair, close to the fire. Margaret rubbed his reddened skin as I untied the robe. The hog that had been drug through the snow, was frozen through in through. Not a speck of blood on his hide. I looked up quizzically at Jacob. "Th . . . th . . . they are all dead." His teeth chattered loudly. I rapped my knuckle against the hog's side. My flesh stung from the cold. Was it that cold out there? Something about it seemed wrong, but at that time I couldn't wrap my fingers around what it was. We thawed both the hog and Jacob out, before dressing the hog.

Jacob said nothing about the other animals, but his face never fully came out of its new pale color. Mother soon recovered from her exhaustion, and things went back to as normal as they could be. Father had now been gone for three weeks.

At the one month marker, the sun peeked out at us. The youngest children dressing and ran outside to play. We were all suffering from cabin fever, and it was a relief to be able to go outside. Margaret and I ventured to the barn, now that we could clearly see the way. It took us two hours to clear the packed snow that blocked a small door. We were lucky that the wind was blowing out of the north, if it had been the other way, nothing would be able to get into that barn until spring. Our noses were bright red, tears from fatigue iced our eyes, and we shivered from our wet clothing. Still, we were determined to get into that barn. We needed another hog to feed us all. Margaret entered the dark barn first, and I stumbled in right behind her. She lit the lantern that was just inside the door. I heard her gasp as I brushed the snow from my jeans.

Slowly we walked, chalking each stall in the process. They were all empty. All the sheep were gone, the chickens, the dairy cows, and even the hogs. We moved out of the barn, everything still seemed in slow motion, we were in a state of bewilderment. Once outside Margaret mumbled.

“Jacob.”

That’s right, I thought. Jacob had said that all the hogs were frozen dead. He brought back one, but what of all the others? I ran to where I heard the children playing, falling in deep holes along the way.

“Jacob.” I gasp as he came into view. “The hogs,” I was forced to take a breath.

“Are not there.” Jacob finished my sentence, his head bowed in shame. “I didn’t realize that you were going out to the barn, or I would have stopped you. Everything that was in there is gone.” His eyes never met mine. “I should have told you all, but I didn’t want you to panic. All I found was that one hog.” He carefully lifted his head, sheepishly he met my eyes. “I prayed for a day like this.” His hands indicating that he was talking about the sun. “I will go to Matthew’s. Your father should be there. I will return with both of them and more food. Hopefully enough to hold us over until we can get into town.”

“You had better leave soon then.” I stared at him hard. He shivered, my stare was colder to him than the ice that surrounded us. He nodded, and returned to the house.

Within the hour Jacob was bundled. His backpack filled with jerky, ammunition, a knife and a Sterno can. A rifle hung from his left shoulder. We watched as he stiffly walked in his snow shoes in the direction of Matthew’s cabin. He thought to shoot some game on the way, just in case he found nothing at Matthew’s. Margaret eyes welled up. Her body language told me she didn’t expect his return. That was just as well.

We enjoyed two days of clear skies before the storm returned. It seemed worse than before, and we all prayed that Jacob had found the small cabin.

Mona and Joan decided to work out their differences while we were all cooped up together, they played silly little games with the slightly plump Chloe. They made faces and got the baby giggling. It was contagious and soon even the dour twin’s Brian and Elizabeth had cracked a smile. Mother brought out the popcorn she had reserved for Thanksgiving, and we set out to pop, string and eat the fluffy white kernels. What a simple joy. It did keep us occupied, and rarely did our thoughts drift to Jacob, Matthew or father.

It had been five weeks since we had seen Father, a six-week absence from Matthew’s presence, and a week since Jacob left. Brian at nine years old was the man of the house. Too young to actually receive much respect from the girls, the duties then fell onto Margaret, as she was the oldest. Food was now scarce. We had no way of getting into the cellar. Mother declared that she would have father put a cellar inside of the house just in case this happened again. We were eating small meals of beans, fried pork skin and biscuits.

By week six, we no longer bothered with bathing. It took too much energy to scoop up enough snow to melt and warm for a single bath. We ignore our smell, and concentrate instead on keeping the younger children’s spirits up. Lack of food was taking its toll on mother, Margaret and me. We gave most of our rations to the six older children. Mother tried to get Margaret to eat more, as she was still breast feeding Chloe. But Margaret insisted that everything was fine. I know better. Chloe was pale, and lethargic. Mona and Joan’s clothing were looser than the cared for. And Brian and Elizabeth’s natural waifness began to look skeletal. It finally came to the point where nothing could make the children laugh.

On the seventh week, the wind blew harder. The windows rattled and the door seemed to push itself inward. We were frightened that the glass would break, and tried our best to cover them with thick blankets. If the glass was to shatter, we could at least keep the shards from coming too far into the house. But when I looked out of one, I saw that the snow was packed over

half way up the house. We might not be able to leave until spring. That night something pounded heavily against the top of the door. We stared at one another, wondering who could it be.

Margaret was the only one that hadn't given up hope for the men.

"Jacob!" She cried and rushed to the door. The locking mechanism was so cold that it took two of us to pry open the dead bolt. Once that was accomplished, we flung open the door allowing the freezing wind to engulf us. Snow fell into the entrance, standing taller than me, and something covered in white, slid down the newly formed slope. We ignored the cold and the snow piling into the house. We waited in anticipation for the snow mask to be removed, and to know who it was that came here.

Father had come home. We rejoiced, and felt relief. It had been too many weeks and we thought him dead.

"Well, don't just stand there. I need warmth and we need to close that door." Mother tended to father, as those of us strong enough began scooping up the snow and throwing it into the bathtub, that sat close to our fire place. We worked hard and fast, closing the door an inch or two every time we had a space cleared. It did us no good to leave the door wide open for more snow to settle in. We were shocked to discover that it had only taken us forty minutes to do the chore. We were tired, sweaty and hungry by the end of it.

Lilly had rummaged through father's pack as we worked. She brought out dried meats, cans, and some candies. Father also had several rabbits tied to the belt on his waist, that mother promptly removed and handed off the Carla to be cleaned. We had food.

"Jacob?" Margaret cautiously asked our father as we settled in around him. His calloused hand gently touched the side of her gaunt face.

"I never saw him." He said with remorse. Margaret screamed out, and fainted. Her true love, her husband, Chloe's father was lost. He had been gone three weeks, we all knew that he couldn't have survived the storm. Now it was mother's turn to ask about her eldest son.

"He was there, but low on fire wood. We held out as long as we could, praying that the storm would pass. When it didn't, we decided that we needed to try to make our way here." Father grabbed mother roughly, pulling her onto his lap. His thick arms wrapped tightly around her before continuing." We walked until he was unable to go further. I started a fire to try to warm him. I'm sorry, but he died in his sleep." Mother whimpered her distress. Matthew had been her worry and joy for 17 years. And now, he was suddenly gone. We all wept that night.

In the following days, the wind let up some and we ate a little better. We were still cautious about rations. The snow continued until we could no longer see out of the windows. Margaret withdrew into herself, and began to neglect Chloe. I did what I could to help both of them, but my spirits were tired. It was on the fourth night after father had returned, that I found Brian blue and stiff. Elizabeth was wrapped tightly around him, her eyes wide and terrified as she looked at me.

"He was so cold." She whispered. "I tried to wake him, but he wouldn't . . ." tears erupted in her eyes. "I thought if I warmed him up. . ." Her words trailed off, and I nodded. I was able to convince Elizabeth to leave him, and we went to tell father. We were unable to leave the house to bury him. Instead he was laid out on the bed of the furthest and coldest bedroom, mine. We said our goodbyes, and father opened the window a crack. After shutting the door, we stuffed towels under the door, hoping that this would keep the cold inside the room. We would preserve his body by freezing it. We wouldn't bury him until spring, five or six months away. No one slept well that night.

Thanksgiving came and went. We didn't celebrate it this year. We had nothing to be thankful for. Chloe was looking sicker, and Margaret was still ignoring her. I knew it was only a matter of time before I would find her dead as well. Two weeks after father had returned, I found Chloe dead in her make shift crib. Margaret didn't respond when I told her. And I alone took her into the bed with Brian.

The room was terribly cold. But my shivering was from the sight of a preserved Brian. Something wasn't right about the way he looked. Not the death mask he was wearing. He had been moved. I pulled the quilt that was covering him back, this was something that I didn't remember being pulled over him in the first place, and laid Chloe down next to him. I kissed her cold forehead and told her I loved her. I then walked around the bed to do the same with Brian. That's when I noticed his pant leg. The left one was not as full looking as the right. I pulled it up, and suppressed my scream. The Flesh and muscle of the entire calf was gone! Gently I covered the two up with the quilt, and left the room. I went to father with the discovery. "Probably an animal. "He told me without any emotions. "Remember we did open the window." I remembered, but the calf was clean, not something I could have ever associated with an animal. The rest of Brian's body had been whole. There wasn't anything I could say or do, we were not allowed to argue with father.

We had three bedrooms close enough to the main room and fire place. Margaret was in one, our parents in another and all of the younger children, including me slept in the closest of rooms. Before father had returned, we were sleeping in front of the fireplace. He decided that the rooms should be better, and told each of us where to sleep. I was to sleep in the same room as Margaret, yet I snuck in with the younger children every night. They were scared and cold. I worried more and more over Margaret though. She was looking paler as the days passed. Soon she wasn't leaving her room and I would have to bring her food. At night I could hear her through the wall, her muffled cries of "no" kept me awake sometimes. Surely she was dreaming about the death of her husband and child. I found her dead three weeks after father's return.

Father carried her body into the death room. He wouldn't allow any of us to accompany him. Yet I peeked in, and I couldn't see Chloe. That night, I stole a candle off the mantle and snuck into the death room. Margaret was laid out next to Brian. She still wore her thick flannel night clothes. Chloe was gone. I thought father would have noticed that, but he hadn't said a word to us. It was for all the best I suppose. Brian's body looked the same, and no more flesh was missing.

Within the week mother passed on. We were all struck hard by this. Out of all of us, she had the most to live for. Her children. Father said that she couldn't stand to watch as her children die one by one, and she gave up. I saw the wisdom in that, still, it hurt. The same night that mother was laid out next to her children, again father forbade us to enter the room, Lilly started sleeping in father's bed. Night after night, I could hear the two of them weeping. It was hard to listen to.

The several rabbits father had brought home kept us fed through the weeks. I wondered why so much meat had come of those few rabbits, yet I was still grateful and didn't question it.

Lilly died less than a week after mother. Her death was different from the others. Mona found her in the kitchen. Sometime in the night, Lilly had walked into the dark kitchen and slit her wrists. She died alone, quietly sitting in a chair. She too was taken into the death room by father. My family started to die quicker after that.

Mona and Elizabeth started having nightmares about Lilly. So to ease their troubled sleep,

father took them into his bed. They died together in their sleep within a few days of sleeping in that room. I found myself questioning what was happening. We seemed to have plenty of meat. We couldn't be dying from starvation. Father's room was chilly, but they had plenty of body heat. So why was it that only father, me, Carla and Joan were left?

Joan started shadowing father. She was only five years old, but she claimed to know that she would die soon. She never left his side. Eating with him, doing his chores with him, and sleeping next to him. This lasted a full week before she too was found dead on the bathroom floor. Her head was split open, I saw the blood and her brains spilled out onto the wood. My nightmares began.

With only Carla and I left, we all decided it was best to move a bed into the main room, and sleep near the fireplace. We had plenty of food to make it through the winter, and enough warmth that Carla shouldn't have died as well. At some point during the night, she left the bed and slept on the couch. Father must have disturbed her, he did toss around a lot, and she was a light sleeper. She was dressed in her thick flannel night gown, covered by a quilt and in a heated room. She had eaten well, now that our rations were larger, yet there she died. Father allowed me to help him in the death room.

My family laid out on the small bed. Their bodies laid awkward over each other. I was unable to tell who was who because father had covered them all with a sheet. It was for the best.

That night I felt something moving under my night gown. Father's hand was gently caressing my thigh. I looked at him. He was doing it in his sleep. He was dreaming about mother. I allowed him to keep his hand where it was and drifted back to sleep. It happened again the next night, his hand reaching a little higher. He was my father and would not do anything to hurt me, so I let it pass. We spent our days' barely talking to one another. There wasn't much to say. We did this on automatic, our thoughts drifting to our family.

I woke up one night with an odd sensation. Something that I can now say was pleasure, though at that time I wasn't entirely sure what it was. To be completely honest, I didn't open my eyes, thinking that it was only a dream and allowed the feeling to engulf me until my body shook and I felt like I was going to pass out. It was only then that I opened my eyes, and caught father shutting his. His hand was inside of my panties. I didn't know what to do. It had felt good, but now I felt ashamed. What had he done to make me feel like that?

The next night I woke to the same sensation, but this time I was also cold. I slowly peeked through slitted eyes. Father had removed our blanket, and was suckling on my nipple as an infant would do. It was too late to protest as my body began to shiver again. It continued like this night after night, father's hand would be in my panties and he would be doing something else to increase the shivers. In a way I wanted him to stop, in another I didn't. Then one night I woke suddenly, it was hard to breathe and there was a sharp pain between my legs. Father was laying on top of me, rocking gently. I didn't know what to do, and began to weep. His low voice whispered in my ear, telling me how much he loved me. I cried silently from the pain, until he shuttered and removed himself from me. I laid awake that night knowing what had happened. Mother had told me about this. She explained that men had needs. I rationalized it in my head. Father was alone now, and I was taking mother's place. We only had one another, and he did have needs.

Night after night I would wake with him on top of me. And night after night the pain lessened. Soon he was showing me how to make myself shiver in the way he had before. And before I knew it, I was looking forward to our nights. Now when I look back on it, I am disgusted

with myself. I was enjoying sex with my own father. But at the time it seemed a necessary enjoyment. Our house was buried in the snow and we only had each other.

We lost track of the days and nights. No more sunlight filtered through. Sex now became a way to pass the time, and we did it on a whim. There were times where I would approach him, kissing and touching him in ways that were un-daughter like. A need for him built up in me. I wanted to stay with him always, and thought about being his wife. He showed me how to do different things with sex, things that would hurt at first, but then the wonderful feelings would cancel them out. Sometimes are movements reminded me of our livestock mating.

I lasted the longest in father's bed. Why that was, I will never know. Maybe because I became a willing participant. We ate little and had sex often. Or maybe it was because I was the only one left, and his need for sex with a partner was great.

I will never now what time it happened, or what day. Father and I were on the bed, his lust was ravenous at that time. He was rougher then normal and was saying awful things to me. It hurt a bit, yet I was still conflicted, I smiled and allowed him to continue. My body shook and the feeling of passing out came over me. Suddenly I was unable to breathe. I could no longer see anything when I opened my eyes. Something was covering my face. It was a pillow! I screamed as the fabric pushed into my mouth. I bucked and thrashed, trying to get the pillow away. Father suddenly moans loudly, and his body shook violently. He then collapsed on top of me, and lessened his grip on the pillow. I was able to breathe again. I removed the pillow and looked down at the top of his head. He laid still for a moment before looking up at me. He smiled, then slowly began rocking again. I didn't know what to do. I laid there staring at the ceiling as he finished a second time. Slowly and gently this time. I didn't dress when we disengaged. That wasn't what my father liked. Instead we would curl up naked together so that when the urge hit, we could do what was needed. I couldn't sleep. I laid there thinking about the pillow.

In the following days, I pushed the incident out of my thoughts and we fell into a routine of eating and sex once again. We stopped bothering getting dressed. After a time though, the pillow came back, just as violent as before. Once a day or was it night, he would push the pillow into my face. Each instance seemed longer than the last. I was scared, what was he doing? He began to change. Instead of the gentle father and now the lover that I knew, he began to slap me, and tie me down. He cut me once with a knife, even dripped hot wax on my breasts. He would violently flip me over, roughly pulling my breast as though he was pulling an utter. He would grab hands full of hair and pull my head back. He forced me to do things that I didn't want to do. And the pillow, the pillow gave him the most pleasure.

I was terrified, and wasn't sure what I was to do. He was getting harder to be around and I tried to find excuses not to have sex with him. None of my excuses worked though. He would throw me down wherever we were standing when the urge hit him. I was in constant pain. I cried often, my eyes' red and swollen.

I was in the walk in pantry one day, gathering up some of the never diminishing meat for something to eat, when the urge hit my father. He grabbed my hair and bent me over the butchering table. Dried blood scratched at my bare chest as he violently and repeatedly entered me. I no longer held back and screamed, thrashing about to remove him. This sent him into a frenzy. He enjoyed my fighting back. That's when I saw it. The small rifle that Jacob had left with was hidden behind the table. I prayed that it was loaded. Father bit deep into my back as I reached for the rifle. He was too busy to notice what I was doing. Soon he was finished, and I had hold of the rifle. He patted my rear and told me I was a good girl, his special little girl, and turned

to walk out of the room. That's when I shot him in the back. He fell dead instantly. I got lucky.

Still naked I dragged father into the death room, and left him on a pile on the floor. Not bothering to cover him. I then went and pulled back the sheet that covered my family. I know knew where all the meat we were eating had come from.

I was found in February. The neighbors that we were never allowed to talk to had managed to get into town and informed the local police that they were worried about us. The front door was dug out and a fireman discovered me laying naked on the bed. I was weak from not eating the meat. I had survived on seed potatoes and snow. Later they found Jacob and Matthew, both dead and missing chunks of flesh.

*~ If the choice was left up to man, he would most certainly choose the wrong path ~*



## **A Controlled Burn**

Orange flames licked and lapped at the tall brown grass, consuming the organic growth around it. Julie stood only a few steps from her home, and 5 acres from the flames, yet she was able to hear the fire eat its way toward her. It reminded her of the fast-moving stream near her parents' apartment in town. It was pleasant and reassuring in its deceptive way. Julie kept the water hose in a tight grip; she had been warned to be ready.

Earlier in the morning, her husband Paul and a two of his buddies had jumped into their trucks and headed out to the rear edge of the property. This was her first controlled burn, well one that she had seen started and participated in more than just driving along a highway that was burning on either side. At least in the car she could out run anything that might have leapt onto the concrete. Here she could lose her home, her husband, or even her own life. Paul had tried to reassure her. He had done this since he was a child. The time was right, the wind was down, they needed to burn to help with next years crops. She relaxed only slightly when he told her she could hold the garden hose. But what would a water hose accomplish in the face of a rampaging fire? Surely nothing. Julie did hold the hose, and waited for the fire to make its way to her. She saw no other way around easing her misgivings.

Paul had spent what seemed like hours, on the phone with different people. The night before they were going to burn, Paul called everyone he thought needed to be notified. He had

explained to Julie that one year someone had not known that they were burning, the volunteer fire department drove the 45 minutes drive out to the farm, and on discovering that it was a controlled burn, Paul was fined \$500 for wasting their time. He scowled at the memory. Ever since that day, he called more people than necessary, making a point to call the fire department, police station and the courthouse in the nearest town. He told them that the plan was to start burning the next morning, and then proceeded to give them more details about the fire than warranted, like what type of match would be used to start the fires.

Julie prepared a large breakfast to accommodate the four of them. She saw them off, walking the men to the driveway. Each man wore similar clothing. All cotton overalls, cotton shirts, carried cotton gloves and wore leather work boots. That was another thing that Paul told her about. She was not to wear anything synthetic if she was to be out that day. Julie had laughed when he said that polyester attracted flames. Paul seemed serious.

Once Julie could no longer see the truck, she went back into the house, trying to decide what she would do while they were gone. But her thoughts continued to drift back to what she was wearing. She ran upstairs and changed into a simple cotton dress. No reason to risk it. Paul and his friends had made it to the back of the property. This was where they would begin. Paul had not disced the land for a fire lane. Many of the farmers in the area did do that, Paul thought it was a waste of time. He preferred back fires. He lit a small corner a few feet from the border of the cattle pasture. He wanted to see how the fire would behave. And it did just that. It crept slowly along, inward toward the center of the barley field. His friends lit a few more spot fires, before connecting them in a line. One man was left there while Paul and the other man headed off for the other side of the field. Once again Paul lit a spot fire, and again it behaved as he had wanted it to. The other man produced a line of fire. The men met back up in the center, chatted and laughed at crude jokes as they watched the fire push faster toward them. No one present was concerned. They had seen how well Paul could handle a controlled burn. They waited.

The opposite flames met only a few feet from where the men stood. The two fires should have concealed each other out, ending the burn. Instead the line turned and headed in the direction of the house. The fire behaved just as Paul had told the men it would. Dusk sat on their shoulders, enhancing the flames light. This is the moment when Julie, having done everything she could indoors, emerged from the house. She could see the men in the distance. The men's robust silhouettes, obscured the sunset. Flames jumped and danced around them, a romantic version of a picturesque Hell. Julie thought of a single verse from a poem she read in high school,

He follows wherever I may go. Along the way, the killing of souls.

It was a childish poem about death. Yet for some unexplained reason it had always stuck with her. She had even written it in lipstick on a mirror in her dorm room. The verse seemed as though it was now playing itself out in front of her. The poem no longer seemed to represent death personified. It was talking about fire. And she convinced herself of this as she watched rabbits and prairie hens rushing through the grasses. Julie ran to gather the watering hose, and prepared for the onslaught of flames. She stood and watched the scene before her. The hose gripped tightly, and the

noise of the fire lulled her into day dreaming of rushing water. It wasn't until she felt the heat of a small dancing demon, that she snapped out of the hypnosis to scream. The jolly demon hissed in protest as Julie doused him with water. The controlled burn had spit and leapt over to reach her. She had to remain vigilant to keep the dancing demons at bay.

Paul and the other two men were less vigilant than Julie. They had done this time and time again. It was now a routine. The two men knew how Paul's fire always seemed to know where to go and when to burn themselves out. They had tried to get Paul to teach them how this was done. He would simply reply that it was just the lay of the land. Once you had that figures, it was just simple placement of the fires. Paul attempted to show them how it was done, but one of the men burnt down

his barn. The other never tried it Paul's way. The way Paul's land handled the fire was so mundane, that they wondered in their thoughts, not seeing that something had changed.

Julie began screaming. The small jubilant demons came at her quicker. They spread out along the small area she deemed to be the back yard. Five acres stood between Julie and the main fire. Yet here they were, little devils cloaked in flames. She had seen the embers shooting into the air with a loud snap. The wind catching their tails and dropping them at Julie's feet. She turned the water on each one. Their hisses of agony confirmed their demise. Still, she was panicked. More and more embers shot out at her. The wind seemed to only blow once one was airborne. It rained down over her in an awing light show, of green distraught fireflies and the menacing red of the damned. Julie had never been a god-fearing person. Even now as she stood there, thinking of Hell, she wasn't able to grasp the concept of Heaven. She was a frightened creature of logic. The ideas that plummeted into her thoughts, were not cohesive, let alone logical. Her emotions and fears grappled with the years of theological studies. Those classes had turned her into more of a cynic. This night, as she watched the burn, Hell became a concept she could rationalize. It stood before her now. She wrestled with the idea of praying to a God that she did not believe existed. If she repented out loud, would he save her?

Paul roared with laughter. He was in wonderful spirits. The fire had started easily, and it was burning the field cleanly. This was what he expected of it. His laughter drowned out Julie's scream, and the brightness of the flames that stood between them impeded the sight of her flailing about. One of the men mentioned the fire's crackling, the sounds of fast-moving water and a siren's call. This sent the other two into a fit of laughter, and they joked about him being the romantic. The other man shrugged it off. In the depths of Paul's belly rolling, he felt slightly unnerved by the thoughts of his friend hearing a siren's call.

Julie pleaded with the rapturous demons to leave her be. Their lust for consumption was all encompassing, and her pleas fell to deaf ears. They licked at her legs, and groped at her chest, singeing the cotton clothing. She screamed again as she tried desperately to wrap herself in a wet burlap sack. The garden hose was no longer preventing them access to her, and she turned the water onto herself. Her long black hair clung to her face as the water poured over her head. The ice-cold well water was painful -- as painful as the damned's licks had been. She suffered it only because she knew that it was her only chance to survive the onslaught. She gave the spirits credit for persistence as they made an attempt to dry her. They were to be respected, that Julie knew, yet she was not going to yield to them. She could be just as stubborn, and screamed out for Paul.

Paul's laughter stopped dead. He too could hear the Siren singing. Something was wrong. This was not how the fire was to behave. With an almost unperceivable flicker of his fingers, the

fire sank down into the earth. It allowed a small path for him to pass, unharmed between the flames. He stepped out onto the blackened ground, beckoning his friends to follow. The two men looked at each other, and simultaneously emptied their beer cans onto the scorched soil, before following. Paul followed the path, the fire was deeper than it should have been. He looked behind him to see if the other's had followed, all he saw was a wall of fire cutting him off from them. Julie's scream fought for purchase, winding its way through the flames.

"Enough!" Paul yelled, his arms gracefully, and sharply moved about. If he had an audience, they would have thought he was an orchestra instructor. The flames whimpered and cowered back from him. The entity sunk to the earth as the path had done, though it didn't disperse entirely. Small flames still tickled the air inches above the soil. Paul gave it a scolding parent look, and the fire sunk deeper, only on small flame, as big as a candle's, remained. Now Paul could see the house. Something that he shouldn't be able to do, as the darkness had swallowed everything. Julie's body was engulfed in flames and illuminated the surrounds. Paul screamed again.

"ENOUGH!" but the fire disobeyed, and continued to burn. Its light became brighter as it rebelled its master openly. The candle flame flickered, mimicking laughter, then built upon itself. It roared its revolt in Paul's ears. Its scream reminded Paul of a violent waterfall. How similar the two opponents sounded, was Paul's fleeting thought. He ran as the demon fire grabbed at him. It was unable to singe a single hair, as he was immune to their damage. But the one thing they could do, was wreak havoc in his life. More embers were spit into the air, encircling the burning Julie.

Julie's tears dried as soon as they were produced, Her mouth puckered at the thirst she felt. She urinated, her body's natural reaction, yet it too evaporated. The water no longer had its dominance over the damned. They crackled in laughter at her feeble attempts of survival. One declared victory, and a jig began over Julie's chest as she fell to the ground. She was grateful for the numbness that enveloped her, and the darkening of her sight. This was her idea of utopia. A world where she was left alone in her thoughts, where sight, sounds, tastes and touch couldn't exist.

Paul gapped at the sight before him. His wife of only six months sprawled out on the ground. Flames hugged her tightly. Suddenly she was no longer flesh, she was a wax doll, her face melted off its base. This cannot be, Paul angrily thought. She is flesh, she is mine. "MINE!" he echoed out loud. "Leave her now!" The fire shuddered, then returned to its prior intensity. It was acting like a naughty child does with a lazy parent. Julie laid silently under them. Anger welled up inside of him, he would have to punish them, as a good parent would have it. His fingers traced the air, in a pattern known only to him and the fire. He heard the steaming hissed curse come from the demons. And then they were abruptly gone. Paul was relieved, yet upset that he had to lose the flame he had nurtured since his youth. It took a lot of effort to procure another one.

He turned his attention to Julie. She had stopped breathing during the process, and now her life was literally in his hands. He held a small flicker of fire in his right palm, this was what the fire damned did to souls. As he was able to control fire, he was able to hold onto Julie's flame. Paul did not immediately return life to Julie. Instead, he stuffed the flame into the pocket of his overalls, and lifted the slack body, taking it into the house.

It would have been unkind to revive Julie in her present state. Paul ran his hands over her body. There was still enough heat inside of her to rebuild the fire. And that was exactly what he did. He closed his eyes, and sent his will to the heat. The heat flickered, struggled, then ignited.

Slowly the fire built within her body, and just as slowly Paul lifted it from her. This new fire reversed the damage caused by its predecessor. With the heat withdrawing, there was nothing left to keep Julie's flesh in its waxy state. Paul promised the infant flame a life at the farm, if it was willing to obey. The infant agreed readily, it had got a taste of life. Paul had given it to him. Without Paul, the flame would have remained heat, and dissipated. Paul felt his own gratitude, this fire had come with no complications, unlike the others he'd had.

The fire fully with drew from the depths of Julie's body, and leapt into its master's hand. "I am grateful to you," Paul whispered, then flung the flame into the fire place, igniting the seasoned wood. Julie's flame wriggled impatiently inside of the pocket. Paul chuckled, it was indeed his beloved's soul. Gently he pulled the flame out, and watched as it danced merrily in his palm. This was a fire that would burn true. It would be ornery, yes, but would not overtly disobey as the previous flame had. Paul struggled with his conscience. Julie's flame could keep him in good company and out of mischief, yet he would not have Julie's body. And what of the infant flame? He had given his word, and it could be molded to be a good child. He shook the thoughts from his head. He loved Julie and wouldn't damn her to a life of a controlled burn. The small flame felt his mood, and jumped from his palm. It flickered as it thanked him, the sunk down into Julie. Suddenly she took a sharp breath and coughed. She lived. "Paul!" She cried out. "I was burning, the fire . . . Hell . . ." Her sobs choked out her words. "It was only a nightmare," Paul reassured his wife as he wrapped his arms around her. Julie fell into the hug, allowing him to sooth her. The fire crackled with it joy.

The two friends entered the house. They looked confused and distraught. Both plopped down heavily on the lounge chairs.

"We ran to the truck when we saw that the fire had . . ." Paul cut the man off. "The fire is out, no worries." The two quickly caught onto what Paul meant. He didn't want to frighten Julie. "I guess I should get use to this." Julie sniffled and smiled lightly, wiping the tears off her cheeks. Paul chuckled softly, it didn't have the mirth he hoped for. They thanked the two men for their help, and settled in for the night. Paul and Julie were both exhausted from the day.

The weeks passed, and the infant flame matured more slowly than normal. Julie seemed withdrawn, and fearful of the fire. She asked repeatedly why they had to even have a fire going. It

wasn't that cold out yet. Paul reasoned that the fire was there to prevent creatures from nesting at the top. Hesitantly she accepted his excuse. She was plagued by nightmares of fire burning her alive. The small fire in the hearth made her nervous. She tried her best not to wake Paul by screaming her way out of the dreams. She allowed the pain to wake her. It wasn't good to be a burden on her man.

Paul knew of the nightmares and did his best to ease her troubles at night. He was unable to control the burn in her fantasies. He yearned to tell her the truth about himself, as impossible as it would sound. She would never come to accept the truth.

When he was five years old, he had joined his father on a controlled burn. He delighted in the smell and light show the fire put forth. His father had warned him to stay clear of the flames, as they would eat him as it did the dead corn stalks. At this age he was an impertinent child, subject to his whims. Forgetful of his father's warnings, he played with a small isolated flame. The lost soul was surrounded by inedible earth, and was able to sustain itself. Paul gathered bits of grass on leaves, throwing it to the hungry flame. Both the flame and Paul were unsatisfied with the amount of food being given. Paul searched out and found a medium sized log. He

struggled with the dead wood's protests of being a sacrifice. He managed to drag it to the small flame, and offered it. The flame jumped and consumed the log. Building upon itself, it grew into a raging fire, one that did not feel grateful for what the child had done for it. As the fire grew, so did its appetite. It turned its hungry toward the child. Paul tried to flee, but the fire was faster and soon began to consume the small boy. He cried out for his father, knowing that he would not be heard over the roar of the flames. He pleaded and begged, cried childish tears for life. The fire would not yield. A desperate thought entered Paul's mind, a thought he was too young to truly understand.

"Let me live and I can keep you burning." He sputtered. The fire hesitated, it was listening. "You will die if you eat everything here." He pointed to the consumed earth. "If you don't eat me, I will be able to feed you, and you will never die." Though the fire had stopped intensifying, it still had not diminished its heat. Paul could smell his flesh cooking as the fire thought over the proposal. Gradually the flame agreed to his idea, and diminished its size to fit into the Palm of the boy's hand. With the heat removed from his body, the pain was gone and the burn mark disappeared. He had struck a deal with fire.

Over the course of the next few years, the fire tutored Paul on how to truly control fire. It enjoyed being a teacher, a father figure to a human, and the child enjoyed learning. Too soon though the fire's hunger betrayed it. Paul's father ended its life. Paul was now sixteen years old. He felt alone without the flame. His old friend had told him how to procure a new fire if they were ever separated. Grabbing a can of gasoline from the barn, Paul marched out a way from the house. Soaking himself with the petrol, he lit the match, and once again found himself burning. The pain was worse than he remembered and found it hard to concentrate. Paul was able to prevail and offered the same deal to the new fire. This one accepted the terms quicker than his tutor had. He should have been suspicious about that. The fire was greedy. It didn't care about a long term life. It was hungry too hungry for Paul to control. Within only a few days, the flame left Paul homeless, and an orphan. At the age of sixteen, Paul was legally unable to take care of himself. But what other's didn't know . . . He scattered his parents' ashes in the stream that ran through their property.

It took him time to bring himself to once again summon the fire. This time he decided to burn things cleaner and more on a natural level. He waited until the grasses were dry. He left the rebuilt home and walked into a grove. With the trees still green, the fire was limited in its destruction should he summon the wrong one again. He gathered small dead twigs, and an empty bird nest. He started this spark by rubbing two sticks together as they taught him to in his survivalist children's group. The fire caught, and Paul slowly built up the flame until hours had past before it began to eat at him. Yet a third time he dealt with fire and was successful. This flame had yielded to his will for more than ten years, before its revolt. Now he wondered if the fire had been jealous.

Making a deal with fire was a preposterous idea, no one would believe him. So the knowledge of taming fire, wielding it, bending it to his needs would forever remain with him. He wouldn't even be able to tell Julie. But maybe, just maybe he could share it with their children. On cue, as if the infant flame could read his thoughts, it flickered in agreement. His children would know the secret! His thoughts turned to the infant flame. He was concerned about its rate of maturity. Maybe because it had been brought into existence by heat, rather than a spark, it somehow retarded its growth. This was not something that his tutor had taught him. Paul hadn't known he could pull fire into life with simple heat. He had chanced it only to save Julie. He had

known that the heat could repair the fire's damage, but not spark a new flame. Paul treated the new flame as an infant. Teaching it the things it needed to know, how to burn cleanly, how to consume slowly, how to avoid things that should not be burned. Each lesson was slow, and Paul had only managed to start the first lesson in control when Julie came home from a doctor's appointment.

Her face was streaked in tears. Her nose red and eyes puffy from a long session of heavy crying. She wouldn't give Paul a chance to ask what the matter was.

"I'm not dying. But I don't want to talk about it now." And with that, she disappeared into her room, alone. Paul sat before the fire place, mumbling his concern. The flame gurgled and cooed before blurting out the word flame. Paul laughed uproariously, before catching himself. He hoped that Julie hadn't heard the laughter.

"Very good." He praised the fire, tossing it a bit of newspaper. He felt the proud papa. It would be truly wonderful the day he became a real father. Paul reached into the fireplace, and allowed the flame to roll up onto his hand. They played for a while, the flame rolling back and forth between his hands. In play there was learning, here the fire was taught how not to burn as well as to elongate itself. Both necessary for controlled burning. The flame became cranky. It was hungry. Paul tossed a small log into the fireplace, and watched as the flame devoured it. Then he went upstairs to find Julie.

She lay on her stomach on their bed. She had fallen asleep while crying. Paul was overcome with his own emotions. Something was terribly wrong, and he didn't know why he too was crying. He wasn't going to question himself further, and curled up next to Julie. He too was soon in a sound sleep.

He woke to Julie's screams. Startled he jumped from the bed to find her standing in front of the small upstairs hearth.

"What is this doing in here?" she demanded to know. She moved aside to allow Paul to see what she had been talking about. The infant flame had made its way upstairs. Julie was furious.

"Sorry. It was chilly in here, I thought a small fire would comfort you." He eyed the flame disapprovingly. Julie abruptly began sobbing again.

"No, I'm sorry. The crackling of the wood woke me. The nightmares..." her voice drifted off.

Paul roughly pulled her to him, and hugged her. He needed to tell her so that she would no longer fear the flame. But in doing so, he may cause her to fear him. He thought it best to continue to keep quiet.

The days passed, Julie still unwilling to tell him what had caused her such distress at the doctor's appointment. He did not bother inquiring. At six months old, the flame began to show some improvement. It seemed to be able to control its movement better, and convey its needs and wants easier. It was a big victory in Paul's eyes. The flame would mature before the next season. Julie, however, had become more withdrawn. She was losing weight rapidly as she was unable to keep what little food she ate down. Her nightmares continued to plague her nightly. Paul worried that he had done something horrible when he drew her flame from her. It was now too late to change what had happened. He could only regret not paying more attention to the controlled burn. He

blamed himself for Julie's troubles.

Snow fell heavily around the two story farm house. Winter had finally stuck to the decision to stay. Paul trained the now toddling flame on how to multiple itself. He watched with pride as the flame spit small embers into the air, duplicating itself on the log. He clapped in

enthusiasm. Julie lightly touched his shoulder.

“Fire has always fascinated me.” He explained quickly. She nodded her understanding.

“We should talk.” Her slender hand reached his, and she pulled him to the couch. There they sat in silence as she carefully reformulated her practiced words.

“I need to tell you why I have been crying at night. It seems that . . .” She choked on her words, and fresh tears swept down her cheeks. “Oh Paul! . . .” She sobbed, throwing herself into him. Paul felt the hot tears saturate his shirt as she tried to bury her face in his chest.

“Shhhh . . .” he rocked her gently. “Whatever it is, you can tell me when you are ready.” Paul lost track of the time as they held each other. Julie thought over her speech. Was it the right time to confess? She had held onto this secret for far too long. It was killing her. She cried harder as she thought how Paul might react.

“Paul.” She pushed away from him. Her deep brown eyes met his sparkling blue ones.

“Remember when I came home crying after I saw the doctor?” He nodded, that he did. “I...I was pregnant before that day.” Was? She was pregnant? Oh what have I done? Paul’s face turned a sickly white.

“I went for a check up. I was afraid to tell you sooner, because I wanted to make sure things were going ok with the baby.” Paul fought the urge to throw himself into the fire. When she had died that night, the baby had died. She miscarried.

“The thing is Paul. It’s all my fault.”

“No, no don’t blame yourself. A miscarriage is no ones’ fault!”

“Paul, stop. Please listen. The doctor says that these things happen. I...” Paul wrapped his arms around Julie as her tears swelled again. He too cried at the loss that he caused them.

“Paul!” She snapped. “I need to tell you. It wasn’t a miscarriage, the doctor said that the baby must have died and my body absorbed it. He says it does happen on occasion. I don’t remember what he called it. But the baby. The baby had vanished!” This time tears didn’t fall as she spat out the words.

“The baby, it just . . .” Paul was unable to finish his sentence. He slowly turned to the fire place. The small flame flickered. “Daddy.” It cooed.



*~ Despite the high cost of living it remains a popular item. ~*

## Coming of Age

My name is Abby Normal, yes that is my real name. I have heard all the jokes so you can save them to whisper among your friends. My parents must have had a sense of humor at some point in their lives, too bad I was the butt of all their jokes. I decided that now is the time to write a story about my growing up. Don't ask why, it just feels right. Someone told me that you might want some back ground on me. But there isn't much to tell. I was born and raised in a small town in Oregon. I have no siblings. My parents were older when they had me. I kept a journal of my childhood because I thought that someday I would be like Laura Ingalls Wilder. I loved reading about her life, and the American Girl series, no those weren't by Wilder, I don't remember who wrote them.

I was an average student with average looks. Stringy hair and skinned knees. But none of this really matters, none of it is important now. What has made me who I am today happened

when I was twelve years old, my life changed, and I grew up quickly.

I would like to say it was a dark and stormy night, I would like to say that the rain fell in sheets, you couldn't see out of your house windows. I would like to say that the electricity had gone out, and the house was only lit up by candles and the lightening that struck too close to the house. But none of that happened. It was a bright sunny day. A warmth that wrapped around you like your favorite blanket, and only a gentle breeze to let you know that blanket wasn't really there. My friends sat with me under my front porch. We were trading pogs, happy to search through one another's collections looking for the perfect one. Did I have this Scooby Doo round plastic chip? You can have my Papa Smurf, if I can have your Star Wars.

The light-colored dirt we sat on, cooled us through our thin cotton shorts. One at a time we took turns shivering. Yet we were so engrossed in the magnificent display of all the wonderfully pictured pogs that no one noticed the goose bumps that crawled along our flesh. I was in light pink shorts, and a white shirt that had "What, me worry?" stenciled across the chest, a throw away from a neighbor. Jenny sat across from me, a dark moody girl that was known an occasion to eat her and others, pogs. I kept a close eye on her. Mark sat to my left. He was quite the eater. His dark blue Pink Panther T-shirt showed what he had for breakfast that morning, or it could have been the previous morning. Mark wasn't known to bath or change his clothes too often. None of that bothered me. He had the best pogs in town.

Sheldon sat on my other side. He was wearing khaki shorts, and a dickie-labeled shirt. He was so clean and tidy. His blonde hair was always perfect, along with those teeth of his. I, as well as the whole student body, had a crush on him. I always felt honored and special that he would choose to spend his time with me.

The four of us sat there, giggling over some adult pogs that Mark had smuggled from his older brother's room. Ever since Jenny had brought over her father's Hustler playing cards, we each took turns trying to out do each other. All I had to bring was my mother's crotch less panties, which Sheldon had pulled on over his shorts and modeled for us. Jenny took some pictures. In all it was a perfect day.

I never knew what time it was when the dark brown pinto pulled into our dirt drive way. Usually I would crawl out of my hiding spot to see who had come to visit. I did say that I grew up in a small town, really we lived just outside of town, not too many people came out to our house. That day, for some unknown reason, I decided not to go out and greet the car. Curiosity screamed and tugged at my chest. Yet I choose to ignore that, and the car. Now I wonder if it was some sixth sense that kept me under the house. Or maybe it was my crush on Sheldon and the way he looked in those turquoise panties. Whatever it was, I only was able to see the dirty black motorcycle boots that the occupants of the car were wearing as they ran up the stairs.

They never knocked, instead I heard the wooden screen door squeal from neglect and slammed rudely closed. I saw Mark from the corner of my eye. He was looking at me quizzically. Who would just walk into your house? His eyes asked. I shrugged my squared shoulders. Maybe my parents had seen them and opened the door for them. Jenny was giggling at something Sheldon had whispered to her. I was jealous. I opened my mouth to ask Jenny what was so funny when the shouting began. I heard my mother yelling for someone to stop. My father's deep voice echoed under the house. It was hard to understand his baritone voice, something about taking whatever they wanted. My mother screamed, high pitched and full of terror. I had never heard anything like it before, aside from the movies. Suddenly it sounded like someone shot off an M-80 inside of my house. I sat there knowing that I should be doing something, but I felt helpless,

and lost. I turned to Sheldon as if he knew what to do. But it wasn't the perfect boy that came to my rescue, it was Mark. He grabbed my arm tightly, I could feel his dirty long nails dig into my flesh. He dragged me deeper under the porch, to a small door that lead under the house. He practically threw me through it. He coaxed Sheldon and Jenny through, before shutting the small door behind him. The four of us sat in the dark, huddled together. The dampness clung to us, we shivered, not from the cold, but from the fear that had followed us through the door. We followed the boots stomping through the house, our head turning with the sounds. We ignored the mother possum hissing at us from deeper under the house. I could feel Sheldon's hand on my knee. I felt the warmth of my fantasies crawl along my thigh. But then I heard things crashing onto the floor above me, and it was Mark's hand rubbing my back that I sought comfort in.

We stayed huddled there for what felt like hours. In that time, I didn't hear my parents calling for me. And I knew it was getting close to lunch time. We waited until the boots hurried down the front steps, and heard the car squeal to life and shot gravel out from under its speeding tires before we crawled out. I stood in the sunshine. My skin hungrily sucked up the warmth. The birds in the blooming apple trees sung merrily back and forth. Nothing was really wrong, not here. I once again turned to Sheldon. I wanted and expected him to be my strength, but it was Mark that again took the lead. He was the one that walked bravely up the thirteen wooden steps that lead to the old farm house. It was Mark that disappeared into the quiet house. It was Mark that peeked out an open window and told Sheldon to keep me outside. And it was Mark's voice that I could hear talking to someone. I was cold. The sun shine no longer warmed me. Sheldon's arm felt like a brick of ice across my shoulder. Suddenly it was dark, and I could hear nothing until the sirens broke the birds' chatter.

My father was dead that was the only thought that echoed in my young mind. I was confused. Where was I? Where was my father, my mother? I remember Mark's father picking me up in his chubby arms. I could clearly see Mark's mother wrapping me in a blanket that smelled of lavender and moth balls. Someone said something about shock. I remember Sheldon looking at me as though I was covered in manure. But nothing of what happened. A man dressed up like a police officer had come into the room where I laid. He said that there was a new type of crime happening. They called them home invasions. I saw green men with huge eyes storming into my house in dirty black motorcycle boots. The police officer told me that they had shot both my parents. My father was dead. My mother was barely alive. She would be in the hospital for a while, and he would take me to see her real soon. He promised. He said that I would be staying here until my mother could make other arrangements. Only then did I look around. There was a poster of Sam from "Whose the Boss" taped to the wall. Star Wars ships hung from the ceiling. There were teddy bears and G.I. Joes throughout the room. I knew the room well. It was Mark's. He was the one that had become my savior. Not the perfect Sheldon. My world shattered around me. I didn't understand, Sheldon was the one I dreamed about, not dirty Mark.

Sheldon's parents arranged my father's funeral. It was very large. Many people showed up at both the wake and grave side. I don't think that most of them were there because they liked, or even knew my father. He was news. My mother had been shot in the head, she was in a comma when my father was lowered into the ground. Sheldon stood next to me, his clammy hand pressed tightly against my dry hand. Squeezing in the appropriate places during the sermon. My father wouldn't have liked the stuffiness of the service. I would have wanted a clown. Mark stood across from me, staring. It was strange. His eyes never made me nervous. It felt right, more so than Sheldon's hand in mine. But Sheldon had kissed my cheek when he saw me after

the day under the house. He wanted me to know he had been the hero. I greedily accepted his roll. Wanting it to be true. But Mark was always there in the background, stepping forward only when it was truly needed.

Sheldon wasn't there with me at night when I cried out loud. No one seemed there for me. I relived that day in my sleep, except I had put faces to the invaders, and I placed myself inside the house with them. One of the darkest nights swept over Mark's house, and over me as well. The dream woke me, I screamed with all the hate that I had built up with me. I had expected Mark's parents, but it was Mark himself that crept into my room. He petted my hair and gently caressed my face. His soft lips pressed carefully on my cheek. I was overcome with wanting and allowed his fingers to roam under my night shirt. And I kissed back when his lips found mine, knowing full well whom I was kissing. From that day, until he left for college, it was Mark that looked out for me, he was the one that comforted me through everything. Sheldon soon forgot me when Jenny developed breasts, and combed her hair.

Mark had been my hero. He shattered everything that I was taught. The under dog was the real champion, the one that could be relied on. Perfection is never really perfect. And to this day, I never forgot that.

Mark and I have now been married for five years. He lost the weight while away in College, My mother had never woken from her coma. We buried her my senior year. It hurt to see her in that coffin, though not as much as it had been sitting next to her hospital bed all those years. The men that had committed this crime against my family were never brought to justice. Mark and I had a pleasant life together that was until last year.

I do not claim to be a writer, I know that these sentences will be choppy, and I can only pray that I can find an editor that can do these words justice. But as I said before, I feel like my story should be told, if only it ended with Mark and me living happily ever after. But those words can only be uttered in fairy tales, real life is never as grand.

I am getting to the point.

Mark found a job with the local police department, in the same town we grew up in. My family home was still in my name, and I never questioned moving back into it. I had fond memories of growing up on our small farm. I felt compelled to try to once again to make happy memories there. With only a few bills to be paid, I found myself a stay at home wife. With no children yet to occupy my time, I spent my days reading and surfing the internet. A high school student blog caught my attention. She was writing my childhood story. Her parents had been killed in a home invasion. I wrote to her, telling her the same things that I said here before. We exchanged e-mails daily, until it was decided that she should come out to visit.

She was a charming 16-year-old girl by the name of Sara. Blonde hair, brown eyed, tall and lanky, reminding me of the book, Sara Plain and Tall. She had never been in the country before, so all of it was a novelty to her. Mark greeted her warmly, as he did with everyone, but left us alone to talk. Her chaperone stayed in the shadows, the woman seemed uncomfortable. No matter what I did to include her, she would shake her head, and withdrawal from the conversation. Sara wanted to walk through the orchard and gather chicken eggs. She wanted to try all the different things that were classic country living. I was happy to oblige.

That evening we sat down to a country meal from out of one of those childhood books. Sara seemed to be in heaven. It was that look on her face, her enthusiasm of country life, that brought me to the decision to bring her into my home on a more permanent basis. The process seemed entirely too easy. Sara's grandmother was happy to allow us to keep her, just as long as

we would allow her a visit or two. Mark and I readily agreed. Before we knew it, Sara was our teenaged daughter.

The death of Sara's parents was still very fresh. She woke us up screaming from nightmares. She wasn't as lucky as I was to have someone her own age there to comfort her. I did my best, trying to soothe her back to sleep.

Things seemed to get better once she was enrolled in school. Boys and friends, as well as school work and track team kept her too busy to relive that awful moment in her life. And though she couldn't bring herself to call us mom and dad, she did look to us in that role. We were happy to appease her in this regard. She went out on dates, or hung out with friends later than what Mark and I had been allowed. She was a good student and was mindful of getting homework and chores finished before venturing out at night. We had become a happy family, but that was about to change.

Sara came home after curfew. She was in tears, but wouldn't tell us what happened. We thought it best not to push, maybe it had just been a fight with a friend or her and her boyfriend had broken up. She would tell us in her own time. We didn't want to be the nosy parents. But whatever had happened that night, had a profound effect on her, the nightmares of her parents' death returned, triggering my own. Night after night we found ourselves heating up hot cocoa before dawn, comforting one another. Sara's grades began to slip. She dropped out of track and saw her friends less. Mark and I talked about her, even suggested taking her to a doctor. Sara denied having any real problems, and promised us that things would soon get better.

It wasn't Sara's screaming that woke me up one night, nor was it my vivid dreams. Someone had opened the front door. Shivers ran through me as I thought of those men from my childhood returning. I slipped out of bed, careful not to wake Mark and snuck down the stairs. Sara stood in the front entrance, her pale blue nightgown whipped about in the storm building wind. Gently I placed my hand on her shoulder, hoping that I wouldn't startle her. Slowly she turned her head. Her eyes puffy from crying. She whispered something and moved back to her room.

I too returned to my own bed thinking about that whispered statement. They were here. But who were they? The men from her past? That made sense, she had been dreaming about the home invasion again. I slowly let it slip from my mind as sleep took over. I wouldn't be reminded of that night until a few days later.

Sara flew into the house, slamming the heavy wooden door behind her. I was standing in the kitchen, trying to decide what we should have for dinner. I could hear the heavy dead bolt slide into place. I peeked around the corner and spied Sara running from window to window, locking them and pulling the blinds down. I tried asking her what she was doing. She was ignoring me. It wasn't until after she had secured the backdoor, did she settle down to talk to me.

It seemed that she had saw strange men around our house that night I had found her standing with the door open. And as she walked home from the bus stop, the same men were by our mailbox. I called Mark, who came out to investigate. Yet he found nothing to suggest anyone had been about. Sara was adamant about what she had seen, so much so, the local doctor was called out to sedate her. That night I found her once again standing in front of the opened door.

Her mood dramatically changed again. She insisted that I home schooled her. She wouldn't leave the house, and insisted that I didn't either. I tried my best to comfort her, even called the police station from the town she had lived in with her own parents. The two men that had murdered them were still in jail. Sara wouldn't believe it. What played out in front of my

eyes, reminded me of the Greek tragedies I read in high school. Sara screamed at me, calling me a liar. She fell to her knees sobbing and ripping at her hair. I couldn't do anything for her, only watch. I feared touching her could make things worse.

The next morning she would not raise from bed. I called the doctor in, praying that he could fix her. It was an emotional problem, he explained. I would have to take her into the city to see a physiologist. Sara remained in bed, and I stayed at home chewing my finger nails, wanting to do more for her, but unable.

We spent a week like this. Her in her room, me in the kitchen, Mark at work. Mark and I discussed Sara's well being in hushed voices. How much more could we take before we snapped as well. I could see it in my husband's face, not much more. The next week Sara was out of bed. I found her again standing in her pajamas in the front entrance. She whispered about the men that stood just outside watching her, waiting for her. I called Mark and the police. They found nothing.

Night after sleepless night this continued. Sara would stand there, talking to herself, I stood watch behind her, letting Mark sleep. I was disappointed in him, he had once been my hero, why wasn't he being one for her. Of course he didn't love her, like he did me. He didn't yearn for her like he had me. He hadn't been there when her parents were brutally murdered like he had been for mine. I couldn't fault him for that. Yet it still made me sad.

It was a Wednesday night, I remember because Mark had to work late on Wednesdays. He came home around ten p.m. and went directly to bed. I silently watched him pass by the kitchen where I was sitting at the table sipping coffee. I wasn't in the mood to sleep, and curious to see what Sara did before the usual finding her in front of an open door. Two hours passed, and there was still no sign of Sara. I started thinking that made that was all she did, simple open the front door. Just as I slid the chair out, I heard her calling, in sing song.

"I'll get it." What was she getting? I hurried out into the living room where I saw her opening the door. "Hi." She said in a coy voice. Suddenly she fell to the ground, her hands went to her head and she cried. "Don't pull my hair" she pleaded. It was fascinating to watch. I realized that she was sleep walking, possibly reenacting what had happened. I hesitated in waking her, wasn't it said that it was dangerous to do so. I allowed her to finish out her dream, and only approached when she was standing in front of the door. She leaned up against me, and I helped her back into bed. The following Wednesday, it happened again. This time I kept Mark awake with me. He needed to see what she was doing.

When it had all played out, exactly as it had night after night, Mark could only shake his head and go to sleep himself. I was left alone to deal with the tragic Sara. She reported seeing men standing outside the next day. Crying hysterically when I told her that she was wrong. Life was getting difficult for all of us. It felt like I stopped sleeping all together. Night after night I obsessively watching Sara reenact the horrible night, unable to stop any of it. After a while, I did finally succumb to the fatigue. I will regret that for the rest of my life.

Sara was screaming in my dreams. She wouldn't stop, as much as I tried to quiet her, she would stop. I slapped her, and the slap rang out like a shot gun going off in the next room. Mark's hand touched my back, and it was wet. I turned to look at him and saw the blood, and I screamed, waking myself. The house was quiet. Looking to the clock, I saw that now was the time that I usually took Sara back to bed. She was not in the front entrance. I climbed the stairs, and found her sleeping soundly in bed. I sat on its edge and brushed the hair from her forehead. "I got him mom." She whispered and smiled. I sighed. It was over. Relieved I went into my own

room and curled up under the blankets. Oddly enough, the sheet was wet and sticky. I crawled back out and touched Mark's shoulder. He is a very heavy sleeper, so it didn't surprise me when he didn't awake immediately. Instead of continuing to try, I simply turned the light on. Mark lay on the bed. A pool of blood surrounded him. His chest had exploded. I didn't stop screaming for several days.

Sara had taken care of her demons. She had started her sleep walking earlier than usual, and Mark had returned home just as she opened the front door. She retrieved the shot gun from the closet in the hall and followed him. The police arrested her, and she is now in a mental institution, far away from me. I now it's told that I have begun sleep walking. Neighbors have seen me in the road wearing only my nightgown. I wonder what I will end up doing to rid myself of Sara's memory.



*~ What is life, except excuse for death, or death but an escape from life ~*

## **Brush Hog**

Where did we leave off? That's right, thanks. My mother was such a bore, she never let me have any fun. She was screaming at me to leave Tif alone All I did was poke Tif that would be my sister, with a sharpened stick. I didn't draw any blood or anything. But my mom still acted like I had tried to butcher her or something. My dad didn't care. He was always out in the fields working with my grandpa Lucky. Oh, lucky wasn't his real name or anything, he was a stunt man when he was younger, everyone said he was Lucky to be alive. And that's how I came to know him as Lucky. My family? Ah, well there was me, my mom, dad, Grandpa lucky, and my

sister Tiffany, or Tif like I called her. She sure was a pain most the time, following me around like I was a god or something. No really. She wanted to everything I would do, even caught her trying to pee standing up once. Do I have to talk about them? I don't think they really ever did anything wrong. Like I said my dad didn't seem to care much about us, my mom only liked Tif. Grandpa Lucky was always lost. Well, by lost I mean he didn't know who we were half the time. He had old timers disease. Some days were real bad. He would call my dad Uncle Sam. Other days he just seemed scared of everything, like a little kid.

No, he never did touch me wrong. He didn't know I was around. He was fun to laugh at, not knowing how to do simple things some days, forgetting he was an old man the next. I caught him trying to steal mom's car one night. He said he had a date with some dame. ~laugh~ too funny. Like I said, I don't want to talk about my family. I haven't seen them in years.

Five years? Yeah, I guess that's right. Seems like it's been longer than that. Fine, my mom. She was tall, blonde haired, 30 something. Big boobs, thin built, I don't think she ate much. Loved Tif, always blamed me for things that went bad. Like what? Well the chickens gone missing, goats drying up, field fires that sort of thing. Of course I had something to do with them. Still, she shouldn't have blamed me for everything. Like you said, maybe I was just trying to get her to love me like she loved Tif. Can I have a pop? Thanks.

Oh, right, mom. Well I think she went to college. I'm not for sure on that. She seemed smart enough for all that. She use to sit down and write in her journal all the time. I snuck in and read it one night, that's when I found out she was scared of me. Me? I was only ten at the time, and it hurt. I don't know what I did wrong. She said that? Figures she would blame that on me. It's not like I did it on purpose. Of was I to know she was pregnant? I was playing around, rough like boys are. I pushed her and she lost her footing and fell down the steps. That's when I saw all the blood. Yeah, it scared me. I got dad to help her. I guess the baby died right then. But I never did it to hurt her! Thank you for the pop. If she says that, then she's the one that is remembering it wrong. I wasn't angry. Yes I was laughing, but I thought we were playing around, hell man I was only six when that happened.

Yes, that's when she says she started being scared of me. I still think it's all a crock of shit. Sorry, I'll try not to curse in front of you. It's hard not to though. This makes me angry.

No, I don't remember that happening. Rat poison was common out there. We had plenty of rats to kill off. They got into everything. But yeah, no I never put anything in her food. She just got sick. I know what the doctor said! She could have forgotten to wash her hands after sprinkling it out near the coop. She did things like that, and blamed me for it. She did yell a lot. You're right. I don't remember what she was like before I was five. Guess I got me one of those memory blocks. Maybe something horrid happened to me back then. Want to hypnotize me to find out? No? Well, think on it. It might help explain things. Dad, I can't tell you much about him. He didn't talk much, and the only time he dealt with me was when he put a belt to my ass. Sorry. I'll try to remember not to say that again. He was always dirty, smelled like the pigs we kept. He would bring that up. You want me to explain why, don't you? Ok, ok. I don't remember how old I was. But was very curious. One of my dad's sows was pregnant. I wanted to know how it worked. How what worked? Ya know, baby making and all that. My parents didn't tell me about it until after, um later. But the sow was huge! All those piglets in there, squashing up together. I wasn't being mean, just wanted to know.

Yeah, that's right. I did get a knife out of my mom's kitchen. A big shinny one. I had seen her use it to cut meat away from the bone of the animals she was dressing. I thought it

was the best thing to use. It was really sharp. Mom was fussing with Tif as usual, dad and Grandpa Lucky were out and about. SO I was left alone. Normal. No, I don't think that bothered me. You get use to it. Anyway, as I was saying, I took the knife outside to the pig pen. We had something like 12 sows in that pen. 3 were pregnant and five had their piglets' suckling. What a noise those wee ones make! Fighting each other over a teet. Sheesh! Well, one sow was laying on her side. That huge one that had grabbed my attention before. I snuck up to her. I knew if I startled her she would make all kinds of a racket and I wouldn't be able to find out. Some point on the way I had grabbed some rope to tether her. No, don't know where I got it from, that wasn't the interesting part to remember any way. Where was I? Oh, yeah, ok, so I tied her feet together real quick and she starts squalling. I knew dad would hear it, so I punched her hard. That only dazed her for a moment, but I was able to tie her mouth shut before she could bite me. Did you know pigs bite? No? Well they do. They can be real-mean. Oh, um . . . I was real happy, I remember that. I had her still laying on her side, she was trying to throw a fit, but I had her tied up real good. The only thing dad really taught me was knots. A boy has to know how to do them. Of course I was glad my dad taught me that. Why wouldn't I? I don't blame him for nothing. The sow? She wasn't happy. I took the knife and slit her down the middle, right between her swollen teets. She should have birthed soon. That is if I hadn't of done what I did. The knife went in real slick like. Slicker than mom slicing hot butter. I was real proud how straight my line was. My hands weren't shaking at all. Her belly slide apart easily. It was a wonder to watch. The piglet starting dropping to the ground. I had cut deep enough, to lice a few of the piglets. One at a time the fell out until the sows bowels began to follow. That surprised me for some reason. It wasn't 'til later that I found out that I should have put the knife into the hilt if all I wanted to see was those babies. The piglets laid still, and I started to poke at them. One started squealing. I ran, ran screaming into the house. I didn't expect all that. My freaking out got my mom's attention. The piglets got my dad's. I was in a lot of sh . . . trouble. My dad whipped me first with his belt. My mother got her turn after she butchered up the dead sow. She hit me with a wire hanger. You'd been proud. I didn't cry about the whippings even once. Yeah, I wasn't allowed near the pen after that. Three of those piglets lived to breed later. But I didn't mess with no more pigs. The cat? It came later, not too much later. I wanted to scare Tif for Halloween. She had this gray cat that she named Chips. It liked to eat potato chips. Well like I said, it was Halloween, so I caught up with that cat. The noose was easy to fashion. Sorry, guess I am getting a head of myself. I found out at school what a gallows looked like. I made a small version of one out of scrap wood around the goat's house. Not too shabby if I say so myself. Looked just like the ones in the pictures. I stole some doll clothes out my sister's room. That's when I caught up with that cat. She was hiding out in the chicken coop watching the chicks. She was a good mouser and never ate any of the chickens. Maybe I was a little mean. Am I sorry, naw. So I have Chips, and got her dressed. It was a hoot watching her try to walk around the yard with those things on. It was a pink and white polk-a-dot frilly dress and matching bloomers. I even found a hat that matched. It stayed on with some elastic. Didn't stay on too good, kept falling to the side. I stood the cat up on the gallows, and put the noose around her neck. I thought about covering her head with a black hood, but didn't have one around. That's when I started calling for Tif. Don't know where my parents were. We were alone a lot. So, Tif came out and saw her cat all dressed up with that noose around her neck. She starts screaming and I pulled the lever. Guess I didn't measure the rope right, cuz it came up short. That cat's neck snapped, it was a clear sound. Tif

was screeching even more. She started hitting me, and saying all kinds of bad things that god should do to me. I shrugged. I mean what did it matter. It was just a stupid cat. You're right. It should have mattered. If I would have measured right, my dad wouldn't have whipped me so hard that night. He beat me real good. I couldn't lay down on my back. The welts were bleeding. No, don't blame him for that. What was that? No, was thinking about my dad and those welts. Still, stings. Sure, I could eat. Anything really. I ain't picky. Thanks. Ed who? Oh sure, I've heard of him. But not until I moved here. They said I was just like him. I think that's only because we both lived on a farm. I didn't do the same things he did. The Brush Hog? But that comes later. I thought you wanted to know about the things that happened before that. Sure, sure, I'll talk about it, later. After we have eaten. Hopeful, yes, he was my dog. Grandpa Lucky ran him over with the swather. He did ok for a three-legged dog. No, I would say it didn't, every farm seems to have a three-legged dog, just part of it I guess. Grandpa Lucky? Tell you about him? Well there ain't much to tell on that. Like I said, he was always lost. ~Laugh~ yep, I did actually lose him once. That was a hoot. He wanted to go hunting. I thought that was boring. Why wait in a tree with a gun for those stupid deer to come walking by? We were walking out to the tree stand. It wasn't hard to lose him. I just ran off in a different direction. Dad didn't find him until morning. He was cold and achy, but otherwise just fine. Um, yeah, dad beat me for that too. No, don't blame him for that either. I would have beat my kid just the same. No, never thought beating a kid was wrong. Hell you got to try to get them to listen somehow. I don't think my dad beat me hard enough. Cuz, if he would have beat me harder, I might be the kid he really wanted. Oh, well that's easy enough to answer for ya. He never wanted no kid. If he beat me harder, he would have killed me. See, his perfect kid. I don't think he hated me, just didn't want me. There's a difference. Man, you are funny. Those dolls, come on what boy didn't tear up his sister's dolls. You? No, course you didn't, you ain't really a man are you? Ok, sorry. Shouldn't talk to you like that. I don't know you that well yet. But I like you. I only give those I like a hard time. Connor? I guess I did give him a hard time. I did like him, but we had are differences, like all friends. He was calling me names, said I was a fagot. I ain't got nothing against them! What kind of person do you take me for? What you do in your house is you own business, but I am not a faggot, so there wasn't any reason to call me one. He wouldn't stop. That's why! Would you put up with the name calling, even from your best friend? Of course not, he just kept saying it and I kept telling him to shut up. When he didn't, that's when I grabbed the tree branch and hit him. He got something like sixty-four stitches in his scalp. I hit him real good. I am proud of that. I have always had a good swing. Just wish I could have been in baseball. But we lived too far out for me to join teams. Connor never did talk to me after that. His loss. Sampson? Haven't thought about that horse in awhile. He was a good work horse, never stepped out of line. But I saw this thing at school. Some guy had preserved bodies in a way that you could see how it worked. One was of a man riding a horse. I thought that was too cool. They called it art when he did it, not when I did it. Dad was pretty sore about losing his work horse in that manner. I thought he would kill me. Instead he took a shovel to the side of my head. If you touch it right here, you can feel where it caved in. I was out of it for a while. They didn't take me to the hospital. I know you were going to ask that. Never did they take me in. Dad broke my arm over the chickens. Mom set it herself. Boy! Did that hurt! I guess we are to the chicken story now. If you insist on hearing it, guess it's not a big deal. Hey, look! Our food is here.

My mom bred some of those fancy Bantams for showing. She would win prizes at the fairs. Very pretty birds I must say. Of course I can appreciate beauty. I don't know what you think of me, but some of your ideas are wrong. Right, so these chickens had a separate house away from the regular layers. She spent a lot of time in there with them. Grooming them, feeding them, talking to them, hell, she even sang to them. She was weird. I'm not sure why I did it, but one night I went out there and took one of the fluffy white ones off its perch. It was a Sultan, very cool bird man. Fancy as shit. Oops, right. Sorry, so I took this chicken out to where my dad kept his bird hunting dogs. He had them trained real well and they didn't at the birds that they retrieved for him. I thought what would they do if they weren't retrieving a bird for him. So I took a hatchet and chopped its head clean off. Blood spurted a bit, nothing like those ducks though. Ducks fling about more. They'll cover you in blood. Killing ducks was normal around there. Nothing I went out and did on my own. I thought you wanted to hear about the chickens?

I cut the Sultan's head off and threw it into the dog run. Those dogs sniffed it a bit, but would touch it. Kind of ticked me off, so I went into the pen and shredded that chicken up with my bare hands. Flung the feather's blood and meat all over the run, covering the dogs. Next morning dad found them. He shot ever one of those dogs dead. I laughed so hard my sides hurt. Hopeful was my dog. I wasn't going to do something like that to him.

This burger's good. A few nights later I went back out and grabbed another bird. A golden buff this time. She's was another fluffy one, feathers on her feet. This one I didn't bother to take the hatchet to. Instead I did this thing that Grandpa Lucky taught me. You grab the bird by the head, and then whip it like you would a wet towel to sting someone's a.. backside. When you do that, the head will snap off and the body goes flying. I did this and it hit my parents' bedroom window. With the head gone they thought a skunk got it. Oh, sure, most times that's all

a skunk will eat. They like the brains. So I didn't get blame for that one. I did get blamed for the next bird, don't know what it was called. It was maroon in color, real short to the ground. It was one of mom's prize winners. I took it out to the barn, and stomped down on it. I thought maybe its insides would blow out. It just laid there and twitched for a while. Not much fun. That's when I got my arm broken, so I stopped messing with mom's chickens. Sure that pissed me off. I don't know anyone that wouldn't be angry at someone for breaking their arm.

Can I have that napkin? Thank you. Oh yes the goats drying up. Now that wasn't my fault. Mom started yelling at me, saying I was doing some Satanic ritual that caused the goats to stop giving milk. That made me angry. Of course I did something. No, I probably should have tried making her listen to me. But by then, ya know. What did I do? This was a

good one. I don't know why they didn't tell you. My family seems to enjoy tattling on me. I like playing games in my head. Make up different stories, try acting them out. Mom said I should write the stories down. But I never cared for books or anything. I liked doing, ya know? Any how, I was suppose to be at school, I rarely did, but mom thought I did. She was inside getting lunch ready for her precious Tif. I went out to the goat house, with a nail gun. Did you know that that's the best way to kill a cow, a nail through the brain? No suffering I hear. No? You never heard that before? Well, it's the truth. I took that nail gun and shot one of the dairy goats that wasn't giving milk any more in the head. She dropped so fast. It was hard not to laugh. After she twitched for a second, I took her to the barn, then checked to see what my mom was doing. She was at the table with Tif, not paying attention to anything else. So I went back into the barn, and gutted the goat, then nailed the goat to the side of the barn. With one of my dad's paint brushes I drew a pentagram around the dead goat. And for the heck of it, see I am watching my

language, I nailed up the bowels and other stuff that had fell out of the thing. You should have seen the look on my mother's face. It was one of those moments I wished I had a Polaroid.

Yep, I got a good beating for that one. Then dad made me work off the money to replace the goat. Stupid thing cost over five hundred dollars! No, it wasn't worth that much. Think dad lied to make me suffer more. I told ya, the goat didn't suffer, nail to the head is the best way.

Oh the fires. That was just some stupid kid shhtuff. Tif and I were playing cowboys and Indians underneath some trees. Had to have a fire to cook with, right? That was Tif's idea. Fire had never done much for me. We started a small fire and it spread. Burnt two miles of wild grass and some schmuck's hunting cabin. Course Tif was too much of an angel, so it was all my fault.

They said that did they? Well, they are right. I did set some more fires later on. But nothing so out of control. I don't like being out of control. My true fires started with some toads I caught. I built a few crosses and nailed their little feet to it, like Jesus. I wanted to tie them up, but it wasn't working. Nails really are great things. But, yeah, I nailed them to these little crosses and bundled some twigs around them. It didn't take much to catch on fire, soon I was frying toads, just like burning witches. It was great! ~laugh~ Other fires? I dumped some gas on another one of our cats, set it on fire and watched as it ran around the yard. I wish I would have done that one at night. Because it could have been a pretty good light show.

Trenton? Do I have to talk about that one? I guess I do. Well Trenton was the neighbor's baby. She came out with him late in the day, and asked if I would watch him while she talked to my mom. Now I ain't got a problem with babies. They annoyed me sure, but no problems. Do you not hear me? I said no problem. Trenton was an accident. He got too close to the fire. Yes, I did spray lighter fluid on him. Wow, you just get to it don't you. I sprayed Trenton with lighter fluid. I was doing an experiment. That's what I kept telling myself. Once he was sprayed down, I let him crawl around where I was burning trash for my mom. It didn't take too long before Trenton caught on fire. Boy did he scream! It was fascinating to watch. He kind of melted. The burning hair stunk though.

He was dead before his mom got out there. But see no one could get me on it, I got in trouble for not paying attention to the baby, but then they yelled at Trenton's mom for letting someone too young, watch her baby.

No, no more fires after that. I was bored with it by then. See, I had set just about everything I could on fire. I knew how they burned. No reason to rehash things, right? Glad you agree. They sure do blame me for a lot of things, don't they? I didn't hurt anyone else after that. I didn't want to talk about that yet. When I'm ready I'll let you know. We are leading up to that. I thought you said you wanted to know about me? Then why keep bringing that up? Sorry, I'll calm down. Could I get another pop? Thank you much.

After the fires, I don't know. I think I start dissecting more little creatures around the farm. They were easy to come buy. I would trap them, cut them open, play with their insides. Same ole same ole. I didn't care. That's why. It didn't matter how often dad hit me by then. I liked making mom scream cuz she was scared. That's why I didn't clean up or hide the mess. I even did it on her nice dinning room table once. That got me locked in my room for a few days without any food. But boy oh boy, was it worth it. Awe, eatin' bugs was something I had always done. No worries there. I just liked the taste, and the crunchy sound. That freaked mom out huh? Well I guess it would her. Guys in the military do it all the time. Don't see why it should be a problem if I do it. ~laugh~ That cat? Ha! Yeah, well, that was great! That thing wasn't hurt. It just puked all over mom's living room. I guess being duct taped to a ceiling fan set on high will do that to you. Now, you keep bringing things up out of order. Mr. Duncan

paid me to do that. He had too many kittens and wanted me to get rid of them. A quarter a cat. I had to make it fun, so I buried them up to their necks and ran them over with a lawn mower.

The salt? Oh yeah! Ha! Forgot about that one. I only did that a few times. Pour a little salt and a cat's ass . . . oops, um rear end and throw them up on the roof. They will drag their . . . rear ends . . . around that rooftop until they fall off. Sam e here, it was kinda mean. Should have killed them straight out. No? Why not, it was kinder to do that then to let them die eating the poisoned rats, are just plain starving to death because of worms. Course the hot rear on top of it all sure didn't help, huh? The brush hog? Back to that are we. Ok, I get it. No, mom didn't let me watch Tif. Remember? She was scared of me. No, I only poked her. Never really tried to hurt her. She was my sis, and even if she did bug me, I still didn't want to see her hurt. But I thought you wanted to talk about the brush hog, not Tif. You said it's been five years? Well, that day with the brush hog seems like it happened recently. I was a good cool day to be out. Dad wanted me to clean out the cattle pasture. We had just sold off everything we had at auction. Dad wanted me to clean it out and get it ready for a different breed. I like driving the tractors so running the hog wasn't a big deal. Um, I took it out alone. No big deal there. They might have been scared of me, but they needed me to work. I drove it along the road that skirted past our land. Didn't want to tear up any crops, and the run wasn't wide enough. I went in next to the pens. Dad want me to mow down some of the bramble bushes that had overran part of the pasture, had it pretty as a picture in a few minutes, not seeing anything else out there, I took the road back home. I was when I pulled into the drive way that I saw her sitting on the ground. She was playing nice with one of her dolls. One I hadn't smashed its head in yet. Not sure what came over me. Don't interrupt, you can ask when I finished. I just want to remember it right, that's all. Thank you. So she was sitting there, and I turned the tractor towards her. She laughed and pretended to be scared. But then she saw that I wasn't going to stop or turn, ya know, I wasn't playing. She got up screaming and ran to the house. I pressed down on the gas pedal to get the old junk tractor moving faster. Poor girl, she probably felt like her heart was going to explode. I ran like that once, hurts. But she's just a screaming away, calling my name, calling mom. I never saw mom come out of the house. Maybe if I did . . . I guess mom was running toward us, or really to Tif, I don't know. But anyway, I ran her down, I felt the brush hog shutter a bit when her body got wrapped up in the blades. It was only for a split second. The blades were able to pull her apart and deposit her like mulch. I saw an arm or a leg, something long, pale and bloody, when I got off the tractor. Mom was screaming. Dad punched me in the back of the head at some point. Woke up here. So when do I get to go home?

End Transcript

Patient number 568932R  
OSAWATOMIE STATE HOSP PSYCHIATRIC  
Osawatomi, Ks  
March 4th 2006

Transcribed from video/audio in room surveillance. Patient was observed as being alone.





*~ Mad Cow? Wouldn't you be mad if you had to eat your family?~*

## **Alone on the Range**

“Whatever dork!” Thirteen-year-old Sean O’Flanagan laughed. His best friend Jason Safarik was doubled over in laughter next to him.

“Can you believe this creep?” Sean shook his head.

“Guy’s a loser.” Jason chuckled, snorting. That sent the two into another fit of laughter. The third boy that they had originally been teasing, flipped them off and stormed away.

“I love you too!” Sean called after him. “Come on.” He motioned Jason to follow him back to their bikes.

“Why can’t we take the bus like the other’s?” Jason asked as the two boys pulled their bicycles from the rack.

“You want to be buff for swim team tryouts, right?”

“Shit.”

“Suck it up man. Come on, my parents are gone this weekend. You can crash with me tonight.”

“I can dig it.”

Sean rolled his eyes at his friend. He really needed to work on his slang. The pair rode their matching blue Haros. They both lived a good five miles outside of town, in the wrong direction. The west side of town had scattered small homesteads between acres and acres of farmed land. The east side had the new homes and close to the highway. The boys lived on the west side, the wrong side according to the kids at school. Sean was used to it and had become thick skinned over the years, unfortunately Jason was newer and had yet to develop the thickness. Sean’s family had money. More than enough to buy one of the new homes. But they had these strange ideas about leaving only the smallest of footprints on the planet. He lived in a decent sized golf ball shaped home. An Earth ship, his mother explained. They raised all their own organic foods, included meat. Most days’ Sean wished that his parents would be like the other people in town, but that was only on the days he wasn’t getting teased.

Jason’s situation was different. His family had little money. They rented a mobile home on 3 acres. Sean’s mom had given them some seeds so that they could grow their own vegetables. Jason told him that this helped. He actually stopped going to bed hungry at night during harvest. His mother wasn’t preserving the foods for winter storage. Jason was spending more nights at Sean’s.

The matching Haros had cost them a lot of money. They worked all summer, doing odd jobs for people in town, gathering cans on the side of the road, and selling some of their outgrown toys. Sean knew that Jason, even after all that work, would fall short of his goal. The difference in pay came from the yard sale. Sean had newer and nicer items than Jason, even if his parents were eco freaks. Sean had Jason hand over all his money, and they bought the bikes together, Sean made up the difference, and neither boy mentioned it. They were true friends.

They pedaled home, not thinking of where they lived, or the cost of the bikes. Instead they thought of what might be in Sean’s fridge and what horror movies they could watch.

“We need to get some junk delivered.” Sean blurted out. “All I have are some chocolate-covered blueberries. And the chocolate is organic.” Jason made a gagging noise at the announcement.

“Can we?”

“No prob. mom’s cool with it, as long as it is only once in awhile. She’s not completely militant ya know.”

“True, true.” The boys pedaled a little faster. They wanted to phone the grocer before Mike went home for the night. He was the only one in town willing to deliver groceries to the wrong side.

The boys, covered in the dust from the dirt roads, dropped their bikes on Sean’s wild flower lawn, then shoving and running into the house. Jason jumped over the back of the low sitting couch. Something that was picked up on the side of the road, and Sean’s mom had re-

upholstered using illegally grown hemp fabric. Sean grabbed the land line and dialed the number for the grocers. Mike happened to pick up.

“Mike! Great, listen we need junk.”

“Mom’s tab?”

“Yesir.”

“Cool” and that ended the phone call. Mike knew exactly what kind of junk foods the boys preferred. He had delivered to them several times in the past. Sean joined Jason on the couch. Together they flipped through the channels on the television. The tv was only allowed to be turned on during the weekends. Sean’s father had put his foot down to the idea of being rid of the television all together, like mom wanted. Sean was grateful for this, he actually could talk to some of the other kids about what they watched over the weekend. Currently, there was nothing on worth watching. Bored the two wondered into the kitchen. Mike wouldn’t be around for at least another twenty minutes, so they settled to down a bottle of non-alcoholic sparkling grape juice. The grapes were grown right outside of the house.

“Sean, why don’t you get home schooled? I mean I have seen the day time shows, and they say that freaks like your parents’ home school.”

“I was before you moved here. Dad said that I was being smothered, and needed to get out.” And then there it was, the boredom crept over them.

“Let’s go cow tipping tonight.” Sean suggested.

“What the hell is that?”

“Ya know. Ya wait for the cows to go to sleep. See they sleep standing up. so their asleep right. And you sneak up on them and push them over. Cow tipping.”

“Why would we do that?”

“Damn your boring! It’s fun. I know you haven’t done it yet. So why not tonight?”

Jason looked uneasily at Sean. He was sure he was being put on, but why not. Jason shrugged.

“We’ll fatten on junk, digest with some horror flick, and then go tip a cow or two.” With their plans for the evening settled, they bored tense seemed to lift, and they fell back into their youthful teasing.

It was turning it a blissful night for the two. They ate the junk that their parents would have never approved of, watched an unedited horror movie, the kind Sean’s dad called T and A movies, and drifted off into a prepubescent fantasy filled sleep. At two a.m. the alarm buzzed, and the two jumped, startled from their sleep.

“Time to go sport.” Sean mimicked his father’s wake up call. By that time the idea of tipping a cow over had lost its appeal to Jason. He mumbled and rolled back over.

“No you don’t cowboy.” Sean, now wide awake, teased. “You have to be initiated into the wrong side.” Jason grumbled before giving in, and slowly pulling himself out from under the blanket.

“Dude, you suck.” Jason rubbed his eyes.

“Only you would know.” Sean laughed at his joke, then realized that it meant differently then what he intended to be. It was Jason’s turn to laugh. Sean shrugged him off, and grabbed his jacket.

Back on their bikes, out on the dark road, the pair shivered from their slight fear. Neither would admit to it though, they prided themselves on being tough country boys. Sean took the lead, he knew where to find the closest cows. Jason followed close behind, watching Sean’s reflective light obsessively.

On arrival, Sean gentle set his bike on its side, not wanting to make much noise. He

feared waking the property owner, or even the cows. Jason followed. They snuck passed the house, and to the cattle pen. Inside they found several cows, all of them laying down.

“Bull shit! You said that they stood up to sleep.” Jason whispered harshly.

“Wrong ones.” Was Sean’s reply before moving past the pens, out into an open field. “They’re out there.” He pointed. Jason didn’t find the idea of walking out into a dark pasture amusing. But he felt compelled to do it, otherwise he would never hear the end of it from Sean. Slowly they crept toward the silhouette of a single standing cow.

“On three, we push.” Sean whispered. Jason nodded in the darkness.

“One, two, THREE!” Sean and Jason run up to the cow, the palms of their hands hit the cow’s side at the same time. They shoved with all their might, but the cow didn’t budge.

“What the hell is this?” Jason asked.

“Run” was the calm reply.

“What.”

“Run!” Sean screamed. Jason looked to the cow. It was staring directly at him. That’s when Jason noticed. This was not a cow, but a bull.

“Oh, shit.” Jason urinated on himself. He could hear Sean’s shoes hitting the ground as he ran away from them. Jason turned quickly and ran, the bull followed angrily. He could hear it snorting, felt the foamy spittle it flung about landing on the back of his neck. Oh God, the boy thought, it’s going to kill me. They ran screaming from the pasture, past the pens. They grabbed their bikes and rode as fast as they could home, where they collapsed on the couch laughing hysterically.

“Am I now officially part of the wrong side?” Jason roared.

“After you change your diaper you are.”

Jason blushed in embarrassment.

“It’s all cool. I did the same thing my first time. Go grab some pants out of my room.” Sean then ignored his friend and flipped on the t.v.

Jason stood in the middle of Sean’s large room. How envious he was of his friend. Jason couldn’t help but feel angry that Sean got everything, while he had nothing. He tried to shrug the feeling off, and found a pair of pants. The guest’s bathroom was the same size as the bathroom he shared with his entire family. It just didn’t seem fair. The hot water that pounded down on his tight back didn’t stop the shiver of realization that crept up it. It had been close with that bull. But how could he doubt his best friend? Sean said he had done the same thing when he had first moved out here.

“Damn him.” Jason whispered. Then shut off the water and dried himself off. In the foggy mirror he caught a brief glimpse at himself. Things weren’t fair. He was a dark headed, strange looking boy, while Sean was pale hair and beginning to look more like a man. Jason’s jealousy was wrong and he knew it. He tried to ignore it, and get dressed.

Sean was waiting for him with a large bowl full of small chocolate candies.

“Naked Chicks.” Sean grinned ear to ear.

“Sounds good to me.” Jason sat down heavily on the couch, grabbing a handful of candy in the process. Before long, the boys slept where they sat, chocolate drool ran down the corners of their mouths. They both dreamed of bare chested women being chased by bulls. Just before dawn, pounding and yelling at the front door woke them. Sean jumped and ran to the door, worried that his parents might have been hurt. Instead of finding a police officer there to inform him of the accident, the farmer whose bull they had pushed stood in a tight pair of jeans and button down

flannel. In his hands he held a double barrel shot gun.

“Tell your mother to stay away from my cows.” He spit through his teeth. The abruptly marched back to his truck that was idling in the drive. Sean stood there watching him go.

“What the hell was that?” Jason asked startling Sean.

“Nothing, come on.” Sean shoved Jason back into the house.

“That was nothing.”

“It was the guy whose bull we ticked off last night.”

“Shit, are we busted then?”

“No, don’t think so. He thinks it was my mom out there.”

“Why?”

“Because she is an eco freak, that’s why.” Sean’s answer didn’t seem right to Jason, and it should on his face. “Ok, the thing is the government wants to put chips inside of any animal that might be part of the food chain, like cow, both milking and eating, chickens, rabbits, pigs, whatever. Something about diseases and this chips will prevent them from spreading. Mom was ranting one day, said that all this does is place blame on people that had nothing to do with the animal being sick. She and dad were ticked. Dad told me that small farms will end up going out of business because of these chips.”

“That’s not cool. And it doesn’t make sense.

Sean shrugged, that’s all he was told about it.

“So why was the cowboy here, screaming about your mom?”

“He has those chips in his cows. Mom has been telling him why they are so bad. I guess he thinks she would go as far as removing the chips herself.” Sean shrugged. “We have one more parent free day, let’s not freak over it, cool?”

“Cool” Jason agreed. And they went to the kitchen to see what kind of junk was left from the night before.

Monday morning brought the boys back to school. They spent the time ignoring the other kids, except for a few of the wrong side girls, and making sure they didn’t have any homework that would have to be brought home on the bikes. That week, neither one of the boys mentioned the bull or the bull’s owner, not even to their parents. Friday morning Sean’s parents told him that they were going to a rally in the nearest, large city. He would have another weekend alone, and Jason was invited to stay.

Jason’s family didn’t mind that he was only thirteen years old, and staying in a house with no parental supervision. Jason was getting feed better being at Sean’s then at home, and with Jason gone, there was more food for the remaining family. That evening Jason was once again sprawled out on Sean’s couch, while Sean was on the phone with Mike.

Night fell as normal, and the two watched another T and A flick. Their bellies happy from chips and colas. Thunder rolled up in the distance.

“Storm.” Sean stated, Jason nodded and turned his attention back to the naked and bloody screaming woman on the television set. The thunder didn’t cease as it would have normally. Instead the rolling thunder seemed to be getting closer to the house. Louder and louder, it bothered the boys. Sean ran to the window to look out.

“Stamped!” He yelled at Jason, and flung himself away from the window.

“What the hell is a stamped.” Jason asked, not familiar with western movies or living on an open range.

“The neighbor’s cows were spooked. They’re running. And they won’t care if this house is in

their way!” Sean’s eyes were wild with fear. He had seen what a stampeding herd could do to a person in their path. “Stay away from the windows.” Just as he said that, a cow broke through the glass. She was too large to fit completely through, and was stuck midway. The glass cut into her hide, blood dripped onto the cork flooring of Sean’s house. The cow’s eyes rolled into the back of her head, she moed in distress, and green foam dripped from her mouth.

“Oh, damn.” Jason whispered.

“I told you.” Sean shook his head. Jason got up to approach the hurt cow. “Don’t touch it! When the other’s have past, we will go get the owner. He will deal with it.” The beating of the hooves surrounded the house, but was not distancing itself. The boys sat, watching the cow and listening to the shuffling of hooves just outside for what seemed like an eternity to them.

“I think they have calmed down. Maybe we should call someone to come help us. Sean suggested.

“Do you know that farmers number?”

“Damn, no.

“Mike?”

Sean looked at the clock, it was only eight thirty, Mike would still be at work. Sean grabbed the phone off its cradle, and dialed the grocer.

“Mike? Um Mike we might need some help.” Sean told him about the cattle around the home. After he hung up, he told Jason that Mike said he would be right over. Right over meant in twenty minutes if Mike left right then. The boys had a long wait.

A few minutes past nine o’clock, they heard the badly maintained engine of Mike’s VW Bug. They rushed to the door, daring to take a peek out. Mike pulled into the drive, the yellow and green rusted Bug pulled up into the drive. Mike’s tall slime silhouette emerged from the car. The boys heard the squeaky hinges of the door, before it slammed shut. The cows paced and moed in response.

“Is this what you were talking about?” Mike called out to them through the dark evening. The boys could only nod, knowing that Mike wouldn’t be able to see them. Yet they had been awed by the sight of so many cattle lounging around the yard.

“Where’s the owner?” Mike asked as he made his way, zig zagging to the house. Sean and Jason Shrugged. “You would have thought he would have noticed when his cattle left.” Mike was thinking out loud.

“What’s weirder.” Jason found his voice. “The cow stuck in the window is foaming green”

“Green?” Mike echoed. “Weird.” Mike was a few paces off the front porch when the cattle began agitated again. Mike turned to see what was happening, the boys followed his gaze. A very large bull was making its way through the densely packed cows. The boys could tell it was not happy. Then it seemed to scream. They had never heard that before, but that’s what it reminded all of them of, a loud angry scream. Mike turned on his heels and ran for the house. The bull followed closely behind. Mike leapt up onto the steps to the porch when the bull caught up to him. The long horns pierced into his back. Mike screamed from the intense pain as he was gorged. His body shook, while the boys stared at him. Suddenly the bull was still, and Mike went limp. The bull raised his head and bellowed into the sky. Mike’s dead body slide further down, the white horn emerged through his belly. The boys screamed and slammed the door before the bull could get a chance to find them.

“What the hell! omygodohmygod.”

“Jason, stop!” A shivering Sean yelled.

“What happened?” Jason was now in tears. He had never seen a man die before, much less gorged to death. “He, he’s stuck on the horn.”

“I don’t know. Dammit. What are we to do now?”

“The police, call the damn cops.” Sean agreed and ran back to where he had set down the cordless phone. He got a hold of the local police department and told them everything that had happened. Sean got a response of laughter before the dispatcher hung up on him.

“They don’t believe me!” Sean exclaimed.

“Oh, god, what are we going to do now? Does your dad have a gun?” Sean shook his head in the negative.

“He doesn’t think guns are right.”

“Your parents are freaks. Stupid freaks.”

“Shut up Jason! How wee they to know that we would be held captive by a bunch of pissed off cows?”

“Man, do you think we caused this? I mean, we did push that bull.”

“Jason, I told you before, I did the same thing, this never happened.”

“Then what’s different this time?” Sean thought about the answer to Jason question. He turned to the cow that was now quietly struggling to dislodge itself.

“Those chips!” Jason looked at Sean blankly.

“Remember that farmer that should up yelling about my mom last weekend? He has those chips in his cows.”

“So what, someone is controlling them through these chips?”

“No, I think they are just pissed off. I just can’t think of another reason. You wanted to know what was so different.” Jason agreed that Sean was making sense.

“So, what do we do now?”

“We wait until they leave.” Sean locked the door. He felt stupid doing it, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that the cows would figure out how to turn the doorknob.

The boys made an attempt to ignore the noises in the yard. The horror movies had to be turned off, it was giving them the creeps. Late into the night, they began to drift off into sleep, and that’s when the scratching started. Jason was the first to hear the strange noise. He pushed Sean’s shoulder trying to get his attention.

“Do you hear that?”

Sean nodded. The two got up from the couch and tip toed their way to the window. The cattle still mulled about the yard, but the bull, the one that Mike’s body was still impeded on its horns, was scaping the side of the house. Slowly and deliberately, he walked the length of the house. The bloody tip dug into the earth made home, leaving a trail. Jason and Sean could only watch, unsure of what the bull was up to. Suddenly it bellowed into the air, causing the others to stir.

“Something’s coming.” Sean whispered. The boys peered through the window, the sliver of the moon was quickly covered by the dust rising off the dirt road.

“What?”

“Another herd!” Sean jumped. “What is going on?” The boys watched as the new herd descended onto the house.

“I don’t know man, but I think we should get out of here. What if the come through the door?” Jason paced the floor.

“Come on! How the hell are we suppose to get out of here?”

“They’re not out back.” Jason smiled. There was a way out.

“I don’t know, I think we are safer in here.”

“Bullshit! You know that’s not true.”

“Jason man, look around you. If they are that mad at us, then they will get us if we leave.”

“Cows are stupid. They’re not mad at us. They are just mad! Maybe that’s it, maybe they have that mad cow disease.”

Sean rolled his eyes at his friend. “Listen. We are staying.”

“Fuck you we are!” Jason screamed and ran to the back door. Sean tried to chase after him, but the other boy had too much of a head start. Jason burst out of the back door and ran head long into a waiting cow. She huffed at him, covering him with green slimy snot. Jason was both terrified and appalled. Sean started screaming for him to run back into the house. By the time Jason was able to turn and start to run back, the bull had blocked his way. Jason stared wide eyed as the bull scratched at the ground. Sean watched as if what was unfolding before his eyes were in slow motion. The bull moved forward, Mike’s body now stiff from a rigor mortise, his weight of the stiff body didn’t seem to hinder the animal. He bowed his head, aligning the horns with Jason’s small body, and charged with a roar. Sean couldn’t turn his head in time, and watched as his best friend was impelled through the chest with the shinny black and white-tipped horn. Jason’s weak scream echoed through Sean’s head. His best friend thrashed about, whimpering for Sean to help him.

“I’m sorry.” Sean whispered, then turned and shut the door. He sat himself down at the kitchen table. He wanted so much to cry, but couldn’t. He felt terrible for not catching up with his friend before he made it to the door, and now not being able to cry for him.

Sean spent a long night alone, finally falling asleep at the table. He dreamed of Jason pushing the bull. The bull was the color of blood. The sound of breaking glass woke him. Sean felt confused, he couldn’t grasp what was now happening. The cows were breaking the windows. Glass sprinkled the ground. The cork flooring muffled the sound. A bovine tried to squeeze her way through the small window opening, she was as successful as the first one had been. Now there were two cows complaining loudly half way through the windows. A repetitive dull thumping came from the front entrance. The cattle were getting smarter. They were ramming the front door, trying to knock it in. Sean was mortified. Unable to grasp the situation, he had no way of thinking how he might get out of what was happening. It all seemed to unreal to him. Too much like those zombie movies.

“Zombie bovine?” He whispered. Zombies hate fire! He became excited about the thought.

Running quickly to the fire place, he threw a few seasoned logs into it. Clumsily he waded up some newspaper and stuffed it around the wood. He had seen his father do this several times. The matches proved to be tricky. He hands were shaking with far, and the match wouldn’t strike the first few tries. He heard the wood of the door crack. He became desperate, more frantic but on the fifth try he was able to get the match lit and threw it onto the wood where it promptly blew out. The feeling of defeat tried to overwhelm Sean, he pushed it aside for his need to survive dominated. The second match flared up on the first strike. Sean was more cautious with it. Slowly he moved the flame to the newspaper, and held it there until it caught. The front door splintered some more. Sean moved the match to the second piece of newspaper, holding it there until it caught as well. The sound of a hinged coming from the door frame almost caused him to lose the match. In his panic he had used more newspaper than was necessary to start the fire. One at a time, he lit the paper until it was too hot for him to reach into the hearth. The slam of the heavy front door landing on the floor echoed through the house. Sean quickly looked from side to



side, trying to find something that he could use for a torch. He spied a cow walking into the living room. He ripped down the curtains closest to him, screaming as cow eyes stared at him through the window. He held onto the curtain rod and wrapped a strip of the torn lace curtain around one end. Running back to the fire he saw that more cattle had entered the room. They were all standing eerily quiet, staring at him.

“Fuck off!” He screamed and thrust the curtain wad into the fire, praying that it wasn’t too flame retardant. The lace caught quickly and Sean for once was grateful that his mom bought used merchandise. He turned and waved the makeshift torch at the staring bovines. They didn’t flinch.

The large bull sauntered into the room. The cows moved aside, giving him leeway. Jason’s body was not perched up on the horns and Mike’s still was. Sean felt a tear streak his cheek. He flung the torch about, igniting other old, used fabric. The couch burst into flames. The cows moved back from the heat, but didn’t retreat entirely. The ones stuck in the window struggled more to free themselves. Sean spotted an opening for escape close to the burning couch. He jumped over the flames, skirting past a black and white dairy cow. She didn’t move to stop him. The bull bellowed behind him. Sean could hear his hoofs hitting the floor as he charged. The boy looked over his shoulder. The bull had lowered his head, aiming for his chest. Sean dropped the torch and tangled his feet up on it. His body hit the floor, jarring his teeth. He rolled onto his back just as the bull reached him. He stopped, and snorted in the child’s face. Sean prayed it would change his mind. But bulls are known for their one tracked minds. “Mom.” Sean cried just as a hoof came down on his head.

*~ Our nightmares make us what we are ~*

## A Mind Ordered Bride

Mallory found herself unable to restrain from telling her mother how much she was annoying her this morning. Mallory got it, she understood that she was late in leaving. But did she have to be so naggy about it. It wasn't as if Mallory really wanted to go, but she had a vision of the place. Now she regretted telling her mother about it.

Mallory was a 22-year-old college student, who, to earn some spending cash, did tarot readings and palm readings for her mother's rich friends. She also suffered from visions. They didn't come often, but when they did, she knew not to ignore them. This latest one she had confided in her mother about. She saw a man on a small farm. He was tall, handsome and alone. The vision suddenly shifted and she saw herself standing next to him, smiling. That was the whole of the vision, but there was something dark lurking in its peripheral. Mallory knew that this was her true love, this farmer boy. Months later she had answered a want ad in the city's main paper. A micro farmer was looking for a companion. She couldn't believe her luck when she received his picture by e-mail. It was the same man in her vision. She had answered the ad on a whim, nothing more. Her vision was coming to be.

Mallory found it interesting how fate worked. This wasn't a coincidence. This was where she was to be in her life. She had been fine with it, until the morning she was to go visit the man's farm. That unseen darkness made one last attempt to filter into her sight. She couldn't see what it was, but it made her uncomfortable. Now she was having second thoughts. Her mother though would not hear of such things. Cold feet, she kept saying whenever Mallory tried to talk to her about it. Mallory knew it was much more than that.

The limousine waited patiently as the young woman argued with her mother on the sidewalk. Their conversation was hard to hear over the other people walking about, talking on cell phones or to themselves. And the constant blaring of car horns at the intersection contributed to the noise. Mallory and her mother were used to such things, and it didn't impair their fighting. The chauffeur did lean in a bit, trying to catch what they were saying. He was only able to hear bits and pieces. And from what he heard. He was glad he didn't know the whole story.

Mallory stated that she was only entering the limo under duress. The chauffeur nodded in acknowledgment.

"Have you ever been in love?" Mallory asked the driver as they pulled onto the freeway. He glanced back at her in the rearview mirror.

"Once." He replied when he was certain that she was asking him and not someone on the cell phone.

"Did you ever wish you hadn't?" Mallory leaned toward the driver. He wasn't a bad looking man. Maybe in his forties. Dark, smartly cut hair, clean shaved and only a hint of crow's feet.

"Well, to be honest, yes." The reply shocked Mallory a bit.

"Why?" she blurted without thinking of his feelings on the subject. She bit her lip, when she realized she might have made a mistake.

“Because she didn’t love me. She married my brother.” His expression didn’t change from that of a man determined to keep the large vehicle in its own lane.

“Oh.” Was the only response Mallory was able to come up with. She sat back on the leather seat, losing herself in thought. It was only when the driver gently shook her did she realize that she had fallen asleep.

The airport was crowded with all kinds of people. Mallory had always been uncomfortable in crowds. Moving out of the city might be a blessing in this regard. But not having access to the things she loved, like the theater, a museum or even the movies troubled her. Maybe that was the tinge of darkness in her vision. Boredom.

The slender stewardess showed Mallory where her first class seat was located. She was handed a glass of wine and a pair of airplane slippers. The latter was stuffed under her seat, while the former was consumed in a few large and hard gulps. She was nervous. Something evil was waiting for her in Nebraska.

\* \* \*

“How was your flight?” The handsome blonde stranger asked her as Mallory sat next to him in his beat up truck.

“It was good.” She replied politely. She was unable to stop herself from blushing. The feelings of foreboding had left her as she got closer to landing. Now, seated next to the man she had loved through visions, e-mails and phone calls, the thoughts had been banished. Nothing could possibly go wrong here, she thought.

His small farm was just as wondrous as the pictures he had sent her. A full weeping willow set next to a large pond greeted them at the gated entrance. The drive was covered with small shiny pebbles of various sizes and colors. The immediate estate was manured and a lush green. Fancy and petite chickens wandered around lazily as they approached the small gingerbread like cottage. It was all like some fairy tale.

His name was Daniel Blevins. He was 32 years old and had inherited his farm from his parents. Both of which died while driving home from the city. Some teenagers had been out joy riding while drunk, and crashed into their car. The farm had been in his family for several generations, his ancestors hailing from Switzerland. He had enough money to live comfortably, but his father had shown him the worth of working with one’s own hands. He preferred his old pickup and old worn in jeans. Mallory found that adorable, as well as admirable.

Mallory found herself on a plush leather couch. She told him everything about herself. She couldn’t restrain herself, but it just tumbled out. She had even told him that she had visions. He responded to it happily, stating that he found that to be a wonderful gift. It was only a matter of days before he asked her to marry him.

They went out to walk around the pond that she had first spied when they arrived. The sheep were grazing nearby. Peacocks and peahens, chatted among themselves, as swans and geese dunk under the water for small fish. It was perfect to her. He knelt down on one knee, and held her hand in his. It was a simple “will you marry me.” Mallory broke out in tears, overwhelmed by the moment. She didn’t trust herself to speak, and nodded enthusiastically. That’s when he slipped the biggest diamond ring that she had ever seen onto her ring finger. This was true bliss.

It was decided that they would hold the wedding ceremony exactly one year from the date that he proposed. That gave them time to plan and prepare for family to come out. He had a few aunts and uncles he wanted to invite, while Mallory had only her mother. Still she thought it

would be a grand wedding. It was that same night of the engagement that Mallory's visions came back.

Shadows smeared out the faces of the participants. Yet the mood was clear. Death was roaming among them. Mallory saw a woman, very pregnant, staggering out of a barn. Her dress was torn, exposing her swollen belly. Blood dripped to the ground. Mallory could see tears mingle with the red fluid, and knew she was crying. The woman screamed and stumbled trying to escape her assailant who had burst from the same barn. He was dressed in torn blue jeans and a flannel. In his hands was a bloody butcher knife. Mallory woke herself up screaming in terror. Daniel was at her side, his hands were gently stroking her arm. concern was etched into his face.

Night after night the same dream came, and night after night Mallory woke screaming. Daniel was always at her side trying to comfort her. Over the next few months the dream wouldn't reveal any more then it did the first time. Mallory knew she had to tell Daniel. But what was she to say. She wasn't sure if the couple in the dream were them or not. She couldn't see anyone's faces.

Almost a year had past. The dreams became brighter in color. Still, the strategically placed shadows remained, though they had begun to lighten up. From experience Mallory knew that this meant that the vision was coming closer to becoming reality. It wasn't until she found out she was pregnant did she finally tell Daniel of the dream that had plagued her.

"What does this mean?"

"I'm not sure Danny."

"Is it me in the dream?" Daniel saw her reaction and it didn't match her response of no. The dream had past like a contagion. Daniel couldn't shake the feeling that he would be the one to kill his new family. He was all he could do to sleep at night. Days past and the thoughts sank deeper into Daniel's mind. He was aware of the only way out of it. Leaving a note of his love and devotion to Mallory and their baby, Daniel loaded his father's pistol and walked out to the pond where he had proposed to Mallory. A single shot to the head was all it took to end his life. Mallory woke from the noise. She sobbed for days. The dream had been replaced by the image of the man she loved laying on the green grass, blood and brain littered about. His shiny face now dulled. He had truly loved her, and chose to spare her life by taking his own. He had been a truly wonderful man.

Mallory's life slowly moved on. She was now the owner of Daniel's small family farm. Neighbors' upon hearing the news of her future husband's death flocked to the house with food and items for the baby. Many offered to help with chores and assist in other duties about the farm. She felt as if he had no choice but the except their offers. She missed Daniel.

Mallory was now in her fifth month of pregnancy. The date of her wedding passed without a ceremony, or even a mention from others. It was late in the afternoon and had been invited over to a neighbor's house for dinner. They were a couple about her age, and she felt right at home in their company. She drove Daniel's old pick up to their home. No one answered the door, so Mallory went around the back hoping that they hadn't forgot and was planing on barbecuing. Screams stopped her short of the back yard. Mallory could see someone running out of the barn. It was a pregnant woman in a ripped dress! The woman's husband in torn jeans and a flannel grabbed her hair and pulled her down to the ground. His knife slit cleanly and deeply into her throat. Mallory could only stand there and stare.

*~ We are all novices. Only the dead have nothing left to learn. ~*

# A Homesteading Neophyte

## March 2nd

I thought that it might be appropriate to reveal a little about myself before we get into the nitty gritty.

I am a 28 year old stay at home mother of 3 wonderful boys. 4 years ago my husband and I were living in suburbia, on the corner of a slightly busy street. At that time we had one son and I was pregnant with our second. I was tired of hearing the loud rap music blaring at all hours. To be completely honest, I listen to death metal, but not when I am trying to get a young child to bed.

We were annoyed with all the trash people felt compelled to throw into our yard, and just having a toddler near such a street was frightening. We set out to find a home away from all that was troubling us. Not once did we actually think about modern homesteading. But once we fell in love with a small home on five acres, we saw the potential.

The homesteading thing came about at the same time as our garden. We should try to live harvest to harvest. What a brilliant idea! ~ha!~ But we are trying. And the posts that are to follow will be about all my first times. It is a beginner's tale of mistakes.

Posted by Phelan at 4:30 pm

0 comments

[links to this post](#)

## March 12th

Brooding chicks.

Allow me to start by saying that the following is not about my first time brooding chicks. It is my third. But it is my first time with bantams. The two sets of layers and heavies were no too traumatic, though we did have a problem with one of the ducklings pulling feathers and killing our two turkeys. Turns out referring back to one of my homesteading books } the duck had a vitamin deficiency and that dandelion leaves and clovers were the remedy. Or so the books claim. Maybe it is now just a habit, but that duck is still a menace.

“Most hens today have had the nesting instinct bred out of them” My father-in-law agrees with that statement and informs us that should invest in some bannies. My husband and I discuss this at great lengths. “Bannies?” “Yes.” {We are wonderful conversationalists} We do have an option, buying an incubator that would be placed in the house. But do we really want them inside where our two year old can get to them? He already gets into the fridge and laughs hysterically as he breaks open the eggs on the dog. And then there is the fact that the geese and rooster loathe the child. He has been goosed and spurred {a couple of times were through the fence} yet he still wants to help gather the eggs. I carry the stick of doom when I enter the pen, not only to protect the boy, but also myself. {The roosters are holding some type of grudge against me} The bantam idea seems to be a brilliant one. We can set up a smaller pen for them, move the hatchable eggs over, and our two year old can safely help me with them.

Back to the catalog. We decided which ones we want and I go online to order. What’s this? I have an e-mail from the hatchery we order our chicks from. They have more bantams than they can sell and have them on special. I jump on that deal immediately and order the minimum of 25 chicks with plans to give a few to a friend.

Three days pass and I receive a phone call from the post office. The woman on the line was very concerned and I reassured her that they were fine, and that we would be by shortly. Unfortunately my car was don’t in working order and I had to call the motorcycle shop that my husband works at. I ask his boss to tell my husband that “the chickens are in.” Apparently the boss found this amusing and asked if it was code for something illegal.

2 hours later my husband arrives with a very large box. Twice the size we were use to getting. I had prepared the brooder {a kiddie pool, heat lamp, feeder and water} in the master bath. Anxiously we open the box. Aaaaawwwww how cute! We moved them one by one into the brooder, counting 1,2,3,25,50,60. 60 bantams! But I had only wanted and paid for 25! The hatchery hadn’t been lying when they claimed to have too many bantams in stock. 12 of the little ones had died in transit, the total they sent us was 72 birds.

When receiving 3 day old chicks, you have to check and see if their bowl movements are blocking their vent. I checked them as I placed them into the brooder, wiping off the ones that needed it. That night we fell asleep o the sounds of chirping.

I found two dead the next morning. Were they too cold? I moved the heat lamp lower and checked the thermometer. A few hours later I found another dead and one dying. What was happening?

I look through my homesteading books hoping that they could explain this to me, nothing. What was I doing wrong? I was doing everything that I had done before. I checked the hatchery’s website, nothing. I tried general chicken info on the web, nothing. I removed the chicks from their brooder, washed it and changed the litter. I cleaned out their feeder and waters. A few hours pass, and more have died. Why can I not save them?



I am not sure how I decided it had something to do with their vents, but I checked and some of them did have blockage. I cleaned them off, and every two hours I would return to clean them again. No one said I would have to wash chicken vents the rest of their lives. No more had died, but we had lost almost half of them, I guess, to my incompetence. My husband came home the next day with four turkeys. Guess what turkeys like to do. You got it, no more cleaning chicks for me.

The day came that the chicks could go outside, and placed into the nursery. We have adult chickens and water fowl, so it is wise to introduce them slowly. {A word to the fledglings, when building a nursery, make sure it is completely enclosed, no open areas at all. } A few weeks pass, and we are very happy with our 30 + bantams. The turkeys think I am mommy, and watching all of them run through the tall grass was a joy. And now I welcome you to spring time in Kansas.

80+ mile per hour winds hit our home. The shingles on the deck flew about as our trampoline took flight. Too dangerous to go out and check the babies, so I am forced to wait until morning. With the rise of the sun I am out in the flooded field desperately calling for the bantams. I find only nine, and one turkey. The wind had sucked them out of the nursery. My husband and I looked through our fields, finding only three more, dead. It was a horrible day for me. I had grown so attached to our little ones. I broke down and cried. I messed up. I spent the remainder of the day up past my ankles in mud, shoring up the nursery. I could at least try and save my remaining flock.

**Posted by Phelan at 6:30 am**

**1 comments**

**[links to this post](#)**

## **March 20th**

I have been reading about some of my fellow homesteaders out foraging. I thought this was a great idea. So I packed up the family and we went to the river. We are only a few miles from a public area of the river. It was a decent day for a short hike. The boys were so excited about the water. The youngest started a happy scream when he saw a deer near by. We didn't find anything edible, but still we had fun.

**Posted by Phelan at 6:14 am**

**0 comments**

**[links to this post](#)**

## **April 2nd**

As an avid reader, I have purchased book after book on the subject of raising your own chickens. They have told me many things, things that the experienced chicken wrangler has learned over time. But even in the most personal homesteading books, they merely graze the topic of "Your first time." They do not prepare you properly for your first butcher. And why should this be

important? For me it would be the mistakes. Not only are they a good anecdote, but they help in allowing you to not feel so alone in the silliest of mistakes. I am a homesteading fledgling, and perhaps some of you are as well. If not, you might enjoy this article with fond memories of your first time. But if you are new to all of this, maybe I can help you avoid some of the mistakes I make. We shall learn together.

It started off innocently enough. Fresh organic farm eggs. We looked through the hatchery catalog, deciding on what chickens would be the best for our homestead. We ordered all females, yet we soon learned that sexing a chick is not an exact science. We ended up with two roosters and four hens. Too many roosters for any small coop. The hens ran terrified from their advances. Hiding in the barn, in places where neither the roosters nor I could retrieve them. Soon one of the hens found a way to escape from the yard. Angered by the attitude of these amorous males, I marched angrily into the house. "Get me the gun! I am going to shoot them!" My husband of course laughed and said he would take care of them. And the chase began.

My husband and our oldest son {he is eight years old} went into the pen. Maybe our pen is too large. But we allow the goats, chickens and water fowl to roam together, eating bugs and homegrown grains and scraps. My two younger sons and I watched from the back deck as the other two ran around, trying desperately to capture the horny rooster. After a ten minute chase, and one goose bite, the rooster was snagged. {I have seen a neighbor wandering around with a net on a long pole, I might need to invest in one} Walking up to us, my husband beamed a victorious smile, and suddenly became nostalgic. He asked if our oldest son wanted to see what it meant for someone to run around like a chicken with his head cut off. Of course he did. Even with my objections of, "the book says to hang it and slit the throat." His excuse was, his father had shown him when he was a child. Now my fellow beginners, please, please listen to the books, and have the correct equipment when butchering your own chicken. Our mistakes didn't end with the attempt to capture the rooster, as you will soon see.

I took the youngest son into the house. I for one did not want to see this. I had been a vegan for most my life, pregnancy turned me into the carnivore I am today. I know full well that packaged chicken does not grow on trees, but to see it first hand, not prerecorded, is a whole other issue. I raised these roosters from chicks. So I had some attachment issues and had to remind myself that organic meat was one of the reasons we bought them. From the false safety of my couch and closed window, I heard the thwack of the knife as it hit the butcher block. Mistake number one; we did not have the proper knife, my husband used the machete from out of the garage. Who knew that the necks of a rooster were that tough? The books didn't say anything. Soon I see a grey and black rooster flying through the air. Its neck was broken and it died quickly, but the poor thing had defensive wounds on one wing. In long order {neck still too tough} the bird was finally hung upside down to bleed out. I went to check my boiling water and to call my mother.

As my husband and oldest son once again ran around the pen in an attempt to catch rooster number two, my mother informed me of the gullet. Gullet? What!?! Why!?! Homesteading book numbers 1-5 say nothing of a gullet, and my anatomy of a chicken book had gone missing. My mother wasn't clear on it, just that her mother had cleaned it out. *But the book mom!* Thwack! They caught rooster number two and it now hung upside down from a tree as I frantically searched my books to find information on this gullet. Still clueless, I walked outside to a very proud husband, and a son mumbling "huh, so that's what it looks like?" I am panicked. "There is this thing called the gullet, we have to remove it whole, or it will stink." Of course I

have heard of a gullet. I knew what it did, but where it was and how to remove it was beyond me. {Can I just remind you that this is my first time?} My husband tells me to call his father, he will know. The call goes out, and I am told to cut around the base of the neck and pull the skin back, the gullet will be obvious {um . . . ok}.

Back inside I have a twenty-gallon pot of boiling water. The book says that once it starts boiling, that the time it takes you to move it out to the bird, it will be cooled off enough to use. Mistake number two, the pot isn't big enough. I am standing with the rooster in my hand looking from pot to bird. How will this fit? The books only say a big pot. If twenty gallons isn't big enough, then what? My husband reassures me that it will be fine and makes a joke about being so timid. I point out that I am a product of middle class suburbia. As if that justifies things. Firmly grasping the rooster, I push it down into the scalding water, and as the books says, I swished it around by the feet for 30 seconds. It stunk! The book never mentioned the smell that came with this. It was overwhelming, nausea inducing, longest thirty seconds I have ever had. Gagging, I handed the bird over to my husband and bravely asked for the other one. The second one was either cleaner or I had grown use to the smell, either way the book would not explain it to me.

Time to remove the feathers. We place the birds on top of garbage bags. My husband with one, and me, the other. My bird had not scalded long enough {maybe, the book just says hard, not how hard} for the feathers on the wing {once again the books said to start with the wing and tail feathers, and the rest will come off as a sheet} was a little hard to remove. I did manage, and soon my bird was naked and my fingers were covered in soft sticky feathers. None of the books explained how one might keep that from happening. We made jokes about rubber chickens and my son posed with them for a picture. I know, silly, but we will always remember our first time. The books tell us to start with its feet. My husband being the expert on human anatomy that he is, explains to his silly wife and his adoring boys how tendons work. My mistake number three; marrying a know-it-all. As we had discussed in the past, I was the one that would be cleaning the birds. I followed the instructions in the book, and had the feet ready for removal. It was my husband that told me how to cut the tendons. The books didn't say it, but it makes sense to me. Bend the foot down as far as capable, exposing as much tendon as possible before cutting it at an angle. Before long, my three sweet boys were torturing each other by pulling on the tendons and closing the rooster's toes around each other's fingers.

The book says nothing about removing the gullet, so I am on my own there. I cut around the base of the neck as was told via the phone. Mistake number four; not finding out which direction to pull the skin before doing so. There are two separate tubes. One was the throat. The other was full of scratch. But the father-in-law says it looks like a sack, not a tube! Do we remove that? My hands are bloody, another fact that the books didn't seem fit to mention. As read by me, when you hang the bird upside down the carcass is now void of blood. Poor novice me. My husband dials the number and holds the phone to my ear. He grows tired of this within a few seconds, and removed his shirt so that I may hold the phone myself. My mother-in-law answers the phone and relays the discovery of a tube and not a sack to my father-in-law, whose own father is in town. I can hear them yelling at the phone about what kind of chicken did you buy? And to pull the tube out through the beak. Mistake number five; Involving the in-laws. While I listened to their suggestions and jokes, my husband began cutting the skin down the breast, and lo and behold, the gullet! Now why couldn't they have just said it was in the breast area? Carefully we removed the gullet, remembering my mother saying if we broke it, it would stink. Once that was removed, we could go back to following what the book said.

“To remove the gut, you must cut around the vent in a circular and funnel type fashion” Good detailed advice, isn’t it? One thing not mentioned was how big the circle should be. I cut around the vent, maybe a little too close, for suddenly I hear my husband yelling at me, I had cut into the intestines. What? I don’t smell anything. We feel panicked now, we must hurry. Mistake number six; panicking because my husband smells something. I tried to pull the vent out. “Once the vent is cut, the gut is easily removed.” {Um . . . ok?} I pull and pull, nothing moves, so I cut some more. I pull again. Frustrated I wiggle my finger into the rooster, between the gut and flesh. I wasn’t expecting it to be so warm inside. I hesitate to say that this made my job any easier. I rolled my finger around, loosening and detaching the insides, from the insides. That helped, and I could remove the gut easily. And looky here, I had not cut the gut, merely milked it. Nummy . . .

Mistake number seven; not having the correct equipment, once again. The book says to use a pair of good poultry shears and cut along the spine, the chicken should then open up like a book. Can I close that book now, please? My knife would not penetrate the spine, and I don’t have shears. But my husband does have tin snips, dull tin snips. Slowly, I kind of follow the spine, veering to the left just a tad. “Open like a book”? A branded new leather bound that has been super glued shut maybe. And there are these sharp pokey things that emerge from the spine. After prying the rooster open, my three wonderful boys come running back to see what a heart looks like. Oh the sweet bliss of curiosity. A chorus of “I know what that is” rang out around me. Of course their identification of organs was off. Each boy took turns holding them before feeding it to the dog. I know one should keep the giblets, but I only held onto the liver {very good fried and dipped in mustard} A round of eeewww gross could be heard over that one.

Mistake number eight; starting too late in the day. Night had fallen by the time I got the first rooster washed and into the freezer. My husband, being the kind soul he is, started on the next one, until he cut his knuckle and I had to finish. Here we are at the gullet again, and guess what, it doesn’t stink if broken. It took us two hours, from cutting the feet to placing them into the freezer. Our goal {jokingly of course} is now five minutes. We realize that we will need to do it again, as we do have another rooster and have hopes of hatching are own chicks.

Some may say poor rooster, but I say, see the money we save doing this ourselves, taste the difference for yourself, think of how much more healthy you will be by raising and dressing your own organic bird. The benefits out weighed my repulsion. I did have a flash of dizziness from the blood on my hands, but reminded myself that it was not mine, but a rooster that I had cared for so lovingly and who will allow my boys to grow up healthy and learn a respect for animals in a way that some people will never know.

I will let you know later how the canning goes.

Posted by Phelan at 549 am

5 comments

[Links to this post](#)

## April 20th

The chicks are doing well. There was a skunk about, but I think the dogs have managed to scare it off.

I love learning how to homestead. So many new things to accomplish, new skills to learn. I couldn't imagine ever doing anything else. The homesteading books have been a big help. Still they don't cover everything as I am discovery. But I don't mind, I like a challenge.

Oh, I almost forgot. My oldest was out in the field and found a large bone. He brought it up to the house all proud about finding a dinosaurs bone. Poor kid, it was hard to tell him that it was a deer bone. We told him it was a good find and that he could keep it. He wants to decorate it and hang it in his room.

Posted by Phelan at 722 am

2 comments

[Links to this post](#)

## May 1st

I once had a wonderful idea, I will get my husband a pair of goats for his birthday! My brother-in-law had recently bought three miniature goats. I gave him a call to find where he had purchased them. Turns out that he works with a couple that raise their own goats and they had several kids for sale. I called the couple and set a date for the following weekend to look and possibly purchase a couple of their goats. The woman on the phone went on for twenty minutes about how beautiful her goats were. And that right now, their black fur was a little dull due to them shedding for the summer heat. I asked a few questions that the homesteading books suggested, and upon hearing the appropriate response felt comfortable with dealing with them.

We were not totally unprepared for our new guests. The land we bought had goats living there at one point. The fencing was still up and their "house" was in decent condition. Nothing too run down, at least nothing we couldn't fix in one afternoon.

The day I was to go out and meet my potential new friends arrived. Wouldn't it make a grand surprise? Here I was envisioning my husband taking the children into town and returning to find his presents merrily chewing on blades of grass, or cans, whatever it is that they eat. Back to one of the many homesteading books I own to find out the correct information. "Egg layers mash will kill a goat." That is good to know if one knows what egg layers' mash is, it took the internet and some fancy wording for me to find out. I am starting to wonder if my books are outdated. I digress, the day I was to go and buy the goats was upon me, and I am not fully prepared to transport them. I do not have a large dog crate, nor a harness and leash. Sighing I ask my husband if we had any rope. He of course asks me how long. But how am I to know that? None of the books take about transporting goats. Dog leash length, is all I can think of. My husband is a very smart man, sometimes he is even a clairvoyant. He now knows that I have bought him something that needs to be tied down. A canoe? No. A goat? No, not *a* goat. I turn from him so that he can miss my eye rolling condition that I have had since I was a child. But my subterfuge is futile. He will be coming along with me, and I have no say in the matter.

My husband, three sons, and I pile into our Volvo wagon, and drive the 45 minutes to the small acreage that held more than two hundred goats. The boys stumbled over each other so they could see all the colorful and playful kids. Tiny, adorable things. My husband was immediately in love with a small gray and black kid. He told the couple of his admiration, and they went to retrieve it. They attempted to lure the goats into the sheds with the promise of food. But alas!

Goats are not dim witted, and did not fall for the couple's trick. A chase commenced. I watched as my oldest son, my husband and the goat breeding couple ran around the yard, kids and goats going every which way but the correct one. After a good fifteen minutes, I began to wonder if they knew what they were doing, and if I should offer them the use of some of my homesteading books. With that many goats, I for one would have thought they knew how to corral them.

With the goat now in the custody of my husband, we paid them the money they had asked for. All the while my husband's eyes could be seen roaming over the remaining kids. Only one more, I told myself. With that thought, another should have quickly followed, you've just jinxed yourself. The chasing and capturing of two more goats began, fortunately it ended quicker than the first chase had. We now had a small half miniature half fainting, black and gray goat, its mother, and a black miniature and domestic mix black kid. The black kid had an arrow-shaped white spot between the eyes, and a demeanor that screamed "don't mess with me!" He had been born over the winter, and was not as use to human companions as the other's were. Here's another point where I felt I should offer some of the homesteading books to the experienced goat herders.

Soon we were schooled in the ways of castrating a young goat. A mistake we will not make again. Looking back, we regret allowing them to do this. We will have to buy another male so we can have fresh goat milk. I have read I am missing out on something wonderful.

The three goats were coerced rather forcefully into the back of our wagon. My husband, being the eccentric {that would be the most polite word I can think of} man that he is, decided that his new best friends would be terrified of the car ride. I really wish I had a camera at the time. My husband, all 6-foot 1 inch, 175 lbs. of him crawled into the back and sat amid the threesome. What a sight we must have made traveling down that long highway.

We made it home safely. No one was damaged beyond repair, and soon the three were frolicking happily in their new home. My husband paraded his party guests through the backyard, expecting to hear the ohs, and ahs that come along with seeing something so cute. Only the children cared. I feared my husband might want to camp out with our new friends that night. As they might be scared of the dark. I love my husband, but sometimes I stare at him and wonder what he is thinking. My fear did not come to light and he slept in the house. {No goats accompanied him}

Our dog found the new members of our family fascinating. He ran around the pen, barking merrily, sniffing at them through the fence. I returned to one of my homesteading books. It tells of how one might ward off wild dogs, and nothing much of your pet. How was I to know that introducing a once city dog to a new skittish animal would cause problems? Maybe if I had actually thought it through some more . . . but I am not the one known for logic, that would be my husband. So I will blame what happened next on him. Of course the more experienced homesteaders know what happens in the following passages, so my fellow homesteading fledglings I give you this, get a puppy and train it around any livestock that you might one day wish to own, please.

Our dog was more than happy to enter the pen, to gaily race around chasing the gray and black goat we affectionately named Smokey. Suddenly the mood changed and our dog clamped its teeth around the hindquarters of the goat. I began screaming, scolding the dog in a vain attempt to get it to obey me. My husband ran them down, grabbing the dog by all fours and flinging it over the fence. He landed with a thud, but unhurt and he ran up to the house, curling up on the ugly armchair that was left on our deck. Thankfully the goat was fine. Just terrified!

A few days have passed, and we have found a routine that fits us all. They seem to like only one kind of feed. Goats, picky eaters? According to the books I read as a child, this would be a false hood, but according to the books I read now, this is the truth and nothing but. Of course this fantasy of goats eating tin cans, comes from the fact that they nibble on just about everything, but never eat enough of one thing to do themselves great harm. I learn something new every day out here. This nibbling and the curious nature of our goats led up to what happens next. My husband, while out working on his motorcycle, hears what he assumes are our boys screaming. He yells at them to stop fighting and goes back to his work. The screaming comes again, yet it is somehow different from the normal “leave me alone” screams that we were use to. He walked out to the garden and instead of finding our boys piled onto one another, rolling around in the dirt at their attempts of playfully, and annoyingly harming each other, he finds our dog covered in blood. Frantically he ran around the out of control tomatoes, looking for what creature would cause that much blood to appear on our dog. Smoky stood, bleating and bleeding. My husband easily caught him and brought him into the barn. Our oldest son was the one to retrieve me. I ran out to see what had really happened. According to my son, not only was the goat dead, but his father was bleeding to death! Finding my husband in good condition, I sobbed at the sight of our goat. The dog had torn open the back and side of Smoky’s neck. Dark red blood seeped through my husband’s fingers as he pressed against the wound. “Get me the peroxide, a needle and floss.” Without thinking I ran back to the house to get him his requested items. I realize that what I am about to tell you will not come as a surprise, if only I had read about something similar in one of those books!

Now what on earth am I to do with this stuff? I stood in front of my husband, my mouth gaped in sheer panic and bewilderment. “You want me to sew the wound up?” This was not the time for jokes! He really wants me to thread this needle and sew up the flesh of a living panicking animal? If I had been a fainter . . . I refused to do as he asked, and placed a call to the {not so} nearest vet. Another thing that the novice homesteader might want to think about, finding a vet before livestock comes home. It was after hours for the office, and we were lucky the vet was still in. My husband placed Smoky onto our oldest child’s lap, and they drove the thirty minutes into town. Two hours later they returned. The goat’s injuries were not as bad as we feared, nor the vet bill as high. Smoky boasted a bright blue bandage, and my husband told me that the vet says she has seen many goats with injuries from dog attacks. It is the biggest cause of goat deaths here. Now we know, and the gates are more than just slightly secure, and our dog knows better then to even glance in their direction.

Besides the happiness of my husband, I am not sure why we bought the goats. So far we have benefitted from their companionship and keeping the grass around the lagoon down. My next step with them will be breeding the female, and turning her milk into yogurt and cheese. I have read how one should go about doing such things. We shall see how it goes.

**Posted by Phelan at 644 am**

**9 comments**

**[Links to this post](#)**

**May 5th**

I know my last post was about bringing the goats home. We have had the goats for awhile, about 5 months actually. I just thought I would write about it. I thought it was a cute story. The goats were thriving, but lately they have been acting strange. At first I thought Trina {the female} was in heat. She was bleating a lot. But the vet said she wasn't, and that something might be stressing her out. The two boys seem to be aggravated as well. They have been fighting more. I wouldn't have thought this was odd if I hadn't asked the vet about Trina. {We are thinking about breeding her.}

Do you remember me telling you about the deer bone that my oldest found? well, he brought in a dogs skull yesterday. It looked like it had been crushed. We asked him to show us where he was finding them. Out in the very back of our property was something that looked like a cave entrance. Of course I don't have hills here, it was set in the ground with a rock over hang. I think it might be a badger's hole.

**Posted by Phelan at 445 am**

**3 comments**

**[Links to this post](#)**

May 22nd

I realize I haven't been posting a lot lately. I wanted to try and make a post daily. But things have been hectic around here.

My husband went to investigate the badger hole. If it was an active hole, we thought it best to relocate the badger. Not something we want around here. Turns out that the opening was larger than we first thought. It was big enough that my husband could slip right into it. While he was down there, he said he found more animal bones. One looked out of place, and while he was staring at it, something took a swipe at him. He got out of there as fast as he could. But whatever it was tore up his back pretty good. The ER Doctor asked if we raised bears. Wild bears, here in Kansas?

**Posted by Phelan at 6:57 am**

**15 comments**

**[Links to this post](#)**

May 23rd

Thank you for all your prayers and thoughts for my husband. He does have an infection, but our Doctor says that it should clear up. Someone mentioned that it could have been a mountain lion, or cougar as well call them here. There are rumors about the State releasing them into the wild, and a neighbor found a cub tangled up in some barbed wire. So that could be.

**Posted by Phelan at 5:22 am**

**7 comments**

**[Links to this post](#)**



## June 20th

Sorry guys. Things, well things haven't been good here. I have seen some of your messages, I just. Well, I couldn't bring myself to answer or post. My oldest son. Oh God! My oldest has been missing for 2 weeks. He was out exploring and disappeared. We can't find him anywhere. The checked that cave and the wildlife man said that nothing was living in there. The search the fields, talked to the neighbors, checked the river. But they can't find him. I don't know what to do. I want my boy home. I love him so much. oh God, please bring my baby home.

Posted by Phelan at 2:30 am

53 comments

[Links to this post](#)

## July 4th

I guess it's a holiday. I don't feel much like celebrating. My oldest son is still missing, and the police stopped searching awhile back. And now on top of that. My husband was buried yesterday. The infection in those scratches got so much worse. He got a raging fever and was seeing things. I took him to the closest ER. They admitted him and gave him antibiotics. They didn't help. He stopped breathing and then slipped away from me. I have never loved a man more than I loved him. We had been through so much together. This homesteading thing was just the next step in our lives. A good wonderful step. One that took us away from the drugs and the fast biker style life that we were living. Why did this have to happen. I lost my son and my husband. I would like to be able to crawl up in a corner and die, but I have my two other sons, I can't leave them willingly.

I miss my husband. I miss curling up with him at night. I miss the way he use to make my knees weak with a simple and loving kiss. I miss the way he teased me, and grabbed my breast at the wrong moments. He was strong in both character and spirit as well as in muscle. He was never sexier than he was when he was doing physical labor around the homestead. I know he loved me, he showed me every day.

It's also time that I should face the fact that I will never see my oldest son again. He has been gone too long for me to keep hold of any hope. He was a boy scout, excelling in everything they taught him. He was an adventurer, a painter and becoming a master story teller. Who knows what he might have been, if he would have stayed with me. He was also stubborn, but I will not fault him for that.

I miss the both of them, it tears at my heart.

Posted by Phelan at 8:12 am

139 comments

[Links to this post](#)

## July 18th

Thank you for all your kind words. You'll never know how much they mean to me. Someone asked if I would now leave the homesteading behind. I had to think about it, and no. My husband would have wanted me to stay and make this work. Luckily I have some great neighbors. They took over some of my chores so that no one went neglected. I think I had better get back to work.

Posted by Phelan at 4:55 am

45 comments

[Links to this post](#)

## September 4th

I am starting to think that our homestead is curse. No I am not saying that in jest. I think it might be time to leave. I can't stay here any more, the memories are too painful.

My youngest would have been 3 years old today. I say would have, because I buried him too, a month ago. That's why I haven't been around. I'm not sure what I did to piss God off, but he is making sure I suffer for it.

My 3-year-old was playing in his sand box. Our yard is not fenced in, but I don't think that would have mattered. Something spooked our neighbors herd of horses. They did break through his fenced pasture, and ran through our fields. I heard them coming and looked out. I wasn't able to save my son before, before the horse got there.

He was so happy! There was no reason for him to die! I can't seem to stop crying, and my 5-year-old has withdrawn into himself.

The homestead is now up for sale. I can't do this anymore.

Posted by Phelan at 6:17 am

202 Comments

[Links to this post](#)

## October 30th

No one wants to buy my house. The locals have spread rumors in town about the land being cursed. Plus the laws here state that the realtor must tell a buyer if some one died here. I keep

lowering the price, but if I go any lower I won't be able to buy a new home for us.

**Posted by Phelan at 8:33 am**

**2 comments**

**[Links to this post](#)**

## **December 25th**

It is a bleak Christmas. I am all alone now. My five year old is now with his father and his brothers.

We were outside playing in the snow. Our life was finally becoming more normal, just the two of us. We were having a snowball fight, laughing and enjoying every minute one it. i chased him around the house and that's when he slipped on the ice and hit his head on the side of the house. He bleed in his brain, and died shortly after reaching the hospital. He was so creative, although painfully shy. I adored him. He had become my whole world. Now, now I am alone.

Yesterday I shot all the animals, even our pets. I don't want to be responsible for any living thing. I am no good for them. It's better that they are dead. I haven't buried or burned any of them. I don't feel up to it right now.

My bed is covered in the things that my boys loved. Crayons and coloring books, blocks, stuffed animals, and motorcycle parts.

My shot gun has been loaded. I hope you all have a better Christmas than I.

**Posted by Phelan at 7:59 am**

**657 comments**

**[Links to this post](#)**



## **About the Author**

E..M. Phelan resides on a small homestead in the middle of Kansas, with her husband and three children. She has written articles for the e-zines, All Foods Natural, World Food and Wine and Get Rich Slowly. She currently maintains a blog entitled A Homesteading Neophyte.



