

2015

Growing Writers

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Recommended Citation

Moffitt, Katherine, "Growing Writers" (2015). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 142.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.146>

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Growing Writers

by

Katherine Moffitt

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

University Honors

and

English

Thesis Advisers

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2015

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Abstract

This thesis is about my internal process of finding and giving answers to the questions I had about life through my story “Uncle Loo” and sharing my characters and story with others so that they many grow as writers as well. I created and used my character Loo as a guide to wander into the questions I had and found answers in his life. I used a process of taking real life examples, picking the best part of the story and incorporating it into my writing. By taking true events from life and placing them in this story I was creating a more relatable and believable world. Loo’s story is a biography of his life from a brief summary of his childhood to more in-depth scenes of his early to late adulthood. This includes scenes of his first date with his future wife, marital problems and solutions with May, his wife, and their struggle facing the fact that they cannot have children. They find their solution in adopting their orphaned nephew, Logan, and in the process, help him cope with the loss of his parents. The uneasiness in their care of the child is meant to reflect my uneasiness about death and my own struggle in finding a way to comfort others and myself when death reminds us that nothing lasts forever.

Artist Statement:

The decision to write this novella came about through the strength of my character Loo; he needed room to expand and take on more of a personality and so I wrote this novella. The decision was easy to make but the writing process was difficult, in writing his experiences in a real world setting the difficulty came up in finding a reason to write his story. It was not a story of great adventure or excitement (or at least that's what I thought as I was writing it). But it was a story about an old man retelling his life and his best memories. I must admit that this premise was greatly influenced by my father and grandfather and their own ways of retelling their own stories. Though they were greatly influential, there were some decisions on my part that affected the outcome of this story such as the importance of Logan the nephew and the decision to focus on Loo's relationship with May before the entrance of Logan. This story has been a pleasure to write regardless of any struggles and I hope, as any writer does, that a reader many come along so I may share this story with them.

Introduction

Here is an outline of my thesis. I will first describe the genre of fiction where the setting is the world that the author experiences in their daily life, but the subject is fictional. Then I will discuss the differences in fictional writing genres: realistic fiction, fantasy and science fiction, etc. will be discussed. The importance of truth in fiction writing will also be reflected upon. I will next talk about my research in relation to character development. I'll finally talk about the method I used for writing "Uncle Loo", and at last I'll give you the story to read and enjoy.

It is imperative that all writers, or any writers for that matter, read the work of others to inform their own efforts. This should not be limited to the genre of the writer or the time period in which the writer works. For example, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Arabian Nights* bear equal weight with *Frankenstein*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and *Acceleration*; all of these works carry the same principals of fiction and that is to make their stories real with the help of adding truth. Truth in fiction can take many forms. It can sometimes be found within a major plot point in a story that started out as a news report that the author heard. Or it might even be found in a character's quirks such as a bad habit that also belongs to the author's loved one. Oftentimes when a certain event happens to the author, feelings attach themselves to the writing, and pieces of the author's life fall into the text. As for reading work that already exists, one reason that I have for doing this is to create a better understanding of how to write well. I take the experience of works that were written by writers before me and mimic their style and their techniques. In sharing my story "Uncle Loo" as my thesis project, I will answer questions I had about life as I wrote and will share my characters, my experience of the writing, and reflection upon the story with others.

Within the larger category of fiction there are many genres, which include but are not limited to: popular or literary fiction, science fiction, fantasy, horror, mystery, romance, westerns, and many others. All provide wonderful opportunities for storytelling; in science fiction, readers can experience a new view of the problems that they face every day, in an exaggerated form perhaps, placed in a future or foreign world. For example, in *1984*, Orwell showed his readers a world where life was dictated by a big brother figure who watched the public in an unfamiliar form of surveillance in a future time. In fantasy the story could present everyday problems in the same way or could also set much bigger problems, like war, in a foreign world. For example, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, namely in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis' characters face a battle against evil that is very similar to the war that they faced outside the new world they found. The biggest difference between the two wars that they faced is that in the war in Narnia they can actively participate but in the world outside they feel helpless. In popular or literary fiction, characters are placed in a real world time and place, much like *Acceleration*, where the story takes place in a lost and found in a subway station in Arizona, where the main character, like any other human being, finds himself bored working there. One could know these characters or bump into them during daily errands, but the writer can manipulate their qualities and motivations in any number of ways. In *Acceleration* McNamee changes his character's motivation for staying at the lost and found by setting him on a quest to find the owner of a journal he found. It's difficult to say just what makes people interested in fiction writing, but I like to think that it's when you put your heart and soul into what you've written. A writer must invest a great deal of time writing and rewriting.

In all fiction, truth is the most important part of the writing process. Truth; or the elements of reality placed in the literature is what makes a story believable and it ties readers to

the story. This helps them believe these characters and happenings that you've created are real. The more real your piece is the more you can find and the more you, and in turn your readers, can discover about life and the inner world we rarely have time to take part in during our daily lives. Reflection is the key. A written work becomes more than just a story; it turns into a place where people go when they are stressed and need an escape or if they need a friend. Characters that exhibit properties which are present in beings that exist in our reality become real. That is why I want to be a writer; I want to write places of escape and friends for myself and for anyone who reads my work.

I created and used my character Loo as a guide to wander into the questions I had and found answers in his life. I used a process of taking real life situations and putting them in my story. For example, an older friend spoke to me about his experiences during the first years of his marriage and told me that he had come to a point where he had fallen out of love with his wife. He suffered from a bout of depression over it but then came to realize that he was loving his wife the wrong way and was on his way to starting a new kind of love that he had not experienced before. He is still married to her after 25 years. I incorporated my friend's story into Loo's, in an effort to try to understand this lesson for myself. In this way I got to see the same story from a different angle and force myself to ponder the event further. This also gave the text scenes that imitate real life events which made the story I was creating more relatable and believable.

Loo's story is a biography of his life from a brief summary of his childhood to more in-depth scenes of his early to late adulthood. I decided to place Loo's childhood in summary for a number of reasons. First, Loo is the narrator of the story, meaning that all the events are taking place as memories; he probably would not be able to remember very much of his childhood since

it was so long ago. Second, most of the events that I chose to show my readers are the adult problems that Loo faces, such as falling out of love, dealing with a loss of closeness with his younger brother, and adopting his nephew out of a need to raise a child. The scenes I chose to write are of his first date with his future wife, May, because I wanted to introduce her early in the story to give my audience a clear idea of who she is before their view is changed by the marital problems that she and Loo face later on. Without understanding May and who she is, the threat of her marriage breaking up would be valueless. Also, I chose to write these scenes out of my own personal interest at first without my audience in mind. As a writer I find that most of what I write is meant for myself and then for others after the revision process.

After introducing May, I show Loo's marital life with her and then Loo's falling out of love. This was written because I wanted to first show the marriage going well before the problems happen so that there would be more pressure on Loo to keep the marriage together. As for falling out of love, I decided to write that into the story because Loo is human and at times he cannot control what he feels. Loo reaches a solution to his problem by realizing that he needs to love May in a more developed way. I wrote this to better reflect the story I heard from my friend. I wanted this story to reflect life and its problems. And, of course, after any problem is solved a new one always follows. Loo and May reach a new struggle soon after saving their marriage. They cannot have children. Without this struggle they would not find their solution in adopting their orphaned nephew Logan and in the process, help him cope with the loss of his parents. The uneasiness in their care of the child is meant to reflect my uneasiness about death and my own struggle in finding a way to comfort others and myself when death has come knocking.

As a writer, my characters (especially Loo) take on lives of their own and although I'm the one responsible for placing them on the page, they take over and cause me to let go of the control I have over them as writer, and I curiously begin to trust and follow them. This is also what happens when we read a work that engages us; we move into the world of the characters, relinquishing control and in that way, as writer or reader, we become open and begin to experience life beyond ourselves. This is the power of the written word. It's like being a virus, you want to expose as many people to the story as possible so that at least one person catches the cold that's spreading. Then in that way, those readers can infect others.

With all of this in mind I embarked upon my adventure of crafting Loo's story. This required several things of me. First, I needed to research possible places for Loo to live in the United States of America. At first I chose to set him in the South mainly because he spoke a certain way that made me assume he was southern. For example:

“Okay, I'm buyin' somethin', does that still mean I gotta get out?”

I wanted him to be the truck driving, cowboy hat and boot wearing handy man of the south who knew how to shoot and fish. He could be that way anywhere, but not without making his fish-out-of-water quality part of the story and that was something I did not want. I did not want to imagine this man outside of the South and I believed that it was already a part of him. I was only half right. Even though real people take pieces of their living environments and set them within themselves as a part of their personalities, Loo did not have a specific piece of any place to put in himself. I needed to find open country states that are notorious for small, isolated towns, research the climates of these states, the way people speak, the plant life, and life in general in those areas in order to fill Loo's life.

As for his name “Louvis” or Loo for short, I made it up for a different purpose. When Loo was first created I was writing a fan-fiction piece with a friend and was in need of a father figure to watch over Logan, who I had created first. This certain fandom that I was writing for was the Sonic the Hedgehog franchise which typically gives their characters odd names that are supposedly insight into the special abilities that the characters have. Loo did not have any special abilities; the only thing I had to go off of was that Logan was an anthropomorphic echidna in the fan-fiction so Louvis had to be one too. (This is an odd franchise to get into, I’ll give it that, but it has its fun moments.) The special thing about the two being echidnas in the fan-fiction was that in the franchise, echidnas are supposedly extinct or close to extinction and were once a tribal race, the cultural identity of this race fluctuates in just about every game SEGA has made but they mostly identify with what we westerners think of as Mayan and Egyptian culture. So for a character coming from a very foreign and out of place culture, he needed a name that fit and ever since then his name stuck and sort of gave him a quality of whimsy that I wanted to keep. In the story “Uncle Loo” that I will present in my thesis, there will be no fan-fiction elements or echidnas so you can breathe easy. I wanted this story to be for everyone, not just fans of Sonic the Hedgehog.

As for Loo’s nephew Logan; I have already researched child psychology by reading developmental psychology text books so I could get an idea about how to write the mindset of a three year old and how to interpret the nephew’s speech without him coming off as a gimmick. At first I wanted to write Logan’s dialogue in a way that I could show my readers how he sounded. For example:

“Can ah sweep wis you an’ Auntie May?”

A classmate of mine who had a three year old son informed me that the speech of my character was too impaired for a normal three year old boy. As a reader he could already imagine the voice of my character without so many cues from the dialogue. Without proper critique this line would have gone unchanged. This brings me to the point that critique is an important part of writing and is needed for the writing process. I was holding my audience's hand too much and that caused my writing to pull readers out of the world they were inhabiting and remember that they were reading a fictional story. This is a big problem when this happens because when your audience falls out of the world you built they miss out on the story.

“Can I sleep wit you and Auntie May?”

Without feedback from colleagues I would not have made any changes and more readers would have stopped in the middle of the story because they don't believe it. With that in mind, the writing process of this paper will contain constant critique from advisors and colleagues to help me keep the audience hand-holding to a minimum. That will give my audience a better experience reading and it will add to the quality of truth placed in my story while keeping the writing process on a steady schedule.

I'm writing a story that takes place in today's world. However the conversation between my work and the sources I have listed below are for different genres. In any work of fiction there is the element of truth. As Virginia Woolf puts it in *A Room of One's Own*, “Fiction contains more truth than fact.” It could be found in the details of the worlds created in the literature or in the everyday lives of the characters. The need for truth in fiction has been a topic of argument for a long time, some have said that there is no truth in fiction because all the facts given are written to contribute to a story that never happened in our reality but others have said

that by writing these stories authors make their fiction real. My intent in writing this story did follow the idea that by writing Uncle Loo he would, in a sense, become real or at least exist in this reality.

Writers aren't born, they are grown. They don't grow unless they have the works of other writers to sow seeds within them. In *Frankenstein* a reader can learn to understand why narrative choice is important. Frankenstein's monster would not have been such a sympathetic character if Shelley's audience did not experience a shift in narrative from Frankenstein to his monster. By experiencing a first person narrative from the monster we understand his motivations, his unfamiliarity with common objects and the pain he felt as he was rejected by mankind. On the fantasy spectrum, *The Chronicles of Narnia* also uses narrative very well; however it is placed in the voice of an omniscient third person perspective that, at times, could enter the thoughts of the characters in the story. This gave the audience more insight to the inner struggles of the characters but it also added an internal layer to the story aside from the external, both of these together better reflect the experience of life.

What all of these works have in common is the truth within them. They use these techniques to better imitate life and add truth to their stories. It's true that there are external and internal parts to life and others will have vastly different narratives to bring to the table when it comes to telling the same story or what happened outside of the story of the first person. However, they all come together to form the truth within the story and it informs the work of the readers to help them grow as writers and contribute further in the literary world.

Uncle Loo

I asked my mama once why she named me Louvis instead of some traditional name like John or Clovis. Louvis wasn't exactly a real name and it never ran in the family. I've been picked on about my name for years; it's never really changed my pride but on one particular day it came close. I ran home from school in a fuss because all the other kids were making fun of my name. It's funny how kids can be cruel but forget just how much after they grow up. They taunted me until I cried and ran home. I was so mad at my Mama for calling me Louvis. I screamed at her as soon as I saw her. Now Mama didn't take fussing as kindly as mothers do now-a-days; she put me over her knee and spanked me until the screaming stopped. But my tears kept going. Those kids called me a weirdo, a hippie, even locust (that one I never understood) and they liked butchering my name. It wasn't easy growing up in a small town where all the kids called you names.

When my sobs subsided she sat me down and gave me a cheese sandwich with a glass of milk (that was my favorite at the time) and asked me what got me all riled up. I told her everything and she just sighed. She didn't like the bullying anymore than I did, but if it wasn't for my name it wouldn't have been happening. I asked her to tell me, again. After all that time of nagging and whining, I got her to tell me the story of my name.

She told me that I was named after my great-grandma and great-grandpa. It was a mix of Louis and Victoria but I couldn't understand it. I don't think anyone else did either. Mama told me that my great-grandpa was a kind man and worked as a carpenter his whole life while my great-grandma was the sweet hearted daughter of a school teacher. I was young and I didn't care. It was too upset to have a mixed up name so Mama told me to call myself Loo. So I did.

The nickname didn't work right away, but after a little while the other kids finally stopped bothering me. I made friends with one of the kids who made fun of me and he wasn't so bad once we got to know each other more.

His name was Jake and he had a front tooth missing. The new tooth was slow in arriving so it gave him a lisp that we all could tell he was ashamed of. I guess that's why he was one of the first to pick on me. He wanted something to distract everybody from his talking problem. We weren't friends right away, of course. He picked on me one day too many and I slugged him in the cheek. After that, I was given full respect because he and everyone else knew I'd do it again if anything got under my skin. When the playground was empty and we were in class, our teacher Mr. Rampt stuck Jake next to me. I wasn't too pleased. I caught him cheating from my math homework and using my glue for his pranks on the other kids, and occasionally me. To get even with him, I glued his math book shut and snickered while until Mr. Rampt ordered I share my math book with him. It sort of surprised me that he took good care of my book when I gave it to him, it gave me the idea that maybe Jack wasn't just a little jerk. We got to know each other a bit more and we've been friends since then. Now he owns the music shop.

As for me, I'm a hardworking handyman at the local hardware store. I know what's on each shelf and I make it a point to help out everybody who walks in. I've gotten pretty good at my job and that comes from a long family history of hunters, fishermen and handymen. My ancestors have always been the hardworking kind, and through so many generations, it's become our talent. I've got the weathered hands to prove my bloodline, and pretty soon I'll pass it down to my nephew (at least that's what I hope). My wife May's got some idea in her head about teaching him technology stuff, like computer programming and so on. I'm not so sure I trust that profession enough to let him at it. I can't tell if it'll bring him a good living.

May gets all sorts of plans in her head without bothering to tell anybody about them, at least not until she's already started. Then she tells me and gives me chores to do. She already wants the sink fixed and the house painted the color she wants. I told her that color she wants is a bad idea but she won't hear a word of it. I have half a mind tell her she can go paint it all herself. I've had some bad ideas. But the color she wants from that magazine is a fad that's just going to fade out in two years. I told her. I said: "I'm not living in a pink house!" But she didn't listen. So now we live in a pink house that looks like it was painted like I don't know what I'm doing. Mind you, it wasn't me who painted it, but the neighbors are going to look over and think that way. As if I don't know how to paint my own house. Don't go telling her I said this, after all the flak I gave her about it already she's so mad she'd peel my hide if I mentioned it again. The funny part is I'd love her all the same if she did. I've infuriated her more than any man ever has (and I know this because she always feels obliged to let me know) and she still loves me.

Chapter 2

May and I have lived in the same town all our lives. It's small, but when you're young everything looks bigger than it really is. The whole town was the only world we knew. It still looks the same as it did years ago. The sight of new leaves in the spring takes me back to those simpler times each year, back when right was right and wrong was wrong, unless you weren't caught. When I hear the leaves rustle in the wind, I remember May in her Sunday best at the age of five. Playing with me in the mud puddles, outside the same church we got married in. We caused trouble together as we got older, too. We tied paper bags to cats, chased chickens, drew on neighbors' houses, broke windows with baseballs, explored the meadows, and did pretty much anything that would entertain us. It wasn't until high school that I took a dating interest in her, but then so did all the other boys in the school. They would have followed her around all day to get her attention, if they could. Her old man knew that. So he set her up as a cashier in his bait shop, to keep her out of trouble, and to bring in steady customers.

She was breathing fire the whole time she had to work, but it was for her own good. All the boys would visit the shop at least once after school, trying their hand to get May to look away from her magazines. It was hard for us to tell whether or not she was interested, mostly because she treated us all the same. "Buy somethin' and get out!" She'd bark at us from behind the pages of her "Glamour" or "Vogue" whenever we were taking too long.

As she was watching over the shop, her old man was there too. He'd nest in his worn out office chair in the corner of the shop, behind the register. He wasn't a fool either; he knew enough to put snacks on the shelves for us boys. I spent all my allowance on candy and pop every week. This went on for years, even into our college years. Every summer, May would sit

in the bait shop, not out of disdain anymore, but out of opportunity. So long as she was paid, she would stay.

I took to working as a handyman for the local hardware store during those summers and I liked it so much it became a full time job. I would drive out to people's homes and fix things, with my younger brother Tommy because I was showing him the ropes; there was no leaky pipe or loose roof tiling that we couldn't fix together. We'd look into anything that was busted and needed fixing at a cheap price. I worked all year round while my folks saved up money to spend on Tommy's college tuition. Sending just him to school was all they could afford and that was *if* I helped raise the money, but that was fine with me. Tommy was the smart one, and was more interested in schooling than I ever was. He was curious about the way things worked and wanted to study science or maybe it was engineering... some fancy title that had to do with industry, I can't remember much of that anymore.

While Tommy was working on getting accepted by a school, I had my job to do. On one day I was called in the work after my shift to fix the bait shop sign. That didn't surprise me much. That old wooden fish with its splitting sides and faded letters survived heat waves and hurricanes, but whenever a kid got the bright idea to throw a rock at it that thing flew off without so much as a squeak. This happened every month.

"One of these days!" May's old man ranted at the top of his lungs, "I'm gonna catch those little bastards in the act an' give 'em the whoopin' of their lives!"

In the heat of that August, I set the sign back on its hanger with Tommy's help. It was a good thing he was there too; it took too long to set that old plank in place. The heat wasn't helping either. Tommy had an idea that he wanted to try on his own to keep the sign from falling

off, so I let him try it and went inside to cool off. Inside, May sat at her usual spot behind the register, reading literature books instead of the magazines she poured over in high school. The clock in her old man's office was ticking lazily under the hum of two running fans. I pulled a cola out of the small fridge in the back, wiped the sweat from my brow and thought I should tease her.

“Okay, I'm buyin' somethin', does that still mean I gotta get out?”

She sent me an icy glare from behind Dickens's pages; the gold lettering on its cover didn't match the dingy old corners that were bashed into nubs from use. Her bronze hair floated around her shoulders, while a fan blew air in her face.

“If I wasn't paid by the hour, I'd be inclined to kick your behind.” She leaned forward just slightly.

“You always did have a temper.” I couldn't keep a smile off my face. I must've looked like I was planning something. But the air was too thick for thinking and my skull was already too thick for clever ideas.

“And you always had a big mouth.” Her eyes were set back on her book but the stare she gave me was still stinging my confidence.

A fly buzzed into the room in a large semi-circle before landing somewhere behind me. I fumbled with the money in my pocket and set a couple dollars on the counter.

“You still haven't told me to get out yet.” I set my cola down and waited for her to do her job.

“That’s because you’re the only one I can stand. You get that sign fixed yet?” She ran up the register and handed me the cola.

“Yes, ma’am.”

She leaned her elbow on the counter, setting her chin in her hand.

“Then how’s about seeing a movie with me? You get a free ticket, and I get a free ride.”

She didn’t just learn books at college, she’d become a slick operator. How could I have said no?

Chapter 3

The best and hardest year of our lives was the year we got hitched. Marriage is a beautiful thing, but it isn't all that light when you carry it. It took us a while to get our two separate lives to fit into one. And in the third week, we were exhausted of each other. I rolled over in bed one chilled morning and took a long look at May's resting face halfway sunk into her pillow. Her long hair draped over her shoulder as her exhales teetered between snoring and light wheezing. I thought I needed to feel something. The rush of love that I had felt in the earlier days didn't return to me that morning, and I was in horror. *I don't love 'er anymore?* My face was feeling stuffed up, like all my blood was packed in there. *I'm gonna to be livin' with this woman for the rest of my life, I gotta love her!* I sat up from bed to let my face empty out and she stirred in bed. I decided to sneak out to the kitchen and try to figure out just what I had done wrong. I spent about an hour alone before May walked in and noticed something was up.

I stomach was in a knot while she slowly poured her morning coffee and waited for me to talk. When I wasn't blabbing like usual she finally asked me.

“What's wrong?”

She took a sip of her coffee and I just poured my cup in silence.

“Are you gonna tell me? Or will I have to beat it out of you?”

I took a long sip and let the bitter taste stain my tongue.

“Come on, spit it out.”

I learned that day that my mouth can handle hotter stuff than my throat can, and I spit up my coffee onto the floor when I tried to swallow it. May laughed and shook her head, as I coughed out the pain.

“Not yer coffee, Crazy. Now you’ve made a mess.”

“I’ll clean it up.”

I set a towel on the stain and let it soak up the coffee on its own. May huffed and squatted to wipe it up herself.

“You never do it the right way.”

What I didn’t know then was when May loved you, she did it in all of her actions, even though her words left something to be desired. The whole day she’d ask me what was on my mind. I knew I couldn’t hide what was going on for too long but that never stopped me from trying. The good thing about it was that May had her suspicions but she didn’t act on them; she was waiting for proof.

The week after my problem happened, I started getting depressed. As a consequence I stopped doing the things that I did when I was in love. I got distant. On one night in particular, May glared at me from the kitchen table when we were supposed to have dinner together. When we were starting out our marriage, we did that every night. But I started eating on the couch with the TV on.

“Goin’ somewhere?” She asked.

“Er, jus’ to the-”

“The TV?”

The fridge hummed in the kitchen behind her as the air got thick.

“Yeah.”

“Would it kill ya to eat at the table?”

“It might?”

She sighed and leaned her forehead into her palm, her elbow propped on the edge of the table. I walked out into the living room and settled into my spot hoping my half-assed attempt at humor would hold her at bay. I reached for the remote and pressed the button to hear the numbing hum of the tube turning on but it wouldn't switch on.

I tried the remote again with meatloaf half shoved into my mouth. I opened up the back of the remote and put in new batteries. I tried switching on the TV from the button on its side. It was still off. As I stood in front of the boob-tube and scratched my head, I saw May reflected on its gray screen. She looked like the cat that ate the canary, snickering into her plate. I went in and looked behind the TV to find that the damn thing was missing its cord.

“God damn it, Woman! How'm I supposed to watch my shows? Ya ruined the whole set!”

“You only watched cop shows anyway. It was for your own good.”

My frown was so big it took my whole face to make it.

“May! I paid real money for this set and now it's trash!”

“I told you not to get it. What was wrong with the smaller one?”

“I didn’t want the smaller one!”

“Well I did!” She set her arms on her hips.

“Then why didn’t ya tell me?”

“You bartered this one from the Hansen’s, remember? They were happy to get rid of it!

Now I see why...”

My eyes looked back toward the TV.

“Why won’t you sit with me anymore, Loo?”

My back felt prickly with the fact that I couldn’t tell her; even though I was burning mad, I still wanted to keep my sad secret to myself. After staring at her for a while, she gave up and said we could pay someone to fix the TV after I was paid on Friday. I sat with her at the table for the first time in a while, hoping that she won’t pry. I spent the whole night wondering why I didn’t want to tell her since the thought of it scared me so much. I sat at the kitchen table a long time, May went up to bed without me and I turned the lights off to help my thinking. The crickets and frogs outside clamored on as I figured out a few things. I didn’t want May to know I didn’t love her because I didn’t want her to leave. But why didn’t I want her to leave if I didn’t love her anymore?

After a few hours of sitting in the kitchen, I couldn’t take the think so I decided to sneak a midnight snack; I remember it better because it was just as midnight struck. I opened the fridge to look for something to eat and found that May left me a turkey sandwich. When it comes to

food that woman is magic. After all the distance and the suffering I put her through, she still did the small things for me. But this didn't keep us from fighting.

May and I had a fight again when we went out for dinner in the city. She liked the city much more than I did and I always felt like a bean-stock out of its fairytale. I was sensitive to every stare and glance, but May seemed to like the high rise buildings and hazy air. She in her later college years she lived in an apartment. So she was more at home, while I was constantly bumping into things. There wasn't enough space. I was a country boy and everyone could see it, that didn't bother me until May saw it. She was successful in the city. I couldn't even make it into a room without the door hitting my rear end. Quiet country life doesn't have too much to bring in competition with the bustling cities of Northern California and Southern Oregon. That is if you're the kind to call them bustling cities. I'm sure there are busier. Country and city life are two different sets of thinking that I could never switch between.

May seemed to like getting on my case about my trouble. I wasn't the kind of man to be comfortable book learning, desk sitting and account balancing but she understood what it was like to be competitive. Going back to school and getting a good education would get me a long way, but we didn't have the money for that. I thought it was just dream talk, like the kind of stuff we say on the front porch. Just talking about the possible ways to go in life and dreaming about ways to make life better and the future brighter.

We entered a fancy restaurant, the kind that you need to call ahead for. I already felt like I was underdressed just as soon as we walked out of the truck. May was all dressed up and beautiful in a red dress she bought a few years before and never got to wear. She held onto it for so long I forgot it was even there. It sort of reminded me of when we went to the circus and

watched the high wire act. The woman balancing on that thin wire looked right at home, walking along in a fancy get up that's suppose to take your attention away from the obvious hours of practice that's in everything she does.

Hm, where was I going with this? Oh! Yes, I remember. Now May didn't necessarily look like that but it gave me the same feeling. Now you can imagine how that would stand out way out in the country, but in the city she fit right in. In the restaurant, which was a quiet place (I've never been in such a quiet restaurant before) we tried or at least I tried to keep my voice low enough to mingle with the rest of the small murmurs that filled the room like a thin layer of cigarette smoke. It definitely wasn't easy. I had imagined that places in the city would be louder, I guess I was wrong but I've been told that it always depends on where you go. We went to the wrong place.

May noticed that I wasn't enjoying our night out. I couldn't tell if she was mad at me or sorry for me.

"Five minutes here, and you already don't like it."

Then I knew she was mad at me.

"It's not that I don't like it. It just ain't like the way it is back home."

"Of course it isn't like home. This is San Francisco."

"I know that, I'm just sayin' -"

"You're not saying anything! My mother was right..."

I spent a moment of silence in shame.

“If your Mama was so right about everything, why did you marry me?”

I really put my foot in my mouth that time.

“You know what, you’re right. Why did I marry you?”

Her voice was icy, I still have a few icicles stuck up my spine from that.

“Maybe love has something to do with it...”

I was trying to be cynical, but she had me in a trap of my own making.

“Do you still love me?”

“Of course I do.”

I thought I was lying through my teeth. I wasn’t quite sure at that point if I still did. I think about that day as the first time I ever truly lied to my sweet May. Sometimes when I can’t sleep at night I think about that moment and try to erase it from my memory so I can climb out of the self deprivation. Hopefully now that I’m an old man I can finally succeed in doing that.

Chapter 4

During the ride home, we were as quiet as if we were driving to a funeral. I couldn't say anything because I was too scared that she'd find me out. I wasn't sure about anything that day. I even forgot the way home for a little while.

"Where are we going?" She asked.

I snapped out of it and realized that I missed our exit.

"Damn it!"

"What's wrong with you, Loo? You've been acting like this all day. Where is your head?"

"I dunno, Sweetheart. Maybe I'm just getting tired..."

She looked out her window and I took the next exit and started paying more attention to the road just in case.

"Stop right here." She pointed to a gas station.

We rolled in slowly, I figured that the truck could do with a couple of gallons. May got out and went into the little store. I was worried about where this was going. When she came out with a pack of cigarettes I breathed a sigh of relief. If this was what she was after, then we would have something to talk about.

"What'chu doin' with that?"

"I'm gonna smoke it."

“But you don’t smoke.”

I set the hose back and paid for the gas.

“Doesn’t mean I can’t start.”

I got in the car beside her and took a good long look. I bet she didn’t even know how to start. She settled in her seat and waited a while for me to start the car and drive. When that didn’t happen she looked at me and asked:

“What?”

“It’s a nasty habit.”

“So?”

“Woman, are you out to ruin the good health you’ve got?”

“It isn’t as bad as they make it all out to be. If it’s an occasional thing then it shouldn’t be a problem.”

I started the car and drove back onto the freeway.

“But why are you starting now?” I asked.

“It ain’t like I have anything else to do!”

We passed a dead coyote on the side of the road. That was a strange sight around these parts but not as strange as the image I had in my head of May smoking.

When we made it back home May lit one of the cigarettes and tried to smoke it, she coughed more than smoke then threw out the freshly lit cancer-stick into the dirt. I stomped it out with a smug smile.

“So much fer smokin’.”

“Oh shut up...”

I couldn’t help my chuckle; it just jumped out of me and didn’t give me a chance to catch it. She was red faced and coughed out what was left of the crap she dragged in.

“See what happens when ya don’t listen to what I tell ya? Just what were you after anyway?”

“I missed the smell when I left the city...”

That shut me up real good. I didn’t realize how much she wanted to leave. We couldn’t afford to go live in some place like San Francisco, but what I didn’t realize was that living in any city would’ve made her happy. She wanted more than what but she was stuck with me, a poor handy man in the country keeping her tied down when she really wanted to go out into the city and mingle with those kinds of folks.

But if this was what she wanted, then why did she say yes? Why did she marry me and not some yuppy from New York? I thought I was making her miserable for a long time after that. We didn’t talk much about it. I couldn’t talk for awhile. May thought I was getting sick and kept asking what was going on, so I lied and told her it was a sore throat. I couldn’t think of any other excesses so I continued using that one until she got scared and thought I had cancer.

“Woman, I ain’t got cancer!”

“Oh, how would you know? Mister Handy man! You don’t know a thing about cancer!”

“Neither do you!”

“I know plenty enough, you’re going to the doctor or I’ll ride you until you do!”

There was no arguing with her.

The doctor didn’t find anything wrong, and I didn’t want to tell him about my marriage problems. Those were my business. Divorce started to seem like an option, at least in that way, May could live in the city like she wanted and get a big city job. I was going to go tell her when I came home. I walked in through the door and set my hat down and walked into the kitchen and May screamed. I thought she was reacting to my return home until a mouse skittered past my boots and into the laundry room. May was cursing up a storm because the mouse had built a little nest in the corner of our pantry. May had found it and was disgusted on the spot. She wanted to call Bart, who’s the local exterminator around these parts, but I told her I’d take care of it.

So I trapped it in the laundry room by shutting the door and blocking the crack underneath with a towel. There was a trap inside there so it should’ve been caught. May wanted to be thorough so we set a sticky trap *and* a snap trap. We caught three mice.

“See? I told you! We need to call Bart! I didn’t even now there were three in there!” She exclaimed.

“Now now, Honey. If the traps worked for these little suckers, it’ll work for the other ones too. Y’know, if there are still any left.”

“Of course there are! If you see one there are at least ten more hiding somewhere else!”

“Nah, you probably scared them all off with yer screaming yesterday.”

May shook her head; she wasn't in the mood for my jokes but she smiled anyway when she stormed off in a huff. I spent my mind on trap ideas after that, the divorce talk would have to wait. I couldn't leave the job unfinished, besides no real man should pick up a leave when their wife doesn't feel safe in their own home unless he's the reason why.

That night I had a dream. May had got us a cat even though she was allergic. The cat ate all the mice and then I had to leave. After I left, the cat grew and was twice the size of a cougar. It chased me out of town and into the city where I was hit by a bus. I still hate the site of cats after that dream.

That morning I got downstairs with the dream weighing on me like it didn't want me out of bed. May didn't seem to notice. Sometimes when I had a bad dream I would wrap my arms around her in the morning and I'd feel better. I tried it that morning, and held her close to my chest while she held her mug in bewilderment.

“Loo, what's got into you?”

She smelled like coffee but it was a warm and cozy sort of smell. Her long brown hair was pushed flat against her scalp from when she rested her head beside mine. Maybe I did love her after all.

“Loo, answer me.”

“Just a bad dream, Honey.”

“That bad, huh?”

She lifted her cup of coffee to my lips. I took a sip.

“Do you want to tell me about it?”

“No. I just wanna get past it. What are you up to today?”

“I’m gonna get the laundry started, then I’ll go get my hair done. You’ll have the house to yourself all afternoon.”

“It takes that long to get yer hair done?”

“Well I’m going out to the city to do it.”

“What’s wrong with the places here?”

“Nothing, I just want to try something new.”

“Okay, but don’t cut yer hair too short.”

She did anyway. Her hair was long enough to reach the middle of her back and she cut it so short it barely touched her shoulders. It suited her but I missed the length, though I didn’t dare complain. Don’t ever tell a woman her haircut looks bad or you’ll get it up one way and down the other.

This wasn’t the last time May had visited the city. She was going there every other day and it was only a couple weeks later when she told me that she was looking into city jobs; she said that the commute to the city wasn’t so bad if she left early enough. I wasn’t so sure about that, but as long as she was filling her time with something that she liked then I was happy too. She wrote a lot of things for the local newspaper and took pictures of the high school sporting events here at home and that paid well enough with the addition of my pay. But May wanted

more. She wanted some sort of office and a work telephone and a big business life; something loud and full of noise.

It seemed like and country life wasn't good enough for her anymore. It made me sad in a way but I understood it. There was a time when I didn't want to stay in town either, but the world out there was so full of distractions that I felt as though I'd never get anything done. I guess I was afraid of leaving the town. I admired May for striving for something bigger.

Chapter 5

May applied for many newspaper and magazine jobs outside of the town but no one was hiring. She was working so hard to find a job that the idea of keeping her current one was falling by the wayside. She stopped turning in articles and looking into things that her boss told her too. Soon after that she was fired. At first she was very upset but with a bit of cheering up she got to see the bright side of it. She was miserable working toward deadlines and reaching a certain word count. I didn't understand a thing about what she saw in that business. So I convinced her to set out and write a book.

That thing is still sitting on a shelf in the office somewhere. We never got around to getting it published. I say "we" mostly because it was an effort from both of us. She did all the writing but I gave her all the stories she needed, so long as she asked. I liked reading as a boy and kept every story in mind. So every time May was stuck plot wise, which was often, I was always there to provide a new idea. She liked putting real life stories into her work too, but I never got to see those parts. Sometimes I just hope there isn't anything in there about me.

One day she spent the whole time writing, just scribbling anyway, page after page. This was when she first started writing for fun. I wasn't worried about her work ethic and thought she might be misplacing it. I earned enough every month to keep us going, but she was working herself so hard on nothing that she forgot to eat that day. I wasn't sure if she was doing this because she wanted to or if it was a way for her to stay away from me. I left her be but I still worried.

When I was finally fed up with waiting for her to come out of her writing cave, I took her notebook and hid it somewhere before I left for work. She was screaming at me when I got

home but she managed to write all day. It frustrated me but I had another plan. When May went to bed that night, I snuck out and took all the writing stuff; all the pens, the pencils and even the highlighters. I was gonna hoard all the paper too but she caught me mid-theft.

“So this is where you went off to.” She commented.

I did my best to save my hide but I knew it was a pointless move.

“Hey Baby, what are you doing up so late?”

“Checking up on my husband. What are YOU doing up?”

“Eh...I love you?”

“Nice try, Honey. Put those down and get back to bed.”

“No thanks, I ain’t tired just yet.”

“I didn’t ask if you were.”

I smiled the most charming smile I could muster.

“C’mon Baby, don’t be stubborn at me like that...”

“Then which kind of stubbornness do you suggest? Back to bed. Now! And I mean it!”

May can be a real hard-ass sometimes.

In the morning I was more successful in hiding all the pens. May was still asleep that morning so I had plenty of time to hide them. She didn’t say a word about it when I came back from work and I was a young fool who didn’t have a clue about women. I didn’t know enough

to think she had something up her sleeve. I walked in the door not knowing it was all a trap. She was very sweet until after dinner, then I knew the noose was too tight for me to slip out.

“What did you do with all the pens, Loo?”

I swallowed hard.

“Well... it doesn't matter anyway. I bought a computer.”

“You bought a WHAT?”

I hated computers, just like the city. I didn't have any understanding of why a computer was so special.

“I was going to buy one of those typewriter things but then a computer seemed much more practical.”

“But you don't even know how to use a computer!”

“It ain't that hard, Honey. They have programs that teach you how to use them now.”

She was right but I didn't want her to be. Computers were just a fad. An expensive fad and we didn't have money for. I guess in hindsight the problem was more about the money than the computer. We argued all night about it.

“You're takin' that damn thing back tomorrow!”

“We're keeping it and that's final!”

We glared each other down before she left for bed and I sat on the couch. I must have fallen asleep while watching TV because that's where I was when I woke up.

May was busy fiddling around with the computer in the office and I still hated that thing.

Then we had that fight, the worst one we had ever had on our entire married life. It was painful but needed. It was what saved our marriage in the end. I remember I was tired from work, and May was upset from staying in the house for too long. She had gotten a job working for a city newspaper and was working from home. When I get tired, I get hungry so I spent some time prowling around the pantry and fridge for a good home cooked meal which May was too busy to make. Then we snapped at each other.

“Why can’t you cook for me like you used to?”

“Cuz you’re not kind to me like you used to be.”

“Maybe I would be if you fed me more.”

“Damn it, Loo! You always do this! Why is it that I gotta do everything for you and you do nothing for me!”

“Nothing!?! You call paying the bills nothing!?”

“You know what I mean by nothing! Admit it! You don’t love me anymore!”

“So what if I didn’t love you anymore!?! It don’t mean you should drop everything!”

There were tears blocking her throat.

“I KNEW IT! You don’t! And you never did!”

“I DID! I just don’t anymore! I tried to hide it but it’s over! I don’t love you anymore!”

“So all this time you were pretending! You didn’t even care enough to tell me!?”

“I cared! I just didn’t want you to overreact!”

“Overreact!? How am I supposed to react! Our marriage is a lie!”

“It’s not a lie it’s just different now!”

“How?”

My head was spinning; I couldn’t find the right words.

“May, it ain’t like when we started anymore. Things got different. We ain’t the same anymore.”

“That’s no reason to leave me!”

“I didn’t say I was leaving you!”

“Then what are you saying?”

“...Just cuz I don’t love you anymore doesn’t mean we should split up just yet.”

“Well it sure sounds like it to me! How could you do this, Loo?”

“It wasn’t MY decision to stop!”

“Maybe it was...”

She left me alone in the room. It felt cold and empty after she left. I was expecting her to pack her bags and leave me but she stayed. I don’t know why she stayed but I’m glad she did. I thought about what she had last said and wondered if she was right. Maybe it was my decision. I was up all night thinking about it. If it was my decision to stop in the first place than there was

nothing to stop me from switching back, maybe that was possible and if it wasn't what did I have to lose?

I did my best to love May the way I did when we were first married and it didn't stick. I felt like a phony and it didn't feel right. That and May was on to me so every time I tried it got me a mean look in return. I was starting to get used to it until one day she just gave up, or maybe that was when it started to become real. She usually did all the vacuuming during the week when I wasn't home. But the old thing was busted so it was my job to fix it. Turns out there was a mess of hair tangling the spinning brush on the end so I cut it all off and it worked; good as new. May was out shopping so I took it upon myself to show her the good news. Not sure where that idea came from but it worked. I had the whole place cleaned up before she even got home. And that is a miracle in itself; I'm the biggest slob in town.

When May got home, there was no glare or sass. Just a smile (though that could've been from the good time she had away from home). But I learned my lesson that love shows up in many forms in life and sometimes the form that you were expecting or told to expect doesn't show up. And the one that does you don't recognize until you're miles down the road.

Chapter 6

May and I live a good life, and a good marriage. I'd do it all over again if time rewound, but we never did have a child that was ours. In our first years of marriage, we tried, tried and tried. We were making so much effort that we were almost desperate. We just had to have a kid of our own. We wanted our marriage to produce something that would call us Mama and Papa. And when my May was finally fed up with trying and waiting she decided that we needed answers from a professional. She wanted a baby as much as I did, and it wasn't fair to her to say no if she wanted to see a doctor. When the local doc didn't know, he referred us to some specialist in the city.

We went together on that day. It was autumn, but it was still warm from summer. The leaves were still hanging on tight to their branches, though the colors of each leaf were slowly changing. For some reason or another, May never liked the crisp air of fall. She said it always made her sad. When we got in the truck to drive off, the neighbor's dogs were barking up a storm at a squirrel, who most likely just wanted to get the season over with. I remember the rest of drive was silent, no radio; no talking, just real quiet. We were dreading the answer.

The office was clean and I thought it took too long for something to happen while I paced around the room. I walked from the window to the door and back again, like a caged animal waiting to either be fed or put down. I tried sitting in the chairs, but the scratchy fabric felt like I was being stuck with needles. When I was finally let in to see May; I was more hopeful than she was. I remember the bland look on her face but her eyes were sad. The floor looked like it was meant for a science lab like the ones you see on TV. They told us to wait for the test results, I

felt like I was on one of those science fiction shows. I just wanted to hold my wife again, but I was too busy waiting for Frankenstein to walk in.

When the doctor walked back in with his neat papers in his hands, hardly bothering to look up, he gave us the quick and painful jab we were anticipating.

“I’m sorry Mrs. Johnson, but the results are conclusive. Children are not an option for you.”

It didn’t seem right that she was told from such an uncompassionate doctor. Though I suppose there’s a point in a physician’s career when he stops feeling sympathy for patients. After breaking all the bad news that anyone can come across from many years in that line of work. I can imagine that all the goodwill that he may have started with in the beginning can dry up. There was a box of Kleenex on the desk in front of us, placed there just in case, but my May didn’t cry. She was too proud to cry in front of a stranger, or even in front of me.

When the news echoed off of the cold walls, it ricocheted into my heart and I was left blank. But May questioned every word the doctor said.

“Are you sure? Can’t you check again? Just how ‘conclusive’ are these tests anyway?”

She was trying to find a way back to the dream we had, but it was shattered. The doctor folded his glasses into his breast pocket and smoothed back his dark hair that was peppered with years of stressful patients.

“I can assure you, Mrs. Johnson, that what I’ve told you is the truth. You can’t have children.”

“Why? This doesn’t make any sense! I’m not sick so why can’t I have a baby?” Her voice was aching from holding back the emotion you shouldn’t let go of in people places.

“If you’re interested in specifics-”

“I don’t want specifics! I want a baby!”

I set my hand on May’s shoulder. It was time to go. And go quietly.

We didn’t stay long at all the other clinics that followed. Everywhere we went, it was the same answer. One night, after the many nights we had dedicated to our defeat, I had nothing better to do but to stare at the ceiling from my side of the bed. It was late, humid, and our window was wide open to the sound of crickets while I hoped for a cool summer night breeze to sweep away my sweat. No luck there. My hands and feet felt swollen and my body listless and was too tired to even move. In the small peace I found in imagining what the North Pole might have been like at that time of year, I heard a sob from beside me. I knew May was devastated, but she kept her tears only to herself. She was too proud to dry her eyes on my shoulder. Though I knew it had nothing to do with me or the way I was. I was set still for a while, wondering if she knew I was awake. She was quiet the rest of the time, I thought she was asleep. When I got up from bed, I heard her snuffle.

“Where are you going?”

“I was gonna check the freezer for something cold.”

The crickets quieted down to almost nothing as the breeze I was looking for finally wafted in.

“If there’s any ice cream, could you get me some?” She propped her pillow up against the headboard and sat up.

We talked about adoption for the first time that night, and only occasionally did it ever come up again. When I handed her the bowl of ice cream she wanted and sat beside her, I thought I'd say something to cheer her up.

“Ya know there are hundreds of kids out there. Just waitin’ for a couple like us to adopt ‘em. There’s nothing stoppin’ us from at least lookin’ into it.”

She nodded and dipped her spoon into a mound of vanilla. Her eyes were red around the edges in the yellow light of our nightstand lamp.

“We can go look tomorrow, if ya want?”

She nodded again but her mood didn't change. She didn't even look up from the bowl in her hands. The air was still and getting stale. She let go of her spoon and it made a light clink against the side of the bowl.

“Do you want that?” She asked.

I blinked.

“Do you want to adopt?” Her voice croaked a bit.

“Well... Why not?”

“It wouldn't be the same. Would it?”

“I guess not.”

Her ice cream was melting in neglect, while I stared into it.

“You don't love me less?”

“Of course not, it’s just one of those things. We can’t help it.”

She nodded and saw her ice cream was turning into a puddle.

“Do you want the rest?”

“Nah, I’ll just take it back to the fridge.”

I ate it anyway.

I went and looked into a couple of adoption houses, expecting May to give the word when she was ready. But we didn’t know the first thing about adoption. We didn’t know the first thing about kids either.

Chapter 7

In the years before May and I were married, my brother Tommy went to school in up in the colder states. He got himself a good job, and I'd call him every week and talk to him, sometimes about enjoying his single life as long as he could and as much as he could. Other times, we'd talk about his plans of moving back home. We'd spend hours just talking about small things, like how he'd learned to like coffee or how people talked where he was. But the hours eventually shrank to nothing, and the number of calls did too. Especially after he met his wife, who I didn't hear about until a year after he was married. I missed him around town. I finally heard back from him when he and his wife visited during Christmas time, they said they were having a baby. And then they did.

May and I were happy for them. They had a boy they called Logan, a terrible name, but a beautiful boy. As soon as he was born they started researching into how to teach him reading and math at an early age, as well as looking into what was "brain food" for infants. The way I saw it was, they were trying to raise Albert Einstein, but you can't raise a kid that way. Though I guess I wouldn't know.

Then, early last spring, my brother and his wife died out in the hills of Washington. The big state that is, not the capitol, it rained heavily that year and snowed a little too. When spring came up and melted the snow, the ground became too wet for the poor old hill to handle and it all ended up in a landslide. On the night that it happened, the ground underneath Tommy's house swept away from its foundation, while the mud from the top of the hill collapsed over it. I'd seen pictures of his house before the disaster; half of that thing was on stilts and it would've never lasted more than a decade. I told him it was dangerous that it was a stupid idea, but he

didn't listen. He told me he liked the view and that he was convinced the place was safe. I wish he'd listened.

Logan was lucky to survive. The rescue crew found him half buried in the mud of what used to be his room, his hand poking out from a pile of muck that squeezed him against the wall. There were pieces of the house everywhere, huge boulders toppled over each other with debris of splintered wood. Pieces of my brother's life were scattered all the way down the hill. His couch was on the street. His car sat upside-down in the woods. His bed was buried under the torn walls of his house all over what was his driveway. The tile from his kitchen poked out of dirt mounds that rested in his backyard. Logan's toys were scattered over thick black piles like colorful sprinkles on one of those store bought cupcakes, they were caked onto the landscape. One of the rescuers, who knew my brother, told me they had found Tommy and his wife at the very end of their street. Three blocks away from their home. Their bodies were tangled and crooked underneath the rocks.

Tommy's sister-in-law who lived in Portland drove over to Washington to care for Logan and take him on his own flight here. He was going to stay with us since we were the only family he had that had room, time, and the resources to take care of him. We were more than willing. Sister-in-law drove him over in a fancy rental car that still had the reflection of the city in its shiny paint job. I didn't know much about this woman, but I knew she was a working-girl from the big city who was too busy with her work to take care of little boy. I could see it in her stilettos and tattoos.

Logan was a quiet three year old. Which made me pretty uneasy, but I understood that he missed his folks. And I figured that children in strange places were quiet. When he first spoke

to us in the afternoon, it was barely a whisper. I figured it was because he still had no idea who we were. We had only seen each other in pictures and at Christmas time but even then he was still too young to remember.

Logan calmly spent the day getting his bearings around the house mostly by picking up just about everything he saw. I've still got smudges all over my reading glasses from then. How he got the bright idea to put it in his mouth, I'll never know. After rescuing my reading glasses, I thought it was best to save May's china from destruction too. I took Logan up on my shoulders to give him a tour around all the rooms, including the attic and the basement. Our house was small, but it had one extra room for him to stay in. He seemed to like that room the best. There was a place for him to sit next to the window, which he took a liking to immediately. He sat in that spot looking outside for a long time, thumb in his mouth with big eyes studying the yard below him. He had that glazed look in his eyes that kids get when they're about to take their nap and don't know it. I took the opportunity and went back to the basement and burrowed through a few boxes. I thought maybe I could find a few toys from my childhood for the little squirt. All I could find was Tommy's worn out sock-monkey, he used to drag it around when he was Logan's age.

I almost didn't hand it to him. And when Logan quickly took it into his arms I felt a surge of nostalgia in my gut that stung me all the way to my temples. He looked so much like Tommy I almost wept. Logan didn't just lose his Daddy; I lost my only little brother. I really regretted giving Logan the stuffed animal then, I couldn't dry my eyes enough to hide what I was holding up. It was lucky that May walked in to snap some pictures.

“Aren't ya just the cutest lil' monkey? And now you've got a little friend!”

“Can I see it?” Logan reached up at the camera and May, being the softest around kids, let him have it.

“Are you sure you should be givin’ him that?” I questioned. “That’s an expensive piece of equipment. It cost me an arm an’ a leg.”

Logan picked up on how to operate that camera in seconds. He snapped a picture of his own and laughed.

“Aw, look at you! Takin’ your own pictures? What a smart boy!” May picked Logan up and kissed his cheek.

I couldn’t help but laugh at the grouchy face he made.

“Don’t do dat!” Logan exclaimed.

“And why not, Smarty-pants?”

“I don’t wike it!”

I shook my head, “Young man, you better start likin’ it. Cuz Auntie May’s got tons more waitin’ fer ya.”

He stuck out his tongue at me while his face was scrunched up in disgust. I got to admit, I do admire some of his spunk.

“Now look here, boy. You gotta treat us with respect, or your gonna get a whoopen.”

May was quick to coddle him, “Ah, Loo, just go easy on him. He’ll get used to us soon enough. Besides,” she added with a smirk in the corner of her mouth, “I think you deserved it.”

She went and kissed Logan's cheek again. Now, I think I've already said I've infuriated May before, but this was one of the cases where she had infuriated me.

"Damn it, woman! Don't undermine my authority in front of the boy. You'll only encourage 'em!"

"Louvis Abraham Johnson, don't you take that tone with me!"

"I'm not takin a tone! I'm sayin' we need to raise this boy right!"

"Oh, now you've gone an' made him cry! Aw, don't cry, Honey. Uncle Loo will say he's sorry. Won't you, Loo?"

Logan whimpered in his Auntie's arms while we stared each other down. My blood was boiling, but I knew that if I didn't back down we'd be at this for years.

"Fine! I'm sorry! But that doesn't mean he isn't gettin' a whoopen next time."

I left the room with my tail between my legs in righteous indignation.

After that our dinner was void of adult conversation. I said nothing. She said nothing. And Logan did all the talking. His mouth was so full, we figured it was best to just nod our heads and pretend we knew what he was saying. When it was bedtime, I told him the story of Red Riding-hood and tucked him in. He slept cuddling the sock-monkey soundly, so I was fooled into thinking he would sleep through the night. By the time I was hitting the hay, he had started a fit. He woke up screaming and having delusions from his night terrors of the landslide. This became an every night occurrence where he would cry, and cry hard. May was the first to try calming him down. She scooped him up and held him tight but he just kept crying. It was getting so bad that after a while May and I were getting desperate for sleep.

The second day he was staying with us was much like the first. He was quiet, and playing with the camera that May just gave him. He went into every room and snapped pictures. I think he took one of me napping on the couch, because I could have sworn I heard a snap and his laughing. May was busy in the kitchen baking something. I remember the smell leaking into the living room from the kitchen was really good, like cinnamon. She hadn't baked in years and I missed that smell. Logan wandered into the kitchen every once and a while. I heard him talking and showing May his pictures, even though May was too busy making sweets to look long enough. Though, all she would have seen were just pictures of empty rooms and things we see every day. He didn't bother to show me anything. I asked to see, once I sat up to watch him waddle past, but he just kept walking. I wondered maybe he was still sore at me from the day before. I let him be and he wandered off.

All of a sudden we heard him crying upstairs, really crying. We thought he was hurt. May was quick to rush out from the kitchen and scoop him up. We looked for blood or bruising. But when we found out that wasn't the case, we weren't sure what to resort to. I guess every once in a while, life can give you distractions to forget what's causing you pain. But once you've got nothing to occupy your mind with, all the pain comes rushing back. He kept wailing on and he tried to push us away with his little fists. When he started getting violent, he'd throw things at us and hurt himself by butting his head against the walls. We knew he wanted his Mom and Dad back, but there was nothing we could do but hold him still until it was done. Sometimes it went on for hours, other times he just went to sleep. I noticed that if I kept his head on my shoulder as he had his fit, he'd eventually fall asleep. He'd scream and bite at me, but it didn't bother me much.

During his naps was when we found some time to breathe, though I wasn't home as much as May was. I still worked at the hardware store, while May stayed home to keep an eye on Logan. I knew the poor kid was suffering, but I wasn't sure how to help. He was a sensitive boy like Tommy was so I couldn't spank him. I almost put my hand to him when I came home to find bruises on May's legs. My blood was running so hot, but my May has always been so forgiving and stopped me. I told her that was the last straw. I told her it was time to put him in a care house of some kind, the kind with doctors and nurses in them who know how to take care of him. It broke my heart to have to send Logan away. But a boy his age shouldn't be afraid every night crying for dead parents. And he shouldn't be afraid of the mud.

Chapter 8

I went ahead and made the calls without May. They told me he would be admitted soon.

“Unca -woo,” he asked a few nights before I was going send him away, “Where did my Mommy an’ Daddy go?”

I was about to turn out the light and go get a wink of sleep before his nightmares started. But I trudged back into the room and sat on the edge of his bed, the mattress sank under my weight and my tired bones creaked.

“They went to Heaven, Logan.” I answered.

“Why did dey go to Heaven?”

I hesitated to answer, but I knew if I didn’t, he’d be up all night. And that meant I would be too.

“They went cuz their lives were done.”

“Can I go to Heaven?”

He was looking up at me with the blue eyes Tommy had. I couldn’t look back.

“You will if you’re a good boy. Now get some sleep.”

I got up to leave, but he sniffled and rubbed at the tears that were blurring his eyes.

“But I miss my Mommy and Daddy!”

“Look, Logan, you gotta be happy so they can be too when they watch over ya. Yer gonna make yourself sick keepin’ this up. Just get some sleep.”

He let out a yawn, and my shoulders dropped in slight relief. Maybe he would finally listen.

“Unca-woo... Why didn’t I go to Heaven too?” His voice was soft and drowsy.

“It’s cuz you gotta grow up big and strong, Kiddo. You’ve got a lotta stuff to do first.”

“Wike what?”

“Like sleep.”

He whined at me, but I turned the light off and headed down the hall I really just wanted him to shut up and go to sleep. *I* wanted to shut up and go to sleep. May and I had lost about a month of it. It was the only thing we were thinking about.

At about eight in the morning the next day, Logan waddled over to hand me the lunch he helped Auntie May make, before I had to go to work. He was carefully tiptoeing to avoid all muddy puddles in the driveway and I couldn’t help but shake my head. The poor boy had no idea what fun he was missing. At that point, I was determined to get him to play in mud. I thought that maybe he’d get better if I did. He’d be scared at first but, hopefully, curious. All he needed was a little encouragement, at least that’s what I thought. I set the lunch in my truck, squatted down and clawed out a handful of mud. It was warm from the sun, even though the spring air was still kind of chilly. I held it out for him but he stepped back.

“Come on,” I said, “come on an’ take a look. You wanna see it?”

He cautiously stepped over and stared at it.

“Go on, take a handful.”

He stuck a finger in the pile, but shook it off as quick as he could. It was hopeless, but I still had to try. I thought that maybe with a little bit of knowledge he'd warm up to it.

“Ya wanna know what mud is made of? Dirt and water, that's all.”

May scoffed at my attempt to bring Logan back to real boyhood.

“Dirt, water an' cow-pies, ya mean.”

“What's a cow-pie?” Logan asked.

He was at that age where he had to know about everything. If you didn't give him the answer, he'd make a fuss over it.

“It's cow poop.”

Aunt May said with an air of dryness to match the chore she was doing. Our drier was broken so she had to hang out the laundry, much to her disgust. But Logan was too busy laughing to notice his Auntie's mood.

“Cow poo?” he repeated to entertain himself, “Unca-woo dat's cow poo!”

He pointed to the mud in my hand.

“Hey, you got it on yer hands too, lil' squirt.”

He continued to giggle as he stomped on the mud under his sandaled feet.

“Cow poo! Cow poo!”

He sang as he hopped around and found joy in the squishing beneath his toes.

Is my job done? I thought as he dipped his hand into the puddle under his feet and inspected the brown coating it came up with. I watched him carefully squat toward the puddle and dip in his other hand. *I ain't jus' seeing things, am I?* He shook his hands to get the mud off, and nearly dirtied the sheets May was hanging up.

“Hey! I just washed these! Go on, an’ play somewhere else.”

She shooed him away as he sheepishly wiped his hands on his shirt and pants. He waddled out into the dirt driveway and found a new puddle to stomp in. On his way over it, his shoe was sucked in underneath and he fell over, backside first, into the pile. He let out a little yelp and May almost trudged over to his rescue, but I stopped her.

“Wait! Let’s jus’ see where this goes.”

“Shouldn’t you be at work?”

“Shh! Look!”

It looked like the poor kid was going to cry. But for some reason, I couldn’t help thinking this would work. He stared down at the muck under his legs and took up a handful to get his shoe loose. Once he did, there were still chunks on his hand. He smashed his hand into the dirt under him in frustration, and found his handprint when he was done. He looked at it for a while, wiggling his legs into the warmth of the puddle. He took his shoe and smashed it on the ground, like he did with his hand, and found another print. As he sat in the mud I noticed the water from the puddle collected around him. Considering the sun was out, that spot must’ve been a warm paradise. May shook her head and crossed her arms with a heavy sigh.

“Why’d you have to go an’ show him how to play in the mud? I’ll never get him clean after this.”

Logan stuck his face in the mud and came up with muck all over him.

“Well, I’d better get to work.” I laughed and got into my truck before May could get at me.

“Looks to me like your work is done already, you old bastard!”

She was shaking her fist at me as I drove off.

Before I had gotten home that day, May had scrubbed Logan so much that his skin had almost turned red and it squeaked. He caked on so much mud when I had gone, that he was forced to take two baths. It made me so proud. May scolded me all night, but it was worth it.

After Logan was clean enough to reflect light; I tucked him in and he didn’t cry or scream in the middle of the night. It was the first peaceful night in a long time, we had actually lost track of when we had gotten a good night sleep. But it wasn’t totally uneventful. He was still awake by 11 pm, poking and prodding me to wake up.

“Can I sweep next to you and Auntie May?” He asked.

I was too tired to argue. I knew it wouldn’t do any good anyway. But let me tell you, it was definitely strange having a child sleep between us, especially after so many years of childlessness. He wiggled, squirmed, kicked me half-way off the bed, drooled and snored all in his sleep. It exhausted me to think of how much energy he had when he was awake, I didn’t think he’d have so much in his sleep too.

Chapter 9

In the morning, I took him fishing; or at least taught him how to throw a hook into the water and hold the rod still. I took him out to a nearby pond to fish, though there were very few things to catch. At least there was a dock I could set my chair on. Logan sat in my lap, bouncing and swinging the rod in excitement. He probably expected to catch his fish immediately and stayed that way for five minutes. Then he decided there were no fish and that question asking was a better way to pass the time.

He asked me all sorts of questions as he threw sticks and various objects at the water: why do fish live in water? Why do we catch the fish with hooks? Why is the water so muddy? Can I play in the water? Why not? Can we give the ducks food? Why can't I throw sticks at them? How do they swim? Do you swim? Why can't I go in the water?

At about noon he'd nearly given up.

"Unca-woo?" He asked as he plopped down on the dock to watch the water, "Why does Auntie May ca' me 'sweet pea'?"

"It's cuz she loves you." I said.

"Even when she puts me in de corner?"

He looked over at me skeptically. I couldn't see my brother in his face anymore. All I could see was his reaction the other day at his punishment for not eating his broccoli like he was supposed to. Which was, in fact, to sit in the corner. He gave us sass for being forced to eat something he didn't like and I'm sure he picked that up from May.

"Yep, even when she puts you in the corner." I nodded slowly.

“Unca-woo, why does Auntie May do dat?”

“Put you in the corner?”

He nods.

“It’s cuz she loves you too much to spank ya.”

I smirked and watched his face scrunch up in frustration. I wasn’t giving him the straight answer he wanted and he was getting fussy. He was tired. It was almost time for his nap and I needed to take him home, but I promised him we’d catch a fish before it was time to go. I shouldn’t have made that promise; I knew it was a dumb idea.

“Well, are ya gonna fuss at me all day? Or are ya gonna help me catch a fish?”

He put his little voice down to a whisper and looked down at the water from the edge of the dock.

“Are you sure dey are in dere? Maybe dey’re sweeping!” He reached his hand into the water to feel for one.

“Careful now, don’t fall in.”

I tipped my chair back comfortably, against the rail. I didn’t expect him to be too curious. But he reached in too far and fell in anyways. I just caught a glimpse of him falling face first into the pond, his little legs kicking behind him over the edge of the dock. I dropped the fishing rod and dove out of my seat so quick I almost gave myself a heart attack. I managed to grab him by his leg and pull him up onto the dock. He coughed and whimpered as he wiped his eyes from the water while I patted his back to help the water out of his lungs.

“Now, didn’t I tell you not to lean too far?”

He sputtered some water and cried.

“I just wanted to see de fish!”

I laughed and picked him up to go home, his clothes squished under my arms.

He sat in the car on an old towel I had for such an occasion, his little arms crossed and sopping wet. He fussed at me whenever I laughed, but I couldn’t stop a few snickers getting loose. At least after that he knew better than to reach into the pond too far. I drove into town to cheer him up. I thought that maybe getting him an ice-cream would console his temper. He pressed his hands to the glass of the counter of the shop, while I lifted him up to look at the flavors they had. He only knew them by color. As he looked at all the bins of ice-cream lined up under his nose, I spent my time looking around the shop. It had changed since I was a kid. I remember the walls were lined with light pink and white wallpaper in vertical stripes from floor to ceiling, and that the counters were kept cleaner than what I was seeing that day. The wallpaper must have been taken down. Now the walls were all painted in baby blue. Logan said he wanted the pink flavor and if I was a man more attached to money, I would’ve bought him some other kind of snack. Most of the ice-cream either melted down his hand, or was smeared on his face.

He tried his best efforts to gulp down his ice-cream on our way home. The drips from his cone dried on his shirt, while he was busy making my car sticky. His hand prints were all over the passenger side when he was done.

“Now, when we get home, don’t tell Auntie May about fallin’ in. Okay?” I asked.

“Okay.” He replied behind the mountain of strawberry ice-cream piled on his face. Then asked.

“Unca-woo?”

“Hm? What is it, Kiddo?”

“I wanna go fishin’ tomorrow too!”

“Alright, we can go again tomorrow, but after I get off work.” I couldn’t stop the smile cracking into the corners of my mouth. He cheered and ran into the house once we got there. I sighed and wiped up the mess he left behind before any ants caught a whiff and tried to finish it off for him.

May greeted us at the front door, gave Logan one glance and knew.

“Alright. Upstairs with you, Monkey. It’s time for an early bath.”

Logan cheered and ran upstairs. May gave me a look, and I knew there wouldn’t be any dessert for me after dinner. I was about to defend myself when she kissed my cheek.

“You’re a good uncle, Loo. I’m glad you changed your mind.”

I wrapped my arms around her and held her tight like I used to. Logan came back down the stairs with nothing but his shirt on and hugged us. He looked up at me with those blue eyes of his and said.

“I wove you Unca-woo!”

“I love you too, Logan.”

Chapter 10

On warm, sunny days Logan liked sitting in the back of my truck. We spent a lot of time together sitting back there and drinking lemonade. It was nice to have some quiet time with him when it was close to his nap time. He could get a bit fussy, but if I played my cards right he'd fall asleep like a log. Nothing could wake him up from a nap when he really needed one. On one particular day, he had fallen asleep in the truck, and without looking to check I drove off with him in there. I went to work on a Sunday to catch up on some repairs, the store used to be empty on Sundays when I was younger. I sort of miss it. There wasn't much to do on Sunday then, and there wasn't much to do that day at my office or workbench, whatever you want to call it. I picked up an old radio that Mrs. Bentley wanted me to fix for her when May called the office and asked for me.

She was panicked, asking if I had taken Logan to work with me or not, saying that she had looked for him everywhere. Telling her to calm down wasn't going to help, so I told her I'd look for him and I'd call the sheriff to keep an eye out if I ran out of any luck. What I didn't know then was that Logan had woken up, climbed out of the truck and started wandering around the store. I searched the town, up and down and sideways, I even drove along the highway searching for him. I was starting to panic too. I rushed back to town and to the sheriff's office to get his help. The old jail was a remnant from the gold rush, iron bars and everything. They didn't jail people as much in those days, after all it was only a small town.

I explained the whole situation to Sheriff Garren and he laughed. He was much older than me and had an odd sense of humor. A couple of years back he came by the house to pretend

to arrest me, when the whole purpose of his visit was to warn me about a cougar running around. May didn't really like him. In that moment I could see why.

“This is nothin' t'laugh about Sheriff! That little boy is-”

“Safe at the hardware store, Son.”

I froze mid-sentence.

“Looks like he wandered there all by himself lookin' for ya.” The Sheriff said through his thick chuckles. “Better get going before your wife kicks yer ass for losing him.”

I wasn't sure whether I was grateful or confused. I could've sworn Logan was playing in the yard when I had left the house. And there was no way he had gotten all that way to the store on foot.

When I got to the store he was eating popcorn and sitting in my chair in the office. Janet made sure he sat still and waited for me. As soon as I walked in I scooped him up and asked him how he got here. He was too busy with the popcorn to answer right away.

“Unca Woo! Can I ride in de back of de truck again?”

I almost slapped myself, I had left during his nap time and he liked to nap in the truck. It was always warm on sunny days and during a breezy spring season like we had been having, I should've known to look back there. He didn't even have a clue about how worried we were.

May was in a pacing the house the whole time I was looking for him. When I got him home she was quick to scoop him up and hold him until he couldn't breathe.

“Where were you?? You shouldn’t wander off like that! Never ever go somewhere without Auntie May or Uncle Loo!”

“Okay.”

There was dust all over him from riding in the back of the truck. It didn’t take long for May to get him in the bath tub and chew me out for not looking in the bed of the truck before driving off. I made sure to check the back of the truck before going anywhere after that and I still do that today.

Chapter 11

Logan loved the neighbor's cat, but it didn't love him back. It's the same old story with every toddler, you decide to pet the cat at the wrong time and it scratches you. He ran in crying and holding his hand; that was the day he decided he didn't like cats. I didn't like them either, but not for the same reasons. It wasn't too bad a scratch, and May wasn't home so I cleaned up his hand and that was that. A few days later the neighbor was complaining that their cat came home wet every time they let it out of the house. But my suspicion wasn't raised until Logan tried to walk through the yard with a hose in his hand. It was too cold for him to be playing with water.

"Hold it there, boy. Where do you think you're going with that?"

"I'm going to de sandbox." The guilt was already on his face. He knew he was doing something wrong.

"What do you need the hose for? It's too cold today, Kiddo."

He didn't answer or put the hose down. That was a sure sign something was up.

"What are you doing with that hose?"

"De cat is taking away my sandbox!"

That's one of the reasons why I didn't like cats either. I picked Logan up and took the hose from him.

"Then let's go chase it away together. Okay?"

He nodded with the determination I hadn't seen from him before. It turns out Logan was in a battle for his sandbox for a long time and I was only now learning about it.

“Der it is!” He pointed with a big frown on his face.

The cat was busy doing its business when we charged. I think we scared the shit out of that cat. It stumbled before it could run out of the box and rush out. Logan screamed at it but I couldn't help but laugh.

He looked down at the turd in his sandbox and screamed again in frustration. He really did hate that cat. But then I wondered how the cat was getting wet without Logan getting a scratch. I set Logan down to let him vent out his tiny rage and he went and picked up a plank of wood that I had been saving for building a playground for him and chased after the cat.

If you ask me I think Logan's frustration was understandable, especially after the cat came back after each cold reminder to stay out. I picked Logan up, told him to stop and that it wasn't good to hurt animals, even if they make you angry. He still didn't like the idea but I promised I would build another sandbox for him that the cat couldn't get into.

When summer came I decided to build the playground for him that I kept promising. It was about time he had a proper place to play and I was more than happy to make one for him; especially since it was a good opportunity to teach him the family trade too. Something that I always liked to do when I was a boy was to build things. It didn't matter what I was building, I always thought it was fun. I thought for sure Logan would like to build stuff too. I got all the materials ready, I was going to build a swing set, a slide and a new sandbox for him, and get him to help, but he didn't seem interested. I even let him watch me build, but he just sat there and watched. I couldn't get him to participate; even when I offered to let him hammer in the nails.

I couldn't keep from scratching my head. He played inside most of the summer and then I caught him on May's computer.

“Get away from there, Logan, if you mess that up for Auntie May she's gonna be mad.”

“But I woouooooon't!”

“You heard me. Now don't make me say it twice!”

The next time May turned on her computer she found that Logan had changed the desktop picture to blue instead of dingy green. I wasn't sure what to do about having a computer wiz in the house. At three years old he learned how to navigate his way from the start spot to the programming stuff. Lord only knows what he would've done if I didn't stop him in time.

After all that, May decided it was a good idea to give him an early start in computer learning. She bought him games and books for the computer and about the computer. She was taking things too far. I wanted him to learn how to be a boy first, not a computer wizard. Before May could show him his first computer game I stole him away to go camping.

When I was a boy I took camping as an excuse to become a wild thing. All the crazy havoc that I couldn't cause at home I would cause out in the wilderness. I knocked down a beehive once and got stung about 70 times. I thought it was worth it. I could show off all the scars to my friends and prove how tough I was. I would go hunting for cougars and bears, thinking I could get away with tracking them down. But out of all the stuff I did, swimming in the lake was the best of it. And I was sure Logan would love it too.

Logan didn't seem to like being away from the house as much. He definitely missed Auntie May's cooking, I missed it too, but there were some up sides. I let him stay up as long as

his could stand (which wasn't very long). We'd watch the stars at night and talk about them. I tried to get him to see the constellations but he'd make up his own. Something about a bear scratching his rear end against a tree; he liked that one the best. During the hottest part of each day we'd hang around the lake. I caught him to swim and I made sure he knew how to be safe around the water. He tried to grab a couple of fish but they were always too quick for him. I hoped one day he would grow up to be a man like me and my father before me and his father before him; tall, proud and strong.

When we got back from camping, the first thing May had him do was take a bath. It seemed like half her job was giving him baths. He liked splashing around in the tub and spilling water everywhere. That was his favorite part. When he took a bath there was usually more water on the floor than in the tub. May didn't seem to get irritated by it as much as I did. I slipped every time I walked in to help. I can't take a fall like I used to anymore, my old back couldn't take it.

When the bath was done, May fed us dinner. It was the best meal she had made in a while since at the time she was working for a newspaper in San Francisco. She would type up her articles on the computer most days and had little time for anything else when she had an assignment. On those days I would take Logan to work with me. It was much better than daycare in my opinion, first of all he loved it because he was the center of attention almost all day while the folks I worked with cooed over him. And second I got to teach him the tricks of my trade. I taught him what each tool was the first day I took him, and before the week was over he knew every tool by name and knew how to use it. I was so proud.

His favorite part about going to work with me was lunchtime; he liked food, so long as it wasn't green. And even then he had a couple of exceptions. He wasn't too picky an eater. In fact I had to chase him away from some of the foods I keep for myself. I always kept a link of sausage in the fridge in case I wanted a snack. One day I came home to find it gone, May never touched that sort of stuff. And Logan pointed and asked to buy some of it the first time I took him to the butcher's. Kids eat too much for their age.

Logan wasn't picky about his foods but he was picky about his clothes. He wore the same two t-shirts and shorts all spring and summer, and he wore his sandals all day too. May figured it saved time to just wash one set of clothes while he wore the other set but there was a whole dresser of clothes he wasn't wearing. And if we even hinted at making him wear something else he'd whine at us. I figured it was because those were the clothes that he had before living with us and he wanted to keep wearing them because they reminded him of home. But they were getting dirty really fast. Especially since I taught him how to play in the mud and go camping. He didn't fear the wilderness as much anymore and his bright yellow t-shirts were getting dull with mud and grass stains, much to May's dismay.

One day May decided to wash both sets and that left him without any other clothes to wear. He would've spent the whole day in his pajamas if May didn't force him into the clothes we got for him. They were a bit on the big size for him but we figured it was best to get something he was going to grow into. He whined and fussed and complained of course, but May set him straight. He nearly took all his clothes off before she spanked him. With sensitive kids like Logan ya always gotta wonder whether spanking him is really the best way to go. I always thought twice about it and that always stopped me. But there are times when ya gotta do it and it's the best if you get it over with. Kids remember the physical stuff the most.

Chapter 12

Let me tell you about the time Logan came home with a puppy. He was about six then. He was walking home from school and when he got in the door there was a dog in his arms. That pup was a good dog. It was a sort of rowdy one but he liked licking Logan's face like crazy and wagging its tail; I waited in my chair while Logan tottered in. I was on sick leave from work. I was working on fixing the church roof and I fell off, broke my leg but it wasn't too bad. Maybe I'll tell you that story later. Anyway, Logan waddled into the living room from school with the dog in his arms. He was asking me if he could keep it. I thought it wasn't a bad idea but May would've had a cow.

May was in the office again, this time trying to figure out computer things. Sounded like frustrating work from the way she grumbled in there. Like a dragon in a cave. So I told Logan:

“Why don't you set 'em in the backyard and I'll talk to Auntie May for ya.”

He dropped his little back-pack from his shoulders and ran to the backyard. I called for May because my leg was still hurting too much for moving. She walked in all huffy and puffy but I didn't pay any mind. I knew what she was mad at, didn't have anything to do with me.

“What is it?” She said.

“I wanna talk to you about somethin'.”

I motioned for her to come sit with me but she stood there in front of me like it wasn't even an option.

“What is it?” She asked again.

“Logan wants to get a puppy.”

“I know. I don’t want a puppy. We already have a baby to take care of. We don’t need a puppy.”

“It can’t be that much work, May-be baby.” I tried to put as much charm in my smile as I could.

She only narrowed her eyes at me.

“What did you do? You got a dog without telling me?”

“No. *I* didn’t, but uh... Logan found one.”

“No! We are not keeping it!”

“Aw, come on Honey! You didn’t even see it yet!”

“I don’t need to see it!”

She called Logan in from the backyard and he came in carrying the dog. He’s a smart kid; he knew he had a better chance of winning with the puppy in his arms.

“Please, Auntie May! I wanna keep the puppy! Pleeceeeeeease?”

There was a tense pause while May thought it over. I was hoping Logan’s pleading would sway her.

She took a good long look at the puppy in Logan’s arms and caved saying that Logan could keep it if he did most of the work in taking care of it. He was real excited to have a puppy. But I was just hoping May wouldn’t change her mind like she was liable to do. Logan kept his

word for the most part he even gave the puppy a bath on the first night. He made a hell of a mess doing it but at least he wasn't dropping his responsibility. The sad part was that the puppy wasn't just a mutt off the street. He belonged to a family outside of town who lost him. On the way to work I found a poster with all the information on it. It was tough to do the right thing and take the pup back, but he was happy to see his family again and that's what mattered. Logan didn't leave his room for a couple of hours after taking the puppy back.

There wasn't a way to convince May to get Logan a new dog. She was almost relieved. Though that's not to say she didn't feel bad for Logan. I tried to cheer him up as best I could.

"Maybe I can convince Auntie May to get ya a cat or a hamster."

"I don't like cats! And what's a hamster?"

"Well they're uh... kinda like rats, they're small and furry and they make funny noises."

"How funny?"

"Well get yer shoes on and I'll take ya to the pet shop to show you."

The pet shop didn't have very much to offer, they had some gold fish, some parrots, and mice but there weren't very many animals, aside from the fish, that May would approve of. I was hoping for a rabbit or something that both Logan and May wouldn't mind. They didn't have to like it at first, because I had the feeling that furry creatures always had a way of getting on your good side.

We perused all the cages and tanks; I decided to watch the turtles slowly crawl towards their meal while Logan wandered around looking. He seemed to be having a blast which made my job easier. I could see him past the turtles through the tank and smiled. His darting from

cage to cage made the turtles look like they were standing still. Logan spent a lot of time looking around until he found a particular animal he liked. I wasn't sure what it was at first but when I went to get a closer look I was kind of surprised. They had a box of pygmy hedgehogs in the shop. They were probably the most exotic pet they had in there. I remember something about them becoming a popular pet in the 80's but I never got into it. I didn't really see why anyone could just get a dog or a cat instead. Logan seemed to like them a lot. He kept reaching in to touch the little points on their backs. I was already thinking of some way to explain all this to May when we got home. The man in the shop asked if Logan wanted to hold one, of course he said yes. What kid would say no?

I didn't want to make May mad by bringing a pet home out of the blue but that's what we did anyway. I figured that it was such a tiny little thing that it wouldn't take much looking after so May wouldn't have a cow. I was wrong.

“What did you do!?! You gave him another pet? You didn't even think to ask me?”

“It's not that big, plus he knows how to take care of it, Honey.”

“What is it?”

Logan lifted up the cage to show May his new pet.

“It's a hedgehog! I named it Fred!” He exclaimed.

“Oh great,” May didn't sound very enthusiastic, “And who's going to get stuck takin' care of it?”

“Me?” Logan said.

He wasn't too sure about the house politics that were going on around him so I scooted him along to the stairs and said:

“Why don't ya show your new little buddy your room while I talk to Auntie May, okay?”

“Okay.” Logan was hopefully oblivious when he went up the stairs.

May was staring me down.

I put on my best smile and tried to look innocent even though I knew May was going to be mad when I bought Logan that pet. I stirred up my courage and spoke first before May had a chance to chew me up.

“You should've seen the look on his sweet lil face when he saw it, Honey. It would've melted yer heart away.”

“Well I didn't see, so if that's your whole defense I suggest you pack your bags for the dog-house.”

“Aw, May! It's only a little hedgehog! He can take care of it by himself, I'll even get on his case about it if that's what it takes!”

“Why are you so hell-bent on getting him a pet?”

“Because he needs the responsibility. He needs something in the real world to keep him from spending all his time staring at the computer screen!”

May sighed and stared at the couch for a second.

“Alright,” she said. “But if it gets loose in the house it's your job to find it.”

“It won’t get lost in the house.” I had a good laugh about that.

On the first day of keeping Fred in the house we lost him. Logan thought it was a good idea to let him out of the cage to play and he ran out of Logan’s hands and into his closet. He must have spent a good long time trying to get Fred out of there because I didn’t find out about it until after dinner.

“So Logan, do you like your new pet?” I asked.

“Yeah...”

He didn’t make any eye contact, he was guilty but I thought it was because he didn’t take care of Fred like he was supposed to.

“You know you’re supposed to feed him everyday right?”

“Mmhm.”

“So what’s the matter? Do you want help taking care of him?”

“He’s hiding in my closet.”

“WHAT!?” May exclaimed from the kitchen. “I knew it! I knew you’d lose it! Loo, why did you get him a pet like that?”

Typical May, it’s always *my* fault.

“Relax, Honey, I’ll take care of it.”

Logan sat in his seat as quietly as he could, he didn’t want Auntie May taking away his pet or his dessert.

When I finished my dinner I went upstairs into Logan's room just in time to watch Fred skitter out the door and into the hall closet. Now I was really in trouble. May didn't like rodents hiding where she stored things. I didn't either but at least it was just Fred. I opened up the closet and sat down on the floor to get a better look at where he'd gone. No luck. I tried poking around for him behind the box of sewing stuff and out he ran. Those things are really fast once you scare them enough. Luckily Logan was watching close by and caught him. I don't think Fred was too happy about that because he leaked all over his hand. I warned Logan never to let Fred out of his cage without supervision again. He nodded his head but he did the same thing a week later.

When we found the little sucker again, Logan decided he'd build a little play box for him. At least then it would keep Fred out of trouble and Logan would get some lessons in building stuff. I treasure all these memories even when they're a little faded around the corners. I can still feel proud of how Logan grew and is growing up, and though I'm an old man at the end of my life these little parts of my life keep my creaky bones moving and my worn heart pounding.

Qualifications of Investigator:

I, as the investigator of literary fiction and the element of truth in fiction writing, am qualified to research this topic. I have dedicated my entire college career to the pursuit of gaining knowledge about the literary world and what it means to be a good writer.

Qualifications of Advisors:

Susan Kirtley earned her M.A. from Boise State University, and a PH.D. from the University of Massachusetts. She has written and published many works including a book titled *Lynda Barry: Girlhood through the Looking Glass*. Professor Kirtley is my primary advisor and has been working with me to refine my entire thesis.

Susan Reese earned an MFA from Pacific University, and has been teaching college English courses and creative writing courses for 23 years and is an undergraduate advisor to English major students. She has been my advisor for the Introduction section of my thesis.

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