THE WINDS OF APRIL

By

FRED W. CAUSLEY

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Oklahoma State University

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Thesis approved:

Gordon Weaver
Thesis Adviser

Edward P. Walkiewicz

Linda Leavell

Norman N. Durham
Dean of the Graduate College

1290893

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INTRODUCTION

Oklahoma was a land of green profusion, a magic land of running creeks edged with huge hardwood trees that were roped with hanging vines. It was a land of new creatures, such as terrapins that could shut their doors to the world, poisonous snakes that rattled no warning, and long, skinny fish possessed with the teeth of a crosscut saw. That's the way it appeared to me as a child, each time my mother and I made one of our many visits "back home" from Arizona. I was born in Oklahoma, and thus felt a kinship with the state which grew with each visit. And two of the strongest interests evolving from that kinship over the years came to be farming and the weather.

My grandfather owned a small farm in central Oklahoma, where he raised hogs, hay, sorghum, a few cows, peanuts, and corn. I rode with him on the seat of his "Johnny Popper," a tall, old, green tractor, and steered. We picked corn, stacked hay, and made molasses during my visits. There were many cousins to make the days fun, and there were huge meals topped with watermelon. My grandfather died while I was back on a visit, and it enabled me to see past the man and look at his life; at how he depended on the soil, on other peo-

ple, very much on himself, and especially on the weather.

The bully waiting behind the fence for me was always the weather. Even as we packed for a visit, my mother would fret about "twisters," hail, high winds, and lightning. Naturally, I grew fearful. It made me notice that adults in Oklahoma spent a lot of time concerned about the weather. If the smallest dark cloud drew near, my mother, aunts, and grandmother gathered the children close for rapid mobilization to the storm cellar.

As a young man traveling Highway 66 between Arizona and Oklahoma, the huge wheat fields west of Amarillo and on into Oklahoma appeared to me just as the song described: "like amber waves of grain." Looking on such a sight, it was unbelievable to me that this area of the world was once more barren and less productive than large parts of the Arizona desert. Yet some six million square miles of it was absolutely desolate, ruined land during the infamous Dust Bowl. I came to feel that there was a story here of courage and stubborn pride that would not be broken.

John Steinbeck wrote <u>The Grapes of Wrath</u> with the intention of speaking out on a social problem as well as writing a good story. He did both eloquently. Much has been said about Steinbeck's inaccuracies--that the Joad's farm was far removed from the Dust Bowl, that there was never a

farm tractor made (then or now) that could plow a house under, and that wheat and cotton were the money crops being raised in most parts of Oklahoma, not corn. Many people in and from Oklahoma were not at all happy with Steinbeck. The Daily Oklahoman ran editorials against the book and displayed a cartoon of a farmer watching a meek Steinbeck chew on a copy of his book. The farmer was saying, "Now, eat every durn word of it."

What Steinbeck did accurately was to portray a poignant picture of a mass exodus of the American population and its inherent ills. His story leaves Oklahoma with the Joads. They are the "Okies" who went west.

My effort is to look at the "Okies" who stayed behind and, in particular, to look at those trying to exist in the heart of the Dust Bowl. I have read The Grapes of Wrath three times and enjoyed it more with each reading. It is, in my opinion, a piece of Americana that tells the plight of a mass of people, regardless of how accurate the details may be. Secondly, my story is not aimed at correcting any inaccuracies Steinbeck may have penned through the use of creative license or through outright ignorance of a subject as complicated as farming. My effort here is intended to be taken as a fictional work for reading enjoyment, and should serve as a fairly accurate historical, and

perhaps, a sociological story of "Okies" who stayed home.

Because I have been intrigued with Steinbeck's form in _The Grapes of Wrath_, I chose to emulate his structure somewhat. The short chapters in his work that are set apart from the dialogue and character action are used to "set the stage" and to bring symbolism to the story. I have emulated this approach, but only by bringing in chapters that will enlighten the reader for the ensuing story line involving the characters. For instance, I feel that one cannot truly appreciate life in Oklahoma until he or she is aware that the weather is a factor. This is true for all Oklahomans, not just for farmers. If you plan something so simple as a picnic in this part of the world and don't plan ahead for excess wind, sun, or rain, the chances are good you won't have the best time you ever experienced. Imagine trying to farm under such varying conditions, and having your entire livelihood depend upon the results. That is the reason for Chapter I.

There are three chapters in my work aimed at presenting information outside of the story proper. Beginning with Chapter I, the idea is to explain what causes the weather patterns in this part of the world and to give an idea of what farmers really do have to contend with here. I wanted to provide answers to questions a reader might have concern-

ing the weather here. For instance, why is Great Plains weather so unpredictable? And why do thunderstorms and tornadoes form so violently here?

I already knew some of the answers to these questions and to other questions needed to write the story, but I felt more authority was needed to portray even a reasonably accurate picture. As a result, I researched meteorological journals, material from the National Storms Laboratory in Norman, Oklahoma, government bulletins, and articles in general magazines such as _Life_ and _Reader's Digest_.

Yet another very useful source for Chapter I and for anecdotes within the story are a gathering of "storm yarns," a subject that would make a complete book in its own right. Uncle John, with his fascination with "hell-fire and damnation" storms, his comment on coming out of the cellar to see a well done job of destruction, and his eating chicken dinners when the rest of the family went to the cellar, is a composite of people I knew.

Chapter IV explains natural phenomena developing the unique ecological system that resulted in the development of the Great Plains of the United States. Chapter IV also looks at the man-made conditions that resulted in nearly destroying the plains. Nature provided only an extended drouth. The winds were always present but brought no threat to the land

until man's neglect allowed them to reach below the sod.

The events occurring on the plains were bigger than anyone could see without benefit of hindsight. My picture is by no means complete because there were so many facets interplaying that the full story would require a large book. A main concern I have is that the reader see the picture of how the Dust Bowl originated and the destruction it caused. It was also my intention to use the Dust Bowl to demonstrate that a crippled agriculture will usually always mean a crippled nation.

The last such section, Chapter VIII, deals with the recovery from the Dust Bowl. Even though most were working toward their own goals, they were after a common end--to settle the plains and make them productive. Yet the end result was that they were actually creating the destruction of the Great Plains. That process had to be recognized and then reversed.

While this chapter details some of the steps taken toward recovery (and there were many more discussed here), it shows that none were very successful until the rugged individualism of the farmer gave way to a team effort. Once this occurred, recovery was rapid.

Perhaps no one man really had a better overall view of

the needs of the times than Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was Roosevelt's own idea to plant trees on the plains, both to stop the wind and to provide jobs. Many of the recovery plans were unpopular with farmers, who could not see the end result of the effort. My own grandfather, after having found a Roosevelt sticker on my mother's car, gave her the choice of taking the sticker off of her bumper or of getting her car off his farm. Being as stubborn as he, and having just voted for the first time in her life, she chose the latter. He could only remember the government men coming out to his farm and shooting his hogs because they were too numerous, and the money they left did not soothe the hatred he felt for the man he held responsible.

The point made here is that relations between the government and the landowners did not always go smoothly. Without the efforts of two groups of dedicated workers--the Cooperative Extension agents in each county, and the Soil Conservation agents--many government efforts would have failed. They are indeed unsung heroes of the day.

These people brought harmony to the agricultural scene by benefit of having the training needed and by being (usually) from farm backgrounds themselves. My background has provided me the opportunity of meeting and interviewing some of these untiring persons who actually lived through

this period, helping farmers recover from the Depression and the Dust Bowl. The small space given in this work to Jerry Harper and Matthew Carlisle's career in the Soil Conservation Service is by no means indicative of the importance such people had in the restoration of the land.

Matthew chose the Oklahoma A&M college for obvious reasons. He was interested in agriculture, and he was an Oklahoman. I chose that institution for less obvious reasons. Being an agricultural graduate from there myself (it changed to Oklahoma State University in 1957), I naturally thought of it first out of bias. Aside from that, it is an important institution nationally in agriculture. At the time of this story's setting, there were several scientists of international reputation working in soil science and with drought resistant varieties of plants at A&M, and particularly with wheat.

The character of Delbert Hoskins represents several types of persons who fared worse than others while trying to live and work through the frustrations of the times. In Hoskins are seen the ills caused by the wind, dust, and financial stress. Hoskins suffers from "dust pneumonia." Many people died from lung-related diseases caused by breathing the dust. Eye and dental problems were also prevalent. As hard as it is for us to imagine, there was simply no way

to keep the dust out of food and water, or even off of bedding. Hoskins' madness is another malady that was common. Many people could not bear the continual onslaught of blowing dust, hard work, and poverty. Their sense of humor failed them; they often became suspicious and surly toward their neighbors, and many lost their religious faith.

Hoskins' inability to bear up under the strain of the times shows him to be--in spite of his size and physical strength--a weak person. His eventual breakdown and demise is intended to illustrate the result of continuing a course of individualism to the point that it is self-destructive. Only in death can he reach back and ask someone--Matthew--for help. He is rewarded for this last act by becoming a part of the Carlisle family.

I know little about the Shoshone tribe, other than that they were superb horsemen and did have deep consideration for their horses. One of their rituals upon the death of a warrior was to destroy the man's horse and place its carcass along with other possessions at the burial site. Much ritual surrounded the horse in the life of the plains Indians, and my connection between Matthew's horse and Hoskins' beliefs is, though fictional in origin, still plausible. The goal I hoped to attain using this approach was to make Hoskins seem to be caught between genuine mad-

madness and a deep belief in his own boyhood teachings.

It is my wish that the reader not only enjoy this story, but learn to appreciate some of the trials our fellow countrymen have gone through in developing this land. Thus, in a sense, the work is somewhat historical. Even though farmers are the protagonists of this story, it was not my intention to tout them as a special sort of people because they provide food, work hard, and till the soil. Ultimately, they are only trying to earn a living. Railroad workers toiled fiercely to develop this land and gave farmers a market for their produce. The same is true of road builders, truck drivers, and other tradesmen. Businessmen risk ruin daily to expand markets and loan capital.

But farmers are the ones who faced the teeth of the dust storms. They lived with the wind, watched their crops die and, with the help of many, hung on determinedly to resurrect the land. For that, they _are_ heroes. For that I give them my admiration and thanks, and hope that this effort will do them some justice.

Fred W. Causley

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CHAPTER I

The sun's rays penetrate eighty feet into the oceans it crosses along the equator. The sky becomes a sponge, soaking up immeasurable tons of water a minute through evaporation. Air currents, heated by the closeness of the sun, begin a humid, laborious ascent. As they climb, they absorb the rising moisture as body, as form, like warm, damp ghosts rising from the sea. Because the trade winds on each side of the equator move in opposing directions, vast areas of dead calm are created between them. The ocean becomes a great plain of glass, marred only occasionally by the double splash of flying fish leaving and entering the water. The calms in this area of the world are known as the Doldrums, where sailing ships of old were stranded for weeks without wind. At first the seamen cursed, then hoped and worried, then prayed desperately for their sails to lift with the life-giving motion they needed.

The ghostly air currents rise on invisible elevators through noiseless shafts of air, their bodies cooling five and a half degrees for every thousand feet of elevation.

They take shape as they cool, given form through condensation, glistening white on the sun side, gloomy, watery gray underneath. If the Doldrums hold, the ghostly bodies fatten and burst, spilling to the sea as torrential tropical rain. They fall, plumb-strings of water for want of wind.

Relieved of the moisture, much of the air continues rising. Following the curvature of the atmosphere, it migrates north in the northern hemisphere, slowly moving eastward as it goes, due to the rotation of the earth. About a third of the way up the earth, increasing coolness causes the leading air mass to slow and sink. Air from the rear continues to flow in, forming great pressure. This pressure forces the air masses downward to meet the rotating earth once more, and they are sent briskly to the southwest. This phenomenon creates the lively trade winds which once gladdened the hearts of sailing captains and cheered sailors to song. Their work load was greatly lessened as the sails caught one long, continuous push from the northeast.

The 30th parallel seems to be a dividing line for the trade winds, with air rising and again turning northward. Condensing and falling north of this line, the air masses move continually to the northeast, and are called the prevailing easterlies. These are the winds that carry spring rains to the southern United States, to California and the Atlantic seaboard. Without mountains to interfere,

and without repeated invasions of cold air from the north, the prevailing easterlies would bring a Shangri-La of weather conditions to the United States: rain, clear skies,and steady temperatures in a predictable cycle. Where the trade winds and the prevailing easterlies separate along the 30th parallel, areas of great calm may again be formed on the sea. These are the Horse Latitudes, named during the sailing days because of the bodies of horses littering the waters following the long calms. As ships ran out of feed and water, many horses were killed or starved and were tossed overboard. But the atmosphere is never still for long. One part may be still, while other parts continue to rise, expand, and continue northward.

The ultimate goal of the restless, tumultuous atmosphere is the North Pole, or, less precisely, the Arctic Circle. Here the atmosphere is so intensely cold that air condenses and becomes heavy. Under great pressure, it is forced downward, moving in terrific gale force winds, heading southward out of the arctic to the northern lands of the world. By November, the icy winds have invaded the United States, wrapping more than half the nation in seasonal robes of frost, ice, and rain. These polar fronts move farther and farther south with each month of winter, even though the winter solstice has passed on December 21. This is because the great land masses have cooled, holding temp-

eratures down, allowing the migrating arctic air masses to retain their cold breath until they hang like icy drapes far down the wall of the continent. As they move, they hug the topography, which is continually declining in overall altitude. Unless mountain chains interfere, the great fronts warm five and a half degrees for each thousand feet of elevation they descend. The result is condensation. The moisture absorbs this warmth, storing it in water molecules as latent heat. As this moisture is added to the front, the cold changes it to snow, or ice glaze, or cold spring rains.

These are Chinooks, the fronts that bring misery to winter in the northern tier of states. The wetness brings colds and pneumonia. Cattle stand belly deep in mud for weeks at a time, because just enough moisture and warmth has been added to break the frozen grip of the soil. Real trouble begins when the great cold fronts meet the warm moisture-laden fronts coming from the southern oceans.

In the spring, warm squall lines in the Gulf of Mexico force shrimpers to up nets and race for the safety of port. At the same time, polar squall lines are gusting southward, forcing Eskimos and their sled teams to fight terribly to make the last few miles home. It is the vast battleground of the Great Plains where these phenomena of nature usually mix.

The land mass circling from the Florida Keys to the Yucatan Peninsula juts below the 30th parallel north of the equator like a gigantic open fist dipping into the waters of the Caribbean. Within this grip is the Gulf of Mexico, where the Gulf Stream carries the frigid blood of mighty icebergs from arctic seas. As the hot spring sun penetrates the gulf's surface, great mountains of water make the transition from liquid to gas and climb skyward. Rising rapidly, they cool and move toward land, spawning storms and even hurricanes which sweep coastward, raking the land masses with torrential rains and destructive winds.

As the spring storms begin moving inland, marlin fishermen sit dejectedly behind their beers, watching clouds obscure hopes of moving onto the ocean. Tourists who cannot swim or tan, due to the weather, walk along windswept beaches between warm showers, making the best of the time they have before returning home. As the fronts move northward, they are elevated by the gradual rising contour of the land ahead. Again, they are cooled five and a half degrees for every thousand feet of rise in elevation.

By the time the moisture-laden clouds reach the northern half of Texas, or the southern half of Oklahoma, the two opposite fronts will meet. At first, only a thin wedge of warm air seeps under the rapidly moving cold front. Then a wider wedge is forced in, and nature itself seems to creak,

like the splitting of tight wood under each blow of a maul. Then the fronts collide. Hovering over one area, they gain and fall, grunting; enormous ghosts struggling to master one another. At other times they whirl, feint, and lock together, like heavyweights seeking a death hold.

Nature has decreed that cold air must fall and warm air must rise. When warm air is forced underneath cold air, the result is the creation of one of the most spectacular and powerful events in the chain of the atmosphere: a thunderstorm. At first, thin, wispy layers of ice crystals etch the sky with an artist's touch. These are cirrus clouds, often characterized by mare's tails and are peaceful in their own right. But they signal the arrival of cold, high winds and a predictable change in weather. Indians learned the meaning of each cloud formation and used the knowledge to protect themselves from the elements.

A day or two after the appearance of the cirrus clouds, southern skies may carry high cirrostratus clouds, and the familiar ring around the moon may be evident. These clouds build into irregular, small puffs of dark, pouting clouds that appear ready to weep if they but had the force to gather and create a body from which to weep. If there is little or no vertical movement at the time, they condense and form stratus clouds, which range the northern approaches to the Great Plains at altitudes varying from the earth's

surface to 6,500 feet. Only fine drizzle can fall from cirrostratus clouds, because they lack vertical air movement within. As the wind picks up, or as the heating of the earth causes air ascension, stratus clouds take shape, coll-ecting into dark nimbostratus clouds, which are true rain clouds. They look and smell wet, with their undersides hanging low, heavy streaks of rain joining clouds and ground in various places.

Fluffy, white cumulus clouds are usually the forerunner of fair weather and warmer temperatures. But they cluster together at times until they have formed huge cumulonimbus clouds. These are magnificent thunderheads, with bases that may almost touch the ground and violent updrafts in their midsections that carry the tops to 75,000 feet. As they reach maturity, upper atmosphere jet streams carry their tops away, forming the flat, "anvil" appearance that unmis-takably marks their beautiful but deadly nature.

A mass of cumulus clouds becomes a thunderhead when the air currents inside it extend the cloud upward to 25,000 feet. As more warm air is forced under a cold front, more and more condensation occurs and air masses explode violent-ly into motion. As the height of a cloud increases to 40,000 feet, upper air temperatures can fall to 60 degrees below zero, with updrafts raging between 100 and 200 miles an hour. The cloud is now mature. Because of the increas-

ing altitude and the invading arctic air mass, the updrafted air is cooled almost as fast as it arrives, instantly forming downdrafts of equally terrific wind forces.

Moving at tremendous wind speeds and under great pressures, ice particles and rain drops pick off stray electrons from each other, losing and gaining opposite electrical charges, until a huge field of polarity is built up within the cloud. Suddenly, as much as 30 million volts of electricity discharges at 100,000 amperes across the sky. Lightening! Enough electricity in a single stroke to run a large city for weeks! As the storm cloud matures, it sinks under its own massive weight and lightning bolts begin reaching out to opposite charges on the ground. Thin leader strokes leave the cloud, followed instantaneously by huge return strokes from the ground. Trees and poles in the path of attraction explode as if they had been blown apart by dynamite. The sudden intensive heating burns a vacuum in the cool, wet air. The walls of the vacuum rush together, colliding with a sound that could be taken for the very handclap of God. The deafening shock wave can be heard for miles in advance of the storm. As clouds have spoken their rumbling language to awed humanity through the ages, they were given names which meant the same in all languages: thunderstorm.

The droplets making up the body of a cloud are no more

than 1/2500th of an inch in diameter. As great air pressures begin to work them together, they crash into one another and are carried rapidly upward, cooling and condensing together. By the time they have grown ten times their initial size, they are considered raindrops, large enough to fall from the sky under normal conditions. Sometimes rocketing elevators of air lift the raindrops past the freezing areas high in the cloud and they become tiny hailstones, or sleet. They begin to fall, or are caught in the downward elevator and are hurtled through large areas of supercooled rain. Water adheres instantly to the icy sides of the sleet, creating hailstones which rapidly grow in size as layer on layer of frozen rain is added. When cut across, hailstones resemble the layers of an onion. This up and down process can continue until hailstones of immense size are formed, capable of demolishing autos, tearing holes in roofs, even capable of killing luckless creatures caught out of shelter.

When warm meets cold on the doorstep of the Great Plains, all of these cloud types are present at one time or another. They are created, destroyed, recreated and destroyed again, until they become part of one large, slowly rotating system known as a cyclone. These are storm systems that may be 200 to 300 miles in diameter, rotating counterclockwise in the northern hemisphere, and usually moving in a northeasterly direction. Within several fronts caught up in

this great mass may be many extremely violent thunderstorms, each ironically capable of bringing death and destruction along with its life-giving gift of rain.

For reasons not yet fully understood, the land mass north of the Gulf of Mexico lends itself to the formation of tornadoes. Perhaps it is the gradually ascending topography from the Mississippi River westward and from the Gulf of Mexico northward that is duplicated in few places elsewhere in the world. Perhaps it is the warm, moist air continually moving in from the land-locked Gulf of Mexico, which finds movements of arctic air at precise elevations. Whatever the reasons, tornadoes occur often enough in this area of the world to be the most feared and misunderstood of thunderstorm phenomena.

Somewhere within the dark, writhing, ghostly mass of a squall line, warm, rapidly rising air collides with a cooled air mass speeding downward. The result is violently rotating air, moving at about 100 to 200 miles per hour. Electrical charges are raked off by the sheer friction of water whirling against water. As the spinning forces more and more electrons to opposite sides of the cloud, a gigantic electrical field is formed, with the tumbling air mass caught in the center. As millions of volts of electricity line up in opposing charges on each side of the cloud, the effect is analagous to switching on an electric motor. Suddenly, the

air mass is power driven, and the horizontal rotation reaches incredible speeds.

The first hint people usually have of a tornado is a small "hook" hanging from the thick mammaries lining the underbelly of a thunderhead. As the funnel speed increases, the dip becomes a hook, then grows into a snaking, elongated funnel feeding on its own power, growing in size and speed each minute it lives. By now it roars with a voice of continual thunder, and the airspeeds within it are essentially immeasurable by man. Winds of 600 miles an hour have been clocked inside such a funnel, but the instruments used were destroyed before the readings were completed. The funnel quickly thickens on contact with the earth, reducing its forward speed to 45 or 50 miles an hour. With winds swirling so violently around the outside of the funnel, air pressure within the center drops radically. If a closed building withstands the force of the rotating wind and makes it to the center, it is exploded by the difference in outside pressure and air trapped inside the dwelling.

Most tornado damage stories have a degree of validity. Straws have been driven into trees and posts, and two by fours have impaled concrete walls. Ponds have been sucked dry, only to be dumped elsewhere, causing frightened observers to believe it was raining frogs and fish. Houses have been reversed on their foundations with little other damage.

Every tornado spawns its own incredible stories to be passed on from generation to generation.

The people of the Great Plains states have learned to live with little day to day concern for tornadoes. But they are not foolish, either. When these states were being settled and doctors and hospitals were few, storm cellars were often built before permanent homesteads were complete. The frequency of tornadoes increases in the spring, from early April to late June. In an area bordered on the west by a line from eastern New Mexico to the central Dakotas, and on the east by a line from western Louisiana to eastern Illinois, the frequency of these powerful storms have earned the land the name Tornado Alley.

CHAPTER II

Matthew Carlisle saw the boar squirrel's tail flicker spasmodically. The war of nerves was almost over. With a sudden, effortless jerk of his body, the squirrel darted half a foot farther up the pecan and peered cautiously over the top of a limb, just where it forked from the main trunk. Matthew watched the little head come into view, peering back at him as he sighted along the length of the octagonal barrel. The squirrel never heard the spat of the little pump .22. The slug beat the sound to the animal and caught him just below the eye. Dead instantly, his body floated limply from the branch to the underbrush below.

The young man didn't particularly enjoy killing squirrels or any other game. To him, it was a practical and essential part of his livelihood. It was food for his family; more particularly, meat for their table. He ejected the spent cartridge from his rifle and pushed in another with a quick backward and forward movement of the wooden forestock under the barrel of the little Remington. Methodically, he gently let the hammer all the way down, then cocked it a quarter-inch back to set the safety. Placing the rifle carefully in a redbud fork, he waded into the buckbrush growing thickly under the dripline of the

large pecan. He located the squirrel, noted it was a clean kill and slipped its tail under his belt to hang at his side with two others.

One more and we'll have a mess for supper, he thought.

Matthew removed the heavy felt hat he wore winter and summer, and mopped sweat from the area on his forehead above the red mark made by the hatband. Looking up through the pecan leaves, he took stock of the day. "Pa was right, as usual, about the weather," he thought. Earlier that day, in the wagon on the way to church, Calvin Carlisle had warned his family it was going to be a day to watch the horizon for clouds.

"Won't see much til afternoon," Calvin had said. "But it'll start clabberin' up about three or four. You kids don't stray too far from home today, especially you, Luke."

Luke was next to the youngest of the four Carlisle boys, whom Mary Carlisle had named for the Books of the Apostles: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Luke was fourteen and a dreamer and nature lover. That was a bad combination when he was supposed to be getting chores done, but chanced to see a gopher snake downing a mouse. An hour could get by and Calvin usually found Luke on his belly, watching some critter or other go about its business. Worse than that, he would wander off farther than he meant to, engaged in some observation of nature, such as watching kit foxes play along

the side of a gully north of the Carlisle place. Luke was often caught too far from the house when company was expected, or dinner was on, or worse, when a storm was coming. It worried his parents that Luke might get caught out in a bad storm some day.

Matthew remembered hot spring days like this one that had been followed by what Uncle John called, "Real hell fire and damnation clouds." Uncle John was really Matthew's mother's uncle but the whole family referred to him and his wife as simply "Aunt Sarah and Uncle John." They had moved into the small soddy behind the big Carlisle house when Uncle John became too old to work the railroad. He insisted on living in the soddy rather than the big house and on earning his keep as the family mechanic and hired hand.

Uncle John prided himself on not being one to "run to the fraidy hole ever time a cloud passed in front of the sun." He liked to see the family off to the cellar on a bad night--particularly just before dinner--and then eat all the chicken he could force himself to hold. When the family returned, he would gloat, "Why, you folks left it. I thought you didn't want it." Twice he got old Rock and Rowdy, the Carlisle's mixed-breed hounds, to help him with the chore and told the family he had eaten it all. He also loved to describe the wind, and the way the house rocked and the lightning cracked close by during a storm. Calvin would

often sit with him, mainly to keep him out of mischief, but also to get him in the cellar if things really got rough.

Carefully, quietly, Matthew moved on down the bottom, farther from the road leading to the house. His eyes traced the elevated pathways of limbs from various squirrel nests to the ground and back again, watching for the flicker of gray that marked a male. He tried his best to shoot only males in the spring. It was late April and the females would have young to nurse. Matthew had literally planned and managed a squirrel crop in this stand of woods for several years by thinning out males in the spring and females in fall and winter. He could see the gray backs of the males much quicker than the reddish backs of the females anyway. His trained eye could even distinguish a young male, and he would often hold his shot hoping for one a little older.

When he was another 200 yards or so from his last kill, he sat with his back against the trunk of a hackberry. Matthew liked the raspy bark of this tree for leaning against, because he could scratch like an old bear until his itchy, sweaty back was relieved. Being quite still now, he went into his waiting period. His method was infallible. The squirrels knew when something was amiss in the woods and either stayed in the nests or hugged a limb, just watching and listening. But their energetic metabolism only

allowed them so much inertia. Then, like Matthew's back, they had to be relieved. Knowing this, Matthew would wait, then watch them begin to play and gather nuts. Young males and females played courting games and tag amid the tangle of underbrush, pausing to crack and munch an acorn or pecan, then dash up a tree with the remainder. They often played close to Matthew's boots, and even climbed the hackberry from the backside, to peer down at him, or to drop nuts on him.

Eventually, a large gray would cautiously join the youngsters. They were immediately recognizable not only for their size, but by their apparent seriousness. With sharp warning chirps, they would scatter the smaller males, and make overtures at the females. This time, Matthew raised the Remington just after one of these grays made his appearance and had become a little bolder. The movement caused the squirrel to retreat rapidly to the back side of the nearest tree, only to halt and begin fighting the curiosity that would cause him to take that fatal look. Matthew saw the gray head, the bright shiny eye being his first target. In this manner no meat would be wasted from bullet damage and the animals didn't suffer. The little pump .22 barked, and the gray plopped limply at the base of the tree.

At the edge of the woods, just before stepping out onto the road at the edge of the lower pasture, Matthew paused.

He patted the four squirrels at his belt and stopped to admire the beauty of the last redbud blossoms clinging to a branch now leafing with green.

"Thank you, God, for these thy gifts," he thought to himself, then turned and walked out into the roadway. Tipping the brim of his hat to block the afternoon sun, Matthew followed the curving road until it paralleled the railroad tracks running past the south side of the Carlisle farm.

Calvin Carlisle stopped his neighbor in mid-sentence. He and Delbert Hoskins had been sitting on the porch steps, haggling over the cost of a milk cow Hoskins had for sale.

"Listen Del. That was Matthew's little Remington. That makes four. With that fat old setting hen that went off her laying, by Hell, we'll have us a real Sunday dinner. Why don't you figure on sittin down with us?"

It seemed to Calvin that Hoskins was always suspicious. Looking a little surprised, Hoskins' thick, dark eyebrows worked at the ends, resembling two fat caterpillars trying in vain to crawl toward each other.

"Price'll still be the same, Carlisle. Don't make exceptions fer friends, specially when it comes to tradin," Hoskins said, cocking his eyes sideways, with his head down a little. Calvin knew Hoskins was watching for his reaction.

Calvin flushed with irritation, but considered the source and held his tongue. "Shit, Del, I didn't mean that. Just wanted to know if you'd care to get some good food in you for a change."

Hoskins' wife had died several years earlier, and each year the man seemed to grow more surly and suspicious of others. Calvin tried to keep on the good side of him because they owned adjoining farms.

"Reckon you got enough? How you know that boy of yours hit them critters? He only spent four shells. Yer wife might git sore if you short your family bringing in outsiders 'thout no warnin'."

Calvin's good nature returned. He saw a chance, and wheels in his head clicked. "Hoskins, I say Matthew's got four squirrels. Look yonder, he's coming out of the woods. Tell you what, you're wanting $18 for that milk cow of yours. If that boy's got any less than four squirrels, I'll give you a dollar more for that cow for each squirrel he's short."

Hoskins' eyes brightened with interest.

"But if he's got'em, then you'll knock four dollars more off that cow. What do you say?"

Hoskins' small, dark eyes seemed to be studying the hump on his large nose.

"Naw," he said, "You know that kid better'n I do.

Chances are good he got his four."

Now Calvin was enjoying himself. He had his man backing up, but interested. "Okay, Del. Suit yourself. But I was fixin' to pick the spot for you to boot."

The farmer's eyes widened. "You mean to tell me where he hit'em?"

"Sure do, by Hell. I says each one of them squirrels has been hit right behind or below their eye. Can't say which eye though," Calvin topped his sentence with a concerned, almost doubtful look, and Hoskins took the bait.

"All right, Carlisle. You're on. But you're gonna have to add a couple more dollars onto that cow, I'll tell you that right now."

The two men waited patiently while Matthew walked the distance from the woods to the south pasture fence. They saw him thread through the barb wire fence to save following the road up, and making the wide turn into the hallway of tall cedars lining each side of the drive. As they waited, the men made small talk, Calvin chewing and spitting, Hoskins rolling a smoke.

Matthew had started angling toward the back of the house, where he intended to clean his game, when he saw his father wave for him. He looked back to the southwest as he walked, then paused to scan the brightly lighted array of cumulus clouds stretching the width of the horizon. They

lay like great rolls of fresh picked cotton, layer on layer, resembling a distant, snow-covered chain of mountains.

Matthew thought of the time his father had taken him to Denver to buy a bull. There he had seen such snow-covered mountains gleaming in the sunlight, but he wouldn't believe they were not clouds of some sort until his father took him closer. These clouds lay far in the distance, but even so, Matthew could see rain streaks marking the underside, and he could pick up an occasional flash of lightning against the deep gray.

It was now three in the afternoon, and the spring sun seemed as hot as a summer day, but the humidity was heavier. His undershirt damp with sweat, it seemed to Matthew as if he were wearing the air around him. Uncle John would be happy. Those were going to be "hell-fire and damnation" clouds for sure.

Matthew held the little Remington upside down as he approached, emptying the unspent shells from the magazine into his hand. Replacing the rod, he worked the action with his left hand, catching the last two shells with his right. He checked the chamber and looked for the end of the magazine rod just below to be sure no more shells were in the rifle.

"How many you got?" his father called out.

Matthew looked quizzical, but answered, "Four."

"Bring 'em here," his father ordered. Matthew unbuckled his belt and let his catch fall free. Then he gathered them by the tails and approached the porch.

"Hand'em to Hoskins there, Matthew. He wants to look'em over," Calvin said, grinning. Hoskins took the squirrels with deep interest.

Hoskins examined each carefully, laying them one on the other like playing cards, with each bullet entry wound turned up.

"Dammit!" he exclaimed. "You shoot pretty good, kid."

Matthew looked quizzical again. "Pa taught me to shoot them in the head so you don't tear up their bodies. Sometimes there ain't much meat there to begin with." Then Matthew began to catch on. "Pa, did you gig Mr. Hoskins with that old squirrel shooting bet?"

"Ha, ha! I did, by Hell! He was about to back out, too, until I said I'd pick the spot. Matthew hits them there ever time, or he just don't shoot, Hoskins."

The black caterpillars on Hoskins' forehead crawled together. "Well, you still have to be depending on that boy's eye, so I guess I didn't really get snookered. You shoot pretty good, kid."

"Good? By Hell, if we had bet before he left, you'd have seen some real shooting. I'd have told Matthew to take only one bullet and bring back them four squirrels," Calvin

said, trying to draw the scowl from Hoskins' face.

"Bullshit! How?"

"Easy," Calvin said. "Matthew just slips this real fat pecan we keep--it's about three inches long--out of his overalls pocket and waves it at them squirrels. When he gets three in a row looking at that thing, he puts a bullet right in line so it gets all three."

Hoskins bit again. "Shit," he grumbled,"How's he git the fourth?"

Calvin began to chuckle. "The fourth is standing there watching all this going on, and when he sees them three get shot with one bullet, he just keels over dead with surprise!"

"Pa," Matthew said, shaking his head and laughing. It took a minute, but even Hoskins managed a smile.

By the time Matthew had his squirrels skinned and cut up, the smell of baking bread was curling from the kitchen and down the porch steps. "Smell that, Hoskins? You gonna pass that up or not?" Calvin asked.

"Reckon I won't," Hoskins grunted, "But the damn price for the cow's the same--less four dollars."

Mary Carlisle could see young green plants emerging from her garden, so she felt she could be a little more extravagant with her Sunday dinners. She wanted to get the

pantry thinned for the next canning season, and she had put a good dinner together. Ever since her husband had taken full control of the farm following his father's death, the wheat crops had been fair to good.

She was thankful that when wheat prices fell after the end of the Great War in Europe, Calvin's father, William Carlisle, had managed to pay for equipment and add land holdings to the farm. Even though it sometimes meant doing without some things that might make life seem a little easier, she was also glad that Calvin had acquired his father's aversion to debt, and since their marriage, they had expanded the farm. This background made her feel comfortable and secure, and she wanted to share that feeling with her family. Her love was reflected in the heaping bowls of mashed potatoes with gravy, the green beans and hot baked bread.

Even isolated as they were, the Carlisles were aware of the great depression now gripping the country. What it had meant to them so far was that prices for farm products were so low they barely covered production costs. On the other hand, farm supplies were cheaper and hired help came by willing to work hard for the first pay offered. Calvin had been able to increase his production enough to make up for low prices, and the family had managed well for several years. Now bankers were talking about a possible end to the

financial scourge that had gripped the country since 1929.

"Have another piece of that high-priced squirrel, Hoskins," Calvin offered, his eyes twinkling. Hoskins scowled, but picked up a back with his fingers and began to gnaw.

"I swear, Mary, you make bread better every time we sit down," Uncle John said.

"Yes'm, it is good," Hoskins agreed.

Looking over his father's shoulder and out the window behind him, John, the youngest son, noticed the sunlight suddenly dim. Excusing himself, he slipped from the bench the four boys shared and hurried through the living room to the screen door. A breeze had picked up and warm air spilled across the porch, tousling John's hair. He frowned as he sized up the wall of clouds approaching from the southwest. Trips to the cellar at night always frightened him. The older boys liked to talk about the terrible things twisters had done in such storms. He didn't like having to get up in the middle of the night and wade mud out to the humped outline of the cellar, and have to go down where it smelled of last year's potatoes, and where spiders crawled about the corners and ceiling. He hurried back to the table and tugged at his father's sleeve.

Almost shyly, he told his father, "Papa, there's a

pretty big bunch of clouds coming up. Will we have to go to the cellar?"

Mary glanced at her husband, then stepped to her kitchen window, which faced west. Looking to her left, she saw the outstretched squall line, each end reaching out like huge, darkened arms seeking to embrace their valley.

"Oh, Calvin, it has moved in fast! We better start buttoning things down right away."

Calvin took his turn at the window, but only for a minute. His mind moved to action, concern for his family and his livelihood causing him to bark orders rapidly.

"John, you get up to the barn and put the calves inside. Close the big doors, but leave the loft doors open. Be sure and hook them back so they don't flop in the wind."

Looking again, Calvin saw a broad, flash of lightning. He began to count. "One thousand, two thousand,..." When he reached fifteen thousand, they heard the ominous rumble. It continued for several seconds before dying out.

"I make it out about fifteen miles away," Calvin said. "Should be near the south side of Woodward about now. I want everyone to have their chores done by the time you feel the air turn cold. That should be about three minutes from the time it hits. So be back in the house as soon as you can, and no longer than ten minutes."

"Pa, Roxie's hobbled down by the road. Can I bring her

up?" Matthew asked.

"You sure as hell better, if you want her to have a mane and tail," his father answered, with a grin. "Move it, though."

"Del, you're welcome to stay out the storm. You might have need of a good cellar before this blow gets over."

But the burly farmer was already shaking his head and wiping his mouth on his sleeve. "I've got stock to look after, too. Got one cow nearing calf. I'm going to cut through your woods there if you don't mind. Could be I'll save enough time to get home before it gets too rough."

Calvin was uneasy. It was more than a mile to Hoskins' house, and that lay in the direction of the oncoming storm. "How about taking Matthew's Roxie? She's gentle and quick-footed. She'll get you home quicker for sure," Calvin said.

Hoskins paused a moment and seemed to be weighing something deep inside him. Finally, he stammered, "I'm...I.. don't know Carlisle, if anything happened to that horse..."

Calvin cut him off, with irritation in his voice. "When you going to learn, Hoskins? People are more important around here than animals. You need to get home. Take Roxie. Matthew!"

Matthew, heading his mare toward the barn, turned her to the front of the house at his father's call. "Matthew,

Del needs to get home quick. You mind if he takes Roxie?"

"No sir. She might spook some at blowing things, Mr. Hoskins, but she won't pitch," Matthew said, dismounting.

Almost as if he had forgotten the oncoming storm, Hoskins patted the mare's neck and ran an experienced hand down her front legs. He clasped Matthew's hand and shook it, and looked for a long moment directly in Matthew's eyes.

"Not many young'uns would let a body use their horse, Matthew. I'm obliged. Real obliged," Hoskins muttered, seemingly embarrassed at his admission of feeling. He mounted quickly and trotted off, riding easily.

Matthew looked at his father with surprise on his face. "Strange old coot, ain't he Matthew? Well, life hasn't always treated him square, and he's got so he's not used to anyone being good to him. You're a good boy, Matthew," Calvin said, putting his arm around his son's shoulder.

Then Calvin hurried off to turn the pigs out and shoo them down into the woods. There were low areas down there to escape the wind, and the dense underbrush would help protect them from hail. Matthew stood watching the wall of clouds, now rumbling more often and seeming to rotate forward like a huge rug being rolled. A bright bolt of lightening illuminated the interior of the cloud.

Matthew turned to watch the oncoming storm. One thousand, two thousand..., he thought. He was alarmed to find

the storm had already covered half the distance his father had gauged.

He hurried to the back of the house to see if he could help the others. He watched as his mother and Aunt Sarah hurried out to the chicken yard and quickly lured the hens inside with grain. Moving to the back yard, they began jerking down clean sheets and clothing to prevent them from being stained with red Oklahoma dust which would be blown along and washed into them with the first few raindrops to hit.

After helping them, he cut through the house to again check the storm's progress. Uncle John addressed the foot-steps without turning around.

"A real hell-fire and damnation storm," Matthew heard his Uncle John say. The old man was muttering to himself, sitting alone on the porch steps, watching the approaching storm. "LIke nothing else on earth," he told Matthew, pointing toward the ominous, rotating wall of clouds which now hung low to the ground only a few miles distant.

Luke and Calvin had just run the last of the sows and little pigs down into the trees. Calvin found himself wishing he had insisted that Hoskins stay because the storm was moving in so fast.

"Okay, let's get up to the house. C'mon, Luke," he yelled, waving for his son. Luke began his ambling walk

toward the house. "Dammit, son, move your butt. We'll all be sitting out here soaking wet waiting on you." Luke broke into a trot.

In the house, Calvin saw that Mary and Aunt Sarah had readied coal oil lanterns and blankets. Aunt Sarah was arguing heatedly with her husband.

"John Eustice, there is a twister on the way, and I will not stand for you playing games with us this night. Now you get yourself ready to go to the cellar."

"I'll not. Cellar's too crowded, and the chances of a twister hittin are almost none. I wouldn't miss this hell fire and damnation storm for the world. You all be getting on down. The food's safe this time cause we already et," he told his wife, grinning broadly.

The family sat on the porch, watching the gigantic cloud open its maw to envelope the entire Carlisle farm. Suddenly a blast of cold air swept across the porch, bringing chill bumps to bare arms.

"About time to get the kids down, this one looks rough," Calvin said to Mary. Mary, Sarah, Mark, Luke and John went to the side of the house and down the cellar steps. Matthew stood by the open double doors of the cellar, waiting for his father.

"Uncle John, I think Sarah's right this time. You ought to sit this one out in the cellar. That storm's

coming fast and mean," Calvin said.

Stubbornness showed in Uncle John's weather-reddened cheeks. He shook his head only a little. "You get on down, Calvin. Matthew's not yet man enough to hold that cellar door shut if a twister was to hit. I'll stay here."

Blasts of cold air were kicking up dirt and making leaves and twigs tumble across the yard as Calvin headed for the cellar. He was surprised to meet a grim Aunt Sarah coming out of the cellar as he started down. She said nothing, but marched stiffly past him and up to the porch. She pulled her dress up enough to sit comfortably on the steps beside her husband. Matthew and Calvin went on down.

"All right, you dang fool. If you think you're good enough to sit here and be blowed away, I sure as shooting plan to go with you."

Uncle John's cheeks colored even redder. "Get the hell down that cellar!" he roared. "Before I drag you over there and stuff you in."

The wind was now laying trees over at forty-five degree angles. Large branches broke and tumbled across the pasture from the woods as if they were twigs. Fat, ice-cold drops of rain exploded in the dust, leaving pockmarks where they hit.

Sarah's voice rose to a shriek, cutting even above the roaring wind. "I'll not do it! And if you make me, I'll just follow you back. So either shut up, or go to the

cellar with me. Now!"

Lightning flickered out of the cloud in a blinding flash and hit a tall oak standing some thirty yards from the edge of the woods. In a millisecond, it was splinters and blackened trunk. It was followed immediately by a deafening crash of thunder. The cellar door raised, and Calvin stepped out, an angry and questioning look on his face. Uncle John led his equally stubborn wife to the cellar door, took one longing look at the oncoming storm, and went inside.

By this time, it was almost pitch dark outside, and rain pelted the farmstead in steady sheets. Hail began beating on the cellar doors, sounding like some desperate soul trying to get the family to let it hide from the storm. Suddenly it became very quiet. The family stopped talking and just listened. There was absolutely no sound whatever from outdoors. Mary pulled her youngest son to her and squeezed her body closer to the corner of the cellar. Calvin put another couple of wraps of the cellar door rope around an iron peg imbedded in the concrete and motioned for Matthew to do likewise on his side.

At first, they thought it was just the wind picking up. Then Matthew said, "It's a train, pa. Heck of a time for a train to be coming."

Looking grave, Calvin put his finger to his lip. "It's

not a train," he whispered. "Only thing sounds like that is a twister. Hold on tight."

In a matter of seconds, the sound had turned into a throbbing roar. Matthew's ears hurt with the sound, but he didn't dare turn loose of the rope to cover them. They heard tremendous splintering, crashing sounds, and a tree branch suddenly pierced the center two-by-sixes of the cellar door Calvin held. No sooner had it penetrated than it was jerked away as if some giant hand had stabbed it into the cellar and playfully plucked it away. The force snapped Calvin's rope, and his half of the cellar doors disappeared into the darkness of the storm. Calvin's hat, a shelf, and a blanket scampered up the steps like children eager to play outside. Aunt Sarah screamed and shivered in her husband's firm grip. Calvin quickly moved over to help Matthew hold the remaining door.

Their ears plugged, popped clear, and re-plugged as the air pressure made rapid and tremendous changes. Calvin's heart sank as he looked up through the half-open cellar portal to see the second floor of his house,illuminated by a flash of lightning, whirling crazily overhead. Suddenly the storm was gone. Only tree branches and barn tin swirled around like leaves in the small eddies of a brisk stream.

The force on the cellar door relaxed. Matthew let go of the rope and fell against the mattress in a sitting

position, soaked in sweat despite the chilly air. The roaring subsided until it was lost in the sound of the wind and rain. Calvin Carlisle looked sadly across the coal oil lantern toward his wife.

"Honey, before we go back up there, you had better be prepared. The house is gone. I saw it go."

Her face ashen gray, Mary put her hand out to touch her husband. "We're all here. Safe. That's all that matters right now," she said, fighting back tears.

As the clouds moved on to the northeast, the sky began to lighten. Only a few drips of rain added to the rivulets pouring from every direction across the yard. Uncle John and Calvin were the first out of the cellar.

The first floor of the Carlisle home was nearly intact, although it leaned awkwardly. The top was nowhere to be seen. Only small pieces of lumber could be seen across the wheat fields to the northeast. The barn roof was gone. Uncle John surveyed the damage, then said, "By God, when I come out of a cellar, that's the way I want to see it!"

CHAPTER III

Mary Carlisle's resolve failed before her right foot cleared the last cellar step. At the first sight of her decapitated, water-drenched home leaning tiredly toward the northeast, her knees went weak and she sank to a sitting position on the portal of the cellar, sobbing. Matthew supported her with one arm around her small shoulders. Little John patted her back, whimpering and hiding his face against his mother's side.

Matthew glanced around, expecting to see his father coming to comfort his mother. Instead he saw Calvin leaning against the skeletal remains of their windmill. Matthew was shocked to see his father looking suddenly older, the shoulders slumped, the head hung slightly. Calvin's eyes gazed intently at the ground, as if some message was being communicated to him by the movement of a small rivulet still flowing around his boots.

Leaving his mother in Aunt Sarah's embrace, Matthew approached his father, trying not to look at the house as he walked.

"Pa...Papa," Matthew stuttered. When Calvin showed no response, Matthew placed his hand on his father's hand, which gripped the guywire tightly. "Pa! We're all here and

none of us is hurt. You and Momma already said that. We can rebuild a house."

Calvin raised his eyes slowly and looked at his home. He turned his sight quickly away, then took a long, deep breath. He let it out slowly. The fight began to flow back into his body. Embracing his son, he began issuing calm but firm orders to get his family started in the immediate business of living.

"You're right, Matthew. We'll rebuild her, by hell. And while we're at it, we'll make it more like your momma wanted it in the first place. Tell you what, Matthew, you take Luke and John and get them busy hunting down some of those things that mean a lot to your momma. Picture books and Grandma's linens and such. Get as much of that stuff found and cleaned up as you can find before it's ruined, and we'll get her feet under her."

Calvin and Uncle John entered the house to survey the damage. The living room and downstairs bedrooms were essentially gutted. Except for not having a roof, the bathroom, dining room, kitchen and pantry were intact. Not a dish was on the floor and none, not even glasses, appeared broken. Even their food was untouched, though each plate and dish was flooded with rainwater.

Jaws clenched tightly with emotion, Calvin brought the side of his clenched fist down hard on a doorjamb. Muttering

under his breath, he sat down heavily on a chair. Uncle John waited a little, then offered:

"Calvin, this place is leaning some. But that's only because the second floor isn't tying it together. 'Side from that, a header's broke on the main bearing wall. Why, we can push it back straight and cinch it in no time. Just needs some nails, wood and sweat."

Calvin didn't seem to hear, and didn't answer for a few minutes. Then getting up, he let out a great sigh. "Yeah, Uncle John, you're right. Just nails, wood, and sweat."

The two men went out on the porch, where the boys already had a growing pile of personal belongings gathered. Mary and Aunt Sarah were sitting on the steps, cleaning and drying what items they could. Only a half hour had passed since they left the cellar.

"Listen," Matthew called out. "That sounds like Hudspeth's bells on his team."

Hudspeth was an Amish farmer who lived two miles east of the Carlisle place. He had a large farm and several strapping sons, each of quiet nature, hard workers. The little bells on his team lines were about the only luxury the bearded farmer allowed himself. Two horses appeared over the rise in the road, and before long the Hudspeth family was seen hurrying up the lane toward the Carlisle house."

"Why, he has his wife with him, Calvin," Mary said. "I

don't believe I've ever met her."

"They're here to help, Calvin," Uncle John put in,"They're here to help, and they are darn good at it. We had a bunch of those Amish work on the railroad when farming was rough. They go right back to farming as soon as they can, but they are sure not afraid to work."

The sound of a motor vehicle reached them before the Hudspeths arrived. "Sheriff Philpott's coming up in his truck, Papa!" Luke, standing on the west end of the porch, had already spotted the black Ford approaching.

The Hudspeths stopped respectfully a distance from the porch. Each man was dark clothed, lean, bearded and strong. Jason Hudspeth nodded, then stepped down. Approaching Calvin, he put out his hand.

"We're here, according to the teachings of our faith, to do what we can to help in time of need, Mr. Carlisle. We can't tell you how sorry we are, but we can help you put things right if you'll allow us. Some folks don't want us Amish around at all. If that's the way you feel, just tell us, we will understand."

Calvin looked at the dark brown, sincere gaze confronting him. Strange as this man's lifestyle was to him, Calvin could sense the good in him.

"Please understand, Mr. Carlisle. We want to offer our services. But even if we didn't, it's part of our faith to

do so anyhow. And you must also know that we don't want nor can take any pay," Hudspeth continued.

Emotion began to well up inside Calvin, causing him to look down and stammer. "Well...sure, Hudspeth...that's mighty...nice. But I don't rightly know what you could do just now. We're still in sort of a shock I guess."

Hudspeth smiled broadly. "Thank you, neighbor. We really do want to help." With that, he motioned to his family, who quickly left the wagon. Mrs. Hudspeth embraced Mary, offering condolences, and then began helping with the cleaning. The young men immediately set about piling up debris. A couple of them inquired about livestock, and Calvin sent Luke and John to work with them.

Then he and Uncle John and Hudspeth walked out to greet Sheriff Philpott. Philpott was a big man, with a great paunch. He always wore khaki and carried his pistol high up on his side, with the belt emerging from each side of his great stomach. But he was honest and fair, and enjoyed a great deal of respect in the county. He seemed to be forever sweating, winter and summer, and he now emerged from his truck wiping his forehead with a handkerchief.

"Damn, Carlisle. This here's a real shame. How's yer family? Anyone hurt?" The Sheriff's eyes passed over each man, shifting from one to another as well as to those working at a distance. Though he seemed to think and move

slowly, not a man could have so much as picked up a stone that Philpott wouldn't have noticed.

"No, Charley. No one's hurt. The house took a beating as you can see. The barn lost part of the roof and I imagine we have stuff scattered half way to Kansas. But we'll make it. Mr. Hudspeth here just arrived. He and his sons have already pitched in..."

"Well, you better get ready for more company, cause I passed two more teams headed this way. You folks are good neighbors and people are coming in to help," the sheriff interrupted, shaking hands with Hudspeth as he talked. Before Calvin could comment, the officer continued:

"Town got hit some too. Took out several places on the southwest edge. And the widow Edgeley between here and town. We can't find her, Calvin. I figger she's dead. That's why I am sure glad to find you folks in one piece."

"Charley, did you stop by the Hoskins place? Del left here on Matthew's mare. I've been kind of worried, though I admit I forgot him till now. He cut straight through them woods, almost the way the storm came," Calvin said, pointing to a swath of twisted trees in the distance.

Philpott frowned. "Hell, I did. I stopped by, looked around some, but didn't see Hoskins anywheres. His place hadn't been hurt much, some lost shingles and tin, but no real damage. I figured he was just gone from home."

By now dark was approaching. Calvin was genuinely concerned for Hoskins' safety. "You suppose we better go looking, Charley?" he asked.

"Yeah. We better go right now. You got any lanterns?"

Nodding assent, Calvin called for Matthew, then directed him to get several coal oil lanterns from the workshop by the barn. Hudspeth called his sons to help. By the time the search party reached the woods, they needed the lanterns. The path of destruction was about an eighth of a mile wide and filled with entangled, ruined trees. In the lamplight the twisted limbs resembled those of tortured creatures. Philpott gave directions for the men to move slowly and call out softly and at intervals, so that groans or a weak response could be heard.

Matthew was placed on the right side of the damage path, with his father on his left. Sheriff Philpott was next, then Hudspeth and three of his sons. Each man was twenty to thirty yards apart, walking abreast, lanterns held high, trying to see amid the black shadows cast by their lights. Matthew recognized the standing part of the woods to his right. The tornado damage had rendered the terrain ahead and to his left as strange as if he had been placed in another state. He knew a small gully paralleled the twister path just to his right. He stepped carefully, knowing there were tributary gullies crossing his path at right angles. He

called softly as he progressed, checking his steps to stay aligned with the others.

Every few yards he called out softly, "Mr. Hoskins. Call out if you can. It's Matthew Carlisle."

Then Matthew remembered Roxie for the first time since he watched Hoskins riding her away. He let out the long, low whistle he used to call her up for oats. Almost immediately he heard a sound some thirty yards ahead in the darkness. Matthew stopped to listen. He heard it again, but he was sure it couldn't be his mare. It was a high-pitched sound, like a child's cry, but choking at the end. Walking a few yards ahead, he gave the whistle again. He heard the cry again, accompanied by the rattle of tree limbs being shaken against tree limbs. Now Matthew was sure it was his horse.

"Papa! It's Roxie. I'm pretty sure she's hurt. Straight ahead of me about twenty yards!"

Immediately, the line of lantern lights began threading among the debris toward Matthew's light. "Okay son, we're coming! Move slow now," Calvin called out.

Matthew worked his way another fifteen yards or so, then held his lantern aloft for the others to spot him. When he did, he saw something move directly ahead of him.

It's Roxie's hind legs!, Matthew thought. Then, muttering to himself, "She's pinned upside down under that tree. Hold on girl!" This last he yelled aloud, and was heartened

to see his horse try to get up, raising most of the tree a foot or so as she struggled. Matthew circled the downed tree quickly, looking about for Hoskins as he went. The storm damage made slow progress for the others, who were still a short distance away.

Now Matthew could see his mare's head. She was upside down in one of the small ditches leading to the larger gully. The mare bled from her nose and mouth and Matthew moved closer to try and cradle her head. Just then she gathered her fading energy and tried again to free herself.

As she lifted the tree, Matthew gasped in horror. One of the smaller limbs had impaled his mare in her side, explaining why she couldn't roll over and get out of the narrow ditch. Both sides of the ditch supported her back, keeping her from reaching the shallow bottom. As the mare tired, she let her head fall heavily backwards and Matthew heard a muffled groan from below. He moved his lantern closer to her head.

"Hoskins! Oh, my God! Papa...Sheriff...help!" Matthew screamed. Their lights were only a few yards away, but moving slowly. At the sound of Matthew's voice, Roxie again tried to rise, only to fall back, her head hammering the farmer pinned below.

Matthew looked about him frantically. The only limb he could pry loose was a small one, but, being green, he hoped

it would be strong enough to support his horse's head and neck. Encouraging her to rise again, Matthew jammed the limb into the earth on the far side of the ditch below his mare's neck. When she gave up and let her head fall, the limb bent, but held.

Calvin, Philpott, and one of the Hudspeth sons entered Matthew's lamplight simultaneously.

"Mr. Hoskin's down there, Papa. Under Roxie. She was killin' him with her head. Oh God, Papa, look! She's run clear through!" Matthew turned away, his face in his hands.

Calvin looked at Matthew only briefly, then moved his lantern to assess Hoskin's plight. "Del! How ya doin'? We're gonna get you out, by hell. Just hang on."

Getting no response, Calvin feared Hoskins was already dead. He found his way up the ditch until he was at the edge of the downed limbs. Squeezing under, he began crawling toward the injured man. When he got close enough, he felt Hoskin's pulse.

"He's alive, Charley. You boys see if you can get that mare's head up again and I'll tug him out. He's beat up pretty bad from Roxie's head hitting him," Calvin said, attempting to tug Hoskins by the shoulders.

Feeling movement under her, and hearing Calvin's voice so near but not being able to see him spurred Roxie to frantic efforts. She raised up, only to crash back, splint-

ering Matthew's makeshift brace. Her head crashed into Calvin's right shoulder blade, causing him to yell out in pain. The mare again tried to rise, and Philpott motioned for the Hudspeths to help him hold her head up. He sent Mr. Hudspeth looking for a larger limb. The men were able to keep the mare off of Calvin, but only when she didn't struggle. Philpott knew that wouldn't last long.

As soon as she could, the mare began struggling. Philpott looked for Hudspeth's lantern light. He was returning, but he was a good way off. They were tiring and he knew they couldn't keep the mare still. Philpott braced the mare's neck as best he could with his left knee and motioned for the young man across from him to move. When he was clear, Philpott deftly drew his pistol and put a merciful bullet through Roxie's brain.

Matthew rushed to get the limb from Hudspeth to help keep his mare off his father and Hoskins. In his heart he knew Roxie wouldn't have survived her injuries, and that Sheriff Philpott had done right. He jammed the new limb in place and the men rested.

"You okay, Carlisle?" Philpott asked.

"Yeah. She bashed my shoulder pretty good, but I can pull Hoskins. I think his legs are stuck under her front shoulders, though. Can you boys get her up enough?"

"Think so," Philpott answered. "We got to lift the

treetop as well. Get ready."

With two Hudspeths on each side of the horse's neck, and Matthew and Philpott straddling the ditch and lifting in front, they managed to release the trapped farmer. Calvin tugged him out in increments, but soon had him clear of the horse's weight. Matthew joined his father in raising Hoskins between the downed limbs and into the lamplight.

As they propped him against the trunk, Hoskins began to come around. It was some time before he could talk. Two of the Hudspeth sons went back to get an axe and some blankets to make a litter.

Hoskins' nose was broken, his face was covered with bruises and cuts, and his lips were swollen. As it later turned out, he had relatively superficial injuries, considering that he survived a tornado and a beating by a horse's head. As his eyes fluttered open, the first face he recognized in the lamplight was Matthew's.

The burly farmer looked about him, wildeyed and confused. Recognition flickered in his eyes when he looked at Calvin, but then he turned his gaze back to Matthew.

Suddenly, he blurted out, "Boy! Your horse dead?" Matthew, taken by surprise, didn't answer quickly enough.

"Boy!" Hoskins repeated. "Is your mare dead?"

"Yes sir. But don't worry none about..."

Matthew stopped as Hoskins hid his face with his left

hand and put his right hand out for Matthew to stop talking. Hoskins' broad shoulders heaved upward slowly and he sighed, dropping his chin to his chest. He looked like a man who had just lost a friend and was about to weep. Seeming to ignore the others, Hoskins spoke to Matthew as if they were alone.

"I'm Shoshone, Matthew. Half. My maw was daughter of a chief. You know what that means?"

"No sir," Matthew answered.

Hoskins raised his battered face and looked Matthew directly in his eyes. Matthew glanced down at his boots, a little embarrassed by Hoskins singling him out of the group.

"No, boy. Look me in the eyes. You got to know what this means to me."

Matthew assumed Hoskins was still affected by his injuries. He looked the farmer in the eyes. "I'm afraid I don't follow you, Mr. Hoskins."

"I'm Shoshone. I was taught their ways. Brung up with a lot of their beliefs. Parts of their teachin's and religion is my way now. My wife buried over there on my place is Shoshone. She'us a good woman, Matthew. Like my maw. Neither one would want me to go against my teachin's."

Matthew looked at his father, puzzled. Then he looked back at Hoskins. "No sir, guess they wouldn't."

"Most folks think a horse is just a horse, Matthew. But we don't. Shoshone religion says a man's horse takes part of

his spirit. Shoshone law says you cost a man his horse you owe him. Can't just get him another horse. You got to do more, and you're beholdin' till you do. What's botherin' me boy, is that I ain't even got the money to get you another horse..."

"Mr. Hoskins, you got no call to worry about Roxie. She's dead, and you didn't kill her. The storm did. The same thing could of happened if she stayed home..."

"But she didn't stay home boy," Hoskins raised himself up to sit on the trunk he had been leaning against. Excitement began to give him strength. He gripped Matthew's left arm and his voice dropped to a near hiss. "I borrowed her. You recall I was slow to, but I took her anyway. The white half of me wanted to get home quick and worry about my place. The Indian half didn't want no part of taking your horse. But I didn't listen. I went against my teachin's and now I'm beholdin' to you."

Hoskins' seriousness of manner upset Matthew. He had never been in a conversation like this, and the subject was bringing images of Roxie's vain fight for life back into his mind. Fighting back a lump in his throat and wiping tears, his emotions began to get the best of him.

Wrenching loose from Hoskins' grip, he burst out, "I told you it's not your fault. And she's just a horse, no more. I can respect your beliefs, Mr. Hoskins, but they're

your beliefs, not mine. And I don't feel you owe me nothing. We were only loaning a neighbor something in a time of need. Pa and me would have thought you was crazy if you walked home in the teeth of that storm when you could ride. Now Roxie's dead."

Matthew hammered the side of his fist against the downed tree trunk that had killed his mare. His voice rose to a shrill pitch and the tears came freely. "She's dead and she was only a horse! You don't owe me nothin! It's the fault of the goddamned weather in this rotten part of the world. If you need rain, you get drought. If you get a good crop, it hails. Plant a little seed and it'll wash you out two, three times some years. Pa and you and others kill yourselves working and the weather takes most of it away with a laugh. Then just when you're making a little headway, a damned twister comes in and ruins everything, killing people and animals...Pa, I'm sorry, but right now I want to quit it all."

Calvin moved closer to his son to try to comfort him. He knew how the young man loved that mare. "Let it out, son," he soothed. "You've got bigger things than farming in you. We both know that. Just let it out. We'll get back on our feet together."

Matthew wiped his face with his sleeve and stood erect. "Let's go home, Pa..." He stopped when he found Hoskins

standing, blocking his path among the debris. The farmer was weaving a bit, pale and excited.

"Matthew! You cussed the weather. You'll bring down bad trouble on all of us! You got to tell the spirits you're sorry. I know how. That's how I can pay back my debt to you. I can help." Hoskins put his hand on Matthew's chest as he tried to sidestep him.

"Wait, boy. I can help. You'll bring something terrible down on all of us..."

With emotions running high, it wasn't surprising that this move made Calvin angry. He stepped in and pushed Hoskins aside.

"I've about had enough, Del. Matthew saved your bacon tonight. If you owe him anything, it's to not bother him about his horse or letting out his anger on the weather. He may be young, but he's done his share on our place and he's got a right to speak out like a man. Now don't lay hands on him again or you'll answer to me."

Hoskins all but ignored Calvin. He spoke directly to Matthew. "Boy! Let me help. I ain't sayin yore bad. It's just that you don't know what you've done..."

"Enough!" Calvin roared. "Charley, you better step in and keep this crazy old coot away from us if you want him in one piece."

Philpott knew that Calvin Carlisle didn't make idle

threats. He stepped in and gently restrained Hoskins.

"Come on, Del. I'll walk you home with my lantern. Best leave things alone for tonight. Maybe you boys can work this thing out another day. Calvin, have Luke drive over to Del's place in my truck and pick me up. Just show him how it works and he'll be driving by the time he gets there."

At Philpott's urging, Hoskins began stumbling toward home. But he stopped every few yards and called out to Matthew. "Please boy, let me show you. If you don't, we'll all be punished. No need for everyone to suffer..."

Matthew, Calvin, and the Hudspeths slowly retreated toward the Carlisle house, with Hoskins' periodic calls growing fainter behind as they went. Matthew became more agitated with each cry.

"Pa. What did I do wrong? Why is he going on so about what I said? I am sorry I cussed, but that's between me and you and God, ain't it?"

"You had all the right in the world to kick a few burrs outta your craw, Matthew. Del's caught a lot of hell tonight, and that battering he took mixing up with his Indian teachings is coming out in some strange ways. He'll be all right in a couple of days. Try not to let him worry you no more tonight. What do you say, Hudspeth?"

The Hudspeths had stayed completely out of the incident, looking and feeling helpless to offer advice. But

once asked, Mr. Hudspeth answered steadily and with conviction. "You were wrong to invoke the name of God in anger, but as you say, that is between you and the Lord, Matthew. Each of us has done something like that in the midst of trials. But I do feel that you should think over what is bothering Mr. Hoskins."

Calvin stopped. "What's that? Why? It's Indian teachings. We're not Indians."

"No sir, you're not. You're not Amish either. But you allow me to go my way and give me credit for my beliefs, even if you find them strange. Mr. Hoskins seems to be strongly backgrounded in his own beliefs. It's just not what we think of as religion. It might not hurt, for the sake of his being your neighbor and all, to let Matthew go to him in a couple of days and talk with him. Perhaps Matthew might make him feel better about the horse and let him feel as if he had atoned his <u>spirits</u> on Matthew's behalf."

Calvin shook his head as he walked. "No, by hell. Matthew don't owe him nothing. Well, that is, unless you <u>want</u> to go, Matthew. Right now, I'm just a little afraid that character might be dangerous."

CHAPTER IV

Some obscure millenium ago, an ocean of ice came winding and twisting down from Canada into the area now known as the Great Plains. Hemmed in on the west by the newly upthrust north-south stone sentinels we know as the Rocky Mountains, and narrowed on the east by warm winds from the Gulf of Mexico, this frigid creation of nature serpentined all the way to the southern plains in mere centuries. Far south, it was turned east by the famous Caprock area of Texas, where rugged, ancient mountains met its fury with stoic disdain. Its strength taxed, it flowed docilely past the Wichita range of southern Oklahoma, feeling its way between ridges and succeeding only in rounding already weathered and worn mountains.

Before it could regain strength from its arctic source, the weather began to warm inexplicably, and the reptilian glacier died. Like all living things that die, it began to decay. As its frozen mass dissolved, and its icy blood trickled away, it left behind varied deposits of earth. Whole mountains of sandstone had been devoured by the glacier as it fed, and now they were being returned to the land. Mixed with other sources, they became part of the silt, loam, and clay topsoils of the Great Plains.

As the ice melted from the glacier and from the adjoining mountains, torrents of water changed the earth. Mountaintops became fill soil for some distant low spot where the water paused before rushing onward. The ever-present, unrelenting winds of the plains hastened the demise of the great glacier and dried the wet areas. Without vegetation, the sand and silt moved in great, restless clouds sweeping first from one direction and then from the other, redepositing the earth. Depending on the type, 300 to 1,000 years were required to build one inch of topsoil. Gradually, the land flattened. All that remained was a cloak.

As sparse rains fell, stirrings began to arise within the newly formed soil. The last contribution of the great glacier was coming to life. Seeds, grass stolons, and roots deposited in the soil began to sprout. They had been carried in the glacial serpent's protoplasm, left behind at some sloughing of its skin, awaiting only the right conditions to emerge. Winds carried in more seeds and gently covered them. Still more rode in attached to the fur of animals, while some sprouted from the undigested droppings of birds. Like immigrants, they brought their virtues and their vices and contributed to a total picture in a new land. Now the Great Plains of the United States wore a mantle of life-sustaining grasses, herbaceous plants and trees. As each generation of

plants died, they in turn gave up their bodies for the good of the overall plan. In time, a thick mat of humous accumulated, acting as a sponge to drink in and hold each precious drop of rain. Just as importantly, it frustrated the power of the strongest winds to move the soil. By now, the fragile but effective ecosystem was complete.

The gray wolf warily circled the curving wall of hooked horns, dropping his head occasionally to peer hungrily through the fence of bison legs separating him from the calves within. The dumb beasts instinctively circled to protect their calves from the wolf's ploy of baiting an adult into chasing him, so that his mate could attack a calf. They were dumb, but the defense worked, and it contributed to the bison's domination of the American plains. Before the advent of man, a bison had essentially no natural enemies unless it were sick or wounded. Even bears and pumas were no match for the brute strength and sharp horns composing such a formidable wall. Thus the bison multiplied into sprawling herds of millions and became the unwitting caretakers of soil conditions on the vast plains.

Their appetite for fresher, newer growth of grasses kept them constantly on the move. A herd became a bellowing, slow-moving, fly-ridden version of a gigantic reaper, cropping only the preferred growth, leaving the plant to replen-

ish itself and stay competitive. Their sharp hooves aerated the sod and left indentations to catch and hold moisture when it fell. Their droppings returned the necessary nutrients and their hooves churned it in as thoroughly as a garden tiller. This was nature's intended method, and the prairies were continually renewed. The result was a constant supply of dependable forage for the bison, deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope that lived there.

Indians lived within this framework, taking only what they needed from the land and nothing more. They moved with the herds, deriving sustenance from the bison and from the herbs, birds, berries and grasses which could supplement their diet. When they killed a bison, its entire body was used. The thick pelt became robes, saddles, shoes, and shelter. Its meat and fat were their primary food source, and its bones, horns, and hooves became tools--knife handles, needles, scrapers--even decorations. The Indian respected the bison as he did each facet of his environment. Instinct- ively, he knew that each creature had its place and that to disturb that place could bring harm to all.

Then a creature entered the plains that had neither respect for or knowledge of his environment. His huge rifles killed the bison so rapidly that in the space of ten years the millions had dwindled to mere thousands. In their place came the rangy Longhorns, flowing like a living liquid

across the Red River from Texas to the upper plains. At first the plains greeted the cattle with the friendliness it granted the bison. But the longhorns weren't allowed to follow the ripening of the grass as the bison had done. As a result, they cropped the grass too closely, taking too much of the precious nutrients needed for replenishment. Their hooves damaged the thin layer of sod, causing large areas to become eroded and sparsely vegetated. Then came the winter of 1886. A fierce and extended blizzard taught the cowman for all time that he should always respect the plains. The carcasses of a million head of cattle dotted the plains--an exactitude for ignorance.

The exact time a shiny steel plow first bit into Great Plains soil is not known. But reflected in its curved, mirrored surface may have been the woeful face of the Indian, the angry face of the rancher, and the passing of a millenium of soil building. Early farmers were truly out of their element on the plains. They came from small farms in places like Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Ohio, and Iowa. The nutrients in their eastern soils had been mined out and they were looking for new starts. Here they felt as if they were on a limitless ocean of fertile soil, with very few trees to combat. They began as they had done before, turning the land year after year and not replacing the nutrients

they took away. They could see only the waving of the wheat and notice how the wind carried it in rolls like ocean swells. A careful farmer, one educated in the needs of the soils on which he depended, could coexist here. But these men were ignorant, and as Mark Twain so eloquently put it, "Ignorance is the next thing to evil." As it turned out, the two worst enemies of the plains would be ignorance and human greed. Human greed came to the Great Plains in the form of railroads wanting to make money, in the form of land promoters wanting to make money, and in the form of suitcase farmers wanting to make money. And in the midst of all this earning of money, little thought was given to the soil below the sod.

The same dire images seen in the settler's plowshare might have been imagined in the curving metallic shine of a tuba in the Southwestern Colonization Bureau Band in 1902. It was Kansas City, gateway to the west, and six railroads had formed this bureau to bring settlers to the prairies. To the railroads, this meant towns, with goods to ship in and produce to ship out. It meant progress. On the prairie, it would mean the beginning of an end to an era. The barker urged ladies and children to step forward and taste the "nectar of the prairies"--fruit, grain, breads and honey grown there and carefully selected for exhibition. Whole

families departed for free excursions to view potential homesites on the American prairies.

The year 1899 had been record-setting in wheat production, touching off a publicity bonanza by railroads and land promoters. They financed magazine and newspaper advertisements, and attended fairs and church conventions, seeking settlers for the plains. They were very successful. One railroad hauled 10,000 prospects out onto the plains in a single excursion. Population in sixty-one southern plains counties increased by 350 percent in ten years. Wheat planting expanded 600 percent and corn 400 percent. Absentee landowners financed suitcase farmers, who put as little as possible into the soil and took as much as possible out. They had no reason to look beyond the next crop or two, and when the land tired, they moved on, plying their trade in the next county or the next state.

By now, the debt was incurred, and nature was overdue to collect. At first, the settlers thought it was a much-needed thunderstorm developing from the west. They watched as the cloud grew, dark and menacing, rolling upon itself strangely as if heavily loaded with water. They thought it strange that the first advancing gust of wind held no moisture, as was common; the air was even hotter than before, when it was normally cooler in advance of a rainstorm. Widespread drouth had hit the prairie all through 1910, yet

farmers re-plowed their fields, waiting for the inevitable rain to be caught within the clods. But the rain didn't come, and the clods reduced to a fine powder. It whirled in small eddies around footsteps, and played leapfrog in morning breezes. Then the first winds blew.

The storm that hit on this day was only the first, by far not the largest. Yet before it was over, some fields were blown out two feet in depth. Nature was trying to warn an unseeing, unlistening populace. Just as they were beginning to heed the signs, the rains returned, and with it came an enormous false sense of security.

The Serbian nationalist gripped his pistol tighter. It was a national day of mourning for Austria-Hungary in 1914, the day when his country had defeated the Austrians in the 13th century. As Archduke Ferdinand approached, he stepped forward as if to greet him and fired the shot that started World War I. It is sheer irony that this senseless act of destruction would have such a rapid destructive effect on tranquil land areas so far away as the American middle west.

But armies travel on their stomachs, and wheat was needed as much as bullets. Wheat prices in May, 1915, had climbed to $1.40 a bushel. Farmers were given to understand that it was their patriotic duty to plant wheat. And plant they did. Some 27 million acres of wheat ground were added

between 1914 and 1919 and 22 million of that was in winter wheat. By August of 1917, wheat was at $2.10 a bushel.

At the turn of the century, farmers were using implements little changed from the days when Jesus Christ preached at Galilee. But high prices brought industry to the plains. A team and two-row cultivator could cover fifteen acres a day. A team with an eleven-foot drill could plant twenty acres a day. By 1917, tractors were crawling across the plains, reversing the protective layer as they went, turning up the soil to bake, crumble, and blow. The greed for wheat land caused soil to be broken out that should never have felt a plow. Without its protective cover, it was little better than the freshly-laid silt deposited by winds soon after the glacier melted. The droughts of 1911 and 1912 were all but forgotten.

Tenant farming doubled by 1920, and because they lacked the conservation ethics of land owners, the land suffered even more. Wheat prices fell to seventy cents a bushel following the war. Farmers responded by opening even more land to try and pay for equipment purchased when prices were high. From 1925 to 1930, an area seven times as large as Rhode Island had been plowed out of the southern plains. Two-thirds of that was wheat land. Cattle numbers were greatly increased, also to try to offset low prices. They were held on less land, largely by tenants who didn't care

about the welfare of the grasslands they managed.

1931 smiled benignly at the southern plains farmers. Rains fell in just the needed amounts, mostly at the best times. The result was a record crop year. Fifty bushels an acre was common. But there was no war demand now, and prices quickly fell. Wheat that was 50 cents a bushel in June was 20 cents a bushel by August. Again the farmers responded by expanding acreages. The winter of 1932 was mild and wet, but the rains soon quit and the stage was now set for disaster.

They harvested a sparse crop that year. In the fall, they rebroke the soil and <u>dusted in</u> another crop of hope. No snow fell in the winter of 1933 and by February and March, the wind began blowing in earnest. Dust storms were frequent and there was growing concern. The people had no way to know they hadn't even seen a real dust storm. But on April 14, 1934, that would change forever. The storm moved in, rotating horizontally like a huge, dark reaper. Each cycle of the reaper paddles were clouds of dust climbing upon the back of another. They spread in length and height as observers watched, until they stretched the width of the horizon. Static electricity sparked around automobiles and other metallic objects. When the storm had passed, dead jackrabbits and birds littered the plains.

There was barely time for the shock to wear off from the first dust storm when an even bigger one occurred. On

May 10, 1934, a black blizzard, as they were then known, 15,000 feet high, obscured the sun from the plains of Texas to North Dakota. People were killed in auto crashes in the dust and some suffocated in the storm itself. The wind roared out of the west at speeds ranging from sixty to 100 miles per hour. People in many places thought the end of the world had come and fell to their knees in the middle of streets.

By nightfall,the storm had spread dust over Chicago and the Ohio River Valley. On May 12, it settled over the entire eastern seaboard. Dust settled on President Roosevelt's desk in the White House, sounding the first ironic plea for help. Ships three hundred miles off the Atlantic seaboard reported dust settling on their decks. More than 350 million tons of topsoil had been removed by that one storm.

By July 21, the entire state of Oklahoma had been listed by the government as a drought area. At the end of July, 1934, 400,000 families--some 1,500,000 people--were on relief. A mother of ignorance and a father of human greed had spawned a work of true terror and hardship in the midwest that would bear a name in history--The Dust Bowl.

CHAPTER V

The tornado hit the Carlisle farmstead in April of 1931. Even though the family was set back financially, they were far from ruined. Calvin and his father expanded their farm on the basis of save first, then buy what you want. When Calvin's father died, he took full control of the 320 acres comprising the farm. He worked closely with Jerry Harper, the Woodward County Cooperative Extension agent.

Some of Calvin's friends would tease him from time to time because he put so much stock in what a college boy farmer had to say. But Calvin respected education, and he found Harper's advice to be beneficial. While others turned whole farms into wheatland, Harper advised Calvin to diversify. So Calvin grew corn, oats, milo, and hay. But the most acres--240--were in wheat. Several years before, Harper had advised Calvin to buy a couple of tractors, but Calvin told him that meant debt. He bought one for cash and worked it double. When he wasn't using it, he let Matthew earn college money with it by hiring out to plow and cultivate fields for others.

About a year before the storm struck, to get the Carlisles away from complete dependence on crop prices, Harper had begun to talk about a chicken or dairy sideline

for the farm. Many farm byproducts could be used for feed, he explained, especially when prices were low. For the first time in years, Calvin went into debt. He had the extra cash, but he liked to hold some in reserve. So the family wound up with a layer operation managed primarily by Mary, Mark, Luke, and John. Calvin liked to joke that many of their layers were really broilers, it just took a while for Mary and the boys to find out. Five dairy cows on the place provided all the butter, cream, and milk for the family's needs, plus some income for Aunt Sarah and Uncle John. The family wasn't getting rich, but with Harper's help, they were living through some lean times and managing to show some profit.

Calvin had been saving for a new Model A truck to replace the Model T the family now used. But faced with expenses for lumber and materials to rebuild, he knew that would have to wait. Between the combined skills and strengths of Uncle John, the Hudspeths, Calvin, and Matthew, the Carlisle home was rebuilt in record time. The structure was left as one story and with one less bedroom than it previously had. Mary Carlisle became sad when she thought of that missing bedroom--it was not added because her oldest son was going to leave after graduation and wheat harvest to become established at Stillwater before classes that fall. She and Calvin agreed the old house was a lot to keep up and

their boys were going to be out on their own all too soon.

Mark and perhaps Luke would likely stay on and farm. John was too young to predict. But she knew Matthew--though he loved farming--had other interests to pursue. He would dog Jerry Harper's steps each time he visited the farm. The two went fishing and discussed things such as soil fertility, soil formations, and conservation ethics. Each time he left Harper, he chatted excitedly with his mother or with Calvin about the day's discussions. Each time he went, he learned new things about grass establishment, weed control, and control of erosion. It particularly bothered Matthew to see gullied land and to have to watch the sky turn brown with blowing soil. His goal was to be like Harper and help other farmers do a better job of making a living.

As spring wore on, Matthew became busier and busier with preparing equipment for harvest, helping work on the house, and studying for end of school tests. In spite of his schedule, he made time on Friday and Saturday evenings to stop by a large and comfortable home at the edge of town to see Susan Gundy. Susan was the daughter of Mitchell Gundy, the bank's president.

Gundy was about Calvin's age, and the two had once been rivals for Mary's hand. There had certainly never been any love lost between them, but there was a certain amount of mutual respect. One spring evening, both men entertained the

idea of taking Mary to the same dance, and by coincidence, chose the same moment to ask her. One word led to another and the two removed their coats and squared off in front of Mary's home, complete with several onlookers. Mary was mortified and sent her father out to stop the fracas. On questioning, the young men explained to him what was going on, each glaring at the other.

"Now look here, you two," he said, "You young roosters have been bumping heads over Mary long enough and you're starting to irritate me. Don't neither one of you own Mary. She can go with whichever one of you or anyone else she chooses. Now if you want to settle this with fists, well, you just do it somewheres else, or I'll take on both of you. Otherwise, figure out some gentlemanly way to decide who's going to ask her first."

Gundy suggested flipping a coin, and was reaching into his pocket causing Mary's father to scowl. The older man was raising a finger to scold Gundy for what he saw as impertinence when Calvin interrupted.

"Tell you what, Gundy, you see that cat coming down the side of the street over yonder? I say that is a female cat. Anybody can flip a coin. What do you say? That's a fifty-fifty proposition any day," Calvin said.

Mary's father increased his frown even more; then he turned to look at the cat in question. His glanced shifted

quickly towards Gundy, who studied the cat with concern. Mary's father smiled broadly.

"Yes sir, Calvin," he said, "That cat must be at least a hundred feet away. You would have to have some eyes to tell whether that's a pusscat or tomcat from here."

"My eyes are as good as his any day," Gundy had grumbled. "I'll take the bet."

Between the three of them, the cat was soon corraled and a precursory examination ensued. Mary peeked through the window with growing curiosity. She watched Gundy slumping away, his coat through the crook of his arm, her father and Calvin Carlisle walking toward the house, laughing. She had been absolutely furious to learn that Calvin had actually gambled the right to visit her, until her father informed her Calvin hadn't been gambling at all, but cheating.

"That was a calico cat, Mary," he roared, tears of laughter streaking his face. "You should have seen that Gundy's face! Any fool ought to know a calico cat is always female." Her father's laughter had been infectious, and Mary soon agreed to go to the dance with Calvin the cheat.

One Friday evening, Matthew was in the old Model T on his way to the Gundy home when he approached Delbert Hoskins' place. From the lengthening shadow of one of the cedars lining the lane, Hoskins stepped out, holding his hand up. Matthew felt a touch of fear in his midsection, but

nonetheless stopped his truck, cut the engine and addressed Hoskins.

"Evening, Mr. Hoskins," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Hoskins looked at Matthew for several seconds, scuffed his shoe a little, and spat some tobacco juice at a beetle. "Howdy," he began. He had the distrustful look he had worn when he haggled with Calvin over the cow. He had brought the cow over the week after the storm, and said absolutely nothing about his outburst. There was no apology, no questions, just business. When Calvin tried to comment on how nice the weather was, Hoskins' eyes narrowed and his caterpillar eyebrows crawled closer together.

"Yup," he said, "Is now. Ain't no way of telling how long it's to last though, is there? At least most folks don't know."

Calvin had given him a quizzical look and asked, "Del, you got someone who knows how to tell weather? I know Indians put a lot of stock in weather signs and all..."

"Indians had to live by them signs, Carlisle," Hoskins interrupted, "You'd put a lot of stock in them too. There's lots of things you and me don't know about weather and such, but I'll say this--you don't want to go taking them lightly."

Wanting to pacify his neighbor and change the subject,

Calvin had said, "Naw, a man sure don't want to do that. Got to farm by those weather changes too, don't we, Del? How much you say this cow gives?" The conversation drifted away from the sore subject Calvin knew was under the surface. Hoskins took his money, then inquired as to where Matthew was and how he was doing. When Calvin told him Matthew had gone into town, the farmer followed the proprieties of small talk, and then left. Calvin discussed the visit with his son. Although Hoskins had been cordial, Calvin told Matthew he still thought it best to avoid their neighbor for a while longer, just to give feelings time to heal. But now Hoskins' stepping out onto the road had forced a meeting. Not to stop his truck and talk would be both unneighborly, and to Matthew's way of thinking, cowardly. As Matthew got out of the truck, Hoskins answered his greeting:

"Reckon there ain't nothin' much you can do for me boy. I just wanted to tell you I was wrong in gettin' you het up that way t'other night. I mean, I wasn't wrong in what I was sayin', but in how. I shouldn't have yelled. I guess it was those bonks on the head..."

"Wish you would forget that, Mr. Hoskins. We was both pretty shook up that night. Roxie's dead, and we both hate that. I was surprised to find out you are Shoshone. They were sure good horsemen from what I hear."

Hoskins dropped his head a bit at the mention of the

mare and gave a small but visible shudder. " Yup," he answered, "Horses was the only way of life those people knew. My maw told me lots of stories about people giving up their life for their horses. They were the way a man went about being a man. They was like money for us, and like part of a church or somethin'. Thing is, son, I can't forget about yer mare. She was a good'un. I could tell just by sittin' on her. The day'll come when I can do something to make up for her a bit. Till then, I wanted you to know that my offer stands. Things bad can happen to us when we go against the spirits, whether they's white man's spirits or Injun spirits. It's just that I know how you go about tellin' them yore sorry. Yore gonna be a good man, Matthew Carlisle, and I don't want to see you going around with spirits working against you. I know you don't believe my way, but if the day comes you do, come to me and I'll help."

Hoskins put his hand out to shake, and Matthew readily extended his own. He looked a bit surprised, though, when he realized Hoskins was using his left hand.

"Left hand is closest to the heart, Matthew. Shoshone always uses that hand fer friends." With that he slumped back into the shadow of the first tree and down the gloomy lane beyond. Matthew quickly started his truck and continued to Susan's house.

CHAPTER VI

Of the twelve students graduating from Woodward High School on a warm evening in May, 1931, only Matthew Carlisle was bound for college. The others felt they had achieved a high mark in life by completing high school, and indeed they had at that time in history. They were anxious to get on with their lives. Some were soon to marry, others to travel, and at least one had plans to join the military. But Matthew Carlisle had a clear goal by now: he wanted to be like Jerry Harper and help make farm life better in the midwest. To do that, he would need four years of training at Oklahoma A&M at Stillwater. Then he would go to work somewhere as an assistant extension agent and work up. He was fortunate in that he had parents--neither of whom had finished high school--who appreciated a good education. Because they did, they supported him and encouraged his goals. Now they sat with pride in the audience just behind the graduates, who sat in the first rows facing the stage.

Matthew looked about the small room that served as lunchroom, gymnasium, and theater for the school. The color of raw lumber shone on the south wall and the roof, where repairs were yet uncompleted from tornado damage. The windows and doors were all propped open, yet people within

fanned with the hand-printed programs to maintain a hint of coolness. With only one light working, the teachers had worked out a display of candles for the makeshift stage. Matthew thought the long shadows gave an air of solemnity to the occasion. He was a very pleased young man, and very eager to get on with his goals.

"Matthew Wayne Carlisle!" his principal called out. Only one Brown and an Anderson had been before him. Most friends looked at the Carlisle family beam with pride as their oldest son received his diploma, but no one paid any attention to the large figure hulk forward from a shadowy corner of the room and peer intently. As Matthew returned to his seat, the person slipped out the open door and into the darkening evening. No one noticed the same furtive figure blend into the night after Matthew drove away from Susan Gundy's house on weekends.

Several persons noticed the bruises on the face of a tenant farmer from the west side of town who had claimed Matthew had been mistaken by ten dollars in his price for plowing and refused to pay. Most assumed it was Calvin's doing, but he and Matthew were quite surprised when the man approached them at the feed store and, in a nervous and embarrassed manner, thrust a ten dollar bill into Matthew's hand. Holding his hat, he apologized as if he had rehearsed his words, then quickly withdrew, glancing about as he left.

After the family had seen Matthew off on his train to Oklahoma City, Calvin was surprised to notice Delbert Hoskins leaning against the large elm in the railroad station yard.

Matthew's letters home sang of excitement. He roomed with other freshmen enrolled in agriculture and ROTC. He told how he had messed up his first drill, only to be yelled at, and how he reacted by breaking into laughter. *I couldn't help it folks,* he wrote, *This man is about five feet tall and has a voice like he's seven feet tall. He gets all red in the face when you do something wrong. But the other guys suffer when I mess up, so I am going to try extra hard to please him.* Mary Carlisle could not see any reason for one grown man to yell at another and vowed she would tell him so when they visited the campus.

Matthew wrote that jobs were scarce in the town because so many other students were also working. That situation also meant low pay. *I may have to change my plans and come home summers to plow for money, Pa. Unless something unforeseen comes along.* Something unforeseen was Jerry Harper, who telephoned friends in the agronomy experiment station and sent them seeking Matthew. Good students who really knew farming and had a devout interest in the soil as well were rare, and Matthew soon had a regular job helping maintain test plots on the agricultural experiment station.

1931 had been a terrific crop year for wheat, and

Calvin benefitted even more than his neighbors because he had planted a new wheat variety that was earlier maturing and higher in yield. He averaged 50 bushels an acre that year, the most he had ever grown.

Matthew stayed and helped through the completion of wheat harvest and went with his father to the elevator to close his year's wheat sale. Normally Calvin just shook hands, accepted the going rate, and went home. But this time his wife's cousin, Joel Adkins, manager of the elevator, called him into his office.

"Calvin, I want you and Matthew to sign a contract while you're here for your wheat. I know you don't do it that way normally, but you're kinfolks and I have to look out for you. This here great crop yield everyone is so happy about is going to push the bottom out of things when the rest of the wheat starts coming in."

Matthew and his father exchanged concerned looks. "What is it today, Joel?" Calvin asked.

"Fifty cents. Down 20 cents from a month ago. You wait much longer and its gonna be less. Sign now and you'll be guaranteed that much at least. If you didn't know me, you'd think I was trying to squirrel some early prices outa you, but Calvin, this is shaping up to be real bad."

So, for the first time in his life, Calvin Carlisle signed a wheat contract before actual delivery. By August

20, the going price was twenty cents a bushel. Calvin watched sadly as his neighbors went by with wagonloads of wheat that were not going to bring a whole lot more than what it cost them to gather and take it to town. For the first time in his life, he felt as if he had taken part in some sort of underhanded dealing. Yet he had cheated no one. Joel Adkins had made the choice to take more money from his own business and place it in Calvin's. As Adkins had put it when Matthew and Calvin were leaving his office, "Blood's thicker'n water."

As planting time neared again, Calvin and Uncle John sat on the porch watching the evening fall. From up the road they heard the familiar loose-fendered rattle of Jerry Harper's truck. As the agent drove up, he was serious looking, causing Calvin to remark, "Uh-oh. Here comes Jerry with his pencil-and-paper look again." Mary had just stepped on the porch and heard Calvin.

"Well, there goes another evening with my husband," she said, smiling.

"Now, Mary," Calvin said, looking at her with surprise. "Jerry has done a lot of good things for this farm. Chances are he's got some serious head scratching to do." Mary just smiled and walked back in the kitchen to prepare coffee.

After exchanging courtesies, Harper let Calvin and Uncle John know he was going around talking as hard as he

could to try and get people to cut back on the amount of wheat they were planning to plant, instead of increasing.

"I've been talking with some economists at the coll-ege," he said. "With the demand for our product so low, they don't see prices to raise next year. It would be the best time ever to think about more corn, milo, or hay. Might even be a good time to add on to that chicken operation, Calvin. What have you got up your sleeve?"

"What're most folks thinking of doing, Jerry?"

"Just what you already know. They're going to plant fence row to fence row. John Baldwin got plumb mad at me for suggesting he cut back. He said he's got a combine to pay for and with wheat so low, he's going to open up 40 more acres of pasture grass to wheat. That worries me for lots of reasons."

"Like what?"

"Calvin, some of this land around here should never have been plowed. Even with canners and cutters at a nickel a pound, some farm's would be better off in grass or forage. We've got land all over western Oklahoma and into Texas and Kansas that is just lying there waiting for a breeze bigger than a dog fart for it to take off for the next state."

"That's so, Calvin," Uncle John chimed in. "I remember when we had to stop the trains out in the Panhandle to move blown dust off the tracks. That was back in 1911 and again

in 1912. Had some trains actually derail on it."

"What can we do? A farmer's got to grow something to make a living, Jerry," Calvin said.

"Well, that's why I brought the pencil and pad. If you got nothing better to do, let's get to the kitchen table and go to work."

Mary grinned broadly as she greeted Jerry in the house. "I can see why you're still a bachelor, Jerry. You're so busy running from farm to farm you don't have time for a wife."

"Well, all the good ones are married to guys named Calvin, Mary, don't you know that? I'll probably be on your couch again in the morning, so I hope you haven't forgot how to make biscuits."

And he was there in the morning, wan and tired. Calvin looked like a man with a bad hangover. But the pile of yellow lined sheets on the kitchen table showed the results of their effort. Calvin had faith in Jerry Harper, and this time it was going to take all he had. Essentially, they had agreed he would plant only 80 acres of wheat. The rest of the wheat land would lie fallow, with the stubble still in place to hold the soil. If things changed and they got adequate rains, he could put in a later crop. If stocker prices increased, he would buy some cattle and run them on wheat pasture. But for now, he would buy more dairy cows and

expand his chicken operation. As Jerry pointed out, they could always eat chicken and drink milk.

Together they had written, erased, and re-written all over the feed store calendar. But a plan for survival had been established. Calvin had the same guilty feeling watching Jerry drive away that he felt when he saw his neighbors moving their low-value wheat. Yet Jerry Harper was available to any one of them that could get past his college-boy approach to farming.

Spirits picked up in the late fall and winter, when a few slow, drenching rains passed the area. But it seemed as soon as the water stopped falling, the wind increased with the express intention of drying it all out--with interest. 1932 saw a late freeze, then hail storms, cutworms, and drouth. Matthew wrote letters home detailing research trials on drought-resistant wheat varieties, but he emphasized it would be years before they were ready.

The winter of 1933 provided absolutely no snow, and there had been little rain for a year and a half. Then, in February and March, the winds began to blow. The family struggled through another season with little added income. Calvin planted no wheat--at Jerry Harper's urging. What had been harvested before was left in stubble, and Calvin noticed how the drifting sands filled up the spaces between the straws instead of moving on in the wind. Mary noticed that

each time she put out laundry to dry, it came in coated with a different color of dust, depending on the direction of the wind that particular day. Their concerns were growing, but there was nothing to do but continue to haul their eggs, chickens, and dairy products to town.

Matthew was in his junior year and paying all his own expenses. He had earned some scholarships, which made things a little easier, and still worked for the experiment station. He returned home only at Christmas and just after school was out each spring. He and Susan Gundy had agreed to be married as soon as he went to work on his first professional job. It was through Susan that the Carlisles first heard of trouble at the bank. Susan let it slip that her father and mother were fighting. Her father was constantly distraught about the financial condition of the community, and with it, his bank. Thus it was no big surprise to many that he turned up missing one morning with a large amount of the bank's cash.

Charley Philpott put out several notices, but it was his contention that unless there were more leads, Gundy was gone for good. There were just too many people who couldn't blame him under the conditions. Mary and Susan grew closer, since Susan's mother had about all she could bear without listening to her daughter's needs and concerns.

When Matthew heard, he wrote Susan:

<u>My Dearest Susan,</u>

<u>I read mother's letter telling me what happened to your father. I can't tell you how sorry I am. We have put off our own plans for so long, and it seems that we have so much longer to wait. Your situation has set me to thinking. All about me are married couples who have at least one member in college. Yes, I share a room with other students, and we split expenses. But you and I could do the same thing. You are out of school and a good typist. Your experience in your father's bank could help you here. I have already talked to Professor Halpin, my advisor. He assures me it would be tougher as far as money goes, but says that if we are in love, and considering your situation at home, we might as well think about living together here. He has already talked to a local banker about using you. Consider this a proposal. If the answer is yes, we marry at Christmas when I'm home.</u>

<u>Love, Matthew.</u>

So the Carlisle home hosted a wedding that December, and only the joy Matthew felt in his new bride kept him from being totally depressed as he walked with her over his father's land. Where there had once been grass, there were tumbleweeds. Where there had been corn, only meager stalks rattled in the wind, testaments that they were needed more

to hold the soil than for use as fodder for cows. Only the milo on the bottom land produced enough feed to keep the cows giving any milk at all. Matthew knew his father had the determination to keep the farm going for several more years, but his concern was that the plague wouldn't end in time--and his mind drifted to Delbert Hoskins' words: "Wait, boy! You'll bring something terrible down on all of us."

Matthew took Susan in the old truck to meet Hoskins, but he wasn't home. Matthew expressed his concerns to her.

"Matthew, those are Indian superstitions. He can't possibly be serious in blaming you for what's happening here."

"The thing of it is, Susan, is that he seemed to predict all this. He made those statements when things were pretty and green. The night the twister hit our place. And the rest of it is that he don't seem to dislike me for going against him. If anything, he seems to like me. But he gives me the willies. Dad doesn't think Hoskins is all together in the head."

As the couple drove away, they couldn't see Delbert Hoskins watching them with squinted eyes from behind his barn door. After they had left, he picked up a handful of blown sand from what was left of his garden with his right hand, spat in it, and threw it down savagely. Then he walked over to Matthew's tire tracks in his drive, squatted down, and smoothed one of them gently with his left hand.

CHAPTER VII

Light rains fell early in April of 1934, and there were signs that some greening up was going to occur. Everyone was hopeful that the next round of clouds was going to bring the life-giving soaking the land truly needed. But for two more weeks, the temperatures ranged high and the wind blew steady. Then, on April 14, residents of Woodward saw a large, black cloud approaching from the northwest.

Calvin and Uncle John were loading eggs and chickens for a trip into town. Calvin had sent Luke to the back pasture next to Hoskin's farm to bring up a couple of cows and their calves.

"Now Luke, if you get started watching some critter, you're just gonna miss a ride into town, cause we're not waiting on you like we did last time. You get on back or you'll have to stay home. Understand?" Calvin had asked.

"Yes, Pa. I want to go in and see Jamey Willis, so I'll be back for sure. But there's a new coyote den down in that south draw, and I want to go by and see if the pups are big enough to be playing out yet. Do I have time for that?"

"It'll be about two hours before we leave," Calvin answered. "If you're not here, we're just going on." Calvin continued muttering, "Dang coyote's probably where some of

those hens have been going."

Uncle John called Calvin's attention to the onrushing cloud. "Calvin...Calvin, come here and look at this cloud. Seems to be comin' in fast and from the wrong direction."

The prevailing winds were from the southwest, and that was the direction from which most rain patterns arrived. Occasionally one came from the northwest or even from the east, but they were usually accompanied by a large storm system. That was why this cloud drew so much attention from the two men.

"Strange looking cloud, if you ask me, Uncle John. You see any lightning? Guess we better get the hens in and button up the place."

Uncle John didn't answer. He hurried over and climbed the first few steps on the windmill to get a better look. In a few minutes he scurried down, with a worried look on his face.

"Calvin, less'n I'm slipping, that's a duster. A big one. I haven't seen one since 1912, and never have seen anything like that!"

Calvin's brow furrowed and his heartbeat picked up. He remembered the dust storms Uncle John sometimes referred to, and they weren't pleasant. He remembered having to wear a water-soaked bandanna to school and some of the kids getting lost along their way and being late. His mother's aunt

had suffered with bronchitis and general bad health for years stemming from dust problems.

But as Uncle John had said, this one was big. He called for Mary and Aunt Sarah to come and help. Uncle John was hurrying for the barn, which Calvin thought strange with so many birds to get into shelter. As he and the women started moving birds into the henhouse, he saw the old man hurry to the front of the house carrying several boards and some burlap sacks.

"I'm gonna cover the well," he yelled. "A duster can fill one of those things right to the top."

Calvin became more concerned, but was truly glad he had Uncle John's experience to help. He would not have thought of their only water supply until after his family was safe. That thought led him to think of Luke. He grabbed for his pocket watch. Luke was more than 15 minutes late already, which meant he was dawdling and more than likely wouldn't beat the storm home. Calvin stopped Mary in her work.

"I've got to beat it out to the back pasture to look for Luke. Aunt Sarah and Uncle John have been through this before. Look, honey, if I don't come back in until this thing is over, don't worry. I'll bush up somewhere in shelter after I find Luke."

Mary's concern for her child caused her to waste no time in discussion. She knew Calvin would do the best he

could in whatever situation confronted him. She felt the best she could do now was to help ready the farm for the storm and pray for her family. The sky immediately above was beginning to look like weak tea as the storm approached. The first blast of air running out ahead of the oncoming front was approaching, and they could see tumbleweeds leaping to life and racing one another in steeplechase fashion. When the front hit the farm, Mary expected it to be cool. But the air was hot, very dry and unpleasant.

At Uncle John's call, she, Mark, and John ran to the house. Uncle John had drawn several pots of water before he covered the well. He had all of Mary's linens and towels stacked on the kitchen table.

"Soak these and stick them around the bottoms of the doors and windows. Mark, take that old throw rug there and wrap it around the wood stove. Mary, if you've got some twine, let's tie the damper down crossways, so wind can't move into the stove."

He pointed to a small pile of drying towels. "Those are going to serve as bandannas. I want each one of you to get one and soak it with water. Wring it out and tie it around your neck."

The boys looked at the old man with questions in their eyes, but didn't voice them. As the sky began to darken rapidly, they quickly did as they were told. "I'm scared,

Momma," little John said, moving in close to his mother. "I am too, but we'll be all right. Just have faith in Jesus."

The dust storm hit in its full fury just as Calvin reached the south pasture, out of breath from running. He had only managed a couple of calls between gasping when the wind began whipping his voice away. His pant legs streamed on the lee side of his legs, flapping like the ends of flags. It was all Calvin could do to stay hunkered over and on his feet. He took out a dirty handkerchief and made a tight mask over his nose. His ability to see dropped to only a few yards, but he continued until he reached the fence separating his place from Hoskins'. He occasionally called out for Luke, knowing his voice couldn't be heard more than a few feet away. Using the fence as a guide, he walked along the entire back side of the pasture. The force of the wind and the choking dust forced him to stop for rest every few yards.

"C'mon, Calvin, think! If you were Luke, where would you likely be? Would you try and get home or hole up? The coyote den! Luke said he was going to go watch those pups."

With that thought in mind, and knowing his son's habits, Calvin set off against the wind, trying to maintain the general direction of the arroyo. He knew that down in the arroyo the wind should be lessened. After nearly an hour of stumbling, resting, and moving again, Calvin spotted the

trees lining either side of the watercourse. They were laid over in obedience to the fierce wind, and everywhere were broken branches piled up against tree trunks and brush. Each small branch seemed a major obstacle as Calvin looked for the area Luke had described when excitedly telling him about the new coyote family on their farm.

Calvin soon found the trail down the steep embankment made by his cows going in to bush up in shade. The coyote den was somewhere to his right along the arroyo wall. He called for Luke as he went. The storm was worsening and visibility had dropped to mere feet. The wind was calmer in the bottom, but Calvin learned to his dismay that it was no place to hide. Here, the calmer air let dust rain out of the storm. There were already dunes piled on the lee side of the ditch and they were building rapidly in size. Drawing breath was much harder in the bottom. It soon forced him out, and he followed it along, calling for Luke until he could no longer see. Round shapes loomed out of the darkness, and Calvin recognized a stand of red cedars. At least now he knew where he was, and the cedars were the best windbreak on the farm. He literally had to bury up within the branches to get away from the dust being deposited on the lee side of the trees. Breathing was becoming more difficult. He coughed and gagged repeatedly.

Finally, the wind let up a little, and Calvin staggered

up the porch steps. His feeble knocking caused Uncle John to think that what he heard was only the wind knocking something against the house. He and Mary and Aunt Sarah could barely see one another across the room for dust, even though they had a lamp going. When he heard the sound again, he went to the door and turned the knob. He felt someone try to turn it from the outside, and he quickly pulled the chinking out from underneath. He opened it and helped Calvin inside. Calvin doubled over and tried to cough out the dust clogging his throat and nasal passages. Before they could get him inside and the door shut again, the room was full of newly-aroused dust, and they couldn't see across the room. He helped Calvin to a daybed as Mary got water and a towel and began bathing his face.

As soon as he could speak, Calvin asked, "Luke?" Mary simply shook her head. Calvin sat up immediately. "Got to go back, Mary. He can't make it out there."

Uncle John put his hand on Calvin's shoulder. "Neither can you, Calvin. Luke's likely holed up somewheres. You'd never find him and you know it. All we can do right now is wait and pray."

So they sat, huddled in pairs, the two boys talking in low whispers. With each passing hour the storm seemed to increase in intensity. Calvin only knew when it should be nightfall by looking at his watch. Dust built up on the

walls and dribbled down like flour on the side of a bin. About nine in the evening they were all startled by a shriek from Mary. She pointed toward the stove. A pale bluish light danced around its surface, playing first from one side, then the other. Then other metal objects became afflicted with the same ghostly image. Uncle John got up, went over to the stove, and touched it with his hand. The blue sparking disappeared.

"Just static, Mary. Won't hurt us none. Builds up like it does when you stroke a cat at night. I don't know how, but it often shows up in these dusters."

About midnight the wind began to subside. By morning the sky had cleared enough that light could penetrate the dust-laden windows. Calvin awoke with a start from a short, fitful nap. He still sat on the daybed, Mary lying with her head in his lap. He looked at his watch.

"Sun's just getting up good, Mary," he said, shaking his wife's shoulder. "I've got to get out and look for Luke..."

As he spoke there was a sudden sound of heavy boots on the porch. Calvin stepped for the door, but it was rudely pushed open before he got there. Luke's slim form stood in the doorway. He was rubbing his eyes as if he had slept little. Calvin hugged him close and then looked up to see Delbert Hoskins standing in the doorway.

"Ma. Pa. Sorry if you worried. I tried to get home, but I got lost in the dust. I couldn't see anything. I just sort of started drifting with the wind and looking for some place to get out..."

Mary was sobbing and holding her son close. "It's all right, Luke. Are you okay?" Mark and John crowded in close and touched their brother as if to see if he were indeed alive.

"I thought I heard you calling for me down by the coyote den, Pa. But when I tried to get there, I got lost again. That part was awful. Once I hit the woods, the wind was a little easier, but I couldn't see at all."

"I know, son. I know. I was out there. You know we wouldn't leave you without looking. It's okay now, you're safe. How did you find him, Del?"

"I just stumbled along until I bumped into Mr. Hoskins' windmill, Pa. I thought it was ours. You couldn't see no more'n a few feet. So I stood there and hollered. Next thing I knew Mr. Hoskins was there. He took me in his house and we waited out the storm."

Calvin looked over at Hoskins with gratitude on his face. Hoskins turned to leave. Calvin caught up with him on the porch. "Wait a minute, Del. Give us a chance to thank you proper."

Hoskins turned and stood facing Calvin with a peculiar,

unblinking stare. Caked dust ringed his eyes, mouth, and nostrils. "Ain't no call for thanks. The boy found his own way to me. Anyone woulda brung him home to you. Just damned lucky for him he found his way. The ground is covered with dead animals and birds."

Calvin asked him to wait again. "Del, we still feel obliged to you. At least maybe this will make you feel better about that deal with Matthew's horse..."

At the mention of the horse, Hoskins stopped, dropped his head a moment, and gritted his teeth as he spoke. Calvin had never seen his neighbor act quite this way. When he spoke, his voice almost hissed the words, and he seemed as if he were trying to voice some deep emotion.

"She was Matthew's horse, not his brother's. The mare wasn't yours or the boy's maw's. It'us part of Matthew's spirit that went with that horse, no one else's. Matthew is a real fine boy, Carlisle, and if he was to run into a lot of hard luck now, well, it would just plain be some of my fault. That's what you folks don't savvy. I'us taught to talk with Shoshone spirits, but I can't do it for Matthew. I can only show him how. That's what I been trying to tell you. And this, _all_ this, comes from spirits."

As he said this last, Hoskins waved his hand at the scene of destruction all about him. Uttering only a small grunt further when Calvin asked him if he were okay, Hoskins

mounted his wagon and turned the team back down the drive.

Later that day, Charley Philpott drove by to say that Matthew had telegraphed a worried message asking him to check up on them as soon as he could. Since he was out that way, he stopped by. Calvin soon related the story of Hoskins' bringing Luke home and in particular, how strangely the man had behaved.

Philpott looked a little concerned. "That's not all he's been up to lately, Calvin. He's been selling off his property--his furniture, cooking vessels, stuff like that. He hasn't brought a thing in the way of crops to town in quite a spell. Last year I think, then it wasn't much.

"Another thing. You know ol' Dollarhide, that tenant farmer over on the west side of town? Well, I passed him on the street the other day and he seemed just fine. Right after I left him, I looked back and he nearly run smack into Hoskins coming out of the feed store. That man took off like a scalded pup. Makes me wonder if it wasn't Del that mussed him up a few years back?"

"Huh," Calvin muttered. "Don't seem right. Del's always been a little suspicious of folks, but he hasn't ever seemed the type to do a man harm. Far as I'm concerned he's been a pretty good neighbor, except for this crazy deal between him and Matthew."

"Well, I've got a feeling that he's given up on farm-

ing," Philpott answered. "He must be selling off his property to live. I checked and as far as I can tell, he ain't drawing any kind of farm relief checks, though he's as entitled to it as anybody. Let me know if you see or hear anything funny from over that way, will you?"

It took days with the entire family working hard to dig out from under the effects of that dust storm. As Hoskins had noted, there were dead jackrabbits, coyotes and birds of various species littering the prairie. Calvin had to shoot one cow, and they found another suffocated in the bottom of the arroyo. Calvin shuddered as he thought of how he had tried to breathe down there. They had lost several chickens, but more to the heat stress than to dust, as far as Calvin could tell. Sand and dust covered the roads like snowdrifts. The boys and Uncle John used shovels to dig out the tractor and other equipment. Calvin laughed at Mary cleaning out their outhouse so it would open. "Looks like a big cat gettin' ready to do her business," he said, only to be chased with the broom. Calvin was proud of his family because they had struggled so bravely with very little complaining, especially Mary. Her only real complaint was the ever-present dust in her house, on her dishes, and in the bedding. It became something they had to live with, but she never quit fighting the dust.

There were other, smaller dust storms, and some weeks

dust blew daily. On May 10, 1934, the biggest storm of all hit. It covered 250,000 square miles and built a cloud 75,000 feet high. It obscured the plains from Texas to North Dakota. People were killed in auto crashes, some of them neighbors of the Carlisles. Another neighbor was caught out in the storm and suffocated. After digging out the second time, the family's spirit was more subdued. After attending their neighbor's funeral, Mary walked out behind the barn to find Calvin sitting on a small hillock tufted with stubborn switchgrass. When the area had been green and the wheat had waved around them, Mary and Calvin would come here to be alone and discuss their plans and dreams. Now Calvin was here to brood. He looked away as he saw Mary approaching.

"I've been missing you for a while, dear. Are you okay?" she asked.

"I'm doing all right. But Mary, I'm just sitting here trying to face facts. This farm hasn't produced enough in three years to make ends meet. If it wasn't for you and the boys working those hens so hard, we wouldn't even have food. I've just begun to wonder lately..."

"If we should quit?" Mary finished his thought.

"Well...yes. Problem is, I don't know what in the hell else I could do. So many of our friends and relatives have already given up and moved on. Maybe we would be better off to do the same."

"Calvin, I don't want to go. Not yet. My own sister has gone to California with her family. From what she writes back, they are living in hell. At least here we can't be run out of our house. We have one cow fresh. She'll make milk a while longer for us, and the others can add a little for selling. We've lost some hens alright, but we have some sitting their nests right now. Calvin, it's got to start raining again someday. We can make it quite a spell yet."

Calvin looked at his wife. She seemed ten years older than before the first big dust storm hit, yet she wasn't even ready to talk about giving up. He felt a bit of shame and hugged her. "You're a good woman, Mary. You give a man the starch he needs to keep on hoping. Maybe I'll get with Jerry Harper and see what can be done in the middle of this dust bin to hang on a while longer."

They walked back together, arm in arm. Good rains fell for the first time later that month, but then no more came.

CHAPTER VIII

Before the destruction that was the American Dust Bowl had been completed, six million square miles had blown out completely down to the plowpan. The land was either stacked up in drifts against fences, roads, buildings and trees, or it was bare and hard as macadam. Or, like many of the inhabitants of the land, it was gone. It settled in Illinois, Iowa, Missouri and other states where the winds had tired and sifted their tons of burden to the earth.

Although it really doesn't matter, Steinbeck's Okies did not come from the Dust Bowl _per se_. Only two to three percent of the hardy, stubborn population living in the true Dust Bowl area--that area so affected by wind and drought that there was no topsoil left in which to farm--actually moved away for good. One of every four Dust Bowl farms was abandoned, but it was usually a case in which its owners simply could no longer live on the place and moved to town, where they lived on government relief programs. The Joads represented a half million real "Okies" who were the victims of the Great Depression, of disease, and of illiteracy.

The real exodus from Oklahoma came from a broad belt in the population ranging from the northeastern part of the

state down to the southwestern corner, areas where cotton was grown. In a misdirected attempt to help the situation, the government put a cotton relief program into effect that paid by the acre owned. But tenants grew cotton, and the landowners pocketed the money. Tenants owned no land, had no homes, no jobs, and eventually, no hope. Their only alternative was to move, and the exodus began.

The people who remained on the land survived primarily by benefit of two factors: sheer stubbornness and government relief. Many farmers didn't believe in relief, seeing it as a form of outright charity, a sign of weakness and loss of pride. Some of them paid for their pride with their life savings, their homes, and their farms. Jawclenched stubbornness marked the Dust Bowl farmer and cattleman as no human has been marked since Cain. That trait was personified in John McCarty of Dalhart, Texas, in 1935, young editor of the _Dalhart Texan_. In spite of the plague of drought and dust scourging his land, McCarty vowed that it was still "the best damned country God's sun ever shone upon." So McCarty pledged--in his newspaper--that he would not leave it until he was the last man. And he dared others to join him. Thus formed the Last Man's Club. Initially a lip-protruding glare at the evils of the Dust Bowl, it quickly became a rallying cry that reached across the plains. Into McCarty's tiny office came railroad men, cowboys, mechanics,

and lawyers, doctors and businessmen, each pledging in ink to stay to the last man.

The real significance of McCarty's Last Man's Club probably could only have been visible at the time to a keen sociologist studying the whole picture from a distance. But the movement heralded the end of the rugged individualist attitude and began an era of fighting the dust as a united people. When that happened, victory over the dust became possible.

It was an odd gathering. Twenty men, all experts on soil and its control, met in an overheated room in the Amarillo Hotel in January of 1936, while their sworn enemy, the dust, pelted the windows to get in. They grimly listened as a U.S. Department of Agriculture representative announced that action on recommendations they had previously made had been halted because of was a "difference of opinion in Washington as to the value of the work to be done." When Secretary of Agriculture Wallace read their joint response a few days later, he was impressed with two things: the listing of expert credentials of the men signing the document, and the fact that they were not afraid to speak their minds to toe-dragging bureau- crats. He personally endorsed their idea to support emergen- cy payments to farmers for lister plowing fields to help catch blowing soil and hold rainfall.

Among the experts on the list was H.H. Finnell, with the Soil Conservation Service. While working for the Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Finnell's data had proved that lister-plowed soils would remain moist for several feet with little rain, while conventional plowed land dried out rapidly. The lister plow, with its high, arcing sweep, would bite deeply and turn soil into long rows of furrows, leaving a place for water to collect in each row. Blowing sand hitting these furrows collects in the bottom and is thus removed from the air. In the fight against the dust, fields often had to be listered repeatedly because the furrows kept filling with blown sand. The problem had been how to get farmers to use the method on a united basis. One way that worked was a plan which paid farmers twenty cents an acre to lister plow--or 40 cents to have it hired--was to be only one of many that would set farmers on a course of united action.

Legislation for the action moved through Washington with amazing speed. Congress rushed through an amendment to the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act authorizing two million dollars to support the program. President Roosevelt signed it on February 29, 1936, and by March 15 the attack was mobilized.

Soil experts recommended lister plowing on contours agreeing with the slope of the land. This was not a new

concept by any means, but the degree of precision to which they carried it was. Farmers in communities all over the Dust Bowl joined together, running tractors day and night. They traversed the land like apparitions from a nightmare--rattling, clanking, snorting machines guided by grimy, begoggled men wearing miner's dust masks. They stirred up choking clouds of their own dust, and their huge headlights looked like the eyes of dragons shaking and bumping their way through their own smoke. But they were effective. When a whole community had received the treatment, watchers stayed on alert and quickly called in help to repeat the process when blowing was spotted.

By May of 1936, an area five times as large as the state of Delaware--some five and a half million acres--had been covered with lister furrows on contours. And the beautiful part was that it was done in a joint effort by forty thousand participating farmers.

There were many other plans that added to the total effect. County extension agents persuaded farmers to plant a strip of tall-growing sorghum every few yards across their wheat fields. The sorghum made good cattle feed and acted as miniature windbreaks for the wheat plants, which could literally be sandblasted away by grains of wind-blown sand. The sorghum stalks and roots also helped hold the soil from all but the most violent blows.

Charlie Whitfield stood ankle deep in the sand at the top of the biggest dune and gave a long, slow sigh. "Why me?" could have rightfully been at the foremost of his mind. Why was he chosen by the powers that be to take this miserable piece of ground northeast of Dalhart, Texas, and turn it back into grassland? The answer was that Charlie Whitfield knew more about grass and the sod beneath it than anyone else in the Soil Conservation Service and the Dalhart Dunes were to become something to point to--a beacon of hope in the desert of the Dust Bowl. If they could conquer the sand demon here, they could conquer him anywhere on the Great Plains.

This land had only been farmed three years. Now it contained more than 2,000 acres of sand dunes, the largest of which was 880 yards long and higher than anything in Dalhart except the grain elevator. As the wind blew, the dunes moved, expanded, and ruined adjoining land. The Dalhart Dunes were a festering sore that had to be healed. Dozers and disk plows smoothed and leveled the smaller dunes, but they couldn't even climb the sides of the larger ones for bogging down in the loose sand and dust. Whitfield turned to his ingenuity.

"The wind built these dunes. We'll just have to let the wind tear them down. For once, it will work for us

instead of against us," he declared. He had workmen fill gunny sacks with sand and line them standing upright in rows along the tops of the larger dunes. The people smirked. On other dunes he used sheet iron and made wind fences, looking much like billboards. The people shook their heads, and made jokes. On yet another dune, he had workmen dig a ditch three feet wide and four feet deep, running crosswise to the prevailing winds. The people smirked again.

But when the first hard winds blew, they whirled around Whitfield's man-made obstacles and cut the sand off of the top of the dunes. They lowered until the signs and sacks fell and the ditches were erased. The people stopped smirking. When tighter packed sand was encountered, teams were sent to the top, dragging pieces of railroad iron behind them to loosen it, and then the wind intensifiers, as Whitfield referred to his devices, were re-established.

Over the course of a year, the dunes lowered. As more and more ground was smoothed out, it was carefully surveyed and lister plowed on contours. Whitfield again went to his bag of tricks, readying his operation for the day when a little rain would fall. And that's just what he got--a little rain. Light rain fell in March of 1937, and Whitfield quickly planted Sudan grass, kafir, millet, black amber cane, and broomcorn. All were drouth-tolerant crops from various dry corners of the world. The Dalhart area received

only two-thirds of its average annual rainfall that year, but Whitfield's plantings made crops. They did so because the contour furrows hoarded every drop and none ran off. Whitfield harvested crops that year and left the stubble to hold the soil. His "intensifiers" kept on working on the remaining larger dunes. By the spring of 1938, Whitfield was the hero of the now non-existent Dalhart Dunes, and the Soil Conservation Service had solid proof that Dust Bowl lands could be returned to productivity.

Planting trees on the plains to break the rush of the wind was not a new idea. But it was a new idea to the man looking out of his railroad car windows at a bleak Great Plains scene in 1932. The man was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and his idea was certainly not a grandstand play for the upcoming election. In fact, he kept the idea to himself until shortly after his inauguration. Only then did he reveal his idea to the Chief of the Forest Service and ask him to look into the feasibility of a belt of trees running from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada, directly up the heart of the Great Plains. The answer was that trees had been planted here successfully before, although the area was not suffering from extended drought as it was now. Experts quibbled among themselves as to the feasibility, some wanting to initiate it quickly, others saying it would set the Forest

Service back years in public image.

But Roosevelt wasn't particularly interested in Forest Service image at that point. Yes, he agreed, it would be expensive, but it would stop wind and it would provide jobs for needy people. Proceed. To follow the financial meanderings that ensued to get such a project underway would have sent a snake to a chiropracter. But it was one of the President's pet projects, and one way or another, it was going to be established. Finally, the first tree for the first shelterbelt was planted on March 19, 1935. Only 120 miles of shelterbelts were planted that year, but a sixty to seventy percent survival rate helped save the project.

The President was pleased, but Congress was not. Funding was cut, and Roosevelt moved his pet project under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration. To farmers, this meant changes in agreements with the government in order to receive help in establishing their shelterbelts. Problems included unpredictable cost-sharing for tree establishment and having all sorts of strangers coming and going on their land. A later approach required farmers to give the government a 99-year lease on the land needed for the shelterbelts, and the farmers would be paid for maintaining them. The response to that was predictable.

"I don't rightly see how I can sign up under that kind of a deal," one farmer said. "I'm not a-tall anxious to have

a herd of government fellers traipsing in and out of my back door for the rest of my natural born life." Only 129 miles of trees were planted that year.

Finally, a cooperative project was established, one that appealed to the landowners. The farmers prepared the land for planting, provided the posts and wire for fences, and agreed to keep the land cultivated. The government furnished the trees and labor for planting and fencebuilding. Large numbers of farmers began to sign up, and the real shelterbelt phase was underway. Thousands of men from farms and small towns were provided with income from the work. The experts ceased quibbling, catcalls from the press dwindled, and the President was pleased. Before it was finished, this ambitious plan resulted in 18,500 miles of shelterbelts on 30,000 farms from North Dakota to the Texas Panhandle. In time, the tree plantings were expanded west, far out onto the worst regions of the Dust Bowl--and they survived.

The various government agencies that provided many differing types of relief were aimed primarily at getting people through the Depression. But in the Dust Bowl areas, the Depression and dust were synonymous. Thus more programs were aimed at special problems of this area. There were programs to ship cattle in and ship cattle out at lower costs. Some were federal, others were provided by the

railroad. There were programs to bring in animal feed at lower cost and programs that paid not to raise certain crops. Still others paid farmers to stay completely out of certain fields, and some paid them to till those fields in certain ways. Some farmers unabashedly accepted programs that amounted to outright charity, while others waited until they had nearly lost everything before they would even accept cooperative programs such as payments for lister plowing to conserve moisture.

Some of the programs were ludicrous, such as land-owners receiving payments for cotton acreages when it was the tenant farmers suffering and losing everything. Some programs made lots of sense and people were quick to accept them, such as soil conservation measures and WPA employment. But regardless, the individualist of the plains lumped all government intervention--wanted or unwanted, good or bad--under one name: relief. For all the good intentions that went awry in these times, one fact remains certain: not very many Dust Bowl farmers could have made it through without some type of government relief program.

There were so many government people working in the Dust Bowl area that farmers complained they couldn't plow for clogging up their disks with them. One man said he wore his britches out getting up and down to answer the door.

"I'll say one thing for'em," he added, "They's

workers. They're here weekdays, evenings, Saturdays and sometimes waitin' on the porch after church on Sunday."

Humor had to be one of the most endearing and beneficial attributes that Dust Bowl inhabitants retained to help survive the economic and natural disaster they faced in the 1930's. To stand and laugh in the face of adversity seems to have been an American trademark from the inception of this country. Dust Bowl humor marked its people with a special brand of courage and helped them maintain a degree of sanity when the going truly became rough.

A good example is one Dust Bowl farmer telling a tenderfoot who complained of the dryness in the Panhandle that he had grown to like the dusty dry conditions. "Why son, a rain cloud come up t'other day and a drop of rain hit me in the forehead. I passed out, and my wife had to throw three buckets of dirt in my face to wake me up."

Such humor was a common bond that kept people from becoming obsessed with their problems. It helped in a real way to overcome the dust, as did the willingness of the people to sacrifice and to work together. The recovery of the dual malady of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl involved people and government changing a way of life and attitude. When the rains finally returned in 1938, the people and the land were ready to take advantage of them.

CHAPTER IX

Calvin went to see Jerry Harper the day after his discussion with Mary about quitting the farm. For two hours Harper and Calvin discussed possible farming options. Harper recommended more drought-resistant crops such as Sudan grass and kafir corn, as well as added acres of sorghum. With the small amount of rain they had received, together with the low prices, he discouraged Calvin from planting much wheat.

"You might plant about 40 acres, just to pasture your dairy cows on if we get enough growth. But I'd sure like to see you put a strip of sorghum every few yards across that forty. That'll break up some of the beating that young wheat will take. 'Nother thing. We got to be damned sure your fences are in good shape around any Sudan you put in. With all this drought, I don't have to tell you what can happen. You'll have more dead milkers than live ones, or you'll be paying for some neighbor's stock."

Calvin acknowledged that, and assured Harper he had good fencing, except where sand dunes had piled up and made crossings. Those could be dug out and reset, he said. After much planning, Calvin still had the gnawing reality in the back of his mind that he wasn't going to be able to make it financially for much longer. There just seemed to be too

many things against him.

After their work was finished, Harper asked Calvin to join him for lunch. "There's one more issue I want to take up with you and we can talk about it on the way over to Millie's Cafe," Harper said.

Calvin assented, and the two started the short walk to the diner. "Calvin," Harper said, "I know you pretty well by now, and I've been studying for some time as to how I can approach a certain subject with you. I guess the best thing is to just get it off my chest."

Calvin looked at his friend, somewhat surprised. "There ain't much we haven't been able to talk about, Jerry. What's eating you?"

Harper pulled his sweat-stained straw hat off, scratched at the part in his hair a little, and then put it back on, tugging it down as if he expected a strong breeze. He squinted a little, then said, "Calvin, I want you to go over to the AAA office and have Beth Langtry get you signed up for some lister plowing payments."

Calvin stopped walking and looked at Jerry, wide-eyed. "Now just a minute, Jerry. I'm hurtin' all right, but I don't think I'm ready for relief--"

Harper's voice raised a little. "Now hold on, Calvin. I didn't say I thought you should sign up, I said I wanted you to sign up. You may have a ways to go left in you, prob-

ably more than most folks around here. But you need the help and you're entitled. Besides, you'll be helping other folks here."

"By signing up on relief? How in the world is my asking for a handout going to help anyone else?" Calvin inquired, his voice also edging up.

"Dammit, Calvin, it's not a handout. Taking money from the government for doing nothing might be considered charity. But the AAA programs are paying you to take part in a soil conservation effort. You've got your own lister plow, so you can draw twenty cents an acre by plowing it on the contour and letting me tell them you've done it. You're helping them--and the country--and they pay you to do it. Top of that, you've got a lot of acreage you should be drawing on because you're not planting wheat--"

"I don't want no one to pay me for not growing something, Jerry," Calvin interrupted. "You know my feelings on that. As far as contour plowing, I'll plow it into tic-tac-toe boards if you say so, but I don't expect no pay for it. And how the hell does that help anyone but me?"

Since they were within a half-block of the diner, Harper stopped under an awning in the shade to talk. "Because, Calvin. Whether you like it or not, you're considered a good farmer around here. There's been a lot of times when I couldn't reach some of these folks. But when they seen you

something, they followed along like puppy dogs. Now you got old Amos Schwartz over there, he's hurting bad, but he's not signed up, neither. Another year like this one and he's done for. Keenan Johnson won't make this year without some kind of help. There's more. Lyndal Jones, Dovie Roxbury and Matthew Wainwright to name some. All of these people are your friends and neighbors, Calvin. But I can't get them to get help. And they have a right to it. They didn't cause this damned dust bowl, at least not all by themselves, they didn't.

"This AAA thing can help all of them, plus there are other programs too. Dovie Roxbury still has that bony old herd of broodcows. They ain't much to look at, but they can still have calves if we ever see some grass growing around here again. In the meantime, we got one outfit called the Drought Relief Service that can ship in some feed at less cost than he could raise it if the damned stuff would grow! If word got out you that you was 'on relief'--I know, it don't sound good to you, but that's the way it would be told. Anyhow, if word got out, it wouldn't be long before most of the others would be right behind you."

Calvin was speechless for a minute. "You mean if I don't sign up, you'd consider that to be muleheaded pride and my neighbors are the same way? To the point they'd go broke first?" he finally asked.

"Calvin, I don't know if they would intentionally wait that long, but some of them aren't going to make it even with government help. What happens if they wait so long before asking that it's too late? It wouldn't be your fault, of course. But they do look up to you and that's a fact."

The two men ate a quiet lunch without any further word of their discussion. During their meal, Dovie Roxbury happened to come by the diner. He looked up at the posted prices without spotting Calvin and Harper sitting in the back booth. Looking dismayed, he passed the diner and ambled on down the street.

"Damn!" was all Calvin said. He left Harper promising to talk the situation over with Mary and get back to him soon. Three days later he had signed up for several government programs that would help bring his income up to about $240 a month. Beth Langtry was more certain than a telegraph, and the fact that Calvin Carlisle had signed up on "relief" was old news by the next day. Jerry Harper's assessment of Dust Bowl stubborn pride was accurate. Within two weeks, all of the people he had discussed with Calvin, plus others, had joined the one and a half million on some form of relief in Oklahoma in 1934.

Matthew graduated from Oklahoma A&M in the spring of 1935. He was loaded with enthusiasm, armed with the latest

technology in the soil sciences, and very eager to do his part in recovering the plains. Long before graduation, he had applied to the Soil Conservation Service for employment. His old boss in the experiment station, H.H. Finnell, was now heading up erosion control projects in the Texas Panhandle. Through Finnell's influence, Matthew was soon part of an instructing team setting up demonstration farms with cooperating farmers. The idea was to use the latest knowledge in contour planting, strip cropping, and drought resistant crops in a combination scheme to fight the dust and heat. Matthew worked all over the Texas and Oklahoma Panhandles. He wrote home that, while they were learning a lot, the work could be very discouraging because it seemed that almost as fast as they got one farm to showing some promise, the neighbor's land got to blowing and wiped it all out. People just didn't seem to know that they had to pull together, Matthew wrote.

In one letter he wrote his father of the Dalhart, Texas, Last Man's Club: I'm a member, Pa, and I'm sure you will want to be one too, when you hear about it. Calvin Carlisle grinned broadly the whole time he filled out the application. Matthew and Susan came home for Christmas, full of exciting tales about living in tiny apartments and fighting scorpions and dust.

"Pa...I know things have been rough here on the place,

but I really believe the government is going to come through. It will just take some time. And all the weather people say this drought is a cycle that will break. Susan and I thought folks here had it bad until we got out further west."

"Oh, Mary, we saw the most pitiful people out there. The ones who live there have it rough, but these folks were moving west. To California, mostly. Out by Amarillo is what they call a Hooverville. There are people living there in tarpaper huts like animals," Susan said.

Jerry Harper worked behind the scenes to get the Carlisle farm selected as a demonstration farm. That spring, Mary Carlisle was sitting on the front porch snapping the few peas she had coaxed from her dusty garden when she heard a motor vehicle. As it approached, she saw the SCS insignia on the door and soon recognized Matthew and Susan inside. With a squeal of delight, she called Calvin and ran out to the truck.

"What're you doing home, son? Lose your job and steal the truck?" Calvin asked, grinning.

"No, you're looking at the SCS person in charge of setting up the demonstration farm. Carlisle, Calvin...at least that's the way it's written here." He showed Calvin the agreement.

"Well, I'll be. Jerry told us we were selected and I

thought sure, why not? But we didn't dream you'd get the job. Or did you have a hand in that?"

"Well, I might of, but don't quote me on that. Someone's got to make this dumpy place over, so it might as well be a Carlisle," he said, shaking his father's hand and then getting a thump on the shoulder for his remark.

Much work had already been done by Calvin and Harper toward making the Carlisle farm an example for others to follow. Matthew set about carefully surveying the contours so that not a drop of water went unnecessarily wasted. Jerry Harper stopped by frequently, usually bringing some farmer from a far-off corner of the county. It almost got to be routine for Harper and Matthew to get off to themselves talking about the recovery work, while Calvin made the farmer's acquaintance and discussed the pros and cons of what was going on. Calvin could see his own concerns in the man's face in a way that it was impossible for Matthew or Harper to know. You had to have the responsibility--it had to be your farm, your family that stood to be lost if action wasn't taken. Calvin soon learned to derive a great deal of satisfaction from those visits.

Matthew went with Harper on many trips to talk with bankers. Many bankers based their loans on how much water was standing in ponds--an indication to them of soil moisture, and thus a potential crop. The pair managed to convince

a few that if a man was putting the water into his soil in a way that it would await the crop, there probably wouldn't be a pond, yet he was doing a better job of farming. Several lenders visited the Carlisle farm, where the soil treatment was already showing positive results. A real grain crop was underway for the first time since 1931, and Calvin was excited and proud of that fact. But blowing sand from the Hoskins farm ruined the wheat stand in March of 1937. Calvin's mood was black as he told Harper the news.

Jerry Harper looked up from his desk as Calvin hung his hat on the rack. "Wheat's gone, Jerry. All 40 acres of it," he said, his eyes seeming to study his own boots.

"What! How in hell...it was fine day before yesterday. A little droughty, but coming on."

"It was that blow yesterday that done it. Delbert Hoskins hasn't touched a foot of his place with a lister plow or anything else, and that forty borders his. The wheat looked like it was just sand blasted right out of the ground. The sorghum strips helped some, but it was ripe last fall and there's just stalks left. Wasn't enough to turn the wind, I guess."

"Well I'm sorry, Calvin, I really am. But at least folks got to see that you could grow it before it was took. Maybe Matthew can do something about people like Hoskins in his Amarillo meeting."

"What can they do? Force people to take care of their places? Hoskins would never go for that."

Harper was already shaking his head. "No, but they are paying them to take part, and the idea here is to get people like you and your neighbors to go from one farm to another lister plowing every acre on the contour. As soon as one place gets done, move on to the next. A new program has been funded for that, and now it just needs organizing. Matthew has been asked to help with the organizing. Guess you don't see as much of him now that he's working on Curtis' place?"

"Naw, we sure don't. He's awful busy. But Susan came over and said something about this trip the other day. Hope it works out."

If Calvin had any idea his wish would be granted so quickly, he might have asked for green pastures and regular rain, because Matthew received good news within two weeks. The Woodward paper carried announcements about a public meeting of interest to all area farmers on May 15. Jerry Harper and Calvin spread the word to all they met that a new type of government program to fight the dust was under way and they were to take an active part. Not only would it not cost them, but they were to be paid for taking part.

Nearly the whole community was present at the little gymnasium where Matthew had graduated so few years before. He was nervous as he addressed people who knew him from

childhood. He was sincerely concerned that he would come off looking as if he knew more about farming than they did. Finally, he decided truth was the best policy.

"Folks," he began, "Most of you know me and my family. I have a real big fear tonight that some of you might think I have gone off somewhere, got an education, and come home to lord it over you. Well, if that's what you think, I have sure wasted a lot of time and effort, because I'm here to tell you that I couldn't hold the most of you a light to farm by. Pa, I mean Calvin Carlisle, can tell you that my britches don't even seem to want to fit a tractor seat anymore."

There were chuckles around the room, and Matthew's confidence rose. As he lifted his head from his notes to begin speaking once more, he spotted Delbert Hoskins leaning tiredly against the wall beside a group of men in the rear of the room. Matthew felt the old feeling he had when Hoskins had waved him to a stop in the road.

"You are right if you say I went up to A&M at Stillwater and learned a whole lot of stuff about the soil and about farming. But folks, I'm here to tell you I didn't get no <u>education</u> at all until I went to the Texas Panhandle and tried to help folks fight those dusters. I have learned a whole lot since then that they don't teach in classrooms, and that is what I hope to bring home here to Woodward

County. The only way I can do it is with all of you pulling together. Now here is what the new government plan is all about..."

Matthew went on to outline how groups of farmers would share equipment and resources, working around the clock to lister-contour every blowing acre in the county. Then watchers would be set up in bad areas, and if blowing was spotted, they would redo it until it was stopped. He named some of the drought resistant crops they could plant the first year or two and cited the current prices they could expect to receive for them. He told them how it was of utmost importance to lister plow every blowing acre, for one acre blowing could ruin twelve acres on a neighbor's place. Then he asked if there were any questions.

"Yes, I've got a question," came a booming voice from the back of the room. Matthew's heart pounded. It was Delbert Hoskins, who had advanced halfway the length of the room down the row of folding chairs.

"I want to know what's going to happen after you do all this fancy plowing, after you spend all these folk's time and money and then still don't have no rain. And it ain't going to rain, Matthew Carlisle, and you know why it ain't!"

Calvin jumped to his feet and glared at Hoskins. Even though he was angry with Hoskins, the man's appearance

shocked Calvin. Hoskins looked lean and hungry, like a stray cur. His face was dirty and his clothes looked as if he had worn them every day for quite a spell. But most noticeable of all were Hoskins' eyes. They were wide, like those of a frightened animal. In spite of his anger, Calvin couldn't help feeling sorry for the man. Calvin now felt for sure that something unnatural was affecting his neighbor.

Matthew stammered out an answer: "But it is going to rain again, Mr. Hoskins. Everyone knows that. It is just a matter of breaking a weather pattern..."

"To hell with your weather patterns!" Hoskins yelled, waving his fist. "And to hell with your tractors," he added, looking wildly around the room. "Don't a one of you come on my place with your plows or I'll..." Hoskins was interrupted by Charley Philpott's ham-sized hand on his shoulder.

"Come on now, Del, you're making a scene. If you want to take part, just do so like a gentleman..."

"A gentleman! So it's a gentleman you want, is it? Do I look like a gentleman to you?" Hoskins asked, a sneer forming across his grimy face. "Nothing has growed on my place for pert near two years now, and you want me to act like a gentleman? The well puts out barely enough water to keep a piss ant wet and this cussed wind never stops blowing and you want us to act like gentlemen!"

Hoskins carried his tirade further up the aisle closer

to Matthew, pausing to give out a rattling cough a couple of times as he advanced. Philpott stayed close in case of trouble, at the same time noticing that Calvin had gotten up and was circling to the side of the room, angling closer to Hoskins. Matthew stepped from behind the podium and came forward to face Hoskins. He held his hand up toward his father to get him to stay back, fearing Hoskins would become more hostile if Calvin approached.

Hoskins stopped at the front row of chairs and supported himself on the back of a chair. Only his eyes seemed to have much life, and they leapt from person to person before he spoke. "They's two big differences between the rest of you all and me," Hoskins said. "One is that I ain't on no government tit, and I ain't never gonna be. I been down to living off of jackrabbits for a spell now, but I'll tough it out for the rest of my time. Way I figure, I got the dust pneumonia and ain't long for it, anyhow."

Hoskin's words caused mumbling among the crowd. Matthew tried to talk to him: "Mr. Hoskins, let us help--"

"T'other difference is that I know what's brought this plague on us," Hoskins said, cutting him off. "It was done by Matthew Carlisle! He was only a boy then, and it wasn't a thing to hold agin him then."

Now Hoskins turned and looked at Matthew. "But yore a growed man now, and it's time you done right. It ain't gonna

rain again 'till you do. Things ain't gonna get better, so don't try bringing no tractors to my place. You let me help and we can break this thing. No tractors!"

Hoskins began coughing again and made his way quickly toward the door. The crowd stared in silence at the man's strange words, and Philpott stepped aside to allow him a retreat from the room. Hoskins disappeared into the night. After a few minutes, Matthew re-convened the meeting, and plans were made to begin the mass plowing the following Monday. Matthew and Jerry Harper spent the weekend gathering materials, laying out a farm-by-farm map of action to be sure all participants were included. It was agreed that they would start with the westernmost farms in the county and work east, thus keeping the dust they would stir up blowing onto unworked soil. It was Sunday evening after church before Matthew had a real chance to discuss Hoskins' actions with his father.

"What can you make out of Hoskins, Pa? I think he might have gone a little crazy."

"It sure looks that way. Charley Philpott told me to keep a sharp eye out. You see how thin Del's got? I don't think he's been eating well. And he's got a dust cough real bad. Charley says he's still not getting any kind of relief. Good thing he's got no family left, or someone would have to go in there to help."

"Maybe I should go see him," Matthew said. "Sure seems like he's got a bone in his throat about me getting mad at his weather spirits. I didn't know what it meant to him or I would have done something about it long ago."

"I wish you wouldn't go in there alone, Matthew. I feel inside of me that he's dangerous. He gave me the skitters when he brought Luke home."

"Okay, Pa. I'll keep away for now. But sooner or later I feel like we're going to have to have some sort of agreement with him."

The tractors started to roll at seven on Monday morning and kept rolling for weeks. With each turn the men ate dust, breathed dust, and furrowed dust. But farm by farm the contours appeared, and with it, hope. Each man thought of the meager crop that had appeared from the dust on the Carlisle farm. They knew that if only a little rain fell, they too, would again be in the farming business. They continued signing up members in the venture until they had traversed the whole county, and then farms overlapping the county lines. Soon they had lister plowed every acre in their district on the contour of the land except for those of a few absentee landowners and the Hoskins' farm.

Jerry Harper had insisted on talking to Hoskins to keep him and Matthew apart. Matthew had written to the

absentee landlords, who were now being fined daily for their lack of participation. In a couple of weeks he had their permission, and the work progressed. Jerry Harper didn't fare as well. He was run off Hoskins' land at gunpoint. There was nothing the sheriff could do, because Hoskins was in his rights. Finally, an injunction against Hoskins was obtained when his farm blew and damaged several surrounding fields belonging to his neighbors. Philpott served Hoskins the injunction in town and informed him that a crew would be out in the morning to begin treatments for his place.

"In the morning, eh?" Hoskins had said. "I'll be ready."

Calvin Carlisle stood up in the tractor seat as it sat rumbling at the entry to the long lane of cedars leading up to Hoskins' small house. He didn't like this business of having to force one man to do something because it harmed his neighbors. But Charley Philpott walked ahead of him, his pistol unstrapped in his holster. Matthew and Jerry Harper came next, riding in the SCS truck. Other farmers with lister plows followed docilely along behind.

Before they had advanced halfway down the lane, Hoskins suddenly appeared from behind a cedar trunk. His right hand pointed the twin barrels of a shotgun at the group and a large Colt's Dragoon pistol was jammed in his

belt. Hoskins' left hand held a small leather bag attached to his wrist by a thong. Though he coughed a lot, his eyes were unflinching and black. Philpott's hand moved gingerly closer to his pistol handle. Without switching his stare from Matthew, who had stepped out of his truck, Hoskins turned the shotgun directly on the sheriff.

"I will talk with Matthew," he growled.

"No, by hell, you won't, you crazy son-of-a..." Calvin said, starting his tractor forward. The shotgun muzzle flitted toward Calvin's face, and the distinct metallic click of hammers being set back sounded as clear as the ring of a blacksmith's iron.

Hoskins repeated his message: "I will talk with Matthew now."

Matthew stepped forward quickly. "Mr. Hoskins, don't do this..."

"Only you can change things now Matthew," Hoskins said, calmly. "Are you ready?"

The hair raised on the back of Matthew's neck. He knew now that everything he said could be crucial to keeping someone from getting killed.

"Yes, I have come to ask your spirits for forgiveness. Will you help me?"

"Matthew!" Calvin called. "You don't have to do this."

"Yes, I do, Pa. We should have taken Mr. Hudspeth's

advice and settled this thing the day after it happened. Now we must let the shaman help. You are a Shoshone shaman, aren't you?" Matthew asked.

Hoskins smiled slightly. "You know then. If you have that much figgered out, there's a good chance we can do this thing together. I want you to know, Matthew, that I ain't never been mad at you. Fact is, I always figgered you for a pretty good man--like my son might have been if he had lived. He was born dead."

Matthew stammered, "I...I'm sorry, Mr. Hoskins. We didn't know."

At Hoskins' bidding, Matthew sat down, after asking Calvin and Philpott not to interfere.

Hoskins stepped close to Matthew and placed his left hand on Matthew's head. He began chanting lightly, but he soon stopped.

"You are not thinking of sorrow. You are only thinking of your Pa's safety. That's good for a son to do, Matthew, but it ain't going to help us none in talkin' to the spirits. You have to think of all that's happened. Think back to that night in the woods, and know that you have to live by the weather. Farmers are no different than Injuns when it comes to living with weather, son. Try again."

Matthew was amazed. He had been worrying about the possiblility of his father trying to rush Hoskins. He quick-

ly changed his thoughts to the night of the storm, when he had lashed out at the weather in anger. He truly wished now that he had never uttered those words.

The instant he thought that, Hoskins stopped chanting again. "You done right well, boy. That's all there is to it. Hoskins opened the small leather bag and took out a white, granular substance. He took a pinch and motioned for Matthew to put out his tongue. Matthew immediately recognized the taste of salt.

"This is wa-noh to the Shoshone. My mother's people traveled many miles across the prairie to get it. Plain as it is to us, salt is for food and for the body. But the Shoshone say it is also like words. You gotta have it, but too much is bitter. From now on, whenever you taste it, you will always remember that the spirits have forgiven your bitter words."

Hoskins removed his hand, backed away from Matthew a few yards, and raised the shotgun toward Philpott again.

"By God, I told you'ns not to come, but you did. Well, now you're here, you might as well try to help this place. You'ns can thank Matthew for getting things going without bloodshed. I didn't want that, since I don't have a grudge agin any of you and because my own time is close. Now I'm going up in those woods behind my house and stay there till you're gone. If as much as one man or one tractor comes in

those woods, there's gonna be killin'."

Hoskins backed away as he talked, then, stepping behind the cover of some cedars, retreated into the small strip of woods behind his house. Philpott and Calvin sighed with relief.

"By thunder, that's the biggest set of gun barrels I ever looked down, Carlisle. What about you?"

"They're the only set of gunbarrels I ever looked down, Charley, and I was scared to death. What do we do about that character now? We can't let him run around loose. He's nuts!" Calvin answered.

"Pa. Sheriff Philpott. I don't know what's bothering him, but I get the feeling he won't hurt nobody if we don't push him. He seems to like me. Maybe I can talk to him," Matthew said.

"Well, for now let's do as he says and just get started doing what we came to do before he changes his mind--" Philpott's comment was stopped abruptly by the loud report of a shot from the woods. Several farmers scurried for cover behind equipment.

"That tears it, Calvin, now I got to go after him. You folks stay here," Philpott said.

The Sheriff had only taken a few steps when Matthew caught up with him. "Sheriff, I seem to be the only one he will listen to. Let me go with you."

Calvin joined them, and the trio slowly and carefully entered the strip of woods. Only a short distance into the woods, a small glade opened, with a fenced enclosure in the middle. Delbert Hoskins was sitting on the inside, his back to the approaching men. They stopped behind trees for cover.

"Hoskins, you okay?" Philpott called out. There was no response whatever. Waving Matthew and Calvin to remain behind, Philpott stepped lightly forward, his pistol cocked and ready. When he got close enough, he could see blood, and knew Hoskins was dead. He stepped close enough to be sure and holstered his pistol. Matthew and Calvin hurried up, horrified. Hoskins had used the pistol and shot himself through the head. His left hand clutched the little bag of salt tightly to his chest. In the center of the enclosure was a tombstone with a woman's name and an Indian name carved on it.

Charley Philpott came by the Carlisle farm the next day to see Matthew. Calvin invited him in and asked him to sit. "What did you learn about Del's family, Charley? Does he have anyone?"

Philpott looked down at the floor, and then at Matthew. "Well, none that there is any evidence of--at least not blood related. Seems that there was someone he thought a lot of, though."

Calvin and Matthew exchanged glances as Philpott handed them a piece of paper. In scrawled, broken English, with poor penmanship and misspellings, Delbert Hoskins had prepared a makeshift last will:

> This here paper's to let folks know that I got no one to my name. The Indian folks is all dead, and the white folks, what there was of'em, didn't want me. They have long since forgot. Seems like the only people ever did me right was my wife and the Carlisles, especially Matthew. I want my place and what little stuff I have to go to him. With his Pa's place next door, they can build a real good farm, especially with Matthew having learned so much up in Stillwater. All I ask is that Matthew sees to it I am buried by my wife and the graves is kept up as long as he owns the land. I am sorry ahead of time for hurtin' anyone if I have to. But there's some things that have to be done. If you find this note, you will already know what I mean.
>
> Delbert Hoskins.

CHAPTER X

In 1976, a record wheat crop flowed out of the farmlands of Oklahoma to fill a train of hopper cars that would stretch from the world's largest grain terminal facility at Enid, to 46 miles beyond its export point in the Galveston, Texas, harbor. This was hard red winter wheat, world famous for its baking and milling qualities, and it flowed like a river to many parts of the world. Eighty percent of each year's crop goes out of our ports to other countries. Yet our surpluses are so plentiful that it keeps storage facilities full to capacity most years. Much of this bounty originates in the land once known as the Dust Bowl. Looking at the land now, it is almost impossible to visualize covered with sand dunes, tumbleweeds and thistles. Now there are fields of sorghum, alfalfa--even corn in places. And of course, there are the wheat fields, billowing in the wind like waves at sea.

Just prior to the 1976 harvest, Matthew Carlisle walked with his grandson along the edge of such a wheat field, admiring what he knew to be a bumper crop. A typical eight year old, the boy scampered after butterflies, threw rocks at tree trunks and other targets and pestered his grandfath-

er with questions. But some of the boy's questions particularly pleased the old man. His favorite questions to answer concerned the soil, and about why things grew and how, and about the weather.

Matthew liked to point out the mare's tails in the sky, and explain how they signaled a change in weather patterns. He told in animated fashion how a huge cold front can come creeping from the north to meet and fight with a dancing warm front coming in from the Gulf of Mexico, and how the result was the "hell-fire and damnation" storms that he, Matthew, had come to love. He always emphasized to the boy, as well as to the other grandchildren who would listen, that even though the storms were frightening, and sometimes caused destruction and even death, they always brought the life-giving gift of rain.

Whenever possible, he made the point that they should always appreciate the land and the weather, and try to learn to live with it, no matter what it brought. "Besides," he would say, "getting drug down the cellar steps in the middle of the night is what makes Okies so durn tough!"

One of the boy's favorite places to accompany his grandfather was into the woods a short distance behind the house. There, the boy climbed trees and watched squirrels cavort while his grandfather visited the cemetery. Matthew had cleared back the underbrush and made a park-like area

around the grave site of Hoskins and his wife. A chain-link enclosure now kept livestock from the site. Over the years, several other gravestones had been added to the enclosure, which the family now considered their own cemetery. Uncle John and Aunt Sarah were both buried here, as was Susan's mother.

The gravestone Matthew visited on this particular day, shortly before his largest ever harvest, was a double stone bearing the names of Calvin and Mary Carlisle. Mary's side of the stone was yet undated. After sitting for a while, Matthew rose to go, and with a smile on his face, said to himself, "I sure wish you could see this year's crop, Pa. By hell, it's a sight!"

As Matthew and his grandson started hand-in-hand back toward the house, the old man stopped and cast a look at Hoskin's grave. It pleased Matthew to think that Delbert Hoskins seemed to have achieved in death the one thing he couldn't attain in life--being part of a family.

THE END

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VITA

Fred W. Causley

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: THE WINDS OF APRIL

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Holdenville, Oklahoma, January 20, 1945, the son of Louis Howard and Joyce Ann Causley. Married Mary Lou Davis, December, 1963. Have two sons, Fred Jr, age 23, and James Edward, age 22.

Education: Graduated from Tolar High School, Tolar, Texas, May 25, 1962; received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Agricultural Journalism from Oklahoma State University in May, 1972; completed requirements for the Master of Arts degree at Oklahoma State University in December, 1987.

Professional Experience: Part-time freelance feature writer and photographer for a small rural electric cooperative tabloid, 1970 to 1972; feature writing, photography, and public relations for Missouri Association of Electric Cooperatives, 1972 to 1974; feature writer and editor for The Farmer magazine, Webb Publications, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1974 to 1975, and Agricultural Infor-Information Officer, Oklahoma State University, 1976 to the present.

Professional Organizations: Sigma Delta Chi, Agricultural Communicators in Education (ACE), Payne County Press Club.