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We have read this thesis  
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Tavia Hollenkamp

Date

April 10, 1991

GREEN GROW THE RUSHES  
A Novel

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Tavia Hollenkamp

May 1991

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For my brothers and sisters: Lena, Bertie,  
Woodie, Raymond, Junior, Abby, Webb,  
Pat, Twilia, Casey, Dale,  
Willamina, and  
Pansey

## Green Grow the Rushes

I'll sing you one O,  
Green grow the rushes O.  
What is your one O?  
Green grow the rushes O.  
One is one and all alone  
And evermore shall be so.

I'll sing you two O,  
Green grow the rushes O.  
What is your two O?  
Green grow the rushes O.  
Two for the lily white boys,  
Clothed all in green O.  
One is one and all alone  
and evermore shall be so.

I'll sing you three O.  
Green grow the rushes O.  
What is your three O?  
Three, three the rivals,  
Two for the lily white boys,  
Clothed all in green O.  
One is one and all alone  
And evermore shall be so.

I'll sing you four O,  
Green grow the rushes O.  
What is your four O?  
Four for the gospel makers,  
Three, three the rivals,  
Two for the lily white boys,  
Clothed all in green O.  
One is one and all alone  
And evermore shall be so.

5. Five for the symbols at your door.
6. Six for the six proud walkers.
7. Seven for the seven stars in the sky.
8. Eight for the April Rainers.
9. Nine for the nine bright Shiners.
10. Ten for the ten commandments
11. Eleven for the eleven who went to heaven.
12. Twelve for the twelve apostles.

Folk song adapted from Hebrew chant for second  
night of Passover.

Children begin by loving their parents; as they grow older  
they judge them; sometimes they forgive them.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

The Picture of Dorian Gray

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## ABSTRACT

This is a novel about adversity. The story is about one family; it is told primarily but not exclusively through the voice of one child in the family, the oldest girl, Rachel. Rachel is nine when the story opens. This primary voice reaches the reader through a series of "notes" written by Rachel directly to the reader. Of the thirteen chapters, eight are through Rachel's notes and one (the last chapter) is by way of a letter from Rachel to her sister, Iva. The other four chapters are told by three other family members and an omniscient observer. The author has chosen to stay with the one voice more than any other so there is consistency and continuity throughout. Also, the focus on one voice gives the reader the impression that he or she shares something very personal with Rachel, not only the secret of her notes, but the secret she reveals in her notes--the tragedy of family violence.

All the chapters outside the Rachel chapters (with the possible exception of "Eyes of Iva") can stand alone as short stories in their own right. All of the Rachel chapters, including the letter at the end, can be combined and make a short novel or novella without any need for the other chapters. The Rachel chapters and the other chapters do not rely on one another; they enhance one another.

This novel tells the story of a poor family and its struggle for survival, with particular focus on the children and how they cope with the cruelty of their world. The story is told in such a way as to allow the reader to vicariously experience the stark contrasts of tenderness versus violence, compassion and kindness versus meanness, and the goodness of innocence versus evil. None of the first-person story tellers realize the pathos of their condition nearly as well as the reader does; therefore, the reader is left free to make judgments which might not occur to the speakers at all. It is possible that each reader will go away having received his or her own individual message, in which case, the author has accomplished much more than she could have ever hoped for.



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## INTRODUCTION

Since I learned to read, I have wanted, nay, needed to write. And I have found that my most self-satisfying writing and often my most compelling writing comes from what I know and not what I imagine I know.

The writing of this manuscript pertaining to this particular subject has been prompted by several things, the first of which I have mentioned already. Like most writers, I have a need to write, to create a world which you (the reader) can see through my eyes. I want to enlarge the realm of your imagination, take you to another place, and open for you a window into the lives of the people in this story. I hope to entertain you, make you laugh, make you cry, make you believe that what you read is real life.

The second reason for writing this book is that I see a need to help enlighten, to in some way enlarge the realm of the reader's knowledge. Although I hope this novel will be of interest to any reader, I think it will be of particular interest to those people who deal with abused children and with the dysfunctional family. It has been my experience as an education major that colleges and universities must rely, for the most part, on materials written by doctors, nurses, counselors, teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists, etc. I use the etc. because I'm sure I have missed listing some group or groups of

people who have expressed their expertise and their knowledge on the subject of child abuse. Where I see a lack of material (especially creatively written material) is that written by one who knows first hand what it is like to grow up under the tremendous power of an abuser.

And I suppose I feel a need to speak, in my own humble way, to and for those who have experienced child abuse. I do not pretend to speak for all. How can I? I have not been in all their shoes. But my feet have been bound in shoes of similar fashion. And accordingly, my life has been shaped, my steps have been forever altered.

Concerning literature, I have always been interested in Southern literature and in any literature (including Southern literature) written about the poor and the downtrodden. I am drawn to John Steinbeck's writing for this reason. Prior to my graduate work at the University of Tennessee, my exposure to Southern writers was focused on such people as William Faulkner, Katherine Ann Porter, Eudora Welty, Tennessee Williams, and Flannery O'Connor. These writers increased my awareness of Southern literature, and my own writing, which was in infant stages, was certainly influenced by these people, especially by Faulkner and to a lesser degree, by O'Connor. I've also taken a very close look at the work of such people as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf so that I

might enhance my own knowledge and skills in the writing of stream of consciousness.

It was at the University of Tennessee, in a class focusing on Appalachian literature (though not limited to Appalachian writers), that my entire Southern literature schemata was expanded. I learned of such people as Lee Smith, Clyde Edgerton, Kay Gibbons, Jesse Stuart, James Still, Josephine Humphries, Gurney Norman, and John Ehle, to name a few. Have any or all of these people influenced my writing? Absolutely. But there is also an accumulation of influences. The strongest influence, however, has simply been the knowledge that I am not alone in choosing to write about a particular group of people with particular cultural and historical backgrounds, whose language and expressions are easily identifiable.

Concerning the story itself, it might be prudent to point out that although the setting for Green Grow the Rushes is primarily in the southern half of the United States and almost all of the characters are poor Southerners, family violence of any kind is not naturally more or less indigenous to any particular geographic area, cultural group, socio-economic group, or nationality. I consider myself a Southerner; therefore, this setting is simply more comfortable for me as I write what I know.

Lastly, the story presented here is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either a

product of my imagination or are used fictitiously. As in any creative work, I have turned to my life's experiences to recreate life, thus creating art. I would hope that I have in some small way brought about for the reader a measure of reading pleasure and an even heightened understanding of the world in which we find ourselves.

Rachel's Notes (1954)

Ch. 1

July 25 1954. I bleve I seen a killing last nigt. And it looked like it was Daddy that done the killing. Thogh it is untelling since ther was anuther man Mama was a rassling with on the ground and both Mama and the man being buck nekid it was not easy to see who did what when Daddy dived in and was a rassling too. But he had his clothes on.!! I was a standing behind some bushes when I seen it all but of a sudden I cuold of reechd out and tetchd Daddy and Mama and the man if I wuold of wanted to. I was that close. Of a sudden Iva was rigt ther next to me. Iva is just seven. And I am nine going on ten but Iva is fatter than me but she is not fat atall.! I am real skinny.!!

Me and Iva watched all this rassling. We was not skared. We was not nuthing. We heared Daddy cuss and we heared Mama holler. Then we seen the man run off and Daddy stood ther looking down at Mama a laying on the ground and Daddy said she was ded. Her face was all hard and still. Her eyes was a staring open and her long hair messed up and dirt all over her tittys and her belly from a rassling on the ground. Of a sudden me and Iva was a standing by Daddy and he was a bawling and said Mama art not to of trifled on him. Iva was bawling too and then she started a hollering and jumping because of a spider on

her arm. I nocked the spider off and Iva said maybe we  
art to rub Mama's feet. I said you can forgit that. We  
dont have time. Because we got to git to the house and  
peel taters for supper before Mama wakens up and whups us.  
I picked up Daddys old blue cap where it fell on the  
ground when the rassling comensed and I throwed the cap  
over Mamas pussy. Because they was a fly buzing on it.  
Then Iva said Im going to tell on you because you dont  
want to rub Mamas feet. And I started bawling. I given  
Iva a little push so we cuold go to the house and that is  
all of this dream.!!!

I woken up plum out of a ded sleep and was making  
funny sounds like bawling. But I did not have no tears.  
That is what a bad dreams does to me some times. Iva and  
Sissie was asleeping and I was all wet because Jacob peed  
on me. He is just a little baby borned 2 months. I put  
him in bed with me last nigst because Mama was whupping him  
and saying to him I will pick you up by the heels and  
sling yur brains out agianst the bed post. Thogh he dont  
know what she says. She says it to him when he wakens up  
bawling in the nigst and she says it loud shaking him to  
make him stop bawling even if he has a belly ake. He is  
just a little bitty thing. That is maybe sick or hungry  
and wants some titty. Mama says she has no use for  
bawling yunguns and she wishes to God she wuold of never

seen a kid.!! So last nigt I walked and walked back and forth to keep Jacob from bawling. Till my legs was so akey from all that walking and he fell asleping. That is why Jacob was in bed with me.!! When I woken up from the awfull dream its me that was bawling and Jacob sound asleping beside me. His diper all wet and pissy and me pissy too.

Mama and Daddy went to Aunt Clives and Unkle Ivans who is Daddys brother. This is my first riting.

July 26 1954. For a long time and today too I have been thinking on that girl Anne Frank across the waters that Mrs. Daniels told our class about the last of school. And how Anne Frank rote ever thing down that was in her head and that hapened to her and she had to hide in a attik with her mama and daddy and other people and now she is ded. And all the world knows what she rote and have made a little book out of it. I want to do that too and have folks may be a hunderd years from now know ther was a little girl called Rachel. Who rote secret stuff and things that hapened to her and hid it in a lard bucket in a secret place.!! So here is about me and I wish I cuold rite hi tone like Anne but I cant. Here I go. My name is Rachel Sara Lassiter. I am 9 years old be 10 pretty soon and I have long brown hair with red streaks. Im not pretty atall for I have a noze growed crooked from a



gitting broked and it makes me talk funny like may be some  
hair lip people talks. And one of my jaws is not righ  
nether. It slants a little bit to one side but you cant  
see it but a little bit and my teeth are bad crooked but I  
am a hard worker. I have three brothers who are called  
Wade and Sammy and Jacob who are real sweet but some times  
Wade bites Sammy and they fite. I have two sisters who  
are called Iva Stelle who has long brigt red hair and is  
pretty as a picher and makes you laff alot and ther is  
Lona Faye but we call her Sissie. Because Iva started  
calling her Sissie. Sissie is realy tiny with soft yella  
hair like Wades and she use to cuold talk up a storm.  
When she was two she knowed her name and how old she was  
and when she was borned. But when we lived by Aunt Pearl  
Sissie got to running off all the time to Aunt Pearl who  
is Daddys mama. Aunt Pearl is a old woman who dont bleve  
in whupping on kids and she is our grandma but Mama wont  
let us call her grandma. Mama wuold go git Sissie from  
Aunt Pearl and whup her all the way home with a willer  
swich or a belt with her noze a bleeding all over. Mama  
says if you just look at that girl cross eyed her noze  
will bleed. I dont bleve its true but its only when she  
gits a whupping. Now Sissie is five and has frekles and  
Daddy and Mama say damm. Ant that girl ugly. They say it  
and Sissie dont say nuthing. She gits real shaky when

Mama whups one of us even if it ant her. And she pees in the bed and if Mama finds out she whups her and puts her face in it. But Sissie cant help it because I do too some times but I make our bed real fast but you are a hunderd years from now and cant tell Mama. If you was to tell her some thing I wish you cuold tell her to stop whupping us but mostly Sissie. Because her noze bleeds. But you cant because you ant real yet. Jacob is the baby and is so pretty. He is real little and has red hair. And favors Sammy. He cries alot and ant fat like he art to be for Ive seen lots of babys and they are mostly fat. Some times when I tikle Jacob under the chin he opens his mouth in a big laff and throws his head back. We dont live by Aunt Pearl no more. Our daddy is a trash hauler but dont work much he says he has a rupsher and hi blood. And he hunts skwerls and rabbits wich we eat. He cant read and rite. He makes a X for his name. His name is Ramer Lassiter. My mama hollers alot. At ever body. Her name is Ida Belle and a bunch more names I cant keep track of. She is mad all the time and dont let her face set easy atall. And lays up in the bed of a morning asleeping when ever body else is up but we are glad she is asleeping. Daddy says she beats all he ever seen but he dont let her hear him say this. I can tell you this because you ant here but you are a hunderd years away and cant tell on me for telling this about Mama and you cant tell on Daddy

nether.

My mama has some old pichers of her self when she was a girl and of grandma and Aunt Laurel and Unkle Winchester who are Mamas sister and brother. And a picher of grandpap that she keeps in the bottom of the trunk and dont look at. I think she dont like grandpap but I dont like grandpap nether because he peenches me hard and tries to tikle me in the straddle. The pichers of Mama when she was a girl show she was real pretty with a easy face like she just woken up out of a laffing dream. And long pretty red hair like it is now but now she dont laff nor show her teeth in a grin. And is kindly fat because her belly pooches out. She says its from too many kids and she cusses Daddy and goes off by her self and dont want none of us kids to come by her. She sets on the porch and takes her hair down so it falls in her lap. She hangs her head so her long hair hides her face and no body can see that may be she closes her eyes and may be she dont. May be she bawls too like one time when she said Rachel Rachel I wont yall to be good Rachel be good. I did not know her meaning because we wont to be good so she will not git mad at us. I did not know we was not good. I bawled too and Iva bawled too and we said Mama we will be good and we set the little kids by us and we was real still so we wuold not mess up Mamas nerves. Some times when Mama sets ther

with her hair hanging over her face the westering sun makes little sparkels on her hair like the sparkels Mrs. Daniels shaken from a bottle on to our Chrismas cards we made at school last year. Its then I wish I cuold go up to my mama and feel her shiny hair and see if may be she will tell me what is in her head. I think may be my mamas head is full of old pichers. The End. Rachel.

July 28 1954. I cuold not rite no more as Iva stepped on a piese of glass and cut her foot. I cuold not do nuthing but soke it in karaseen to stop the blood. Mama and Daddy did not come home last nigt and me and Iva was a skared because we heared a racket and thoght it migt be some body who will kill us or rob us. We are always a skared when the dark comes when we are by our selves. We dred the dark to come. Now it is day and we are not a skared. The little kids they are a playing in the dirt here by the porch. They make a hole little play pretty town with roads and fences and they cover thier feet with dirt and pull thier feet out to make a little house with two doors. Iva plays too but her foot is sore. She ant happy and loud like she mostly is. Im a setting on the porch a riting and a keeping the flys off Jacob who is asleeping on a quilt here by me. Iva and the little kids they say what are you a riting Rachel and I say a story. I dont want them to know Im riting about things in my head

and about Mama because they might tell. About us they ask me. No it's about a dream I say. They say right a story about us Rachel and I tell them I will some day.

Here come little Fate Curtis a while ago to ask if Daddy was to home so him and Daddy could go fishing. Little Fate is half a Indian with black hair and black eyes and lives way down the road and his daddy is big Fate so he is called little Fate. Though he is not little at all but a big grown man with two big boys of his own and a dead wife. He did not stay long but he was real nice and shook his head at Iva's foot. Said it don't look a bit good. When little Fate comes to talk to Daddy he mostly misses getting to see daddy because he comes at the wrong time when maybe Daddy is gone to haul trash for our living. Mama says Little Fate is well mannerly and I believe she is right!!! He most times pulls up a chair and talks a spell with her. Her face sets real easy like she is thinking on some thing good to eat and she don't get mad at us while he is here. He even given me and Iva a korter the other day to clean out his pick up truck while he set and talked mannerly to Mama. Little Fate don't have no little finger on his left hand because he chopped it off on a dare when he was a boy. Iva says he ain't no Indian or he would wear some fethers.

I am writing this down and about my dream too and I

will put it in my lard bucket down at the river so no body can find it for a long long time may be a hunderd years. I will be ded and gone when you find my lard bucket and if I ant ded I migt be ded when Mama gits throgh for it is untelling what she will do to me mark my words. Because Im riting about her too.!! All the time she says we art to know that she wuold not whup us if we wuold be good. And if the law finds out Mama has to whup us nearbouts ever day they will put us in the Sunbeam Home which is a orfanij. When we go to school with sore arms or back and with belt marks and our eyes black and puffed up like burnt biskits we feel a shamed and dont tell because we are a skared of the Sunbeam Home that has such a pretty name. But Mama says they are mean because they dont let little childern see thier brothers or sisters. I wuold purely die of a sore heart if I cuold not be with Iva and the little kids. One time Aunt Pearl said Mama is just mean and if we tell on Mama the law migt make her straiten up or they wuold put her in jail. But if Mama was in jail we wuold all start bawling but some times I wish she was gone for allways and I will be the mama and git a job in a cafe and not beat on us like my mama does.!! And I wuold brang us some pie.!! And we wuold live high on the hog.!! The End. Rachel.

July 30 1954. My dream about Mama ded on the ground

keeps pushing at my head and may be some thing will hapen like lots of my dreams tell me some thing will hapen. It makes me feel funny and makes me a skared when some times things hapen that I dreamed about. Or that have flashed jaggedy across my mind. Just a flash like a flash of ligtnen that has no sound. I migt be a worshing dishes or a picking cotton or a sweeping the floor or may be Im walking to school and of a sudden a flash of thinking will come in my head. About some kind of sertin thing hapening. And the flash migt go on out of my head fast like it come. Or may be it will stop ded still and set ther before it moves on like a slow moving picher show. It kindly floats by in my head like Im in a dream. It is a kind of feeling like a bleery day will give you. Like you are here but you ant here. Then it will be gone and I will forgit about it and then bleve you me that day or some other day that sertin thing will hapen. Or some thing will hapen that is allmost like that sertin thing. Of a sudden I will remember that yesterdy or last week or some time a go I had a flash in my head or I had a sleeping dream about this. If it is a good thing I feel real funny because now Im not dreaming. Now it is real. If its a bad thing then I feel a skared because if I did not think it then may be it wuold not hapen. Like my dream about Mama I wish I did not dream it. When I pray

to God to make Mama stop her meanness to us kids and to make me pretty I pray to stop these flashes in my head about knowing things. Eva Campbell one time said Rachel I think you have got the site but I dont want no site. Im a skared it is the devil in me like in that story Mrs. Daniels read to us about them three witches who told Mr. Mack Beth things he art not to know. Just the same God dont do nuthing about it. I think he is pretty busy sorting out Mamas doins and ant got no time left for my lighnen flashes or to make me pretty. I feel for sertin that Mama cuold keep two Gods busy if they was such a thing as two Gods wich I sometimes wish they was so we cuold git more help in this world.!! I have to stop riting and cook us some oats. Oats is real good with sugar. I wish we had us some sugar. The end. Rachel.

July 31 1954. Iva cant walk on her foot because it is real sore and she dont ack rigt. Our dog old geezer licked it wich makes a sore well but Ivas foot is still real bad. She is asleeping alot. Mama put a tater poltiss on Ivas foot to draw out the poyson. I cant rite but a little because Mama is home. I am down by the river with the little kids and Mama cant see

August 1 1954. Mama whupped me yesterdy because I was down to the river and did not hear her a calling me



because I cant hear too good some times and I forgot to  
worsh out all of Jacobs dipers yesterdy I missed some.  
Her and Daddy are gone today like they do some times and  
leave us by our selfs even when it is nigt. They go to  
Aunt Clives and Uncle Ivans or to Dell Ritters to shoot  
craps and I know they git to eat and I wish we cuold go.  
By our selfs ant bad in a way because Mama ant here to git  
mad and whup us for ever thing she takes a noshun to. But  
by our selfs at nigt is bad for we hear stuf and bleve  
some body will git us. Its then I pray hard for Mama and  
Daddy to come home. I made us some biskits and water  
gravy but my biskits is kindly hard and I put too much  
salt in the gravy. The End. Rachel.

August 5 1954. Ivas foot is a hole lot better. Day  
before yesterdy Little Fate brung some stuff and put it on  
Ivas foot his own self without Mama and Daddy here. He  
chopped us some wood too so I cuold cook us some taters  
and some biskits. Today me and Iva and the little kids  
Sissie and Wade and Sammy packed us some biskits and a jug  
of water and while I brung Jake in my arms Iva brung us a  
quilt. And we come to that old place about a mile I bleve  
down the road that we know use to be a farm because ther  
is a big old barn with its doors off and you can see  
throuh the big cracks. And ther is a big old pear tree

too. Then you walk and walk some more and a ways from the barn ther is a bunch more trees and bushes and a pond amongst it all. When we git ther we are allways total wore out and we have us a piknick by the pond and eat pears and biskits. And we sing us some songs like when the roll is called up yonder do you know that one.? Its Ivas favrit she throws back her head and throws up her hands like shes a fixing to grab a hunk of sky and hollers yo-nder real loud. And we sing this little lite of mine and down in the valley and victory in Jesus and my favrit is green grow the rushes because I like the the feel of the words in my mouth and its a long song. That total wears you out when you are done but you are happy. Iva gits to laffing and acks like a fool and makes me laff when we sing green grow the rushes because it says green grow the rushes O and Iva hollers O real loud like some thing has got hold of her and skared her. And if we are a walking throgh tall grass singing that song Iva reaches down and peenches the back of one of the little kids legs and hollers O snake snake real loud and falls over laffing. Then we all laff and laff because Iva is fooling. Our best laffing time is with green grow the rushes. Do you know that song.? I wuold sing it for you if you was here. Bleve you me that Iva is a site.!! We dont tell Mama and Daddy we come here to the old farm because Mama dont want us to be no place but to the house.

Not even the little kids tell. We seen snakes by the pond so we are kareful. One time Jake was asleeping on the quilt under a tree and a snake crawled rite by him and liked to of skared me plum to deth. Now I am a riting and set here with a stick in my hand while the other kids is a playing. I dont know why I did not have one of my ligtnen flashes to know that snake was going to hapen the other time but thats just the way it is!!! Ther is no telling when them flashes will come or what theyll be about. Mama ant here and we are happy and not skared of nuthing but snakes. I wish we had us some jelly and some koolaid. When I grow up I aim to git a job and git us some jelly and buy us some ligtbread so we dont have to have biskits and I aim to git some choclit soldier sodypops and moon pies and me and Iva will take all the little kids on piknicks all the time wher ther ant no water snakes. I aim

I had to quit riting for a little bit because the little kids hollerd Rachel Rachel here is a big tri-ansler!!!! I dont know how to spell tri-ansler but it is a great big spider that is as big as my fist and it is real hairy and can jump a long ways. If it dont kill you when it bites you. It migt be youll kill yur self trying to run from it!!!! Its that skary. I killed it with my

stick. I mashed it and it made me gag it looked plum awful. It makes me think on my dream but it did not git on Iva. Blevé you me she wuold be a hollering. I tell you that girl is a site. And what else do you think.!.? We heared a car and reckoned it was Mama and Daddy come looking for us and we was a skared and stayed by some bushes so no body cuold see us. We was a skared that Jacob wuold waken up too and start bawling. But when we looked at the car it was not Mama and Daddy it was a man in a car and he got out and walked around the old barn. We looked and looked and cuold not see who the man was because he was too far off and the trees and bushes was in the way. The car was a ugly yella color. Iva said it was the color of baby shit and we laffed and laffed. That girl is a site ant she.? We was glad when the man got back in his car and got gone. The End. Rachel.

August 6 1954. I cant rite much because the little kids is hungry. Also Iva said she might tell Mama about my riting if she takes a noshun. I told her I will hate her to the end of the world wich I will but that wont do no good if Iva gits a noshun. Mama dont like reading and riting. She can read too bleve you me but she says its for hi tone people who bleve they are too good and she dont like me to read because she says I bleve I am better than she is. Wich ant what I bleve atall. Then she calls

me school girl school girl in a funny hi piched voice when she whups me with the ironing cord or razer strap or a peise of ruber hoze. She says you cant eat no god damm books they dont put nuthing in yur belly. That ant me a cussing thats my Mama cussing. She says she has no use for some body with thier nose in a book all the time. She says mark my words Rachel I will whup yur ass and burn them books if you brang anuthern home. So I dont brang no books no more but when I git big I will bring them and hide them!!! I will hide these riting notes too. In my lard bucket.

Its hot I bleve more than a hunderd degrees because the air is real wavy just above the grass that is gitting brown allready. And grass hoppers is ever where spitting terbacker juse too and you wuold not bleve how bad the chiggers is. It is pityfull how bad they make you ich. The End. Rachel.

August 7 1954. Mama has been hollering at Daddy for she says she is nocked up again. She

August 14 1954. I ant got to rite for a long time because I ant had no time for I was a helping cut broom corn for our living. Unkle Varny who is Daddys other brother and Aunt Mavis and thier younguns and Unkle Ivan

and Aunt Clive cut broom corn with us but I wish they did not because Mama acks funny like she is mad about some thing. Aunt Mavis acks askared and Aunt Clive acks kindly like her feelings is hurt but do you think Mama kares.? No she dont bleve you me. Aunt Clive is real good to me and Iva and the little kids and once upon a time when me and Iva was real little Aunt Clive brung us a easter basket with shiny green grass and a Hershy bar in the basket. Mama said we cuold not have the baskets and the Hersy bars til we was good so she hung them from the seeling so we cuold see them but we cuold not reach them. Mama said we will save them for good. Then Sissie was borned then Wade was borned and when we moved from that house our pretty baskets with the Hershy bars was still a hanging from the seeling. But they was old and dirty from stove soot and spider webs. Unkle Ivan is a big man with yella wavy hair who is a hard worker. And grins all the time and when he was a boy he got kicked in the head by a horse and some times out of the blue he has a fit. Daddy says some times Unkle Ivan dont have all his marbles but he is a good brother who dont git mad easy. If Unkle Ivan does git mad the fat is in the fire because he gos plum crazy for sure. Unkle Varny is a slite little man like Daddy with black hair and he makes us laff alot. His woman who is Aunt Mavis is little bitty and skinny with fawse teeth.

Now I want to tell you where I keep my gallun lard bucket. In case you want to know. It has a good lid and I dug a hole under that big possum grape vine down by the river and I put my bucket in and cover it with a flat rock. No body knows where it is but me not even Iva. I keep my secret stuff in it like the note from Jimmy Blalock that says I like you do you like me YES or NO. With a block by yes and a block by no for me to put a X in. I did not put no X in nether block. Jimmy Blalock is 13 and is in my class because he did not go to school til he was a big boy and he is ugly. Uglier than me with my crookedy teeth and he plays nasty some times with his peter. He pulled it out and shaken it at me one time on the way home from school. He said how do you like this ant it a dandy. I run away but he laffed and hollered that he wants to see my tittys. He hollered real loud that my tittys probly look like little taters. When I seen him at school again he was with a big boy and they called me tater tittys. I run to the girls tollet and hid. I dont have no tittys and ant going to have no tittys ever because I dont need none. I dont wont to come sick and bleed nether. When my mamas bleed time gets here she says she has come sick. My grandma says it ant come sick but it is flowering. Wich I like flowering alot better because it is better on the ear. But I dont want

to flower nor come sick nether because I dont want no rags  
on the line.! Mama worshes out her rags when she is done  
with the bleed time and she hangs them rags on the line  
with our dresses and britches and towels and sheets too.  
You can see these are bleed rags that blow in the wind  
because the blood dont come out good!!! I feel like I  
will be sick in my belly to look at them. And I dont want  
to have no babys for sertin.! I have enuff babys now  
because Mama has babys all the time. Ther is too much  
blood in having babys. Mama says she is sick of kids but  
she is most allways big in the belly with one. She makes  
me lissen to her karefull when she says men is like hawks  
they just want to waller on you and root at you with thier  
peters and feel yur titties and then you git big bellied.  
She says men dont kare if you are a little girl they will  
waller on you anyway. I wonder does Daddy waller on her.  
I wonder why she dont make him stop. Jimmy Blalock ant  
going to waller on me and root at me with his peter bleve  
you me but I will keep his note because I dont have no  
more notes from a boy. I ponder on why Jimmy rote me a  
note for I heared him tell Pete Harper that Im not pretty  
atall and I am a bony makarony. I bleve he was just  
fooling me with the note but I fooled him for it is in my  
lard bucket for ever!!! I will rite more when I git time.  
THE END. Rachel.



August end 1954. It has been windy and I have had a awfull ear ake. I cuold not rite nuthing. And bleve you me ther is lots to do and I cant be a riting all the time. Mama has been cussing Daddy and calls him a jellus son of a bich. Today she hiked off down the road in a mad spell and Daddy went after her in the car and they are gone. Little Fate brung us some taters yesterdy. A great big sack and I am a cooking some for me and Iva and the little kids. It beats all I ever seen but I bleve Little Fate is plum struck with bad luck. He missed Daddy again who was at Dell Ritters. I dont know why Mama did not want to go with Daddy but she was to home yesterdy when Little Fate come. The End. Rachel.

September 6 1954. It is near bouts as pretty a day as you have ever seen. The sun

I had to stop riting because Jacob made a mess in his britches. I given him some flour and water in his bottle to bind him up so he dont have the runs no more. Bleve you me

September 7 1954. Iva got mad because I wuold not let her use my pensil and she told Mama I was a riting stuff yesterdy but I showed Mama some papers where I had rote

all our names even Grandmas wich is Grace and Unkle  
Winchesters and Aunt Mabelines and you name it to see how  
pretty they looked. And I told her that is all my riting.

And I begged Mama please please dont whup me but it did  
not do no good and Iva run outside and bawled. Mama  
grabbed the paper with our names and throwed it in the  
stove and slapped me and nocked me down and kicked me and  
told me to git under the bed just in case. Just in case I  
wuold git any big ideas she said. I cuold not stop  
bawling because my heart was so sore. I knowed I was a  
big liar and prayed God dont strike me ded but I told him  
I cant tell Mama or she wuold strike me ded. My other  
riting was under the mattruss because I hid it ther when  
Jacob messed on hissself again. I knowed Iva was sorry she  
told on me because when mama let me out from under the bed  
Iva showed me a dirt dobbers nest she found and said I  
cuold have it. I am in the tollet now a riting and I

October 2 1954. It ant a easy thing to git by myself  
because I have to take kare of the little kids and Iva  
gits mad if I dont let her see my riting wich I dont any  
way. I cuold not rite for a long time because Mama and  
Daddy was to home all the time. The car was broke. Daddy  
said it throwed a rod. And cuold not fix it fast wich  
made Mama mad. She told him to git Unkle Ivan to help him  
because she said to him you dont have sens enuff to pore

piss out of a boot with the drekshuns on the heels. Uncle Ivan come to help Daddy and Aunt Clive come too and Aunt Clive given Mama a blue flowerdy dress. Aunt Clive said Ida Bell I cant wear this no more Im too fat. Mama taken the dress and put it up to her to show Daddy and Unkle Ivan and said how do I look.? They did not look because they was bizzy and Mama got mad and after Aunt Clive and Unkle Ivan left Mama said Unkle Ivan is a nit wit and Aunt Clive is a fool. She grabbed the dress and said she wuold not wear that gitup to a dog dance and tore it up for me to put on Jacob for dipers. Now Jacob has flowerdy dipers and finely the car is fixed and Mama and Daddy is gone to the moving picher show to see the cowboy Shane. I wish we cuold go. Mama said if we be real good may be when we git big we can go to the picher show. I dont bleve her no way and I think she will change her mind like she allways does when she says we can do some thing. She says we ant been good enuff and when we be real real good she will see. But she dont say how to be good. When I git

November 1 1954. Mama says all the time that Daddy ant got sens enuff to hold down no job but now Daddy has got his self a job in packing town. Unkle Ivan come by this morning to take Mama to the store. She said I will be back dreckly Rachel and has been gone all day.

I want to tell you about our house and things like that. Our house is in what people call the grove and it has lots of cotton wood trees and elms and oaks and some wild plums and other trees I dont know. We have streets like a little town but they are dirt streets. And the grove is at the end of reglar town but if you look down younder there is the river we live by and it has more trees and there are sun flowers as big as yur hand and sand and rocks and it is hot here in the summer and yur feet get burnd on the sand and rocks. And our road is called first street and we are not by no nabers because Mama dont like no nabers by us. Most the other houses are real close together but there ant no houses by us. Mama says you can spit on yur naber at them other houses. But I dont know nobody who spits on thier naber. Even when we go away to pick peaches or cotton or beans and go on mooching trips we allways come back here to live in the grove. I have heared grown ups say the grove was started in the depreshun. I cant tell you about no depreshun because I dont know. I think it was a big figt betwix the poor and the rich and the rich won and got the big fancy houses in town and we got these in the grove. Lots of people live in the grove and ever body is poor like the Chansoms who sell Rose Bud sav. It is stuff in a can you put on yur sores to make yur sores well. The hole famly sells sav for a living ever day that is all they do. And

there is the Moores whos daddy works at a filling station in town some times and old man Foster who picks up copper and old tires and sells them and the rag woman Veeda who is a pityful dum woman because she cant talk she just grunts and shakes a rag at you to tell you what she wants. Lots of famlys live here whos men tears up cars and puts them together again and ther is moters hanging in trees and the car seats are moved in the shade to set on of a summer nigt and stuff like that. And the men goes hunting too and hangs thier skwerl and rabbit skins outside. And ther is the Simmons who make whisky. Old man Simmons is now called Shot Foot because he shot his own foot one nigt when he thoght the law was coming after his wares. His big boys was gone shooting craps at Dell Ritters with the men folks. And old man Simmons was in his own cellar with his whisky without no ligts on and had his gun to figt the law. He fell in the dark and shot his own foot. Now he is called Shot Foot and limps when he makes his whisky. Aunt Pearl lives in the grove too and Uncle Ivan and Aunt Clive and Unkle Varny and Aunt Mavis and lots of other people that I dont know and they are all poor. Mamas sister Laurel and her old man Burk and thier yunguns live in the grove too. Mama says Aunt Laurel is a jellus bich.

Rigt now we live in a battry house until we move some place else. Our house is made of old car battrys and is a

pretty good house but its cold in the winter time. It has three rooms. Mama puts pasteboard on the walls and it looks real clean when we have new pasteboard on the walls but it dont stay that way for but a little while. We rite on the walls and make pictures too then we paste newspapers on the walls with flour and water and black pepper to keep the rats from eating it. Mama dont see me read the newspaper walls.

They is a big hiway and a brij that is at one end of the grove. Then ther is the river that the brij crosses over and that river is on one side of the grove and it curves around and flows by the other end of the grove too. The river is by our street and then you go and go and a long ways off to the other side of the grove and ther is a rail road tracks by twelvth street. People gets drowned some times when the river is flooded and the daddy of Alice Jenfro got killed on the rail road tracks in the month of December last year. Christmas was not very good for Alice or nary of her brothers or her mama. Some times ther is killings here and it is the falt of old man Simmons because him and his boys makes whisky and sells it to the menfolks herebouts. That is all for now. The End. Rachel.

November 18 1954. Daddy ant got his job in packing town no more. Mama calls him the worth less wonder and

says he is worth less as tits on a bore hawg. Did I tell you I am in the 4th grade.? My teacher is called Miss Perkins. She is tall with long arms and legs and takes little bitty steps on her tippy toes and kindly walks like she has a sore some place. Her hair is brown with gray streaks and she has a mustash kindly like a man but not as big. She is real nice to me and set me in the front of her desk because she said Mrs. Daniels told her I cant hear good some times but I am a smart girl. I have missed a bunch of school wich ant nuthing new and today Miss Perkins rote Mama a note to ask why do I miss so much school. I tried to tell Miss Perkins that I have to help at home and some times help make a living because Daddy has a rupsher and hi blood and Mama has nerves. She looked at me funny and patted my arm and said I want you to take the note to yur mother. I did but Mama throwed it in the stove. I wont give Mama no more notes because she said she will go down there to the school and tell Miss Perkins off and may be give her a fat lip. And she says she will teach Miss Perkins a thing or two if this ruckis keeps on. She says you cant do what you want to with yur own kids to save yur neck and ant it a pity what the world is a coming to. The End. Rachel.

November 20 1954. Iva dont like school and throwed

some finger pant at Bobby Simmons because he laffed at her picture. Mama went to figt the teacher but the teacher said it ant nuthing to figt about. Bobby Simmons is mean but he cant hold a candle to my sister Iva. I tell you that girl is mean when she puts her head to it. But I dont want you a hunderd years from now to bleve she is mean all the time. She ant and helps me take kare of the little kids if she takes a noshun. She hates school but she wont have to go pretty soon because we will go to Chandler to pick pecans for Christmas money. Miss Perkins will rite anuther note too and here we go again and the fat will be in the fire mark my words. Its getting cold and I cant be a tramping to my lard bucket too much. Yur breth looks like cloudy fome in front of yur mouth it is that cold. I have had the ear ake bad. Mama made me pee in a tin can and she pored the pee in my ear to stop the ake but it did not work. The End. Rachel.

December 25, 1954. Miss Perkins said we cant leave our Christmas tree here at school so some body has got to take it home. She walked on her tippy toes to the front of the room and put her hands together like she was a praying. Now who will take the tree home she ast. And said I know what we will do and then she made a little green cirkle on a piese of paper and folded it and mixed it with a bunch more folded papers and spred them on the



table. You cuold not see no diffrence to save yur neck. That bleery feeling come over me and I felt real funny like when you set of a summer day and look and look at a slow moving river and dont blink yur eyes. Miss Perkins said Rachel Rachel did you hear me it is yur turn to pick. I went rigt to the table and picked a paper and given it to her. Thats how I brung the Christmas tree home. Dont that beat all you ever seen.? The little kids was fit to be tied they was so happy.!! The Babtist Church given us some presents and a baskit of stuff to eat. They brung us some nitted hats and gloves so pretty they was. All red and white and soft but Mama made us put them up for good. They brung us some apples and oranges and nuts and ribbon candy. One sellafane sack to each kid. Oh it is so good and the preacher whos name is Heart has a good heart and brung us a radio too. He said it dont work too good but bleve you me it does. I like that song sugar in the morning sugar in the evning sugar at suppertime. Have you heared it.? I like to dance too.!! I can do the jitter bug because Mama learned me and Iva. She says she wanted to go on stage when she was a girl. She cuold too I bleve because she can dance good and laffed big and happy about the radio. She is gone now with Daddy to Unkle Ivans and Aunt Clives. The End. Rachel.

## Rachel's Notes (1955)

### Ch. 2

February 1 1955. I could not get to the river for the cold and snow. Yesterdy I went and brung my riting. I will keep it under the matruss til there is no more snow. Just me and Iva and the little kids is home and Iva and Wade rigged up a big flat bord outside with a stick to hold it up off the ground on one side and a string on the stick that come in our winda. So Iva and Wade could pull on the string and pull the stick out and make the bord fall flat. They put some biskit crumms under the bord and I hollered at them for wasting our biskits. But Iva she told me Rachel you are a big sore head who throws a hissy fit over biskit crumms and then she said I am sick of biskits and water gravy all the time and me and Wade are fixing to get us some meat.!! And Rachel dont you look at me like I am crazy.!! And told me to hush because she was a busy woman.!! Ha ha I said you ant no woman you ant even eight yet. Then she peeked out the winda and told Wade to pull the string. You wont bleve this but they killed a hole bunch of little snow birds which are kindly like sparrows. When Iva and Wade brung them little ded birds in the house I felt like bawling and Sissie could not keep from bawling atall. But pretty soon they killed more birds and we was all picking the fethers off and cleaning and worshing them little pitiful things and I was

a heating up the big iron skillet. Did you know it takes nearbouts 25 little birds to fill a skillet.? They smelled so good cooking in bacon greese and we et them even Sissie did not bawl no more. I have forgot to say I had my birthday last month and I am ten years old now. I wish I was 18 because I would be a grown up and I could get a job and take kare of the little kids and git us a fine house with a tollet inside and water inside. I would buy lots of stuff to eat like canned cream for gravy and lots of sugar and flower to make cakes and I would buy candy for the little kids and may be some ice cream and lots of taters and beans and have a cow so the baby would have lots of milk. I would move us a long ways away where Mama could not ever find us to whup us no more may be to Mexico or to Texas to live like the indians. I would not mind to live in a tent and cook on the ground. I know how to do that allready. If you was

Febuary 5, 1955. Mama come home and I nearbouts did not get to hide my riting. I was a skared Iva would tell but she did not. Now Mama is gone again and so is Daddy and Iva. I have the ear ake awfull bad again. It is real cold here but there ant no snow and it is nearbouts dark outside. I put all the little kids in the bed so they can be warm. They dont want to get in the bed but I made them

because we dont have much wood. I have to save it for tomorro to cook with because I cant chop big sticks of wood. Can you chop wood with a ax.? I can chop little sticks and I can pick up chips and chop some bords off that old chicken house out yonder but I cant chop logs for they are too tuff. If I burn all the wood up before Mama and them get back she will get mad. You cant never tell when my mama will fly off the handle and whup us for some thing she will think of. It beats all you ever seen. She ant like my grandma who is real nice and who lives a long ways away and we dont see her much. And we dont much see our Unkle Winchester and his wife Mabeline. Grandma dont let Mama whup us when she is here and grandma did not live with grandpap since Mama was big in the belly with me and was not married to Daddy. My Daddy ant my real Daddy. Mama dont make no bones about that.! And I bleve my real Daddy migt be a movie star. Mama given me to grandma when I was borned and then taken me back. I wish she did not take me back but I would be lonsome without the Iva and the little kids. When I grow up I will find my real Daddy and I will take the little kids with me and Iva too if she will

I had to stop riting and whup Wade. That boy dont never learn that he art not bite no body. Now he is a bawling and Sammy is a bawling from the bite and no body

wants to stay in the bed and I dont know

Feb 10 1955. Daddy taken Mama and ant Clive on a mooching trip. That is where they are now and taken Iva with them because Mama says Iva is good luck and Im bad luck. She says any body like me who bawls because I dont like to mooch is bad luck. She used to make me and Iva mooch by our selfs but we are too big now and Im glad. She would rite a note to say to who it may consern this family is poor and needs help. They are on thier way home they had car truble and the Mr. has a rupsure and hi blood and is bad sick. The Mrs. is in bad shape too she is down with nerves pretty much. Mrs. Jones. And that will be the end of the note. Me and Iva taken the note to peoples houses and given it to the lady of the house. The lady of the house would read the note and some times ask me some stuff and her little kids look and look at us with big eyes out from behind the mother. Some times the kids would be big kids and laff behind thier hands. I bawled and begged Mama dont make me mooch no more but she got mad and cussed me and whupped me for causing bad luck with my bawling. Now she dont take me no more to mooch. Im glad because I hate her and I hate to mooch. Just wait til she whups you and makes you mooch and you will hate her too.! I bet you would not like to mooch nether or you are crazy.

Dont worry tho because I bleve there wont be no mooching in a hunderd years where you are because Mama says people are a getting tite and wont help you. I hope no body asts you to mooch because if you are as old as me it will embares you. But if you are a grown up you migt do it bleve you me and not even kare. Some times I bawl when Im by myself and think on these things about my Mama. I bawl and I dont know why I bawl and then I get mad at my self and say Rachel slak up yur bawling. Mostly I dont bawl by the little kids because they look and look at me with big eyes and bawl too. They say Rachel Rachel what is rong and I tell them I dont know. Just now I put a quilt around me and set on the porch steps a while. I looked way far off down the road and could not see nuthing. But the lite from a house way off. It is a darkly nigt with just a little bitty piese of used up moon and a bunch of stars pored on the sky that looks like speks of salt on that black paper Miss Perkins given us for Halloween. I could of just set there by my lonsome the live long nigt and I was not thinking on being skared one little bit. But of a sudden I was a bawling and I dont know why. A dog barked and I think I heared some body walk by on the road and it skared me. Of a sudden rag Veeda come out of the dark nigt and was just a standing there by the porch and she waited a long time for me to talk but I could not. Then she taken out her rag to shake at me and I started to tell

her I dont have no rags to give you Veeda. But of a sudden she leaned over and wiped at my eyes with her rag and put the rag in my hand then she went away and I could not see her no more in the dark. You wont bleve it but I bawled harder which makes me mad to ack like a bawl bag. The little kids is asleeping so they did not hear me go out of this creeky door and come back in.

I wish Daddy could make Mama stop her meanness but he cant because she beats on him too if she takes a noshun. One time she hit him with the dishpan and cut a gash in his head. He fell to the floor. Us kids was all a bawling and Mama was a hollering for us to shut up and she was cussing Daddy and us. He got up off the floor real slow and went to bed with the blood dreening all down his face and winding around his neck like a bunch of red red ribbons. He is a slite little man and his face was white like bread flower. His hand was a shaking when he wiped the cut on his head with the dish towel and Mama jerked it from him and said dont mess up my god dam towel you stupid son of a bich. Im talking the way she said it and you are a hunderd years away and dont kare but what does it help if you kare. YOU ant Here to HELP us.!!! I dont bleve you would help us no ways. You would just play like you never seen nuthing and would not do nuthing to Mama. No body dont stop her meanness. Aunt Clive and Unkle Ivan ack

sad but they dont do nuthing. Aunt Mavis is too little and Mama migt brake Aunt Mavises fawse teeth if she takes a noshun. Unkle Winchester and Grandma ant here so they cant do nuthing. Unkle Burk and Aunt Laurel dont kare. Nobody does nuthing. Not nuthing to make Mama stop. I was a skared to tell Mama I was the one who given Daddy the towl and YOU WOULD TOO IF IT WAS YOU.!! Bleve you me. I cant rite no more.

Feb 11 1955. Mama and them are still gone mooching. Im glad Mama ant here but still I wish they would come home and bring something good to eat. I wish Daddy would come and hunt us some rabbits to eat. Today its pretty cold its rainy and kindly haff dark and haff lite and it makes me feel dark like maybe Im some wheres else and its long ago. The rain drips and drips off the roof of our house and you cant hardly see to the road. It is that bleery of a day and looks like its coming on dark when its not yet time for dark. Jacob has been a whining because he wants some titty. I given him a bottle with some water in it because there ant no milk. I would put some sugar in the water but there ant no sugar. Jacob sucks a little bit and bawls in a weak little bawl and sucks some more and pushes it away and bawls some more. Bleve you me I wish I had some tittys now I would give Jake some. I put his mouth to my titty which ant no bigger than his but he



put his little hand against my titty and looked at me with big eyes like he was a saying to me Rachel you are crazy you ant got no titty. I think he knows more than people think babys know. I finely got him to fall asleep and I have a good fire going in the stove and have set Sissie and Wade and Sammy in the floor by the stove with a bowl of beans and biskits. They are eating while Im riting. I wish we had us some black berry jelly.

I bleve my teacher Miss Perkins will think Im sick but may be she will know why I ant in school. Some times when I go back she asks me why I layed out of school and I tell her I have to help Mama with the little kids. She says Im the best pupill she has because I do all my work and behave. Mama says you dam right or I will beat her ass if she dont behave. She said this to the man who come to our house one time to see why I ant in school more. Mama picked up a bord and shaken it at him and said I will clean yur plow four eyes. Because he had on eye glasses.

And she said you dont tell me what to do with my kids. Now git and he stepped backards away from her and stepped on the ho. It flipped up and hit him in the eye and broke his glasses. His held his hand on his bloody eye when he left. He ant come back. Mama said it beat all she ever seen that the man cant even look where he is a going. She said no wonder he wears glasses because he is blind as a

bat. Mama wont let me go back to school now. She says she has got no use for no bossy ass teachers. May be she will let me go back when she ant mad no more. The End. Rachel. Oh yes.! When last I was in school Jimmy Blalock come with a swelled up eye and jaw. Some body said his daddy done it. He set by me wich you cuold have nocked me over with a fether because I know he dont like me. I seen he was a copy catting my paper but I did not tell Miss Perkins. He has bumps on his face too but he has not been nasty talking to me no more. The End. Rachel.

Feb 14 1955. Be my valentine!!! Mama and them come back from mooching and I am back to school. At school kids are a saying that Jimmy Blalock runned off but I know where he is. I seen him at that old tar paper house which is me and my friend Francises secret place by the bridge. Jimmy dont know we seen him and we ant told no body we seen him for if we do it is untelling what his daddy will do to him. We seen him when we was a going from school and was a creeping by the shack to see if no body was there before we went in to make our selves to home for a while. We was careful like always when we come by there because one time we seen a little bitty cleer thing on the floor that looked like a baloon. Francis said it was a rubber and said some body has been in our secret place a doing it. Francis is older than me. She is nearbouts 14

and she ant no fool.! She lives with her big sister whos name is Sue who ant married but has a baby. Francis said the man puts the rubber thing on his ying yang that is what she calls it. Puts it on his ying yang to feel good when him and the woman does you know what. Which made me bleve I would puke when I looked at the rubber for it looked plum nasty and now I know for sartin I do not wont no body a rooting and a wallering on me when I get big and for sartin I dont wont no rubber thing poked at me. Francis laffed when I said this and said how do you think there is kids born ever where and you will like it too Rachel you will have to. I said by god I wont nether and Francises eyes bugged out and she laffed more at me a cussing. Wich made my eyes bug too but Im not fooling. That was at the start of school a long time a go. Now we are carefull when we go to the shack. Oh I nearbouts forgot about Jimmy. We come up to the winda real still like allways and peeked in because there migt be some body a doing you know what. And lo there was Jimmy asleping in the corner on the floor. He had a old quilt on him and a pan and spoon was there where he had et some thing. We hid real fast so he would not see us but he did not come to the winda so we looked again. He did not move. Francis said Rachel he migt be ded. No I said he is breething which he was too. We scwatted on the ground by

the winda and I whispered to Francis do you reckon Jimmy has been doing it to some body in here. She thoght and thoght and said no for she did not bleve Jimmys ying yang was growed enuff yet. We had to leeve in a hurry for we laffed and laffed. But I thoght and thoght of Jimmy and why he has to live in a old tarpaper shack by hisself. I wonder dont his daddy care. Jimmy dont have no mama. May be I wish I was like him. The End. Rachel.

Feb 16 1955. I am a scared of Jimmy Blalock for he is a big boy and he is mean but I bet he is hungry. So what I done is leave some biskits and a green apple in the winda of the shack and run in case he come out and seen me. Francis did not go to school so she does not know and I cant tell her or she will laff and tell some body. The End. Rachel.

Feb 17 1955. You wont gess this to save yur neck my apple and biskits was gone.!! But Jimmy was not there no body was there. May be I will

March 1 1955. The grass is a greening up and a getting hi for easter and the wether has turned off pretty without no rain for a while. The plum trees by the river are a blooming. Sissie got stuck on the swing yesterdy. It is a old cable that hangs on a big lim over the river but not

a deep part of the river. You can hook the cable with a long stick and pull it to the bank and then get on and swing out and swing back. There is a big knot at the bottom of the cable with a bord throgh it so you set astraddle the bord and swing. Sissie got on and Iva pushed but did not push hard enuff to make Sissie swing back. I heared Sissie a hollering like she was kilt and when I went to the hollering there was Sissie on the swing and it a hanging out there over the water and Iva on the bank a laffing and a laffing and a trying to hook the cable with a stick. We liked to of never got Sissies fingers prised loose from the cable she was that scared. Some times I bleve Iva does things just for the fun of it and I bleve she migt be meaner than Jessy James.

March 5 1955. Me and Francis been back to the shack ever time we go to school. We know Jimmy stays there because he is a fixing the place up and now there is a plate and cup and a old cot for a bed. I told Iva what me and Francis spied at the shack but I made her promiss not to tell or Jimmys daddy migt find out. She said I cross my heart and hope to die and stick a thouzan needles in my eye I wont tell and she wont nether. Now me and Iva figger may be me and her and the little kids can go away by our selfs some day too. And when we get big I will

learn to talk Franch and she will learn to talk Mexican so we can go to Canada or Old Mexico and live where Mama cant find us. Sissie and Wade and Sammy has got the hooping coff. Me and Iva taken Jimmy some corn bread with out him a seeing us. The End. Rachel.

March 16 1955. Bleve you me plenty has hapened since last time. You wont bleve this but you dont have to you are a hunderd years away. Mama and Daddy went mooching again and come home figting but most of the figting was just Mama. Because Daddy ant got no heart to figte. They come back from mooching and Daddy no more and got the car stopped when Mama jumped out cussing and hollering at Aunt Clive who was a trying to get out of the car but she is so big and fat she cant hardly do it. Aunt Clives face was all red and skwinched up because she was a bawling. And saying to Mama I did not mean nuthing atall and all I said was yur little Wade looks so much like his Uncle Burk. Mean nuthing hell Mama said. You was a slurring me and that son of a bich Burk is the last man I want my kids to look like. Aunt Clive was a opening the car door and said please Ida Belle. And could not get no more words out or all of her self out of the car before Mama flew off the handle and hit her and nocked her down on the ground. One of Aunt Clives legs was still stuck in the car and the rest of her was on the ground with her dress up and showed

her big white legs that looked like biskit doe. Hay Hay Daddy hollered and run around to get amongst Mama and Aunt Clive because Mama was a pulling Aunt Clives hair who was screaming like that hawg we killed one time. Hay Hay Daddy hollered again and pulled on Mamas arm but she turned and hit him and nocked him against the car. Me and Iva was a standing there and Iva had a jar of jelly in her hand. But we knowed we could not do nuthing to help Daddy or Aunt Clive or Mama would just as soon kill us all at one time. I given Iva and the little kids a pull out of the way and picked up Sammy who was a screeming his head off and his lips was blue from the bleery day. Aunt Clive comensed to get herself up off the ground and apeered to me to be getting some mad. Because she was not bawling no more and her face was set and looked like that bull dog Uncle Ivan use to have. Pretty soon Mama stopped figting Daddy long enuff to see that some thing had come over Aunt Clive. Mama backed up a little ways then turned and run in the house. Daddy looked at Aunt Clive and said dont that beat all you ever seen. Get in the car Clive and I will take you home. Aunt Clive did not say nuthing else she did not cry no more nor nuthing but just got in the car with Daddy and they left.

Me and Iva and the little kids set outside on the porch for we was a scared to go in by Mama while she was

mad and had bad nerves. Iva said a nice lady Mama mooched given her the jelly and she said Im cold and given Sissy the jelly to hold. In the house she went to git us a quilt to put around us. And said Mama was not doing nuthing but setting at the table taking her hair down. Lo if we did not look down the road. And see little Fate a coming. That man could not get nuthing rite for Daddy was gone again. Little Fate said where is yur Daddy and yur Mama. We said Daddy is gone but Mama is in the house with bad nerves because they been figting. He pushed his big hat back a little bit and said is that rigt and we told him thats rigt and we have to set still and be good to let Mamas nerves git better and Little Fate looked at us and shuck his head. He said well I got to go and got in his truck to leave. Then Iva said hay may be little Fate will give us a korter but she did not git to go ask him because Mama come outside and hollered at Little Fate to take her to Aunt Clives and they left in his pick up truck. I fixed us some biskits and we et the hole jar of jelly. It was black berry. Dont that beat all? and here I been a wishing for some. The End. Rachel.

March 16 1955. Iva stubbed her toe and nearbouts knocked the toe nale plum off but she is tuff for she bawled only a little bit and then said she cant hardly wait to show Doreen Chansom so Doreen will gag. Pretty



soon Iva will have a birthday. She will be eight. The law brot Jimmy Blalock back to his daddy. Yesterdy Jimmy was at school and I heared him tell Miss Perkins that he would join the army next time so he can go to China and the law cant git him back. Miss Perkins said you are not old enuff Jimmy and we dont have no army in China. When I set down at my desk I did not look at Jimmy. But at reading time he walked by me and said I like corn bread. I felt a little jump kindly in my belly. I bleve it was a happy jump. The End. Rachel.

March 18 1955. Mama whupped all of us but Jacob yesterdy. Jacob was asleeping. The whupping started because Mama said we was too much God dam truble and she was sick to the deth of looking at kids and what in the hell was we a thinking when we et all the jelly like a bunch of god dam hawgs. You know that is my Mama cussing and it ant me. Mama said she wanted to put that jelly up for good. Sissie was a shaking and dropt a cup she was holding and started bawling because she knowed Mama would whup her which she did. I got whupped because I was a helping Sissie pick up the broke glass and Mama said by god no Sissie can pick it up her own self. But Mama was a whupping Sissie and she could not pick it up. And Sissies nose was a bleeding bad it got on the wall because

Mama nocked Sissie to the wall and I bawled and tried again to get the pienes of broke cup and got it and hollered to Mama that it was not on the floor no more. Then Mama forgot about Sissie and whupped me and hit me on the head hard and now I have a ear ake bad and I have got a big purple spot on my neck and I cant go to school. Iva run outside and Mama whupped her for running off and she whupped Wade and Sammy because they was a bawling too and she said we better by god not act like a bunch a hawgs no more and she will learn us one way or the other to act like we got some sens. I cant hardly rite because my arm hurts but I want to rite this so you will know in a hunderd years and so you will not whup yur little kids like my Mama does for yur little kids dont know what to do when you do. Daddy cant do nuthing to make Mama stop. He never does and I hate Mama and I hate Daddy too. Iva says when she grows up she is going to whup Mama with a big belt and she says she will clean Mamas plow.! But I bleve first we migt run off to Old Mexico where Mama cant find us till we are big. I bleve

March 21 1955. I bleve some thing is rong with Daddy. I got up to go to the tollet about early morngloam and Daddy was a setting on the porch. And was a looking off to the river but I dont bleve he seen the river atall. Later he ast me and Iva if any body come by. Me and Iva

we looked at one another and said who and Daddy said any body. We said no Daddy ant no body been here to the house and it brung to my mind that even Little Fate ant been by in a while. And Daddy breethed real deep and settled in his chair like he was easy now. Mama come outside and did not say nuthing for awhile. She taken her hair down and was a combing it and she ast what was you a saying Ramer and kept a combing her hair. I was a telling them kids how to get that bug he said and he pointed to Sissie and Wade. Me and Iva looked at one another. Sissie and Wade was a sitting in the dirt a trying to tie a thred to a june bugs leg but the june bug was a flying around and around and the thred was all in a tangle in Sissies hair. Wade and Sissie was a laghing and a laghing but nobody was a talking. Of a sudden I felt kindly like ever thing was moving real slow and this bleery feeling come over me and I put my face in Jacobs hair who I was a holding on my lap. When I looked up the feeling left me. Mama was a setting in a chair and had pulled her hair around and taken the sizzers out of her pocket so she could cut off the ded ends of her hair. She cut off a little bit and said here Iva bury this hair at the base of that tree. Iva said okay. Because we bleve it makes our hair grow more. Do you bury yur hair that you cut off yur head.? Of a sudden Daddy got up and said I bleve I could win at

craps if I was to go to Dells. I feel lucky he said and given his pockets a pat. Mama said I cant set here all the dam day I will go with you and walk over to Clives from Dells place.

So Mama and Daddy left and me and Iva taken the little kids and a quilt and some biskits and a jug of water and come to the old farm place. We sung us some songs on the way and Iva hollered yo-nder real loud. Then we sung green grow the rushes and it taken us all the way to the farm place with Iva a singing O O O loud enuf to waken up the ded and we laghed and laghed. Now we are here where Im a riting this and Jacob is a gitting so big but cant walk yet and is a playing on the quilt and Sammy is a playing with him. The grass is real green and smells sweet and feels good on our feet. And the little birds sing all over the place and in my head is a picher of me and Iva and the little kids and bird fethers ever where and a skillet of little birds that we et. But I push it out of my head. Leaves is thick on all the trees now and there is dandy lions and lambs korter ever where. We art to pick a mess to eat for supper but I cant fix it because if you dont fix it right you migt die from it. Have you ever tried lambs korter.? You art to for it is real good and is kindly like poke salid. Sissie and Wade are a playing with little bitty frogs that are a jumping ever where and I dont see Iva. I bleve she is gone to look at

the green pears and will be a wishing they was ripe. She

Oh oh oh you wont bleve it but Iva near bouts killed Unkle Burk. I told you that girl is a site but Im glad she was brave because I was not one bit brave I was too scared. Wait wait. I aim to tell you from the front of it. Me and the little kids was at the pond and they was a playing and I was a riting and Iva was off some wheres and of a sudden we heared a car and seen that same ugly yella car turn off the main road and down to the farm. It liked to of scared me plum to deth because I could not figger where was Iva and did not want nobody to see her. I put all the little kids by me on our quilt and we was behind some bushes and a far off so no body could see us and probly could not hear us but may be if Jacob was a bawling they could. The man set there in his car like he was a pondering on some thing or a waiting for some body but dreckly he got out and walked and I could not see him no more. I was a feeling so scared I was near bouts sick and comensed to have that kindly bleery fleeling when of a sudden I seen Mama and dont know where in the world she come from but she was there and was a walking in from the road to that yella car like she knowed it was there. My heart like to of tore me up it was even hitting me in the thoat I was that scared. I did not even know Mama ever

come to this place. Sissie seen Mama and comensed to moaning and I had to shake her hard and make her hush so she would not scare Sammy and Wade and not waken Jacob up who was asleeping now and I was so glad for that. Where oh where was Iva.

I am a riting this now when it is all over but it ant over because Daddy dont know and I bleve this is that sertin thing hapening in my dream of Mama. May be my dream was only part rigt and no more of it will come about. But I bleve it will some day mark my words. I will go back now and tell you the rest.

I could not set still because I was scared Iva would get seen and then we would all get a hard whupping. I set Sissie and Sammy and Wade rigt by Jacob and tole Sissie she is six years old and is big and can be the mama while I go find Iva. Sissie started a low bawling and said she did not want to be no mama but I shaken her and told her she had to and I would whup her my own self if she started a bawling and hollering and did not mind me. Sammy and Wade looked at me with big eyes and they did not bawl atall. I told them I would cook them some little pancakes and taters when we got home if they would please just set still. And if they did not be real still Mama would beat us all to deth. They was all a setting real still when I sneaked off through the bushes to find Iva. I looked and looked and could not see her so I sneaked to the barn was

a going to peek around when I heared Mamas voice and a mans voice but I could not hear what they was a saying. I run behind some bushes my heart a pounding like a big hammer. Now I was sorry I did not stay with the little kids and let Iva get in truble but if Mama seen Iva she would know we was all there. I skrached my arm on the bush and seen some hornets flying close and knowed I migt git stung. I watched the hornets and looked for Iva but could not see her. Then I looked real hard at the pear tree and bleved I spied Iva scrunched down behind it. I started to wave my arm at her when Mama come around the side of the old barn and set down on the grass. And you wont bleve it but Unkle Burk was with her and I near bouts died when Unkle Burk put his hand on Mamas titty and said them tittys dont feel like they did when you was a girl Ida Belle. Ever thing moved kindly slow as I seen Unkle Burk pull open Mamas dress front and put his face down there on her tittys like a baby. Mama layd back real easy on the ground and Unkle Burk pulled open his shirt and pulled down his pants and I seen his peter. I felt kindly sick like I felt one time when I seen a dog with its thoat cut and I knowed it could not live. I wanted to run away but I could not run away and I heared Mama say I ant a girl no more Burk. She said you made me do it then but you cant make me do nuthing now I dont want to. A

hornet come close to my face and I dojjed my head back and thats when I seen Iva run from behind the tree and get behind the barn at the other end from Mama and Unkle Burk. Lord I was a praying what is that girl a thinking on now. She will purely to God be the deth of us if Mama keches her. I seen Unkle Burk leen over Mama and pull up her dress and I could not look no more. I set down behind the bush and prayed to God to stop all this and make Mama and Unkle Burk stop what they was a doing and leeve so they would not know we was here. Then of a sudden I heared Mama a hollering and I looked and seen her and Unkle Burk a figting. Unkle Burk said what has come over you and Mama said I just now desided you fucked my girl hood away and you ant a fucking me no more. Mama kicked Uncle Burk in the straddle and he fell down a holding his self and she comensed to run and he stuck his foot out and tripped her. He was a cussing and was on his all fours about to get Mama when Iva run out from behind the barn with a big bord like a toobefore. I could see the nail a stiking out from it and I was plum froze still. I could not move and it looked like mama could not move nether she was supprised. Iva swung the bord and hit Unkle Burk in the face and then she run. I tell you that girl is a site. Unkle Burk grabbed his face and fell back on the ground a hollering oh God oh God and by then Mama was up off the ground and she kicked Unkle Burke again and again. He



held on to his face he could not hardly get up or walk because he went in circles a holding his face and it scared me and he was a pulling up his britches too. But what scared me more was that he might get Iva so lo I grabbed me a bord and Iva come a running and grabbed a bord too and we was a hitting on Unkle Burke. So he got smart and run to his car a cussing and hollering at Mama I will see you in hell Ida Belle. Mama said not if I see you first and throwed a rock at his car. He hollered out to Mama and said he art to of drowned Mama years ago like Laurel wanted him to. Then he got gone a skweeling his tires and a churning the dusty road. Me and Iva and Mama watched the car go. Mama a standing there with her mouth open and her eyes big. Finely she fell back down on the ground total done in and her hair tore up complete. And just set there on the ground a putting her dress together and a putting up her hair that come down and said thats good enuff for Burk and may be the son of a bich will die. And then she said this is one little rondeevoos Burke wont forget. I could hear Sissie a hollering for me and hear Jacob a crying and I went to find them and by the time I got all the little kids and hid the pensil under a rock and put my paper in my britches. And got back to the barn Mama said lets go home. No body said nuthing. We just walked in the road ruts with grasshoppers jumping in front

of us. Ivas face looked like she was kindly sick. And I belve she was scared like me. Because we knowed Mamas nerves was bad. Of a sudden Mama said here Rachel I will carry Jacob for he is too heavy for you to be a carrying on yur hip like that and she taken him out of my arms. Me and Iva looked and looked at one anuther we did not know what to bleve. We was total stonished bleve you me. We helt the little kids hands and Iva brung our quilt and we walked by Mama and none of us did not say nuthing. Finely Mama said what was you uns a doing there. I did not say nuthing at first but then I said we was having a piknik. And I could feel my self a getting more scared. Mama did not say nuthing. No body said nuthing.

When we got home we was hot and total wore out. Me and Iva comensed to peel taters for supper and Mama set out there on the porch and taken her hair down. The little kids played in the dirt under that oak tree out yonder. When Daddy come home from Dell Ritters he did not act like he won. I heared him tell Mama he heared Unkle Burk got in a figt and he tole Mama he knowed she was not at Aunt Clives so where was she. Mama did not anser him for a while. Me and Iva stopped what we was a doing and lissened real close to hear what Mama would tell Daddy. Daddy ast her again where was you today Ida Belle. Then we heared Mama say to him I was on a piknik. A piknik Daddy said. Mama said yes I was on a piknik with the

kids. Me and Iva looked and looked at one another. We was total stonished but we did not say nuthing just looked at one another and peeled them taters for supper. I made little pancakes for the little kids.

After supper we was a setting out on the porch a lissening to the crikets and katy dids. Jacob was a crawling on the porch and Mama stepped on his finger by aksident. He started bawling and Mama grabbed him and throwed him in my arms and said stop this god dam bawling yungun. I taken him in to bed and dreckly Mama come in the house and taken Daddys razer strap off the wall and said to me and Iva Im going to whup yur asses for leeving this house. The End. Rachel.

March 25 1955. Mama and Daddy come home yesterday and said they have got another house for us to live in. It is on sixth street not far from Aunt Clives. The house is a shotgun house. In case you dont know what is a shotgun house I will tell you. It is a house with two rooms where you can stand in the front door and look in the house and see through the middle door out the back door. If you want to shoot some body in yur back yard you can shoot from yur front door plum through to the back and not mess up yur house nor no body in it unles they get in the door. And then they are a gonner. Mama said there is a shed us

girls will sleep in wich scares me and where will I keep my notes I ast my self. Also Deke Chansom has a big truck daddy wants to buy. Deke wants forty dollars to boot and wants Mama to sew up his four girls some clothes out of some flour sacking his woman has saved. Dekes woman cant sew a lick. Daddy said he wants to get the truck so it will hold all our cooking and sleeping plunder when we go to Texas to pick cotton or to Colorada to pick apples or to Oregon and Californya to pick prunes and cherries and beans and peaches and stuff like that. Him and Mama was a talking last nigt about going to the Ozark mountins to look up some of Daddys people. I bleve the house we are a moving to is close by Jimmy Blalocks house. The End.

Rachel.

## Preacherman (1955)

### Ch. 3

"If it ain't one damn thang, it's anuther," Ramer muttered. He got out of the truck and slammed the door, then glanced toward the left front tire where the fender hung down, bent and loose. It was held to the body of the truck with baling wire. He pushed on the metal fender and glanced down at the tire. The fender would hold, and though the tread was running a little bare on the tire, it wasn't flat. Yet. He walked slowly to the back, his eyes running along the high wooden sideboards to see if any of the family's belongings were falling through the cracks. He was a small, skinny man with dark hair and eyes, curved shoulders, and bowed legs that made him walk with his feet turned in slightly.

"Damn!" he said and kicked the back left tire. With his hands jammed in his overalls pockets, he stared at the wheel and the hunk of rubber that used to be a tire. He pulled a plug of Red Man from his shirt pocket and bit off a hunk. "Git down outa that truck!" he yelled to the faces looking down over the sideboards. "You'uns got no bidness up thair while ahm jacking up this bastard!" He spit at the ground and climbed on the truck to rummage among boxes and find the jack.

In the front seat, Ida Belle held her hand to her head. She'd been jerked forward when the tire blew. She

leaned against the dashboard momentarily while eleven-month-old Jacob cried and pulled at her arm. Suddenly she turned and slapped him across the face. "Shut your mouth!" She held one hand under her belly as she jerked on the door handle and climbed down out of the truck. Some of her thick, red hair was loose from the string that tied it back.

"You shore as hell know how to pick 'em, don't you?" she yelled at Ramer. She tore the string from her hair and retied it as she walked around to where he worked on the tire.

Ramer finished loosening the lug nuts. Ida Belle leaned over close to him.

"In the first place, I don't know why you wanted to take this road. And in the second place, I told you and I told you. 'Ramer,' I said, 'this road ain't no fuckin' good.'" She straightened up and put her hands to the small of her back. "But do you listen to me? No-o-o-o! Don't nobody goddamn travel on a road like this 'cept some fool like you, Ramer! And I told you we'd never make it over these mountains in this junker." She hit the wooden sideboard and jerked her fist back quickly.

"Son-of-a-a...," she hissed the last part of the word and pulled a small splinter of wood from her hand.

Ramer adjusted the jack under the truck then leaned

back and looked up at Ida Belle. Without taking his eyes from hers, he turned his head slightly and spit through his teeth. The spit landed near Ida Belle's shoe. Ramer wiped tobacco juice from his chin and began pumping up and down on the jack handle.

Ida Belle stared at Ramer a moment then shook her head and turned away. She said something under her breath and went around to the other side of the truck where the kids stood or sat on the running board and on the ground alongside the truck.

Sissie sat on the ground by the truck and hugged her knees. Wade and Sammie went behind a bush to pee.

Iva Stelle stood where the narrow shoulder gave way to tall grass. She looked down the wooded incline to the rugged valley below. In the distance, the green and violet folds of the Ozarks turned a shade of misty gray. Dark clouds moved furtively across the valley. "Mama," she said and pointed. "Looka yonder. Ain't it rain?"

"Get your ass away from there before you fall and roll down the damn mountain!" Ida Belle yelled, and looked to where Iva pointed. The breeze picked up and carried with the smell of rain. She turned to see Rachel on top of the loaded truck bed.

Rachel could hear Jacob screaming. His cries were muffled by the glass where he pushed his face against the back window and tried to reach through to her. She

glanced at him and chewed at her lower lip as she hurried to put spilled clothes into a box, her movements nervous and jerky. Long strands of brown hair blew across her cheek and eyes. She tossed her head, turned it so the wind would blow the hair from her face. She quickly stuffed pillowcases, a shoe, some overalls into the cardboard boxes.

Ida Belle's face was set hard. "You know better'n to be on that truck while your daddy's jackin' it up. Git down offa there and take care of that squallin' young'un." She pulled a rag from her brassiere and blew her nose.

Rachel worked her way carefully to the opposite side of the truck, away from her mother. As she lifted her leg over the edge to climb down, she looked up to see a big, maroon car pull to the side of the road and move slowly up behind the truck. Thunder clapped somewhere down the valley and the wind gusted, whipping Rachel's skirt around her thin legs. She jumped the rest of the way to the ground and pulled her sweater tight against the chill. The baby's cries stopped as she hurried to him. She took him in her arms and turned to see a man walk up and stand near Ramer.

"How do you do, sir," the stranger said.

Ramer squinted up at him then removed the flat tire and lifted the spare, grunting as he pushed it onto the



hub. "How do," he said.

"Looks like you folks are having a little trouble."  
The man watched Ramer twist the lug nuts on.

"Well, yeah. Reckon so." Ramer stood up, wiped his hand on his pants leg, and held it out. "Name's Lassiter."

"Reverend Thadius T. Fletcher here." The preacher shook Ramer's hand.

Rachel stood near her father, the baby's arms tight around her neck. She put her face in Jacob's hair and looked over his head at the stranger. The man was fat and bald with pale, shiny skin. Loose flesh on his neck spilled down over his collar. He wore no coat, just a long-sleeved, gray shirt pushed up to his elbows. Suspenders stretched tight over his belly, and his trousers lay in little puddles at the tops of his shoes. He leaned back on his heels and stuck his thumbs in his suspenders.

Ida Belle hurried around the side of the truck in time to hear the "Reverend" part of the introductions.

"Pleased to meetcha, preacher." She stuffed the rag back into her brassiere and smoothed her flowered dress down against her belly.

The preacher looked quickly at Ida Belle and turned his attention to the truck. "You folks heading far?" He looked from one end of the Chevrolet to the other, nodded

at some of the staring children, and looked at Rachel. He reached over and tickled Jacob under the chin.

"If you folks need a place to stay tonight," he said to Ramer, "I live in Colfax. Preach at the Lutheran church there." He indicated with a nod of his head the general direction of Colfax.

"Loothrun? You Loothrun?" Ramer asked. "Didn't know they was no Loothrun in these parts."

"Well, yes. I..."

"Well, I'll be daggone." Ramer stuck his thumb under the strap of his overalls bib and spit through his teeth. "Thought they was all Baptists 'round here," he said. "Never heered of no Loothruns in these parts."

"My wife will be happy to fix a hot meal for your family." The preacher looked at Ida Belle. "In your condition, perhaps you'd like to get off your feet a while and rest a bit. Mrs. Fletcher sets a fine table." He grinned and shifted his weight.

"Why, that would be awful nice, preacher. Wouldn't it, Ramer?" Ida Belle nudged her husband, tucked stray hair behind one ear, and fingered the knotted string.

"Loothrun, huh? Now, don't that beat all? Mighty fine of you to invite us, preacher." Ramer spit again and looked at the preacher. "Ain't from these parts, are ye? I mean...ye sound like..."

The preacher cut him off, "No, unfortunately." He swept his arm outward. "I haven't lived in this beautiful place very long." He looked at Rachel standing next to her father. "But the Lord moves in mysterious ways."

"Amen," Ramer said and quickly grabbed up the tools as he told some of the kids to get into the truck. He hurried around to the back to put the tools away.

Tiny specks of rain began to fall here and there. Rachel gave the baby to Iva and climbed back onto the truck to cover the mattress and boxes with a piece of tarp. She watched Ida Belle, whose arms were folded across her belly.

Ida Belle placed herself directly in front of the preacher and explained to him just how hard it was to "make a livin' in these godawful times with six young'uns to feed and anuthern on the way." She threw up her hands at the hopelessness of it all, then looked to the sky and said she believed it was "gonna rain pitchforks and nigger kids any minute." The preacher nodded a couple of times, agreed with her about the rain, and pointed to Iva and Rachel.

"The two bigger children should probably ride with me. It will save you some room up front."

"Rachel looked down from the top of the truck. She paused to hear the conversation better, one corner of the tarp still in her hand. She felt uncomfortable under the

stranger's stare and glanced away. When she looked back, she saw him step over and put his hand on Iva's shoulder while Ida Belle took the baby from Iva's arms.

"Rachel," Ida Belle yelled, "git down offa there. The Reverend here is kind enough to let you girls ride with him."

Rachel pushed the tarp around the mattress edges. She put some of the tire tools on one end as a weight against the wind, then climbed down to stand beside the truck and Ida Belle.

The stranger was opening the car door for Iva. "We'll follow along behind you," he called out to Ida Belle, "just in case that spare doesn't last. Stop at the edge of Colfax about fifteen miles on the other side of this ridge. I'll lead the rest of the way."

"Sounds good, preacher. Much obliged. Thank you, thank you a thousand times, and God Bless you." Ida Belle hurried around to shove the rest of the kids into the front seat of the truck. She was standing with the door open, complaining about the crowded cab when Rachel came up behind her.

"Mama."

Ida Belle was talking to Ramer. Rachel waited, pulling her sweater tighter.

"He coulda taken more of the young'uns in that big

fine car of his," Ida Belle said to Ramer. She adjusted the front of her dress so the flowers were straight then pushed one of the boys over so she could get in.

When Ida Belle closed the door, Rachel stepped up on the truck's running board and waited to speak to Ida Belle.

"Howsomever," Ida Belle continued to Ramer, "preachers ain't like regular folk. They don't like a lot of racket less'n it's in church. Sit down!" she yelled at the kids and looked over their heads at Ramer. "Nice feller, though, ain't he?"

"Sounds like one of them big city fellers," Ramer said. He was working the choke.

"Mama." Rachel touched Ida Belle's arm.

Ida Belle jerked her head around. "Whatsa matter with you? Git in that car so we can go!"

Rachel stepped down out of her mother's reach. "Me and Iva can ride in back of the truck, Mama. It ain't that wet." She clutched her sweater closer.

"Don't be stupid!" Ida Belle snapped and turned around. "I said sit down, by god!"

"Better hurry," the preacher called out.

Rachel turned and walked to the car. She stood by the car door and watched the truck pull away. She could hear Jacob crying as she got in beside Iva. The rain began to fall harder.

Wiper blades swiped across the windshield, smearing road dirt and rain together momentarily. Thunder clapped somewhere near. Rain fell in big drops. It began to beat down against the windows and upon the hood of the car. Rachel shivered and pushed her cotton skirt close to her legs. Her hands brushed against the seat cover. It felt like soft corduroy. She noticed the smell of bananas. Somebody had eaten bananas today, or maybe it was yesterday. On the floor, near her feet, were a box of papers and an empty Nehi bottle. She carefully shoved them out of the way with her foot. She and Iva looked at one another and sat quietly as the car pulled out onto the pavement.

"What's your name?" The preacher looked at Iva, who sat in the middle, her hands under her legs.

"Iva Stelle."

"Is that so?" He looked sideways at Iva and squinted his eyes as if he were considering whether to believe her or not. "Ivan," he said. "Hmmm. Sounds like a funny name to me. Sounds like a boy's name." He laughed, ha ha ha. "Well, Ivan, I guess your hands are cold since you're sitting on them."

"Nossir. It's Iva. I ain't a boy and my hands ain't cold." Iva looked at Rachel, and both girls grinned. Iva shrugged her shoulders and put her hands in her lap.

"He's funny, ain't he?" she whispered to Rachel.

"Aw now, c'mon," the preacher said. "No whispering secrets." Rachel thought he looked real serious. Then his face broke into a grin.

"How old are you?" Before Iva could answer, he snapped his fingers, "Let me guess. Ah, let's see, you'd be about six or seven years old. Am I right?"

Both girls giggled, and Iva straightened her shoulders. "Nossir, I'm eight, be nine next time."

"Eight! Be nine next time!" he cried. Then he looked at Iva and winked. He raised his eyebrows and turned his eyes back to the winding, wet pavement.

Rachel looked at his hands balanced easily on the steering wheel. The little finger on the right hand was raised and bent slightly. She thought his hands looked like they belonged on someone else. They weren't fat like the rest of him. The long, slim fingers were almost like a lady's except that the black hairs growing on them and along the backs from the fingers to the wrists made Rachel think they looked spidery.

"Then you must be about ten," the preacher said to Rachel.

"Yessir. I'll be eleven come winter." She counted the months in her head and thought winter was a long ways away.

"My, my," he said. "How about that," and laughed

harder this time, like he'd just discovered something very funny.

Rachel looked at Iva, then looked at the preacher. As he laughed, his belly rubbed against the bottom of the steering wheel. She looked ahead at the truck, its sides swaying with the wind and the curves of the road. Sometimes it disappeared around a curve and she felt uneasy until she saw it again. She wished she and Iva were riding on top of it, up there with the little kids, and she wished it wasn't raining. She wondered if the mattress and clothes were getting wet.

"You girls sure are tiny and fine boned," the preacher said. He had stopped laughing.

The girls were silent. They were looking straight ahead. Then, out of the corner of her eye, Rachel saw the preacher's right hand slide slowly down and around the side of the steering wheel. It fell onto Iva's leg. It squeezed and pulled back her cotton skirt and rested on the soft flesh while one finger moved up and down, up and down.

Iva looked down at the hand, then looked at Rachel and tried to move her leg. Rachel felt her stomach tighten.

The preacher squeezed harder, then let go and put his hand back on the steering wheel. He winked at Iva and grinned. "How would you girls like to come live with me?"



Rachel and Iva looked at one another. Neither one said a word.

It was quiet in the car except for pouring rain and the tap-tap of the wipers as they ended their sweeping arc on one side and returned to the other. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.

"Wouldn't you like that?" the preacher repeated.

"Nossir, we cain't," Rachel said quietly. She scooted forward and her foot hit the Nehi bottle. She nudged it back up under the seat and watched through the swishing windshield wipers as the truck moved ahead of them. She watched the rain beat down upon the pavement as the narrow highway twisted and curved around the mountain. They passed a boulder with the words "Jesus Saves" painted across it in red letters. It made her think to pray. Dear Jesus. Dear Jesus. Paint had run unevenly down from the letters into long tear shapes and dried that way. Ahead, the old green Chevy move farther and farther away. She gestured toward it.

"Mama and Daddy might not find your house if you don't catch up with 'em." She spoke softly, hesitatingly, afraid of making the preacher mad. But maybe, she thought, he's not a preacher at all. Preachers don't feel little girls' legs.

"We could have fun," he said, peering through the window and twisting his neck to see up the mountain on his

side of the car. "My aren't these hills a sight to behold?" He cut his eyes around to Rachel. "You could cook for me. Do you know how to cook?"

"Yessir...I mean, nossir. I cain't cook for you. I got to help Mama..."

"Why, we'd be just as happy as larks," he said without waiting for Rachel to finish. "As happy as larks."

"Nossir," Rachel could hear her voice shake. "You said your wife cooks good." The tightness in her stomach was growing.

"Oh, well...ah...", he cleared his throat. "She...." He slowed the car and pointed to a snake that slithered across the wet pavement. "Look at that diamondback, would you? Why, he must be the grandfather of all."

The girls stretched forward and watched the snake slide off into the tall, thick grass as the car moved past it. Rachel didn't think it looked like a diamondback, but she couldn't see clearly because of the rain and the grass. When she looked up, the truck was far ahead of them now, out of sight around the curve of the mountain.

"I guess you'd say 'granddaddy' instead of 'grandfather', wouldn't you?" the preacher asked.

"Grand-daaaddy," he repeated the word mockingly, twisting his mouth and his face when he said it. He laughed, ha ha ha, then hurried on. "Why do you people have to talk so

stupid, huh? I'll tell you why." He paused and looked from Rachel to Iva and back to Rachel. "Because you're a damned bunch of hicks, that's why."

They stared at him and sat quietly. Iva had scooted as close to Rachel as she possibly could. Rachel felt Iva's hand in hers and felt it shake. She knew Iva was as scared as she was. The knot in Rachel's stomach began to make her feel sick. Oh Jesus. Dear Jesus. She and Iva should not have gotten in the car with the preacher. But Mama wouldn't listen. Dear Jesus. Jesus Saves. Jesus Saves. Dear Jesus, she was scared. And he was making fun of them, the preacher was making fun of them. Maybe Jesus was, too. No, no, Jesus wouldn't do that. But he was a preacher. Jesus was, too. Maybe he wasn't a preacher. Where was Jesus? And where was Mama and Daddy? She couldn't see the truck anymore.

"How would you like something like that diamondback to come cree-eeping up on you in the night?" The preacher made his voice sound slow and deep. "Cree-eeping up into bed with you." Suddenly he reached out and grabbed Iva by the arm, "Gotcha!" He pulled her roughly toward him.

Iva cried out and tried to pull away.

"If your hands are cold, this will certainly keep them warm." He shoved her hands between his legs and held them there, pushing back and forth.

Iva turned her head to see Rachel and tried to pull

her hands away. She cried harder and squirmed, twisting and turning her hands to free them.

But the preacher held on and hummed to himself. He drove slower and slower and asked the girls to notice the marvelous handiwork of God, how beautiful the Ozarks looked through the rain, and how lovely the dogwood and redbud looked in blossom.

"Mister...you're hurtin' her." Rachel's voice was barely above a whisper. She was afraid to make him mad, afraid to talk up to a grownup. Ida Belle might say she was sasssing. She waited. Iva's eyes were begging her for help. "Mister, please," she said again.

He didn't move except to push Iva's hands back and forth between his legs. He kept on humming.

Rachel reached across and pulled on Iva's hands.

The preacher held on tighter.

Iva stared ahead, her lip quivering, tears streaming down her face. "I'm gonna tell on you when we see Mama and Daddy," she said and burst into loud crying.

"Oh, really," the preacher said, and raised his eyebrows. "Well, we'll see about that, girlie. We're going to take a little side road..."

Suddenly, from behind, a log trucker blew his whistle. Both girls jumped. The preacher swore under his breath.

"Please, mister," Rachel looked from the preacher to

the log truck bearing down upon them. "Let us out right here, and we'll get somebody else to take us to Mama and Daddy. They'll come back after us. Please, mister, please," she begged. "Your wife don't have to cook us no supper." She looked behind at the truck and waved.

The trucker waved back.

The preacher mashed his lips tightly together as he glanced in the rearview mirror. His face was red when he jerked his hand away, releasing Iva. "No need to whine! The Lord does not like whining brats or tattletales! You behave or you'll burn in hellfire forever." He jabbed a hairy thumb at his chest. "I tell you I'm a preacher! I know these things!"

Iva scooted as far from the man as she could. She hid her face against Rachel's shoulder and cried, her sobs muffled and choked.

Rachel felt the knot in her stomach turn over as the log trucker blew his whistle and pulled around them. The tears ran freely now, and she cried with Iva.

She watched the red rag tied to the end of the longest log on the truck. It waved and fluttered in the rain and wind and grew smaller and smaller until it became a tiny red dot as the truck disappeared around the mountain.

Suddenly the preacher pulled at the front of his trousers. "Ever see anything like this?" He spread his legs wide, fumbled with the buttons, and reached in

through the unbuttoned fly. He pulled his hand away and leaned back so the girls could see. "Now, this here," he said, "is the real grand-daaaady of all snakes." At that, he threw his head back and laughed so hard his face turned red again.

Both girls stared then looked away quickly. Iva pressed herself against Rachel. Rachel had her fingers on the door handle. Through her tears, she noted how slowly the car moved and wondered if she and Iva could jump out. Her mouth felt cottony as the preacher suddenly reached across Iva, pinning her back against the seat. Rachel's chest. He put his hand on Rachel's chest.

"Let's see what we got here," he said and felt through her sweater and cotton shirt until he found a small nipple and squeezed until Rachel cried out.

She tried to turn her body from him and press herself tight against the door, her face against the cold, damp window. She looked through it and beyond at the pouring rain, "Please, please, mister. Oh, Jesus, please...."

Iva began to cry harder and to fight against the preachers arm. She scratched and clawed at him and and tried to move up or down to get away from him.

The car swerved and the Nehi bottle hit Rachel's foot again. She kept her hand on the door handle and tried to maneuver the bottle between her feet and hold it there.

Suddenly Iva raised her head and shrieked, "There's Mama and Daddy!" and pushed on the preacher's arm, then quickly leaned forward and bit him hard on the wrist.

The preacher slammed on the brakes just as the girls looked up and saw the big, green truck that was pulled over to the side of the road.

Rachel grabbed Iva's arm, jerked at the door handle, and fell out.

Both girls hit the gravelly shoulder and rolled downward. Like two tangled rag dolls, they toppled over one another, grabbing and clutching at brush and tall grass until they came to rest against some fallen logs. Rachel struggled to raise herself and felt pain in her right arm. Her stomach lurched. The feeling came and passed.

Skinned and bruised, their long hair tangled with twigs and dirt, the girls crawled up the jagged incline. Iva's nose was bleeding, and she had a darkening bruise on her chin. Rachel's arm was skinned badly. It hurt where the elbow was already swelling. They stumbled toward the truck. The rain had stopped, but the pavement was wet and slippery.

Ramer came toward them with the siphoning hose in his hand. "Whut ta hell happen? Whut made him hightail it so fast?" He pulled a rag from his overalls pocket and handed it to Iva. "Better wipe your nose and quit your

bawlin' 'fore your mama hears ye. And you ain't gonna bleve whut happen." He blinked his eyes and looked from one girl to the other. "We runned outa gas."

Rachel stared at him and swallowed. She was shaking so hard, her chattering teeth made her head hurt. "I don't reckon that man was no preacher, Daddy. If he was, he..."

"Better git on up yonder," Ramer said, and motioned toward the truck.

"Daddy, he..."

"Better git on," he swung the hose back and forth and spit on the pavement. "Tell your mama. I can't do nothin' 'bout it. And quit your bawlin'," he said to Iva.

Rachel turned and walked on to the truck. Iva followed, leaving Ramer to stand there with the hose in his hand, chewing his tobacco, moving it slowly from one side of his jaw to the other.

Ida Belle ran out of the woods where she'd been using the bathroom. Her underwear was almost down around her knees. She stumbled and cursed, straightening her clothes. She was adjusting her dress as she reached the girls.

"What did you 'uns do?" she demanded.

"Mama," Rachel began, "the preacherman...he was trying to...to be nasty."



Ida Belle froze a moment then flew forward and slapped Rachel hard across the face. "You shut your filthy mouth!"

"But, Mama, he..." Rachel sobbed.

"Don't say it! Just don't you say it! That man is a servant of the Lord!" Ida Belle waved her arms wildly.

"He...he reads the Bible and prays, and...why, he's a...he's a preacher!" She burst out crying. "He's a preacher," she said, her voice quieter.

Rachel stood trembling, trying not to look at her mother.

Suddenly Ida Belle's voice was almost a screech. "Now what do we do? Huh? Huh? Answer me that!"

"You and Daddy could tell the sheriff." Rachell brushed at tears with her sleeve.

"Shut up! Just shut up!" Ida Belle screamed. She grabbed Iva and shoved her toward the truck. "Get in the truck and quit your blubberin'." She turned her attention to Rachel. "That man," she shrieked and pointed off in the direction the preacher had taken. She held her arm straight out like it was stuck there. "That man was goin' to give us our supper!"

Rachel wiped at the tears, her eyes on the ground at her mother's feet. Her head and arm hurt, and blood trailed from one skinned knee.

"C'mon," Ramer said. "No sense sittin' here all damn

day." He offered the sponging hose to Ida Belle. "Ahm a-goin' down thair." He pointed to a gully with some trees. "You stop the first car whut comes along and put the mooch on 'em. Ack like ahm sick with the die rear.

"Ida Belle snatched the hose from him and threw it beside the truck. "Why, you lazy, stupid, no-good son-of-a-bitch! I know how to bum!" she yelled. "Hurry and git gone 'fore a car comes."

She had forgotten about Rachel until she looked up to see her climbing onto the truck. "You'd better sneak your ugly ass up there. And remember I'm not finished with you yet!" she yelled. She turned and looked at a car that was coming. Shoving her hair behind her ears and laying a hand across her belly, she reached out an arm to flag down the car.

Rachel climbed onto the mattress and tried to straighten the boxes. The tarp had come loose and some of the boxes were wet. Since the rain had stopped, the rest of the kids were back up on the truck and under the damp quilts. They were hungry and whiney.

Rachel climbed down once and leaned against the truck. Her stomach lurched. Again. Again. Nothing came. She tried to spit the nasty taste from her mouth. She waited, her damp forehead pressed against the splintery wood of the truck. Jacob started crying. Rachel pushed herself

away from the truck, wiped her face with her skirttail, then worked her way shakily back onto the truck to lie down beside Jacob. He snuggled in close against her and fell quickly asleep.

Iva crawled over beside her and eased under the quilt. Her nose had stopped bleeding, and the last of the tears were drying on her cheeks. Rachel noticed how red and windburned Iva's face was. She helped to pull the quilt up to Iva's chin.

"Rachel," Iva said.

"Shhh," said Rachel. "Go to sleep." She adjusted her arm and lay back to rest. The wind picked up and carried with it the threat of more rain. "I hope it don't rain no more," she said quietly.

"Rachel, when do you reckon we'll be gettin' somethin' to eat?" Iva's hand found Rachel's under the quilt. "I'm hungry."

Rachel sucked in her breath to ease the ache in her throat. She felt numb. She gazed off into the sky where a hawk suddenly appeared out of nowhere. His cries mingled with the rising wind, and he soared free, floating above the trees. Rachel watched him as he dipped and rose and dipped again on the air currents, then disappeared out of sight. Iva's fingers squeezed again.

"Rachel."

"What, Iva." Her throat felt tight.

"Do you reckon he'll come back?"

"No." She swallowed. "Go to sleep."

"Rachel."

Rachel didn't answer.

"Rachel, do you hurt bad?"

She swallowed again. "Shhh." Tears slid down her cheek.

She could hear snatches of her mother's voice talking to the young couple in the white coup she had flagged down.

Ida Belle was saying they were "broke with six young'uns to feed, no money, no gas. Oh, yes," she said. There was a pause, then Ida Belle's voice again, "Thank you, thank you a thousand times. God bless you and Jesus loves you, mister."

Rachel wiped the tears away with the edge of the quilt and sucked in her breath. She scanned the sky to see if the hawk had reappeared. But the sky was empty, silent. And then she saw him reappear from behind a tall pine. He rose above the treetops and floated on the wind. She watched him grow smaller and smaller until, beyond a misty ridge and into the grey-green mountains, he disappeared.

## Rachel's Notes (1956)

### Ch. 4

Thursday, May 3, 1956. Oh this is so awful, and I could not hardly wait to write it down though I have not wrote in a long time because Mama found some of my notes and read them and burnt them and whupped me something awful. After that she watched me for a long time to see if I was a writing. It happened after we moved here from our battry house by the river and I kindly had one of my lightnen flashes about it but did not listen to it. But that is not what I want to write now. What I want to tell you is this.

Iva didn't go to school today which is not nothing new atall. But when I got home from school today, she seen me a coming from a far off. She come running down the road lickety split to meet me and fell down and jumped up and got to me and grabbed my hand and wiped the dirt from her dress where she fell down. And she was a sweating too and she said, Rachel Rachel and sucked in her breath and said, Rachel we are famous.

You could have knocked me over with a feather but I said what are you a talking about and started to run with her because she was a pulling on me. Look look she said. See for your self. And I got to the house and did see for my self. Some people in two cars. They was newspaper people and they was a swarming everywhere. It was four or

five people and looked like so many you couldn't stir them with a stick!! One man with a big camra said how are you young lady? and I said howdy do, I'm fine and he said stand right over there. I don't like my pitcher took because I'm not pretty atall but me and Iva done what he said and looked at the camra. Then another man come by him and they talked and forgot about us, and then the man went on a taking pitchers. Pitchers of our house inside and outside and front and back. Pitchers of the yard that has old tires and the washing tubs and ringer washing mashine and dirty dishes and a broke trysicle and a old junk car with the motor out. He even taken pitchers of a old chair with the stuff out of its seat where the dog sleeps and of Sissie and Wade who was a setting on the porch steps a eating green apples somebody given them. There was a white headed man a setting on the porch steps a talking to Sissie and Wade.

Another man with a piece of paper and a pencil was a talking to Mama who set on the porch on a apple crate a holding Ola Mae. And Mama was a carrying on over Ola Mae like she was glad to have a baby which I know better. And Sammy with a dirty face was by her knees and Jacob was a standing there too, a screaming with his britches messy. Jacob seen me and helt out his arms and started to come to me but he fell down because he is little and his britches

was full. The man talking to Mama seen me and said to Mama who is that? And Mama said, that is my oldest girl Rachel. Mama said Rachel just come from school. Then Mama said to the man, Rachel is good in school you know, and is in the fifth grade. She said, Rachel why don't you show the man how smart you are and do some geogaphy or something for him. Where is a pencil? she said, but the man did not pay no attenshun to her for he was a looking at Jacob's messy briches too and he said to Mama, I believe your girl is busy right now. Then he went over and said something to the skinny woman in a nice blue suit and white skarf and hi heels who come out our back door and she wrote something down on a tablet she was a holding. And she looked at me. I had layed Jacob on the ground and was changing him. Where are your bathing fasilitys? she asked. I pointed to the tub a hanging on the side of the house and said, right there. Oh, she said and wrote that down. She was not a smiley woman. Where is your bathroom? she asked. Iva was a standing there now and said, lady have you got to use the toilet? do you have a belly ach? we don't take no baths in our toilet though. And said, I will show you and it is a two holer. The woman kindly snurled up her nose and said she just wanted to see it, and she follered Iva out to our toilet by the mulberry tree. She was a writing fast on her paper and nearbouts fell over a old tire.

Mama told the man who was still a standing by her and a writing, she told him that Daddy is disable with a rupsher and is down in his back, but she said he is looking for a trash hauling job right now just the same. Which I know is a lie for I come by Dell Ritters on the way from school today and spied Daddy there. But I did not say nothing. The people who live by us who are Tooty and Looty the twins who are old maids and are so big they have to go through the door side ways, they was a watching from their fence. I taken Jacob and went in the house and lo there was a woman and a man dressed real fine, and the woman had on glasses and she was a looking in our ice box. I did not say nothing for they are grownups and hi tone and can do anything they want to you. When I seen this, I taken Jacob and went around the house and out to the sleeping shed where me and Iva and Sissie sleep and Ola Mae too because she sleeps with me, and I put Jacob on the bed and got in the bed with him and covered us both up.

I bet now the law will come and take us away and put us all in the Sunbeam Home and they will not let us see each other no more. I can nearbouts taste it in my mouth that something will happen though I don't know what. I would be glad If they would take us and let us be together without no seperashun of us. I would cook and clean and make all of us mind so they would not be sorry they let us



be together. Me and Iva and the little kids can sing up the moon for them and maybe they will like us special. If they have a piana and learn me to play it, we can sing even better. But Mama says they do not let kids see their brothers and sisters. I wish I knowed somebody who has went there so I could ask what it is like. I can't hardly write this for how scared I feel. Its coming on to the edge of dark and I can't see nohow. The End. Rachel. A girl at school seen Elvis Presly in the pitcher show Jail house Rock. I wish I could

Friday, May 4, 1956. I could not go to school today because when I got up, us kids was by ourselves and I could not leave the little kids. It is just at bust of day now and Mama and Daddy are both gone which don't make no sense atall because Mama likes to lay up in the bed and sleep of a morning. I believe Uncle Ivan come by to get Daddy so they could go do a tree hauling job but I don't know where Mama is. She just likes to stroll. She is back in good with her sister Laurel and Uncle Burke so maybe she is at their house. Everbody here is still asleeping but me. Ola Mae woken up a while ago and I given her a bottle. She is asleeping again. I am writing while I can. I have a place to hide my notes behind a bord in our sleeping shed. This will do until I can get to my bucket by the river.

When the news paper people left yesterday, Mama said she was a going to Aunt Clive's house and said she would be back about dinner spell. I knowed there was not nary bit of truth to when she would be back but do you reckon I care? I'm her girl but you just don't know how much she makes me sick!! When them people was here, she played like she liked us fine but when they left she got tuned up. She come in the house and slapped Sammy and Jacob because they was bawling for something to eat and she said she had heared enogh out of them. She given Ola Mae to Iva and said, clean this shity kid and she told me to get this god dam place cleaned up. You know thats her a cussing and not me. And she kicked old Blue, said get that suck egg dog out of the house, which does not make no sense because there are not no eggs for old Blue to suck on. We eat ever egg that comes on this place. Do you believe we was sad to see the back of Mama a hoofing it down that road like a bat outa hell? That asking makes about as much sense as this, does a cow need a side saddel? I told Iva I can't hardly wait to go to high school and learn how to talk French so we can go to Canada, and I can get a job in a store or cafe and Iva can take care of the little kids. Iva said hell no, we will go to old Mexico and we will be famous from the news paper and get lots of money and Mama will be a counting money

and will not see that we are gone. And she said, but we will fool Mama and take a tub or two of money for our selves. I don't know what come over me, but I taken Iva by the sholders and shuck her and said Iva Iva, where do you get such notions? I told her nobody is going to give us no money and now the law will take us because they know we are poor. And they will put us in the Sunbeam Home and I started bawling. I could not help myself. Iva said, don't bawl Rachel. No they won't get us nether by god, we will run off! The little kids was a looking at us with big eyes and I said to Iva don't cuss, and where are we a going to run off to with all these younguns? Iva thought and thought and said to that shack where Jimmy Blalock hid from his daddy. I sware to you that girl has not got the sense god given a goose!! I told her she is crazy. We will just wait until I can talk French or she can talk Mexican. Iva said nobody can't put us in no home for our pooriness or they will have to put the whole grove in the home, which she has a point.

She started running off at the mouth about the news people again and I said, what made them come here? Iva said, do you know when me and Mama went mooching the other day? and I said yes. Last Sunday. Well, Iva said, the preacher Mama mooched was here, he was the white headed man a setting by Sissie and Wade. Are you for sure? I said to her. Yes, I am for sure, she said, and he brung

the news people. Sissie just woken up with the belly ach.  
She

May 4 again!! The fat is in the fire now and I can't write but a little bit because Mama is home. I am out in the sleeping shed. I want to tell you that we was in the news paper today!! There is a pitcher of Mama a holding Ola Mae and there is Jacob by her, and Jacob's face is scrunched up and he is a holding up his arms and it looks like he wants you to take him. That is the only pitcher not no more. The words say we are a poor family who need help and the father needs work. It says there are seven children and one is a infant and the mother is in the family way again. I am not shamed like I thought I would be and maybe somebody will give Daddy a good stiddy job. It just started to rain. I smelled it a coming a while ago and it smells so good. Daddy is gone hunting today and I hope he comes back with a big mess of rabbits or squirrls. The End. Rachel.

Saturday, May 5, 1956. I got up at the peep of day to go to the toilet. It is not raining no more and the ground feels fine and cool under my feet. When I come out of the toilet I seen a car pull up to our house. I went around to the front to see who it is and lo here come

a man with flour, a great big sack of it and taters and cans of peaches and a big rashun of bacon and you name it. My eyes bugged out and I said, who are you a looking for? and he said, are you the Lassiter family? and I said one of them. And he said, do you have seven children here? and I said yes. And he said, well this is the place. He said, I read about you in the newspaper and my wife sent this stuff. Before he was hardly gone, another car come and another and another and they brung clothes and groshries and other stuff, and even play pretties for the little kids. Mama clumb out of the bed, and I run and got Iva and Sissie out of our sleeping shed, and the little kids was fit to be tied, and Daddy was already gone to the tree job I believe. More people come and Iva said howdy do howdy do, bring it on in. Most all that day people brung stuff. Groshries, clothes, bed plunder, some chairs and a table, and some more play pretties, and when they was not no people there but us, Iva said, Rachel Rachel we are shiting in tall cotton now. She made me lagh and I could not hardly keep the little kids still for they seen all them play pretties and was so happy. Mama whupped Wade for being in her way and cussed because Ola Mae was a bawling for her bottle, then she got busy a going through the clothes and groshries and play pretties a picking out stuff to put up for good. No its for the rats, Iva wispered to me. She said, Mama likes to feed the rats.

We laghed and its a good thing Mama was too busy to know what we was a laghing about. Iva run over to our nieghbors Tooty and Looty and said we will go whole hog and give you back your flour and sugar and coffee we borried all them times. Believe you me they was surprised and glad too. I was total wore out from looking at all the good groshries and putting stuff in the cabnet and a keeping the little kids out of the way when more people come to the house. But my heart is so happy it is nearbouts to bust for now we have got lots to eat.

When it was getting on to dark and the people stopped coming, Mama took off to see if Daddy and Uncle Ivan was done with the tree job so she could tell them all about the news paper people. Rag Veeda come by and I given her some old rags and then I given her a blanket and a big can of peaches because she loves peaches. Me and Iva took the little kids and some of the play pretties and went out to our sleeping shed for a happy time. We sung Green grow the rushes and Brother John and Cilito lindo, and Iva acted a fool and Sissie and Wade was fooling too, and we et Marshmellas and store bought bread and spam. We was happy to be by ourselves.

Now Mama and Daddy are home and they are in the house and Sammy and Wade and Jacob are a sleeping in the house, and me and Iva and Sissie are in the sleeping shed. And

Ola Mae too. Sissie and Ola Mae are asleeping. I have got the karaseen lamp lit and am a writing this down. Iva don't say nothing about my writing no more because she is the falt of Mama finding some of my other notes and nearbouts beating me to death. Iva got mad at me and told but I know she will not tell no more. She keeps a look out for Mama while I write. She is the one who found the good hiding place I have now too. Just now Iva said, Rachel I told you we would be famous. I did not answer. I am busy writing. Just now she said, Rachel I heared the house door slam. I

Monday, May 7, 1956. Today a old woman and her doghter who don't look too young drove up in a bran spanking new white car. They was here when I was at school and I heared all about it from Sissie and Wade and Sammy, and Mama throwed in some talk about it. The two women, they taken Iva away but they will bring her back Mama said. They just want to buy her some school clothes and stuff like that. Why don't they get stuff for all of us? I said, if they are so goody goody. I did not say I feel jellus but I do about Iva maybe getting bran new stuff just for her. But I'm scared too, for you can never tell what stranjers will do like that time the preacher man taken me and Iva. Mama art not to never never let stranjers take us away. Anyway Iva art to be in school

and not off with strangers. When I said that to Mama, which I know better than to say anyways, Mama slapped me hard and said shut your god dam mouth!! And she said the woman and her doghter looked like they was plum broke out with money so we art to be glad they come to see us. She said maybe they will take all of you one at a time and get you stuff and maybe give me and your daddy some money, so shut your mouth Rachel!! The End. Rachel.

Tuesday, May 8, 1956. Iva is not home yet and it is coming on to dark. Mama whupped Sissie for something, I don't know what and made her sleep in the house. Me and Ola Mae and Jacob are in the sleeping shed and Sammy is too, for he has come down with a fever. Sammy gets sick a awful lot ever since he pretty near died that time when we was a picking cotton and a living on the Red river in a tent. I was a little girl then and Sammy was little bitty and he was so sick that the other people in the camp said to Mama and Daddy, you art to take that baby to a doctor. A man drove them to the doctor and the doctor said Sammy was a starving to death. The doctor given Mama and Daddy a note to take to the cafe in town. And the cafe given Mama and Daddy some mashed taters and gravy and some jellow and some milk to feed Sammy. Them taters and stuff looked so good and me and Iva and Sissie and Wade wanted



some, but we could not have none. Now that I am big, I feel shame that we asked for some, but we was little kids and did not feel sad about Sammy maybe dying, we just wanted the mashed taters and jellow. You know how little kids are. When you are little, you are not smart like when you get big. I don't know why I but I can just see it all like it is a pitcher painted in my head and I can nearbouts smell them mashed taters. Sammy is asleeping here by me on the bed right by Jacob and I feel a sore heart to think that Sammy might ever die. He has red hair just like Jacob and they look like twins, but Jacob is two and Sammy is three. Sammy is asleeping with his mouth open and a breething hard. I cannot sleep for my head is full of thoughts and I believe maybe the women who took Iva could be the home people with a bag of tricks up their sleeves. If we all get took, Mama will learn. The End. Rachel.

Wednesday, May 9, 1956. Iva got brung home today and she had two new pairs of shoes! some new dresses! new under pants! and even a red can can and a big blue hoola hoop! I am glad she is home but she sashays around like a big shot with her hoola hoop. Mama made her put one pair of the shoes up for good. The woman and her doghter whos name is Roberta took Sissie with them now. I wonder will I get to go too. I made us a cake today from the stuff

the people brung. The little kids just love cake. The  
End. Rachel.

Thursday, May 10, 1956. I have not been to school but  
one day since the news people come. And that was the day  
Iva got took. Finally people have stopped bringing stuff  
to our house. Sissie come home today with new clothes too  
but not no hoola hoop, I don't know why. But Sissie's  
long hair was cut short like a little boys because the old  
woman and her doghter took Sissie to the beuty shop. The  
old woman is little bitty with short, curly gray hair and  
her face looks like a little rinkled elve with her hair  
curled over her ears. She had on a flowerdy dress that  
come to the tops of her shoes that was brown. Her teeth  
are big though. She laghed real big and said to Mama, now  
Sissie won't have that long hair hanging down in the way.  
Which don't make no sense to me because we wear our hair  
plaited mostly. The doghter Roberta who is real tall and  
skinny with short strait hair and a black pocket book and  
black hi heels said to Mama, we believe Sissie looks much  
better. Mama did not say nothing to the old woman or her  
doghter, she just put on like everthing was hunky dory and  
was real smily. But when they left, Mama whupped Sissie  
and told Sissie she art not to let them cut her hair. Now  
how can a seven year old girl stop a grown woman and her

big tall doghter from doing what they want? I ask you. believe you me Sissie can not. I did not go with Mrs. Brown, that is her name. I believe her and her doghter was glad because I have got the belly ach and the runs from eating too much corn and I am total wore out from running to the toilet. I love corn and will eat it any way you cook it. Somebody given us some jars of put up corn and green beans and black eye peas. The End. Rachel.

Friday May 11, 1956. Mrs. Brown and Roberta did not take no more of the little kids after Sissie. This is fine with me because the little kids are too little to go with stranjers anyway. But if Mrs. Brown and Roberta don't get the little kids some stuff I do not think they are fair people. But I aim to go with them to get a can can and a hoola hoop.

I am total wore out and I can not hardly keep the little kids clean and stuff tidied up off the floor and the beds made in case the home people come. I have done desided that Mrs. Brown and Roberta are not the home people. Maybe if the home people come, they will not take us if we are clean and the house is clean. I can not do a thing with that moter out there in the yard though and ever time I pick up the other junk, some more gets throwed in the yard. I wish I was growed plum up!! Mama is gone to who knows where, maybe to see her sister Laurel who she

is goody goody with now but soon she will get mad over something and her and Aunt Laurel will fight. Mama goes to brag to everybody about our good luck in the newspaper. And Daddy is at Dell Ritters or maybe at Aunt Clive's, or maybe he is at his mama's house who is Aunt Pearl. Iva has been a laying out of school acting like it is play part time and a trying on clothes Mrs. Brown bought her, and a flipping the hoola hoop over the little kids and acting a fool. The little kids want the hoola hoop but Iva won't let them have it but for a little bit. She says they might brake it. But finally I made her and Sissy and Wade go to school. Sammy and Jacob are a having a hay day with the hoola hoop. Which Iva would just die if she knowed, but too bad for Miss Big Shot! I can not go to school because Mama has got up early ever morning which is a supprise, and if Mama gets out of bed before I do she won't let me go to school. The End. Rachel.

Saturday May 12, 1956. At least we are not eating short these days. We have got stuff to eat. But Mama is fixated on putting stuff up for good. She puts stuff in boxes and hides the boxes under her bed and says to us, by god you better not bother it!! She locks stuff up in her trunk which means we never see it no more. She has stuff in the trunk from her girl days too, some gloves and shoes

and hats and dresses. One dress that is dark green and silky that she says she wore in her hay day. Mama keeps the trunk locked and takes it when we go pick cotton and stuff. She use to make Daddy tie it on top of the car and now it gets put in the truck. She says she wants to keep a eye on it. The End. Rachel.

Sunday, May 13, 1956. Mrs. Brown and Roberta taken me to their house yesterdy. They said they wanted to keep me til Sunday but I said the little kids will be a wanting me home. Their faces did not look smiley no more and they said, we had planned to take you shopping, which I have never been shopping for myself so I said okay and said please mam, can I have a can can and a hoola hoop like my sister got? and they laghed and said yes. They brung me to a big clothes store and I seen so many pretty dresses it nearbouts made my mouth water. I picked out a pink can can that looks like a big pink cloud that makes you feel like you are a floting when it is on you. And some new shoes that are shiny black but they hurt my feet. But I will wear them any way. And they bought me a hoola hoop. All the time Mrs. Brown kepp on telling me to stand up strait because my back is humpy. She said I am little any way for a girl going on twelve and she said I art to stand up tall. She said I look like a old woman like her, and then her and Roberta laghed and patted me on the head.

They was good to me though and did not say nothing about my crookedy teeth or nose. Then they wanted to buy me two dresses but I said I would take one dress and the rest in money. They looked at one another and Mrs. Brown's voice got loud when she said read hard, that is rediculus!! Which scared me plum to death. But I told her I want to buy the little kids some stuff, which made her face get smooth and she said o.k. So they given me \$5 and I bought two more hoola hoops so now everbody can take turns a playing with them.

When we was done at the store and in the car a going to their house with all my plunder, Mrs. Brown smiled real big and given me some cookies. But I was real hungry and said, no thank you mam, but if it please you I would like some real stuff to eat. She sucked in her breth and her face got red and she said I art to preshate the cookies. I did not say nothing for I did not want her mad at me. Roberta drove the car and Mrs. Brown set her lips tight and did not talk no more til we got to their house.

Their house is a fine brick house that smells clean like when you cut wood, and there is a inside toilet and water that runs from a fosset like at school and a fine white shiny tub where you take a bath, and a little blue rug right by the tub. And there is pink and green soap that smells so good. It beats all you ever seen. A

toilet in the house where you do your busyness. And the rest of house has fine white curtains on the windows and a fine wood table with six chairs and a big mirror by the table where you can see your self eat. And rugs on the floor. And there are more pitchers on the walls than I ever seen in my whole life. And you sleep in a fine bed with a white ruffled bed spread. And I stayed all night but I had bad dreams about the little kids and peed in the bed. So I got up and felt so much shame I could not sleep no more. I made my bed and set up the rest of that night a thinking Roberta and Mrs. Brown will whup me for sure. When the morning got here, the daughter Roberta come in and said, my my you are a early riser. I said, yes mam, and I got to go home now because the little kids are wanting me right about now. When they took me home, they told Mama they will take Iva again on Saturday for they get a big kick out of Iva. They told Mama, your big girl Rachel is seerous about everthing. I believe that means they like Iva better than me. I wish I did not pee in their bed. The End. Rachel.

Saturday, May 19, 1956. A woman I don't know come over yesterday and asked Mama can I come to help make her sick baby well. It has the thrush mouth. The reason she come for me is because she heard I have never seen my real daddy. Mama told me to go so I went, and the woman

whose name is Glory said for me to wear my shoes. So I went and here is what I done. I seen the baby and he is a little bitty pretty boy baby with a batch of curly black hair and though he is sickly, he is smiley. But you can see the thrush in his mouth. Then I taken off my shoes and given the right shoe to Glory and she prayed while I washed my hair in fresh well water. Then with my hair wet, I taken the shoe and walked around Glory's well three times saying the baby's name which is Mack Lee, and then we filled my shoe with the well water. Glory given it to the baby to drink, only he could not drink it, and so she washed his mouth with it. Now he will get well. It always works. The baby is lucky I have not never seen my daddy but I am not lucky. I wish my daddy would come and find me and maybe help me and Iva and the little kids. Glory is a little bitty woman with black hair and looks old like a grandma and not a mama of a baby. She has a whole raft of younguns, I believe she said eleven. She given me two jars of put up water melon perserves and some chow chow to take home and said I could come to see Mack Lee any time. The End. Rachel.

Monday, May 21, 1956. The nurse at school wieghed everbody and checked our eyes and our ears and checked us for head lice. I wiegh fifty eight pounds and the nurse



seen that I can not hear good. She given me a little bottle of oil for my ear and sent a note home that said some kids have lice, so everbody might have lice pretty soon. Mama goes crazy when she thinks we are lousy and so when she seen the note, she sent me and Iva to Cotton's store to get some black flag fly dope. Mama told me and Iva, make sure it says DDT on the can by god or it will not work. And get some hair oil, she said because she mixes the black flag with the hair oil and puts it all over our heads. Now we have got it on our heads and we can't wash it out for two or three days running. I feel sick to smell it. Sissie's hair and Wade's hair is so blond you can realy see the lice if they get some. The End. Rachel.

Friday, June 8, 1956. I did not go back to school no more after the nurse seen us and now school is out. It has been over a year since I seen Jimmy Blalock. He was not in school for a long time now. He lives in a house by us but I don't know where. There is a big boy who lives behind us and I know it is not Jimmy, but I believe I heared Jimmy's voice over there one day. But there is a big wood fence and lots of vines and trees so you can't see. Even when me and Iva looked throgh the big cracks in the fence and pushed back the vines, we could not see good. We seen the backs of three big boys a going around

the side of the house and that is all, and then they was gone. Mama whupped all of us kids today because she said somebody has been in the boxes under her bed. She whupped all of us so she would get the right kid who done it. The End. Rachel.

Tuesday June 12, 1956. I dreamed last night that the home people tied me and Iva and all the others up in a cage and taken us to a big circus for everbody to look at but we got loose and was a running away to old Mexico. Then we seen a car a coming down this long dirt road and there was a big trunk on top of the car. We knowed it was Mama and she would get us back, so we set down in the road and bawled. I woken up out of a dead sleep and I was a bawling. When I

Thursday June 14, 1956. I don't like it here in this house as much as I like the house by the river. But I get to write more because we have the sleeping shed. We have been lots of places since we moved from the old place by the river too. We went to the Ozark mountins to look up some of Daddy's kinfolks. It did not do no good for we did not find no kinfolks, but we found a preacher that liked to of kidnaped me and Iva, but we got away. He made Iva feel of his straddle and he put his hands on my

titties which I still don't have none and am glad, believe you me. And he showed us his peter that was the awflest thing I have ever seen. Mama and Daddy would not lissen to us and do something about it nether. I believe they don't come no meaner than my mama and no dummer than my daddy. But Daddy is not mean to us. And we have been to Texas where we picked cotton and we went to Colorada to pick peaches and apples, and that is where we seen the Colorada river which is so pretty. You art to see it. It is like a storm in the water with white foam a leaping like crazy over the rocks, and it is blue and white, and it is green where there is lots of trees and believe you me, that river pretty near takes your breath away. I have never seen nothing so pretty as Colorada with mountins so high they reach their pointy heads clean up to the sky. When you get up high on the mattruss on the back of the truck, some times you can see deer that run lickety split across the road and disapear in the trees and you can see afar off into the woods and down in the valleys and away off to other mountins that look like they are the biggest things in the world. And the air is so good to smell, it smells like the trees with big pine cones all over the ground. And little chip monks are a running everywhere. One time we was stopped to get some water from a water falls that falls so pretty down the side of the mountin, and I tried to get me a chip munk. They are such pretty

little things. They are so fast it makes your eyes spin around in your head, but I coaxed one with bread crumms to come close to my hand and I grabbed it. It run off fast like lightnen but it run off with a skint tail. I was so supprised I nearbouts died, and when I seen that tail hair left in my hand and that little chip munk running with a skint tail, I jumped up and started hollering. Iva and the little kids come running and could not figger out where I got the tail hair. It took me some time to tell them and make them see my meaning, and they could not see the little chip munk, for it was gone now. Mama slapped me and said stop acting a fool and get up on the truck so we can go.

But now we are back in the grove and we have had a school year and I wrote lots of stuff for you to read, but I could not get it to my bucket. So you know my notes got burnt. And I can't put everthing in words again for I don't remember what I wrote. Mama and Daddy said today they are going fishing with Uncle Ivan and Aunt Clive. They will be gone for two or three days. Then I will take my writing notes to the river. It is getting on to summer, and today has turned off pretty hot already. Me and Iva have got to wash the dipers. But Iva sneeks off or plays like she is sick to get out of washing dipers. You name it and she does it to keep from work. She hates

work specially washing dipers. I would not mind if I was a washing dipers in the mountin water. I would be so happy to be back there. The End. Rachel.

Thursday, June 14, 1956. The woman who was here with the news people, do you recolect? the one who done so much writing? and who Iva showed our tollet? She is the same woman who come to our house today with anuther woman, a fleshy woman with black hair and white pointy glasses and little bitty mashed together lips and a red dress. They was a looking for Mama and Daddy and a asking a heap of stuff like where is your mama and daddy? and when will they be back? and how old are you? and does your daddy have a job now? and where do all the children sleep? and are you hungry? and on and on and on. Iva did not say nothing and the little kids did not say nothing. Believe you me I felt that bleery feeling come over me and a flash of thinking in my head that this right here was the home people for certian. Wade's legs and arms was blue from Mama whupping him and Sissie too, and I seen the big woman look and then she asked me if they fell. I said I don't know. I was glad the kids was clean and the house tidied though. Where is your parents? she asked and I told her Mama and Daddy went to the store. When will they be home? she asked and I said I don't know but pretty soon, maybe by the supper spell. I said yes and no when I could and

played like I don't know much. The fat woman or the skinny woman was not smiley atall. The skinny woman looked at the fat woman after a bit and said, what did I tell you? They looked at one another like they knowed a big secret and then the fat woman picked up her pocketbook and with tight set lips, she said we will come back.

Oh lordy lordy, this wears the shiney off the day like nothing I ever seen. Me and Iva packed us some clothes and Ola Mae's dipers and some groshries in a toe sack and have locked us in the sleeping shed til Mama and them get home. Iva is a taking her hoola hoop. It is the only one that did not get broke. And Sissie and Wade has got some play pretties to take. If Mama and Daddy don't come tonite I will take us to the shack by the bridge where Jimmy Blalock was hid that time. I don't know where Mama and Daddy went. They been gone for two days. Sammy has got a bad cold and Ola Mae is crying for her bottle because Jacob has got it and a sucking on it. You have to watch that boy all the time. We

Rachel's Notes (1957)

Ch. 5

Tues. Jan 1, 1957. Jimmy Blalock is dead!! I was fixing to say Happy New Year here in this writing note but it don't seem right. It feels like mistreating the dead who can not be happy nor sad nether. Jimmy a dying don't seem real. We found out about it when we come back from Texas. I will tell you about Texas, but first I want to tell you about Jimmy. Calvin and Harold, who are the Horner boys who are 14 and 16, they found him. They say it was on a hot summer day last August not a cloud a showing nowhere. And the grass was high and a turning brown in places and the tree leaves was real limp from the heat. Calvin says he knowed already somebody was dead because he felt a shiver run down his back and everything was real still when him and Harold come up out of the river bed and walked along that woodsy place behind Lowell School between the grove and town. Harold, who is the oldest boy says Calvin is lying about the shiver because he never said nothing about it the day they found Jimmy. Harold says it wasn't all that still because he heard somebody a chopping wood and hounds a baying and heard the humming of bugs and a bob white calling out like they do, bob white bob white bob white, you know how they do it. Calvin and Harold say it was kindly long about mid day and they had been fishing. Calvin seen Jimmy first. He was

sitting under that big rain tree that kindly stands off to itself, the one where that deep gully ditch runs alongside it. Anyway Calvin and Jimmy werent no friends by a long shot and everbody knows them Horner boys is trouble makers. They didn't say it but I figger they seen Jimmy and was fixing to jump him, only he was dead and could not get riled nor put up no fight. He was just sitting there, they said. He was leaning back against the tree, his eyes wide open and his hands tight around the neck of a pop bottle. They was poison in that pop and nobody never found out where it come from.

When the menfolk taken him home, old man Blalock come to the door drunk with a swolled up black eye and said to lay Jimmy down right outside the door, said by God there was no way Jimmy was a setting foot in the door one more time. Jimmy layed there till somebody called the law because the dogs was a worrying at Jimmy's body. The law is who said it was poison. Theys folks who say Jimmy poisoned his ownself and some say no, his daddy done it. I heard Deke Chansom tell Daddy that from the time Jimmy was a little bitty boy, his daddy made him do some awful things that decent folks art not talk about. When I said, like what? Daddy told me to get in the house. I hope Jimmy haints his daddy!

If you was to ask me, I would have to say I don't know



who done it. Old man Blalock coulda done it because he is about a sorry as they come. And Jimmy mighta done it his ownself. I can't help but beleive he was down hearted like I get down hearted but it don't never enter my head to kill myself. All I think about is how to get us away from Mama. Everbody knows Jimmy was in trouble with the law all the time and that he even spent some time in reform school but old man Blalock went to court and got him out. What for, I don't know. Him and Jimmy was a fighting all the time. Jimmy took to stealing and got in fights all the time and I heard he drunk beer. It just don't seem right that he is dead and I don't know why he is always a crossing my mind. I think back on that time me and Francis seen him in that shack by the river and he was a sleeping on the floor and a funny feeling runs through me. I'm glad I taken him the apple and the biscuts and me and Ivy taken him the cornbread. Just think on it. He was not much older than I am now but now he is dead and won't get to have no wife and no kids of his own and won't get to live no place but the grove. But one thing for sure, I have got Jimmy's note and here I am a writing about him which means when you read this a hunderd years from now, he will not be dead. Leastways not til you read this part that says he is dead, and then he will be dead 100 years and 6 months!

Thur. Jan 3, 1957. Mrs. Brown and Roberta is glad we are back and they want to adopp Iva. Mama says no but she lets them buy Iva stuff. I don't think I could stand it if Iva was gone but she would not get no more whuppings and she would be rich. She

Sat. Jan 5, 1957. A woman who is real young and pretty with curly blond hair come today and said she is from the Christian Church in town and wants to know if she can take us kids to Sunday school tomorrow. Her name is Cora Doon. Mama said, these kids don't have nothing deesent to wear. Cora Doon said, it don't matter and she said, the lord looks at the heart. Mama said, do you think your church can look at its heart and bring us some groshries? and Cora said she would see. When Mama says this it always makes me feel so much shame and in my belly I get this feeling that makes me think I will puke. But I never do puke I just feel sickly. Mama told Cora Doon she will let me go but nobody else. But Iva is not here noways. So Cora said she will come to get me tomorrow. And then she got in her fine little car and left. I am so happy. I washed my hair and rinched it real good in vineger and put it up on tin curlers that we make from peices of a Prince Albert can and wrap in rags. Right now Mama and Daddy are at Deke Chansom's and the little kids

are asleeping and I am a sitting here with my head bound up in rag tin curlers a writing this down about Cora. She is so pretty with her blond hair and sparkeling eyes and wears pink lipstick. She is not fat at all but built like I want to be built when I get grown. She told Mama she is nineteen and is in college and told Mama, I will take real good care of your girl and bring her home after church. If the church does not bring us some groshries like Mama wants them to she might not let me go with Cora no more. Lots of church people have got us to go to their church, but Mama won't let us go no more if they don't bring groshries or clothes or give her some money. I do not beleive Cora is with the home people. I can not put my finger on the why of it now but I know Cora is specal and is quality. Something in my head tells me. The End.

Rachel.

Tues. Jan. 29, 1957. It is real cold and the wind has been blowing for days on end and us kids are by ourselves. We have not got much wood. We brung in chips and sticks to burn so we can save on the big wood. Me and Iva put up quilts to the doors so this one room keeps the heat better. Wade's head hurts him and he is a laying on a pallet by the stove. He gets a head ache sometimes and then pukes pretty bad. I have not got nothing but some flour to fix us for eating so I made fried bread and water

gravy and everybody is a eating it. I wish we had some jelly or maybe some honey and some butter or something like that. Everbody makes up meals they would like to have and we see who can make up the best one. Sammy wants some cornbread and milk and Iva wants some cake and pork chops and pudding and Sissie wants a big ornge and some taters and Jacob wants everthing that everbody else wants and Wade is too sick to want and Ola Mae and the baby Clayton are too little to say.

If you look outside it is black and gray and the sky is like a big gray lid a hanging over us and a bringing the dark down with it. It makes me feel low and swallered up with sad like there is a funeral somewhere and everthing and everbody morns. It is a feeling that won't let loose of me. It rained a little bit and then froze real hard so even the telephone poles and their wires are slick with ice. Our yard fosset froze and we had to build a fire around it to thaw it so we could get water to carry to the house.

Mama and Daddy has taken our welfare check that the welfare gives us now because Daddy has a rupsher and they have went to Coweta to see my grandpap. Grandpap had somebody write a letter for him to say he has had a sickness come upon him and he is on his death bed. Mama was a bawling and carrying on something pitiful, but I do

not know why. The last time grandpap come here he got Sissie hemmed in behind the chicken house and had his hands in her britches when me and Ivy come up on him. Sissie was not saying a word but she was white as a sheet and when she seen us, she starting hollering and run from grandpap. He hit her with his cane and run after me and Ivy too. We told Mama and it surprised us that she believed us. She did not say nothing to grandpap though, but he went home pretty soon and we was glad.

I heard her tell Aunt Laurel and Aunt Laurel said we was big liers. Her kids who are older than us said we was liers too. So I do not know why Mama is a bawling about grandpap. I don't think he is sick anyway. It is just a big farse to get Mama to come and see him. He don't

Little Fate just come and brung some donuts he got from that place in packing town that gives their old donuts to farmers for their hogs. Little Fate don't have no hogs but he tells the people he does so he can get the donuts. They are hard and mashed together in the gunny sack but they are good anyway. We are fit to be tied. And he brung us a sack of pecan shells that he got for fertalizer for his big garden in the spring. If you look real careful through the busted up shells you will find some peices of pecans. We pored the whole sack in the wash tub and now everbody is a sitting on the floor a

looking for the little peices of nuts. Everbody is happy and we have a blazing fire a going and we are warm too because Little Fate chopped us a big pile of wood too. I tell you I love that man and I would marry him if I was big enough and he was not a old man pretty near forty I think. I have had a birthday and now I am twelve. Just six more years and I will be 18 and can take us all away. All the time when I pray I ask God to help me hurry and get 18 and don't let Mama make me quit school. The End. Rachel.

Sat. Feb 2, 1957. I have not been to school since we got out for Christmas. I have got to help at home. Iva has been to school some but she says school is not down her ally and not her cup of tea niether. Sissie loves school and is so little and sits so still the teacher said like a little angel. Her teacher who is Miss Burns, loves her and says so too. I see Miss Burns on the play ground at recess and when Sissie is by her, she hugs Sissie. I have not never seen Sissie so happy, and she goes to stand by her teacher just to hug her neck. Mama does not know this because we don't tell her nothing that goes on at school. When a teacher sends a note to talk to our mama, the kids give me the notes and I go talk to the teacher and tell them our mama is sick and can not never come to

talk to them. Now the teachers do all their talking to me and I sign report cards and make up reasons why we are not in school sometimes. I say our daddy has a rupsher and don't have no job is why we can not pay no fees or have no lunches. Lunch is a fancy word for dinner. At lunch time me and Iva and Sissie and Wade meet on the school ground and sit under a tree and don't look at people a eating their lunch. I am glad our school has all the grades but next year they will change it and I have to go to the school in town. Then Iva will have to see to the little kids and Sammy will be in school too. I don't think Iva will do it. She does not like school noway. Iva is at school today because the teacher will have a play party with cookies for ground hog day. I'm glad it is a bleery day so the ground hog will not see his shadder. The End. Rachel.

Sun. Feb. 3, 1957. Cora come today. She is the one who takes me to her church sometimes but Mama won't let nobody else go so Cora don't ask no more. And Mama got mad because the church brung stuff one time and that is all but Mama forgets that churchs have big flocks to take care of. Cora come and I told her I can't go because Mama and Daddy is gone. She has got use to this I think. She asked how we was a doing and I said fine. She said, do you need anything? and I said no. But Clayton was a

bawling loud and Cora asked me, does the baby have some milk? and because I am shamed by this and scared the home people will come, I think I might lie. But I don't, I just look at her. She went to the bed and picked up Clayton and said, what is rong with you little baby? The little kids did not say nothing but they looked and looked at Cora and at me with big eyes. So I told Cora I would tell her if she promised not to tell nobody else. She said she would not so I told her we don't have nothing to eat but some flour and the donuts Little Fate brung, but now nobody can eat no more donuts. She left and said I will be back. And lo she did come back and brung us three big sacks of stuff to eat and said she did not tell nobody and I was so happy I nearbouts bawled, but I hate to be beholden. It feels like mooching. We was fit to be tied about the sacks of stuff though, believe you me. Milk and crackers and cans of soup and some noodles and store bought bread and even some bloney and a jar of strawberry jelly and another of peanut butter! And a bunch more stuff! When Cora left we danced and laughed and hollered and Ola Mae bawled louder til we fixed her a bottle of milk. You can not beleive how happy we are right now because we have got a good fire a going in the stove and we have fixed us some soup and some jelly and peanut butter sanwichs and I saved one of the soups cans that is



a Campbell one that makes a dandy biskit cutter. The End.  
Rachel.

Sat. Feb. 9, 1957. Mama and Daddy are back from looking to my grandpap and lo who should come with Mama and Daddy but Uncle Winchester and his wife Mabeline and their three younguns Charleen and Louise and Mathew. And they are the most spoiledest younguns you ever seen. They will not use our outside toilet. Mama had to get out the slop jar she only uses at birthing time when she can't go outside to the toilet. Aunt Mabeline who has a crippled arm that does not work too good and Uncle Winchester has to wipe the butts of them younguns! Now that beats all I have ever seen in all my borned days! Oh boy me and Iva and the little kids do not like them younguns one little bit. Them and their mama and daddy carry on like they are better than us and they do not want to eat beans but throw a hissy fit for serial called posttoasties that you buy in a box. Yesterday when them kids throwed the hissy fit, Iva said to me, Rachel they make my ass want to chaw tobacco. I told you she is a site! I laughed so hard I pretty near busted a gut. Iva does not mince no words! Uncle Winchester is a running from the law of Californya. What for? I don't know. The End. Rachel.

Mon. Mar. 4, 1957. Mama used our welfare check to buy

posttoasties and some store bought bread and pork stake and other stuff for Uncle Winchester and them and given them some money to rent a house in town with a inside toilet too. That is where they are tonite, they are at Uncle Winchester and Aunt Mabeline and their younguns new house. Aunt Mabeline is not a bad woman, she is pretty and nice and real clean but it don't bother her one single solitery bit for Mama to use our welfare check to help them while us kids have to eat beans and live as poor as gully dirt in a cold house with a outside toilet! Uncle Winchester is a big baby who gets in trouble with the law and runs and whines to my mama and daddy or to my poor grandma Grace who has a heart of soft gold and will give all her penshun to him. If Uncle Winchester runs to his big sister who is my Aunt Laurel, her old man don't do nothing for Mama says he is as tight as the bark on a tree. But I believe he is right to be tight with Uncle Winchester for Uncle Winchester is a leech and his kids are brats! Me and Iva and the little kids call them the stake and serial family but we don't let Mama hear us. But Mama don't beat on us but a little bit when Uncle Winchester and Aunt Mabeline is here and for that I am glad and you would be too. The End. Rachel.

Fri. Mar. 8, 1957. Oh I said a long time ago I will

tell you about Texas. For thats where we went after the fat soshal worker woman and the skinny newspaper woman come a asking all them questions that time after we was in the newspaper. When the women come back the next time Mama and Daddy was home. They asked questions like they was a writing a book and Mama got mad. Get your asses out of my house or somebody will be a carrying you out on a slab! is what Mama said to them. Only she cussed a lot and called the fat woman names and told the skinny woman she looked like a worm with the shit slung out of it. And you name it, Mama said it before them women could get out the door and get gone. They run to their car but the skinny woman hollered they would be back with papers to serve and the law to get us kids. Daddy told Mama, well Ida Belle you have done it now. Shut up, you tung tied son of a bitch! Mama said to him. And she told Daddy, I noticed you just set there like a rock! Daddy just looked down at the floor.

Us kids did not say nothing. Then Mama said, they are not a taking my kids away from me, nossiree by god they are not, and she started bawling. And she told Daddy to pull the truck around and let's load up. Daddy shook his head and got the truck pulled up to the door and he told Mama, Ida Belle you come up with some of the god awfulest notions a feller ever heard of.

So we went to Texas to keep the soshal worker woman

and the news woman from taken us to the home. We stayed in Texas til the winter. We picked cotton in the late summer and fall and like to of died from the heat and Daddy got the bloody flux and nearbouts died but for a colored woman who given him some stuff to drink. It was so hot in Texas and the air nearbouts smothered us. And that Wade is a getting to be the best little cotton picker you ever seen. Me and him and Daddy are picking fools. I can pick pretty near 300 pounds and Wade can pick pretty near 100 pounds and Daddy picks more than both of us when he is not sickly. We went to school for a little while and got to ride a school bus. My teacher was a Mrs. Hall who just loved me and said I am smart and helped me know how to spell words on my own because I told her I don't have no dictionary and don't get to go to school much. She asked me questions about my family but I did not tell her nothing. We lived in a cotton shack that the farmer had in his field for transhit workers, that's us. When the cotton was done and it turned off cold, Mama and Daddy left us and come back to Oklahoma to see if the law was still after us. They was gone a long time, over a week, and this time I thought we would starve and freeze to death for sure, but we helped ourselves to wood from the farmer's woodpile and got watermelons and stuff from his big garden. But the farmer caught us eating his

watermelon and asked us what was we a doing. We said we was eating. We thought he would sick the law on us, but instid he told Mama and Daddy when they got back that he would sick the law on them for leaving us. When the farmer went back to his big house, Mama whupped all of us for causing trouble for her and Daddy. When she got through with us, Sissie and Sammy was both a bleeding from the nose bad. Sammy bleeds like Sissie and I don't know why but it makes Mama go crazy and she whups them harder. Then we loaded up the truck and left Texas. I bawled for leaving Mrs. Hall too. We got back here to the grove along about Christmas and moved on 2nd street where we live now by a man and a woman and their two girls who are our nearest neighbors about like the size of a schoolyard away. There is a big empty lot between their house and our house. We had a good Christmas because somebody told Mama the Salvation Army was a giving out play pretties for younguns so she got us some. We don't live too far from the river and my bucket that is a getting rusty. The End. Rachel.

Sun. Mar. 10, 1957. Cora Doon taken me to church and to her house to eat dinner but I could not hardly eat. I knowed the little kids and Iva don't have such good stuff to eat, so I played like I was sick to Cora's mama who is a real nice lady. She said, where are you sick? and I

said, in the belly. Cora's daddy who is real nice too, he put his arm around me and said, our little princess will maybe feel better next Sunday. Nobody never called me no princess before! So Cora brung me home and said she hopes I get well. I tidied up the house and fixed the little kids something to eat when I got home. Mama was still in the bed but she does not never clean nothing noways and Iva hates to work but she can not do it all by herself anyways. The End. Rachel.

Thur. Mar. 14, 1957. I wonder if maybe this house is hainted. Because there is a sound like a old woman moaning. It happens when the wind comes up but it is more than the wind coming in our stovepipe. There is cracks in the wall and when it snows you wake up to little peaks of snow on the floor by the cracks. They are pretty but cold just the same, and we have to clean up the piles and chink the cracks with rags before we build a fire or there will be snow a melting on the floor. But it is not snowing no more. The grass is a greening up and smells so good you want to eat it but you can't eat grass. It just smells that good. The End. Rachel.

Tues. Mar. 26, 1957. I like my teacher Miss Baker just fine. She gives me books to read like Girl of the

Limberlost which is about a girl whose mama don't want her to go to school neither. And Zane Gray books, which I just love and want to read all his books now. And a book about some kids who are going to Oregon in a covered wagon and their mama and daddy died and the kids went on to Oregon anyway. It is such a good story about how brave the kids is. But if I take a book home, I have to watch it or Mama will whip me and burn the book. I just love to read for it carries me off and swallows me up so I am not sad or poor and I don't think on Mama or nothing. I am just in the book, and I hate to let loose of the story, but I have to. When I get big I believe

Sun. Apr 21, 1957. Today is Easter and Mrs. Brown got me and Iva and Sissie new dresses. She did not get nothing for the little kids, I don't know why. Cora Doon taken me to church and then to her house where her mama given me three dozen eggs and me and Cora's little sister Betty colored them so I could bring them home to the little kids. And Cora's daddy come in and helped us color eggs too. I have not never seen no man cook but maybe my daddy who cooks chilly sometimes. Cora's daddy called me and Betty Princess Rachel and Princess Betty and was smily and laghy while he helped us. And we made baskets out of brown paper sacks and put handles on them and Cora bought green shiny grass to put in them so the little kids could

all have a basket. Even for Ola Mae too and she is not yet two years old. You would not believe how happy the kids was when Cora brung me home with all them pretty colored eggs and the baskets. Me and Iva hid the eggs and then the little kids looked for them. Sissie helped Ola Mae find one but Ola Mae fell down on it and mashed it and we all laughed. So Sissie helped her find another egg, but she throwed it and throwed it till it was cracked up, so Sissie peeled it for Ola Mae to eat. She does not like the yellow part of a boiled egg. We made a real play party out of Easter. Mama and Daddy have been gone all day, I don't know where. They don't know we had us a Easter and Mama can not put our baskets up for good! The End. Rachel.

Mon Apr. 22, 1957. Mama and Daddy come home last night late and said we are leaving for Oregon. They have heard there is plenty of work there, so we are fixing to go pretty soon. I think I will put my writing

Tues Aug. 27, 1957. Mama is going to have another baby and has been cussing Daddy like nobodies business. You could not stand it if you was here. We are in Oregon a picking beans. They pay us two cents a pound and the bean vines grow real high, taller than a man's head. And



it takes two people to pick a row. One person gets on one side and one person gets on the other side and you pick all the green beans a hanging on your side, the longest green beans you ever seen. We are in a big valley where they grow lots of fruit and something called hops that you make beer from that grows kindly like the green beans only higher, and berries of all kinds. This valley is called the Willamette Valley and this is how it is spelled too. You see it everywhere on signs and on cherry boxes and on strawberry boxes and you name it. We have lived in a tent and now we are a living in what is called a bean camp where the houses are not houses at all but one big long long building like a motel is with little rooms for ever family. The room is crowded and little and maybe you get two rooms if you are a big family like us and maybe not. The room is dirty and the screens is mostly broke so the flies is terrible. They don't land on you much but they swarm around and we are always a swarping at flies. There is bunk beds and a stove and boards on sawhorses for tables. The mattrusses are striped and old and not very thick but they are all we have in this camp. And you get your water at a pump that everybody uses and you use outside toilets but some camps have got showers which we have not never had before. Me and Iva and the little kids just love the showers and wash ourselves all the time. You can spit on your neighbor here for sure for they are

right here next to you and you can't even go outside without running into other people who works here. There are so many people here you can not stir them with a stick for sure. Iva says you can not even let a fart without somebody hearing it.

We have picked strawberries too but I don't like to for you have to be on your knees all day a going down the rows a picking them strawberries and your knees get plumb sore. But the strawberries are great big and you get to eat some if nobody is looking. The strawberry fields near about make your head fluttery, they smell that good and are that pretty with hundreds and hundreds of green rows with little white flowers and red strawberries that looks like they go on forever. If you look and look on and on, your eyes leave the field and go to the mountains and one big mountain is called Mount Hood that sets all by itself away off yonder. Oregon has lots of stuff growing to eat. Blackberries all by the roads just a climbing over ever fence and amongst the trees and other bushes. And everywhere you look there are trees with good stuff to eat on them. The people who owns them are rich. And we have picked cherries too. Jacob fell off a ladder while he was a picking cherries but did not hurt hisself bad because he fell on top of me! He is going on four but is a hard worker just the same. We work work work all the

day. The End. Rachel.

Sun Sep 1, 1957. Mama does not do much work but that is not nothing new and she is getting worser all the time about whupping us to make us work harder. The other people look hard at her and don't talk to none of us when we are in the field. Mama watches us and makes sure we do not slack up until the field is closed for the day which is at 2 o'clock and sometimes at 3 o'clock. We can not slack off to eat even when everybody else lets up for the dinner spell. Mama says a full belly slows down the work. Clayton and Ola Mae stays with Mama but they bawl for me which makes Mama mad. Jacob stays by me because he is big enough to work. Him and Sammy can not do much and sometimes they get plum give out and start bawling. Mama whups them for bawling and maybe lets them stop for a little while but that is all. Wade is the one who can work hard. He can do as much as any boy twice his age and he is only going on seven. I seen a boy yesterday a waying in his beans and for just a little bit he put me in mind of Jimmy Blalock.

Yesterday was pay day and Mama and Daddy went to town and today they are swapping howdies with some other people down the camp row. The little kids are outside a playing and I have been cooking us a pot of beans for supper. Iva likes the boys but she got mad at me when I seen her with

a little Mexican boy and said, Iva has a boyfriend ha ha. Now she is sullen up and won't talk to me and is outside with some big kids and no telling what they are up to.

I can write now but have to be careful. I keep my writing in a coco can because it is little and I can hide it easy in the dish box. Mama is not ever in the dish box noways because she don't do no cooking or washing dishes. She just eats and bosses and strolls.

Iva says when we get big we art to boss Mama and make her work in our house and whup her if she don't work fast. Don't that make you laugh? I told Iva Mama is not a going to be in my house because I don't want her there! And Iva says we art to tie Mama up and not let her stroll nor eat nothing nether. She says

Tues Sep 10, 1957. Mama was a cussing Daddy yesterday and the boss man come and said

Fri Sep 13, 1957. In this camp there is a old man who is here with his girl and her man and their younguns, and they are from Kentucky. And they talk like we do which is not fast like most the folks here. The old man whose name is Frank Potter whittles little play pretties for all the younguns in camp. He is like everbody's grandpap. I wish he was really mine and lived with us for he is so

kindly. He made Sammy the prettiest little dog, it is like real and you would think it might even bark at you. Sometimes Mr. Potter comes and sits in our door way when everbody is still in the field and I have come back to camp early to cook supper. Mr. Potter he don't work much for he is poorly in his lungs. He says its because he was a coal miner in his young days. He talks to me but I don't talk much. Mama says a kid is seen and not heard. Today Mr. Potter was a sitting by our door while I fried some taters and onions and side meat and made us some biskits for supper. He said, Rachel you ain't no bigger than a minute. Which I know because people has said this before. I said, yessir but I am a hard worker and I given Clayton his bottle. Mr. Potter laughed and said, well dinamite comes in small packs don't it? I laughed too because he always says this about dinamite. While I cooked he whittled and talked about the stuff that happened to him in the coal mines of Kentucky and how hard it was in the olden days. I lissened hard and put all he said in my head. Sometimes he did not talk but looked across the field now and then or at his knife a working the piece of wood. I could see he was whittling a little horse. Pretty soon supper was about cooked and I went to the door and watched Mr. Potter a whittling. Pretty soon he kicked a little bit at the pile of shavings by his feet and said Rachel, I have got eyes in my head and I can see

things. He did not look at me but kept a carving that little horse and waiting for me to talk. But I did not. I knowed he was talking about Mama. Then he said, I grewed up from the bad times and you will grow up too and you will leave it all behind. I looked across the field and could not see nobody above the tall bean rows. I looked and looked and felt kindly like I was helt with that old bleery feeling I get sometimes. I know Mr. Potter can not do nothing to help us so I did not anser his words. In my head I said I can not never leave it all behind til I can take the little kids with me. Then pretty soon I heard people talking and seen them coming out from the field. Mr. Potter stood up and said, Rachel you are old for your years. Here take this and maybe it will be majic and you can ride it away some day. And he given me the little horse. It is so pretty with its head rared back and its legs in a run. I will keep it always and put it in my lard bucket. The End. Rachel.

Sat Oct 26, 1957. I like Oregon but it rains a lot. It it so pretty though with big fields and orcherds and pine trees and rivers and mountains. I wish we could stay here, but we are loading up and going back home in a few days. The law here is pretty strick on sending kids to school and Mama does not like that one single solitary

bit. She says you can not be your own boss now days to save your neck. I believe the people in our camp think Ola Mae is my baby. One woman asked me if it was so. Now have you ever heard such a crazy thing in all your borned days? Little Fate and Aunt Clive and Uncle Ivan and everybody else says I am not no bigger than a piss ant. So how can I have a baby? I am not yet 13 and have not got no titties and have not bled nether. The woman whose name is Rita said, you can tell me the truth honey and I will not tell nobody. I pretty near died right in my tracks! But I did not sass her, I said no mam, I don't have no babies because no boy has wallered on me. She looked like she might choke, her face was so red.

And something else you will not believe!! People acts like we are slow in our heads because we talk slow and don't talk fast like the Mexicans or like the people from here. We talk mostly like the colored people which suits me just fine!! And we have not got no emty heads! But I still like it here because it is so green and there is so much to eat. The End. Rachel.

Sat Nov 30, 1957. We are back in the grove now and a living in our same house on 2nd street because nobody was in it when we got back. Maybe it for sure is hainted! The rent is \$15 a month. Also we are not far from the

river and my bucket so I feel glad. I am thinking I might tell Cora about my bucket.

But maybe I will wait til I am growed up and will put it in my will for when I die. I will think on it.

The two big girls who are our nabers and who are in hi school come over today and asked Mama if me and Ivy can go to their church. Mama said, these kids don't have nothing deesent to wear. The oldest girl who said she is 17 and whose name is Mary said the church has a basement of clothes for poor people. I can not put my finger on it but I don't like Mary. She talks too sweet and easy like butter won't melt in her mouth. And she nor her sister never talked to us when we lived here before. I told Mama, Cora will come to get me tomorrow. But Mama did not lissen to me, for she was lissening to Mary and her sister Barbra say how much the church would help us and maybe they will give us money and bring us some groshries. They said the church has give them clothes and groshries for theirselves. Mama said to me and Iva, do you want to go? which is a surprise she asked us. Iva said yes and I said no at the same time. Mama looked at me real funny and then told Mary and Barbra maybe some other time. Even though Mama is mean she is not no dummy and has come to know that I am smart. When Mary and Barbra left, Mama asked me, what in the hell is wrong with you? She said,



we need groshries and money so why do you say you don't want to go? I said I don't know. And now she is so mad she hollered at me and told me to get in there in the kitchen and fix supper which is not nothing new. She said she is so sick of kids she can not stand it and she wishes to God she was not pregnit again and big as a barrel or she leave Daddy and get herself somebody else. The End. Rachel.

Thur Dec 5, 1957. I go to the big school in town now and I'm in the 7th grade. And Iva says I think I'm a big shot. She is right. I am a big shot ha ha! I missed all of Sep. and Oct. but I'm catching up now. I like school but not the gym part because I have to take off my clothes in front of girls and take showers with them. And most all of them have tittys from the size of a little lemon on up. And I don't have none. I think maybe now I art to have some tittys so the other girls don't look at me funny. Francis has tittys like the size of a little cup. I have got some little hairs on my straddle though! I like English the best and gym the worst. My English teacher who is Miss Groves, given me a bunch of school work to do on a list so I can catch up. She let me borry some books from her to take home. I didn't say I can not take the books home but I put them in my locker. This locker is a tin box on the wall with a lot more tin boxes

and they have a door where you can put your own stuff in the locker and close the door. All of us kids in the school get one. I just love it! But Francis says this is old stuff to her and in two years she'll be done with school. Francis lets me share her locker because she has a lock and I don't have one. It's a lock with a secret code to open it and nobody else knows it!! Maybe I can keep some of my writing notes in the locker but I'll first have to see if Francis gets into my other stuff. Then I'll know if I can trust her to leave my writing notes alone. But I won't tell her about my notes, I'll just have a secret in the locker with the secret lock!

Miss Groves kept me after school and talked to me about my writing. She said she looked at my school records and sees that I've been out of school alot. And she looked at me hard when she said this. She's not a smily woman at all. She's tall and old maybe forty I think and has short black hair and wears glasses. She puts her hands together on the table when she talks to you and looks hard at you through her glasses that makes you want to look somewheres else. It's hard to hold your eyes on her eyes believe you me. She looked hard at me and told me if I want to do good and go all the way through the twelvth grade I have to work hard and come to school ever day. Then she said, why do you have so many

absenses? and I said, because I have to help at home. Then she said, well you tell your mother and father what I have told you about going to school ever day and they will understand. I did not say nothing to this. And she told me to study the books she given me and go back at the front of them to do all the work I have missed. She said she sees I'm a good worker and I learn fast but that I need to work hard on grammer and spelling and paragrafing and where to put comas and stuff like that and not to make such long sentenses. I did not tell her but I'll do the work ever day at my lunch time and catch up. I told her I had to go now because Francis was a waiting for me and I have to get home. She said, o.k. Rachel, but I want you to write a paper for me and tell me about your family.

Mama was mad when I got home and I was scared she would whup me but her mind was on Sissie. Sissie run off again to Aunt Pearl's and Mama whipped her so hard I could not hardly look with out bawling myself. Sissie has got to where she don't bawl when Mama whips her. She just makes a funny sound and shakes bad and tears fall on her face and her nose bleeds. And that makes Mama more mad. When Mama does this stuff it makes me feel like I am in jail in myself. It's like I want to grab her and make her stop but there are bars that you can not see that keep it so I can not do nothing. I believe it is the most awful feeling in the world. Mama whipped Sissie some more and

left for Aunt Pearl's and said she was going to give that old lady a peise of her mind. Oh I was glad she left so I could help Sissie stop bleeding at the nose and set her down and just set by her till she stopped shaking. There is not nothing else I can do and it makes me feel like there is a big hole I can not clime out. Daddy was not here for he was gone with Uncle Varny to get some parts for Uncle Varny's pickup motor. It is late and Mama and Daddy are gone yet. I bet Mama beat up on Aunt Pearl. And Aunt Pearl won't do nothing because Mama is pregnit! But Mama don't care! I don't know what to write for Miss Groves. And Mama can not stand to see me a writing. The sky has been a looking like it will snow. Iva has got the runs and is poorly. The End. Rachel.

Fri Dec. 6, 1957. I could not go to school today for Mama hollered at me from the bed where she was a laying up. She said, you stay your ass home today Rachel and take care of these kids! And I think to myself I wish I did not make no racket to wake her up! Then Daddy got up and built a big fire in the stove then said he was a going over to Varney's to help him fix that pickup. Mama said, I'm a going with you by god, I'm not staying home all the dam day! When they left I set down and just bawled because now Miss Groves will be mad at me.

Mama and Daddy have been gone all day and it is night now and I have been pondering what I will write for Miss Groves. I wish it would snow so I can say that is why I did not come to school today. Everbody is asleep but me and Iva. Sissie and Ola Mae are asleeping here on the pallet where me and them sleep in the kitchen. The other kids sleep in yonder on the floor by Mama and Daddy's bed. Iva is mad because she can not go to the big school with me. She says she hates taking care of the little kids and she won't have no kids when she grows up but will get her a rich man who takes her to the piccher show and to play parties all the time but she says first we need to figger out a way to kill Mama. She is all the time saying Rachel let's rub her out. That's what she calls it, rub her out because she heard it from some big kids. When she says it she makes me and her both laugh.

Mary and Barbra go to the big school and when I see them they are real smily and wave to me. They wave to us from their house all the time now, and Iva says they given her some cookies yesterday. But she is a hawg and et all of them her ownself. And you can bet your bottom dollar I told her she is a hawg too! The End. Rachel.

Sat Dec. 7, 1957. Mama and Daddy come home last night right when I was a writing and I nearbouts killed myself trying to hide my writing under the pallet. Iva says she

is going to tell if I don't slack up. But I don't think she will because she promised the last time. But she lies sometimes so I better watch it! I don't have no good paper to write on for Miss Groves. I left my notebook paper in my locker because if I bring it home the little kids mess it up and I can not write with Mama here noways. I write my notes on peises of paper sacks and what ever I can find. Iva said we can maybe borrry some paper from Mary and Barbra. I don't know yet what I will write if I get some paper. The End. Rachel.

Tue Dec 10, 1957. I went back to school today and I given Miss Groves my paper. It is about me and Iva and the little kids a going to the farm place where the pear tree is and a singing Green Grow the Rushes and stuff like that. She just taken the paper and looked at me hard and said asked me if I was sick is why I didn't come to school. I said, no mam my little sister was. Which is true that Iva was sick. I don't know if Miss Groves will like my paper. But today also I done a bunch of work at lunch time and given them to Miss Groves too. The End. Rachel.

Wed Dec. 11, 1957. Miss Groves given me back my papers that I done to catch up and but not the one on the

farm yet. She said

Fri Dec 20, 1957. We go to school one day next week and then we get to stay home for Christmas. I love Christmas but we will have a leen Christmas this year like we mostly do. Mama is big pregnit and mad all the time and cusses Daddy and gets mad at everbody real easy. Nobody can hardly do nothing or she will get mad. Even if Clayton cries Mama gets mad. Iva talks about Santy Clause all the time and acts like he is real when she knows he is not. Then Wade and Sammy and Sissie get to thinking Santy Clause will come to our house and for that I want to hit Iva. You know that girl has not got a bit of sense sometimes! Mrs. Brown will get Iva something I know and she will probably get me and Sissie something but I will tell her I want the money and then I will buy the little kids some play pretties!

I worked hard and fast at school and have nearbouts got all the extry work done for Miss Groves. She liked my paper on the farm place and said I am a good student and maybe the fastest learner she has. You don't know how good my heart feels to hear this. Now I want to work harder. The End. Rachel.

Mon Dec 23, 1957. It is snowing and so deep you can not see the ground to save your neck! Daddy brung a big

pile of wood home. I wish we had us a Christmas tree. A big book come in the mail last week and it is from the Sears and Robuck place. It has all kinds of pretty stuff and we have nearbouts wore out the pages a looking at it. Daddy tore out some pages to start a fire but it was the clothes part. Iva hides the book now and just brings it out after Daddy has started a fire. Mama slapped her hard and said don't fool with stuff that don't belong to you. When Mama left Iva said she is a mean bitch and hid the book again. That girl beats all I ever seen. But she is right about Mama. The End. Rachel.



## Hole in the Middle of the Day (1957)

### Ch. 6

*They call me Sissie but I am Lona Faye. I am eight years old and I am old old old like Aunt Pearl and nobody knows it but me. I'm afraid of the dark for it is red like blood and it can smother me suck me up swoosh like a big whirlwind and make me die. I am eight and Rachel is twelve and Iva is ten and Wade is six and Sammy is five and Jacob is four and Ola Mae is two and Clayton is the baby but he won't be the baby for long for there is another baby in Mama's big belly.*

Mama sits at the table now, and Iva is on the floor rubbin Mama's swelled-up feet. I look hard at her belly poochin out and I try to see through to the little baby. I don't think it would want to come here if it knowed what I know, and I wish I could tell it so.

"Ain't that enough?" Iva asks Mama and then she says, "Doreen's mama and daddy got them a Christmas tree. Wish we had us one."

"Piss on Doreen," Mama says. "Rub some more on the bottoms." Mama holds her feet out straight.

*I can see little blue lines on Mama's legs. Blue blue buckle your shoe and Rachel has said inside the blue lines is blood. "It's blood" Rachel told me but she did not say why the lines are blue but I know it's because Mama's blood is blue and not red like mine when my nose bleeds*

*all over and makes me think of the dark for the dark is red red you're dead in the head.*

"How's Santy Clause gonna know we want Christmas if we don't have a tree?" Iva asks and leans back with the palms of her hands spread open on the floor like two stars.

"Make somebody else rub a while, Mama," and she looks at me. "Sissie can."

*I feel scared and hold my breath and look at Iva's star hands. I am scared to move. I move my eyes to the blue lines on Mama's legs.*

Mama says, "Sissie ain't got sense enough to do nothin." Mama does not look at me when she says this.

I look at Rachel then who is standin by the stove stirrin the boilin beans, then I turn around real slow so Mama does not see me move, and I put my face to the winda.

*There is a hole in the middle of the day and the dark will get through it pretty soon and I do not like to see the dark come for it is red like blood and it is so heavy pushin and mashin on me sometimes. I am standin on a wooden box and I look through the steamy glass at the snow that swirls through the long bony fingers of the trees and across the yard and swirls in the other snow to make a face. The snow swirls some more and I see a mouth and the mouth in the face moves. It wants to talk to me. I put*

*my hand on the winda and wave my finger a little bit so the face can see me. The mouth moves some more. It opens and it talks. It does. It talks. It says "Lona Faye Lona Faye."*

*"Hey" I say in my head. It knows who I am! It calls again and again louder. I look around to see if anybody else can hear it. They are not lookin at me or the winda. Rachel stirs the beans and Iva rubs Mama's feet and Mama does not say nothin and the little kids are playin. I look back outside and the wind whips at the face and it swirls the snow some more and swirls the face away and I feel sad and the snow makes big piles of white against the fence and the toilet and the sides of our house and makes little piles against the corner of this winda.*

*Ola Mae cries and Mama tells her to shut up or she will give her somethin to cry about.*

*Rachel closes the oven door and says, "Ain't no use thinkin Santy Clause has his eye on us. If you got money, you get Santy Clause. If you ain't, you better forget Santy Clause. And we ain't, so forget it."*

*"Why don't you just shut up! You don't know everything," Iva says to Rachel.*

*Rachel is real still, then says, "I know that much. I know you make the little kids get their hopes up when there ain't no sense to it."*

*I wonder if the face in the snow is Santy Clause. I*

*look real hard to find the face again and find Santy's eye to see if the eye is on me.*

"Well, if he stops to see Doreen and them, he ain't gonna leave us out," Iva says and then tells Mama her hands are sore from rubbin Mama's feet and asks if she can stop.

"Alright, get the hell up and quit your whining." Mama groans and I hear the chair move.

"Doreen smoked a cigarette with Bobby Simmons and stole a bottle of pop from Cotton's store," Iva says, "and if I was Santy Clause..."

"Well, you ain't, so shut up!" Mama tells her. "Get me a glass of water."

*I wipe the steam off the winda and make a little circle and my hand slides across a crack in the glass. I wish I could squeeze through this crack and get in the snow and swirl with it and bury my face in the soft white feathers of it and sink down inside where it is not red dark and it covers me and hides me from Mama. Wade could go with me so Mama would not find him either. But not Iva and Rachel for they are too big and not Sammy and Jacob and Ola Mae for they are too little. Just me and Wade who is the same size as me. Me and Wade in the soft cold swirly snow goin down down down where there is a warm place warm like Aunt Pearl's lap.*

"Sissie, did you hear me?" It's Rachel. I turn to look at the plate of cornbread and beans she holds. "C'mon over here and sit by Wade and Sammy on the floor," and she puts my plate beside them.

Sammy says to Rachel, "Is Santy Comin?"

But Rachel tells him to eat.

"Yep. We got to hurry and eat and go to bed so Santy Clause can come tonight," Iva says.

Rachel looks hard at her but don't say nothin.

Mama sits in the only chair, so Iva stands at the table and breaks cornbread into her plate of beans. "When's Daddy gittin home?" she asks.

"Daddy's at Dell Ritter's, and will you forgit about Santy Clause?" Rachel says to Iva, "at least long enough to help me fix plates for the little kids?" Her voice sounds mad. "Daddy'll be home when he gits home and not until. Sissie," she says to me again, "C'mon."

All of a sudden, Mama says, "Santy brought Wade at Christmastime. Bet y'all forgot that."

Everybody looks at Wade, and I start to jump down from the box when I hear the sad, sad howl of the train whistle far away.

*I know it's just a whistle for Rachel has told me over and over it is just a whistle but I think in my head it is somethin cryin somethin screamin and the sound makes my skin so tight it burns.*

I put my hands over my ears fast to shut off the howl, and I turn again to the winda and look through to see if the sound shoots into the air and comes after me.

*I cannot see it, but I know it is there it is there it is there. I can hear it mix with the moan of the wind and move up up into the sky and come closer and closer. I can feel it swoosh through the trees and push through the swirlin snow. I close my eyes and I can smell it for it smells like wet ashes and it will get me and smother me in wet ashes.*

Somebody grabs my arm and jerks me off the box. I open my eyes as Mama's fingers, like the fingers of the trees, dig into my arm.

"Stop it! Now look at you standin there with your face all screwed up, actin like a goddamn loony. Git your hands off your ears and git your ass over there and eat!"

Mama slaps me and I fall against her and I grab her knees to hold on, but I fall down against her legs and I cannot get up for she hits me again on the head and the back. She hits again and again on my head, my arms, my back. She grabs my hair and pulls my head up and back, and that is when I see her face.

*The face in the snow calls me "Lona Faye Lona Faye Lona Faye."*

Mama hits me across the mouth then lets go of my hair

and I fall.

*I see the snow face close its eyes so it cannot see and I know my nose bleeds for I can feel it and I can see blood blood smeared across one of her knees and down the side of her leg across the blue blue lines and far away I hear her call me stupid stupid stupid. The voice outside says "Lona Faye Lone Faye." I do not know if I can walk and I am suckin in air like I have just nearly drowned and inside my head I am crying cryin cryin but I do not make cryin sounds for I know how to cry without makin sounds.*

Rachel holds her mouth real tight and her hands are shakin when she helps me move over on the floor next to Wade. She wipes my nose with a rag and gives me the rag. "Hold it on your nose," she says but does not say it loud.

"Git away from her!" Mama hollers at Rachel. "And somebody git me a rag to wipe this blood off my leg!"

Rachel puts a plate of beans before me and a spoon in my hands, then she puts a cup of water by Sammy's leg and her voice sounds funny when she says, "Y'all share."

The floor is cold and Sammy and Wade do not say nothin, they just look at me. They do not eat.

*I look down at my plate and try to stop the cryin inside and I think of the swirlin snow and the face and the mouth in the snow that wants to talk to me I wish it would talk to me some more I wish it would help me to go away to Aunt Pearl.*

I know Mama is watchin me and I am scared to move. I think of the swirlin snow again, and I can feel the cold comin up through the cracks in the floor and rattlin the boards. Without liftin my head, I raise my eyes and look away fast so Mama does not see me. She is not lookin. She sits at the table and leans over her plate, her back to me and Wade and Sammy. I look fast at Rachel who stands by the stove. She sees me and puts her finger to her lips.

Nobody says nothin for a while, then Iva asks, "What's Daddy doin' at Dell's?" and digs in a drawer. "Ain't we got no more spoons?"

"He's shootin craps. Now, will you shut the hell up and eat?" Mama talks with her mouth full. It sounds like the wind and the snow swirl in her mouth.

"Are you gonna use that?" Iva asks me and points to the spoon in my hand.

I give it to her for I do not want to eat.

"Ain't you hungry?"

I shake my head.

Rachel holds Clayton and feeds him.

*Clayton is a baby and I wish I was a baby and Rachel would hold me. I want to pee but I am scared to go outside. I don't hear the train whistle now but it still might be there. Aunt Pearl used to hold me but Mama*



*whipped me and my nose bled and Aunt Pearl said for me to stay away. "It's for your own good" she said and that is when I first cried without makin sounds.*

Sammy moves his leg and spills the water, and he looks like he might cry. Water runs across the floorboards and crawls, makin a dark, wet river under our legs, our plates, and it looks like pee, and some of it falls through the cracks of the floor. I feel pee about to come out of me. I grab my straddle to hold it back and Rachel sees me. She looks fast at Mama, but Mama does not see her. Rachel looks back at me and her eyes tell me she is afraid.

"Here," she says and puts Clayton on the floor and gives him the spoon and plate and she is there, quick, with a rag to wipe at the water.

Mama turns around. "Now what?" she asks and looks straight at me, and her eyes, they hurt me. I hurry to get up and to get away from the water that chases me, but I am watchin Mama and I drop my rag and step on the edge of my plate. The plate flips over and spills the beans. Mama stares at me, her mouth open. I can see the cornbread in her mouth.

"You beat all I ever seen," she says. I look away so her eyes can't get me. I am shakin, but I hold tight to my straddle so the pee won't come.

"Ill clean it up. It's just water," Rachel says and

pushes me out of the way. "Move, Sissie." She looks hard at me when she kneels on the floor. Then she looks quick at Mama before she leans close to me and whispers, "Don't pee."

But it is too late. I feel the warm pee spread through my fingers, down my legs, and into my shoes. I see Mama push her chair back and I think she has seen, and she will whip me. Rachel looks at Mama then she gets up fast and shoves me to the door. She grabs two coats, throwin one over my head and shoulders, and she pulls me outside into the wind and snow. She leans against the door a little bit and listens to Mama cuss, then she takes my hand and we run to the toilet. Snow covers the tops of our shoes, and the wind pushes on us to keep us from goin to the toilet.

It is cold in the toilet, and I do not feel my nose bleed any more, and I do not even try to pee for I cannot pee no more. So we leave the board over the toilet seat and me and Rachel, we stand here close together for there is not much room, and we listen to the wind whippin at the toilet door, bump-bump-bump, and we do not say nothin. I can see tears run down Rachel's face as she bends down and wipes the pee from my legs with the tail of her skirt.

*I listen to the wind and the snow swooshin and whirlin around the toilet and I do not know why Rachel cries. I*

*do not know why she makes sounds like the far-away moan of the train whistle as she finishes wipin my legs and sits down on the toilet board and puts her face in her hands that shiver. I am cold but in my head I go away from the cold and I look away from Rachel and I try to look through the walls of the toilet to see if the blood-red dark has come yet.*

Then Rachel is shakin me. "Sissie, Sissie, you art to answer me. Why ain't you answerin me?"

But I do not know what to say for I did not hear her, so I just look at her now and she says to me, "We have to go back in the house. I'm cold. Ain't you cold?" Rachel is not cryin now. She is shiverin.

I nod my head, and she says, "I don't think Mama knows you peed on yourself. Just go in and sit down like nothin happened. I'll fix us a plate so we can eat."

*The cryin starts inside me.*

Rachel opens the toilet door and it is then I see the dark is comin fast, and Rachel does not have to make me hurry.

When we get in the house, everybody is done eatin and Mama is in the other room on the bed.

*The cryin inside me stops.*

Mama hollers at Rachel, "Close that damn door, and you and Iva clean up them dishes."

Rachel does not answer for she has already closed the

door and is helpin me get out of my coat. My teeth chatter. Iva and Wade and Sammy and Jacob are on the floor looking at a big Sears picture book full of play pretty toys and stuff. Clayton sees Rachel and holds up his hands for Rachel to take him. Rachel picks Clayton up and steps over the book and puts a stick of wood in the stove. She tells me to sit down in the chair while she fixes me a plate. She holds Clayton on her hip and stands by the stove and eats. We eat our beans and watch Iva and the little kids.

"I want this big red fire truck," Wade says. He picks at a scab on his toe and holds the page of the book down with the other hand.

"Santy can bring me this doll and this baby buggy and these little dishes," Iva says "and when I git big, I'm goin to have me some money so I can buy these doll clothes and this little oven and..."

"You always want it all," Rachel tells Iva, "and anyway, when you git big, you won't play with no dolls. You're too old to play with dolls now."

"I am not too old to play with dolls! Maxine Chansom is fourteen and has dolls all over the place. Anyway, how do you know so much?" Iva asks and holds up the book so Rachel can see. "Which one do you like?"

Rachel gives a little laugh, then says "I'd take that

one if somebody was to give it to me." Rachel points to the one that looks like a little bitty baby without no hair.

*It's the one I pick too in my head for it looks like the baby that might be in Mama's belly and I can hold it and not let Mama get it to make its nose bleed like mine but I don't say I want the baby doll for Mama might hear me and get mad for hearin me.*

I eat my whole plate of beans and don't tell what I want to say to the little baby in Mama's belly.

"Y'all make my ass sick," Mama hollers from in yonder. "Git that mess cleaned up and git to bed!"

The wind is loud again and some comes down our stove pipe makin a little whoosh of ash and smoke into the room while we do what Mama says. Pretty soon Rachel makes a pallet in the kitchen floor where she sleeps with Clayton and me. I sleep at the foot. Iva and them go to bed in yonder by Mama and Daddy's bed.

*I do not sleep in yonder for the red red dark will get me and Mama will not make it stop and Mama's eyes will get me too if she can see me.*

I lay down on the pallet and pull the quilt up to cover my head.

*Rachel's feet are cold by my back Daddy is at Dell Ritter's shootin craps Iva can't find a spoon Santy brought Wade at Christmastime Wade wants a red fire truck*

*Iva wants it all Sammy spilled the water Rachel cries like  
the train piss on Doreen Santy's eye ain't on us the  
toilet door goes bump-bum--bump Mama has a little bitty  
baby in her poochy big belly Mama's blood is blue blue  
buckle your shoe the wind pushes and pushes swoosh-swoosh  
against the wall the face in the snow wants to talk to me  
it is cold outside and the dark might get me I see the  
snow the white white swirly snow and I am in it going down  
down into the swirly snow where it is warm warm warm like  
Aunt Pearl's lap.*

I feel Rachel move, and I know she will get up to  
change Clayton because Clayton has peed on hisself and on  
our pallet. I feel the wet with my feet. I open my eyes  
and see it is almost daylight, but everybody else is still  
asleep, even Daddy who gets up before anybody. Rachel  
stands on her tippy toes and looks out the winda above our  
pallet and then sees that I am awake and tells me in a  
whisper voice that the snow is deep outside.

*I listen for the wind but it is still and I do not  
hear the wind blow.*

Rachel stands real still for a little bit and looks  
out the winda without sayin anything. Clayton starts to  
cry and Rachel turns fast and shushes him and covers him  
and goes to find a diaper. I cover my head with the quilt

to stay warm.

Rachel stumbles and makes a little sound, then is real still and I hear her whisper, "Sissie, Sissie" and she pulls the quilt back to see my face, and she stares at me a little bit with a funny look in her eyes and I am scared by the look in her eyes that says somethin is not right.

*I feel the cryin start inside me.*

Rachel turns her head and holds her arm out and points with her finger. I look where she points.

*The cryin inside me does not know what to do. It stops and it starts and it stops again and I hold my breath.*

I look back at Rachel who looks at me with her eyes real big now and she whispers to me, "Santy has really come," like she cannot believe it is true and she says it again, "Santy has come," and we both look again at the little tree that sits on a box, the same box I stand on when I look out the winda. The tree is covered with paper chains like we made at school, and Rachel is shakin me and laughin, and I am pushin back the quilt to get up, and I am shakin from the cold and for what else I do not know. And then Iva comes in on her tippy toes and looks at us and Rachel points to the tree. Iva looks at it and looks at us and puts her hand fast on her mouth and her eyes are big like cups and me and Rachel, we do not know what to do, but Iva knows what to do for she says, "See, I told

you Santy would come," and runs over and looks the tree up and down.

On top of the tree is a little star that is shiny like tin and under the tree is stuff that Iva starts pullin out and we look at it like is play pretties for somebody else. Pretty soon here come Sammy and Wade and we all look at what Iva pulls out, a dump truck for Wade and a ball for Jacob and I think I see a baby doll and there is some ribbon candy and apples and oranges that smell so good like the orange Aunt Pearl peeled for me one time.

I am scared that the oranges and apples and candy and play pretties are not for us, that maybe Santy made a mistake and Mama will whip us if we don't leave it all alone. I look at Rachel who hurries to change Clayton's diaper and she looks at everybody and says, "Shhh" for now everybody is talkin and Sammy is laughin and saying, "Oh, oh, oh," even though his lips are blue, blue from cold and Wade is making noise with the truck and we might wake Mama up.

Then Daddy coughs and coughs and comes in coughin some more and stops when he sees us. We look at him and he looks at us and says, "I won last night at Dell Ritter's, and I had a talk with Santy." Then he builds a fire in the stove so it will get warm in here and so we can stop shivering and so Sammy's lips won't be blue.



Mama is still in bed, but pretty soon she hollers,  
"Y'all make my ass sick! Cain't nobody git no sleep  
around here?"

We are all real still while Daddy puts a quilt up to  
the door hole. Then he gets the fire goin good and makes  
it warm in our kitchen. Everybody is laughin and I smell  
the oranges.

I feel her there and I raise my eyes to see Mama  
standing in the door with the quilt pulled back. She  
looks around at us then mashes her lips together and opens  
them and says, "I swear to God, y'all could waken up the  
dead."

We do not say nothin.

Mama scratches her poochy belly with the baby inside  
then looks at the tree and gets a big laughin look on her  
face and says, "Well, looky here what Santy brought," and  
tells Daddy to get up out of the chair so she can sit  
down.

I sit on the pallet with some ribbon candy and the  
little baby doll that Rachel says belongs to me now. *I  
forget about the swirlin wind and snow and the voice that  
calls me Lona Faye Lona Faye and I look and look at the  
little baby doll and I think of what I will tell it about  
my Mama.*

Rachel's Notes (1958)

Ch. 7

Fri. Mar. 15, 1958. I think I have got saved! And you won't believe it but a bird come right in the window of the church. Iva acted a fool in the church right there before everbody! Sometimes that girl has not got no sense at all.

It was at my friend Bella's church which is a Holiness. Have you ever seen them or been in their church? They make you sit right up and take notice of their praying and their hollering, which is something to behold believe you me. Bella has been asking me all school year to go to church, but Mama wouldn't let me because I didn't want to put the mooch on the church people. Ever time I asked Mama, she would get mad and say, shut your goddam mouth, Rachel! If you can't mooch the sons of bitches, then you ain't going! That's the way she put it. She has to cuss about everthing, you know. But on the bus Monday, Bella asked again, please please Rachel, see if you can come to church with me. And Bella is not no beggy person. She is kindly quiet and soft spoken. So I figgered I could ask Mama one more time and that is all. You don't know my mama! I said to Bella. But I got up my nerves and asked and lo, guess what? Mama said I could go if I taken all the kids even Iva. Who I didn't want to take because Iva acts a fool in church or

maybe she causes a ruckus with the little kids and gets them tuned up to bawling or laughing or whatever. But I taken everbody, Iva too. And I will never do it again mark my words!!!

The long and the short of it is that we went to Wednesday night meeting, even the baby Spencer who is teeny tiny. I don't know what Bella's daddy thought when he come to get us nine kids, me a holding a little bitty baby. He didn't say nothing but was real smiley and Bella was smiley too. On the way to church, Iva farted real loud and acted like she didn't do nothing.

The church is an adobey getup with windows but no glass, just wood shutters that was open, it being warm weather. Right off the little kids was fit to be tied at all the bird nests outside under the eaves and at the birds flying around that church and raising a ruckus. It beat all you ever seen and it made you suck your breath in to see so many little birds. Bella said its always like that, but she said the birds are critters of the lord like us so nobody makes them leave. They was alot of people, maybe fifty and we set on wood benches. The floor was a dirt floor and real clean. We taken up a whole bench with Bella and her daddy.

When the singing started, everthing was just dandy for we like to sing you know. The little kids too. But then

the preaching started. Of a sudden a woman in front of us jumped up and lifted her arms high in the air like she was picking something off a tree real fast and she started hollering real loud Oh Lord Oh Lord the spirts got me, praise the Lord. It liked to of scared the baby plumb to death. He woken up in a jerk and started bawling. Iva started laughing and got the little kids to laughing too. But I looked at her hard and moved my lips to say please stop and pretty soon she did.

But the preacher he hollered loud too and was pretty soon coming down the middle of the church looking at everbody on each side and a hollering about sin. He is a little bitty man with a shuck of thick black hair that kept a coming down in his eyes when he jerked his head hither and yon. He was dressed kindly like a regular man without no necktie and with big boots laced up high over his britches legs. He put me in mind of a soldier with his boots like that. And he swung his arms and pointed to folks when he preached. The devil will put the spirit in you take it to heart! Sin will invite you sin will excite you but don't let it bite you! Don't let the serpent of sin put its venom in you! No brothers and sisters, don't let it bite you! Then of a sudden he fell over on the floor and he was a rolling and a kicking up the dirt with his boots going up and down like he was having a fit. And you know without me telling that Iva just about busted a

gut laughing. People lept up out of the benches and hollered amen brother and some woman fell in the dirt too and her dress come up and showed her Christmas, but she lept up and hollered more. All the time the people was a hollering amen amen. By this time Iva was on the floor under the bench laughing so hard I wanted to kill her but I was too busy trying to rock the baby and make him slack up bawling. Half the little kids, Sissie and Sammie and Wade and Jacob, they was under the bench with Iva and they was all busting a gut believe you me. Ola Mae and Clayton did not know what to do. They knowed I wanted them to be good, but they seen Iva and the rest of the younguns under the bench a laughing their heads off and pretty soon Clayton was a bawling and wanted me to take him, but I couldn't for I was a holding Spencer.

You know that laughing is catchy and pretty soon I felt it start in me deep down in my shoes and start moving up. I couldn't stop the baby bawling. I couldn't stop Clayton bawling. I couldn't get none of the others out from under the bench for my hands was full. Ola Mae was the only one a sitting real still on the bench, her short legs a sticking out in front of her and her eyes big like cups. I looked at Bella and her daddy and they was looking strait ahead. I knowed Bella would never ask me to church no more, and now she would not be my friend

neither. Tears was running down my face and I could feel myself laughing and bawling both.

Then the preacher shot up from the floor like something had a holt on him and he hollered again. Don't let sin take you to your grave today or tomorrow or tomorrow! Don't let sin bite you! And about that time one of the little birds come in the open window and was a flying at me and got tangled in my hair and then the baby's blanket. I jumped up and hollered and was a trying to get the bird out and people was a looking at me a hollering amen amen. They did not know about the bird, but Iva must of seen it because of a sudden she was helping me swarp at the bird. Of a sudden the bird got off and was a flying around by our feet and then over by the wall and then we did not see it no more. Iva looked at me and busted a gut laughing again. Spencer was a screaming and I was a bawling hard because I nearbouts dropped him in the ruckus. The preacher seen me a standing up and a bawling real hard so he run down the middle of the church and come to our bench and put his hand on my head and said bless you child, bless you, and pulled me out from the bench and up to the front. People was all around me a bawling and a hollering like nobodies business. I guess I got saved because the preacher told the people I did. They was all so happy I did not have the heart to tell them no different. When it was over, I was glad to get

out of that church and get the little kids back home. I will not never take Iva to church with me no more! Now I hate to go back to school for Bella will see me.

Mama was not home when we got here. Mary and Barbra brung us over a cake and we was fit to be tied. But it did not set right in our bellies and given us the runs real bad.

Wed. Mar. 19, 1958. The grass is a greening up good from all the rain we had lately. The river is up too and I hear Rag Veeda nearbouts got herself drowned a trying to cross the footlog over that narrow bend down yonder. Veeda fell but helt onto the log and lucky for her one of the Simmons come along and saved her. Veeda is old and can't see good.

Iva come home from school with two silver dollars last Friday. She said her friend Mag Dooly given them to her and Mag got them from her grandma. Iva given me one and we felt like we was rich. What we done is bought us some store bought bread and some bloney and given the little kids a dime a piece for school lunch. They don't never get school lunch because we don't never have the money. They felt like big shots believe you me. I got a quarter of mine left. Iva is a good sister when she wants to be and she is most times real good about splitting up with

you whatever she has. We did not tell Mama and Daddy about the silver dollars or they would have snatched them away. I believe we could take care of our selves a whole lot better without no mama or daddy.

Mary and Barbra are just as friendly as you please and they come over last evening to sit a spell with me and Iva and the little kids. Mary don't set long though. She acts like she might get dirty or something. I don't believe Bella aims to ask me to her church no more, but she is still my friend. She given me some of her lunch today. The End. Rachel.

Tue Apr 1, 1958. APRIL FOOL!! Oh the grass is a getting so high. I was up at bust of day which is the best time of the day if you ask me. It has rained in the night just a soft easy rain that makes everthing clean and freshly looking. This house roof don't leak and for that I am greatful! I hate the clang of water a dripping into kettles and buckets and such, don't you? So it was real still. Mama was asleeping and so her meanness was not started yet. I seen our bitch hound a coming up from across the road, her belly a hanging with her full titties, and I knowed she was a heading for her babies to feed them. I had got ready for school but was a waiting for time to get the little kids and Iva up, so I just set there on the porch by my lonsome. I looked around at our



yard and you can easy see we are poor people. Our yard is trashy which it don't do not one bit of good to clean up. Out yonder by that old broke down shed is two old junk cars. And a pile of tires we sometimes cut to pieces and burn when its cold and there is not no wood. I want to be growed up so bad so I can make us all clean and have lots to eat and fine clothes to wear, but it don't seem like it will never happen. Time is a going so slow and I hate to say this because God might strike me dead but I wish my mama would keel over dead. It is not that I really want her to be dead but it is the only way to stop her from being mean. You tell me a better way if you got one because I don't know none. I've said to God that we are just kids and why won't he make her stop. But she don't stop her meanness when I pray. She is worser and worser all the time. Sometimes I believe God don't care about nothing but his big ownself. Maybe he's up there, his high and mighty self a looking down here at this world and all the people in it and sees that maybe we are like a bunch of pissants with the big ones climbing over the little ones like them pissants in that glass bowl of dirt we got at school in our science class.

Yesterday Mama whipped Iva so hard I thought Iva was going to keel over dead her own self. Mama taken a piece of rubber hose and beat Iva because of the silver dollars.

Iva had got another one and spent it at Cotton's store. Old man Cotton told Daddy and he told Mama. So Mama whipped Iva for not giving the silver dollar to her. If she knowed about the others, I wonder what would she do? Daddy art to have the rubber hose used on him too for he knowed what Mama would do to Iva and he caused it!! Mama is right in one thing. Daddy is a dumb son of a bitch which is what she calls him all the time. And that's me a cussing this time because I am mad believe you me. You would be too if you could see Iva and how she couldn't go to school today. And Daddy don't never make Mama stop. He just sqwats on the ground or sqwats on a chair and don't say diddly sqwat! But he is not smily at all when Mama is a beaten on us. I wish I could get in my daddy's head and see why it is he don't do something. I don't know where Iva got the other silver dollar. The End.

Rachel.

Sun Apr. 6, 1958. Today is Easter. I have not seen Cora Doon in a long time for she was in college in Texas. But she is home now and she come and got me to go to her house for Easter dinner. Sometimes it is a hard thing to go to Cora's because it is just me a going. I think on it more and more on how I don't feel right a leaving the little kids. I know Cora can't take all of us to her house to eat but I wish she could just the same. It is

kindly like when Mama cooks something for her and Daddy and don't let us eat. Her and Daddy eat and they know we want some but we can't ask. Daddy will sometimes give the baby a bite. but the rest of us just stand there and watch them eat and that is all because if we ask, Mama says NO! and get your asses out of here! Mama fills her mouth full and we watch her chew and wish it was our mouths a chewing. Now that is how I feel like the little kids look at me when Cora comes to get me. If I go, I can maybe get something for them. If I don't go, I can not get nothing to eat for me or them. But I can't always get something and I feel bad when I come home. So sometimes I just don't go with Cora, but I don't tell her why. I wish you could tell me what you would do. I can not write no more. My heart feels heavy over this. The End. Rachel.

Mon Apr. 7, 1958. I forgot to say that Cora taken me to her doctor to see why I talk funny and why I'm not growing right. I don't know what he told her for he sent me to sit down while he talked to her. She didn't tell me what he said but she asked me if I remember ever getting my jaw broke or my nose broke. I said no. She didn't ask me nothing else. The End. Rachel.

Sun Apr. 20, 1958. Iva has had a birthday and now she

is eleven. She is bigger than me but not much. Just fatter and she is not fat by a long shot.

Deke Chansom come today and dunned Daddy for five dollars Daddy owed him. Mama told Deke he art not to of come on Sunday a dunning us for money because now the dett is paid!! That's just the way it is, she said to Deke. She said, Deke you know good and well if you dun somebody on a Sunday, they don't owe you no more.

Deke got mad and was red in the face when he told Mama, by god Ida Belle I lose track of what day it is. I swear to God I did not recollect it was Sunday!

And I'd be mighty careful about swearing to God on a Sunday too, Mama said. Or he might strike you deaf along with being dumb!

Daddy went behind Deke out to his pickup and talked to him, but I don't know what they said. When Daddy come back in the house Mama told him if he pays Deke, it will be over her dead body.

Iva come behind me outside and said, let's kill her Rachel so Daddy can pay Deke a standing over her dead body. We laughed and laughed mostly because we know it won't never happen but its funny anyways. You can't never tell when Iva is serius or not because shes always trying to think up ways to kill Mama so it won't look like a killing. And sometimes just for fun we plot and scheme on ways to do it. Its a change from making up meals we won't

never get. We have thought of putting a snake in her bed because shes deathly scared of snakes. But so are we! So whos going to be the one to put it there? We have not come up with the answer to that! Iva has thought of putting a dirt dobbers nest in bed with her. That won't kill her, I told Iva. It will just sting her and stir her up bad and she will know the dirt dobbers nest didn't fly in there by its ownself. So far we have not come up with a good way to do it. The End. Rachel.

Fri May 30, 1958. I have not got to write in a while. I have not had the heart. I talked back to Mama the other day and I paid dearly for it. I was a washing dishes when I hear this ruckus outside and Sammy a screaming awful. I run to the door and the other kids was all on the porch and Daddy was there too just sqwatting on his honches. Mama was whipping Sammy with a willer switch right across his back that was sunburned. Him and Jacob sunburn so easy, they are so fair skin. I could see the red lines of blood across Sammy's back and him so little and trying to get away from Mama. And he fell down and Mama grabbed his hair and helt on tight. The little kids was scared. Sissie was bawling and shaking. Daddy was just a setting there. Of a sudden I wanted to grab that switch from Mama and beat her and beat Daddy too. I don't know what come

over me but I hollered at Mama to stop and said I would call the law if she didn't stop. She stopped o.k. I don't recollect much of what happened for Iva said I was knocked out. I just know my ribs is still sore and above my right eye is a purple spot. Now when Mama thinks on it, she looks at me real hard with her face tight like a rock and she puts her finger to my face and says, if you ever threaten me again Rachel or tell anybody anything I will make you wish you was dead! Then she says, DO YOU HEAR ME? real loud to make sure I do hear her. If I don't say yes loud enough, she makes me say it again loud so she can hear good. Oh you don't know how I wish she would fall off the world.

I have got to cook some taters and bread to go with our beans. I will write more later. There is not nobody here but us kids because Mama and Daddy have gone to Coweta to see to grandpap who is down with his heart or something. I dread for it to get dark. I have been working real hard in my English and my teacher says I have improved alot. She says I know what to say but I have got to learn to say it right. She calls it properly.

Mon June 2, 1958. School is out and the bad of that is that I love school. The good of it is that I don't have to be sick in my belly and head ever morning because I am scared Mama will waken up and catch me trying to go

to school. Then I go to school and don't think on her till I come home and then I am sick in my belly and head for what she will do when I get home. And you never know when she will be up to meanness or not!! Most the time when I get home the baby is a crying and the little kids is hungry and there is dirty dishes to wash and dirty diapers to wash and the house to clean up. And Mama has probly whipped one of the kids or is doing it when I come home. And oh I am so happy when she leaves. And sometimes she takes Iva with her and that makes me so mad and sad too because Iva could help me more if she would. But she goes with Mama anyway and I wish she wouldn't do this for it makes me think shes not our sister or don't want to be our sister. Because she don't act like she cares nothing about me and the little kids. Though she don't go all the time I still wish she wouldn't go at all. But when she comes home I forget about being mad at her because she makes me laugh about stuff. I wonder where my real daddy is and why he don't ever come to find me. I believe one of these days he will come. Me and Iva and Sissie and Sammie and Jacob and Ola Mae have had our birthdays. The End. Rachel.

Tue June 17, 1958. Mama and Daddy are talking about us going to Texas to pick cotton in a month or so. I

dread it. I don't

Sun June 29, 1958. Little Fate brung us a sack of the hog donuts yesterday. He

Thur July 10, 1958. Me and Iva went to Mary and Barbra's church last night and oh I wish we didn't for now my heart and my head is filled with sorrow and shame. And I will be scared all the time of what they will do to us now. And I can just tell you about this and nobody else for you are not here and you can not tell. Here is what happened.

You know how Mary and Barbra have asked Mama to let us go with them. Well they didn't ask no more after that first time, but yesterday they did. They told Mama if we would go with them they would get us some shoes and dresses and stuff for the little kids from their church, for it helps poor people.

O.k. Mama said, they can go. Mama said, Rachel be sure and get all you can and get me some shoes size 7.

O.k. I said and could not hardly wait to look at the gobs of cloths Mary and Barbra told us about.

But when we got in the car the Daddy acted like he was surprised at Mary and Barbra and said to them, I didn't know you wanted to help these children. Why didn't you bring them a long time ago?



And Mary said, because they didn't want to come. Then she said to her mama who was a looking over the seat at her, she said about me and Iva, they are strange too.

Me and Iva set there in the back seat with Mary and Barbra on the sides of us and we just looked at each other but didn't say nothing for that is the way we are brought up. We didn't know they thought we was strange.

And when the daddy was a driving the car to the church, of a sudden Mary said to her mama and daddy, they are little liars too. They lie all the time, she said, and looked at us like she didn't like us at all.

The mother looked back at us and given us a hard look. We didn't talk for we didn't know what to say. I didn't want to go to the church now, but of a sudden we was already there. Oh you can not know what was in my head for I don't know myself. In my head I was stirring around the words that we are strange and we are little liars. Why did Mary say that? I asked myself and could not find no answer. I comensed to get that bleery feeling but when I looked up, I seen all the people and we got out of the car. Mary and Barbra was so nice hugging all the people and saying, hi sister Wanda and hi brother Robert and sister this and brother that. All the people was real smiley and when the people seen me and Iva standing there real close together, they was smiley to us too.

Mary and Barbra told it that they wanted to help their neighbors with some clothes. The people said to them, thats so nice of you girls. And the people said to the mama and daddy, its just like Mary and Barbra to be so wonderful and set a good example for all the young people of the church. The daddy did not say nothing, but the mama said, yes they are very good girls.

Me and Iva taken this all in and didn't say nothing. When the church was over, Mary and Barbra pointed to me and Iva and told their mama and daddy, we will take them down stairs to get them some clothes and was smiley like they liked us again.

Hurry, for we are going to have refreshmants, punch and cookies, the mama said.

So they taken us down the stairs that winded around and then down a long hall to a big door that you push hard on and then there is the room. And it is plumb full of stuff. Oh you should see the stuff that is there! Its plenty for the whole grove and is like a big store. Man and woman and kid and baby stuff all on tables or a hanging and they was shoes too. Me and Iva stood there filling our eyes and didn't move till Barbra said, here Rachel try on these shoes, and Mary got a dress and said, will this fit you Iva?

I said, please do you have some shoes for my mama size 7? And then we was so happy and I forgot that Mary said

we was strange and liars. We picked out stuff and put it in a box. Oh it was fun with Barbra and Mary a helping us. Then Iva saw a blue dress, for she loves blue dresses you know. And it was so pretty with a little white neck. Barbra walked up to Iva and took the dress and held it up to Iva, then she said, no you can not have it. And she pushed Iva real slow against our box of clothes. Then she leaned down for she is a big tall girl of 16, and she stuck her face real close to Iva's and said in a mean voice, did you think we would really let you have any clothes?

There was not no talking for a minute and I could feel my heart a pounding hard. Iva didn't know what to say and you know that is not like my sister. Mary, who was a standing by me, taken my arm and twisted it hard and pulled it up behind my back high so I was on my tippy toes. She said, if you holler or tell, we will get you. Oh you can not know what was in my head and my heart when I seen Barbra push Iva into the box of clothes and put another big box upside down on top of Iva and then she set herself down on top of that box. Iva hollered and hit the box but you couldn't hardly hear her and I was scared she would smother. I was crying for my arm was hurting bad and I was scared for Ivy but Mary slapped me hard and said, shut up! She said, I don't like you and I have

never liked you or your brat sisters and brothers, then she spit in my face. Then there was a noise and I knewed somebody was a coming, and oh I was so glad. Barbra jumped up and pulled Ivy out of the clothes. Iva's face was red from crying and she couldn't hardly stand up. Mary let go of my arm and her and Barbra told us in a hard whisper voice that we better not tell or they will get us. Mary said, I will poison your brothers and sisters and it will be easy for they eat anything! And then she looked at Barbra and it looked to me like they knowed a secret.

Iva come over by me and we didn't say nothing when the daddy come in and said, what is going on? Mary and Barbra laughed and said, nothing. But the daddy looked hard at them. I believe he knowed something. He looked at me and Iva a standing there by the hanging clothes and he said, did you find something for your family? I didn't get to talk for Mary said real fast, I told you Daddy they are little liers! They don't really want no clothes!

The daddy looked and looked at me and Iva then looked and looked at his big girls. He didn't ask me and Iva nothing. Then he told me and Iva to come up the stairs with him. The big girls follered and given us mean looks. Once when we was going to the car, Mary said in a mean whisper voice, we'll get you if you tell! On the way home the daddy didn't talk and the mama kept on asking him what was wrong. He just drove the car.

Mama was mad because we didn't bring no clothes home or her some shoes size 7. Me and Iva didn't tell on Mary and Barbra neither believe you me. I believe Mama would give Mary and Barbra a piece of her mind, but it wouldn't do not good because they would get us when Mama and Daddy is gone which you know is a lot! The End. Rachel.

Sun July 13, 1958. I am total wore out trying to watch the little kids all the time. Sissie was real sick yesterday and puked on herself. Come to find out, she had been eating some candy Mary given her. I was so scared I slapped Sissie and shaken her and said, don't you never eat nothing she gives you and I already told you that! Do you hear me? She said, yes and puked some more. Iva was gone with Mama and Daddy and when she got home I tried to get her to herself and tell her about Sissie and the candy. But I couldn't. Pretty soon Mama and Daddy went over to Aunt Clive's and Iva didn't go. I was so glad and I told Iva she has got to stay home and help me and I said it to her hard, which made her get sullied up. So she said, no I won't neither stay home for you are not my boss, Rachel. And then I hit her and she turned to run and knocked Ola Mae down against the table leg. I grabbed Ola Mae up and seen a bloody cut and then I flew after Iva. I was so mad I was crazy!

Iva run outside, but I got her and was on the ground on top of her a hitting her and she was fighting me back. I grabbed a stick and hit her. She turned her head, and I poked the stick in her ear. When she screamed, it made me come to myself. There was me on top of her and the little kids a hollering and bawling and Ola Mae up on the porch with her head a bleeding and her arms holding out for me to take her. It was like a war had happened believe you me. Of a sudden I was bawling and shaking. I knowed right then I was as mean as Mama. I let Iva up, and I sat there in the dirt and bawled like a baby. Iva was a bawling with her ear, and the little kids was bawling too. I looked across the empty lot and there was Mary a standing outside a looking at us. I couldn't do nothing but look and bawl and tell Iva over and over I am sorry sorry sorry.

Then lo down the road I seen Mary's daddy a driving his car. I jumped up and run to cut him off before he got to his house. He stopped his car and I couldn't hardly talk from running so hard. I couldn't hardly stop bawling. He looked at me funny and said, what is wrong? Then he looked up to his house. I looked too and seen Mary run inside. I told him his girls are mean to us and told him what they done in the church. I told him they was trying to poison Sissie.

Woe Woe, he said. What are you a saying? I told him

again about Sissie. He looked and looked at me and then his face got hard, and he said, Mary said you are a little liar. Now I believe it! And he nearbouts run over my foot driving away to his house and his tires throwed up dirt in my face.

Oh its so hard to tell you about this for right now I have to wipe the tears from my face and I can't hardly see to write this note. I wish you was not a hunderd years away but was here and you could help me. I can't write no more. The End. Rachel.

Tue July 15, 1958. Its real hot in the house and so we are out here on the shady porch where there is some breeze. I don't let the little kids out of my site. The baby and Ola Mae are asleeping here on a quilt and Iva is a plaiting Sissie's hair in one big braid. Sissie's hair has growed back and is long and Sissie says shes glad. Iva's ear is sore but just now I asked her if it hurt and she said no.

You know I have a ear ache all the time so I know how bad it can hurt. I feel so mean and again I have to wipe the tears from my face because I done that to Iva. She looked at me right now and said, its alright Rachel for my ear don't hurt none. But I know its not alright, and I know I won't never forget how hard she hollered. I will

take it to my grave which will be around forty I think.

Just now Wade had a splinter in his finger, and I had to stop and get it out. He said, what are you writing Rachel. And I told him a story for school. Oh, he said. But Iva started laughing and said, that won't work Rachel because there ain't no school. And I said, well I've got a head start.

We have not seen Mary or Barbra or the mama or daddy come out of their house. The daddy's car is there though. Just now Iva said she wished she had some chocolate pudding and Sissie said, no strawberries will be better. Then Wade says he wants watermelon. I said all we got is flour and taters, so I'll make us some biskits and water gravy and fried taters when I get through here a writing. We will play like its strawberries and chocolate pudding. So Sissie and Iva run in the house just now to peel taters but first Sissie let a big fart and everybody is laughing. Don't that beat all you ever seen? The End. Rachel.

Wed Aug 6, 1958. We have not seen Mary and Barbra and now we are loading up the truck tomorrow to go to Texas for the cotton. I don't know why we didn't go to Oregon this year. I wish we did. Its so pretty there. Daddy is a talking about going sometime to north Dacota for the sugar beets. We have not never done that so I can't tell you nothing about it yet. The End. Rachel.



Wed Aug 20, 1958. We didn't go to Texas! We are at a place called Roswell, New Mexico! Have you ever heard of it? If Old Mexico is like New Mexico, I don't want to take the little kids and go there when I get 18! It is so hot here you can nearbouts fry an egg on a rock! And the dirt is real red like some in Oklahoma. And the grass is not green at all for it is all burnt. There is stickers and snakes and skorpians and there is not no water close. We live in a cotton shack which is what the boss man has for his pickers. There are two more cotton shacks by us in a big field with the sun beaten down on us and no trees. A Mexican man and his woman and their five younguns live in one shack. A white man and his woman and their two boys who are me and Iva's age, they live in the other shack. The other pickers live in town I guess. And everbody here in the shacks has to haul water in big barrels on the back of a wagon. The water tastes like rotten eggs, but it is all we have got to drink and cook with. And it gives us all the runs. We can not take too many baths neither. We are not by no town but way out in the middle of nowhere. Mama hates it because she hates to stay home. But right now she is to the Mexican woman's shack a talking to her. She don't like the white man and his woman. She said the white man believes he knows it

all. The End. Rachel.

Tue Aug 20, 1958. We have worked so hard this past few days me and Iva and Sissie and Wade and Daddy. Mama don't go to the field. We have been pulling boles which is better than picking cotton because you can pick the bole and all the cotton in it at one whack. Your hands and fingers get cut up bad, and they bleed because we don't have no gloves. And your back nearabouts kills you a pulling that long heavy sack. Sissie and Wade pick in gunny sacks with a string for their sholder straps. You get so hot and thursty and hungry. Sometimes you feel weak in the knees but you keep on a working. When we go in from the field, we are hot and swetty and dusty, and our hands are a bleeding. We are total wore out believe you me. We are up again at bust of day and work everday but not on Sunday. Mama is at the Mexican woman's shack more than she is here, but not in the day time because the Mexican woman works with her man and younguns. I wonder don't them people get tired of Mama? The End. Rachel. Just in case you want to know, I still have the coco can. The End. Rachel.

Fri Aug 29, 1958. Roland and Wydell are the names of the boys who are me and Iva's age. Roland is 14 and he likes Iva alot, I can tell. And Wydell does too. When us

kids was a sitting outside together tonight, Wydell got mad at Roland and said he was going to tell on Roland for kissing Iva. You could have knocked me over with a feather! I didn't know Roland kissed Iva. How did I miss this? I asked myself and vowed that I would watch closer to see what Iva is up to. I tell you that girl is a site.

But if I was pretty like Iva I might let somebody kiss me too. When we went to bed, I asked Iva to tell me when did Roland kiss her and what was it like. She said it was when we was in the cotton field today. She said Roland and Wydell was in the row next to her and Roland called her to see a lizzard. Wydell was there too but Roland told him to get away. Wydell told Roland to shut up and he stuck his head by Roland's and Iva's to see the lizzard. Of a sudden Roland kissed Iva on the cheek. Iva told me it was like a feather that smelt like spam because Roland had eat spam for the dinner break. Then Iva said, turn your head Rachel and I will show you what it felt like. So I did and she kissed me on the cheek. I didn't hardly feel it but she said that's the way it was. I can not immagine no boy kissing me on the cheek. I can not immagine nobody else kissing me on the cheeck but maybe Iva who just done it. We don't kiss nobody in our family but maybe the baby. We don't hug nobody in our family but maybe the baby. The End. Rachel.

Wed Sep 3, 1958. Roland and Wydell's daddy goes by the name of Bill Avery. Mama calls him trapeze, but she don't do this to his face. He used to be in a circus and was a flying trapeze artist. He likes to tell you all about it and swing his arms and talk about crowds and the people clapping and all kinds of stuff that goes on in a circus. I like to hear him talk myself. Mama calls him trapeze to us so much that we never can remember his name. When I was fixing supper this evening, I needed some salt and we was out, so I sent Sissie to borry some from Mrs. Avery, who is a puny little thing without a bit of meat on her bones. Mama says that's what I'll look like when I get grown because that's what I look like now. When Sissie went over there, Mr. Avery come to the door. I guess Sissie called him Trapeze instead of Mr. Avery, because he come over here red in the face and mad and told Mama, my name is Bill Avery and I'll thank you to remember that! Mama said, well Bill Avery why don't you take a flying leap and kiss my ass! and she slammed the door in his face! And Mama was so proud because we laughed she forgot to whip Sissie for slipping up. I don't need to tell you that Mr. Avery and Mama are not talking and we are not sposed to talk to him or his woman or his boys neither. Iva says she would like to clean Mama's plow good for that part of it. I believe Mama suspicioned

something about Iva and Roland because she said to Daddy right in front of me and Iva, watch that Iva works instead of plays in the cotton field.

Mon Nov 3, 1958. It was way down into fall before we come home from New Mexico. Iva is a getting titties now and is real proud for she is not twelve yet. I have not got none and have not bled neither, thank the lord. For I would not know what to do about the rags. I pray ever night not to bleed. I have some hairs under my arms though, and if its real hot, I sweat under there too. And I have got hairs on my straddle, not many but some little bitty ones like baby hair! I hope you are a girl who reads this a hundred years from now. But if you are a boy, you won't know me to laugh at me. Ha Ha. And my health book at school says boys get hair too. Ha Ha. The End. Rachel.

Tue Nov 4, 1958. I'm in the 8th grade now and I'm taking typing! I love it so much and my teacher Mrs. Runyon. Mrs. Runyon says I'm the best beginner she has ever seen. Mrs. Brown and Roberta are proud too. They say I can get a good job in an office when I grow up. I just love school and I really love typing. I don't see Cora Doon much no more for she's busy in college. She's

in England I think. She send me a card from there. It has a picture of Big Ben. Have you heard of that or seen it? The End. Rachel. Oh I nearbouts forgot. My English teacher goes by the name of Mrs. Rooster! Have you ever heard of a name like that? The name does not fit her though. She's big and fat and has hair that is nearbouts white and she keeps it in a hair net. She clippy clops around the room in her shoes with high square heels and talks so fast you can't hardly keep up with her. Oh boy is she smart! She says she's not in the habit of giving an A on a paper so we better buckle down hard. But I like her just the same and I work special hard for her. The End. Rachel.

Sun Nov 10, 1958. Mrs. Brown and Roberta has found us a house in the country with a creek and trees, and oh it sounds so pretty. I can not hardly wait to get out of the grove. Right now we live on 5th street in a sign house. It is made from sign boards and you can go around the outside of the house and read anything you want to read. There are signs for Bull Durham tobacco, Prince Albert tobacco, beer, motels, filling stations, cafes, horse feed, flour, RC Cola, Morton salt, Burma Shave signs and you name it! It's all on our house. I wrote a paper for Mrs. Rooster and told all about our sign house. She liked it so much she given me an A- and told everbody in the

class about it and said, Rachel can

Wed Nov. 19, 1958. We'll move in December, but I'm sick to the death because I have to go to a different school that don't have typing. What will I do. Oh I feel so miserble. I want to take typing so I can get a job when I am 18 and I can take the little kids away from here. Now it is all messed up. Iva told Mrs. Brown and Roberta too. Now Mama

Thur Nov. 20, 1958. Mrs. Brown and Roberta come yesterday and talked to Mama and asked if I can live with them until school is done so I can finish the typing. Mama said she will see and then her and Daddy said they was going to play dominos and left. My insides is nearbouts eat up with the nerves for thinking on it. The little kids don't know what it means yet but I do. I'm mixed up. I want to go because I can learn to type good and maybe get a job. But who will take care of the little kids when I am at Mrs. Brown's house? Who will cook for them? Who will keep Mama from whipping them? I am scared Iva won't.

Iva is sullied up at me now because she says I'm taking away her Mrs. Brown and Roberta. And it's as plain as day to me they don't like me near as well as they like her!

I'm not no kick for them! Iva went out and got on the tire swing and started bawling real hard. I follered her and she told me to get away from her but I didn't. I set myself down in the dirt by the tree and didn't say nothing. Of a sudden Iva hollered at me and said, I'm not fixing to be Mama's slave! And you think you are so smart because you get to go and I have to stay here!

I said, Iva Mama has not said I can go yet.

She will and you know she will because you always get everything! Iva said. And she bawled harder.

Are you crazy? I asked her but she didn't want to listen. She looked at me hard with her face screwed up and tears a running down her face and she said, everbody always says you are so smart and they say Rachel can do this and that and Rachel is such a good little mama and Rachel is so good in school! And I'm sick of it Rachel!

I couldn't believe my ears was hearing right. I can not see with the eyes of Iva. Who? Who? I said to Iva. But she was bawling too hard. In my head I knowed I have heard Aunt Clive brag on me and Deke Chansom's woman tells Mama she wishes her girls was hard workers like me. But I never knowed it beared down on Iva like this. She is so pretty and so funny and it looks like people want to be around her more than they do me. I have got my hands full and don't have time to be funny and wouldn't know how. I said to her, everbody likes you Iva.



No they don't! she said. Cora likes you and never does take me! And now you are taking Mrs. Brown and Roberta! And she bawled some more and got up out of the swing and stood right in front of me looking down at me with her fists doubled up. Rachel, I given you one of my silver dollars and now you don't care to leave me here to take care of the little kids while you go off and live fancy! And Mama and Daddy will leave us by ourselves and I am scared when it is night! And you'll be sorry when I get robbed and kidnaped and maybe killed! and she run off to the toilet and latched herself in.

Right then I put it in my head that I won't go live with Mrs. Brown and Roberta even if Mama says I can. I wanted to ask Iva why she leaves me and the little kids but I didn't get to. Sissie hangs close to me. She is taking all this in about me leaving and thinking on it and so is Wade. The End. Rachel.

Fri Nov. 23, 1958. Sissie peed in the bed last night and Mama beat her bad. I think I'm so busy sometimes I don't even know Sissie is here til Mama beats on her. I don't believe she gets treated right by nobody but Wade and she is real close to him. I hate to see Mama beat on any of us but I wish she would whip me and not them. She knows it too and looks at me hard when she gets done

whipping them for I am always standing there close. If I am outside and I hear a ruckus in the house, I run in there. Or if she is outside a doing the beating, I run out there but I can't never do nothing. She tells me, get your ass over yonder and set down and get that look off your face! Oh you don't know what it does to me. You don't know how my head is full all the time and how I wish I could grab holt of Mama and beat her up and then tie her up so she won't bother nobody else. I wish I was grown up! And you don't know how I think on my real daddy and wonder why don't he never come and get me. And I wonder where is he? and what does he look like? I think maybe he might be dead or he would come. Sometimes I can see just by looking at Mama that she's ready to get mad and beat somebody. Sometimes when she's mad and there's something done that she don't like, she hollers, who done this? and I tell her I done it. Most times it don't do no good and she whips all of us. She says its so she can get the right one. She knows I'm a liar. I hate my mama for she is so mean you can't but hate her!

Mrs. Brown and Roberta came and taken Iva to their house today. Mama and them talked out by their car, and then they left. Mama and Daddy are gone now and me and the little kids are here by ourselves. Which is not nothing new at all is it? The End. Rachel.

Mon Nov 25, 1958. When Mrs. Brown and Roberta brung Iva home, Mama and Daddy was gone. Iva said Mrs. Brown wanted to talk to me so I went and stood at her car. Roberta was the driver like always. They was both smiley and Mrs. Brown's big teeth showed big when she smiled. She told me her and Roberta had a good talk with Iva and Iva told them how mad she was at me. But they said, we have told Iva we won't forget her and we'll bring you home on Friday nights and take her with us for Saturdays. Roberta said, that's right, we won't forget our Iva, and she looked in her pocket book and given Iva a dollar to buy us all some candy she said.

I said, what about Mama? She might not let me go. I didn't tell them Iva said she won't take care of the little kids for I didn't want them to look hard on Iva.

Mrs. Brown looked at Roberta and then said to me, your mother said you can, didn't she tell you? But Mrs. Brown didn't wait for me to say no. She went right on smiling and talking and said, so after you help your family move, we'll take you to our house.

Now I'm writing all this down and I'll take it to my lard bucket, for I don't believe I'll be writing at Mrs. Brown's house. They might find my writing for I have no place to hide it. For they know ever nook and cranny and I don't. My head is full about the little kids, but my

breathing is easier to know I'll come home on Friday  
nights and will be home the whole week end. One side of  
my head says I should not go, but the other side says I  
have got to learn to do something that can get me a job so  
I can get us all away. Oh I forgot to say that Mama is  
pregnant again. I believe

Rachel's Notes (1959)

Ch. 8

June 10, 1959. Yesterday Mama and Daddy got home from the grove in the middle of the day, which was strange because they generally don't come home till good dark. Mama got out of the car cussing Daddy and calling him everything but a white man because a black cat run across the hiway in front of them on the way home. She slammed the car door and said to Daddy, you coulda stopped and let somebody else drive over that black cat's trail first! Now we'll have nothing but bad luck! Then she went right out to the clothes line and stood there looking at all the clothes hanging in the sun to dry. I seen her unpin a pair of my underpants and another and another and look real close at the straddles. What is she doing? I asked myself but kept on giving Ola Mae a bath for I had a wash tub of water on the porch and had been giving the little kids baths. Daddy sat down on the porch and groaned like he was plumb wore out and shook his head like he was pondering on something. He rolled hisself a cigarette. Pretty soon Mama come slow over to the porch, for you know she is great big pregnant. She said, Lord it's hot and pulled her long hair around and run her fingers through it to take out the tangles and told Daddy, this heat is a killing me Ramer. Then she looked at me and kindly cocked her head to one side and said real slow and serious,

Rachel ain't you come sick yet? Just like that she said it! I nearbouts died and could feel my face get red because she said this thing to me, never mind that Daddy was sitting right there in spitting distance! I stopped washing Ola Mae's face and looked at Mama and looked at Daddy quick who was patting his pockets for a match, and I didn't know what to say I was so filled with shame. She asked me again, well have you? and put her hands to the small of her back and stood there like that. Real quiet I said no and didn't say no more but taken Ola Mae out of the tub and dried her off. I put Ola Mae's clothes on her and I didn't look at Mama or Daddy neither one. I could feel Mama's eyes on me looking and looking. Then she said, Rachel I want to know are you a virgin? My eyes come up to hers and it was like time froze plumb fast. My breathing kindly stopped and I couldn't move and I couldn't hear no sound, but I seen her mouth move again and she was saying, have you been messed with? I started to say something and couldn't talk at all and then I come to myself and said, no Mama nobody has messed with me. Why then is Little Fate asking after you? she said and her voice got loud. Daddy got up then and said, I told you Idabelle, now leave it be. Mama said, well by god Little Fate has been nosing around Francis and she ain't nothing but a kid and I sure to god want to know if he's messed

with Rachel too. I couldn't look at her no more and I could feel the tears run down my face. I just stood there by the porch a holding the towel in my hand and looking down at the dirty water in the tub. A june bug buzzed around me and hit the side of the tub and fell in the water. It paddled to the edge and tried to climb up the side of the tub but kept falling back. Mama did not say no more but pretty soon went in the house and Daddy did too. I heard Mama call Daddy a son of a bitch and tell him not to get no ideas neither by god. I felt kindly fainty and had to sit down and in my head was why why why is she asking me this? I don't know nothing about Little Fate and Francis but Francis is old enough to marry him if she wants to and I wouldn't blame her. I believe he would be good to her. I have not seen Little Fate who would not never do nothing to me noway and neither would Daddy. And I don't ever want to bleed and won't ever tell her about it if I do! Then a picture come in my mind of bloody rags on the line and I nearbouts puked and sucked in my breath a bunch of times I felt so gaggy. Lord no I don't want to bleed I said to myself and I had to run to the toilet. I pray God can at least do that much for me. I won't think no more on what Mama said about Little Fate and Daddy for it is too much to think on.

Don't you know why I have not wrote in a long time? It has been since we moved out here to the country and I

went to stay with Mrs. Brown and Roberta. Which was mortal misery in itself in some ways. Oh their house is fine and dandy as I told you before, but I was lonesome and the kids was all the time stirring around in my head and I couldn't eat sometimes for thinking on them. But I did watch television for I love to do that. And I got to go all the way through the typing and the rest of school without no hitches which is the first time that has ever happened to me. I'm 14 will be 15 my next birthday and I'll be in the 9th grade when school starts. I can type 72 w.p.m. with 2 errors, that is the best I done. W.p.m. is the way you say it. W.p.m. means words per minute and you have to say your mistakes too which is called errors. Mrs. Runyan said I'm the best first year typing student she has ever had. She says I have piano player fingers which means my fingers are long and go fast I guess. I didn't tell Mrs. Runyan that I can pick cotton and beans and berries fast too, but it was in my head. And guess what? I weigh 72 pounds which is the same as my w.p.m. I was the littlest person in my class which is not nothing new.

I wish I could get bigger and get some titties for gym. Do you know why I tell you stuff that is in my head that I can't never tell nobody else? Well I'll tell you in case you have not figgered it out for yourself. It's



because I know that you are not real and when you do get to be real I will just be a little puff of wind--maybe like I was before I was even borned. Back then I was just a gleam in my real daddy's eye. And where is my real daddy? Will he ever come to get me? This is in my head all the time too. I've asked Mama about him but it don't do no good for she gets tuned up about how pretty she was as a girl and how all the men liked her and how Aunt Laurel was and still is jealous of her. Mosta the time I get so mixed up and try to bring her back on my real daddy but pretty soon her and Daddy are in a big fight and she calls him a jealous bastard. So it don't do one bit of good. I give up. Nearbouts anyways.

But I wanta tell you what I started on in the first place about wishing I had titties and this is just for gym mind you because other times it don't matter. One day I made me some titties by wearing a brazier Francis given me and sticking socks in it. But when I had to go to gym and it was time to take a shower one of my socks fell out and I nearbouts killed myself trying to stick it back in. I was standing at my gym locker with the door open so I don't think anybody seen me. Lord I hope not. But nobody said nothing so I guess they didn't see. I left my brazier on when I taken a shower but sometimes girls do that when they are ashamed to show their titties so nobody thinks nothing of it. From then on I didn't put no socks

in, believe you me and I wore the brazier empty because it's a padded one. I had to be careful not to mash my brazier or it would stay sunk in where it got mashed. Lord it is awful to try to fix yourself some titties when you have not got none. Now school is out and I don't have to worry about titties until school starts but by then maybe I'll have some. All I want is some little ones. The End. Rachel.

June 15, 1959. It is hot already today but kindly cloudy like maybe we'll get some rain. The air is real still and sultry. It takes all the sap from you and makes you feel like you are real tired and you can't get livened up. There is not nothing to do but work so we just sit here by ourselves and wish we had something real good to eat. Iva and Sissie are a cutting out paper dolls from a Montgomery Wards book which is not like Iva atall. I just said that to her about the paper dolls and she said, what do you want me to do, turn cart wheels? Which made me and Sissie laugh. Iva said, o.k. and got out there in the dirt and done one wobbly flip flop and come down on a yellow jacket that stung her on the foot. Now she's mixing spit with some of Daddy's tobacco to put on the sting. Sissie looks a little holler eyed but her and Wade and Ola Mae got a bad whipping this morning for waking

Mama up and Sissie's nose bled a long time. They ain't a day that goes by but what somebody and maybe all of us gets a whipping for something. Its funny that Mama don't whip me a much as she used to but she likes to make me watch when she whips the little kids. She knows I can't stand it. She's whipping me though and she knows it! Sammy and Jacob and Ola Mae are playing on a skate. They go back and forth on the hard packed road that comes up to our house from the highway. We have all learned to skate pretty good with one foot because we don't have but one skate. We have got a bicycle too but it don't have a chain which is o.k. because we get on the hill in front of our house and take turns going down the hill. The handle bar keeps coming off though.

Our house is bigger than what we lived in in the grove and I guess it used to be white but you can't hardly tell it now. It has four rooms and a big porch and is on top of a low hill. The roof leaks which I just hate. There is a front room and a kitchen and two rooms for beds. We have got four beds, one little one and three big ones. Mama sleeps in the little one by herself. Daddy sleeps on the sofa because we have got one now but it is real old. Mama don't ever let Daddy sleep with her. Before we got the sofa she made Daddy sleep on the floor. She says she don't want to sleep with no man. I feel sorry for Daddy but wish I didn't. Feeling sorry for him on top of

everything else I got to worry about just dreens the life right out of me. There is a mimosa tree and three elm trees and a sweetgum right by our house so it's a little shady when the sun's hot and at one end of the porch is a big bunch of four o'clocks climbing everywhere. When the wind comes up in little fits and starts, the tree leaves make a little sighing sound. But if the wind comes up bad the door slams hard and sand and dirt get everywhere. The dirt here is nearabouts red as blood. It beats all you ever seen trying to keep the sand off everything. There was a broke down chicken coop but we don't have no chickens and have tore the coop down and used it for wood. And then you go a ways out from the house and there is a toilet and a big old barn that we'll probably tear up for wood too but right now the little kids get out there and climb everywhere. They play like there is buried treasure but Iva tells them there's not nothing but dried cow turds in that barn and says if there was gold in shit we'd all be rich, they's so many of us! Pretty soon the little kids are sulled up mad at Iva for messing up their play party. But she don't care. She just acts a fool more.

There's about a acre here with a creek a ways off and lots of trees down by the creek. It's where we go sometimes because it's cool there. We take us a jug of water or coolaid if we got it and some cold cornbread or

biscuits and we go down there and spread out a quilt and sing the moon up and we still like Green Grow the Rushes. And we sing Barbry Allen and Greenback Dollar and A Froggie Went a Courten and You Get a Line and I'll Get a Pole and We'll Go Down to the Crawdad Hole Babe and christian songs like Do Lord Oh Do Remember Me and Nothing But the Blood of Jesus and Teen Angel. But there is not but a little water in the creek until it rains bad and then muddy water roars down through the little creek and comes up over the sides and nearbouts scares me to death when the little kids are down there. There are some plum trees and persimons and wild grapes. We eat so many plums we get sick with the belly ache for four or five days running and the grapes are real sour and not no bigger than a minute. But we eat till there are not no more. We are hungry always. And we are miles from town with no neighbors except for a house we can see a far ways off and no store close and no money to buy nothing with if there was a store. Mama and Daddy go to town to the grove nearbouts every day and here us kids sit. We can't do nothing but eat what is here and when that is gone we do without which is most of the time. Sometimes when we don't eat all day until maybe the next day we just set real still because we feel real fainty and don't have the strenth to do nothing but sit and let our eyes go along the fence by our road until we see the highway. Just now

I looked down to the highway and I seen a pickup pass that looked like Little Fate's but it wasn't. We have not seen him for a long long time for he don't know where we live. I can't hardly think on him without donuts coming to mind. The End. Rachel.

June 16, 1959. Mama and Daddy brung home a television last night! Can you believe that? Daddy got it from a man he done some work for. It is little bitty with a bleery picture that keeps moving up and down and nearbouts gives you a sick headache. The little kids are fit to be tied but they are not the only ones. We watch the Cisco Kid and Roy Rogers. I like that Gabby don't you? Have you ever seen Gabby? He is a corker believe you me and always in a ruckus about something. And there's this one show called Queen for a Day that's mostly women who are poor and they see whose the poorest and that one wins some fine stuff like encylapedias and grosheries and maybe a stove and dishes. Mama says she wants to get on that show and I wish she could. We would be in hog heaven to win all that stuff! Have you ever seen such a thing in your life as a show like this?

I had a bad dream last night that somebody was drowning me and it was a man who put his hands on my titties too. And my titties was as big as mushmellons! I

July 7, 1959. The grass is nearbouts all brown and stiff from no rain and it's been hot and windy. I've had the ear ache real bad from all the wind. Cora come and got me on Sunday and took me to her church. Mama nearbouts didn't let me go but Cora begged her and given Mama \$5.00. Cora is going to get married she said. She taken me to her house for I had not seen her little sister Betty nor her Mama and Daddy for a long time. Betty looks like a woman she is so big. A whole lot bigger than me and we are the same age! She's got long brown hair that hangs to her waist and brown eyes the color of coco and a round moon face that is really pretty. And she wears lipstick now, just a little and has got her ears peerced. And she had on a pair of shorts and a pretty blouse and looks like one of them movie star girls on the Mickey Mouse club! Cora's mama and daddy was real nice and asked how have I been. I told them about the typing and their eyes got real big because they couldn't believe I can type so fast. Cora's daddy put his arm around me and said he will have me type some letters for him some day. I said I'll do that. He wanted to take me and Betty to swim at the lake that is by them and for a boat ride in his fishing boat but I couldn't go for I had to get home. The End. Rachel.

July 19, 1959. A man come to our house yesterday and said he is our neighbor and pointed to the house we can see from a far off. He is a young man maybe in his twenties and real tall with black hair slicked back like he pushes it back all the time with his hands. You know what I mean don't you? He had on a pair of overalls and a tee shirt and farm boots. He talked real nice. I told him, Mama and Daddy are not here so what can I do for you mister?

I've got a big garden, he said. And he told me his woman and him cannot eat all the greens and onions and radishes and stuff like that and would we like to have some. Lord yes and we'll take all you don't use, I told him. And I told him I'll come and help his woman clean house or wash clothes to pay for the stuff. And I asked if he had some taters. Yes we do, he said and some green beans too if you want them. Lord yes, I said. But he said his mother in law was there and could help his woman plenty but he'll tell her what I said. Iva was standing there and she said to me, Rachel you are not going no place and make me stay home. I didn't say nothing to her in front of the man but when he left I bawled her out good. I hollered at her and said, why don't you say you will go clean his house and do his washing then and I'll stay home! She told me to kiss her ass and I'm not her



boss! That girl is a site and I don't know what gets into her sometimes. Sometimes she is mean and sometimes she is not. It is like she is scared of something. I swear to you

July 20, 1959. We had a tornado yesterday and it tore up the sweetgum tree by its roots and nearbouts got our house! Have you ever seen a tornado? It is a sight to behold believe you me. You know it before a tornado comes out of the sky because everything is real strange and you feel it even if you don't have a lick of sense. First off it was hot and still yesterday morning and you couldn't feel one bit of breeze. If you looked out across the yard you could see the waves of heat that makes you feel real funny to look at for very long. It makes you feel like time is standing real still and you are being sucked into the waves. Everything else gets real bleery like its not there and you don't have no body to feel with and can't hear no sounds. That's how still it was. And the sky was a funny color like the blue had some yellow mixed in with it. But of a sudden one part of the sky was black like no black you ever seen with dark dark green and brown mixed in. And it moved like a big crawling thing till it covered the whole top of the sky but not the bottom where the yellow blue was. You could nearbouts draw a line across the sky with the top half dark and the bottom half

real bright. It was like a dark curtain hanging halfway down over the sky. That's the way it got yesterday. And the air went from real still and hot to cool and windy of a sudden. Iva run in the house to tell me but I was standing at the window watching. Even the little kids come running to the house and our dog come up from the creek acting funny with her tail stuck between her legs. There is something about a twister that tells you to take notice. Then we smelled it. It is a mix of rain and dirt and heat. Me and Iva seen the little finger dip down out of the sky at the same time we heard the roar. The little finger dipped down and went back up as pretty as you please. We grabbed the kids to make a run for the creek as fast as we could go because our house is on high ground and is not a good place to be. Iva taken Clayton and run ahead with Sissie and Wade and Sammy and Jacob running behind her. I hollered for her to go to that place that is kindly like a cave by them big rocks down yonder. It is close to the creek but not right on it. Iva couldn't hardly hear me for the wind was so loud. I could see her mouth say what, but I pointed with my hand and she knew where to go. I got a quilt and got Ola Mae and Spencer and started running. When I looked back I seen the tornado finger had come out and was real long and big. I seen it dip down to the ground and scoot across our

highway throwing brush and dirt and trees up in the air. It looked like pictures of a ant eaters nose I have seen only longer. We made it to the cave and sat there till it was over which was pretty fast. When we come out we seen where the tornado had been headed right for our house but changed its mind and went another way. In a little while the man from down the road who given us the garden stuff came to see if we was okay. His name is Reeve.

## Queen for a Day (1959)

### Ch. 9

"If that woman gits to be Queen," I say to Ramer, "I sure to God can." I hold my arms around my belly like I'm holdin a barrel on my lap. I'm sittin here on the faded, flowered sofa feelin this baby move in my belly while my littlest 'un, Spencer, is asleep at the other end of the sofa. The sofa arm at that end is bent over and hangs down like the broke wing of a big bird.

"And I'll be go-to-hell if I'm a-goin to sit here in this Godforsaken hole the rest of my life while other people gits to go on television and win new Philco frigerators and hi-fis and dinettes and stuff, and as soon as I have this kid, I wantchu to know I'm goin out there to Californyee and git on that show so Jack Bailey can put a crown on my head!" I have to catch my breath after I say that mouthful to Ramer, but I mean business! I don't tell him I'm a-goin to send a letter off to Jack Bailey. Ramer don't believe me, but I got a dream. In fact, I got lots of dreams.

Ida Belle Arretha Janine Sophrenie May Pleasant is my full name. Longer'n your leg, ain't it? But suits me. Go by Ida Belle. Ida Belle Halliday, since I'm common-law married. I'm thirty-two years old, borned during the Depression. Went to school off and on, got to fifth grade. Me and my little brother, Winchester, and big

sister, Laurel, raised right down yonder on the Verdigris River. Lived near Uncle Luther and Aunt June. Papa was a fisherman. So poor we didn't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of. Owned my first pair of store-bought underwear when I was fourteen years, seven months old. Traded a mess of catfish for them britches. Stole the catfish from Papa's trotline. He owed me them britches. And a whole lot more.

Ain't a big woman. Used to be about the size of one of them women in the beach and beauty part of the Sears & Roebuck Catalog. Put on a few pounds since I was a girl, though. Got a pretty good singin voice. Always wanted to go on stage. On my arms and across my nose and cheeks, they's a few freckles, but got kindly creamy skin that sunburns easy, bleachey-blue eyes, and two things I'm real proud of--my legs and my thick, naturally wavy, red hair. Papa and Uncle Luther, when I was a girl, was the first to point out about my legs, and everybody always noticed my hair. Figure I coulda done good on stage what with my legs, my hair, and my singin voice. One of my dreams. But, it's done got buried. Long time gone.

So. Right now, got nine kids and pregnant again. Expect I'll be abed about any day with this one. And like I told Ramer just this mornin, if I get pregnant again after I have this one, I'm goin to climb on top of the

house and jump right off on my belly. Can't stand it no more. Too many mouths to feed. Too many pissy, shitty diapers. Don't matter that Rachel and Ivy been washin the diapers since they was big enough to reach into a No. 2 washtub sittin on a stump. It's me. Just plain tired of walkin around big as a cow. Tired of havin babies. Tired of lookin at goddamn kids. I tell Ramer to keep that pecker of his in his britches where it belongs, but that dumb son-of-a-bitch, he don't listen to me. Like he ain't listenin to me now while I'm tryin to tell him I could be queen. I watch his face while I retie the string that holds my hair back.

Can't stand my hair hangin loose around my neck except on the days when I wash it and brush or comb it until it fairly shines in the sun like copper wire, and then I let it hang loose so it'll dry good. I sometimes remind my girls that when I was young my hair would've made them ashamed of theirs. Was past my waist then, a wonderous thing, a bold and beauticious sheaf of silky stuff that caused men to catch their breaths and women to stare at me with jealousy smeared plumb across their faces. Like to comb my fingers through my hair. It's a habit I've had since way back then. Pull it around and over my left shoulder. Comb my fingers through it now as I stare at Ramer, waitin for him to talk to me.

But I think I smell somethin and forget about my

hair, forget about Ramer, forget about the television for a minute. Lift my nose upwards and sniff. "Rachel," I calls out loud cause Rachel she's deaf in one ear, "are you a-watchin them beans?" I know I got my lips mashed tight together as I keep my nose hung up there in the air. That's another habit I got--mashin my lips together tight. Ramer called me "Old Tight Lips" once, but he knows better than to call me that to my face, because I throwed a full teakettle at him. Scalded him on the arm, and across the chest, too. Shirt stuck to the skin. Sometimes I wonder if he was talkin about my mouth or my pussy, because he tells me I'm tight with that, too. Now who would believe that by lookin around at these kids?

Rachel answers like I know she will. "Beans are done, Mama. Supper's nearly ready." Rachel ain't a bad girl, except her not hearin good gets aggravatin. Uppity sometimes, too. Acts like she's the mama to these kids till I jerk a good size knot in her tail. Just 'cause I depend on her to do the cookin and cleanin and just 'cause we leave her to take care of things around here when me and Ramer go to town ain't no sign she can take over. Nossir, I don't let nothin get out of hand. Papa always said if a kid starts to sass, you nip it in the bud. "Spare not the rod," he said, and I don't. Like I say, Rachel ain't a bad girl. Don't give none of my kids a

chance to git bad. I take Papa's advise serious.

"Well," says I, and look at Rachel standin there in the doorway. "I thought I smelled somethin' burnin. Have you peeled tators yet, or have you got your nose in a book?" Which I know she ain't, readin no book, I mean, but I ask anyway. I look at her face with the pale light makin shady little dips across her nose, her cheek, and around her eyes and I see in her a little bit of me. Only in the face. Not inside her head. No siree. I don't like to read no books. Never read one plumb through in my whole life. Don't plan on it now. I want to say, "Rachel, you think you're gonna find dreams in a goddamn book? You think you're the only one that got dreams? Look at me, Rachel. I'm your mama. I got dreams, too. I want to be queen. I want to have people clap their hands for me, say, "You're a bee-ootiful queen, Ida Belle, with your creamy skin and copper hair, and we know you had a hard life, so we want to make you queen." But I don't say none of that. I look at Ramer, "Did you hear what I said about goin on that show?" But he just sits there like a knot on a log.

Rachel, she don't answer me about havin her nose in a book. Instead, she says, "Ivy's peeling the tators while I make cornbread." Rachel is skinny and fourteen. Chest flat as the floor, not like I was at fourteen. Straight brown hair, long slender fingers, nose that bends sideways



a little, forlorn eyes, and a way about her that just plain ain't like the other kids. But then her daddy ain't the same as theirs. I don't talk about her daddy. Ain't no sense in it.

Rachel, she stands there nervous like, hands rubbin against that goddamn raggedy, too-big apron she's always a-wearin, "We're out of bakin powders," she says and then stops and takes a breath before she goes on. "Was just enough for the cornbread." Looks at me with that scared-dog look, like she thinks I'm a-goin to throw somethin at her. She don't smile because her teeth are crooked. Knows she ain't pretty. I don't tell her no different. No sense lyin. Don't want her to get no swelled-up head. Gets swelled-up enough over them school books.

I put a stop to that, though. Last book she brought home, I throwed it in the stove. Like I say, I take Papa's advice serious, and I didn't spare the rod! Rachel had to stay home from school the rest of that week. Suits me. Need her at home anyways.

They's times, when I get all wrought up like when I have to whip Rachel or Ivy or one of the other kids, I don't feel real. Somethin just comes over me and everythin around me moves slow, like the slow motion on that television, and kindly gets foggylike and loud, so

loud and so jumbled and so floaty that I can't keep straight what's happenin. I hear somebody cry out and I know the cries come from my kids, but the cries get to be screams. Then if I see blood, the blood and the screams seem to jumble together and I think the screams come from a great roarin voice that tell me to hit harder, harder. Don't stop! Don't stop! A push of somethin comes in through my skin at the soles of my feet and the tips of my fingers. It bores through like the points of little needles, rushes up to my throat, then whooshes through my head like the wings of a great bird and takes part of my mind with it. It makes me wonder sometimes if I 'm losin my mind like this, pieces at a time, on great whooshing wings.

I turn my head and look back at Ramer. "Did you hear me, Ramer? I want to get on that show." Ramer, he just stands there by the rusted King heater and hitches up his baggy jeans. He's a little man. Not much bigger than a piss-ant. Straight brown hair, swarthy-looking skin, eyes the color of purple ink, and a nose that's too big for his face. He's got some gypsy blood, but makes a claim to black Dutch, instead. I know better. He's gypsy, alright. Stands there slack jawed and droopy eyed, his bowlegs spread slightly apart for balance and pours Prince Albert from a flat, red can into a cigarette paper.

"Uh-hum," he says and runs his tongue along the

foldin edge of the paper. I wonder if the paper can cut his tongue. He raises his eyes to mine and I look back at the television.

Ramer got it when he was haulin trash for some man in Packin Town. The television, I mean. The man said it was old, and he was tired of foolin with it. It's a little bitty thing. Picture so pale and snowy we have to hang a quilt over one of the windas so we can see Jack Bailey good. And the picture keeps flippin over. It looks like people are doing backflips in slow motion. Sometime the flippin speeds up and somebody has to hit the side of the television to slow it down. The heads of people come up from the bottom of the screen while their feet are still at the top. Me and the kids can put up with it, though. We never owned a television before. We don't mind that people do backflips. I might do a backflip, too, if I was to be queen. And if I didn't have this kid in my belly.

Sissie, Clayton, Wade, Sammy, and Jacob sit on the floor in front of the television. Sissie holds Clayton. They're all sittin on a quilt, their backs stiff as pokers. Sammy coughs, and his nose runs. He wipes it with his sleeve. He stands up and I holler at him to sit down, to get out of my way. He looks at me like he's ready to bawl, but knows he'd better not, then sits down and scoots close to Sissie. Everybody sits real still and

stares at the little finger of the clappin meter as it jiggles back and forth while the audience chooses a queen. That little meter looks like the top half of a clock that has been cut across the middle. The heads of the kids foller in a slow up-and-down motion when the meter disappears over the top of the picture and comes up from the bottom. It looks like they're all noddin yes real slow.

"Looky there," I say, "them people are clappin for that woman like they never heard a story as pitiful as hers." I shake my head. "If I was to be there, I could tell them things that would make their hair curl. They sure to God would vote for me and say I deserved to be queen after all the sufferin I done in my life." All of a sudden I feel the tears squinch from behind my eyes and I pull a rag from my bosom to blow my nose. Sissie turns around to look at me and I tell her to quit gawkin. She looks away real quick and don't look at me no more.

Ramer says to me, "What's the matter with you?"

I don't answer him. He don't need to know nothin about what's the matter. And not about my letter I'm goin to write to Jack Bailey, neither. He shrugs one shoulder and hooks a metal milk crate with the toe of his shoe to pull it over next to the wood heater. They ain't even no fire in the heater, but Ramer, he sits by it. I expect him to climb on that milk crate and squat, sit there like

a goddamn banty rooster. That's the way he generly does it. But, no, when he sits down this time, he folds one leg and raises it so the foot is propped on his other knee. He strikes a match on the bottom of his shoe and then he looks at me.

"And just how do you expect that we can git all the way out there to Californyee is what I'd like to know," he says to me. "You come up with some of the godawfullest notions." He shakes his head then lights the cigarette. One of the little kids, Ola Mae, asks if she can blow out the match. Then he asks me, "You think money grows on trees?"

I just look at him. See how stupid he talks? No, I don't think money grows on trees, but I don't say it to him. I watch him hold the burnin match close to Ola Mae so she can make her small mouth a tight, round O and blow out the flame.

"Aw, shut up!" I tell him. "You ain't got no magination atall," which he ain't. I don't even look at him now. I just think about my letter and watch Jack Bailey right there on television, right before my very eyes place a diamond crown on the head of some Mexican woman. The baby kicks, and I place my hand on the spot. I don't know what I'm doin with Ramer in the first place. Could have done better than him. Trash hauler. Dumb

son-of-a-bitch. Can't read or write. Worthless as tits on a boar hog.

*If it wasn't for Papa... If only Papa... If it wasn't for him. Uncle Luther, too, if truth be known... But it cain't be. I cain't never tell nobody. Coy Thayer. Lean. Flat, hard belly. Black hair. China-grey eyes. Part Indian. Me, sixteen. Young. So young. Grass on the riverbank soft and green smellin. Sun on leaves. Wind flang sparks of sunlight across my bare titties, across his coffee-colored back, across his legs where they vined with mine. Coy, Coy. His mouth, soft, wet. Oh, God! Papa, don't. Hands on my titties, between my legs, my hair, my hair. My hair fanned out around my head, fanned out on the ground and shinin like copper. Papa! Papa! Don't! My hair, my crowning glory wet with blood.*

"Gracias, Senor." The crown starts to fall. The audience claps their hands as the Mexican woman grabs it and stands there holdin it on her shiny, black hair. Jack Bailey puts a cape around her shoulders and hooks it at the neck. I bet it's red. It's got leopard trim. The woman is thirty or so, a widder woman, on the fat side. Said she had six kids till lately. One died from pneumonyee, which I don't believe for a minute. One kid is crippled. The woman is on the show to ask for clothes for all her kids and a wheelchair for the crippled one.

She has a stupid look on her face like she don't know what's happenin to her.

All of a sudden the woman grins through tears and moves her lips. "Gracias, gracias, gracias." The audience claps harder for her. Jack Bailey tells her she is "Queen for a Day," and tells her she wins the grand prize--a trip to New York City. What is she going to do with that? I ask myself., a RCA Victor television, a case of Milk Duds and basketball equipment for the kids. And Jack Bailey says, "Here's a Kodak Dualflex IV flash outfit with ten rolls of film, four dozen flash bulbs, batteries included." The camera, he tells the woman, is to take pictures of the trip to New York City.

"Ha!" I say out loud, "that's a laugh." I picture that woman shoving the crippled kid up and down hot streets while the others trail along behind her bouncin basketballs, chewin on Milk Duds, and starin at all them dope fiends and morphodites in New York City. I wonder if the woman gets to keep her cape and diamond crown.

A skinny blonde in a sparkley dress runs forward and takes the woman's picture with the Kodak and then hands the camera to the new queen. "If it's made by Kodak, you know it's good!" says the blonde. The Mexican woman's face fills the whole television. She has tears in her eyes, then she is plumb overcome. She cries till her nose

runs and starts to do a slow-motion backflip.

"Well, I swear to God!" I say loud enough to startle Clayton awake. I glance at him. He stares at me, his eyes big and unblinkin and his legs stiff, his mouth startin to screw up. "If I'd a-been that Mexican woman," I say to Ramer and the kids, "I'd a told Jack Bailey to ram that New York City trip up his ass and to get me some new clothes and some groceries! And besides that, I'd tell him I want a new washin machine, a couple of beds, and enough chairs so we could all set down at the table at the same time!"

"Aw, Mama," says Iva Stelle. She's standin in the kitchen door with Rachel so they can see who got crowned. She's got a wood spoon in her hand, been stirrin the taters. "Don't you always say," she says to me, "'if you can't eat the devil, don't drink his broth?' That woman don't get to pick and choose the prizes. She's gotta take what they give her." Ivy Estelle is twelve and a regular smart aleck.

"Who asked you, anyway?" I say and give her a stern look. "And who's ever heard of a Mexican dyin of pneumonyee?" I say to everybody who's listenin. "All they eat is peppers and onions!" I know my voice is gettin loud, and I can kindly feel that thing, whatever it is, comin over me now, but I don't really give a good goddamn.

Ola Mae goes over to the kitchen door and stands by



Rachel, and the other kids don't look at me. Ivy looks down at the wood spoon then backs up a step or two before she turns around and follers Rachel and Ola Mae into the kitchen. It's real quiet for awhile except for the cartoon beaver on television singin, "Brusha, brusha, brusha with new Ipana toothpaste."

I push myself up from the couch and go to the winda, jerkin the quilt down with one hand while the other hand holds my belly from underneath. This kid is pretty low, I think. I say, "Let's get a little light in this place." Clayton starts to bawl. I turn and pull him up by one arm. He's peed on the sofa. "Rachel," I yell, then change my mind. "Here, Sissie," I say, "change this pissy kid! I look out the winda. Out on the porch I see a broke-back chair, two old tires, and Ola Mae's doll. A bicycle with no handlebars and no chain leans against the porch railin. The railin is startin to rot. Ramer don't fix nothin. The landlord don't fix nothin. I think to myself I wish we had a garden. I could grow me some cherry tomatoes. I look across the yard, beyond the cottonwood tree with the tire swing and down the long driveway where a saggin fence leads to the road. *Road where the grass is late-September brown. Brown from a too-hot summer. Summer on the River. River. Soft, cold water, pale green and gold-lookin leaves on the trees, the*

*drone of bees and junebugs.* I see the mailman at the end of the long driveway. He places something in the box.

We don't get much mail. Think to myself I'll get it my ownself. Walk out the door and down the porch steps slammin the screen behind me. Hear Rachel call out, "Ain't you gonna eat, Mama?" Don't answer. Walk sway back and slow down the dirt driveway, kicking a few rocks and red dirt clods on the way. Can't see my feet. Belly feels heavy and got a pulling ache in my low back. Sun's out, raising heatwaves, and a yellow jacket, like a low-flyin bird, swings down close to my face. I swat at it and think to myself they got a nest somewheres close, maybe out by the toilet or the well house, or somewhere under the house eaves. Better put Ramer on that, then think to myself what for? Time he gets around to it, yellow jackets will have moved on. Time I get to the mailbox and find the letter, ache in my back is raisin hell.

Don't know the handwritin on the letter. Return address reads Coweta, town where Papa lives. I feel a little sick. "Dear Daughter." The ache in my back pulls at me. "How are you? Fine I hope. I am not to good." *I don't feel too good, myself, Papa.* "My nabor, Viva Hadley, who is crippled up with lumbago rites this letter for me. I tell her she will not have to rite to many more letters for me becaws I am not long for this

worll." *Coy, my tangled hair grassy riverbank the sun the drone of bees...* "Then you or nun of the rest of my fambly will have to bother with me." *Footsteps a broken twig silence. Papa.* "As I have tole you before a man has a short time to be in this worll and long time to be gone. Don't you think you art to find the time to visit your pore dying papa before he goes to his mortal rest." *Coy run he's seen he's seen run what's wrong why cain't you run run run he'll kill us...*

I stand there by the mailbox, sun beatin down on my head and read the letter again. Papa, Papa, why cain't you leave me be? The ache in my throat makes it hard for me to swalla, feel real sad, the tears squinch up behind my eyes, know I'm a-goin to bust out bawlin any minute as I stand there lookin at my hand that wads the letter up and drops it on the ground.

A pickup passes, honks. I look up in time to see it hit a rabbit. Rabbit makes a little high-pitched cry and rolls like a ball between the wheels. It gets throwed plumb across the pavement and lands on its side not far from me. It lays there still, on the hot pavement, wind ruffling its soft, grey fur, its eyes wide open, starin.

I stare at the rabbit's eyes and at its mouth where warm, red blood colors its lower lip and threads onto the fur. Somethin warm and sticky, warm like pee starts to

run down my legs. The ache bunches itself up and stabs through my back, my belly, and feels like somebody is pullin my legs apart. Think to myself, as I stand there in the hot sun, holdin onto the mailbox and looking at the eyes of the rabbit, it's time.

I make it back to the house and tell Ramer. Gives me that slack-jawed look and drinks the rest of his coffee while I lean against the rickety table, the blood gone from my knuckles where I hold onto the edge of the table real tight for a hard, cuttin pain.

"Ain't no big hurry, I guess," he says, but goes to get Eva Campbell.

I've knowed Eva a long time. Knowed her when I was a girl. She helped me bring most of my kids into the world.

Right now Eva comes in bringin a jug of homemade whiskey, her old quilt with the star flower pattern because her legs gets cold sittin up in the night, and a little battered suitcase from which she takes a shotgun shell, separates the shot from the powder and makes me take the powder in a tablespoon. Makes Ramer help her pull the bed out from the wall, helps me get undressed and get in it. Throws her long, grey braid back over her shoulder, sets her skinny ass down in one of my wicker chairs, and pours her and me a good slug of the whiskey. Says, "Here, Ida Belle, take this so you can get to feelin good before you get to feelin bad."

I see the wisdom of Eva's advice and before long, I'm feelin no pain between the pains. Next thing I know, tears are pourin down my face and I'm tellin Eva about wantin to get on that show and be 'Queen for a Day.' Tell her I always wanted to be somebody important, tell her I know I coulda been on stage what with my legs, my copper-colored hair, and my singin voice. Start to sing a verse of "Sweet Betsy from Pike," but a pain cuts me off. When it passes, I say, "But you know how Papa never would let me do nothin. Never would let me go nowhere after my sister, Laurel, growed up and married. Made me stay right close to home."

Eva looks at me and says, "Yeah, and too bad your mama couldn't stand up to him."

I think of Mama and think to myself, yeah, too bad.

The pains are comin closer together and me and Eva both know it won't be long. I've had nearly ever one of my young'uns pretty fast. Eva says I have kids like fallin off a log. "That may be so," I tell her, "but I'd a helleva sight druther fall off a log."

The room and the wicker chair Eva's sittin in and Eva and even the bed start to get a little cloudy, and pretty soon I'm tellin Eva about the letter from Papa. I keep tellin her I don't want to ever see him again, somethin I ain't never really said to nobody, and I ask for another

slug of the whiskey. She asks why not and pours the whiskey. Asks what did he ever do to me that was so bad, and I tell her I can't tell her. I just bawl and say I don't want to. I cain't tell nobody.

I'm bawlin so hard now Eva tells me I better not drink no more whiskey. I say, "Okay, but give me one more," and I try to stop crying, try to sing another verse of "Sweet Betsy" but cain't remember how it goes. I start thinkin about Coy and about Papa findin us there on the riverbank. I push it out of my mind. A pain cuts through me and I push at that, a long, hard killin pain deep down inside me, in my back, in my belly, between my legs and it makes me think of the first time Papa...

*Somebody comes into the room and Eva says something to him it's a man it's Papa and he goes out. I swear to God it's Papa and I don't want him here. He sticks his head back in and I start screamin for him to get out. He goes out. Somebody hollers. I think it's him. He's over me now pullin back the bedclothes pushing at my belly hands between my legs. I hear screams and I don't know where they come from. Papa's leanin over me. He has so many hands. I push his hands away. He's got his hands down there. I look down. Blood. I see blood on his hands. Screams. I hear screams. The screams and the blood they jumble together. Coy. I know Papa has killed Coy. He hit Coy while Coy was on top of me hit him in the*

back of the head pulled him off and rolled him down the bank to the river. Splashed Coy's blood on my hair. Coy. Coy. I call him and see him try to get up but the river takes him away and Papa is holdin me down. He hits me hits me hard is on top of me. He's pushin between my legs. I fight beg him to stop he has so many hands. Somebody is calling my name. It's him. It's somebody else a woman. He's off me now. There's blood everywhere. I look down between my legs at the blood and I see the rabbit the rabbit the bloody rabbit. It's alive again. The same little high-pitched cry. The hands try to push it at me. I hit at the hands at the rabbit I claw it I fight to get it away from me to kill it it died already I saw it die. I hear someone holler from far away, "Ida Belle, Ida Belle." I think it's Papa but the voice sounds like a woman's. Blood on his hands. Then the rabbit is gone. The hands have taken it away. Papa's gone but I still hear his voice. He's talkin. He's moanin now. I lay there on the riverbank my hair fanned out on the grass the sun shines on the leaves and when the wind shakes them leaves light falls across my eyes and across my naked belly. I can't move. I know Coy is drowned. There's blood in my copper-colored hair. I close my eyes.

Know I've slept because when I waken up, I see the deep blue night through the window by my bed. I call out

to Eva. She comes, turns on a lamp, and pulls up the wicker chair, says, "Ida Belle, Ida Belle," and shakes her head before she busts out cryin. I watch her sittin there hunched over, her long braid hangin over her shouder and I think to myself as I feel my belly, it ain't over yet. Eva looks at me and starts to say somethin then busts out cryin all over again. Makes me feel plumb bad seeing Eva like this. I ain't never seen her carry on so. I feel the tears squinch up from behind my eyes, figure Eva's plumb wore out. Reach out and touch her hands where they're layin clenched together on her lap, say, "Eva, you're plumb tuckered out and so am I. Why don't you lay down and send Ramer in here."

Eva looks at me real sad like and says, "Ramer's too tore up."

"Tore up? What for?" I ask and feel myself gettin mad. "He ain't havin this kid, I am." Then I ask myself how come the pains stopped. Somethin tells me to feel between my legs and feel of my belly again and I know right then it's done. "Last thing I remember," I say to Eva, "is tryin to figure out where Sweet Betsy is from."

"Ida Belle," Eva says to me real slow because she's stopped cryin now and lookin me straight in the eyes, "Ida Belle, you had the baby...it was fine 'til..." and she stops talkin and her face scrunches up as she looks away from me. "Ida Belle, you fought the birthin...you..."



She chokes up and cain't say no more. I foller her eyes to the dresser and see a little bundle, and I know it's a little baby wrapped in Eva's star-flowered quilt. Right then I know, too, that little baby is dead. I stare at it a minute then look at Eva and she's lookin at me with a strange, sad, furrowed-forehead look with tears swimmin in her eyes. Leans forward, pats my hand, says to me, "Ida Belle, go to sleep and in the mornin, we'll figure out what to do." Thinks to myself, that Eva's a good woman, lay my head back on the pilla lettin it all sink in. Next thing I know, Eva's got up out of the wicker chair, turned out the light, and left me there to think it all out.

I look across the dark room, try to see the star-flowered quilt, and I can't see nothin. Seems like I'm not lookin across space but I'm lookin across years and in them years, them long wearisome years, they ain't nothin but sad things happenin. Next thing I know, I'm cryin real hard and feelin real sorry I said what I did about gettin on top of the house and jumpin off on my belly. Feel like I brung all this mortal misery on myself. I'm so sore and so wore out, I don't want to do nothin, but sleep. Last thing I think on before I doze off is when I write that letter to Jack Bailey, I'm goin to be sure and tell him I got eight kids, woulda had nine, but the least 'un died. Think to myself, surely to God

I'll get to be queen after all the sufferin I done.

Rachel's Notes (1959)

Ch. 10

Wed, July 29, 1959. I have some awful bad news. Mama had a little baby last night and it died. Even Eva Campbell was broke up pretty bad about it and bawled real hard. She give us her star flowered quilt to bury the baby in. It was a girl baby and Mama named her Lillian Wyoming after a movie star and a state we been through. So her name is Lillian Wyoming Lassiter. Don't you think that's a pretty name? Now Lillian Wyoming will be buried and she won't never get to see none of us kids til we go to heaven. If there is such a thing as a heaven. But right now Lillian won't ever see Sissie with her long blond hair or Wade with his easy laugh nor Iva with her fooling nor me nor none of the rest. And she won't get to sing with us nor see the sun rise like it's stretching its arms over them trees out there nor hear no whooperwill call of a evening nor look at no tiny little lady bug nor nothing like that. It is sad when you think on it that way. Sissie told me, Rachel our little baby sister didn't want to home here on account of Mama. I shushed her because Daddy and Eva was in the other room. You know Sissie is ten now and though she is no dingy, she is a strange child and acts scared or sad all the time. She told me Spencer didn't want to come neither. But I said, he is here and he's so sweet. And Sissie said Lord yes

and run to him and played with him to make him laugh. You wouldn't believe how pretty he is with black hair and big blue eyes. And he is still a baby hisself. The End.

Rachel.

Sat, Aug 1, 1959. I've had my hands full believe you me. Mama is still laid up abed and it's hard to keep the kids still so Mama don't get mad at the racket. She has not said much though. She's been mindful of Lillian Wyoming I reckon. You know she's not herself and is pretty bad off if I'm writing this while she's right here to home.

I felt sorry for Mama when she was birthing. Us kids could hear her hollering alot before the baby come and some of the hollering was about grandpap which don't make no sense at all. Eva told me to mind the kids and patted me on the arm and said, you got more sense Rachel than some grown women I know. She told me her and Daddy would take care of Mama and for me to take care of everything else. I done what she said and fed the little kids then put them down to bed. Daddy didn't do nothing but maybe go in there a time or two and take Eva some hot water. Me and Iva stayed up a while but pretty soon Iva fell asleep on the sofa. I was up when Daddy hauled out the birth bucket. There was lots of blood and you could smell it.

Now that I think on it I can still smell it though it is all cleaned up and done with.

The little kids are down at the creek and Iva and Sissie are washing dishes right now. Us kids don't know how to take it with Mama not hardly hollering at us nor nothing. It makes us all feel funny and act funny like maybe there is a tornado is on its way. Even Iva is washing the dishes without no griping or chomping at the bit to get out of the house. Daddy is gone to see Uncle Ivan about a tree job they got to do. Eva Campbell stayed till yesterday and now she's gone. She'll be back tomorrow she said. She's good to us kids and acts kindly like our grandma.

It has come to my mind that maybe Mama will die too and that makes me feel so sad I can't hardly stand it. I just want her to be good that's all and not to die though I confess me and Iva sometimes try to think of ways to kill her and Iva has come up with a new one, but I'll tell you about that later. I went in there last night because Mama was asking for a drink of water and when I give it to her her hands was shaking. I felt so sad and of a sudden I wanted to say to her, Mama please be good to us. But I couldn't say it. I nearbouts did but I couldn't. I can't tell you why I couldn't. So I went on to bed and felt a heavy something in me like a big log or rock was on me pushing at my heart. Then in the night I had to get up

and go pee and change Clayton so I peeked in there on Mama and she was sound asleep with her mouth open like she sleeps. I went in there and stood by her bed in the dark and looked down at her. Her face was so still and her long hair spread out on the pillow and she looked like a old woman with the moonlight shining in the window on her face. I thought to myself that's the way she will look when she is dead and I could feel the tears run down my face. I tasted the tears run in my mouth and of a sudden my lips was moving and saying Mama Mama without making any sound. I closed my eyes tight then but the tears wouldn't stop. I felt a hollering inside me like you can never know and in my head I was saying Mama Mama Mama over and over. Of a sudden she was awake and said, Rachel? I opened my eyes and she was looking at me there in the dark. She was up on her elbow and I could see the shape of the moon bright in her eyes. I stood there and couldn't stop the tears from coming but I didn't move. I can't tell you how bad I wanted her voice to be kind and how bad I wanted to reach out my hand to her. But my mama is not kind and I know that. So I didn't do nothing. Rachel? she said again and her voice was kindly soft like she didn't want to wake nobody up. I took heart from that and made up my mind. What's wrong Rachel? she said and waited for me to answer. I was looking around in my head

on how to ask her without making her mad at me but before I could find the words she laid back on her pillow and said, Well Rachel there will be other babies, this one is in heaven. There in the dark by her bed I cried harder, but I sucked in my breath and said it. I said, Mama will you not be mean to us no more?

She didn't say nothing for a minute but just looked and looked at me, her hair all shiny there in the moonlight. Pretty soon she said, Rachel what have I done to you all? What have I ever done to deserve you saying such a thing to me? I didn't answer. For what would you say? Pretty soon she said, go to bed. And I did but I couldn't sleep. The End. Rachel.

Wed, Aug 12, 1959. I made a molases cake today. I used molases because we didn't have no sugar. The little kids just love for me to make a cake and I can make good ones with one egg and molases and flour and baking powders and salt. You just beat up the egg white for the frosting. When ever I can get sweetening I make us a cake. Sissie and Wade taken their cake and was out by the road where some men was fixing the pavement. Pretty soon here come Sissie and Wade running in the house and said they sold their cake and the men wanted more. Iva grabbed the rest of the cake and out she went and sold it for a quarter a slice! I made two more and Iva sold it all. I

tell you that girl has got a head for figgers on her sholders don't she? We made 8 dollars on the cake so everybody wanted to buy something real good. Iva and Wade went to Reeve's and he taken them to a little store about 5 miles from here. They brung back bloney and bread and sugar to make more cake and a can of pineapple and some lickorish and jaw breakers and two great big party pack sody pops. I taken the pineapple and made us a pineapple upside down cake and everybody was fit to be tied! Reeve brung us a big back of garden plunder and we given him a big piece of the pineapple upside down cake. The End.  
Rachel.

Thur, Aug 13, 1959. Sissie fell down and busted her mouth real bad. If we was in school we would be telling the truth for a change if we had to say what happened to Sissie's mouth. We make up all kinds of stuff when Mama whips us and leaves marks on us. The teachers and the nurse is so stupid they always believe us. Iva is gone with Mrs. Brown and Roberta.

I want to tell you something that is on my mind but I don't want you to make fun of me. My nipples are sore and I don't recollect when they first got sore so I don't know what made them this way. And they are kind of puffy too. It might be they get this way when you start to get



titties but I don't know. I'd ask Iva but I'm older than she is so I'd feel like a big fool. I'd feel like a big fool to ask any body! Iva never says nothing to me about her titties being sore and I didn't see it in my health book nowhere about this. So maybe there's something wrong with me like maybe I have cancer! I am 14 going on 15 and I know that girls bleed and what a man and woman does so the woman gets pregnant. I have seen dogs do it believe you me so I know! But I have not heard nobody talk about sore nipples. The End. Rachel.

Fri, Aug 14, 1959. Reeve come today. He didn't say why. I was in the middle of cooking so he had some dinner too. He watches me alot and is real nice to me. He

Sat, Aug 15, 1959. Iva and Sissie

Tue, Aug 18, 1959. Cora come today and asked if I can go to her house before she moves away to the school in Texas where she will be a music teacher. I said, Cora you know when I come to church with you there is only Iva left here with the kids so I can't stay at your house too long. She said, o.k. but I might not see you for a long time Rachel so please ask your mother. I said o.k. I'll ask Mama if I can go on Sunday. Cora is so pretty and looks like a movie star and pretty soon she'll get married and

have babies. Maybe when I grow up I'll take the little kids and we'll go see Cora in Texas. Which is the lone star state with all the cowboys and sage brush and long horn cows. I might marry me a cowboy. Ha ha. The End. Rachel.

Thur, Aug 19, 1959. Reeve come again today. He just walked across the field which is a pretty good piece to walk and come in the yard as easy as you please. The little kids was playing in the yard. Iva and Wade and Sissie was trying to tie a rope in one of our big elm trees to make a swing. I was washing clothes in our ringer washer right out in the yard. It's too hot in the house. Pull up a chair I told Reeve, and take a load off. I laughed because they was not nothing but a saw horse and a stump. He taken the stump. How's Opal? I asked. That's his wife's name. I've not seen her but Iva has and said she looks like a fattening hog she's so big. But you know Iva. She's in Tulsa, Reeve said, and she said she won't be back.

I didn't know what to say so I just said, why not? and kept sloshing the clothes up and down in the rinch water and sticking them through the ringer. Reeve shrugged his sholders and got up and helped Iva throw the rope up to

Wade who was in the tree. Then he sat back down and said, she never did like farming, got the big city in her blood. He didn't say no more and I didn't neither but pretty soon he got up and said, see you Rachel, and he left. I kept washing the clothes and kept thinking about Reeve. I wish I was older and not so ugly with my crookedy teeth. The End. Rachel.

Mon, Aug 24, 1959. Cora came on Sunday but Mama wouldn't let me go. She said I can go next Sunday. My nipples is still sore and I got up the gumpshon to ask Iva if hers is that way and she said, Lord yes Rachel and ain't it awful what a woman goes through? I laughed and said, Iva you are not no woman! We was outside by the toilet and walking down the path on our way back to the house. Iva was in front of me. She stopped and turned around and put her hands on her hips and kindly half closed her eyes like them movies stars do and said, sister watch how this woman can walk. Then she started walking again and swayed her hind end from side to side like she was really something. But Mama come out the back door about that time and believe you me, Iva stopped swaying. Anyhow I have come to believe I might get some titties which is okay as long as they don't get big like mushmellons. School starts in two weeks and we'll ride the bus for it turns around right in front of our house.

The End. Rachel.

Fri, Sept 11, 1959. This is the first time I've had the chance to write since Cora taken me to her house for the last time in my life. I won't never go no more. Cora Cora it makes me so sad. What I'm getting ready to write here is the worst thing I can tell you. But I have to tell you from the front of it or not at all.

After church Cora taken me to her house but her Mama had to go help with a baby shower so Cora said, Rachel I have to drive my mother to do this so you can go with me or you can stay here with Betty till I get back. Betty said, please please stay Rachel, and so I did. Cora said she would be right back. Pretty soon Mr. Doon come in from outside and said, you girls get ready for we're going to the lake and he clapped his hands and grabbed Betty and danced around with her. Betty looked really happy then said, what about Mama and Cora? Oh we'll leave them a note and they'll come on out, he said, and got busy on the note right then. I told him I couldn't go for I had to get home. Oh please please, Betty said. And she looked like she would cry when she said, we might not get to see you again Rachel for a long time. Please she said again and run to get her new bathing suit to show me and brung her old one for me to wear. She helt her new one up to

her which was bright red with little bitty straps. How do I look? she asked. And here Rachel you can wear this, it will fit you good. Please please she said and was so smily so I said, okay but I got to get home before long. Oh that won't be no problem, Mr. Doon said and then said to us, you tootie frooties get ready and I will get the fishing boat and the poles. And out the door he went.

So we got to the lake and they wasn't hardly nobody there but some other men out in their boats. Mr. Doon got busy putting his little boat in the water. Me and Betty had our bathing suits on already so Betty dived into the water and went out deep but I just walked along the sides because I can't swim. Pretty soon Betty come out and put a blanket on the sand and laid down. Mr. Doon come and said, let's go for a ride girls. Betty said she believed she would get a tan on the blanket but Mr. Doon talked me into coming for a ride because I've not ever had a boat ride before. Betty said, where is a life vest for Rachel? but Mr. Doon said, oh she'll be okay. Well hurry back, Betty told him and we was off before you could say scat. At first Mr. Doon drove real slow and stayed close to the shore, but pretty soon we was in deep water. It was a little bit windy so the boat swayed from side to side with the waves. It scared me pretty bad but I didn't say so because Mr. Doon was so smily and happy that he was giving me a ride. It wasn't a big boat but it had three benches

to sit on. Mr. Doon was at the back by the motor and I was up front where I could reach both sides and hold on good. The sun was beating down hard but the wind off the water was cool. The wind blowed my hair in my face but I couldn't do nothing about it for holding on to the sides of the boat. I was too scared to move my hands. I was real still on the seat and faced Mr. Doon who acted like he was getting a big kick out of taking me for a ride. Pretty soon he went faster and then we was in the deep water. I looked down at it and it looked kindly blackish green and of a sudden I got that strange bleery feeling I get sometimes and the chills come upon me. I felt like something was pulling me into the deep of the water. I raised my head and Mr. Doon was smily at me. How do you like it? he asked. I didn't say I didn't like the boat ride because I didn't want Mr. Doon to get mad, he was so proud of giving me a ride. I looked at the shore and was so surprised to see it was a long ways away and Betty was nothing but a little speck. Mr. Doon said, Rachel are you scared? I shook my head yes and tried to be smily but I couldn't do nothing but hold on tight to the sides of the boat and clamp my teeth hard for they were knocking together like I was cold.

Move up here by me, Mr. Doon said. And he patted the seat right in front of him. He reached out his hand and I

took it and moved slow. Lord it was scary and I believed the boat might turn over. But Mr. Doon read my mind and laughed and said, we won't turn over Rachel. So he helped me move and when I sat down he patted my leg and said, don't be scared now Rachel, and he turned the motor off. Then he said, if we are real still and you look real hard you can maybe see a fish. I held on tight to the sides because the boat would tip up and then tip down and then up again, it was awful. I looked at the water but it looked dark and cold and

Sat, Sep 12, 1959. I stopped writing last time because Mama got home and

Sun, Sep 13, 1959. I don't know what made me believe I could tell you what happened for now I don't think I can. I hate to think on it myself. But I swear as God is my witness Oh God I promise you I didn't cause it for I didn't do nothing. If I done something to cause it I don't know what it was. I

I have come back to write this and stopped and started so many times but it's because I'm so filled with shame. But I will write it. I will because you're not here noways and I don't want to be mealy mouthed and act like I'll tell you something and then not do it. I hate that

when somebody does it to me. And when you read my notes here I'll be dead and gone anyways. So here goes.

Mr. Doon patted my leg again and didn't move his hand. I kept ahold of the sides of the boat but I looked down at his hand on my bare leg and in my mind come a picture of that preacher who had me and Iva in his car that time. I looked at the water and looked at the shore and then my eyes come back to his hands. I watched him put his other hand on my other leg and push my legs apart. When I tried to pull my legs together he put his knee between my legs. I looked up at him then and he was not smily no more. His face was strange and kindly dreamy like he wasn't here and his mouth was open just a little bit. I could see some gold on one of his teeth. I felt the tears well up in my eyes and come down my face and heard myself like it was somebody else talking. I said, Mr. Doon I can't swim. I felt fainty and my voice was shaky.

He didn't say nothing but put his hand by my straddle and stuck his finger inside my bathing suit. I got to get home, I said and felt his finger touching my pussy and moving. Then I hung my head and cried real quiet for I knowed if I was loud somebody would hear me and maybe come and see him doing this awful thing to me. Of a sudden he pushed his finger more and it started to hurt and I squeezed my legs harder but it didn't do no good. He



pushed more and more till I felt like his finger was making a cut inside of me. He put his other hand in the top of my bathing suit and felt of my titties and made a funny little moaning sound then said shshshsh to me to be quiet. But I couldn't be quiet and I started praying out loud and crying too. Then I lost myself and started kicking him and tried to get up and the boat was shaking from side to side. Then I reckon I did stand up because I fell out of the boat and went down down down it seemed like forever in the water. I opened my eyes in the dark green water and I knowed I was drownding. The next thing I know was somebody pulling on me and then my head was out of the water. I was coughing and choking and grabbing for something and my hands hit the side of the boat. Mr. Doon was trying to pull me up. I wouldn't go in the boat but pulled myself along the side till I got up at the front and stayed in the water holding on and coughing and gagging. Pretty soon Mr. Doon started the motor and had to drive all the way back to shore with me in the water hanging on to the side of the boat. As soon as I felt the bottom with my feet I let go and went to the shore by myself. Mr. Doon pulled his boat in by some trees a ways off from Betty. I didn't go by him no more and when I got by Betty she was asleep. I didn't tell her. I didn't tell Cora. I didn't talk no more to Mr. Doon even in the car. Betty said, you are quiet Rachel, but Mr. Doon said,

Rachel is sad because Cora is leaving. Then he said, right Rachel? and I said yes and started crying. Betty patted me all the way home.

I can't name for you all that's been in my head about this because there's too much. I cry when I think of Mr. Doon with his finger in me and how it hurt but mostly I cry because he was always so nice to me before. I don't know what I done to make him treat me this way. Mama seen me crying and said, what in hell is wrong with you? I told her I have a belly ache and she said, shut up. Then she said, have you come sick? is that what's wrong? I told her no and went out to the toilet and puked. The little kids don't know what to think with me bawling. Sissie hangs close to me like she thinks I will disappear and Clayton wants me to hold him all the time. I hate Mr. Doon so bad I wish I could stab him and cut his hands off. I wish God would cause him to drown like I nearbouts done! My heart is so sore and so heavy with this that I can't hardly get livened up about nothing. I have lost my Cora forever because I won't ever again go to her house and I won't see her in Texas and I can't tell her why for the shame of it. Oh Cora Cora I wish your daddy had not done this to me. The End. Rachel.

Fri Sep 25, 1959. We're in school now and it's a

school where all the grades are in one big school. All of us have our lunch times the same and they don't cook at this school so everybody brings their own lunch. But you know us kids don't take no lunches for you can't take beans and biscuits. But there's not none to take noways because we eat everything up at home. Me and Iva and Sissie and Wade and Sammy and Jacob all go to school now. We meet on the school ground under a big tree at the lunch time. We talk or just watch everybody else till they are done with their eats and start playing. Then our little kids play. Me and Iva and Sissie don't play. We just watch for we don't have no friends here. We are the new kids at the school and we are real poor so nobody wants to be by us. And I hate a new school because the kids always ask why do I talk funny. One girl who's daddy is a doctor said I sound like I have a cleff pallet. She is rich and thinks she is real smart. So everybody laughed when she said this. It was the first day of school. That girl's name is Fern and she is big and fat with bumps on her face but she has fancy clothes. She has a watch too and a ring that she says is her birth stone. It has dimonds on it too.

This is my last note to go in my bucket for it's chuck full. The End. Rachel.

Rachel's Notes (1960-61)

Ch. 11

Wed Oct 12, 1960. It's been a long time since I wrote because I just plain haven't had the heart. I lost some of my notes from last school year and from this past summer. Here's what happened. My bucket was chuck full so I buried it deep in the dirt floor of that old barn out there. It's dry in there and the kids don't dig around for treasure no more. So I believe my bucket is safe forever now until I am grown and can come back and get it. Then I started putting my new notes in a shoe box and kept it hid down by the creek. It's sandy and rocky down there, so there are lots of places to hide what you want to without nobody finding it nor no rain getting to it. By the creek or river has always worked before, but not this time because a flood come and washed the whole bank out where my shoe box was hid. After the flood I found the lid to the box but it was mushy from the flood. I seen some pieces of paper but you couldn't read them to save your neck.

I've taken to showing the little kids how to make their abc's better and to do their names in cursive and play ticktacktoe and stuff like that so Mama sees me writing with them all the time. I've been doing that for a long time now. At first she wanted to see everything, but now she don't. One time Ola Mae talked about me

writing and Mama didn't say nothing. I think it's because she sees me writing with the little kids all the time. She might have it in her head that I would never be stupid enough to write no more and not about her for sure. Well I've got notions about this writing like I've got about going to school. I aim to keep doing it and doing it until I'm done or I'm dead. So Mama don't know about the writing and the law makes her send us to school. Lord I'm glad for that.

Now I've got a little wood box like a little trunk with a little hinge lid and a lock and Mama don't know about it. Cora give it to me and it smells like cedar inside. I keep it in the loft and keep my writing in it where I can get to it easy. You can't go in our loft but there's a board above me and Iva's bed that I can push open and slip my box right up there. This way I can look up at night and know my box is right there behind a board. The End. Rachel.

Sat Oct 15, 1960. Oh it smells so good in the fall of the year. This is my favorite time when the leaves are colored red and yellow and gold and rust and the air smells like apples and ripe persimmons and cut wood. It makes you want to hug yourself tight and walk and walk across the field and down by the creek and not do nothing

but hum to yourself and listen to the leaves rustle where the wind plays in the trees. I don't get to myself much because the little kids is always there but it don't matter. They run and play till they are total wore out and laughing. It's like we are in another world till somebody says they are hungry. We are nearly always hungry. Ola Mae's legs are bowed funny and she is real skinny and Clayton's belly is real poochy and so is Spenser's. The baby Easter cries all the time. Maybe you don't know about her. She was borned two months ago and is so tiny like a little bird. And I have got some little titties about like a egg yoke. But I have not bled yet thank the lord. The End. Rachel.

Sat Oct. 15, 1960. Don't it seem like the time is going slow? I am fifteen now and I am in the 10th grade. Two more years and three more months and I will be old enough to take the little kids and run away. I

Sun Oct 16, 1960. Reeve was by last evening for a little while, but Mama and Daddy was here so Reeve didn't stay long. Mama said she don't like Reeve. She says he's a grown man and has not got no business around a bunch of kids. Opal hasn't come back. I like Reeve a whole lot because he is decent to us kids and talks to me like I'm a grown woman. I get a funny feeling around him sometimes

and know he has something on his mind he wants to say to me. But he never says it. I have that old bleery feeling about it but can't put my finger on what it is. The End.  
Rachel.

Thurs Oct 20, 1960. We weighed in Home Ec. today and I weigh 86 pounds! I am so proud I could bust a gut! My hair is real long like always. Me and Iva and Sissie and Ola Mae, all of us girls have long hair. The bus gets us to school before the school doors open so we always wait at the door. Pretty soon there's a bunch of people at the door. Nobody hardly talks to us, but one girl said to Iva and me one day that we have pretty hair. She said, your hair has such pretty high lights, what kind of shampoo do you use?

We don't ever have no shampoo so I was going to make up a big lie. But I didn't get the chance because Iva looked the girl straight in the eyes and said, Tide washing powders, what of it?

I like to of died, believe you me. The girl kindly stood there like somebody slapped her and then she said, oh really? And then she hollered at some of her friends and told them that we use Tide on our hair. They thought it was real grand and said they was all going to try it to see if they get such pretty high lights. When I got Iva

to herself I told her not to say things like that to people. She said, well we do use Tide Rachel. I said, yes but you don't have to tell them that.

Piss on them, she said, next time I'll tell them we use Nair and they can go try that! I confess I laughed so hard I just about died at the thought of all them girls being bald headed from putting Nair on their heads. And Iva will tell them too, mark my words. That girl does not mince no words!

Mon Oct 24, 1960. I just love my Home Ec. teacher. Her name is Mrs. Mary Laurel, but everybody calls her Miss Mary even though she is married and going to have a baby. Miss Mary is young and pretty with brown hair to her shoulder and real strait teeth that makes her grin look real pretty and not like mine. She is real good to me and has me do stuff at lunch time to help her get ready for her next class. I confess things look pretty good to me already but I clean the blackboard and straiten up chairs and wipe off stoves anyway, for we cook in Hom Ec. you know. Miss Mary brings me a sandwich or a piece of pie, but most times I can't eat it because Iva and Sissie and the little kids don't have none. When I'm helping Miss Mary, I can look out the window and see Iva and Sissie and the little kids wait for me under the tree. So I hurry and go.



Mama beat Iva last night for sassing her and it was awful. I wish Iva wouldn't get herself in such messes. She knows better but sometimes it's like there is something in her that makes her want to be wild and reckless. I tried to take up for Iva but Mama knocked me down. The little kids bawled and tried to get out of the way. When one of us gets a whipping, everybody gets scared and believes Mama will whip them too. Sometimes Mama starts on one kid and don't stop but goes on to whip more. It's like them wars you read about with crying and screaming and running outside and no place to go. But in a real war, you get to fight back. We can't fight back, and if we run from Mama she beats us harder. Wade chews his fingernails all the time and has headaches. Sissie's nose bleeds and Sammy's does too and even Spencer starts screaming and trying to get somebody to take him.

I'm studying on family in Home Ec. and no family is like ours. It disgusts me to study about the good father who is the boss of the family and goes off to work and the woman who takes care of her little children. We learn about taking care of babies too and how to keep house and cook. I don't say a word in class that I keep house and cook and take care of babies now. I hate to talk in front of people. Miss Mary said we'll start sewing after Christmas and so I look forward to that.

I've had a bad ear ache yesterday and today. The End.  
Rachel.

Tue Oct 25, 1960. Everybody stares at our trashy yard when we get on the school bus. I bet nobody thinks about us having ten kids and how you can't keep a place fancy with ten kids. I've got my hands full trying to keep something in our bellies and some clothes clean and diapers washed and the baby fed and keeping us in school. I'm ashamed when people look at us and how poor we look and how trashy our house is, but I'm used to feeling shame, so what makes any difference? Kids really stared at Sissie today when we got on the bus. She has got a purple mark on the whole side of her face. Just me and her and Wade went to school. There's always some little girl looking at Wade because he's such a pretty little boy, so nice and never says boo to nobody.

Home Ec is right before lunch. Today Miss Mary stopped me from leaving the class and said, Rachel will you stay and help me today?

I've got to go to my brother and sister, I said and I pointed outside.

Oh, it's too cold outside today, she said. She put her hands together on her belly like she does now for she is getting bigger every day. She looked at me and grinned real pretty and looked so pretty with her hair shiny and

curly. She said, I made a punkin pie and brought us some ham sandwiches. Bring your brother and sister in today.

I said, no thank you mam. I didn't want her to ask questions about Sissie's face. I didn't want to have to tell her a big lie and I couldn't think up one noways. But when we was under the tree together close to keep warm, I looked up and lo, Miss Mary come across the school ground and brung the sandwiches. She looked at Sissie a long time but didn't ask me no questions. Wade and Sissie was fit to be tied, for they love ham. The End. Rachel.

Fri Nov 4, 1960. You know how I love school don't you? but I tell you it's a job just to go. First off Mama might not let me go. Iva has come to hate school because we're always making up back work where we missed. The little kids get to go to school pretty much, but somebody is always picking on them. We don't fight back to nobody. Remember Fern? She picks on me and pushes me and pinches me and knocks my books out of my hand. She says I talk funny too. Her friends laugh when she holds her nose and mawks the way I talk. I don't never do nothing back because I'm scared of her. I wish I could fight back. I would smash Fern's fat face in and hold her head under water and drown her if I could. But I can't because I'm so scared and feel sick in my belly when I see her come by

me. Iva is the same way but she has got more gumpshon than any of us kids. I can't stand to see Iva pushed around and scared. I haven't got no words to tell you what's in my heart and head about this. When somebody has got gumpshon like Iva, it hurts you more to see them buckle under. The little kids get picked on and even a big boy on the bus hits Wade and Sammy and Jacob. Me and Iva try to keep them right by us because we have not got no heart or gumpshon to fight any big boys. We are scared to. I believe people knows we haven't got no gumpshon. Fern knows it. Mary and Barbra knowed it. Mr. Doon knowed it. Even Aunt Laurel's big kids know it. What makes us this way with no gumpshon? And how does everybody know? Iva says she aims to quit school as soon as the law will let her. I can't hold with putting blame on her for this. Sissie can't keep up with school. She is so nervous all the time and gets beat up at home and beat up at school too. And Sammy too, for his nose bleeds just like Sissie's does. It's like people likes to see blood or scared faces looking at them. I don't know why I tell you this because it only makes me cry to write it. I have to wipe the tears from off my face and keep on going to school so I can get us away. I can't write no more. The End. Rachel.

Fri Nov. 11, 1960. I seen a funeral procession today.

It was in town and the school bus was bringing everybody home. We got to Main and Marble street where the bus turns to go out of town. Here come this long string of cars with their headlights on. They was all driving slow behind a hearse. They didn't stop for no stop signs nor no people. Everybody else stopped like they always do for a funeral procession. All the people walking and on bicycles and all the traffic stopped and was real still. Only somebody's old dog kept going down the sidewalk like he had someplace to go and couldn't stop even for the dead. The funeral line moved down the street real slow until it got to the road that leads to the graveyard, and it turned and curved real slow around that corner till all the cars was out of sight. It was like time stopped fast while a dead man passed through. When he was through, everything else went back to the same as it was. I wish time would stop all around me and Iva and the little kids and let us go on through without no more crying and no more being hungry and no more troubles. And then when we're grown up, time could go on. The End. Rachel.

Sat Nov 19, 1960. Christmas is on its way and they got the decorations up in town. There's red and green sparkly stuff hanging on the store fronts and Santa Clause pictures and what looks like old timey lanterns on the

light poles. We go right through town on the school bus when we're headed home. I love Christmas but I dread it in some ways because Mama goes mooching. The good part is we get groceries from churches. Somebody from the Kiwanis might bring clothes and play pretties for the kids but they might not neither, which is another reason why I dread it. And if the kids do get some play pretties, Mama puts them up for good if she takes a notion. But one thing I can say about Mama is she likes for us to get a Christmas and she'll mooch one for us if she has to. She's like a kid about it herself and gets smily and laughy. I have this old memory in my head and it's like a picture painted there of my mama walking in deep snow to mooch a church to get us some Christmas. It's a sad memory because I felt sad when it was painted on my mind. There she is with her belly big like always. She don't have no coat on, just a sweater and holding herself tight as she picks her feet up high and puts them down again to walk in the deep snow that comes to just below her knees and touches the bottom of her skirt. There's a white church with a steeple in the distance where she is headed. Now that's the picture. I wonder what it is that makes her do this for us then be mean to us? When I think on this, it makes me not want to poison her. Which we have not done yet because we can not think of a way to do it. Every once in a while Iva says she is working on it. A

while back I put rat poison in one biscuit and was aiming to give it to Mama, but I couldn't bring myself to do it.

I didn't hear no more from Cora. I wonder if she knows what her daddy done? I don't think so. The End.  
Rachel.

Wed Nov 23, 1960. I walked in on Mama and Daddy doing it! This is not the first time but this time I seen Daddy's big thing and it just about made me puke. Here's how it all come about. It was night and everybody was asleep. But I had to go pee. I seen the light on in the kitchen and walked through there to the back door. There was Daddy sitting on a chair and Mama on his lap facing him with her skirt up. She jumped up when she seen me and Daddy's thing was sticking right up. I liked to of killed myself trying to get out of there! Have you ever heard of somebody doing it that way? Spencer will be moving out of my bed pretty soon so I can take Easter. Because there will be another baby for sure! Lord help us! The End.  
Rachel.

Sat Nov 26, 1960. We got a smidgen of snow last night but the sun has been out today. Though it's still knify cold with the wind blowing like it is. I hate winter because everything looks so dead with no leaves and no

green nor nothing bright and pretty. The whole world looks gray and bleery. When the night comes in, I feel like it will swallow me right up.

The little kids are croopy and we are here by ourselves. I made us some cornbread just now and the little kids are eating it in fresh milk that Reeve brought us. Reeve has cows you know. Iva is gone to Mrs. Brown's. We don't see Mrs. Brown and Roberta too much but they show up once in a while. When Reeve brung the milk this morning, he asked me if I can do some housecleaning for him. He said, I'll pay you \$5.00 Rachel because I want the house spiffy for my brother and his wife who are coming for Christmas.

Oh I would love to make \$5.00, I said. I'll ask Mama if I can come tomorrow. He said, Okay. Then he kindly stood there with his hands in his pockets looking down at me. I'm not real tall you know, and then he left. He has not ever hired me to do no work for him. His house must be pretty bad, but he's got his hands full farming that place by hisself. I don't know why I told him I'll ask Mama, for you know I can't. She don't like him to be around us, but she has not ever said so to him. She just tell us this and makes nasty slurs to me that I better get notions about Reeve out of my head. I don't have no notions but that he is good to us. Sometimes I think on him. Maybe there's notions in my head and I don't know



them or I'm too embarrassed to look on them real close. Maybe I can go work for the \$5.00 and not tell Mama. I wish Iva was to home.

Thursday was Thanksgiving. We didn't have school. The End. Rachel.

Mon Nov 28, 1960. Mama and Daddy haven't been home since Saturday. Iva come home from Mrs. Brown's last night and brung us some fruitcake. The little kids think it tastes bitter, but they eat it anyways.

Yesterday I went to Reeve's. I talked Sissie into minding the kids while I was gone. Reeve's house wasn't too dirty, but I swept and mopped and done up the dishes. It's the first time I ever went in his house in all the time we lived here. He was out in the barn tending to his cows most of the time. I readied things up for him and his brother and sister-in-law. I worked fast to get done before Mama come and pretty soon I was done. When he come in and got in his pocket to give me the \$5.00, I asked him can I take the money in trade Reeve? He kindly grinned and said, what do you want me to trade, Rachel? Then his face got red and he looked away like he wished he didn't say that. Of a sudden he was kindly nervous too. I said, can I get two gallons of milk from you and will you take me to the store to get some flour and taters with the

rest of the \$5.00? Oh sure, he said, and went right out to get the milk. While he was gone, I put the mop and broom away and checked to see if I missed cleaning anything. By the time he come in, I was putting on my coat. He waited for me and when we started to leave, he reached for the door handle at the same time as me. His hand went on top of mine. He left it there for a minute then moved it and looked at me. Neither one of us said nothing. I was nervous my ownself now and felt real funny like my heart was in my throat or like I might cry. I could hear the clock tick then and wondered why I didn't hear that clock before. Of a sudden Reeve said, Rachel? and then didn't finish. He stood so close to me I could feel the cold from his coat and smell the outdoors on him. I wish I could tell you what was in his head, but I can't because he didn't say. When I said, what? he said, aw nothing. Then he opened the door and taken me in his pickup to the store. He didn't talk to me no more and I didn't talk neither. When he took me home, the kids run to the door and was glad to see me. They couldn't hardly wait to see what was in the sack and see that I had got them some suckers. They hate for me to go anyplace from them but they are happy for me to bring them something. Sissie said Spencer bawled the whole time I was gone and the little kids near abouts wore her out asking when I would come home. Easter was sleeping. I wonder what

Reeve wanted to tell me. The End. Rachel.

Friday Dec 2, 1960. I've not had my mind off Reeve this whole live long week! What in the world is wrong with me? Do you reckon he wanted to say something about Mama like people do sometimes to let us kids know they know? Most times when people say something, you can tell they are embarrassed. I think that might be what Reeve wanted to do. I wish I knew and I wish it was something else, but I am afraid to say what I wish. The End.  
Rachel.

Thur Dec 8, 1960. Iva had an awful dream last night and told us kids about it the first thing when we was by ourselves. She said in the dream a big fancy car was taking me away and I was leaving her and Sissie and Wade and everybody else. She said I didn't even care that I was leaving everybody.

The little kids sat there taking this all in and asking Iva questions about the dream. The next thing you know, Iva was bawling. She said she can't take care of everybody by herself. I said, Iva where will I go? And I said, you know I want us all to be together and have always been afraid the Sunbeam Home will get us and separate us! It's just a dream and not nothing else! It

was sad to see Iva cry like this because mostly she is tough and don't cry about nothing. I said, hey girl you've got to learn to talk Mexican and I've got to learn to talk French, and I tried to tickle her. But it didn't do no good. The next thing you know the little kids was crying too. It was awful. And all this because of a dream! I told Iva to shush up for I'm not going no place. She hollered at me, you shut up Rachel, for you are not my boss! Then she run outside and now she is sulled up. This beats all I ever seen. The End. Rachel.

Mon Dec 12, 1960. Two things came in the mail. A Christmas card from Cora and a letter about grandpap. Grandpap has died of his heart! Now Mama is boohooing and carrying on like the world caved in. It floors me because she has always acted funny like she didn't want to be around grandpap. She didn't want us girls to be around him neither and told us so and always watched us when grandpap was around. Now her and Daddy are going to Coweta for the funeral. I asked Mama to see if she can bring grandma back with her to see us. She calls grandma Mommy and said, I'll see if I can bring Mommy home with us for Christmas.

Oh I'm so happy! I hope grandma comes for we love her so much. Mama does not whip us near so much when grandma is here. Grandma never does stay too long at our house

though before her and Mama are in a tiff. The End.  
Rachel.

Sat Dec 17, 1960. Mama and Daddy are back from Coweta and guess what? Grandma is here and so is Uncle Winchester and Aunt Mabeline and their steak and cereal kids! Our house is full. Us kids sleep on the floor so the grownups can have the beds. Mama is acting so nice it would floor you for sure if you could see. Daddy and Uncle Winchester come in today with a big Christmas tree, I think they stole it. You know my Uncle Winchester is always outside the law and is mostly real good at it. Sometimes he is not too good for they catch him and put him in jail. He lives high on the hog though, and so does his wife and their younguns Charleen and Louise and Mathew. They have got a fancy car and fancy clothes but never no money unless grandma is with them. Then they use her pension. They brung a present for us and Mama has got presents for them. I don't know where she got the money, for we don't get no welfare no more. Our check got cut off the last time we went to pick beans in Oregon. You would marvel to see

Thur Dec. 22, 1960. I can't hardly find a place to write! Right now I'm in the toilet. It stinks in here so

bad you can't

Fri Dec 23, 1960. Charleen and Louise and Mathew are driving us kids to hate them! I believe they will make me hate to be around other people's kid forever. I believe it because we have it so bad and they have it so good, but still they whine and bawl about everything and don't appreshiate how good they have got it. It would disgust you! They have got to have their post toasties or cheerios too. And we don't get none no siree. Mathew puts on a big act like he is a real man to Wade and Sammy and Jacob and wants to fight all the time. Charleen and Louise bawl because they don't want to sleep on the floor or they don't like to use our outside toilet or they want to go home. Iva gives all of them the evil eye. Then they run to tell Uncle Winchester or Aunt Mabeline and point at Iva and whine. Mama is forever hollering at Iva to behave. Iva told me and Sissie if she gets the chance, she will pinch all them kides heads off! Me and Sissie busted a gut. We all wish the whole steak and cereal family would leave. Charleen is Sissie's age and snurls up her nose when Sissie tries to talk to her or play with her. It beats all you ever seen. My Uncle Winchester is funny and makes us laugh but he is a big liar and cheat. He will whine to Mama and tell her he needs money to keep out of jail and will take the last dime we have got. He

whines to grandma and takes her pension. Aunt Mabeline is pretty and nice because she sure does not beat on her kids. It looks like she feels sorry for us kids sometimes too. But she is still a snobby woman who thinks her kids are better than we are. Iva says Aunt Mabeline thinks her kids's shit don't stink! And I bet if she could read this note I'm writing, she would call me and Iva little bitches and say she will slap us. Which goes to prove she is not no better than Mama who she looks down her nose at. If Aunt Mabeline don't like somebody, you have got to hate that same somebody or she gets mad. I heard her tell Uncle Winchester that Ida Belle is more than she can bear. I don't like to hear her talk about Mama like that. Me and Iva and the little kids has lived like dogs on account of Mama and we have give plenty of blood over the years to have the right to say what we want to about her. But we know we don't mean didly squat to Mama like her loving brother Winchester and his wife and younguns do. Some Christmas this is! The End. Rachel.

Mon Dec 26, 1960. Christmas is over and us kids are by ourselves again. Yesterday morning we opened presents and us girls got hair brushes and the boys got a little plastic car apiece from Uncle Winchester and Aunt Mabeline. Grandma didn't buy us no presents because she

used her pension on you know who. But she don't need to get us nothing for we love her just to come. She's a good cook too which means I don't have to do all the cooking. I confess Aunt Mabeline helps cook too.

Mama bought all of them presents and us too because she said she mooched a church that given her some money. Mama got us girls a coat! It surprised us near about to death. She can do that sometimes, be so mean all the time then out of the blue do something like the coats or get some material and make us something. It beats all you ever seen! But it don't happen much believe you me.

Oh yes, Mama wanted to have a little play party for Christmas. Can you beat that? Me and Iva and the little kids was total astonished. She put some dried corn in a little jar and said for everybody to guess how many grains of corn in the jar, and the winner will get a box of candy. Everybody guessed but the babies. Aunt Mabeline wrote the numbers down on a piece of paper. I guessed 532 which was the exact number on the button! It made Aunt Mabeline sulled up. She said I cheated some way, but Iva and the little kids said, that is the way Rachel is sometimes. Even Mama said, that's right. Grandma said so too and said when I was little bitty I could do it better than now. She said it used to make her feel strange. But Aunt Mabeline was still sulled up when they left here to go home. I didn't open the box of candy till they was



gone! Then me and Iva and the little kids eat up the whole box of chocolate candy. I don't believe we ever had a box of candy like this in our house before.

I forgot to say the Nazarine Church brung us a bunch of groceries on Christmas Eve. We used some for Christmas day but Mama put the rest up for good. She put them in a closet and made Daddy put a padlock on it so us kids can't get anything out to eat. She told Daddy, I'll learn these god damn gluttons not to eat up everything!

Iva didn't say nothing but she given Mama the evil eye behind her back while Daddy was fixing the lock on. Soon as Mama and Daddy was gone though, Iva hit the roof. She said, I'd like to cold cock Mama right between the eyes with a rock! Then she went in there to that closet and tried to pick the lock with a bobby pin. When that didn't work, she said, I'll show the big shot Ida Belle a thing or two! Now she's trying to take the hinges off the closet door. And you know what's going to happen to Iva and probably to all of us if she gets the closet door open and Mama finds out about it. It don't do no good to tell Iva for I've tried. Now I'm just letting her wear herself down. That girl is a trial for sure. The End.  
Rachel.

Wed Jan 18, 1961. Fern is still pushing me around at

school, but Miss Mary seen her do it and talked to her. Now when Fern sees me, she calls me Miss Mary's little lamb. People hear her and laugh. I wish I could beat her up. I will be 16 pretty soon. Just 2 more years and I will be 18! The End. Rachel.

Thur Jan 26, 1961. Mama beat me so bad yesterday she near abouts broke my arm. My eye is real black and I have got a knot on my head as big as an egg! Also one of my titties and my left ribs are sore and purple. I can't hardly move my left arm and I'm so sore all over I have to move slow, but I went to school today anyway. It was all over Mama whipping Iva and Sammy and Jacob. But Jacob was the final straw for me. This is what happened.

Mama whipped Iva for sassing and Iva wasn't really sassing noways. That's the truth. But Mama has had a feather up her ass from something ever since grandpap died. She just covered it up good while grandma was here at Christmas. Then she whipped Sammy for something I don't even know or remember, but he's so little and skinny and was screaming and bleeding from the nose something awful. While I'm writing this, I can picture his face all scrunched up and his eyes real big and his mouth open in a scream and blood was smeared across his face and running in his mouth. And all the time he was holding up his arms and trying to crouch down and keep Mama from hitting him.

Of a sudden Mama decided Jacob needed to get whipped too. She always says stuff like, and YOU! god damn YOU, YOU been looking for a good beating and now I'm going to give you one!! And she goes after somebody and you don't know who will be next. I think maybe she went total crazy when Sammy's nose was bleeding. I was trying to keep the other little kids out of the way, but our house is so little you know. Pretty soon I taken Easter in my arms and went outside for I couldn't stand to watch what was going on. I hugged Easter to me and stood out in the cold bawling with my face in her hair, and she was squirming and crying. I hugged her too tight I guess. Of a sudden Jacob came running out the door and run up to me holding to me and begging me to help him. He screamed at me, Rachel don't let her whip me don't let her whip me!

Oh it was awful. The door jerked open and here come Mama and grabbed Jacob, but he held on to my legs screaming Rachel Rachel Rachel. She got him and dragged him in the house and I followed crying my eyes out for I couldn't help him. Daddy sat there and didn't lift a finger. I wanted to kill him, murder him right now. Of a sudden I handed Easter to Sissie or Iva, I don't know who, and I run between Mama and Jacob. She was so stunned her eyes opened big as a dinner plate. I said, you're not doing it no more and I pushed her back. I don't remember

much except I heard her call me school girl and then she hit me in the face with her fist and knocked me down. Then she grabbed something and hit me on the arm and head. That's all I remember. Iva said later that Daddy even laughed when Mama knocked me down and that Mama hit me with a metal bar which is what knocked me out. You should see my eye. It's redish black and swelled shut!

When the school bus come this morning I was the only one of us kids who went to school. And Mama was up when I went but didn't say word one. I got on the bus and walked all the way to the back and not one person, not even the bus driver said one single solitary word. They watched me till I set myself down and looked to the front of the bus. Then the bus driver closed the door and pulled onto the highway. Nobody talked all the way to school. It was the quietest that bus has ever been. Can you beat that?

Every class I went into people stared, but I stared right back with my good eye and they looked away. Something has come over me mark my words. I don't feel real. When I got to Miss Mary's class, she just about fainted. She told everybody else they could leave and have early lunch. She took hold of my right hand for she soon found out I couldn't lift my left arm. She sat down at a table across from me and held onto my hand and cried. She is so young and kind you know and has not had no hard life. She shook with her tears and looked and looked at

me and didn't say nothing for a long time. I felt sorry for her and tried to get up and get her a kleenex off her desk but she wouldnt let me. Pretty soon she let go of my hand and pushed herself up from the chair for you know she is getting to be pretty big now. She washed her face first and then she got a wet rag and stood by my chair a holding the rag on my eye. She pulled my head against her belly and held me that way for a long time. I didn't know what to do but let her do this and maybe she would stop crying. I could tell she felt the knot on my head for she pushed around real easy on it and then cried harder. But I didn't cry. I felt sorry for Miss Mary, but I didn't cry.

Pretty soon she wore down and set herself in the chair next to me. She said, who did this to you Rachel? I didn't answer her because we have not ever told nobody nor talked to people about Mama before. I'm so used to making up lies and trying to make sure we wear our clothes so they hide the marks. You don't know how wore out I am from this. I hate to lie, I just hate it! It makes me feel like that's why God don't help us. But I'd like to know how he'd take care of this mess if he was in my place and wasn't no God his ownself. I'll finish this later for right now I've got to get in there and help Iva cook supper. It's too much for her by herself. She's being

real good and not giving me a fig of trouble over the cooking and stuff. Mama and Daddy was gone when I got home from school. I wish they would never come back!!  
The End. Rachel.

Sat Jan 28, 1961. I had to read my last note to see where I left off telling you about Miss Mary. Pretty soon I did tell her but it was so hard and before I told her, I made her promise not to tell nobody else. She didn't like that idea but pretty soon said o.k. When I told her Mama done it, she made a little sound and clapped her hands on her mouth. She looked at me like she was slapped. She said she thought it was my daddy. I near abouts laughed at that and told her Daddy has not got no gumpshon at all and told her Mama would beat on him if she takes a notion. I told her Daddy don't never hit us but he don't help us neither which makes him near abouts as bad as Mama in my books. Miss Mary said that Mama must be a great big woman and I said, no she is not, and I told her Mama is about the size of Mrs. Walsh who is my English teacher. Miss Mary figgered that would make Mama about 140 or 150 pounds which is not little but not a elephant neither. She made me kindly laugh when she said this and I put my hand on my mouth like I always do when I laugh. I don't want nobody to see my crookedy teeth you know.

Then Miss Mary asked me what caused Mama to do this

and when I went to tell her I could hardly tell her without getting the picture in my head again. That is when I cried. I cried and cried for my brothers and sisters because I can't help them. I told Miss Mary what happened and was so ashamed to have to tell her I tried to fight my own mama. Pretty soon Miss Mary asked me, Rachel do you know somebody in the city who can help you?

I thought of Mrs. Brown and Roberta and told her about them. I told her I don't know if they will want to go against Mama though. I said, they have knowed us for a long time and know what Mama does to us.

Miss Mary said, give me the phone number and I'll call them so we can get you away from there. She said, you can't stay there one more night, and I know a judge who is in the children court who will help you leave if we get Mrs. Brown to take you to him.

Then I was scared bad. I said, no mam, I can't tell nobody else and I can't leave the little kids for there's no telling what will happen to them when Mama gets mad at me for leaving. No mam, no mam. I can't do it, you don't know what she will do!

Miss Mary grabbed my hand again and her forehead was wrinkled. She said, we have got to do something Rachel! You have got to tell people who can help you. I kindly laughed and said, Miss Mary I have lived like this all my

life and I hate it and want to get us out of it. But I can't leave of a sudden. I've got to go home after school like always. I'll talk to your judge to see if he'll help all of us, but it has to be at school time or Mama will know.

Just like that I decided! I don't know what come over me nor how I got so much gumpshon of a sudden. So now we'll see what happens. Oh I've got so much hope that the judge will take us right away from Mama. Or maybe he'll make Mama and Daddy leave and we can take care of ourselves if we can get a welfare check until I get a job. I've not ever heard of no kinds by theirselves on welfare, but I know if the judge will help us do this we will be fine and dandy. I didn't tell this to Miss Mary though. Miss Mary said by Monday we will know what to do next. Before I left her, she went to the office and come back with a camra and taken a picture of my face. She said it's in case we need it later.

It's real late and all the kids are in bed but me. I have not told Iva what Miss Mary said. I'll wait for the talk with the judge. Iva will be suprised when I tell her we don't have to poison Mama. She will be glad I think because we have both wore ourselves out trying to figger a way. Mama and Daddy left early this morning. They might be back any time now, but I'm at the table where I can look out the window and to see if the headlights turn into



our road. The End. Rachel.

Fri Feb 10, 1961. I have not wrote in a while because Mama and Daddy has stuck close to home. They act funny like they are on edge. If they knowed I told on them, then I wouldn't be here writing this right now. I might be six feet under! Mrs. Brown and Roberta come to the school and got me to go see the judge. His name was Judge Zane Flowers. Don't you think that's a funny name? It was so hard for me to tell him about Mama. You can't know how hard. Judge Flowers and Mrs. Brown had to sit there in his big office and wait for me to stop crying before I could tell stuff. I asked the judge, can't you just take us away without me telling on Mama? He said no. He was not smily neither. I said, can't you make them stay away from us forever and can't you tell the welfare to help us kids with groceries and rent? He looked at Mrs. Brown then looked at me real hard and said no. He was a bald headed man real tall and old who sat at his desk with his hands holding to each other. He wore glasses that just come up to half his eyes. It taken me a long time to tell him about Mama because I talked and then bawled and then talked some more and then bawled again. When I got finished, he said he can't help us atall. I said, why can't you? He said, because no grownups has seen none of

this, not even Mrs. Brown. I told him lots of grownups have seen, but when he asked me who, the ones I could name are ones who won't tell. Like Uncle Ivan and Aunt Clive and grandma and Uncle Winchester and people like that. Even Aunt Pearl is too old and afraid of Mama. I recollected that Mama was going to use a ax on Aunt Pearl one time but Daddy stopped it. No, I said in my head, Aunt Pearl won't tell. And then I knowed we was doomed. If the judge won't help us, then nobody can help us. And I didn't like him one single solitary bit for not asking me up front about the grownups. It would have saved me a lot of trouble telling him the rest. I was sorry, so sorry you don't know for telling him anything. I stopped talking right then and wouldn't talk no more. I have never been so downhearted in my whole life. All the telling on Mama didn't do one single solitary bit of good. There is no hope but to poison Mama and I have made up my mind that is what we will do.

When I told Miss Mary about the judge and said there is no hope, Miss Mary said there is always hope. I didn't tell her I have just about give up on hope! Now I'm scared Mama will find out about the judge. Even Mrs. Brown is scared Mama will find out and jump on her. The End. Rachel.

Wed Feb 15, 1961. Today when I went to school Miss

Mary seen me right off and asked me to come to her room a minute. When I did, she said she has not told nobody about Mama because she promised me, but she would like me to talk to her minister. I told her it will not do no good and I am scared Mama will find out. She said the Minister will not tell. I believe her, so I said I will tell him. But I told her if he don't have no answer I won't tell nobody else I don't care who they are.

He come to the school at noon. When I was done telling him everything, he asked questions about me taking care of the kids and about Mama and Daddy and Mrs. Brown. He said if him and Miss Mary and Mrs. Brown can trick Mama into letting me go, then all of us can get away from her. How? I asked him and couldn't see how anyone could trick my mama to do anything.

The preacher who's a great big man and who makes marks on a piece of paper when he talks said, you fought your mother back and that may be the best thing you have done because it might be the key to open the door for you and your brothers and sisters. He said, if your mother thinks you will fight her back, she might want to get rid of you. She don't want to lose her power and might think you are a threat to her. He talked on and on about how Mrs. Brown can tell Mama she should send me away. He asked me if Iva would take care of the little kids by herself. I told him

I don't know. Iva has a mind of her own for sure and there's no telling what she will do when I leave. Then he pointed out that if Mama sends me away, she might have to stay home and take care of the kids herself. He said she will get tired of that and maybe she won't want the kids no more. He talked some more but I could only hear part of it now. My mind was on the little kids and Iva and what would they do? When would I see them again? and how fast could they all be got away from Mama? and oh my head was awirl with the worry of it all. I thought Iva will hate me if I leave her behind for very long. I recollected how Mama acted when the social worker tried to take us and I don't believe she will let any of us go easy.

Pretty soon I told Miss Mary and her minister I will have to think on it. I told them the little kids will be scared to death and so will Iva if I don't come home every day from school like always. The minister told me I can't tell Iva or Sissie or nobody because somebody might tell and mess up the plan. I

Thur Feb 16, 1961. Today I told Miss Mar

## Eyes Of Iva (1962)

### Ch. 12

My first thought when Rachel left, oh God, oh God, oh God, Iva you got to do somethin! Next thought, shit girl, you can't do nothin nohow. Rachel's gone. You can't bring her back. Looks like she don't want to come back nohow and what's more, she don't care about the ones of us she left high and dry. Left me behind to take her place, and me just a ratty-assed, fourteen-year-old kid my ownself.

*Oh Rachel Rachel you lying bitch! You with your eyes following me I'd like to spit in your eyes and rub away your mouth that poured out lies lies lies all them times you said we'd stay together was nothing but lies.*

Coulda told you Rachel would leave. Was in that dream I had before she up and went. So didn't surprise me none she went. Surprised me though, she didn't say nothing beforehand. Wonder what come over her to do a thing like that? Not tell us, I mean. Not tell me. Not tell the little kids. Just left us sittin there waitin for her to get off the school bus that day. The day she never come home.

*Rachel you said we'd always be together we'd sing the moon up Green Grow the Rushes O-O-O oh Rachel you've gone and done us worse than Mama done us.*

There me and the little kids sat a waitin for her, day

after day. The little kids cried and carried on so, and I cried my ownself till I couldn't cry no more. Bein sad and forlorn alla time got on my nerves and made me mad at everybody.

Mama told us she signed the papers her ownself for Rachel to go to that home, said Rachel was gettin unruly.

Unruly! I wanted to tell Mama to her face that she was the one unruly. Wanted to cuss her out good and loud. I give her the evil eye when she wasn't lookin. Had a sudden remembrance of Rachel fightin Mama back. Felt good to think on it.

*Trouble with you Rachel you wasn't unruly enough to suit me. You ain't no sister of mine. Huh-uh no huh-uh I ain't laying claim of kin to no do-gooder fool who runs off and leaves her own.*

"Where is this home?" we asked. "Is it the Sunbeam Home? When is Rachel coming back?"

"Get your asses in yonder and shut up!" Mama said and slapped me. "The rest of you are gonna end up in the same place if you don't shut up!"

Nobody said nothin, but we was all thinkin the same thing. We was ready to go. All of us. Right down to the baby if she could talk.

So there we was. Me and Sissie and Wade and the rest. Waitin. Forlorn. Sad like somebody died. Alla time

cryin. Hungry like we always was, but that ain't nothin new. And by ourselves. That ain't nothin new neither. Wonderin. Why'd Rachel let them take her away without takin us with her?

For a while, looked like the rest of us might get to go, too. Mrs. Brown hinted to me that pretty soon we'd all be with Rachel.

Mama put the skids to that though. Musta done it that day when Mrs. Brown and Roberta come to the house right after Rachel left. I watched out the window while they talked in Mrs. Brown's car. Pretty soon I could see Mama wavin her arms and knowed she was givin Mrs. Brown a good cussin over somethin. Next thing I know, Mama and Daddy is out of the car and Mrs. Brown and Roberta are drivin off. It was to be a long time before I seen them again. Mama come in the house, slammin the door behind her.

"By god!" she said, "it's a cryin shame you can't do what you want with your own kids without somebody else buttin in. Well, I'll show all them sons-a-bitches," she said, "I've got a trick or two up my sleeve.

Next day her and Daddy took off. Said they was goin to get Rachel. Me and the other kids was glad of that, but I had this sunk feeling about everything going right down the drain. Didn't look like none of us was goin to get away from Mama. Started countin the years in my head

on when I could leave. Started sortin out the places I could go. Come up with a big fat nothin. Seen myself a old woman trying to run down the road to get away from Mama. Seen Mama comin with a big stick. I shudder to think on it now.

But Mama and Daddy come back empty handed. Said the home people couldn't find hide nor hair of Rachel. Mama told how she throwed a fit and the man there finally said Rachel didn't want to come and said Mama would have to go to court to make her come. All Mama could say when her and Daddy got home was, "What have I done to make one of my kids not wanta come home?"

Ain't that a laugh?

*There you go again Rachel walkin across my mind and laughin like you done with your hand over your mouth to hide your crooked teeth you better hide in a deep black hole where can't nobody find you not even your ownself.*

Coulda told Mama what she's done! Coulda throwed it up in her face like so much horse hocky! I wanted to say, "Where you at, woman? Where's your head anyway?"

I confess I felt good about Rachel not doin what Mama wanted. Still, when I got to thinkin on it, didn't seem right atall that Rachel didn't wanta see none of us kids, and right then I started gettin it into my head that I hated her. Wanted to cuss her out good and loud for



leavin us. It was all a trick. All them years tellin the rest of us we was goin to get away from Mama together. And now here she was gone. Zip. Abba cadabra like a genie. No goodbye, kiss my ass, howdy do, nothin. Gone.

So here it is eleven months, three weeks, and four days later, and I'm sittin here in a little room with two beds, two dressers, and a bookshelf. Sitting before my own dresser right now combing my hair. Lean over close to the mirror, look at my eyes. Like to look real deep, pretend I'm talkin to Rachel.

*Rachel I bet you think you're hot shit but I got news for you and you ain't nothing!*

I'm waitin for the bell to ring for the evening meal. I'll eat in a big fine cafeteria right off what they call the rec room because it's where we have our recreation.

This place is called the Juanita Cusper Home for Juvenile Delinquents. That's me. A juvenile delinquent. The judge sent me here because I told him to his face that I'd druther be in a place for juvenile delinquents than go home. I like it here a lot. Suits me fine and dandy. Everybody else complains. Not me. They oughta go live with Mama and then come here. This is a breeze is what I say.

I been here two months, and two days. I get three hot meals a day, something I'm glad to get and wish Sissie and

Wade and the others had. Feel bad thinkin on them and knowin they're most likely hungry. But I got to get that off my mind. Don't want to get all teary eyed, mess up my mascara.

Get a weekly allowance of \$2.50, too, and plenty of socializin if I play my cards right, a pass to town once a week to see the picture show, and they learn us a trade in here. I'm learnin how to fix hair, gonna get my beauty operator license time I'm sixteen.

Nosiree, this ain't a bad life compared to what I come from. Get to eat when I'm hungry, wear lipstick if I want, fix my hair in a twist, put Final Net on it. Nobody beats on me, and I can cuss up a blue streak if I'm amind to. I got to mind my Ps and Qs though, go to school, keep myself and my room clean and do the work they tell me to do, not get no writeups for sassin or fightin or stealin.

There's some fightin goes on here, but mostly I keep out of it. And a lot of kids here knows how to steal good, but they mostly steal from the stores in town. My roommate, Eudella, says her motto is kindly like Robin Hood's, rob from the rich and give to the poor. Guess she figures she's the poor. Ha ha. When the kids get their passes to town, they come back with some pretty good stuff, too.

Eudella come in last Saturday with some pancake

makeup, a pair of black nylon hose, and four hair bows--two pink ones, a white one, and blue one. She got a little picture of Jesus, too. The gold frame has got pink and purple rhinestones all around the edges. Eudella says she come outa Ben Franklin's with that little picture stuck down in her underwear. How she done it without gouging herself beats me. She give me one of the pink hair bows and said I can wear the hose next time we go to the picture show. Said she'll give the Jesus picture to her grandma.

Wouldn't mind havin one of them little Jesus pictures my ownself. I could sit here and look at him, give him the evil eye and say, "Why'd you let Mama have all us kids?" But then I would probably get on a bawlin streak, which I do anyways thinkin back on the olden times, thinkin how this come to be.

After Rachel left, Mama and Daddy was bent on findin us a different place to live. Wouldn't let me go with Mrs. Brown no more. Moved us closer to the Grove, closer to town. Seven miles exactly from our front door to where you turn left at the bridge and you're in the Grove. Guess Mama and Daddy was lookin to save money on gas, what with their strollin back and forth all the time. They coulda cut down on the strollin is what I got to say about that.

Didn't do us kids one bit of good to get moved.  
Wasn't no Reeve livin close to give us garden plunder.  
Wasn't no Rachel either.

*Why'd you leave it all on me Rachel? Why?*

The big old house they moved us to, why it looked like somethin out of one of them Frankenstein movies. It was hot in the summer, and when winter come, we like to froze. We had to shut off the upstairs to keep ourselves halfways warm on the bottom floor. There was cracks in the walls, the stairs was rickety, the inside pump was broke which meant we had to carry our water from outside, some of the windas was cracked or broke out altogether, and the outside toilet was turned over. We had to right it before we could use it. The house roof leaked, too. We lived in that house eight months.

*You woulda hated that leaky roof.*

Then Lordamercy, early one cold mornin in November here come Aunt Mabeline like a bat outa hell, churnin up the dirt in our driveway with a new two-toned Buick. She got out of the car, swingin that gimpy arm of hern, and come in the door, stringin them kids behind her.

"Ida Belle," she said all outa breath, "I got to get your brother out of jail, and I ain't got but thirteen dollars to my name."

Mama looked at Daddy like somethin important was gonna

come outa his mouth, but he just hunkered his puny self over the heatin stove and didn't say nothin. Poured hisself a cup of coffee from the pot he kept on top of the stove.

Mama reached in her brassier and pulled out what was left of the \$310 we was now gettin from the welfare every month to feed and cloth and house two grownups and nine kids. She counted out the bills.

"Seventy six dollars is all I got," she sucked in her breath, "and it's a long ways to the first of the month," she said to Aunt Mabeline. She sat down on the sofa like the air was gone plumb out of her. "Have a chair," she looked at me standin there by the stove. "Iva, get Mabeline a chair." "We'll think this out." She looked at Daddy. "Give me some of that coffee."

He give her some coffee and him and her and Aunt Mabeline looked at the stove and looked at one another, thinkin it out.

Us kids didn't say nothin. We'd been waitin for Mama and Daddy to go get some groceries. Wasn't a bite to eat in the house. Not a bite. Why Mama and Daddy always waited til we was down to zilch on the groceries beats me. Guess Mama liked to keep them dollars in her brassier as long as she could. But her and Daddy was just gettin ready to go to the store when Aunt Mabeline come.

"We got to get some wood," Daddy said and run his

fingers through his hair. "Ain't much left."

Mama took a drink of the coffee and set it on the floor at her feet. She screwed up her face and looked at Daddy. "Goddamn! Do you have to make the coffee so strong it stands up and walks?"

He didn't answer her. She talked to him like that alla time, like maybe he was a dog.

Aunt Mabeline didn't say nothin.

Mama sat there with her elbows on her knees, pickin at her fingernails. "Reckon we can borry the money?" She looked at Daddy, then straightened up and pulled her long hair around to one side of her neck. "We got credit with Lige at the grocery store. Reckon he'll loan us money on the rest of the credit we got comin this month?" She stared at Daddy, wrapping her hair around and around her finger, her mouth open.

There goes our groceries, I thought, and looked around at the other kids. Wade was standin by Daddy. Sissie was sittin on the end of the sofa holdin Easter. The rest of the kids was scattered around the stove, two of them sittin on the floor diggin in an empty peanut butter jar. Charleen and Louise stood there against their mama like she was a leanin post while Mathew squeezed hisself between Sammy and Jacob by the stove, his hands in his pockets. The belt on his pants was cinched so tight, it

looked like it was about to cut him in two. I wished it would. The pants was pretty new and so was the dresses Charleen and Louise had on.

"What's he in for?" Mama looked at Aunt Mabeline.

Aunt Mabeline brushed somethin off her skirt, then looked at Mama without sayin anything for a while. Finally, she told it, named it right slap dap out in the open like it was somethin just as natural as goin to the toilet. "Hot checks. Kids had to have some clothes, and we needed some money to make a payment on the car."

Nobody said nothin for a minute.

"Well," Mama stood up and cleared her throat. "We sure as hell can't leave Winchester in jail now, can we?" She went to put her coat on.

Thought to myself, nosiree bub, we sure can't do that. Better to let us kids starve and freeze to death than let Uncle Winchester spend one more night down there in that warm jail where he gets fed and watered regular. I went over and sat down by Sissie where I could stare holes in the steak and cereal kids.

Directly, I looked at Daddy. "Y'all ain't gonna go off and leave us without nothin to eat and no wood, are you?"

He didn't say nothin and didn't look at me, just hitched up his pants and looked at Mama who had her coat on now and was headed for the door. "What we gonna do

bout some groceries?"

"Aw, these goddamn kids ain't gonna starve!" Mama said and her voice come up loud like when she gets mad. Easter started cryin and Sissie bounced her up and down to shush her.

As Mama was goin out the door, she hollered back over her shoulder, "Just stay your asses right here and we'll be back when we git back." She slammed the door.

Aunt Mabeline and her kids and Mama and Daddy left in the Buick.

I looked at he little kids and seen all them big eyes starin at me. Knowed that look a searchin in my face and diggin around my eyes to see if I'm Rachel, see if I could take over where she left off. But I ain't no fool and I wasn't fallin for it.

*Liar Rachel talkin about us learnin to talk Mexican or French so we could go to one of them foreign lands! Fool and liar!*

"What are y'all lookin at?" I hollered.

Nobody said nothin. Pretty soon Wade went outside and come back in with some pieces of a tire he'd cut up. That's what we burned to keep from freezing. Be evening, there was still no sign of Mama and Daddy and it was startin to snow pretty heavy.

If I had it to do over again, I think I would get to a



phone and call Mrs. Brown. Would have her and Roberta take us all to the Sunbeam Home right now or take us to where Rachel was. Get a little hitch in my belly this minute thinkin how Rachel was always so scared of the Sunbeam Home. Wonder what she's thinkin now that she's in a place like that? Serves her right. Wonder what she's thinking now that we're separated like she never wanted us to be? Most times I have it in my head she don't care and most time I hate her for it.

I got over my mad spell and me and Sissie tried to rustle us up somethin to eat. Thinkin back, it's all so hazy and makes me feel bad to dwell on it.

Still, it all keeps walking across my mind just like Rachel keeps walking across my mind, messin up my thinkin, makin it so I can't keep my mind on getting my beauty license. Yeah, some days the teacher is up there talking up a blue streak and then she up and asks me a question. My mind is on where I been and I can't tell her where I am, much less what kind of a wavin lotion you use on fine hair, or how long to leave it in without causing a frizz.

We fell asleep waitin for Mama and Daddy to come home with the groceries and the wood. I don't know when they got there, it musta been way into the night though, because when they got home, it was pitch dark. I woke up

and watched Daddy dump a little sack of baloney and bread on the table.

I sat up on the couch and rubbed at my eyes. "What took you'uns so long?" I asked.

"Shut up!" Mama said and stood over me like she wanted to slap me hard across the face. Oh I wished I could kill her.! Flat out, slap dab kill her!

"It'll be cold day in hell before I start answering for my whereabouts to a snot-nosed kid." Mama walked over by the stove and pulled a chair up next to Uncle Winchester.

I could hear them all talkin as I cried myself back to sleep. I got me one of them bloney sandwiches first, though. Guess Charleen, Louise, and Mathew slept in that fine Buick of theirs. Bet they didn't eat bloney and bread.

In the mornin, Mama and them got ready to leave us again. When I asked where they was goin, Mama said, "Now where in the hell do you think we're goin? We're gonna help Winchester find a house to rent," she cocked her head to one side and looked at me like I was the crazy one. "And we're gonna go get them some groceries so they can feed them babies!"

Aunt Mabeline give me a slant look and went to pushing her kids out the door like she was in a hurry to get

outside. Uncle Winchester was already out to his car.

"What about us?" I asked Mama and started bawling.

"We brung you'uns some bloney and bread. That'll do till we get back. What the hell else do you'uns want?"

"Nothin," I said and waited till they was gone before I started pitchin my fit, cussin her and Daddy, callin them every name in the book. Sissie sat there holdin Easter, lookin at me like she was scared I would fly into her any minute.

"Well I'm sick of this!" I said and threw myself onto the couch and bawled harder.

They didn't come home all day long, and we burned every last stick of wood we could find on the place. It was so cold, our drinkin water froze in the bucket. Wade cut up all the old tires he could find. When the last piece burned up, I told Wade, "Bring the ax in."

"What for?" he asked and was plumb pop-eyed.

"I'll show Ida Belle a thing or two," I said. We're gonna burn up this junk furniture!"

Sissie started beggin me not to and I told her to sit down and shut her mouth. "This ain't no Rachel you're messin with," I said, "so don't start pissin and moanin with me!"

She started bawlin. "Iva, you're gonna cause Mama to beat all of us, and you know it," she said.

*There you go Rachel walkin across my mind again.*

"Shut up!" I hollered. Do you wanta freeze or will you settle for stayin alive and gettin a ass beatin from Mama?" I took the ax from Wade and laid into one of the chairs. Then I stopped and looked at Sissie.

"We've had plenty of ass beatins and we know what that's like. But we ain't died yet, and I for one, don't want to freeze to death. Do you?" I asked her.

She didn't say nothin, just sat there bawlin with Easter on her lap, her face in Easter's hair.

Wade helped me chop up the table, the three chairs, the kitchen shelves, and anything else we could pull off the walls that would burn. Lordamighty, we had us a fire goin for a while. We had a box of old shoes and burned them, too. When we'd burned up nearly everything we could find, I told Sissie, "Put all the kids on the couch together and pile the quilts around them. Me and Wade are gonna go find some more wood. We'll be back in a little bit."

Sissie looked at me like she knowed I was lyin about being back in a little bit, but she done what I said.

The wind cut like a knife. Me and Wade like to froze as we headed straight for town. Our coats wasn't nothin to brag on. Wade's pants had big holes in the knees and I had to hold my skirt down to keep the wind from whipping it up. Walked across the fields when we could and the

highway shoulders when we couldn't. Come into the Grove by way of Penn Avenue and turned left there off the bridge. Headed straight for Uncle Ivan and Aunt Clive's. We come upon Uncle Ivan sittin in that rusty pickup of his. He seen me and Wade and motioned us in the pickup. He was hummin along with the radio. Yella Rose of Texas, his favorite song.

Stopped hummin, said, "Where's your Mama and Daddy?"

"They're with Uncle Winchester and Aunt Mabeline and rentin a house for them and their kids." My teeth was chatterin against one another.

"Where?" he said and stared at me and Wade.

"We don't know. They was gone all day yesterday gettin Uncle Winchester outa jail..."

"Let's git in the house," Uncle Ivan said, "before you'uns freeze."

Aunt Clive give me and Wade some soup and we sat there eatin and tellin her and Uncle Ivan everything about Uncle Winchester in jail and Mama and Daddy helping him and his woman and younguns with our grocery money. Uncle Ivan and Aunt Clive looked at one another and didn't say nothin, but pretty soon Uncle Ivan went out to his pickup and started loadin up some wood. Aunt Clive was puttin some of the soup in mason jars for me to take back to Sissie and them when Mama and Daddy come in the door. That's when the shit hit the fan.

Mama grabbed me by the hair and throwed me across the room. "You goddamn heathern," she said to me, "I said to stay home and I meant stay home!" She had a piece of rubber hose in her hand and grabbed Wade, whippin him with that hose all the way out to the car. Aunt Clive didn't know what to do, but it's all a blur to me as to knowin if she tried to do anything or not. When Mama come back for me, I had got myself up off the floor and that's when the fight was on. I think I went crazy because I started fightin her back.

"I'm tired of being hungry and bein cold while you and Daddy take care of other people!" I screamed at her and hit her as hard as I could.

She grabbed for my hair, but Uncle Ivan was there like a blur and grabbed her hand. Next thing I know, Uncle Ivan and Daddy was about to get into a fight, but I think they just done a lot of hollerin. Before it was over, Mama got me in the car. Me and Wade rode in the back seat, huddled together and bawlin our eyes out.

When we got home, we just got our coats off when Mama started whippin Wade again. I couldn't stand it no more. I flew into Mama and fought her like I've been thinkin about doin all these long years. Wanted to kill her, too. You can bet your boots on that. I hit her in the eye and have a recollection of the surprised look on her face.

Then I ran out the back door and kept runnin. When I looked back, I didn't see no car lights comin after me, so I slacked up and that's when I seen I forgot my coat.

Pretty soon, a car stopped and the man in it opened the door. The car was a long slunk-down fancy thing with cow's horns up front of the hood. The man inside rolled down his window, said, "Hon, would you like a ride?" He had on a cowboy hat. I was cold, but I was scared to get in the car. I kept walkin and the car kept movin alongside me. I was asking myself which would be worse, what the man might do to me or what Mama might do to me if her and Daddy took a notion to come after me?

I got in the car, and the man shoved his hat back and give me his handkerchief, said my nose was a little bloody. Asked me where I was headed. I told him and pointed in the direction I wanted to go, but he drove only a little ways and looked like he was goin to turn off on a side road. I went to screamin and hollerin like a crazy person. Car skidded to a stop while I flopped and kicked and throwed up my arms alla time hollering like somethin had hold of me. Tried to find the door handle.

"What ta hell is a matter with you, girl? Are you crazy?" Cowboy looked back over his shoulder to see if anybody seen and took hold of my arm. "Hey, whatsa matter?"

But I found the door handle and jerked my arm away.

Got out and slammed the door, called that man every name in the book as he drove off shakin his head and talkin to hisself. Made up my mind then and there I'd never ever get in another strange car. My head was in a rumble or I wouldn't have got in this one.

*Rachel Rachel where are you? Remember the preacher? Ozark Mountains? The dogwood? That old truck? Piss on you Rachel piss on you.*

Made it to Aunt Clive's and Uncle Ivan's house. Mama and Daddy didn't come, so I stayed all night. Aunt Clive's brother, Ross, was there. Just got in from Arizona, come to visit Aunt Clive and Uncle Ivan. Wife left him, and his kids were grown and gone. I'd seen him off and on from the time I was little, so I knowed him and he remembered me. Was always nice to me and Rachel and the little kids.

When Mama and Daddy come the next day, they didn't act mean at all. Lordamighty, they acted like they would do anything to get me back home.

So I looked at them, said, "I'll go, but I want y'all to get us a decent house in town with a inside toilet like I know you'uns probably got for Uncle Winchester and Aunt Mabeline." Said, "I'm tired of y'all leaving us and making us do without while you'uns treat them like kings!"

Uncle Ivan and Aunt Clive and Ross listened to all



this and heard Mama and Daddy say they would do everything I wanted if I would come back. So I went home with them.

Only thing that changed is we moved to town. Not in the Grove though. Mama and Daddy got us a house with a inside toilet. First time we ever had a flush toilet in our lives.

*Rachel you arta seen it. You done your business then pushed this little handle and the clean water come gooshing in. You...why did...don't you...? Never mind!*

Mama and Daddy still left us alone, and they still left us hungry. If we made Mama mad, she flew into all of us with the ironin cord, a piece of rubber hose, a board, or whatever else she could get her hands on. We was there one month when the shit hit the fan again.

I can't even recall what brung it on. I know Mama was whippin Ola Mae and then she was whippin somebody else, and next thing I know, I'm fightin her.

She falls and I'm right on top of her. I can hear the kids screamin and Daddy hollerin, then somebody has me by the hair and is pullin me off Mama. It's Daddy. I turn on him, grab a bucket off the table, throw the water in his face and hit him with the bucket. I run out the door. Left there with nothin but the clothes on my back.

That's the way I remember it.

I walked across town to where I knowed Mrs. Brown lived. She called the cops and told them what happened.

Next day I was taken before a judge in the children's court, and there was Mama and Daddy just as pretty as you please. Guess they thought they was gonna take me home again.

The judge sat there lookin at me over his glasses, his eyebrows bushy and thick. He was old and skinny and bald headed. He scared me by the way he looked at me, not sayin a word for a long time, lookin at me over his glasses, his hands clasped together on his desk in front of him.

Pretty soon, he started askin Mama and Daddy stuff about me. What's the problem? How old is she? Does she go to school? Does she mind? He acted like I wasn't even there.

Mama said, "The problem is she's unruly, she won't mind atall! And she's been having sex with her Uncle Ross!"

Lord, I was so mad at what Mama said, I can't tell you how boilin I felt. Felt like a lorn dog is what! Like I had no friend in the world. Felt like somethin was throwed in my face. Wanted to cuss Mama out good and loud right there on the spot. And Daddy didn't take up for me one little bit. He just sat there, his skinny self lookin at the judge.

The judge said to me, "Is that right, Iva? You and

your uncle...?"

"Lord no, it ain't right!" I said before he could finish. I didn't want to hear him say it, it was so awful. "Ross ain't my uncle no way," I said. He's my aunt's brother, and he's old as my daddy!" I started bawlin then. Directly I sucked in my breath and said to Mama, "I will not ever go home again after you a sayin such a thing as you just said!"

Next thing I know, the judge is tellin me I got a choice, go home or go to a place where they put juvenile delinquents.

"I want to go where my sister, Rachel, is," I said. "Please let me go to her!"

The judge shook his head no real slow and looked at me over his glasses. The onliest sound I could hear was my own breathin. Then he was sayin, "I think you might have some serious behavior problems, young lady. Your parents here want you home. You're lucky..."

Didn't even let him finish. Couldn't stand to hear how lucky he thought I might be. "I'll go to the place for juvenile delinquents," I told him. I was thinking to myself, the line has got to be drawed somewheres. Then I hung my head and bawled like a baby.

"And I want a doctor to check her, too! She's been messed with and ruint or my name ain't Ida Belle Lassiter!"

*Oh Rachel Rachel Rachel Rachel Rachel. Wouldn't nobody listen to me.*

So here I am now, and better for it if you ask me. Me and Rachel and the other kids, we busted our asses to please Mama all them years, thought she'd change. Right before she left, Rachel said to me, "Now Iva, it don't make no sense to make Mama mad. Just help me so we can get ourselves away as soon as we're old enough. There ain't no other way, not even the law can help us." Just shows Rachel don't know shit. We coulda run off like I done by myself. The law woulda put us all here.

*Can't we go back? And can't we meet at the shack by the bridge where Jimmy Blalock hid from his daddy? We'll go back together and get the little kids.... Forget it I ain't countin on you for nothin forget it forget it just forget it!*

I got to get this off my mind and stop thinkin on it. Don't care to dwell on it too much. Got to keep my mind on gettin my beauty license. Here I am messin up my eye makeup.

Tomorrow we get to go to town. I got me a boyfriend here. His name is Jay, and he's real cute, and tough, don't let nobody push him around. Tomorrow is Valentine's Day and Jay's asked me to sit with him at the picture

show. There's a gangster movie showin, somethin about Dillinger.

Think I'll go to Ben Franklins, too, see if I can treat myself to one of them little Jesus pictures. If Eudella can walk out with Jesus in her drawers, so can I! If they don't catch me, next time I might get me some fingernail polish, some mascara, some blue eye shadow, too. Got some eye shadow on now. Periwinkle blue. Belongs to Eudella. Look in the mirror at myself, blink my eyes.

*Rachel Rachel you arta see me now.*

The Letter (1952)

Ch. 13

April 30, 1962

Dear Iva:

How are you? Fine I hope. I am fine. Well, I guess you have had a birthday and now you I bet you're in hog heaven because you're going on 16. Happy birthday late from your sister who thinks about you all the time. I bet you have got a boyfried, too, if I know you. Ha! Ha!

Iva, you could've knocked me over with a feather! I didn't know you were not at home! If I did know, I would've got in touch with you lots sooner because I've wanted to talk to you for the longest time. What in the world happened that caused you to be in a home for juvenile delinquents? Mrs. Brown and Roberta told me where you are. They finally come to see me this last Saturday and I've been here over a year. I don't know why they never did come before. I believe it's because they're afraid Mama will do something to them.

They said Mama throwed a fit and claimed you was about to run off with Ross Blevins, Aunt Clive's brother! Is Mama crazy or what? They also said Mama told the law Ross messed with you. I tell you, Iva, I believe Mama needs her head examined because she is fixated on that kind of stuff. Set yourself down right now and write me a letter and tell me what went on and what you are doing in a

juvenile delinquent place. I confess I'm glad you're away from Mama, but I hope you are not out of the frying pan into the fire.

Iva I don't know if anybody told you, but we was all supposed to get to come here where I am living now. Did Mrs. Brown and Roberta tell you about it? I hope they did and that you were not thinking all this time that I didn't care about you and the little kids. Mrs. Brown and Roberta and my teacher, Miss Mary, and Miss Mary's pastor had it all fixed here at the home for the rest of you to come, too. They told me I was the key and they promised me they would get the rest of you away from Mama and here with me. But every day I waited and every day passed without you all coming. I couldn't write because I was afraid I'd mess everything up. They told me if I wrote letters, Mama would see the letters and get mad and maybe figure out that I was up to something. Then maybe she wouldn't let you come just to be mean. They told me to have patience because these things take time. But it has been so awful, I have felt like I was in jail inside myself. I am so glad that now I can at least talk to you.

Oh, Iva I waited and waited. I cried. I couldn't eat. They put me in the hospital two weeks after I come here because I couldn't eat and was all the time crying. I woke up in the nights because I thought you or Sissie or

one of the little kids was calling me. I had bad dreams that Mama was doing something awful to you. You know how I used to always get that funny feeling that something was going to happen? Well, I had so many of them, I couldn't keep straight what was the real feeling and what was just being scared or hoping too hard. Every day I hoped you would come and nobody come.

Then here come Mama and Daddy one day. I liked to of died! The office called here to the big girls' building and said I had visitors. I was so happy, Iva, you don't know. I was like a crazy person thinking it was you and Sissie and Wade and the others. I was thinking I couldn't wait to show you my room. I could picture me and you and the little kids taking us a picnic and going in the back pasture here where it is so pretty. We have ponies here, you know. I pictured you and Wade and Sammy and Jacob riding ponies and laughing and laughing and you with your long hair flying in the wind. And I could see us eating sandwiches and cookies and the little kids running and playing and us all real laughy.

But when I looked out the window, I saw Mama and Daddy get out of the car and none of you. Mama looked around like you know she does when she is in a strange place. I stood behind the curtain and watched down our long sidewalk and seen her stand there by Daddy for just a minute like she didn't know what she would do next. It



come over me of sudden that she was so forlorn in the world. She looked to her left, then to her right and picked at her fingernails. She squinched her eyes against the sun and didn't look one bit happy. Daddy put me in mind of one of them little skinny Mexican dogs a looking around and waiting for Mama to move and he will follow her. For just a little bit, Iva, I had this deep, deep ache inside me that I can't explain to you. It was a strange, achey feeling and very sad, too. Then just as sudden, I had a strong feeling that Mama and Daddy was here to take me home. Something told me to run, so I didn't wait a minute more, but ran to my housemother and asked her to help me hide.

My housemother, Mrs. Roanoke, knows about Mama because of my nightmares and because I'm always waiting for you all to come. Everybody here knows. But Mrs. Roanoke said she couldn't help me hide or she would get in trouble with the law. That didn't stop her from telling some of the girls here to help me, though. So they helped me hide in our big attic. Everybody pretended to Mama and Daddy and to the director of this home that they didn't know where I was. It was hours before somebody came to the attic to get me and say it was safe to come down now. Mama and Daddy was gone.

They said Mama looked in every room her ownself and

wanted to go to all the other buildings to look for me. But our director, Dr. Woodward, finally told Mama he believed I didn't want to go with her. Well, Iva, you know Mama. She wanted to fight everybody. She threatened Mrs. Roanoke, called her a liar, and said Mrs. Roanoke was going to hell in a handbasket. Dr. Woodward finally told Mama she would have to leave and get a court order.

I couldn't hear none of this because I was hunkered in a corner of the attic. But I was so happy Mama came after me, because I thought her coming meant she was tired of staying home. I wondered if you maybe fought her back when she whipped you and maybe you told her you wouldn't take care of the little kids nor do no more work. I thought maybe Mama might give all of you up to this home so we could be together. I know now I was a big fool to think it might really happen.

But right then I was happy and when they left, I waited every day and had my housemother call the office all the time to see if there was any word. Pretty soon the days turned into weeks and one day Dr. Woodward called me to the office and said Mama had told Mrs. Brown it would be a cold day in hell (Dr. Woodward called it hades but I know Mama) before she would let anybody take any more of her kids. Mrs. Brown wrote me a letter, too, and said all the paperwork had been ready for Sissie and Sammy and Jacob to come, but Mama suddenly got mad about

something and cussed Mrs. Brown out and wouldn't let nobody come. I believe she figured out she was tricked to put me in here. Dr. Woodward told me, Rachel we have stopped everything and have to wait for your mother to agree to let the children go. He told me not to give up hope and he would not throw the paperwork away.

Iva, the big trouble has been that this home is a church home. It is not an orphanage. Everybody here has got at least one parent who comes to see them all the time. The parent is just not able to care for the kid right now and needs help from the church. The church nor the home has no power to take kids away. Only the parent or the law can put somebody here, but not the home. That is why the people here couldn't go to court and take all the rest of you away from Mama. Mama signed a paper to put me here. It is the same as if she signed the papers for me to get married. She can't undo it if I want to stay here. What do you bet she has kicked herself a hundred times for signing that paper?

But I want to you tell you, Iva, that I learned something yesterday from Dr. Woodward that lays so heavy on my heart. First off, he told me something good, he will see to it that I can come there to see you. But the next part was bad, though Dr. Woodward didn't know it was bad when he told me. He was just telling me what he has

found out about you and he mentioned that a Judge Flowers is the one who put you there.

I said, Dr. Woodward I know Judge Flowers. Dr. Woodward was so surprised, and he said, how do you know him? So I told him what I want to tell you now. Iva, Judge Flowers knew a long time ago that Mama and Daddy treated us bad! I told him right before I came here! Mrs. Brown took me to his office when Mama beat me up bad and blacked my eye shut. Do you remember when Mama done that just a little while before I left? I talked and talked to the judge to see if he would help us. I told him everything, Iva, and give him Mama and Daddy's names and all of our names and he wrote them down. I told him how we was treated. When I was done telling him, he said he couldn't help because no grownups would go to court to help us say Mama done these things. So you see, Iva, he knew about you before he ever saw you and sent you to that place. Mrs. Brown was with me when I talked to him. Did she tell you? Why didn't she speak up to Judge Flowers? Why didn't she remind him that he could have stopped all this? Oh Iva, I can't ever forgive that judge for not helping us. If he would have listened to me, we would be together in here now and you would not be a juvenile delinquent. When I was finished telling this to Dr. Woodward, he turned his head and looked out his window and didn't say nothing for a long time. His face looked real

sad but he didn't tell me what he was thinking.

Oh, Iva, Iva. I am so sad I have to wipe the tears from my face. Now what about the little kids? You know and I know Sissie can't take care of them and Mama has probably beat her and the others nearly to death many times since we left. I can't stand it. I can't stand the thought that they're hungry and so forlorn and maybe think you or me don't care about them. I wish I could die right now. This is the first time in my life I've really give up hope. It was learning about that judge that finally done it. I hate him with all my heart and soul. I wish I could make him go live with Mama! I wish I could kill him! I have felt so sad since I've been here, but since yesterday I feel like there is not no life for me.

Iva, you know the little kids are thinking nobody cares for them. I bet you wonder like I do what they are doing right this minute. I am older now, and next year I'll be eighteen. I know I don't have the gumption like you do. I wish I did. But maybe I can learn to drive a car and put the kids in it and we can all come to see you and take you away from there. We can all get in that car and drive and drive to Mexico and sing the moon up, Iva. Remember how we used to do that? Remember how we used to sing that song Green Grow the Rushes and you would act a fool and holler O real loud pinch somebody's leg and act

like it was a snake? Remember, Iva? Remember the pear tree at that old farm place? I have not had a pear since then without thinking of us traipsing off down there with the little kids. And it so hot and dusty. It's a wonder snakes from that pond didn't get us for sure. And you a laughing and acting a fool turning flip flops and making the other kids get the giggles. I remember too much, Iva.

Well, I have got to close because I am messing up this page with my crying. I want to tell you to please don't get in no trouble and don't be cussing too much. I know you pretty good, though. Ha! Ha! When I take this letter to the office, I will tell Dr. Woodward to please fix it so I can visit you pretty quick. And I have made up my mind, Iva, that I'll go home just as soon as school is out in three weeks. I'll tell Dr. Woodward about it today, too. I'll tell him I can't wait no longer. The little kids will be a wanting me right about now.

Until I see you again, I am your loving sister.

Rachel Sara Lassiter

P.S. They don't have French in my school, but they have Spanish, and I have been taking it this year. Can you take French?

## VITA

Tavia Hollenkamp was born Wattavia Noblett on January 22, 1945 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She spent most of her childhood in Oklahoma where she completed her elementary schooling. She graduated from high school in Willamina, Oregon in 1963, married in 1966, and after having lived and worked in several states, moved to Minnesota in 1978 with her two children, Wendy and Eric. She started to college in 1980, receiving her Bachelor of Science degree in education in 1989. Also in 1989, she accepted a Hilton Smith Fellowship from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and completed the Master of Arts degree at that university in May, 1991.

The author has worked as an itinerant field hand, a chief cook and bottle washer, a waitress, a nursing home attendant, a truck dispatcher, a receptionist, an insurance claims clerk, a secretary, a dialect coach, an artist, a tutor, a teacher, and now a writer. Her plans are to move to Alaska, teach English and creative writing, and write stories.