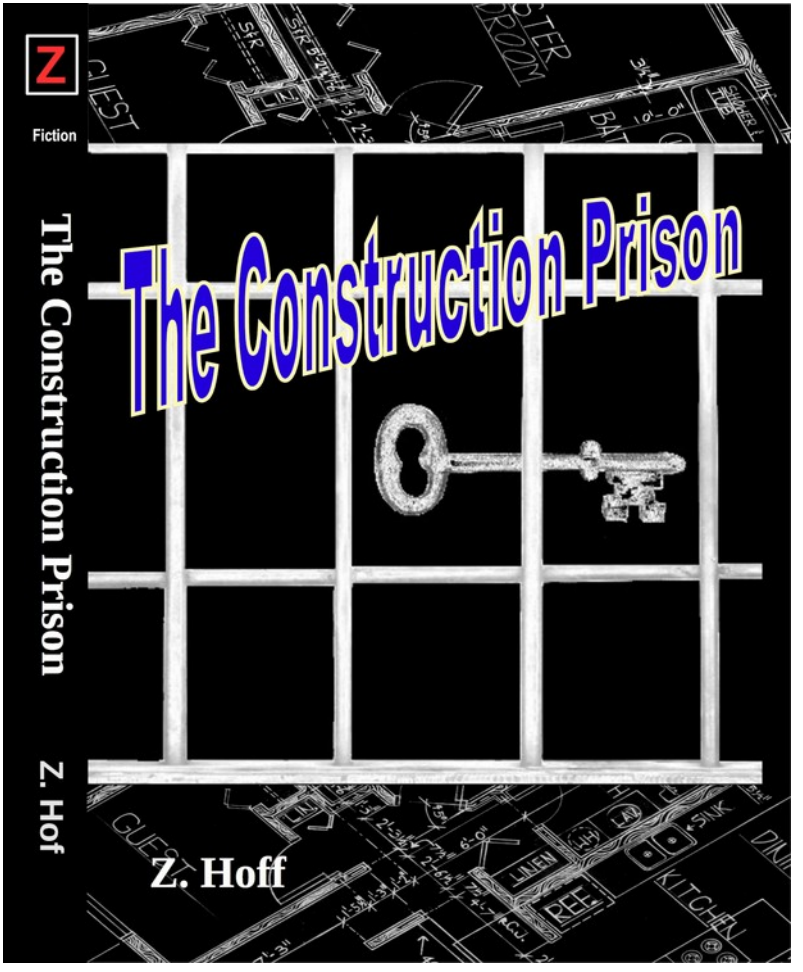
The construction prison



Z. Hof

The Construction Prison CD



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This book is a work of fiction loosely based on actual events that happened over 60 years ago. Except for Herman, which is part of my deceased father's real name, all character names were either created in the author's mind or have no connection to this novel.

Other than information that is in the public domain and some events that are based on my father directly and my grandmother, Gennie, directly any similarity between locales and events depicted in this novel are purely coincidental.

The construction prison

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The construction prison

Illustrations are separate on Separate

Caution

Do not try anything described in this book.

Nearly all of the methods depicted in this novel are now hopelessly obsolete. One should **not** use this book as a reference for construction purposes.

Take it from an old broken up carpenter: Safety glasses, safety shields and proper safety equipment are a **must** on all construction projects.

No exceptions!

Introduction

This novel is **not** about the nuts and bolts of the construction industry. It is about a young man who was forced from his home to fend for himself in any way he could. His struggle to survive was haunted by memories of his horrific childhood.

The liberal use of dialog and light graphic nature of this novel allows the reader to feel as though they are seeing the characters in action at arm's length.

Religious choices and child abuse issues are an integral part of this novel's plot; however, the literary decency is not watered down by the use of risqué four-letter words.

Zebadiah E. Smith left Buckeye, Arizona in a worn out Ford Sedan. He was going to Atlanta, Georgia, where he believed he could get a good

paying job. But, his money ran out before he got to Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

He started with nothing and worked his way up to what he thought was a secure future. But, each time he believed everything was going his way, something would happen to force him into taking another job doing menial labor.

However, Zeb, as his friends called him, was no quitter. He was bound and determined to beat the odds and escape from his construction prison.

Will he ever make it to the top and stay there?

DEDICATION

To My Fellow
Construction Workers
All Over the World
To Mary, my wife of 40 years
To Our three Children
To My Daughter

To My Mother, Whose Hardship in
Dealing with my Father has been
an Everlasting Inspiration to Me
She Passed Away.
November 12, 2006

And most of All
To My Beloved Grandmother Gennie
who Gave us Big Meals and
Made Christmas Morning Sparkle
Even Though I Know She had
Virtually no Money to do so
She Died of Stomach Cancer
When I was about Fourteen.

The construction prison

First Job



He shifted back and forth in a straight-back arm chair in the Hattiesburg, Mississippi local employment office while he waited for his name to be called for a spot labor job. It was Thursday afternoon, July 7th. The heat and humidity were taking their toll on workers that summer. This was not where Zebadiah Emmanuel Smith dreamed of calling home, but this was as far as he could go toward Atlanta, Georgia without getting a job. His money was nearly gone, and he did not even have a small prospect of finding work any time soon.

His pride would not allow him to call his father, who lived in Buckeye, Arizona, to ask for help. It had been over twenty hours since he had

anything substantial to eat. This was the second day he sat for hours hearing the interviewers call everyone's name but his. The sweat was poring off his brow as he started talking to a man named Benjamin McIver, a tall well built Irishman. Ben began talking about the ducks and chickens he had to feed when he got home. Zeb's eyes widened as the thought of chickens took him back to when he was only ten years old:

"Zeb! Get over here now!" He knew when his father, Herman Zebadiah Smith, a 200 pound man dressed in gray clothes, barked an order at him, he had better get there fast or feel his father's wrath. When Zeb stood before his father, he said, "What's the matter daddy?"

"I'll tell you what is the matter. First of all, I am not daddy to you. I'm papa to you and don't you ever call me daddy again!

"Remember last night when I told you to close and latch the hen house door?"

"I closed the chicken coop door like you said."

"Did you latch the door?"

"I am sure I did."

"Well! This morning I went into the chicken

coop and found five dead chickens. An animal got in there last night and ripped them apart, and it is your fault. It looks like you need a lesson in manhood. There is a price to pay for your not obeying my order. Go and get me a strong stick."

"I didn't mean to forget to latch the door. Please! I didn't mean to."

"Are you going to get the switch or do you need a little help first?" Zeb knew about his father's raw violence and did not want to anger him any more than he already did.

A while later he brought the stick to his father. "Please don't. I won't forget again. I didn't mean to leave the hen house open last night. Tears began rolling down his face as his father's hand grabbed him by the arm and spun him around as he raised the board into the air. With one powerful swing Herman assaulted his backside. Zeb had already raised up as high as he could without leaving the ground. This infuriated his father. He said "It's time you showed a little backbone and take your licking like a man.

At the dinner table Zeb was forced to apologize to his mother for him leaving the hen house door

unlatched. It made him sick to admit it when he did not know whether or not he was at fault. His Father built the chicken coop and did not do a very good job of making the door latch. But he dared not question his father about the latch or even utter a single word about it.

Ben said, “Are you all right?” Zeb came out of his trance with a start. “I guess the heat got to me and made me a little drowsy, that is all.” They talked about there lot in life for several hours. Finally, Zeb, as his friends called him, decided to give it up for the day. He rose slowly and said goodbye to Ben. He walked toward his coal black, 26-year-old Model A Ford Tudor sedan. “Oh no,” he muttered under his breath. He knew the carburetor in his car leaked a little gas most of the time, especially when he shut the engine off, but somehow he had forgotten to turn off the fuel valve before he went into the employment office. While he was away from his car, gas had been slowly leaking out of his car’s updraft carburetor onto the ground.

He opened the hood and quickly turned off the gas valve located on the carburetor. He grabbed

an old pan he kept behind the front seat, got out of the car and placed it under the leak.

Suddenly, a deep voice from behind him said,

"Having trouble son?"

"No, my carburetor float valve is leaking gas again." The man walked up to Zebadiah's left side and said, "My name is Willie Waterman, but most everyone calls me Bear."

Willie was a giant man who tipped the scale at 225 pounds. His salt and pepper beard shined behind his dingy store bought glasses. He had a 35 inch arm reach which helped make him a formidable boxer, and his obvious muscular appearance said, "I am the boss around here." However, behind his rough exterior was a teddy bear softness he kept well hidden from the outside world.

"I own Willie's Tree Service, a local tree outfit on the outskirts of town. I could use a good tree man. 'Don't find many people nowadays who want to work. That is why I spend a lot of time here looking for tree men."

"My name's Zebadiah Emmanuel Smith. People call me Zeb and a lot of other awful names." He

was lanky and had desert tan skin. He was sputtering into manhood. His clothes looked like hand-me-downs. His shoes were weather worn and the soles were so thin his socks would get wet whenever he walked through a puddle of water.

“Bear, I’ve been looking for a spot labor job for two days now, and I haven’t even heard my name called once.”

“You are a little on the slim side for tree work. But, if I hire you, do you think you got what it takes to become a first-class tree man? Will you give me a day’s work for a day’s pay?”

“I need a job awful bad, Bear. I’ll work hard for you. Real hard!”

“I like your attitude. You’ve got the job. I will pay you ninety-five cents an hour, and a dollar bonus for any day we get over ten trees done. Deal?”

“Deal,” Zeb echoed.

“What we’ll be doing is clearing a parcel of land on the north side of town. The trees have to be cut down, the limbs chopped off; and they have to be cut into 8-foot logs, and then they have to be loaded into my Chevrolet pickup truck bed.

"I almost forgot. The logs also have to be stacked up neatly behind my house."

"Is there anything else I need to know about the job?"

"Yes. I left the good part for last. We have to root out the stumps after we cut all of the trees down. That's not part of the dollar bonus deal.

"What I mean by rooting out the stumps is, first we dig out and expose the roots, then we chop most of the them off. When a stump is all loosened up, I back my truck close enough for us to put a log chain around it; then I get into my truck, step on the gas and jerk that there stump right out of the ground. Then, we will get to bury up the holes where the stumps were. Sounds simple don't it? ... Let me tell you right out straight, the tree business won't be easy on you."

"I will do a good job for you Bear."

"Have any money? Got a place to stay?"

"I have a little over a dollar left, and I have been sleeping on the back seat of my car."

"Here is a fin. You can get a room for a week on the east side of town and still have enough left over to get a little breakfast tomorrow."

"Now, I expect you to be at my place at seven o'clock in the morning. Don't let me down."

"I will be there, Bear."

"Don't forget to tell the night clerk to wake you at six in the morning. The tree business doesn't wait for the roosters to crow, you know."

"I'll help you get your old car running and then you can follow me to my place and we can have dinner. I was in the employment office several times today and they told me you didn't eat all day, so don't say no."

"Now, Let's get to work on your car."

A while later, Bear said, "Hit the starter."

The engine sputtered for a while before it broke into a rhythmic Putt-Chee-Kah, Putt-Chee-Kah, Putt-Chee-Kah.

"Zeb, your old car runs real good. How did you come by it?"

"My father gave it to me on my 18th birthday which was May 17th of this year. But, he really gave it to me instead of paying me for working with him most of my life on his cotton farm out in Buckeye, Arizona."

"Why didn't you stay and keep working on his

farm?”

“Bear, I couldn’t take another summer working outside in the burning desert sun. I had to get away from my father. He came from the old country, and he is as stubborn as a whole barn full of mules. He would always tell me I was one of his worthless sons. After I graduated from high school this June, he told me to either work the farm, get a job or get out. And he said he did not care which option I took. I reckon he had his reasons, but I really wanted to go to college and amount to something. He said college is a waste of time because real men work with their hands and their back, not with their mouths and pencils.

“There aren’t many jobs around Buckeye or Phoenix, Arizona in the summer, so a friend of mine, Richard Longmont, told me there are a lot of good jobs in Atlanta, Georgia. So, I started toward there. I did not expect it to be so difficult to go from Buckeye to Atlanta. I got this far before I ran out of money.”

“So much for your life’s history,” said Bear.

“You think I’m a complainer, don’t you?”

“No! I do not Zeb.”

Bear changed the subject, “When you came across country, you probably got some stale gas at one of those stations that doesn’t get fresh gas very often. These old Model A cars have a habit of kicking up a fuss when their carburetor gets varnished up from bad gasoline. I just cleaned out the carburetor, so some fresh gas just might keep her from leaking again. If it does not work, I have a friend who has a wrecking yard in back of his house. Mr. Singer might have a good carburetor for your car. He sells parts real cheap. But, you’ll have to get the carburetor yourself, because he does not remove any parts from his old cars.”

“I will have to wait till I get some money Bear. I only have the fin you gave me plus a dollar and change left.”

“I did not give you that fin; it’s an advance on your pay. We work hard to make it in Mississippi. If you stay here, you will have to work hard too.”

“I will work real hard for you every day. I promise.”

“Come on Zeb, let’s head on out to my place. I know the Mrs. will have a table full of good food waiting for us. And I’m starved.” Bear led the way

as the two vehicles made their way to the south-western side of town where Bear had a two story, five bedroom house nestled in the trees. Three of his six children remained at home to occupied three of the five bedrooms. Two cats, five geese and a dozen chickens gave life to Bear's place. The two vehicles pulled into the driveway as his family peeked out from behind the thin curtains to see who was coming. Bear got out of his dark-blue 1949 Chevrolet pickup truck and closed the door.

Zeb drove up beside Bear and said, "Where do you want me to park?"

"Under the big tree over there will be good. The tree will help keep some of the sun off of your car."

After he parked and got out, Zeb said, "Is your pickup truck new?"

"No. She's about six years old now. This truck has hauled many tons of logs over the years. It is my sidekick.

"Let's get on up to the house and let the Mrs. know we have company for dinner. She is a real fine lady. I met her when I spent some time

visiting my older brother in Bowling Green, Kentucky. My brother and I were having a bite at the diner where she worked. First thing you know, we were going out, and it didn't take long before I knew she was worth more than all of the gold in the whole wide world. A couple of months later we got hitched."

The steps creaked and sagged as they made their way to the front door. The burr-zang sound of the screen door spring and the squeaky hinges told all inside that daddy was home. The windows were all wide open. A homemade, 24 inch, exhaust fan mounted in the center of a window in the hall barely changed the temperature inside the house.

Bear's wife, Carol, was five-foot-four-inches tall and weighed 135 pounds. She had shoulder-length brunette hair that was freshly washed and covered with bobby pins. "Carol, this is my new tree man. He goes by the name of Zeb Smith."

"Howdy ma'am." Zeb did not feel comfortable around women. He had been on his father's cotton farm all his life, and even though he would sometimes dress like some of the city folks in

Phoenix, he did not develop any of their city ways.

"Sure is hot in Hattiesburg ma'am," said Zeb.

"You get used to it after a while, but on real hot days you'll do a lot of praying for a cool spell," said Carol.

"Zeb will be having dinner with us."

Carol's eyes told Bear he'd dragged in another shaggy dog. Lord knows they didn't need another mouth to feed.

"Zeb, have a seat on the couch over there. I will be in the kitchen for a while," said Bear.

No sooner than Bear closed the door behind him, his wife cut loose on him.

"We ain't hardly got enough food for us and the children, let alone some stranger you picked up in town."

"I hired him to work on the new clearing job I got last week."

"Dear, he is too skinny for tree work. What's he going to do for you? Bring you your two man saw, because he ain't big enough to put it to work."

"Come on mom. His father kicked him out. The way I figure it is, if he had the gumption to go all the way from Arizona to here on his own, I will

give him a chance. I gave him a fin to get a room and told him to be here at seven o'clock in the morning."

"Dear! You can kiss that fin goodbye. Because he isn't going to show up in the morning."

"The boy has not had anything to eat for at least a day. He needs our help mom."

"One of these days you are going send me straight to the graveyard. Do you hear me?"

"Now that the sermon is over, can we get on with dinner. I'm hungry. What is for dinner?"

"Ham hocks, black-eyed peas, corn on the cob, left over grits and apple pie. I do not think that city boy will take to our kind of eating."

"If he doesn't, he will just have to starve, 'cause you will not be fixing him any special food. Fair enough? ... Is dinner ready?"

"Give me five minutes to set an extra plate and get back to myself." Bear turned and walked to where Zeb was sitting. He started to settle down into his big easy chair, then he quickly stood back up again. "Zeb, would you like a glass of ice cold tea?"

"Sure would go down good Bear. 'Haven't had

anything except water since day before last."

"This here hot spell won't last long, you will see. Why it'll be winter before you can shake a stick. But the Mrs. was right about praying for a cool spell. You'll see that tomorrow when we get started clearing the trees off the 5-acre parcel Mr. Pigeon just bought. There will be frost on the ground before we finish clearing out all of those trees.

"I got the job of clearing the parcel because Mr. Pigeon and I go back a long way. ... Okay, to be truthful, nobody wanted the job except me. It's not going to be easy work, but the money is good. He always pays me on time. Business has been a little slow lately, so I have to take any job I can get. That's why the Mrs. went on the way she did. I know you heard us talking in the kitchen. I admit I've made some bad choices in the past about hiring tree men. But, I am past 45 and can't work as hard as I did just a few years ago. Why, I remember when I was just a young upstart riding on a rattler headed for Chicago."

Zeb's face told Bear he did not know what a rattler was.

“Oh, a rattler is a freight train. When the train stopped at the train yard, I jumped off and tried to hide behind a boxcar to wait for the yard bull to leave, so I could sneak into Chicago. You see, a yard bull is big feller who tries to keep bums and hoboes from riding trains for free. I didn’t get to hide fast enough. The yard bull saw me dart behind a railroad car. He was a big black man who was at least a hundred pound heavier than me. Okay. Maybe fifty pounds heavier than me. He came up behind me and said, ‘I saw you hop off that rattler over there. You probably heard about us yard bulls beating the tar out of hoboes, haven’t you?’ I sheepishly said yes to him.”

“What are you ‘bout 15?” he said.

“No sir, I turned 20 a few months ago.”

“You’re just a kid. What you doing hoppin’ freight trains?”

“Things haven’t been going too good for my family back home, so I thought I might be able to get a job in Chicago.”

He said, “That’s enough talk, now you are going to get it. Hold out your hand.”

“I was afraid to hold out my hand, but I did

anyway because I figured, if I did what he said, he'd go easy on me. He reached into his pocket as he began telling me how dangerous it was to hop trains. I thought he was going to pull out something to whip on me with, but he pulled out a small roll of bills and peeled four dollars off the top and put them in my hand. Then he said, "Hide 'em in your sock. This part of Chicago ain't a place where saints hang out."

"Thanks Mr. ..."

"Name's Curtis. You make a lot of money someday, you come back and see Curtis and give me back five dollars. If I ever catch you near my trains again, you're really going to get it. "Now, scat on out of here and stay away from the waterfront district. It ain't no place for a kid. 'You hear?"

"Yes sir. My name is Willie. Then, I got out of there as fast as I could. I really needed the money to get something to eat."

"Did you ever get to see Curtis again?"

"I sure did. About a year later I saw him walking into a department store. I walked up to him and said, 'Is your name Curtis?' "

He turned and stared at me for a minute before he said, “Are you that skinny kid named Willie, I once told to stay off my trains bout a year ago?”

“That’s me.”

“How you doing?”

“I am doing well. I got the five dollars I owe you. I reached into my sock and pulled out a wrinkled up ten dollar bill and put it in his hand and said, ‘Thank You.’ ” After which, he told me he knew I was a good kid. But, before he could turn me down on the sawbuck, I ran away as fast as I could. I knew he would tell me ten dollars was too much.

“Anyway. Before I got into downtown Chicago, I was walking on a street in the warehouse district when an old man called for me to come over to him. His raspy voice scared the socks right off my feet. I heard a lot of bad things about Chicago. I walked forward and stopped just far enough away from him to be able to run away if he tried to grab me.”

He said, “Are you one of those bums hopping freight trains down at the railroad yard?”

I said, “I admit, I rode on a freight train to get

here, but I ain't no bum. I want a job that pays enough money for me to get a place to stay and put some food on the table."

"This is your lucky day. My Name is Albert Frisque. I own this textile warehouse. I had a man quit on me last week, so I could use some extra help." Albert was muscular and looked healthy for a man in his late sixties. He was five-foot-eleven, clean shaven and had a few thin patches of white hair around the edge of his head. He was wearing wire-frame glasses and a slightly wrinkled black thrift store suit.

"You can work for me. Mind you, it is no easy job loading and unloading bolts of cloth from trucks. After you get some food in you, I think you will make it all right." That was twenty-four years ago. Old man Frisque made a man of me. But I always wished I had a college education, so I could get a job in one of those fancy office buildings in downtown Chicago.

Bear, "You shouldn't feel bad just because you work with your hands. I know a bookkeeper who does my father's taxes back in Arizona. He is only 39 and he can't even walk up a flight of stairs

without a cane. He sat in his easy chair till he got where it's hard for him to walk up a set of stairs."

"Dinner is on," Carol called.

"Zeb. Let's eat," said Bear.

They walked through the kitchen to the dining room. Two unfinished wood tables were pushed together and had a flower patterned table cloth on each one. The chairs were all different as if selected from various discards. The dishes were spotless and the flatware was dull and scratched up but clean. The wooden floor was time worn and the walls were yellowed.

"Have a seat at the table Mr. Smith," Carol instructed.

Carol came from a proper Kentucky family where it was unthinkable to address a stranger by their first name.

"My husband tells me you come from Arizona."

"Yes ma'am. I had to get away from the desert heat."

"Heat. You are going to find out what heat really is here in Mississippi. The heat out in Arizona is a dry heat. When it gets real humid and the temperature goes above 90, you will lean

against a tree and ask God for a cool breeze."

"The heat out in Arizona may be dry, but a hundred degrees in the shade is still very hot."

"Why did you come to Hattiesburg Mr. Smith?"

"I was on my way to Atlanta when I decided to see if there was any work I could do around here. I was about to give up when Bear walked up to me and offered me a job cutting down and clearing out trees. He won't be sorry he hired me, I promise you."

"The tree business is real hard work and a man has to be up to it. My husband has hired a lot of men over the years and only a few have worked out for him. I hope you are one of them. He is not young anymore and could use some good help. He's real generous; but be forewarned, he does not like to be taken advantage of. And he gets awful mad when someone tries to cheat him."

"I worked hard for my father out in Arizona, but he was never satisfied. I know Bear will tell me the truth about how hard I work."

"You are right, but he will also tell you if you don't work hard for him. He hate slackers."

Dinner went smoothly as they traded stories

about their past lives. When dinner was over, Bear said, “Zeb it is eight o’clock and about time for you to go into town, so you can find a place to stay tonight. Me and the Mrs. usually bed down real early. It won’t seem like more than a wink before you will be on your way back out here tomorrow.”

They walked to the front door and started toward his car.

“Bear, the dinner was delicious. I liked the apple pie. I haven’t had any tasty food since I left Buckeye.”

“Mom will be pleased to hear you liked the dinner she made for us. Now Zeb, once you get onto the highway, stay on it until you get into town. Dirt roads around here are like the branches on trees. There are a whole lot of them that go nowhere.”

“When I get on the main highway, I will stick to it like glue.”

They stood there talking for a while, but the mosquitoes were biting so fiercely that Bear said, “It is about time for me to get on up to the house and for you to shove off before these pesky

insects eat us alive.”

The sun was low in the sky and the birds and animals were turning up the noises of the night. A quiet loneliness crept over the area as Zeb said good night to Bear and started his Model A Ford. Within a minute, he was heading toward town. He soon became aware the road he came in on was not as smooth as he remembered. At each intersection, he stopped and wrote down the names of all the roads, so he could find his way back to Bear’s house in the morning. The last thing he wanted was to lose his first job.

A Room At Last



HE had no idea where he was going. North looked like east, south looked like west and west looked like north. He drove until he came to the next crossroad. Fear consumed him as he tried to swallow. He just knew he would never be able to find his way back to Bear's place in the morning.

As he rounded the bend, his dim headlights barely lit up a large animal grazing on the grass growing in the middle of the dirt road. His hands grasped the steering wheel like his life depended on it. His face was drawn up like a sprint runner waiting for the starting gun. He pushed the ooga horn button. Ooga, ooga. The animal turned its

head toward him and just stared.

“What kind of animal is it? Are there any bears in Mississippi?” he thought. “Surely, Bears don’t eat grass,” he reassured himself. “It must be a deer like the ones I used to see in the mountains of Northern Arizona,” he told himself. Or was the night playing tricks on him? Ooga. “Get out of my way you stupid lazy animal,” he screamed. The animal disappeared into the trees before he had driven another two-hundred yards.

“It must have been a dumb stray cow from a farm around here. Only a cow would just stare at me while I am screaming at the top of my lungs at it.”

The truth is, Zeb was scared. He wasn’t used to all the sounds of the night and having a grazing animal block his path like a broken down vehicle.

Back in Buckeye, he would sit on his father’s back porch and enjoy the cool evening breeze as the setting sun slowly disappeared over the horizon. The slightest unfamiliar noise would break the death like silence of the night, and strike an outrageous fear in him. Many an evening he would listen to unseen coyotes yelping out

there somewhere beyond his father's cotton field.

"Hey. There's the mail boxes I saw when Bear turned off the highway on his way home. What does the sign say? Number 15. What kind of name for a road is Number 15?" Zeb had not noticed the road sign when he turned off the highway earlier, but the darkness of night had scared him into remembering, Number 15.

He drove to the end of the dirt road and then he turned at the mailboxes onto the highway. He felt a lot safer on a paved road as he headed toward downtown Hattiesburg.

The air was thick with humidity and the earthy smells of summer. He missed the dry air back in Buckeye. Deep down inside he wanted to go back to Arizona. Then his thoughts focused on his mom as he drove on.

"I may have been underfed, but I'll show dad I can make it on my own no matter what. I know you can't hear me mom, but I have to say it out loud anyway. It hurts too much for me to keep it in.

"Remember when I was little and you told him about me getting into the refrigerator while he

was gone? He waited until you were out of hearing range before he got a lamp cord and beat me with it so hard I had to sit sideways in my seat at school for the next two days. It hurt mom. I hope you know how much it hurt.

“All he wanted to do was to enforce his patriarchal authority over us and to reinforce his so-called right to divvy out what little food we had. He almost always selected the biggest portions of our food for himself. Whenever we had a whole chicken for dinner, I would get the neck and half of the back. Sometimes he would feel generous and give me one of the wings.

“I really want to come back home, but I can’t until I prove myself. I told you I was going to Atlanta, GA because I know you would not believe me if I told you dad ordered me to get out or get a job. The only reason he kicked me out was because I questioned his authority to rule us with an iron hand. He claims to be the family patriarch and prophet. No further questions necessary, according to him.

“And all of those old junk farm machines he collects and parks out beyond the cotton patch is

nothing more than a ruse to make him feel big because he owns a lot of things. He thinks another depression is coming, and he will get rich selling them for scrap metal. The only depression he will ever see is his own.

“He tells everyone within hearing distance about how his religion is the only religion. But, he will never tell anyone he beats his kids with his two inch wide black leather belt.

“Well Mom, I have to go now. I can’t go on. We’ll talk again later. Okay?” His eyes glassed over as tears dripped off of his chin.

An occasional house light told him he was getting closer to town. It would not be long before he would be back in Hattiesburg. He never had to look for a place to live before, let alone in the middle of the night. It looked as though he would be spending another night on the back seat of his car. He sure could use a shower. It had been a week since he could even go though the motions of taking a bath using a porcelain covered basin he kept in the back of his car. Zeb drove into the first gas station he saw. It was Todd’s Gas Station. He longed to fill up the gas tank, but even

if he had the money, his carburetor could leak every drop onto the ground, if it stated to leak again.

The gas station was a small two room brick building. It had two very old glass-jar gravity feed pumps, a single outside grease rack and lift, the usual tire display out front and car parts were hanging on the back wall in the front room. A small lever operated cash register, a couple of grease rags and some candy bins were on the chipped and scratched eight-foot front counter. There was a rusty soda cooler under the gas station's main front window.

The attendant was wearing a white short-sleeved shirt with the name Todd in black letters inside an oval on the left pocket. "You got here just in time. I was getting ready to close up for the night. Fill-er-up?" he asked.

"No, fifty cents worth of regular and a quart of 30 weight bulk oil."

Zeb followed Todd to the bulk oil container near the grease rack on the west side of the station. It was outside and looked like a big red detergent box with a hand crank handle on top

which he turned to fill a two quart oil can with a shut off valve and a drop down filler spout. He followed him back to his Model A.

Todd noticed the car had Arizona license plates and said, “Are you coming into town or just passing through?”

Zeb was beginning to get used to being thought of as a stranger from the wild west who drifted into town looking for trouble, so he needs to be seriously questioned. He knew better than to tell anyone he had almost no money and was desperate. So he said, “Jobs are very hard to find in Arizona. I heard there are a lot of good jobs in Atlanta, Georgia, but I decided to stop at the employment office to see if there were any job openings in the Hattiesburg area.”

“I guess you know jobs are as rare as hen’s teeth around these parts. Did you find a job?”

“I got hired on at Willie’s Tree Service. I will start in the morning. We will be clearing the trees off of Mr. Pigeon’s back five acres.”

“Everyone knows everyone around here. You’ll earn your money working for Bear. He’s a real worker he is. He wants his money’s worth out of

everybody." That was the last thing he wanted to hear. The luster was beginning to wear off of his new job. His stomach was full, but he was afraid the bill for his free meal was about to come due.

"The bill comes to 50 cents for the gas plus fifteen cents for the quart of bulk oil."

"Twenty five, thirty-five, forty-five, fifty-five, sixty and sixty five cents. Do you know where a fellow could get a clean room for about 4 or 5 dollars a week?"

"Can't say offhand if I know of any clean livable places in the 5 dollar price range."

"Bear said there were some rooms available on the east side in the five dollar a week range."

"Take it from Todd, you got a lot to learn about Bear. He comes in here and always tries to get me to give him a lower price to repair his truck. Most of the time it does not run very well, and he does not have the money to get it running right. So I keep patching it up for him. What Bear is probably talking about is a mile or so east just off US highway 86. There is an old man named Frances Bartholomew Benson who rents rooms real cheap. If you go there, be forewarned. They

are not exactly what I would call clean and they are certainly not modern. Some say he is a little cuckoo. So be careful around him."

"How do I get to Benson's rooming house from here?"

"You head straight into town and turn east at the second stop light; then go about a half a mile and then you need to get onto US highway 79 going north. Once you get there, you will need to go three more miles to the intersection of US 79 and US 86 where you will turn east and go about two miles. You'll see a sign that reads: 'Benson's Rooming House Turn Here.' You'll be going about a quarter mile down a dirt road before you get to his place. It is a dingy-white two-story colonial building with four big rotted out columns holding up a huge front porch. There will be a faded out hand painted sign on the front gable. It reads: 'Rooms for Rent Real Cheap.' It is a real run down place, and it needs a coat of paint real bad. Now, don't pay what he tells you the first time. He likes to haggle over the price. Just say, 'Can you give me a break? I just got into town and am not well healed.' Got it?"

"Got it. I'll do it. Thanks, Todd." He climbed into his car, got it running and once again rattled off toward town.

Before he knew it, he saw the first red light, then he saw the second. He turned north on US highway 79 like Todd had said. Then he turned onto US highway 86. Before long he saw the sign that read: "Benson's Rooming House Turn Here." It was not the kind of sign he had expected. It was obviously hand painted and the lettering had almost faded away to say the least. Zeb felt a fear come over him as he turned toward the rooming house. He began to visualize bad things in the road ahead and wanted to turn back toward town, but he only had six dollars left and had to take what he could get. The road narrowed as he drove on, and the ruts in the road were awful. There were no houses or anything along the way. It was pitch dark and his faint headlights only lit up the road enough for him to see the difference between the road and the trees. It was hot and he was sweating profusely. He itched as the sweat dried on his body. The mosquitoes were leaving

big red welts on his arms and legs. The heat from his 4 cylinder engine was not making things better. He had the swing-out windshield moved all the way forward which let in a little air as he drove on. Within a minute, he saw the gigantic colonial house ahead. There were five cars in the front yard and he could only see three lights on in the rooming house. He could barely make out the four rusted spring-steel rocking chairs on the front porch. He drove up and parked off to the right of the house. He shut off the engine and listened to see if any dogs were barking. Zeb had a lot of close calls with overly aggressive dogs. He was afraid of them and did not want to be bitten this night.

"Good," he sighed. "No dogs tonight, I hope," he thought.

He got out of his car, walked up to the office door and knocked. No one answered. He knocked on the door several times more. Still no one answered. Zeb knocked harder. No one came. He knocked even harder. Finally, a loud boisterous voice said, "What do you want?"

"My name is Zebadiah Smith and I would like to

rent a room by the week."

"Well. Why didn't you say so in the first place. Be out in a minute. I was listening to my radio."

Frances came to the door. He looked like a monster from a silent picture horror movie. Frank obviously had not taken a bath in weeks and reeked of rancid sweat.

"The name is Frances, but people call me Frank."

"Mr. Frank, how much would it cost me for a room by the week?" He noticed that Frances had a loud voice, so he figured it was because he was hard of hearing.

"For how many people?"

"Just me."

"Do you have a job? I have had a lot of tramps try to stay on when their rent was up. You ain't one of them, are you?"

"No sir, I got a job working for Willie's Tree Service."

"You don't say. Bear will either make a man of you or put you out to pasture. You seem a bit thin for a tree man."

Zeb noticed Frank's glasses were thick. In the

dim light, he probably could not have seen if he was thin or not.

Frank said, “What kind of jalopy are you driving?”

“It is a 1929 Model A Ford Tudor. It has been in my family since the beginning of time.”

Frank said, “Runs real good, does it? I could hear it a long way off in the quiet of the night.”

Zeb wondered how he could have heard his car so far away and not know he was knocking on his front door. Frances’s contradictory answers made him wonder whether he really was disconnected from reality.

“I have a little trouble with the carburetor. Other than an occasional gas leak she runs real good. I drove her all the way from Arizona to here.”

“You don’t say. I knew a prospector out Arizona way. He went out West to look for gold and ended up picking cotton for a living. His name is Marty Peterson.”

“What a small world. He used to help pick the cotton on my dad’s farm. Mr. Peterson now owns a small farm supply store in Buckeye. He sells rakes and shovels and such.”

The construction prison

“He couldn’t be the Marty I know. He was a first class freeloader. He always tried to get me to pay him more than we agreed to whenever he helped me work on this place, about twenty years ago.”

“It’s probably him. Dad always complained of how hard it was to get a good deal out of him.”

Curiosity finally got the better of him. He asked, “How did you know I was thin?”

“I just guessed. One day last year, this big fellow walked up to the door and his left leg busted plumb through one of the slats on my front porch. You didn’t bust through the slats on my front porch, so I figured you must be on the thin side.”

“I guess that explains it. How much for a room by the week?”

“I got to jawing and lost track of it. I am over 80 and the old noodle does not work like it used to. A first class room goes for fifteen a week. Would you like to see it?”

“Do you have anything for a little less?”

“I have a small room with a bath and stove for eight dollars a week and I will throw in an oscillating fan.”

“Can you give me a break? I just got into town and am not well healed?”

“Five a week and I will keep the fan.”

“It is awful hot at night and I would like to have the fan, but I don’t have much money on me.”

“Left your family in Arizona, did you?”

“Yes sir. I drove all the way here on my own steam.”

“I remember when I was about your age, I took off and flat left my mother standing on the porch yelling at me, ‘Just you wait and see, you’ll be back.’ I proved her wrong, I ain’t never seen my mother again. She was a bad one. My father drank himself to the grave and without him to stand up for me, I could not take it anymore. So I up and walked off.”

“Did you have a car?”

“I didn't even have a bicycle. Give me your hand. Five bucks a week due on Friday of each week and I’ll toss in the fan.”

Zeb shook Frances’s hand and said, “Thank you.” He was shocked at how strong he was for being so old. He was not a bad person. ‘Just a lonely old man whose family had long since

passed on. He was surviving the best he could. His sight was poor and his hearing was a little week, but his spirit was strong.

“You got the five dollars?” Frances asked.

He reached deep into his right hip pocket and pulled out the wrinkled up five dollar bill Bear had given to him and handed it to Frank.

Frances led him down a long hall and opened the door to a room. It was about 13 feet by 19 feet. There was a folding army cot with a lumpy mattress on it. The bed was pushed up against the south wall. It had a shower, a tiny galley sink and a toilet all crammed into a dinky corner bathroom. It also had a small refrigerator and a two burner stove on top of a rough wooden counter. The stove had no oven and was located near the thin bathroom wall. A small kitchen sink was located next to the stove. There was a cabinet above the sink. It had three doors. The lower cabinet had two doors with a single shelf inside to store food and things on.

“Young fellow, you got yourself a real deal on this room. It is one of only two rooms I have with a private bathroom in them. The rest have to

share a bathroom with at least one other renter. I added this room years ago. It used to be the back porch on this fine old house. It is time for me to bed down for the night. See you in the morning. I get up ‘round nine o’clock.”

“I have to be on the job at seven, Mr. Frank. I will have to leave at six-twenty in the morning.”

“Good night son.”

Zeb forgot to ask Frances to wake him up at five-thirty in the morning and his alarm clock was unreliable. It would work some nights and not others. All he could hope for was for the alarm to wake him in the morning. He took a good look around the room and realized it was really small and rundown. The army cot was worse than he had first thought. The upholstered chair next to the front door was dirty and had worn spots in the headrest area and several tears in the fabric. The linoleum flooring had several small holes in it and had a lot of scratch marks on it, mostly in the middle. The floor gave way as he walked around the room to check it out. He feared his foot would go through several soft spots he found in the floor. The dining room table was a card table that

wobbled and sagged in the middle. There were a lot of cigarette burns around the edges. It had a big coffee stain near the front of the table. The wooden chair under the table squeaked as he wiggled it back and forth and, it too, was badly stained. The room smelled like mildew and rancid tobacco.

Zeb got his few belongings out of his car. He put the antique oscillating fan on the table, plugged it in and turned it on. After sitting at the card table for a while just taking in the day's events, he got ready for his long awaited shower. He went into the bathroom and turned on the water. Soon it was barely warm enough for him to be able to take his bath, but he needed a bath bad enough to suffer through it. He got undressed and stepped into the stall. As he put his full weight on the floor, it started to sag like the floor in the front room. "At least now I can get cleaned up," he said to himself, as he rotated like he was on a rotisserie. Then he let the lukewarm water run off of his back. He lifted his left arm up and felt a fine sticky thread. He tried to pull away but it was stuck to him. What was it? The single 40

watt light bulb in the middle of the bathroom was not bright enough for him to have noticed what was between the shower curtain rod and the shower head. He turned his head and a huge black widow spider, clinging to a half a dozen web strings, was staring him right in the face. He was frightened. What was he going to do? He had an old newspaper he made a mad dash for and swatted the spider. He thought he would never be able to take another shower in there again.

Before he finally went to sleep, he said out loud, “What on God’s green earth have I gotten myself into.”

Bites and Blisters



A loud banging on the door woke Zeb up. “It’s five-forty, and time for you to get ready and go to work.” Zeb got up, got dressed and opened the door. It was Frank. He said, “I know you probably either forgot to set your clock, the alarm did not go off or you do not have an alarm clock.”

“Thanks Mr. Frank,” he said sleepily.

“If you’d care to have breakfast with me, I’d enjoy the company. I know you are a little down on your luck and I would like to help you out. Cutting trees down and rooting out stumps on an empty stomach would be no fun at all.”

“I will be out in a minute, Mr. Frank.” He did not tell him about the spider. He figured Mr. Frank had enough to worry about already. Besides, he didn’t

think Mr. Frank would understand him anyway.

A little while later, Zeb made his way down the long hall toward the smell of bacon and biscuits. He knocked on the door. Frances opened the door and said, “Come in. Come in.”

As he walked toward the kitchen, he could see a long plain table with six high-back wooden chairs around it. A plate full of biscuits and gravy, some bacon and six sunny-side-up fried eggs sat in the middle of the table. The food looked so good to him. “Mr. Frank, I cannot pay you for breakfast.”

“Don’t worry yourself about it. I am here all by myself most of the time, so just sit down and eat.

“You are the youngest renter I have ever had stay here. What are you about eighteen?”

“I will be nineteen come the middle of May, Mr. Frank.”

“When I was a young feller, I needed a meal real bad and there was no one to give me one. So eat up and get on out to your job. You don’t have much time before it will be seven.”

Zeb devoured the food and rushed out to his Model A, got it started and headed for Bear’s

place. He should have checked the water in the radiator before he left. Out in Arizona, it could have been a cardinal mistake. The car was badly overheated and a little steam was coming out of the engine compartment. He was about half a mile from the gas station he stopped at the night before. He hoped the engine would not burn up before he got there.

A few minutes later he was at the station. He got out his porcelain basin and filled it with water from Todd's tire dunk tank, then he poured the water into the overheated radiator. Zeb left a note for Todd telling him he needed some water for his radiator because his engine would have burnt up if he did not fill up the radiator. He wrote he would drop by after work and settle up for the water.

He got back in his car and continued going toward Bear's place. The roads looked a lot better than they did in the dark last night.

With his tummy full of bacon and eggs, he almost forgot about the black widow spider and how he tossed and turned all night on his lumpy mattress.

After turning off the main highway at the

mailboxes, he continued toward Number 15. The ruts in the road did not bother him as much as they did when he was on his way into town the night before. As he turned off the road into Bear's big circle driveway, he saw Bear loading some tools into his '49 Chevy pickup. He drove up to the tree where he parked his car yesterday and stopped. When he got out of his car, Bear said, "Hi," and continued going about his morning routine. Bear was not as friendly toward him as he was yesterday. Could the people he talked to about him be right?

"Had any breakfast?"

"Yes. Mr. Frank at the rooming house sat me down to a real good breakfast."

"Are you referring to Frances Benson?"

"Do you know him?"

"He and I used to be thicker than thieves until he got so far out in left field I could no longer understand him. He would just say a lot of off the wall and outrageous things."

"Bear, so far, I like him. He is being good to me. I know he does not know what he is saying most of the time, but he treats me well."

The construction prison

“Here Zeb, you can put these tools in the back of the truck while I tell mom you are here and we are ready to go to Mr. Pigeon’s place.”

When Bear returned, he said, “To tell you the truth, Zeb, mom really expected you to come a little earlier this morning so you could have breakfast with us. She made some breakfast and packed a lunch for you. She will not be mad because you already had breakfast. The kids will eat it up faster than you can say, ‘It’s gone.’ She’s not as set against you as you might think. But, she would have lost it if you had not showed up at all today.”

“If Mr. Frank hadn’t of banged on my door at five-forty this morning, I might not have gotten here before noon. And, I also had to stop at the gas station and get some water for my radiator out of Todd’s tire dunking tank.”

“How do you know Todd’s name?”

“I stopped in there last night and got a couple of gallons of regular and a quart of bulk oil.”

“Did he tell you how cheap I am when it comes to getting my truck repaired?”

“He said something like that.”

“Why that old codger. I’ll tell him a thing or two the next time I gas up my truck. I have been trading with him for over 15 years. I bought gas and got my repair work done there when I could have easily done the work myself. Todd’s father started Tod’s gas station when he was 70 years old. He earned the trust of all the locals and made a go of it when no one else could. Did you see those old glass-jar gravity gas pumps? Ask him why he doesn’t get up off some of the cash he has been a hoarding and buy some new pumps.”

“Bear, I do not care what he says. It goes in one ear and out the other. I go by what I know to be true. I am grateful you gave me a job. I think you are kind and generous. Can we leave it lie?”

“You are right Zeb. It has been a long, tough year for me and the family. I am not getting any younger, and I am toting a little fear of getting old and feeble. Everything is loaded. I will stick my head in the door and tell mom we will be leaving in a minute or two.”

Afterward, Bear let the screen door slam shut and started toward his overloaded pickup. He opened the truck door, climbed in and started the

engine as Zeb got in the truck on the passenger side.

“Your truck sound good. What kind of engine does she have?”

“She has a 216 cubic inch in-line 6-cylinder engine. She’s got more power than a hundred mules.

“I have some bad news. The weather forecast calls for a very hot and humid day today. It means a lot of bugs, gnats and a million mosquitoes by quitting time this evening.

“I know out in Arizona you knew to drink lots of water on hot days like this. The same holds true here. I threw an old towel in the back of the truck for you. There are two water kegs in there too. The big one is for drinking and the other is for wetting down. You get the towel wet and wipe your face, the back of you neck and your arms. You will wet down maybe a thousand times a day. Well, at least a hundred times a day. Mom says I tend to over exaggerate things too much. I say it comes from having such a hard life, but she says it is from just plain padding my stories.

“Let’s talk about the tools you will be using

today. First, there are three kinds of axes I have. One is a razor sharp Canadian hollow ground double-bit axe. It is my pride and joy. You don't get to use it until I am sure you know how to treat a fine axe. There is also my regular double-bit axe. That one you will be using later. The third one is the single-bit axe which is the one you will start with. It is a lot safer than the others and it is real good for chopping off big limbs. I do not want you to make a mistake and accidentally sink an axe blade into the front of your skull. Remember, the tree business is very dangerous. A body can get hurt real serious like in a few seconds. You just got to know not to stand behind a falling tree. They can jump off their stump and come at your gut like a cannon ball.

"I once hired a tree man who was a real go-getter. He could top a tree and limb it faster than a cheetah can catch a rabbit. But, one day old Jess made a big mistake. When he pushed the last saw stroke into a tree trunk 28 feet up, the tree top rotated around behind him and wrapped the pull rope around his chest. The tree top was crushing his ribs and there was nothing we could

do about it." Bear continued, "If the ground man would have let go of the pull rope, it could have torn him up real bad. When I grasped what had happened, I grabbed a big ladder real fast, leaned it against the tree trunk and climbed up to the top of the ladder. Then, I climbed up, took out my pocket knife and cut the rope between his waist and the tree top. The tree top fell to the ground with a loud crash. We got him out of the tree and took him to the hospital. If the tree top were any bigger, the rope would have cut him in two."

"He spent several days in the hospital. Old Jess had three broken ribs and his back was all messed up. He never did any more tree work after that. Last I knew he was working in a restaurant as a short order cook."

Bear explained how the pull rope works. "You see, a little before a tree top starts to fall, the ground man pulls on the rope to keep the tree top from landing on top of a building or to force it to fall in the right direction."

"I will be careful and take good care of your tools. Dad used to tell me, 'You can get another job, but you cannot get another reputation.' "

“I thought you disliked your Dad.”

“Yes I know, but he does have some good points. It is awfully hard for me to see the good in him through all the bad things he has done to me.”

“I have not had a chance to ask you what you think of Mississippi Hattiesburg?” Do you like it here?

“The people around here have treated me well, and I really like all the trees and rivers. All we have in Arizona is barren land full of all kinds of sticker bushes and cacti.”

“Me and the Mrs. always wanted to see the old West. I hear they have a place out there called Scottsdale. They call it *The West’s Most Western Town* or something like that.”

“Scottsdale is a real nice place. The only catch is, it is way too expensive for a small-time cotton farmer’s son.”

“We need to get back to the trees. After you cut down a thousand trees and root out their stumps, we will see how much you really like trees. There is Mr. Pigeon’s place two houses up the street on the right.”

The construction prison

“I am ready to get started cutting down some trees.”

Mr. Pigeon’s house was huge with a half-pitch shingled roof. It had gray louvered shutters. The outside walls were covered with white shiplap siding and it had two big dormer windows facing toward the front. The grass was immaculately mowed, the hedge and shrubs were trimmed to perfection. The curtains were very expensive looking. And the car in the front yard was a brand new 1955 Packard hardtop Four Hundred. it cost more then $4,000 with all the extras. It was red with a white top and had whitewall tires. It also had lots of chrome. It sure made Zeb’s eyes glass over with envy.

“I will pull the truck around back so you can unload the tools while I tell Walter we are going to start clearing his back five acres. He is real business like and likes to be filled in on what we are going to do.”

“Okay Bear.” He unloaded the two man saw, the single handled one man crosscut saw and two of the axes. He knew better than to touch Bear’s special axe. Zeb’s father would have whipped the

hide off of him for touching any of his special tools. He unloaded the heavy wooden sawbuck and dragged it away from the truck toward the trees. He put the 8-pound sledgehammer and the log chains on the pile of tools. Bear still had not come out yet, so he took one of the cups out of the tool box and got a drink out of the water keg. It was already hotter than he had expected. His skin felt like it was on fire. He was covered with sweat from head to toe. He wished he was back in Buckeye again, but it was not possible. There was no way he would ever crawl back home in defeat.

Bear came walking toward him from the back door and said, “We can get started now.” He explained to Zeb how the trees had to be taken down. “We have to clear a start. All of the trees have to be taken down in a pattern. The worst thing that could happen is to have a tree fall against another tree and not fall to the ground. If a tree gets stuck, it can get real dangerous. Did you bring a fine toothed comb with you?”

“I have a comb with me.”

“Good. You will be needing a baseball cap too.”

The construction prison

“Why do I need fine tooth comb and a hat?”

“Because there are tree spiders and ticks in these here woods, and this time of year they get real bad.”

“Oh.” Zeb thought about the black widow spider in his shower last night. He did not want to see any more spiders anytime soon.

“Tree spiders are little black furry short-legged critters. I think they are harmless. At least I have never been bitten by one of them. Now ticks, they are different. They dig into your skull and suck out your blood. I took one out of my son’s head that had a blood sack as big as pistachio nut. You got to get them to back their head out of your scalp before you pull them out. Otherwise their snout will break off and stay in your skin.

“We also have to talk about snakes. I have read about diamondback rattlesnakes and sidewinders out in Arizona. There are are two kinds of snake around here you need to show a lot of respect for. One is the copperhead, and the other is the water moccasin. They are both poisonous. So, do not ever reach your hand under anything without poking at it with a stick or an axe handle first.

There just might be a snake hiding under there waiting to sink its fangs into your hand or foot, so don't kick at anything either."

"I am real anxious to sink an axe blade into one of those trees over there."

"For now, Let's carry the saws and axes over to that small tree over there. These trees are mostly long needle pines. Come this evening your hands will be all sticky with pine sap and rosin. I have a small can of turpentine in my tool box. We will use it to clean the sap off our hands when we get finished tonight. Turpentine does not smell very nice, but it gets most of the sticky sap off your hands and arms."

Bear pointed to a tree about three inches in diameter. "It will be a good tree to get started on. We are going to cut it down with the two man saw. I will grab one handle and you can grab the other. We are going to cut it waist high at about a 15 degree angle sloping down hill. The angle will cause the tree to fall toward the house and away from the rest of the trees. I know there is plenty of room in Walter's back yard for it to fall in. Now if we were to cut down one of those big trees over

there, we would have to fell it sideways, or the tree will hit Walt's house. We do not want to destroy his house. Again, do not stand behind a tree, especially when I yell 'timber'."

"Right."

Bear picked up the two man saw and walked to the small tree and told Zeb to grab the other handle. "What you want to do is pull the saw toward you and then I will pull it back. 'You understand?"

"Yes." He soon found that using a two man saw was not as easy as he had first thought. He would try to pull the saw too soon, and he failed to stop pulling it soon enough, which put a strain on both Zeb's and Bear's arms.

After several small trees were fell, he began to get the hang of using the two man saw. By then, there was a cloud of gnats buzzing around the two of them. Every so often a cumulus cloud would shade them for a few minutes, which gave some relief from the hot mid-morning sun.

At ten o'clock Bear said, "We need to take a short water break." They walked to the back of his truck and filled their cups with the cool water.

“When we get back to work, you will be chopping off limbs, and I will use the one-man-crosscut saw to cut down a few small trees. I have a hatchet behind the front seat in my truck. You can get it, and I will show you how to chop the limbs off the trees.

“There are two ways of cutting off limbs. One way is to chop them off tight against the tree and the other way is to cut each limb off about a foot and a half from the trunk. They do it that way when they want the tree to be off the ground so it can be cut into logs without having the saw dig into the ground. I don’t do limbing that way because I would have to limb the tree twice. I chop off the limbs only until I get about 8 feet up the trunk. Then, I saw off a log and drag it away. I keep cutting off 8-foot logs until there isn’t enough tree left for another log. We will cut the logs into eight foot sections so they fit neatly in my pickup truck bed.

“You have to be careful when chopping off limbs. You stand on one side of the tree and the hatchet stays on the other. No feet or hands go on the hatchet’s side of the tree, or else you could

chop into one of your own limbs. “Zeb, you are redder than a boiled beet.” He handed a towel to him and said, “Wet this towel under the water keg spigot and wipe yourself down. It will help cool you down a little. “You are doing okay for a first day. I want to tell you these first few little trees we cut down don’t count toward the dollar for ten trees in a day bonus. The way I figure it is, for now, you are in the learning phase and it is taking me a lot of time to teach you the ropes. Later on, after you get the hang of it, all trees bigger than 3 inches in diameter will count toward the bonus tally.”

“That is okay with me.”

“Got a pair of Jersey gloves?” Bear questioned.

“No, we don’t wear gloves most of the time in Arizona.”

“We still have six hours to go. I noticed you are already getting some real mean blisters on your hands. I have an old pair of leather gloves in my tool box. You can go get them and put them on.”

Zeb got the gloves and the hatchet out of the truck. Bear showed him how to use it. He told him never to swing the hatchet toward any part of his

body, to never put his hands in the blade's path and to never lay the hatchet down except in its proper place in his tool box. "Remember to always sink the hatchet blade into a log or a stump, so we will not forget to take the hatchet home or trip over it on the ground."

By noon, they had five trees cut down and limbed. Bear said, "It is shade time." He walked over to his truck and brought out two sack lunches and a gallon jug of tea. They each ate two extra-thick ham sandwiches with lettuce and tomato, a slice of cherry pie and a few biscuits left over from dinner last night. They swapped stories about the hard times in their lives. Zeb was at a disadvantage because he did not have a lot of hard times to talk about. And he surely was not going to go into the details of his childhood. By five o'clock they had eight trees down, limbed and cut into logs. Bear said, "It is time to load up the logs and go home." They quickly loaded up as many logs as the truck could hold, tied them down and put their tools in the empty side of Walter's garage.

"Ready to unload some logs st my place?"

He wanted to tell him he had enough for a first day, instead he said in a dry tone, “Ready.”

It was almost dark by the time they got all the logs unloaded. Zeb was really tired. He was also afraid he would fall asleep at the wheel before he got back to his room.

As he walked toward his Model A, Bear said, “Wait here, I’ll go in and tell mom we are finished for the day.”

While Bear was in the house, Zeb thought about his first day and suddenly realized how many mosquito bites he had and how much the blisters on his hands hurt. A little while later Bear came out and said, “Mom insists on you staying for dinner. She made us a big pot roast with mashed potatoes and gravy, black-eyed peas, corn, carrots and lots of ice cold tea.”

“I told her you worked real hard today. She was pleased.” They didn’t talk very much at the dinner table. There was a serenity in the air as they ate. When dinner was finished, Carol came out and handed Zeb a small brown paper shopping bag and said, “Look inside.” It was a twin bell alarm clock and some food neatly wrapped in waxed

paper. “My husband told me your clock did not work last night. Our oldest son moved into town two years ago and he left it here. I know he would want you to have it.”

“Thanks Mrs. Carol. It was so kind of you to give me this clock. I really want to thank you for inviting me to dinner. It tasted real good. You are a good cook.”

She said, “You are very welcome Mr. Smith.” Then she went back into the kitchen again.

Bear said, “It is half-past eight and we need to be turning in. Tomorrow will arrive early. You need to be here at seven in the morning.” Bear was so tired, he forgot tomorrow was Saturday. They walked out of the house to his Model A and said good night to each other. Zeb said, “I will see you on Monday at seven,” then he got into his car, started it up and headed home.

On the way home he stopped in and got another couple of gallons of gas and told Todd he would pay for the water he got there early in the morning. Todd chuckled and said, “It is on the house.” The night air was very hot and humid as his car lumbered along on its way back to the

rooming house. He thought about how his day went. He could not wait to get into his shower. He was so dirty with sawdust and pine tree parts he did not care about spiders anymore. He had so many bites on his skin that another one would hardly be noticed. He was slowly becoming a man like Bear.

Squeaky



It was already dark when Zeb got back home. He went to his room, number 11, and unlocked his door with his skeleton key. He turned on the oscillating fan, set the brown bag next to the kitchen sink and sat down in his sofa chair. He wanted to get up and take a shower, but he fell sound asleep in less than a minute.

It was a little after midnight, when he awoke to hear loud banging, screaming and hollering down the hall. It sounded like it was coming from room number nine. Zeb did not want to open his door to find out what was going on because he was afraid of people who were fighting. It also sounded like people were throwing things. Within a few minutes he heard a banging sound and a

boisterous voice that said, “This is the police!

Open up the door and keep your hands where I can see them!” Later, he heard the officer say, “We received a complaint about the people in room nine making an awful racket.” A moment later he heard the officer say, “May I step in? I will try not to step on any of the broken items on the floor. What are your names?”

“My name is Len and she is Hilda, sheriff”

“Have either of you been drinking tonight?”

“No sir,” said the slurred voice of a man and then echoed by the voice of a woman.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, Sheriff Boots.” Boots got his nickname because he had been in the Marine Corps and his high-top boots were always impeccably shiny. He was five-foot-nine, weighed 175 pounds and had a strong Western look.

The man’s voice corrected her, “He is not Sheriff Boots. I know him, he is Sheriff, Harley Lancaster. You must be respectful to the sheriff and get his name right.”

“What is this on the floor? It looks like some squeeze socks. Will I find some jellied alcohol

mix in them?" Have either of you been drinking squeeze? Before you answer, I want you to realize I am going to overlook you telling me no earlier. But, if you tell me no again and I find some empty jellied alcohol cans, both of you are going to jail."

"Now. Did you drink any alcohol here this evening?"

"Yes we did sheriff," said the women's voice.

A while later he heard, "Do you both have yourselves under control?"

"We sure do sheriff," said the man's voice. "We don't mean to be causing trouble," the woman's voice added.

"Here is how it is. I am going to get back into my patrol car, and if I am called back here again tonight, you both are going to jail for drunk and disorderly conduct. Do you both understand what I just said?"

"We both understand," said the man's voice."

"Do you understand ma'am?"

"Yes, Mr. Sheriff," the woman's voice said.

"I am going to leave now. Remember, I do not want to have to come back here again tonight, so you both need to keep it buttoned up." A minute or two later he heard a loud bang like someone

slammed a door. It was a half an hour before he started to settle down from all the commotion. He got up and took the alarm clock out of the bag, wound it up and set it down on the card table next to the wall. A while later he heard a clock down the hall chime one time, so he set the clock for 1:00 am. and set the alarm for 5:30 based on the chime.

He was hungry, so he took the brown bag over to the card table and neatly placed the food wrapped in waxed paper on it. He unwrapped the items and found she had given him two ham sandwiches with lettuce, mustard and ketchup, a corn on the cob and two oatmeal cookies He ate every bite. His new job had already giving him a ferocious appetite. He raised his head up and whispered, “Thanks Mrs. Carol.” Then he realized he did not work on Saturday, so he did not need to set the alarm so early. He reset the alarm for twelve noon.

Zeb’s eyes began to tear as he thought about his mother out in Arizona. He spoke softly and said, “Mom, I really do miss you. Mrs. Carol is a lot like you. She is about five-foot-four inches tall and weighs 135 pounds. She has shoulder-length

brunette hair and always wears house dresses. She treats me like I was one of her own children. Mr. Frank and Bear treat me good too.

“I am glad I did not make it to Atlanta. I wish you could be here now. You’d be proud of me. I told dad I would make it on my own. I survived my first day of work today. Bear told me I worked real hard for him.

“There was quite a ruckus down the hall a while ago. But it is quiet now, so I have to go back to sleep. It is going to be a tough weekend for me, but I will survive it somehow. We will talk again tomorrow. Okay?”

In the morning Mr. Frank came over and said, “I am going to keep you fed until you get paid because I know you don’t have any money.” Zeb realized Frank was a life saver and appreciated what he was doing for him. That night Zeb slept soundly until his new alarm clock rang. It was a lot louder than he thought it would be. However, he soon went back to sleep.

The rest of the weekend went by without incident. It was not long before he set the alarm for 5:30 am. Monday morning. Once he got up he listened for Mr. Frank. He heard nothing. “I guess

he is still sleeping," he muttered to himself. He was worried about breakfast. Maybe Mrs. Carol would invite him to breakfast again. He had very little money left and only had enough gas in his car to last until Friday. His stroke of good luck seemed to be drying up.

He got ready and was on his way to Bear's place in less than 15 minutes. When he got there, Bear wasn't outside like he was on Friday. He wondered why he was not loading up his truck; then he remembered they put the tools in Walter's garage before they left last Friday afternoon.

He drove into the driveway and parked under the tree before he got out and walked up to the house. He knocked on the door. Bear answered and said, "Come in Zeb." He went in and saw the family sitting at the breakfast table. He longed for something to eat, but he did not ask. Bear picked up several brown paper bags off the kitchen counter top and grabbed a green cooler chest sitting on the floor. He asked Zeb to bring the gallon jug of tea sitting next to the sink. They walked out to the truck, put the food items in it, then they got in and left for Mr. Pigeon's place. Neither of them said very much for a long time.

Suddenly, Bear handed Zeb one of the brown paper bags and said, “I know it isn’t much, but we are a little short on groceries. The Mrs. packed up what she could so you can have a little something to eat for breakfast.”

“I don’t expect you to keep feeding me. I want to stand on my own two feet. I’ll make it through this somehow.”

“You’ve got a lot of spunk son. The truth is, it will not be easy for you here in Mississippi.

“Hattiesburg has history of hard work. It was founded in 1882 by a lumberman & civil engineer named Captain William H. Hardy. The lumber business has been a major influence in Southern Mississippi. The trees we are cutting down are small and sparse. Otherwise they would have been logged out real professional like.”

“Today is Monday, and I am worried about Friday. Mr. Frank made it very clear. I am to pay the rent on time every Friday.”

He handed Zeb three dollars and said, “This will get you by for the rest of the week. Consider it another advance on your pay. I told you Mr. Pigeon pays like clockwork, so we’ll both breathe a little easier come Friday night.”

"Thanks for the money. I'll put it to good use."

The sun was bright. There was not a cloud in the sky. It was going to be another unbearably hot and humid day. When they got to the house, Bear parked his truck next to the garage. Before they went out to the field behind the house, he again warned Zeb, "Copperheads snakes love to hide in the woods and under piles of old logs. So you need to keep an eye out for them, especially in this heat." At eight o'clock they started cutting down trees. By the time they sat down for lunch, they had cut down seven trees. And by day's end they had fell, limbed and logged out nine trees. They quickly loaded the logs into the pickup bed and repeated yesterday's routine.

The next day, Thursday, they fell, limbed and cut 10 trees into logs in 11 hours. Bear told Zeb he is getting the hang of the tree business. "Starting next week you will get the dollar bonus on any day we get 10 trees down and unloaded at my place," said Bear.

Zeb was real proud of himself. The heat, the mosquitoes bites, and the blisters on his hands did not bother him as much as they did before. They loaded as many logs in the truck as they

could and started toward home where they unloaded and stacked them in front of the pile of logs behind the shed in Bear's back yard. Zeb asked, "What will you do with all these logs?"

"Around October, when the tree business starts slowing down, we will cut all those logs into two foot long firewood. I have an 18 inch cordwood saw in the shed over there. It came off an antique tractor. I put a twin pulley on a three horsepower Wisconsin gas engine and put another twin pulley on the saw and connected the two together with two real strong v-belts. Some people call my cordwood saw a buzz saw."

"What will you do with the logs after they are all cut up?"

"That is the beauty of the tree business. This fall we will split the smaller ones into halves and the larger logs into quarters, so I can sell them to my firewood customers. One has to get all of the mileage out of a log they can."

"You have all the angles figured out, don't you."

"Tomorrow is Friday and as soon as I get paid, I will give you your first pay. With last Friday, you already have 48 hours times 95 cents. I owe you $45.60. Minus the 8 dollars I already gave you. So

I owe you $37.60 near as I can figure."

"Are we finished for the today?"

"Yes. I will see you here tomorrow at seven."

"I will be here." Zeb got into his car and started toward his room. He stopped and got another gallon of gas at the service station. He asked Todd where he could get some food real cheap.

Todd told him Herpell's grocery store was about a mile down the road. He said, "If you tell Elmer, the owner, you have a job working for Willie's Tree Service, he will more than likely cut you a break on the food prices."

Zeb gave him the last dollar he had and then he collected his 75 cents in change. Afterward, he headed toward the country grocery store. When he got there, he went into the store and started looking around. A gentleman in his early forties wearing white coveralls, a dark-gray shirt with long sleeves and a scuffed up pair of brown wing-tipped shoes came over to him and said, "May I help you sir?"

"Yes, I have a job working for Willie's Tree Service and I was wondering if you have any food I could buy for 75 cents. I just started working, and that is all I have left. The gentleman looked

Zeb up and down, then he started stroking his week old growth of whiskers as he stood there in deep thought. He got out a brown paper sack and put a loaf of slightly crushed bread, two bologna caps, a small uneven slice of ham, three small slivers of salami, a small bottle of soda, a can of baked beans and a Baby Ruth candy bar in the sack. He set the bag down on the counter and said, “That comes to exactly 75 cents.” Zeb handed him three quarters and thanked him for giving him a break on the food. He told him when he got paid tomorrow, he would be back to buy more groceries. He was grateful to have plenty of food to eat for dinner.

It was well after dark when he got back to his room. After a warm shower, he sat down and ate most of the food. Then he wrapped up what was left of the bread and put it in the brown paper sack that was on the table, then he set the alarm for 5:30. In a few minutes, he was fast sleep.

At 2:30 he awoke to the sound of tearing paper. He listened for a while as the sound got louder and more frequent. He crept out of his bed and slowly walked toward the front door where the light switch was located. He felt around in the

dark until his hand was firmly on the light switch. He flipped the light on and saw a mouse on his card table tearing a hole in the bag with his bread in it. “Who do you think you are tearing a hole in my bread sack.” By the time he said, “Who,” the mouse was already beating feet toward the sink cabinet doors, and within a second it disappeared under the cabinet door next to the refrigerator. He went over to the door, carefully opened it up and peeked under the shelf where he saw a hole neatly chewed in the wall a few inches above the floor line.

“Just you wait till tomorrow Squeaky. I will bring home a sap covered pine tree limb and take out my special pocket knife and whittle it into a plug you won’t find so tasty. That will fix your wagon.”

He sat down in his tattered sofa chair for a while and realized he needed to set his alarm clock. He got up and walked over to the alarm clock to find it had already been set for 5:30. He shrugged his shoulders and stumbled back into bed.

At five-thirty the alarm sounded. He got up and splashed some cool water on his face. Then he

sat down at the card table and noticed the bread sack had a neat round hole in it the size of Squeaky. He took the bread out of the sack and found it had been nibbled on a lot. Squeaky evidently came back during the night to make another raid or two on his loaf of bread. He still had the can of beans and some of the meat left. He walked over and got the meat and the can of beans, opened it up, cooked them, and then he ate the meat and every single bean. A loud rap at the door startled him. He walked to the door and opened it to see Frank standing there. “Come in Mr. Frank.”

“No that will be all right. I want to remind you your rent is due today. And I want to invite you to have breakfast with me. I’d take it kindly if you would accept my offer.”

“I only have a few minutes before I have to go to work, but I can hurry.” They walked to his big table with the high-back chairs. He said, “Sit yourself down and eat.” Frank had made two thick slices of French toast, two scrambled eggs and a tall glass of milk. Zeb gulped down the food as Frank filled him in on the details of the commotion the other day. He said, “The two

people in room nine had both come from the big city. The one they call Len hadn't been in town very long before Sheriff Lancaster was called to his place on the outskirts of Hattiesburg. The sheriff evicted him from his apartment because he did not pay his rent. Shortly afterward he met this girl named Hilda who lives here. Then he moved in with her last week. He told me they were about to get married, but it never happened. I guess he went into town and bought a bunch of alcohol mix and they proceeded to get drunk. They got so loud, I finally had to call the sheriff and told him to get here real quick because they were making an awful racket. I guess you heard the rest of what went on."

"Yes I did. ... I like to keep my nose out of other people's business, especially when they have been drinking."

"That is a good way to live Zeb. You will not be bothered by them again. I gave them 'till Monday to pack up their belongings and hit the road. I expect my tenants to be upright and proper. You see the Bible over there, I believe the scriptures. I want to be right with the Lord so I can be with Martha when I die. We were married for over 45

years. I do miss her so much."

"I understand Mr. Frank. I have not been away from my mother for three weeks and I already miss her a lot. It is hard for me to look past the pain my father caused me, but I am trying.

"It has been nice talking, but I have to leave for work. I get paid today, so I will pay the rent when I get back home."

"Don't work too hard. It is supposed to be a scorcher today." He got into his Model A and started toward Bear's place. This was a very special day for him. He was going to get his first pay. Bear was coming out the door as he drove up and parked. Zeb walked over to the pickup, and they both got in and went to the field in back of Mr. Pigeon's place.

When they got to the garage, they began the same routine they had been following for the past week. They fell and limbed 9 trees by six o'clock. One of the trees did not fall completely to the ground, so they had a hard time getting it down and cut into logs.

Shortly before sundown, Zeb asked Bear if it would be alright for him to cut off a piece of a real sappy pine branch and take it home.

"Okay, but what are you going to do with it?"

"I had a visitor in my room last night. A mouse got up on my card table and ate a hole in my bread sack. The mouse ran under the sink cabinet and disappeared. I found a hole in the back wall. I want to make a sap covered plug to fill up the hole, so the mouse cannot get into my room to eat my bread."

"A pine plug won't stop a mouse from eating your bread. It will just eat another hole in the wall somewhere else. The best way to stop mice from getting into your food is not to feed them. Do not leave food laying around for them to get into or adopt a house cat and hope it is a good mouser."

Zeb took the one man saw and walked over to a pine bough which was covered with a lot of sticky sap. He cut off a piece two inches long and an inch in diameter, then he put it in a brown paper lunch bag and put it in Bear's truck. A short while later they both were headed toward the pile of logs behind Bear's shed. Zeb was scared he was not going to get paid because he did not see Bear go up to Mr. Pigeon's house to get his pay.

He glanced at the driver's side of the pickup in hopes of getting an idea of his mood. Bear said

nothing. All he could hear was the hum of the truck's engine. Zeb waited patiently for an excuse for him to ask about his pay. He did not want to ask outright because he was told not to worry. However, he was waiting on pins and needles for a sign he would get paid. He knew he must pay the rent today or be told to hit the road.

Bear drove the pickup to the back of the house where they unloaded the logs. Then he gave Zeb a broom and said, "It is Friday and the truck bed needs to be swept out. When you get done, you can come up to the house and we will have a bite."

"It will only take a minute to sweep out the truck bed."

Later, they were all seated at the table where they ate a light dinner. Afterward, Bear said, "Zeb. 'You want to come into my makeshift office."

He thought, "Oh-no. No pay." He got up and followed him to his office where Bear sat down in a big hardwood chair sitting in front of a small desk.

"According to my figures you had 48 hours by Thursday and nine hours today. That gives you 57 hours at 95 cents an hour which comes to exactly

$54.15 minus the eight dollars I advanced you. I owe you $46.15. Here you are, twenty, forty, five, six dollars and fifteen cents. Now, I want to warn you. Do not think $46.15 is a lot of money, because it is not. You watch those pennies. Save a little money for a rainy day, because they are coming a whole lot sooner than you think.
Remember to be here at seven on Monday."

Bear walked out to Zeb's car with him and bid him good-bye. Zeb was so excited he wanted to jump all the way to the moon, as he started his car and drove off toward home.

Carla



He felt a little let down because Bear did not seem to be very excited about giving him his first pay. Maybe he had a lot on his mind. After all, he did tell him they were low on groceries. Bear had put a lot of distance between the two of them during the past week. Maybe he was too tired to feel real excited. He did tell him he was over 45 and was not able to work as hard as he used to. Whatever the reason, Zeb was grateful to have a job. And for the first time in his life, he had earned his own money.

His thoughts drifted to Frank and how he was all alone. He thought about his mother, and even thought about his father. But he was keenly aware he was driving all alone on a highway stretching for miles in either direction. He stopped and at

the local gas station and bought five gallons of gas. He told Todd about getting paid and how he would be able to buy more gas at a time from now on.

Todd said he was glad Zeb was doing so well. But, like Bear, he warned him to be careful with his money and for him to keep how much money he had to himself. He also told him he needed to be a little more private about his other personal affairs. This was Mississippi and one should not brag on one's self. Zeb paid Todd for the gas and once again started home. He stopped at Herpell's Grocery to buy some groceries. Elmer greeted him with a smile and said, "How did the job go today?"

"Can't complain. I'd like a quarter of a pound of ham, a half pound of bacon, a pound of baloney sliced medium, and a pound of bacon wrapped up separately. He gathered up four cans of beans, a dozen eggs, several sodas, three candy bars, a box of cereal, a loaf of bread and a quart of milk, while Elmer cut the ham, wrapped the bacon and baloney for him. He added an extra dozen eggs and some other groceries for Frank. He wanted to pay him back for the meals he had made for him

during the week.

After Elmer tallied up the groceries, he said, “That will be five dollars and eighty-five cents.” He gave him the money and said he would be back in a day or two to get some more groceries, then he walked out and got into his car.

When he drove up to the rooming house, he saw Frank sitting in his big chair near the front window. He parked his car, got out and took his groceries down the long hall to his room. He opened the door and put the bags of groceries on the table before he started putting them away. This time he put the bread in his refrigerator, so Squeaky could not get into it.

After all of the groceries were stashed, he remembered the pine tree branch piece he put in his car. He went out and retrieved it from behind the front seat. When he got back into his room, he placed the bag with the branch in it on the floor next to his shower stall.

After sitting in his armchair for half an hour, he got up and took the half pound of bacon and the eggs out of his refrigerator and then took them with the bag of groceries to Frank’s apartment. He knocked on his door. Frank did not come to

the door right away. He knocked again. Still no answer. Frank has no place to go. Edward, his son, comes over once a week and takes him to town so he can shop for whatever he needs for the next week. Frank had to give up his driver's license and sold his souped up car many years ago. He knocked one more time and Frank finally said, "Who is it?"

"It is Zeb, Sir. I have something for you and I want to pay the rent."

"Just a minute. I must have fallen asleep." A moment later he came to the door and let him in. Zeb gave him the eggs and the half pound of bacon along with the bag of groceries and told him he had to at least give him something for making meals for him during the week. Frank took the bag and said, "That is mighty neighborly of you to think of me so kindly."

He filled him in on getting his first pay, and then he gave him the five dollars for the rent. Frank started telling about the first time he got paid and how he felt after he got his first pay. The story helped make Zeb feel better about his lot in life.

"I brought home a pine branch and I want to get to whittling on it. I like to carve green wood."

He told him he liked to carve because he had said too much and did not have the heart to tell him the pine plug was to keep a mouse out of his room.

“Young fellow, It is time for me to take a nap. Before you go, I have something in the kitchen for you.” He left for a second, and when he returned, he handed Zeb a small jar half full of lard. “Put a little dab of this here lard in your skillet and let it melt before you put the eggs in it. And be sure to set your stove burner on low when you are frying eggs.” Zeb went back to his room. He wanted to get out the pine branch and begin shaping it into a plug, but he took a shower and went to bed instead. He wanted to sleep in, so he did not set his alarm clock. The temperature was already 85 degrees by the time he woke up on Saturday morning. He got up and splashed water on his face and walked over to the table to see what time it was. “Eleven o’clock,” I must have been exhausted,” he thought. Then he started to make a late breakfast.

The only cooking utensils he brought with him from Arizona were three forks, two teaspoons, a butter knife, a pancake turner, a cast iron skillet

and a small enameled pot with a lid. His mother told him to never part with the cast iron frying pan she had given to him before he left Buckeye. His China collection included: Two plates, a cereal bowl and a scratched up porcelain mug. He also had half a box of white tipped kitchen matches, but his stove was electric.

He turned on one of the burners and started to prepare his late breakfast. It made him happy to see the burner turn red, which meant it was working. Then he took the bread, eggs and bacon out of the refrigerator and set them next to the stove. He put the skillet on the burner, put a dab of lard in it like Frank had instructed and put two slices of bacon in it. It sizzled loudly. He decided the burner was too hot, so he turned it down a little. He had never cooked breakfast before. His training was in progress as he took one of the eggs and cracked it on the edge of the skillet like he used to see his mother do. The egg was not cooperating. It had several pieces of the shell in it and the yolk was busted. He got the shells out of the pan with his pancake turner. The egg started to turn black around the edge and was burning up. He tried to turn it over, but it was stuck to the

pan. He scraped it off the bottom of the skillet and turned it over. It had burnt spots all over it. His mother made it look so easy. He wondered why this egg was being so difficult. The bacon was all burned up. Cooking breakfast was turning out to be quite a struggle for him. But he was stuck with the breakfast he made. Like it or not, in less than 10 minutes he ate every bite. Several hours later he decided to ask Frank to teach him how to make breakfast. He went to his door and knocked. Frank answered the door and asked Zeb what he needed.

"I need help. I tried to cook my breakfast and made a mess of it."

They sat down in front of his floor model radio and talked about what Zeb could have done wrong. "Did you put any grease or butter in the skillet before you tried to cook the egg?"

"I put some lard in the skillet just like you said."

"Maybe you didn't use enough lard and that's why the egg stuck to the pan. How hot was the burner when you put the egg in the skillet?"

"At first, I turned the burner up all the way up. The bacon was burning up, so I turned the burner down a little."

"One day next week you can come over here and you can cook breakfast for us. I will show you how to cook eggs, make French toast and how to cook bacon."

"I'll be home tomorrow. Would 8 o'clock in the morning be a good time for you?"

"No. I go to church on Sundays and I do not like to do any business then."

Zeb got the hint and said good-bye before he went back to his room. He was hungry. So he got ready and went downtown. On 10th street, he saw a small drugstore sign that read: Tenth Street Drugstore & Soda Fountain. The thought of having a thick chocolate malt and a sandwich took over his mind. He drove up and parked. Then he got out of his car and walked into the store. The soda fountain was located in the front corner of the drugstore facing the street. There were two 1890s style fly fans hanging down three feet from the ceiling. There was a bright red soda machine and two malt blenders sitting on top of the twelve foot long counter. Four booths and five round bar stool chairs with four-ribbed chrome edges made up the seating in the soda fountain. The seats were puffed up in the middle and covered with a

bright-red material. A large mirror was mounted on the back wall.

He walked up to a booth next to the front window and sat down. Within a minute the waitress walked over to his booth and said, “Are you ready to order?”

“Yep. I would like to have a tall thick chocolate malt with a cherry on top, a big ham sandwich with everything on it and an order of fries.”

“Can I get you anything else?”

“I’m good for now.”

Zeb sat there waiting patiently as he stared blankly out the window. The sun was hot and shining directly in on him.

The waitress came back several minutes later and said, “Here you are. One chocolate malt with a cherry on top, a ham sandwich and an order of fires.” Then she scurried back to the counter to wait on a couple who had just sat down.

When he heard the waitress say, “Are you ready to order?” He turned his head a little to the right so he could look at her out of the corner of his eye. She was 5 foot 6 inches tall and weighed 118 pounds. She was wearing a light-blue jumper with a thin white-lace border over a white blouse and

was wearing a white drugstore apron. She had long dark-brown hair. He wanted to know her name and something about her, but he had never asked a girl any questions like that before.

A while later the waitress came over to his table to get his empty malt glass and said, “Can I get you anything else?”

He was as scared as a cat being chased by a Bull dog. He wanted so desperately to find out if she was married, her name and what she liked to do. Finally, half choked up, he said, “I am all right for now.” He thought fast and said, “I am new in town and I would like to know if there are any movie theaters in Hattiesburg.”

She said, “There is a small movie house on Main Street. The first show is at ten o’clock. and the bargain matinee is at 2:00. They are showing a *Laurel and Hardy* movie and a new movie, *War of the Worlds*.”

“Thank you. I will drive by and take a look at it this afternoon.” He said ‘drive’ because he wanted her to know he had a car; however, he did not want her to know his car was over 25 years old. Then she quickly went back behind the counter to wait on her other customers.

Because she told him the hours of the shows without hesitation and seemed to know all about what movies were now playing, she might like going to see a movie with him. He wanted more than ever to know her name. But she was waiting on other customers. He thought a moment, then he put up his hand for her to come to his booth. When she got to his table, he said, “It is real hot outside. What would be a good drink to cool a fellow down.”

“Would you like a root beer float? It has ice cream in it.”

“Sounds good to me.”

He sat there trying to figure out a safe way of finding out her name and if she was married. It did not seem like it was in the cards for him to find out her name. Then an older gentleman came over to her and said, “Carla, I will be in the back room for a minute. If any customers come into the store, give me a call.” His luck seemed to be turning for the better.

“Here is your large root beer float.” Then she placed the check upside down real close to him. He sat there nursing the drink. Every once in a while she glanced at him, and of course he

looked back at her. He didn't want to jump to any conclusions about her. She could be married and have two or three children to feed. "No. I am sure she is not married," he thought. However, he did not say a word to her about it.

When his drink glass was empty, he placed a quarter tip for her beside it, got up and walked over to the soda fountain push button cash register and paid for the food and drinks.

He walked to his car and started toward the downtown stores and the movie theater. The next time he went to the soda fountain, he would know every movie theater in town. He found the theater and drove by it. It was not what he had expected. Perhaps it was her favorite movie theater. The town was quiet. Very few cars were on the road that hot afternoon. He went into several stores just to look. Bear had warned him to watch his money. However, when he saw a little radio in the window of a second hand store, he could not resist it. He was lucky the store was open on Saturday. He stopped to have a look at it, but the owner assured him the superheterodyne radio was a good one, and he could have it for a dollar and a half. He bought the radio, took it out to his

car and continued window shopping.

By six o'clock he had driven by or went into every store and theater he could find, then he drove by the drugstore one last time to see if Carla was still there before he went back to his room. Zeb could not get her out of his mind. He couldn't wait until Monday to ask Bear how he knew Carol was right for him.

He all but forgot about Carla when he got back to his room and plugged in his radio. It worked okay, but only a few stations were audible. The rest were either very weak or inaudible because static drowned them out. The hot night air caught up with him as he sat in his chair listening to an episode of *The Lone Ranger*. By 10 o'clock he was sound asleep.

When he finally woke up, it was 9:30 in the morning. He got up, took a shower and then tried to cook an egg and two slices of bacon. This time they turned out a little better because he used the right amount of the lard Frank had given to him earlier. He got ready to go downtown again to see if Carla was working. However, he forgot it was Sunday and the drugstore was closed. After driving around for a while, he took his boredom

with him back to his room.

The uneventful morning left him with nothing else to do but listen to his radio; however, the reception was very poor during the daytime. So he walked down the hall to Frank's door and knocked. When he answered the door, he said, "Hi Zeb. Well, don't just stand there, come in and have a seat. How are you?"

It was 10:30 and he really wanted to talk about Carla. But he told Frank he was ready for the cooking lesson they talked about earlier.

Frank said, "It is a little late, but I guess it will be all right. I normally don't do any business on Sunday. But I am going to make an exception because you need to learn how to prepare your breakfast."

Frank invited him into his kitchen where he showed him some of the rudiments on how to cook several different breakfast foods. When the breakfast was ready, they sat down and talked for a quarter of an hour while they ate.

Then Frank said, "It is 11:25 and I do not have a lot of time. I need to be ready to go to church when my good friend Agnes Milford gets here. Every Sunday morning at 11:40 sharp she takes

me to church. I want to be right with the Lord when I die, so I can be with my wife again. Would you like to come to church with us?"

"I have some things to do. Perhaps another day." He remembered his father constantly talking about religion as if he were a master of theocratic studies and the ways of his god, while he was being abused by him. He equated his father's religious beliefs to the severe beatings and verbal abuse he got from him. "You said you wanted to talk. What is on your mind?"

"I saw this girl at the drugstore soda fountain yesterday and I kind of like her. I was wondering if you knew of a way I could find out if she's married or single."

"What is the girl's name?"

"I don't know, but an elderly man called her Carla."

"Oh Carla. He is probably her father, Sam. He owns the drugstore on Tenth Street. She is not married. I get all of my medicines there and I know the family quite well. They go to our church every Sunday morning. The offer to go with us is still open. Will you change your mind and attend church with Agnes and me?"

Zeb was torn between his desire to formally meet Carla at church and the memories of his horrible childhood back in Arizona. He thought it over and said, “No. I really need to sort this all out.” There was a long pause before he said, “I did better at cooking breakfast this morning. I will come over tomorrow morning at 9:00 so I can make breakfast for us like you said.”

“There will always be church next Sunday. You are welcome to come over tomorrow and we will cook breakfast together.”

“Thank you for inviting me to church. I will think about it and perhaps I may feel differently next week.” He knew he could not bring himself to attend church. The fear his father created in him ran deep. It would be a long, hard road for him before he could accept a religious conviction.

At exactly 11:40 a black 1951 Ford sedan drove up to the rooming house and an older lady wearing her Sunday go-to-meeting dress stepped out of the car in her black high-heeled shoes. She was 190 pounds, five-foot-seven and was wearing a light-gray hat with a short white veil.

Frank greeted Agnes and they got into her car and drove away. Zeb went back to his room and

tried the radio again. One radio station was clear enough to hear most of the words. He listened for an hour or two before he fell asleep.

It was 11:35 pm. when he woke up and realized he would be on his way to work in a little less than eight hours. He went to the refrigerator and prepared himself a bologna sandwich and filled his China mug with milk. As he sat down to eat his midnight snack, his mind was buzzing with the events of past two days. Again, he started thinking about Carla. Did he make a mistake in not going to church with Frank? Then he again thought about his father and how badly he was treated at home.

"Get out or Get a Job, Get out or Get a Job, Get out or Get a Job," echoed in his mind. It was like a jingle or a song one cannot get out of their head. He tried to think about Carla, but it just turned into, "Get out or Get a Job, Get out or Get a Job." He set the alarm for 5:30 and went to bed.

The alarm went off faithfully. He got ready and went to Frank's door and knocked. After a long time, Frank came to the door and said, "What is up Zeb?"

"Today is Monday and we were going to cook

breakfast at 9:00, but I forgot about having to be at work by seven."

"Gosh, I did not realize it either. My recollection is not what it used to be. My brain is perfect, but 80 percent of it is out to lunch most of the time."

"I have to go to work now." When he drove into Bear's driveway, he was walking from his truck to the house. He parked his car and went over to the pickup and waited for Bear to come back out.

Bear said, "Hi Zeb. Ready to cut down some trees?"

"Yes Sir, I am ready." The day went by in a flash. They cut down, limbed and sawed 11 trees into logs. They loaded the pickup with all the logs they could, then started back to unload the logs on the pile behind Bear's house. Bear was looking the other way because they could not get all of the logs they had cut into his truck on any given day. There would have to be a catch up day or two where they would only haul logs all day. When all of the logs were unloaded, Bear said, "We did a real good job today and you get a dollar bonus since we got over 10 trees finished. I am really tired and need to eat dinner and bed down for the night. See you in the morning at seven."

“I will be here.” Zeb was beginning to feel like the novelty of having a new tree man was was wearing off, and Bear was becoming more like a boss.

Before he went into the house, Bear turned and said, “The Mrs. told me to tell you she wants you to have dinner with us Wednesday evening after work.”

“I would like that. See you later.” He climbed into his car and started toward the drugstore before he realized it had already closed. He would have to wait until next Saturday before he would have a chance to see Carla again.

He drove home and parked his car in his favorite spot. After he opened the door to his room, he realized he had forgotten to whittle the sappy pine branch into a plug to stop the mouse from getting into his room. He got out the brown paper bag with the small pine branch piece in it and began to fashion a plug to fit in the mouse hole in the wall. When the plug was finished he took off his shoe and used it to bang the plug into the hole in the wall under the sink. “Squeaky, that will keep you from getting any more of my food,” he said out loud as if the mouse could actually

hear him. He fixed himself something to eat, took a shower, set the alarm and went to sleep.

The next two days were routine. It was almost dark when Bear walked toward the log pile after they got home on Wednesday evening. Suddenly Bear said, “Stay real still Zeb. I smell copperhead. It is a spicy smell. Do you smell it?”

“Yeah.” Zeb stood frozen in his tracks while Bear crept back and walked over to his shed to get a big stick that was leaning against it. He took the stick and began poking it into the log pile. Suddenly he jumped back as a copperhead struck at the stick and then slithered off into the woods. Bear said, “I told you them copperheads like to hide under logs.”

Zeb now knew Bear was telling the truth about being real careful around snakes. A while later they unloaded the logs onto the pile behind the house. Bear said, “The Mrs. already has dinner on for us. We can head on up to the house now. Bear told Zeb not to mention the snake because he did not want to upset his wife. They washed up and sat down to a chicken with stuffing, carrots and potato halves all roasted together in a dark-blue and white speckled enameled roasting pan. They

also had baked sweet potatoes and corn bread along with lots of ice cold milk and tea.

“My husband tells me you’re doing a lot of work for him,” said Carol.

“I do my best, Mrs. Carol.” They shared stories about the tree business and a few different local events. By eight-ten, dinner was over and they went into the living room and continued to talk about the future of the tree business. He knew his job would not last forever. Bear confirmed it when he said they had already cut down over a third of an acre of trees, which meant the job would be finished in less than four months. Zeb’s chest tightened with fear as he thought about having to find a job in the winter. Then he remembered Bear telling him about when the trees were all cut down, they would root out the stumps and then cut the pile of logs into firewood. He relaxed as the evening came to a close.

“It is 9:15 and time to pack it up for the day,” said Bear.

Zeb took the hint and said, “See you tomorrow.” And then he thanked Carol for inviting him to dinner.

“You are certainly welcome Mr. Smith.”

On the way home his mind was wandering. His future was not as sure as it was a while earlier. For the first time since he got the job as a tree man, he was having doubts as to whether he would make it in the long run.

In no time at all, he was back in his room and working on his nightly routine. After he made a small bedtime snack and ate it, he set the alarm clock and tried to sleep, but the wheels kept turning in his head. He spent hours worrying about running out of money during a cold winter before he finally fell asleep. Two hours later, the clock down the hall chimed eleven times; then a clap of thunder woke him out of a deep sleep. His mattress and shirt were soaked. He felt around in the dark and found the light switch and turned it on. The roof was leaking right in the middle of his bed. “What else can happen to me now?” he thought. Zeb was depressed. Life on his own had turned out to be a terrible nightmare which was getting worse every day. But this was not going to get him down because he was a fighter.

After he placed a pan under the leak and wiped up the water the best he could, he changed his clothes and went to sleep in his big chair. A while

later, he was half awake and hearing, drip, drip, drip. Then he fell asleep again.

Even though he got virtually no sleep during the night, he went to work and cut down trees as if nothing had happened.

He knocked on Frank's door after work. Frank came to the door and said, "Come in. What news do you bring?"

"Well, Mr. Frank, the roof in my room leaked last night and I want to fix it for you since you have been helping me out so much. What do you say?"

"That would be fine with me. I have some tar out in the shed. I will get it and a ladder so we can get to it right now. After they finished the roof, Frank told Zeb he had something for him. They went to Frank's apartment where he gave him a tray full of food to take back to his room. Zeb was very happy Frank was not mad about the roof leaking. Herman Smith, his father, would have blamed him for the leak in the roof and given him, at least, a severe tongue lashing. He took the food back to his room and set a fork beside the tray for Carla, even though she was not there.

A Kiss to Remember 

It was difficult for him to drag himself out of bed and go to work the next day. When he walked out to the field they were clearing, he did not want to start sawing trees down. He wanted to find out if Carla wanted to see a movie with him.

The sun was bearing down on him and the insects were having a feast on any exposed spot on his skin. He felt like he was in an oven being roasted alive. But, there would be no mention of how uncomfortable he felt. His pride would not let him give in to the summer heat. The water kegs were taking a beating. They had to refill the kegs with water a second time before the day was over.

“Hey Zeb, is this how hot it gets in the middle

of summer out in Arizona?" Bear teased.

"It may not be this hot in Arizona, but it is hot enough to make me wish I was drinking hot chocolate on an iceberg," Zeb fired back.

"It will get cold soon enough. By December, it'll be so cold your teeth will chatter and your bones will rattle. ... It is almost noon. 'Time for lunch."

They sat under a tall pine tree and ate their sack lunches. Bear brought out a small jar of lemon slices and his favorite glass jug of tea. He told Zeb no matter how hot it gets, ice cold tea always takes the sting out of the sun.

By 4:30 they had cut down and completed nine and a half trees. Bear said, "It is Friday and I have had it, let's pack up the logs and head on in. I will give you a dollar bonus for the nine and a half trees since I called us off early."

"Thanks, I appreciate it."

The logs were soon stacked neatly on the pile of logs behind his house. It was pay time. They walked up to the house and into Bear's little office.

"Let's see now. You got in 42 hours this week plus two, ten tree bonuses. Forty-two times 95 cents equals $39.90 plus two dollars comes to

$41.90. I owe you $41.90. He counted out the money into his eagerly awaiting hand.

Zeb put the money in his pocket and said good-bye to Bear as he walked out of the house toward his car. He was anxious to get into town and see if Carla was working and get himself an ice cold root beer float. Tea had become his regular drink, but a root beer float was his treat of choice, especially when it was brought to his table by Carla.

On the way home, he stopped at the service station and got ten gallons of gas. Todd was not very receptive, so he did not bother him with the details of his work week.

Before long he was on his way to Herpell's grocery store to pick up a few food items. He did not want to buy too many groceries because they would not keep in the summer heat. He realized he had better start saving his pennies or face his future on an empty stomach.

His thoughts drifted back to the drugstore and Carla. He knew he would never go to church, but she was so beautiful he could not resist her. Perhaps the Lord would change Zeb's mind. However, he was set in his ways just like his

father.

He had not been paying full attention to which direction he was driving and found himself driving by the drugstore where Carla worked. She was not at the counter. A young man was waiting on the customers. He was short and stocky and wearing a black bow tie, a pair of black pants, a dark blue shirt and a white soda fountain vest. His mind went into overdrive. Could he be Carla's boy friend? He had to find out. Unfortunately it would have to wait until later, since he was not about to ask him about her.

When he got back to the rooming house, Frank was sitting in his chair listening to the radio. His door was propped open to let in the summer breeze. He got up and met Zeb at the door. "Hi," he said. "Have a good day at work today?"

Zeb thought he only wanted to know whether he got paid or not so he could collect the rent. Then he thought about how Frank fed him all week and how he would say a lot of off the wall things once in a while. Maybe he was just trying to be friendly. "I have to put my groceries away, then I will came over to pay the rent and then maybe we could talk for a while." His most

important reason to talk with Frank was to talk was to maybe find out a little more about Carla.

“Good, I always like to sit down and spin a yarn or two. Most of what I tell you is really true, near as I can recollect. You know how a mind tends to drift in and out of the clouds now and then.”

“I daydream all of the time myself. I cannot get Carla out of my mind. I drove by the drugstore without realizing it today. She was not there. A short stocky man was waiting on the customers.”

“He may be Sam’s son, Luke. They gave him a Bible name, you know.”

That was music to his ears. She may not have a boyfriend after all.

“You missed a real good opportunity to meet Carla real formal like at our church last Sunday. She was dressed up real nice. I want to tell you that you do not want to hurt her. You need to take a long hard look at her religion before you try to win her affections. Religion is like a big wall. If one person is on one side of a wall and the other is on the opposite side of the same wall, it is not possible for them to meet in the middle. Take some time to think about it Zeb. Oh. I almost forgot. I bought you something when I was in

town this week." Frank went into the other room and came back with a neatly wrapped package. He handed it to him and said, "I believe this holds your answer."

He opened the present. It was a golden edged Bible the size of a magazine. He was deeply touched and thanked Frank sincerely. However, Zeb was interested in Carla, not in her religion.

They sat down and talked for an hour and a half. At 8:30, he said he wanted to pay the rent for the next two weeks. He figured he had better pay his rent ahead to cover for a rainy day, which was going to come very soon.

His room was hot and stuffy when he went back to it. He found a safe place to put his new Bible. By now, he was getting used to having to cook his own meals. The menu for tonight included fried chicken wings with sliced potatoes and carrots. He added a little chunk of lard along with some water. The chicken crackled as he added a quarter cup of flour and sprinkled a little salt and pepper on top. He turned the wings and potatoes with a fork every few minutes. A half hour later, he was having a feast on his wing dinner.

When he finished eating, he got up and put the dishes in the sink. His sofa chair felt real good after a long week of hard work. A minute later he was fast asleep.

By 7:00 am. Saturday morning the sun was just above the horizon when he realized it was almost time for him to get ready and go to the soda fountain to see if Carla was there. He took a long shower, shaved extra close and put on his best clothes. He even polished his shoes with a tin of polish he got at the grocery store yesterday. For Carla he had to be as spiffy as possible.

What a day he had planned. The main problem was, he had not set aside any time to think about how he was going to get over his fear of girls. She was a very charming person, and he hoped she would make it easy for him to ask her those all important questions.

Luck was not on his side. He procrastinated so long that when he drove up to the soda fountain, it was 12:30 and all of the booths were taken. Carla was dripping with perspiration as she rushed to keep her customers waited on. The heat from the deep fryer and grill did not make matters any better. She looked like she had a long

arduous day.

"That's it," he thought. "I can start talking about how many customers there were and how she really did a great job getting all of their orders filled." He started looking at every item in the drugstore, hoping the customers would go away so he could get a chance to be alone with her. Over a half hour had passed before the rush ended. He walked to the soda fountain area and sat down in the end booth by the front window. Carla came over to his table and said, "What is the order of the day?"

His mind went ballistic. He knew what he really wanted, but he ordered a large root beer float instead. Then he said, "Had a busy day?"

"It has been very busy all morning."

He got out his first words; however, it would be a long way to the movie theater entrance. The words just would not come out on their own. This called for drastic measures to overcome his fear of asking her point blank to go see *War of the Worlds* with him. Would she even want to see a movie about Martians invading earth? Perhaps she was too tired to care about a movie after waiting on customers all day. His thoughts were a

blur when she came back with his drink. As she turned to leave he choked out, “My name is Zebadiah Smith and I work for Willie’s Tree Service. I am new in town and wonder if you would like to see the movie *War of The Worlds* with me this evening.”

“You told me you were new in town the last time you were in here. I don’t particularly want to see *War of The Worlds,* but I would like to see the cartoons and the *Laurel and Hardy* movie. However, you will have to ask my father first. He is over there behind the drugstore cash register.”

“Ask her father first. She wants to go to the movies with me,” he thought. He was on his way to his first date, or was he? He got up and walked around the drugstore again. This time her father came up to him and asked, “May I help you find something?”

“Can I be very truthful with you sir?”

“Yes. What is on your mind young man?”

“I asked your daughter, Carla, to go see a movie with me and she said I have to ask you first.”

“That is correct. My name is Samuel E. Martin.” Sam was tall, weighed 160 pounds and had a boyish looking face; he had brown hair and brown

eyes and was wearing light gray trousers, a starched white shirt and black dress shoes. “Most everyone calls me Sam. What is your name?”

“Zebadiah Emmanuel Smith, sir.” He called him sir because he did not want to seem overly pushy or personal toward him. His goal was to get a date with Carla, not to get told off by her father for being overly aggressive.

“Zebadiah where do you live?”

“I live at Mr. Frances Benson’s rooming house.”

“I see. How do you plan to get to the movie?”

“I have a Model A Ford Tudor and she runs real sharp.”

“Do you have a job?”

“Yes sir. I have a job and I work 5 days a week.”

“What do you do at your job?”

Zeb knew her father probably would not be impressed with his job, since he was only a tree man. “The truth is, sir, I cut down trees. I work for Willie’s Tree Service.”

“I have not seen you before. Are you new in town?”

“Yes sir. I drove here from Buckeye, Arizona about three weeks ago.”

"Do you plan to stay here in Hattiesburg?"

"Hattiesburg is now my new home."

"Zebadiah, let's go over and see if Carla wants you to take her to the movies. I know how hard it was for you to tell me you cut down trees for a living. I felt the same way when I was asked the same question by Carla's grandfather some 22 years ago."

They walked over to the counter and Carla's father said, "Have a seat over there Zebadiah."

After Carla saw Zeb and her father, she walked over to them.

"Carla this is Zebadiah Smith, he has asked me to give him permission to take you to see a movie with him. He has my permission."

Her father held out his hand and they shook hands. Then he said, "I need to be getting back to the drugstore cash register. I already have several customers waiting for me." Then he walked away leaving Zeb alone with Carla.

"Would you like to see the *Laurel and Hardy* movie with me tonight?"

"Yes, but I cannot go out until Saturday. I need to help mom do housework this evening. I don't want to break my promise to help her. The rest of

the week I work until the store closes."

"What would be a good time next Saturday?"

"I could be ready by 5:30?"

"Five-thirty is a good time for me."

"Where do you live?"

"We live in the house behind the store."

"I will be there before 5:30 Saturday afternoon."

"I'll be ready by then."

He was ecstatic. He got his first date, yet at the same time he felt a little guilty about not taking her religion seriously.

A cloud of excitement followed him as he opened the door to his room. It would be seven long days before he would get to take her out. He started counting the minutes until next Saturday evening.

Some of the euphoria faded away as he began making his evening meal. He had discovered the wonderful simplicity of hamburgers. It was hard for him to burn them and they were fast and easy to make. Throw in a glass of milk or soda along with a candy bar for dessert, and he thought he was eating like a king. He turned on the radio and listened to the music for a while. His mind was glowing with good thoughts of the moment. It

took a long time for him to come down out of his cloud. The sun had long gone for the day when he crawled into bed at 2:30 in the morning.

Sunday went by very quickly. Thoughts of Carla and her church had kept his mind occupied all day long. By nightfall he had rehashed every possible angle on how he could keep Carla and avoid her church. He was in deep thought as he set his alarm clock and fell asleep sitting in his big chair.

At 5:30 his alarm prompted him to get up and go to work. The rest of the week was spent cutting down trees. Saturday afternoon was really tough on him. He was as nervous as a caged cat. Everything had to be perfect. Not a speck of dust on his person or in his car would be allowed, because Carla deserved him at his very best. He would tolerate no less.

At 5:10 he drove up to Carla's house, parked his car, got out and walked to her front door. The red brick house had a quarter pitch shingled roof with white gabled ends. It had a large front door with a small opaque diamond shaped window at the top. There was a large picture window on the north end of the house and three white casement

windows with hunter-green slatted shutters on either side of each window. He stood there for a while taking deep breaths in hopes of relaxing; however, it did no good at all. He knocked on the door. Carla's mother opened the door after a few seconds.

"You must be Zebadiah Smith."

"Yes Ma'am."

"Please come in Mr. Smith."

He walked in and stood as rigid as a lamp post.

"Carla will be out in a minute."

Zeb's heart was beating faster than a humming bird's wings. He was short of breath and fear had consumed him.

In less than a minute, Carla started walking down the short hall from the back rooms. She was so gorgeous. He had never seen her out of her drugstore uniform before.

Carla walked up beside him and said, "Mother, I would like you to meet Zebadiah Smith."

"How do you do ma'am?"

Then Carla said, "Zebadiah this is my mother, Emily Martin." She looked just like her daughter, only a little older.

"Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Martin."

After the introduction and a small chat, Zeb said, “Are you ready to go Carla to the movie?”

“Anytime.”

They were off to the movie theater. He was as quiet as a mouse. Zeb drove up to the movie theater and parked. He got out and opened the door for Carla. They walked to the ticket booth where he said, “Two adult tickets please.” They walked into the elaborately decorated lobby and then over to the concession stand where he bought a large popcorn and two sodas. It was only 5:40 and the movie was scheduled to start at six. “Would you like to go in and sit down?”

“Yes. We are early so we will be able to get a good seat,” said Carla. They talked about their respective jobs. He told her about cutting down trees and she talked about some of the rude customers she had to wait on at the drugstore. He was glad there was no mention of her church. Perhaps it was because she felt uncomfortable around him. The introduction and cartoon started within a few minutes. During the *Laurel and Hardy* movie he slowly put his arm around her shoulder. She did not move away from him as he had expected. She felt like a soft teddy bear. He also

noted she leaned closer and closed to him as the evening went on. When the W*ar of the Worlds* movie started, he thought she might be scared, so he put his other hand on top of hers. It was as if she expected him to comfort her. By the middle of the movie, he couldn't stand it any longer. She might slap him, but he decided to take the chance. He leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. When she turned toward him, he put his arms around her and kissed her again. His heart was pounding, not only from the warm kiss, but also because of his fear she would, yet, slap him.

When the movie was over, they got into his car and started toward her house. She seemed a lot more relaxed when they were alone. He had hoped she would not bring up the subject of religion, but it didn't take her long to steer the conversation into talking about faith in God. She invited him to attend church with her family tomorrow, Sunday morning. He tried everything he knew to get her off the subject, only she kept changing the conversation back to her church.

When he got to her house, he said, "I will think about going to your church, maybe next week." He was devastated. There was no chance he

would ever go to church and he knew it. His wonderful evening was in ruins. There was no one to blame but himself. He was told over and over again to consider her religion, still he chose to look the other way. Now he was paying the price.

The next morning he kept his mouth shut about going out with Carla. He didn't want to hear, I told you so. The next three weeks were very routine as he stewed over his failed date with her. He went to the drugstore every so often to get a bite to eat and a drink. When Carla waited on him, he would keep his distance by being polite and formal.

By the middle of September they had over four acres of trees cut down and cleared away. The weather was getting cooler and he knew Bear's prediction of a bone chilling winter was slowly coming to pass.

Carla looked as beautiful as she ever did. Zeb felt so left out and could only keep telling himself over and over again it was never meant to be.

The weather turned much colder by Saturday, October the first. He began to wonder how bad the weather would get during the winter months. His worries were confirmed when they finished

unloading the logs one evening. Bear said, “I don’t want to scare you, but lean times are coming soon. It will be too cold to root out stumps and we are going to have to rely on our nest eggs. If you have not saved a nest egg yet, you need to start saving some of your money for winter.”

He was already putting as much money in the bank as he could, but Bear made it sound so necessary for him to have a bunch of money saved for the winter months.

Carla had fired up his self preservation barrier more than once. Trees became his medicine. And the long hours they were putting in to get the field cleared and the stumps removed before winter helped him get her off of his mind.

He gained twenty-six pounds, his shoulders were broader and the muscles in his arms had grown to an enormous size. Monday afternoon, the seventh of November, Bear walked over to Zeb and said, “When you first started working for me, I told you when you were ready, I would let you use my special axe? It is time for you to sink a real axe blade into a tree. Go to the truck and get the axe out of my tool box and you can try her out on this tree. It is our last tree to cut down. It

took him only five minutes to chop down the big tree. When the tree was fell, Bear said, “How do you like my axe?”

“It is a real dream.”

“After this tree is done, we will start removing stumps. We’ll have some days coming up where we won’t be able to work because the ground will be too frozen or too wet to root out stumps. Tomorrow we will be starting to work at 9:00. For the rest of the winter, it will be too cold for us to start any earlier.” Bear told him he would try to find some odd jobs for him to do on days when the ground was frozen.

It looked like he would have to spend a few days sitting close to the heater in his room trying to forget Carla.

Christmas



Zeb drove to Bear's place, got out of his car and waited for him next to his pickup. A moment later, Bear came out and said, "How goes it Zeb? Ready to start digging out some stumps?"

"I can't wait," he said enthusiastically. Actually he was glad to have a job; however, the idea of digging out stumps was getting a bit old. It was nine o'clock Tuesday morning when they drove out to the field to begin removing stumps. "Zeb, will you get the stump removing tools out of my truck while I go in and talk to Walt for a minute?"

"I will put the tools over by this big stump." He took the shovels and other equipment out of the truck and placed them neatly next to the stump. Bear had told him cutting down trees was a lot

easier than rooting out stumps. However, he remembered the turpentine painfully stinging the cuts and blisters on his hands. “How much worse could a few stumps be?” he thought.

Bear came out of Walter’s house and said, “It is time for us to have a talk about staying clear of the axe blade when you are chopping out roots. You need to be extra careful not to chop into your foot or chop into your leg instead of a root. Remember, ‘If you do not get in the path of the axe, it cannot cut you. Never get in front of or behind an axe blade. Always be on the right or left side of it.’ ”

“Will that keep me from getting cut?”

“No. Remember, an axe can glance off a limb, off a tree trunk or off a root and sink into your flesh real deep. The same rules I taught you several months ago about felling trees applies to stumps too. Here is a pointed spade. You can start digging the dirt away from the roots on this stump. When you get the roots around the stump exposed, I will show you how to chop them off safely. Then, we hit the stump with this 10 pound sledgehammer to make sure it is all loosened up. Then we will put a log chain around the top of the

stump and hook the other end of the chain to the back bumper on my pickup. Then, I will jerk the stump out of the ground and drag it over near the south end of the field. When we get a big pile of stumps, I will douse them with kerosene and you can take a match to them."

Zeb started digging the dirt from around the roots. When he got several roots exposed, Bear showed him how to kneel down beside the stump and chop off the roots without chopping into his leg.

Bear stood down in the hole next to a root in order to show him how to avoid being cut by the axe.

It did not take long for Zeb to get down on his knees and start chopping the radial roots from the big stump. The calluses on his hands offered him some protection from the wooden axe handle, but it did not stop the pain from the new blisters he was getting. Bear was right. Removing stumps was the pits. They only rooted out three stumps before lunch. When they sat down to eat, Zeb was completely exhausted. However, he would never tell Bear how tired he was.

When they packed up for the day, they had

seven stumps removed. Bear said, “We had a fair day today. Tomorrow we should do a little better.” Zeb thought that digging out more than seven stumps in one day was a bad idea. He didn’t like removing stumps. He had no choice, like it or not. Standing in the unemployment office line would have to be reserved for someone else.

On his way home after work, he went to the drugstore, not to see Carla, but to see if he could get some liniment for his hands and his aching back. He hurt so much, he wanted to scream. However, he would never cry out in pain because his new found manhood would not allow him to even let out a tiny whimper. Sam came over to him and said, “Can I help you find something Zeb?”

“You sure can. I need some salve to put on my blisters and liniment to help heal up my back.”

“Got just the thing for you over here. It is an inexpensive back rub that works like a champ.”

“That is what I need.” He took the liniment and walked up to the register to pay for it. Sam said that Carla told him she felt like she did something wrong because Zeb has been acting cold and casual toward her. “Is there something wrong?”

Life was catching up with him. Just when he started to feel like a man, his conscience made him feel like a heel. The last thing he wanted to do was to explain why he was being impersonal toward her. He thought a minute and said, “It has nothing to do with Carla at all. I think she is the most wonderful girl I have ever met, but once one knows someone is not right for them, they have an obligation not to hurt them by pretending. Do you agree?”

“Yes I do. When I was courting a girl named Maggie, before I married Emily, I knew she was not right for me. She didn’t want me to go into business. She hated the idea of playing second fiddle to a shopkeeper. When I told her I planned to open a store someday, she turned me down for another date. I never saw her again.”

As he left the drugstore, Zeb felt good about not having to offend her father’s feelings about his daughter.

He saw Frank sitting in his chair by the front window as he drove up to his parking spot. He needed someone to talk to and hoped Frank would come to the door when he heard him drive up. But, he did not.

The liniment felt good on his hands and back. It was not long before he cooked and ate his dinner. Then he laid down and went to sleep on his awful bed.

The next few days went by very fast. Before he knew it, it was once again Friday. Thoughts about Carla faded away as his thoughts turned toward getting paid.

He remembered what Bear said about building up his nest egg and went to the bank after work to deposit almost one half of his pay into his account.

He asked the new bank teller if she knew how many days the ground froze over solid during the winter months. She said, “I do not know. I know it doesn’t get as cold around here as it does in Montana or Alaska. Would you like to make a deposit into your account?”

“Yes, I would like to put $23 into my account.” He then handed her his bank passbook.

The name Maria was on her name tag. She had jet black hair, brown eyes, and was wearing a navy-blue dress. It fit tightly around her waist. She was five-foot-five and weighed 125 pounds.

“Gee. She is awfully friendly. I wonder if she is

married. Here I go again. Stop. I am not ready for this," he thought.

After she wrote the amount in his bankbook and handed it back to him. He said, "Thank you." His flushed face and his voice gave away his thoughts.

She smiled at him and said, "You're welcome."

He turned and walked to his car in a cloud of emotions about her. It did not seem more than a minute before he woke out of his trance to find himself rooting out more stumps in Walt's back yard.

Each Friday thereafter he went to the bank to see if Maria was there. Each week he was polite and nothing more. He did not want to get himself worked up into a lather just to be let down again. Maria was beautiful and he knew it, but deep down inside he knew she would not be interested in a tree man. She was so professional in her manner it made him feel as though he was totally out of her league.

After several weeks, the blisters on his hands were healed. He got used to rooting out stumps; However, his hands were now getting severely chapped and bleeding around his fingernails. The

colder it got, the more he longed to be working inside a warm building. “Why didn’t my father let me go to college like I wanted?” he thought. The joy of being a tree man slowly turned into the realization that he was no more than a paid prisoner in the tree business. Bear was like a father to him, but he was trapped in the tree business as surely as Zeb was trapped in it himself.

Thursday afternoon, Bear said, “I am real tired, we have almost three acres of stumps out, let’s quit at noon today.”

“You don’t have to say that twice, it’s mighty cold and windy out here today.”

After Zeb got back to his room, he could not sit still. He got his Model A running and headed for the soda fountain, half wanting to see Carla and half wanting to just be around people. When he got there, Carla was not there. Another girl was at the counter. She was small and had dishwater blonde hair that came down to her shoulders.

He ordered a cup of hot chocolate and asked the new girl, “Is Carla off today?”

“No, she moved up to a college dormitory in Lexington, Kentucky. She’ll start working toward a

degree in, I think, religious studies shortly after the first of January.

“College is silly and a waste of time. I don’t want any part of book learning. They ain’t no substitute for good ol’ fashion horse sense.”

“I suppose you are right, but some people want all the book learning they can get, you see?”

“Not me.”

He was happy the temptation to change his mind about going to her church was over, but for the first time he was envious of Carla. She was going to college and he was going to dig out more tree stumps.

He sipped his hot chocolate, not because he had any particular interest in the new girl, but because he wanted to put off having to go out in the cold December weather. However, he could only put off the inevitable for so long. He soon found himself back in his room where he turned on his radio to a country music station. Then he held his hands over the heater in his room to get them warm. When they were warm enough, he prepared his dinner, took a shower and turned in for the day. It was bitter cold when he awoke at eight o’clock the next morning.

At nine-thirty they were in the field digging out stumps. Zeb's spirits were low as he rubbed his hands together in an effort to warm them up. His thoughts focused on Carla sitting in her warm college dormitory and toward Maria standing behind her teller window, as he grabbed the shovel to dig out more roots in the nearly frozen ground. It was a lot harder to dig the dirt away from the tree roots during the cold weather. He also had to be careful not to fall on an icy spot on the ground.

Before he knew it, Christmas was a week away. Bear asked him if he wrote home for Christmas.

Zeb told him he had not completely gotten over his father and was afraid of angering his father, Herman Smith.

"You can't let your mother down because of your father. You have to write to her and let her know where you are. I know the Mrs. wants to hear from all of her kids when they are away, especially around Christmas time. Promise me you will write to your mom."

"I Promise I will wrote to her very soon."

After work, he stopped by the drugstore and got a hot chocolate. He heard someone call the

new girl, Connie. He was business casual toward her whenever she waited on him. She made several cute remarks at him which he let sail away with the wind. By this time, the soda fountain was more of a habit than a place to meet someone.

He got up and walked over to the push-button register and paid for his drink, then he walked over to the drugstore side and started looking for a Christmas card.

Sam walked over to him and asked how he was doing. Then he said, “I received a letter from Carla last week. She still likes you and wishes you could come to Kentucky and attend college with her.

Zeb told her father he was not quite ready for college yet. “I always wanted to be an engineer. I like to work with my hands and make things.” The real reason Zeb could not go to college was he did not have the money. He changed the subject by saying he needed a card to send to his mom. “Do you have any Christmas cards?”

Her father showed him a small rack with mostly religious cards in it. He chose one with a snowman sitting in front of a quaint cottage. The

card would have to do, since his choices were so limited.

When he paid for the card, he told Sam he really liked Carla, but he had to stick with his decision about her. Again he told him she was a wonderful girl. He also said he did not feel he had the right to lead her on when he knew it was never meant to be. Zeb was happy Sam thought enough of him to keep telling him about Carla. However, he was not making it easy for him to keep her out of his thoughts.

"I have to get this Christmas card in the mail to my mother." He paid for the card, went out to his car and wrote a note to his mom and put it in the envelope with the card.

Dear Mom:

I am living in a rooming house on the outskirts of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I have a job working for Willie's Tree Service. We have been cutting down trees and clearing the brush from a field behind a real fancy house. It is hard work, but I can't complain. I miss you and wish I could be with you, but I have to be absolutely sure I can stand on my own two feet before I can even think

of coming back to Arizona.

Merry Christmas and have a happy New Year!

Love, Zeb.

Tears rolled off of his cheeks as he sealed the envelope, took it to the post office where he mailed it and then drove home. Frank opened the door as he walked toward his room. He said, “Got time to visit for a spell?”

“In a minute Mr. Frank. I have to get cleaned up and eat first.”

“Come back when you are ready. I have a big supper on the stove for us.”

The door was still open when he came back to Frank’s apartment. He knocked on the door jamb and said, “May I come in?”

“Please do.”

“How are you Mr. Frank?”

“I am all right. It looks like you had a rough day.”

“No, I just can’t relax. I cannot get things off my mind. I am afraid I will not make it through the winter.”

“You will make it through winter with flying colors. I have been kicking around this old world

for over 80 years and have yet to starve to death. If push comes to shove, you can do a few chores around here to cover your rent."

"I am not worried about money. I don't have anyone. Do you understand?"

"I do not have anyone except Agnes. When you get my age, one by one, everyone you know either moves away or dies on you. Each time someone dies, it makes me wonder how soon I will be reunited with my wife again.

"Speaking of Agnes, the lady who takes me to church every Sunday, she is very ill. She is not expected to recover anytime soon. Agnes is the last close friend I have. We go back so far I hate to think about it."

"Have you told your pastor about the situation? I am sure someone will come and take you to church and take you to get your groceries."

"I hate to impose on you, but would you be willing to take me to see Agnes?"

"How could I refuse? You have done so much for me. When would you like me to take you to see her?"

"I am too down in the dumps to be a good visitor for her now. How about after work on

Monday, unless she gets a lot worse off?”

“Just let me know what time and I will take you to see her. What about groceries and all?”

“I have enough for a week or so. We can deal with my needs later.”

“Mr. Frank. Would it be alright if I come over and spend part of Christmas day with you?”

“I don’t have anybody coming. That would be splendid.”

“What about Agnes? Would you like me to take you to see her Sunday? Christmas is this Sunday.”

“It’s funny how a mind drifts when they are grieving over someone. I would like to visit her, but I will have to call Agnes first and see if she will be up to having visitors.”

December 23, 1955, Bear invited Zeb to share Christmas morning with his family.

“I don’t want to impose on you. Mr. Frank has no one to be with him for Christmas. I plan to spend part of Christmas day with him. And I am going to take him to see his friend Agnes. She is gravely ill. Thanks anyway.”

“Well then, you have yourself a real Merry Christmas Zeb.”

“Have a Merry Christmas and happy New Year.”

Christmas morning Zeb took Frank to see his friend, Agnes. She was feeling a lot better. It looked as though she would completely recover.

Frank told Zeb that seeing her all chipper was the best Christmas present he ever had.

When they got back to the rooming house, Zeb told Frank he would be back in a minute. He went to his room and brought back a package the size of a large hat box. He handed it to Frank and said, “Merry Christmas.”

Frank opened the present and it was a dark blue jacket. He said, “You did not need to get me anything.”

“I had to get you a jacket to wear on these cold evenings. I do not want you to catch a bad cold like Agnes.”

“That was mighty thoughtful of you.”

By five o’clock he was back in his room with his hands over the heater and thinking about Bear, Carla, Maria and Frank. This was the first Christmas evening he ever had to spend away from home. He then thought about his mother and the smell of dinner coming fresh out of the oven. “Mom I know I’ll come back to Arizona soon. I miss you so much.”

A Tough Decision



Monday night, he took Frank to see Agnes. She looked awfully pale. “What is the matter with her Mr. Frank? I thought she was recovering.”

“Her cold went into her chest and then turned into a bad case of bronchitis. It could go into pneumonia at any time. For the past few years I have been trying to get her to take better care of herself. It fell on deaf ears. She is way too set in her ways for that. The doctor thinks she will be all right. One can never tell about one’s health. We can come back and check on her every day until she gets on her feet again.”

Zeb could see how much Frank was distraught

over his dear friend's illness. Frank was not his usual self.

"Mr. Frank do you think she will get well soon?"

"I know she'll completely recover. The Lord will not let her die. She is too fine a lady for Him to let her leave us."

When the visit was over, Zeb took him to the store, so he could get a few grocery items. Frank was in a trance on the way back home. He was feeling very bad about Agnes being so sick. She had lost over 20 pounds so far. "There is no telling how long her illness will last. But, I know she will get better soon," said Frank. When they got back, Zeb said, "Are you going to be alright? Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I will be shipshape soon enough. I just have to toughen up a bit."

"Knock on my door if you need anything Mr. Frank."

"I will."

He checked in on Frank every night after work for the rest of the week. Agnes was feeling a little better by Friday night. He took him to see her again on Sunday afternoon. During the visit Frank asked Agnes, "Can you believe we made it all the

way to 1956?" He was trying to cheer her up even though there was little hope she would recover.

Zeb remembered when his grandmother Jenny died. He was only fourteen-years-old when he was told about his beloved grandmother being gravely ill. Six months later, after a long failed convalescence, she died of cancer. He believed Agnes was going to die too.

"We need to go home now. I talked to the Pastor and told him about you being sick. He said he would visit you later this afternoon."

"Frances, It is so good of you to look after me."

The next several weeks went by without being noticed. By the end of January they had removed almost all of the stumps. Agnes was doing a lot better. She was feeling more able to care for herself. Frank insisted on visiting her several times a week. He wanted to do everything he could to make sure she fully recovered.

Zeb went to work early Tuesday morning. When he drove up and parked under the tree, Bear was putting their lunch in the truck. On the way out to the field, Bear said, "The way I figure it, we'll have all of the stumps dug out in three weeks. I have been losing most of my jobs to a new outfit that

moved down here from Jackson, MS. They have a huge bulldozer. It can root out a dozen stumps before I can get my tools out, and they have powerful chain saws that cut down trees faster than a lightening strike.

“I hope to be able to keep some of my firewood business, but it looks like I will not have any work for you by the middle of February.”

The world was passing them by. Bear couldn’t afford the heavy equipment to compete with the larger tree services. His face grew taunt with fear. He was 46 and had to face the fact that he would soon have to look for a job himself. What kind of work could he do? All he knew was the tree business.

He did not know how to operate a chain saw or run a bulldozer. Fear also shot through Zeb too. He saw himself sitting on a hard wooden chair at the employment office again. His fears started to go away as he realized he was still young enough to start over again or learn a new trade.

It began to rain shortly after sundown. The ice cold rain peppered the thin roof over his room. When they got to the field the next morning, it was flooded. They could not even get out to the

stumps without wading through large puddles of standing water.

“It looks like we are going to have a couple of days off to rest up. We cannot do any work here until the field dries out a little,” said Bear.

Meanwhile, Agnes had fully recovered. She came to pick Frank up and take him to church Sunday, the 26th of February. Frank continued to look in on her twice a week. He wanted to make sure she stayed well.

They only had seventy stumps left to remove by the end of the month. Zeb had been asking around to see if anyone knew of a place where he might be able to get a job in a couple of weeks. There weren’t many jobs he could do. Employers either wanted someone with at least five years experience or someone who has a college degree and at least a year of work experience. He was frustrated, yet at the same time he was confident his persistent manner would result in a job of some kind. Several people told him he could go to some of the local restaurants and get a job washing dishes. He was not yet so desperate he would even consider taking a job as a pearl diver; however, the thought he might have to take a dish

washing job had cropped up in his mind on more than one occasion.

The next two weeks were hit and miss days of work. The field was completely dry by the end of second week, which made them happy.

On the fifteenth of March, Bear invited Zeb to have supper with the family to celebrate the final stump being removed and the clearing job being finished. His heart felt like a sinking ship when he suddenly realized his job would soon end. But he did not let his emotions get out of control.

Dinner was clouded by uncertainty about the future. They shared some stories about the good season they had cutting down trees. Everyone kept up a positive facade in the face of the inevitable hardships that would come to all of them very soon.

After dinner, Bear told Zeb to drive back to the log pile when he came in the morning at 9:00, and they would get started cutting the logs into two-foot pieces, and then they would begin splitting them into fireplace logs.

It was dark when he started up his Model A and headed back to his room. He stopped at the gas station to get some gas on his way home.

When he saw the grocery store was still open, he stopped and bought a lot more groceries than he normally buys. His fear of a hungry future caused him to stock up. After he parked his car at the rooming house, he walked up the steps and opened the main entrance door. Frank's door was open, so he knocked on the door jamb. Frank said, "I am doing some busy work. I'll will be there in a minute."

"It's Zeb. Take your time. I will wait for you."

"Frank said, "Come on in and have a seat."

He walked over and had a seat on one of the cushioned living room chairs. A while later Frank came into the room and sat down. He said, "I have been doing some rearranging in the bedroom and in the kitchen. Agnes is coming over tomorrow and we are planning to make supper together."

"That is great. I am all for you."

"What is on your mind Zeb?"

"Today I had dinner with Bear's family to celebrate the last stump being removed from Mr. Pigeon's back five acres. I am worried I will not be able to get another job."

"Nonsense. You are one tough *hombre*. You will

find another job in a snap. There is always a need for a hand who is willing to work hard. That is why you got your job in the first place."

"I know I am willing to work hard. I just need a little reassurance."

"You've got it from me. As long as I am alive and you treat me like you have been treating me, you have a place to stay and something to eat. I have not forgot how much you helped me and Agnes. That sticks in my heart like glue."

"That helps me a lot. I need to be strong about this. Mom always used to say, "Worrying only clutters up the path to the good times."

"Speaking of your mom, did you ever get a letter from her."

"I got a couple of letters from her, but I never answered them. I only promised Bear I would write to her. I did not promise to answer any of their letters."

"Shame on you, you need to go to your room and write a letter to your mom this instant. I know you care about her a lot. Why didn't you answer her letters?"

"She was going on about how dad was doing this and dad was doing that. I don't want to hear

about him."

"You do not have to even mention your dad. Your mother needs to know how you are and what you have accomplished since you moved here from your home back in Arizona."

"All I have done since I have been here is to get dirty and all bruised up. I have not done anything exciting like Carla and Maria have."

"Some day you are going to realize that going to college is no bed of roses either. There is no guarantee Carla will ever end up doing anything great. She is a good girl, but that does not make her infallible. You need to stop feeling sorry for yourself and hang on to what you need most, your mother and father."

"I can agree with you on mom, but not my dad. Oh, all right! I will write to my mom tonight and mail it in the morning on my way to work."

The next morning he mailed the letter and headed for Bear's place. He drove his car up to the pile of logs and parked it in the sun. The warmth of the sun made the car a lot easier to start at the end of the day.

Bear came out and opened the shed. Then they dragged the cordwood saw over next to the log

pile. He told Zeb to get the gas can out of the back of his truck and fill up the tank on the three horsepower Wisconsin engine. After the tank was full, Bear said, “You are going to be holding the other end of the logs after we get going. I will be feeding the logs into the saw. This blade has no safety guard on it. It can cut off a hand or an arm in less than a second, so we will have to work together in unison. You will get the hang of using the saw after we cut up a few logs.

“There are four things you have to do to start this engine. First it needs a little gas in the tank; then we have to turn on the gas valve. Go ahead and open up this needle valve all the way.” He pointed to the little valve above the glass sediment bulb under the gas tank. That turns on the gas to the carburetor. If it does not leak, you close the choke. Then you wrap this t-cord around the starter pulley and give her a man-sized jerk upwards. If you are lucky, she will start on the first pull. But, since she’s been setting all winter, we will more than likely be very tired of pulling on the cord before she fires up the first time.”

Zeb pulled the stater cord ten times before, the Wisconsin engine sputtered and puffed out a

thick cloud of black smoke from it's salt shaker like muffler which was attached to the end of a foot-long one inch galvanized water pipe. There were two elbows on the end of the pipe which made it look like a sunflower blossom drooping downward toward the ground. The extra pipes kept rain water from getting into the engine and ruining it.

After the engine ran for several minutes, Bear said, "She is a purring like a kitten. We are ready to saw us some firewood." They cut the eight foot logs into four pieces each until the Wisconsin engine ran out of gas. Bear said, "It is noon, let's go up to the house and have lunch while the engine cools down."

Zeb's arms were aching and his back felt like a truck had run over it. He sat down slowly so his back would not hurt.

They had a quick lunch and then headed back to the pile of timber. Bear asked Zeb to come over to a big stump near the end of the log pile. "This is my splitting stump. Go and get the wedges and my 8-pound sledgehammer from the shed."

Zeb stood there in a trance. His eyes remained glued on the splitting stump. It took him back to

when his father came up to him while he was sitting on a stump, grabbed him by the arm and beat him for not coming when he was called. His father didn't even ask whether or not he had heard him. He wanted to scream out why are you beating me, but he dared not.

"Are you alright?" said Bear.

"No I haven't been feeling well lately. I will be okay in a minute. I will get the wedges and the sledgehammer."

"The sledge is hanging upside down on the shed wall over there. And the wedges are those big metal things on the edge of my workbench. They look like a thin cheese wedge," said Bear. He pointed to a spot on the wall where the maul was hanging. "Meanwhile I will get the wheelbarrow and load up some of these pieces of wood we cut up this morning and wheel them over next to the stump."

They got set up to split the log segments into firewood. Bear showed him how to split the two-foot pine logs by tapping the wedge into the end of the wood until it stuck and then he hit the steel wedge several times with the full force of the maul until the log split in two.

After they split all of the log segments they had cut earlier, Zeb refilled the Wisconsin engine's gas tank and started it up. This time it started on the second pull. They continued cutting and splitting the log pieces until the sun was low in the sky and the chill of the evening forced them to quit for the day.

Fourteen days later the log pile was all gone and Bear's firewood supply covered an eighth of an acre stacked five feet high.

"Wow! That is one big pile of wood," said Zeb.

"This wood will bring in enough money to keep the family from starving next winter. Too bad this will be the last year I'll be able to sell firewood. Me and the Mrs. decided I need to get out of the tree business. Last week I got hired on at my son's school as a maintenance man. They do not have enough work to keep me busy full time, so I will have to do some janitorial work to fill in the rest of the time to make a full workweek. I will be starting at his school on Monday morning." He did not want to tell him he was really going to be a janitor with some maintenance duties.

"At least it is a year round job for me. You have been a good hand. I hate to let you go, but I have

no choice. One day you will have to face the fact that you will no longer have your youth and you too will have to look for a softer job yourself. You can have anyone call me and I will vouch for you, so you can get another job."

Zeb's fear he would have to find another job had come true. He did not know what he was going to do. "I hate to leave, but I know you have no choice. Besides, you told me several weeks ago the job would end soon. I am grateful you kept me on this long."

"I have a few things I want you to do to help me around the house. We will only be working on weekends because of my new job. The living room floor in the house needs to be patched up a bit and the kitchen needs a little work. I expect it will take us two or three weekends to get it done."

"I will be here for you Bear. Good luck on your new job. After we get done with the work on the house, would you mind if I drop in to see you once in a while." He choked up and did not want to appear to be afraid of being out of work.

"You can come see us anytime you like. Just give us a call first. I plan to start working on the house at 9:00 Saturday morning and we will work

until 5:00. On Sunday we will only work from one till five."

Both of them went into the house where he received his final pay. They talked about how good the season was and how they wished it did not have to end.

Later, as he mounted the running board of his car, he knew it was tearing Bear apart to have to give up the tree business and take a job he knew did not pay a whole lot of money. Zeb did not tell Bear or Frank he got a letter from his mother. She wrote to him about having a bad crop year and about his father having a mild heart attack.

It was inevitable he would have to go back to Arizona very soon. His mother would need him to help her out if his dad were to suddenly die. However, he was going to stay until he finished helping Bear fix up his house.

A sadness came over him as he drove back to his room. It was a chilly evening and there was not a cloud in the sky, but he felt like a dense fog was hanging over him. His life had once again been turned up-side-down. What was he going to do?

After he turned onto the highway, he was not

paying attention and before he knew it, he turned left at the wrong intersection. The road was leading him nowhere. The houses all looked alike. Near the end of the road, he saw two man standing in front of a house that was being built. He stopped and said, “I am lost. Can you tell me how to get back to the highway?”

“You go back about a half a mile and turn right. The highway leading into Hattiesburg is about five blocks past the next crossroad.”

“Thanks. I lost my job today and I am a little in the fog over it.”

“What kind of work were you doing?

I was a tree man for Willie’s Tree Service.”

“Does he drive a clean looking navy-blue Chevrolet pickup truck?”

“Yes he does.”

“Does he live in a big two-story house just off of Number 15 road?”

“Yes Sir. Why do you ask?”

“Let me see your hands.”

He held out his hands so the man could see them.

“Why did you want to see my hands? Is there anything wrong?”

“I run Jackson’s City Tree Service. I opened up here last summer. I was just out here going over the blueprints to my new home with Ron. He is my building contractor.

“And you are?”

“I am Zebadiah Smith.”

“Would it be okay for me to call you Zeb?”

“Most everybody does.”

“Ever operate a bulldozer?”

“I would not mind learning how to operate a bulldozer.”

“Ever used a chain saw before?”

“No. I never learned how.”

“I thought you said you were a tree man.”

“We did everything by hand, except for a buzz saw with a three-horsepower Wisconsin engine on it.”

“What were you getting?”

“I do not understand what you mean by, ‘what were you getting?’ ”

“How much was Willie paying you?”

He wanted to tell him he was getting a dollar-ten an hour, but he remembered how his mother hated it when he lied to her. “I was getting 95 cents an hour plus a dollar bonus any day we got

10 trees done."

"I can hire you at a dollar and a quarter an hour starting tomorrow morning. Are you interested?"

"Yes, but my father out in Arizona has had a heart attack, so I may have to go back out West real soon to help my mom if he gets worse or suddenly dies."

"You think it over and let me know. Here is my name and number. Call me if you decide to stay and want the job."

"I will think it over." He was half mad at him because he was the one who put Willie out of business. Worst of all, he did not want to be a tree man for the rest of his life.

It was a tough decision for him to make. He wanted to stay to prove he could make it on his own over the long haul. At the same time, he wanted to go back to be near his mother in Arizona. But, he had less desire to be near his father.

He drove back to the highway, then he went home. Frank was sitting in his big easy chair rocking back and forth. He looked like he was not feeling well. As Zeb walked past his door, he said, "Got a minute?"

“I have to clean up a bit first.”

“It won’t take me more than ten minutes.”

“Good. Take your time there is no hurry.”

Later, Frank told him how Agnes took him to see the doctor and the news was not good. “I have something awful to tell you. The doctor says my liver is not functioning properly. It is real bad. I told him to give it to me right out of both barrels. He thinks I have less than a year to live.”

“I am so hurt for you Mr. Frank.”

“Don’t be fretting over me. I will be with my wife soon and that is what matters most. This worldly body is all bent and broke up, but I will get a new one, once I am with my wife again.”

The decision of whether to stay or go back to Arizona was now even harder for him to make. He talked with him for an hour before Frank said, “I am feeling a bit weak and need to get some rest.”

The atmosphere in the room was gloomy and worried thoughts were churning in his head. “I have some sorting out to do myself,” said Zeb. “Today was my last day as a tree man. I made a wrong turn and ended up in front of a huge house. It turned out the house is owned by the company that put Bear out of business and cost

me my job. And Mr. Frank is gravely ill. What else can happen to me?" he said under his breath.

"Mr. Frank, I have been holding out on you. I got a letter from my mother a week or so back, and she wrote about my dad having a heart attack. She wants me to come back to Arizona. I do not think I am going back anytime soon. She says dad is a lot better toward her, but I know better. He is an ornery old man, and he'll never change."

"You need to be considering your mother. She needs you now more than ever."

"I will think about it. This is not the time for me to make any decisions. You take care of yourself. By the way, how is Agnes doing?"

"She is doing right smart. You would never know she was almost a goner."

"That is good to hear. I will come over and check on you in the morning." He moped around all evening. It was three am. before he drifted off into a restless sleep.

The next morning he drove around in an effort to get his mind off of his troubles. He turned down a short street and saw a big house with the side of it torn open. Construction materials and scraps were scattered on the north side of the

house. In the front yard, stuck in the grass behind the sidewalk, he saw a sign with the words "Carpenter Wanted" hand painted on it. There was no one around, so he wrote down the address; and then, he drove around for several more hours before going back home.

It was after dark when he opened the door to his room. "Carpenter Wanted. I think I will drive out there tomorrow and see if I can get a job as a carpenter. I helped my father work his cotton farm and helped him work on his house. I wonder if I am a carpenter. I believe I am a carpenter," he said to himself. "I am going to ask them for the job." he decided.

He was under intense pressure to choose whether to stay in Hattiesburg or go back home to Buckeye, Arizona

Carpenter Wanted



At 6:15 am. he could not get the Carpenter Wanted sign off his mind. By nine o'clock his excitement turned into fear. "Who am I trying to kid? They will never hire me as a carpenter," he thought. Then he remembered how his mother would say, "You don't get anything unless you try."

"I will give it my best mom. Thanks," he said to himself. In the morning he left his room, walked proudly toward his car and started toward the house with the sign. When he saw the carpenter wanted sign, he swallowed hard, drove up and parked. Two men were looking at some blueprints sitting on a sheet of gray war surplus plywood

lying on top of two small saw horses. “They are the ones I have to talk to,” he surmised.

He stepped off the running board of his car and marched toward the two men. He stopped about four feet away from them. One of the men turned and gave him a quick once over. “What can I do for you?” he said.

“I am here to apply for the carpenter job.”

“Hi, my name is Jim Kearney.” he said. He was average height, wearing a dark brown suit, and was very aggressive. I own Kearney’s Remodeling and Additions and this is my foreman Loren Stealey. He was clean shaven and was wearing a plaid shirt, gray pants, brown leather boots and had black hair with lots of gray mixed in. He was six-feet tall and weighed 185.

“I’m sorry. I already hired a new carpenter. I guess I have not gotten around to taking down the sign. What kind of experience do you have?” said Loren.

“Jobs have been sparse lately, so I have been working cutting down trees. I helped my father with the machinery he used on our cotton farm out in Arizona.”

“Do you have any carpentry experience?”

“I used to help my father whenever he did remodeling on our house.”

“I need carpenters with a lot of experience. If the man I hired does not work out, I will need someone with at least five years experience to replace him.”

“Here we go with the experience thing again. I don't have a chance. I will always be a tree man. It sticks to me like pine sap,” he thought. But he stood there and waited them out. After several minutes, the foreman said, “I could not help but notice you have real solid arms, and your hands look like you know how to work. I could use a good laborer who will pitch in and get the job done. I can start you at a dollar an hour if you want the job. If you work out, later I will give you a dollar and a quarter an hour and promote you to a carpenter’s helper. What do you say?”

Zeb thought it over for a minute. His choices were to either be stuck in the tree business or take the offer. Once he finished weighing out his options, he said, “When do you want me to start?”

“Tomorrow at 8:00 in the morning. Friday is payday and time goes in on Wednesday. I have a two day hold back so my bookkeeper can have

the pay checks ready by Friday afternoon.

“What we will be doing is building a two story addition on the north side of this house. We will be making it look like the existing building. So get a good night’s rest and be here in the morning ready to work.”

“I will be here at 8 o’clock sharp. Thank you for giving me a chance.” He had no way of knowing that thanking him was the wrong thing to do. It made it sound like he was desperate, which could make it harder for him to get a raise in the future.

“You’ll need to have a wrecking bar, a hammer, a nail apron, and several pairs of canvas gloves by work time tomorrow.”

“I will stop by the hardware store this evening and get some tools.” Zeb wanted to jump for joy. He got another job in just one day. However, he had no way of knowing, he just entered the world of construction labor where he would more than likely remain for the rest of his life.

He drove back to the rooming house to tell Frank the good news. When he got to his door, it was closed and there was no activity. He knocked on his door and waited for a minute before Frank said, “Who’s there?”

“It’s Zeb. I have some good news for you.”

“He came to the door and opened it slowly. Sorry, I am a little under the weather today. I have to go and see the doctor tomorrow. I hope he can give me some medicine to make me feel better.

They discussed his new job for a while. “The foreman told me I needed to have some tools by tomorrow.”

“What kind of tools did he say you had to have?”

“He said I need a hammer, a wrecking bar and some canvas gloves.”

“Come with me out to my storeroom in the back yard beside the garage. I have not driven a car for over forty-five years, so the garage and my storeroom are a bit worn down. I took tools and things in trade for rent, over the years, when some of my tenants fell on hard times.” He followed Frank to a 16×20 foot storage shed with a standard third pitch composition shingled roof. The walls were made with 2×4s covered with dingy white siding. The door had a hasp with a rusty padlock holding it closed. He took out a key, opened the lock and pulled the door open. Grass and weeds had grown up all around the edge of

the shed. Zeb saw a dozen tool boxes lined up haphazardly along one wall. After Frank dumped the tools out of a small pole-handled carpenter's tool box into a larger toolbox, he told him to put the tools he needed into the empty box. He put in a 16 oz. curved-claw hammer, a framing square, a wrecking bar, a wide chisel, an 8-point rip saw and a four foot level in the toolbox. "That should do it for me. What do I owe you?"

"For you, a fin will do it nicely."

He handed Frank a crisp new five dollar bill, which he rubbed between his thumb and index finger for a few seconds before he put it in his pocket.

"Thanks for the tools. I will put them to good use."

"Don't mention it. I always like to help out a friend."

They went back to Frank's living room where they talked about his appointment and how he wasn't getting any better. Zeb wished he could do something to make things better for his friend, but he knew Frank had terminal liver disease.

When the conversation wound down, Zeb said he would go, so Frank could get some rest. He

told him some rest might make him feel better even though he knew there was nothing he could do, except to be there for him if he needed anything.

The hardware store was about six miles away. He drove there and talked to Carl of Carl's Cash and Carry lumber and Hardware. He went in and asked how much it would cost for a nail apron. Carl told him a pair of coveralls with a nail apron attached goes for $5.50. If he wanted a two pocket canvas nail apron, he could have it for free, if he bought something. He looked around and selected two pairs of canvas gloves with jersey cuffs for 35 cents a pair. Carl asked him if he needed any nails. Zeb did not know what size nails he would need, so he went to the bins of bulk nails and pointed to the big ones. Carl said "A pound of 16d nails. Are you going to be doing some framing?"

"No. I am going to be doing some remodeling. What does the d after the 16 mean?"

"Well, the d is a short way of saying penny." He spoke as if he really knew what a penny meant. Probably not. "A 16 penny nail is 3 ½ inches long and there are about 50 nails per pound. I have

16d box nails, and I have 16d common nails. Box nails are skinnier than common nails. The building business is switching to box nails. They do not split the wood as much as common nails, but they are not as strong either. The nails I put in the bag for you are box nails."

"I think I understand." Carl did not offer to tell him that carpenters do not furnish their own nails unless they work on piece rates and furnish their own materials.

"I suggest you go out in your backyard and practice driving these nails into a board or two."

"I do not have any boards."

"For fifty cents more, I will throw in a half a dozen pieces of scrap wood for you to practice on. Now, don't take a big swing at a nail. Start the nails real slow or you could end up with a blood stained piece of wood and a mighty sore and bleeding thumb.

"I will get a hammer and show you how to drive a few nails into a piece of scrap 2×4. First, you have to tap the nail lightly to get it started. Once the nail is started, do not put your hand near the nail again." He tapped a nail into one of the boards, and then hit it three times. "Always

remember, you are going to be driving nails all day long. There is no reason to set the world on fire. However, once you get good at nailing, sooner or later you will be challenged to a nail driving contest by a show-off who wants to prove he or she is better at driving nails than you are. The last time I got myself into a nail driving contest was back in the forties. This bullheaded carpenter thought he was a nail driving kingpin. I was a 140 pound sprout who was itching to prove I was no spring chicken.

“We had just finished tacking down 128 lineal feet of 45 degree tongue and groove sub-flooring. He kept going on about how fast he could nail the flooring down. After he kept bugging me for an hour, I told him to start at one end of the floor, and I would start at the other end. I also told him it would cost the looser a dollar a foot for every foot less than 64 feet they had nailed off when we met. After we met, he had nailed down 28 feet and I had nailed down a hundred feet. That meant he owed me 36 dollars.

“I told him I would not make him pay me the thirty-six dollars if he promised to never brag about how fast a nailer he was again. He never

bragged about anything on that job again, at least not as long as I was there.

“Got a hammer?”

“I have a 16 oz. claw hammer out in my car.”

“If you bring it in here, I can see how you do at nailing and maybe give you a pointer or two.”

“Okay. I will be right back.” He got his hammer and drove a few nails while Carl watched him. He bent all of them over several times, but he did managed to get them all driven into the wood without seriously banging his fingers or his thumb.

Carl said, “Do you have enough money to buy five more pounds of nails?”

“Yes.”

“You will need them so you can do a lot of practicing”

“I am not getting the hang of driving nails, am I?”

“Not exactly. However, you will get better as time goes on. I hope you get better at driving nails before you start your new remodeling job.”

“I am only starting as a laborer for now. I will practice until I get good at driving nails.”

“You might want to practice driving nails in at a

45 degree angle too. Some carpenters still insist on angle nailing the studs to the bottom plate. They say it helps prevent moisture from rusting the nails away over time. And they also say the nails hold more at a 45 degree angle. I am not saying one way or another. I don't drive nails for a living anymore."

As Zeb turned to leave, Carl said, "Be careful and don't get caught red handed with any blood stained boards." And then he winked at Zeb. You are ready to start filling these pieces of wood full of nails?"

"I will be extra careful. Thanks for helping me with my nailing." He got into his car feeling he was ready for his first day as a construction worker.

The next morning he sprang out of bed and got ready. He packed a big lunch which included a gallon jug of iced tea.

When he drove his car up to the house where he would be working, the carpenter wanted sign was down. He saw Loren talking to a man while they were looking at the blueprints to the room addition.

He got out of his car and walked over to where

they were standing. The blueprints were very interesting to him, but he did not know what even one line on them meant.

Loren turned to him and said, “Ready to get after it?”

“I am ready and raring to go.”

“Zeb. This is my carpenter, Robert Sampson. He was five-ten and weighed in at 170 pounds. His sandy brown hair was combed to the right side and he was wearing white bibbed overalls. Zeb will be starting to work for us today.”

“Hi Robert.”

“I prefer to be addressed as Bob.”

“Hello Bob.” Loren asked Zeb to follow him over to the side of the house. He gave him a square spade and said, “We will start by digging the footer.”

He did not know what a footer was and there was no way he was going to let on he did not know what a footer was. “I will just have to wing it,” he thought. “Where do you want me to start?”

“We’ll start over next to the existing foundation and follow this string I put up yesterday. I do not want a skimpy footing. I want it to be 30 inches deep and 24 inches wide. Nothing less will do.

Do you have a folding ruler in your tool box?"

"I will get one tonight. I did not think I needed one."

"Did you buy the tools I told you to get?"

"I got what you asked and more."

Loren went over to his pickup truck and got a yardstick. "This is better than a ruler anyway." He put a mark on it at two feet and another one at 30 inches, then he handed it to Zeb.

He was bitterly disappointed. He had no idea he would have to start digging dirt for a living again. There were three men on the job. The new carpenter, Zeb and the foreman. Bob went up stairs with Loren to a room where he could hear them talking about tearing out the old bathroom and putting in a new one.

By noon he had dug out 18 feet of the ditch for the new foundation. It was quite cold. The dirt was mucky and stuck to his shovel. It was an aggravating and miserable day. He wasn't having a good time of it at all.

Loren came over to him and said, "You are doing a real good job of digging the footing. We will have lunch in the garage. You look like you could use a rest."

After lunch, Loren said, “Time to get back to work.”

By 4:30 he had most of the foundation dug. Loren said, “We will call for concrete day after tomorrow. Until then we will finish digging the footer and start putting in the rebars.” He wanted desperately to know what rebars were; however, he would have to wait until he had a chance to see what rebars look like and find out what they are used for.

On the way home he stopped by the lumber yard to ask Carl what rebars were and to discuss the full meaning of a footer. The lumber yard was almost deserted when he got there, which made it easy for him to talk to Carl. He came up next to him and said, “How’s the nail driving coming along?”

“I have not had a chance to get start practicing yet. I have some questions I would like to ask you. OK?”

“Sure. I like to answer questions, but I can’t guarantee you I have any answers though.”

“What is a footer?” said Zeb.

“Footer is a slang word for a foundation or a footing. It is usually made of concrete, at least 8

inches think, with two #5 rebars embedded in it."

"What are rebars and what are they used for?"

"They are metal bars with bumps all along them to grab the concrete and keep it from cracking and breaking apart in the ground. Rebar is a shortened name for a reinforcing bar. They come in a lot of different sizes. You will probably be using two continuous strands of 5/8 inch in diameter rebar which will be embedded in the concrete 2 to 4 inches from the bottom of the foundation ditch. Come with me, I will show you what they look like." They went to the back of the lumberyard and went into a small room filled with metal objects. He motioned for Zeb to come over to a large rack of rebars that were separated according to size. He looked at them and said, "Not awfully impressive are they?"

Carl grinned and said, "You will have different words to describe them when you get to be my age. In construction work, age is your second worst enemy."

"What's a construction worker's worst enemy?"

He took out a small bottle of pills and said, "Injuries, and of course pills. You are a man who can lift three-hundred pounds one day and the

next day you cannot even pick up twenty pounds. That is what happened to me over ten years ago."

Zeb swallowed in silence. Reality hit him like a sour lemon. If he was not careful, he could end up in a wheelchair having to ask for a handout just to stay alive.

"That clears things up for me. Thanks. The foreman told me I need a folding ruler. Do you have one?"

"Yes I do. I have an inexpensive one for a dollar and an amber one, with an extension on it for measuring inside dimensions, for a buck and a half."

"I will take the dollar ruler." He paid for the ruler and thanked him for his help. Carl was making a good business investment by helping him out. He would continue to come back for information and continue to add to his tool collection.

The next day he finished the foundation by quitting time. He went upstairs to tell Bob the footer was done. Bob told Zeb that Loren went to pick up the rebars at the lumber yard. Then Bob told him it was time to pack up and go home.

When he got back to his room, he headed straight for the shower. He felt dirty and abused.

He was once again digging dirt with a brand new title.

The next morning he found himself in the ditch driving in metal stakes and tying the rebars to them with steel wires that cut and scraped his hands. By the end of the day the foundation was ready for inspection.

They kept him busy for the rest of the week tearing out moldings and several walls.

Friday came and he got his first pay. The money helped him justify being a laborer. The carpenter wanted sign turned out to be nothing more than a lure to get him back into doing hard labor again. He was feeling low as he drove to the soda fountain and ordered a root beer float. He was sitting there gazing off into space when Sam came over to him and said, “Got a minute to talk? Something important has come up.”

“Sure. Have a seat.”

“No, I have to keep an eye on the cash register. When you finish your drink, come over to the register and we will talk.” What on earth could he have on his mind?

He sipped his drink as his thoughts drifted off into a daydream which allowed him to go over all

of the possible reasons her father wanted to talk to him. When he finished his soda, he reluctantly got up and walked to the register.

Sam told him he was going up to visit with Carla at her college next weekend, and he wanted to know if Zeb wanted to go along with him. He said Carla still talked about him, and she wanted him to visit her.

Zeb, again, went over the past events in his mind. After a long pause, he said, “I would like nothing more than to see Carla again, but I know there is no future in it for us. I am sorry, I have to say no.”

“If there is anything I can do to change your mind, please let me know.”

“I do not think I will ever change my mind.” Zeb was beginning to feel as though her father was as emphatic about Carla and him getting together as she was about her church.

“You do not have to worry about Carla as a girlfriend. She has a boyfriend named Paul. They are planning to get married soon. She wrote about wanting to see someone from Hattiesburg she knew in the past.”

He thought this situation was a bit strange.

“Why would she want to see me? I have no ties to her of any kind,” he thought. Curiosity left with him as he headed back to his room. When he opened the main door to the rooming house, he went to Frank’s door and knocked.

“Who goes there?”

“Zeb, Mr. Frank. I need to talk to you for a spell.”

He opened the door and said, “Nice to see you. Come in and have a seat. What is on your mind? You look troubled.”

“You always seem to know when I am out of sorts. I am kind of down because I have a very tough decision to make.

“Sam, at the drugstore, asked me to go with him up to Kentucky because Carla wants to see me. It sounds fishy to me. What do you think?”

“He told me about you. He thinks you are a real nice person, and he hopes you will come over to the Lord’s side someday. He thinks Carla is getting a bit rowdy up there in Kentucky. She has a roommate in her dormitory who thinks she is one hot tomato and is influencing her a lot. That is the reason why Sam is going up there.

“You asked me to help you make a decision. So here is what I think. I believe you will never get a

good night's sleep until you find out what Carla really wants. You need to be informed that it may not be what you think. Sam told me about Carla being engaged to a boy named Paul. That means whatever she wants probably has nothing to do with any romantic intentions.

Zeb went back to his room followed by more curiosity about Carla than ever.

Lexington



Saturday morning, the 7th of April, Zeb sat in his easy chair thinking about Sam's offer to go see Carla. He had not completely gotten her out of his mind. She was too beautiful for him to completely forget her.

It was nine-fifteen am. The drugstore would be open and the soda fountain would be rich with the smells of fresh coffee and donuts. After he drove to the drugstore, he went in and walked over to his favorite booth. The smell of coffee was so strong it made him want to order a cup of it even though he did not like the taste of it.

His thoughts wandered as he sat there in a daze. "Why not? I can call Loren and tell him something came up and I need to Kentucky for

the weekend," he thought.

No one was in the drugstore, except for three people who where sitting on the stools in front of the soda fountain, and a couple was sitting in a booth by the big picture window.

Connie was working, and when she came over to wait on him, she said, "Having a bad day, are we?"

"No. I have a very tough decision to make."

She fired off a few rounds of her off-the-wall comments at him in an effort to cheer him up. The words simply drifted away as he sat there going over the pros and cons of going up to Lexington to see Carla.

"What should I do?" he silently debated. "I want to see her real bad. It will not work. She is going to marry someone else. Did I make a mistake in not asking her out again?" His head was a buzz with his problems as he ordered a root beer float with an extra block of ice cream. A tall root beer float was becoming a soothing agent for him whenever he was troubled.

Sam came over to him and said, "Changed your mind?"

"How long will we be gone, if I decide to go

with you?”

“It will take three days. I will have you back by Monday morning.”

“I’ll probably regret it, but I have decided to take you up on your offer if Loren, my foreman, says I can have off until Monday morning.”

“You can go into the back room and use my phone to call your boss.” He got up and followed Sam to the telephone. A minute later he said, “Hello. ... Loren. This is Zeb Smith. Something unexpected has come up and I need to go up to Kentucky from this Friday morning until Monday morning.”

Loren had told him over the phone he could have the time off. “I really appreciate you letting me take off on Friday. I will be back by Monday. ... Goodbye.”

“Was he upset because you asked for time off?”

“No. He said things were getting caught up and he was going to have to give me some time off by the end of the week anyway.”

“You will enjoy the trip. We will be going through some of the most beautiful scenery in America. Have you ever been to Kentucky?”

“No. I have only been from Arizona to here.”

“Then you are in for a treat. Lexington is a very beautiful city. I will see you at my house on Friday morning at two-thirty. It is a long drive from here to Lexington, Kentucky, so we need to get started very early. My son will look after the drugstore while we are gone. He is very good at taking care of the store for me.

“I’ve been after him to apply to enter Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. They have a very good business school. He is sharp about business operations, and someday I want him to get a top level management position in a big retail store.”

“I wish my father was like you about going to college. He does not believe I will ever make anything of my self except a farm laborer. If I ever have children, I will let them choose whether they want to go to college or not. I believe children should have a limited say in their own future.”

“If we do not guide our children in a good direction they will fall by the wayside and end up a failure. That is why they need the Lord,” said Sam.

Zeb knew he was not going to change Sam’s

mind. Neither of them was going to budge an inch. So he said, “I hope the weather will be good in Lexington when we get there.”

“Sam grimaced before he said, “The weather forecast calls for cool weather all weekend.”

When Zeb got back to his room, he realized he had not been out of town since he moved there. Hattiesburg was now his home. He relished in the idea of getting away for a while. But he was not real enthusiastic about seeing Carla again. It was his curiosity that drove him to accept Sam’s offer, not her beauty.

He kept trying to think of a good reason for her wanting him to come to Kentucky. It threw him for a loop to find out she was engaged. His thoughts were going around in a circle like a revolving door. All week long he tried to get her out of his head. Thursday night was particularly hard for him. He sat in his sofa chair and kept telling himself over and over again. Stop thinking about Carla. Stop thinking about Carla. Stop thinking about Carla. ... The last thing he remembered before falling asleep was looking at the clock and it was ten-twenty pm.

His alarm clock woke him out of a deep sleep

at one-forty. He was groggy from a lack of sleep as he forced himself to grab a cold breakfast and get ready for the trip.

He drove into Sam's driveway at two-twenty. Sunrise was several hours away. Because he only had a little over three hours sleep under his belt, he felt like he had not slept in a week. It was a good thing Sam would be doing all of the driving in his 1955 Chevrolet Nomad station wagon.

Sam came out of his house carrying several large bags as he walked to his car. The Nomad was already fully loaded with belongings. Zeb did not know where he would be sitting. Sam and his wife were obviously going to sit up front and he was going to have to sit in the back seat next to a large duffel bag.

At two-fifty they pulled out of the driveway and headed for Kentucky. Sam did not say much, and his wife fell asleep before they went ten miles. After they had gone fifty miles, Zeb was confident Sam was a good driver and he soon fell soundly asleep too.

Several hours later they stopped at an all-night diner that looked like a railroad car and ate an early breakfast. Zeb had the two egg breakfast

and a cup of hot chocolate. Sam had the trucker's special and two cups of coffee. His wife had a short stack of pancakes with a slice of ham on top and a cup of hot tea. The waitress handed the bill to Sam. But, before he could reach for his wallet to pay for the meals, Zeb held out two dollars toward him and said, "Here, I want to pay for my share of our breakfast."

Sam pushed the money away and said, "No. You are my guest on this trip and I will pay for everything."

He put the two dollars back in his pocket and said, "I just wanted to pay my share."

A few minutes after they started toward Lexington again, Zeb was once again sound asleep. When they entered the outskirts of Birmingham, Alabama, Sam said, "Wake up, we need to get something to eat and gas up."

Zeb and Sam's wife woke up instantly. "Where are we?" asked Sam's wife.

"We are entering Birmingham, Alabama. We need to get some gas and get something to eat."

"I am starved," said Zeb.

Sam always bought Texaco gas except when he had no other choice. Zeb, on the other hand,

bought his gas more because of Todd than a service station preference. He was always loyal to people who treated him well. It was his way of relating to people outside of his solitary world. Sam pulled into a Texaco gas station. It was immaculate and had a lot of candy and other confectioneries in a glass case under the front counter in the station office. They all got large sodas and a treat or two. Sam said, “Don’t let all those sweets spoil your appetite for dinner.”

Sam paid the station attendant for the gas and the treats. Zeb handed Sam a dollar and a quarter for his share of the bill. He said, “I told you back at the diner that you were my guest.”

“I just wanted to make sure.” They continued north until Sam announced they were on the outskirts of Knoxville and would stop to gas up at the first clean looking service station. They went another seven miles before Sam spotted a station with two rows of gas pumps in front of a large glassed in building. There were two service bays on the east side of the gas station. The sign in front of the station read: “Mechanic on Duty.” Sam believed gas stations with a mechanic on duty always gave better service. Some of the

older stations along the way only had two pumps, one regular and one ethyl, and a small station office. Some gas stations were in dire need of repairs and a coat of paint. He also believed bigger stations had fresher gas. And he was real touchy when it came to a station attendant getting under the hood of his nearly-new Nomad.

Sam drove up to a gas pump and told the attendant to fill-er-up with regular and check the tires, oil and water.

They all got out and stretched their legs for a while. Zeb went inside and bought some treats for everyone. By now, he was getting a good idea of what Sam and his wife liked. He took them out to the car and handed a soda and some candy to Sam and his wife. Sam said, “I thought I told you this trip is my treat.”

“I know, but I wanted to buy something for everybody. I feel like a mooch when I don’t help out at least a little.”

Sam was clearly upset. However, he respected him for wanting to pay his share of the expenses. A few minutes later they were once again on their way. The rest of the trip was hopelessly routine. At six o’clock they were in Lexington on the prowl

for a real clean motel. Everyone was looking out the car windows for a real sharp looking motel with free TV. Several blocks after Sam turned off the main highway, he saw a sign that read: “Clean rooms and free TV.” He said, “The motel over there looks like what the doctor ordered.”

Sam’s wife said, “The motel looks good.” It had nineteen rooms in a horseshoe shape. There was a row of trees with a short wall around them a foot and a half high. It looked like a big boxed in planter. The little wall had a flat surface on top where people could sit in the shade on hot days. Sam drove up to the office and parked his car. He said, “I will go in and find out how much a room will cost for two nights.” Later, he came out smiling and had a room key in his hand. “I got a room for us at a real good price, and you will not believe how fancy it is. I had to look at several rooms before I found one that did not smell like a spittoon. He backed his car out of the office driveway and parked it in front of their motel room door. They had a good view out of their front window. They all grabbed something to carry into the room. It took three trips for them to bring everything in. Afterward, Sam picked up the

telephone and called Carla.

“Hello, Carla. This is dad. We are in the Warren Manor Motel. ...”

“We are all well. ... ‘Just a bit worn out. What time do you want us to come to your dormitory in the morning? ... ”

“Nine-thirty will be good for us too. I have Zeb with us. Would you like to talk to him?”

Zeb’s heart sank as he heard Sam tell Carla about him being along on the trip. Sam handed him the phone.

“Hi. How have you been? Are you getting good grades in school? ...”

Carla told him she was well and getting good grades.

“I am happy for you. Your dad tells me you are making plans to get married soon. Are you getting married? ... Paul Higgens ... next month ... I see.

“You have a roommate named Darlene and she is real wild and is dying to meet me.” Zeb got his answer as to why Carla wanted him to come to see her. He did not know whether or not she was doing this to spite him or whether she was just trying to play matchmaker for Darlene.

Sam overheard the conversation. After Zeb put the phone on the hook, Sam said, “I am so sorry. I had no idea she only wanted you to come up here so she could introduce you to her roommate. Is that correct?”

“I am afraid so. I will do my best not to make a scene over it. I’m from Arizona where we do not hide in anyone else’s shadow. They will never know how much disdain I have for both of them.”

“One of the reasons I came up here to visit Carla was to find out whether or not she had fallen in with a bad crowd. She seems to have lost most of her good Christian values. I will talk to her, in the morning, about her values and try to get her back on track.”

“I don’t want to come between you and your daughter, but, I’d make sure she has abandoned her values before I unloaded any bad feelings on her.”

Sam knew Zeb was right. He was beginning to realize Zeb was a very wise young man. However, the reality of it was, his wisdom came at a very high price. He was a reluctant student in the school of hard knocks. Sam had no knowledge of how hard his childhood was. He was careful to

keep his deepest feelings hidden from everyone.

Later, they got into the car and Sam drove them to The Chef Family restaurant to have dinner before they retired for the night. Zeb ordered a sirloin steak, a baked potato with sour cream, a side of carrots, two slices of garlic toast, a large slice of Dutch apple pie á la mode and a large glass of iced tea. He remembered how Bear would bring his trusty jug of iced tea out to the job and how refreshed the tea made him feel. Sam had a club sandwich with lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise, a large cola drink and a small salad with French dressing. Sam's wife ordered a French dip, coleslaw, and a large milk.

They did not say much to each other as they ate their late evening meal. A short while later they returned to their room to prepared for a good night's sleep. Sam's wife set the alarm, and then they turned in for the night. At seven-thirty the alarm went off and woke them up. They all felt refreshed and ready to tackle the day.

Sam said, "Anybody ready of bowl of oatmeal?"

Sam's wife and Zeb said, "You can start without us."

"Just kidding. I saw a café a few blocks down

the street, let's go there and give it a try for breakfast."

"Count me in," said Zeb.

"I am ready for a tall stack of hotcakes, some crispy bacon, and a cup of coffee," said Sam's wife.

After Breakfast they got ready to go to the East Central Kentucky College dormitory to visit Carla.

Sam had a lot on his mind as he started his station wagon and headed for the college. What kind of rogue had Carla fallen prey to? Does she still go to church? Was Paul really a Christian? What kind of person was Darlene? Was she as bad as he had imagined? He would soon find out.

Playing the Ponies 

When they arrived at the dormitory, Sam said, “1547 N. Wainchester St. This is the building she described to me over the phone. I will go in and see if she is in room 223. She said her room was on the second floor at the east end of the hall. The three story red brick building looked very old. It was in good condition for a colonial styled dorm. The windows had white frames and were placed ten feet apart. All three stories were identical except for the decorations on each window.

He entered through a big French door. The carpet was tread worn, but clean. The musty smell reminded Sam of his garden tool shed. He wanted Carla to get a private room, but she would not hear of it. She told him she needed to learn as much about people as she could. Sam slowly walked up the narrow varnished oak staircase. Each step had its own unique sound. When he got to the second floor, he opened the door, walked in and went down the long hall. He stood briefly in front of her door before he knocked on it and waited. Carla opened the door and said, “Hi dad, How are you?”

“I am happy with life.”

“How is business? I miss the drugstore. Has my brother started going to college yet? Has he applied to go to Indiana University yet?

“The drugstore is very busy. Your brother has not started college yet, but he has applied to go to Indiana University. For now he is minding the store for me while we are away.

“Mom is down in the car with Zeb. I will go get them. I’ll be right back.” He went down to the car and told the others he saw Carla and she seemed energetic and anxious to see them.”

Zeb thought, “Here we go again. I get led off to be with the wild one, while they get to be with Carla. How revolting this trip to Lexington is turning out to be.” But, he promised not to make a scene over it, and he was going to keep his word.

They got out of the car and walked to Carla’s room. It was very small and smelled of strong perfume. There was not a whole lot of space in there, so Zeb volunteered to wait out in the hall, but Carla refused to let him.

As soon as he got in the room, he saw Darlene sitting on one of the beds with her legs crossed. He stood there in shock. She was an attractive platinum blonde. She was five-foot-eight inches tall, weighed 140 pounds and was dressed to the hilt. He felt like he was in Hollywood. There was not a single country bone in her whole body. His breath was short, and his fear of her was slowly taking him over.

Carla did not waste any time. She motioned for Darlene to get up, then she said, “Zeb Smith. I would like you to meet Darlene Somerset. She comes from Atlanta, Georgia. Her father owns one of the biggest car dealerships in Atlanta. Carla leaned over to Zeb and whispered to him,

“She is real rich and likes the city life scene.”

He thought, “If she is rich, then give me a poor starving country girl.” He hated her at first sight. She was not going to put a leash around his neck. “Yes dear. I will worship you and your money. No thanks. I don’t need a leash around my neck.”

But a promise is a promise and he would never let his character be dented by welshing on a promise. His feet were saying get me out of here, while his mind was saying: Stay! Stay! To most men, Darlene was a dream come true. To him she was a nightmare gone bad.

Carla said, “Darlene is going to Lucky 7 Turf racetrack this afternoon and Zeb you are invited to go along with her. You do not have to bet on the horses unless you want to.”

“Darlene didn’t even have enough nerve to ask me to go to the track on her own,” he thought.

“Carla,” said Sam. “Will you come down to my with me car so we can talk?” Carla followed him down to the Nomad. There was no one on the streets because the students were either in class or in their dorm rooms at the time. They got into the car and started talking.

“Carla, I know Zeb pretty well and he is not

going to take kindly to going to a racetrack with Darlene."

"Then he can tell her he doesn't want to go to the track."

"What has happened to you Carla? Have you lost all the values Mom and I have taught you?"

"No, I have not. I am all grown up now, thank you."

Sam was hurt after he heard what she had said. She had indeed gone down the tubes as he had suspected. Carla was now telling her father just how she felt. Sam didn't know about Darlene being pain in the neck for Carla She was secretly hoping she would flunk out of college and get out of her hair for good. But on the other hand, Carla believed Darlene was a good person to test her people skills on.

Sam felt low as he continued, "Carla, what is Darlene really like."

"I cannot tell you with an honest face how perfect she is. She is out having a good time. She is not enthusiastic about studying social science. Her father forced her to sign up in college, or she would not get any money from him. To make matters worse, She has to check in with him

twice a week or he will not send her any money for the next week. He wants to know her every move. She is just rebelling against him, and I do not blame her. I believe that is why she drinks and goes to the track to meet a former jockey friend of hers she calls Doc Holiday."

"Doc Holiday. And she drinks!"

"I don't know why she tells me his name is Doc Holiday. Maybe she doesn't want me to know his real name for fear her father will find out and cause her a lot of trouble over it."

"I think, if her father ever found out she was going to a racetrack, he would blow a fuse."

"No such luck. He was here last month and took her to the track with him. They gambled pretty heavy and lost a lot of money. I asked him if he felt bad about losing so much money. He said it was pocket change. Then he told me he does not go to the track very often, so he makes a big splash at the betting window. Then he asked me if I were to put my last thousand dollars on a horse that was a sure thing and it came in dead last, could I walk away from the track with a smile on my face.

I told him, "No way. I don't gamble." Then he

told me to never go to a racetrack. I was so glad he advised me not to go to the track, since there is no way I would ever go to a racetrack in the first place."

"Then, why did you introduce Darlene to Zeb and tell him she is going to take him to the racetrack today, if you will not go there yourself?"

"It is up to Zeb to say he does not want to go to the track, not me. I would lose Paul if I even talked about a racehorse. I cannot wait until he graduates this June with a degree in electrical engineering. He is going to go places.

"When we went to church last Sunday he treated me so nice. We also had a great time at his church's Wednesday night fellowship meeting. He is a devout Christian. Darlene only drives me closer to him and to his church. I was really hoping Zeb is strong enough to turn Darlene around. She has so much to offer him if he can."

"Oh Carla. You do not understand Zeb at all. Mom and I both believe he is a good kid and will someday do something great. Darlene could be the one who undoes him for good. He needs a good old fashioned country girl, not a Hollywood dropout."

“She is not a Hollywood dropout! She has never even been near Hollywood.”

“He has been deeply hurt, so how are we going to get Zeb out of this mess?”

“He will have to get over it – all by himself.”

Sam knew he was fighting a losing battle discussing Zeb with her. But he was pleased to hear that she had kept her Christian faith and was heading to what he hoped would be a good life with Paul. No one can predict the future, yet Sam believed he knew how Carla was going to turn out in the end.

A smile came over his face for a second, which was soon erased when he focused back on Zeb.

He almost forgot he came to Lexington to get her on the right track. Now he was having to deal with a racetrack.

After all, he brought him to Lexington. That made him partially responsible for what happens to him. “Zeb is a tough one and can take care of himself,” he thought.

“Let’s go back up stairs and join the others, shall we?”

Carla said nothing about what her father said, to her after they got back to Carla’s room. They

just walked in and joined the conversation again. It was decided that Darlene and Zeb would go to the track together and afterward they would go to a fancy restaurant and have dinner.

The group talked for a half hour before Darlene realized the first post would be starting soon.

Darlene said, “Zeb, are we ready to go?”

“I am ready,” he said dryly. They walked down the stairs, then out to the parking lot in back of the dormitory. Darlene walked up to her 1956 red and white Corvette. It was the most beautiful car he had ever seen. She told him, this bird really knows how to fly. And she was ready to give him the ride of his life.

“Please. I drive a 1929 Model A Ford and that is as fast as I want you to drive.”

“Can I drive a little faster, please?” she asked playfully.

“I guess a little faster would not hurt anything.” He wasn’t used to someone else doing the driving. He wanted to drive her Corvette real bad even though she made him feel like a stable boy riding on a prize winning horse. What Zeb did not know was this Corvette was no ordinary car. It was souped up to a full house. It was a fire

breathing dragon. He was indeed about to take the ride of his life.

She slowly drove out of town and then stopped the car and said, “Now I can show you what this machine can do. Fasten your seat belt because we are going to sprout wings.” She put the car in first gear and floored the bird. Dark-gray smoke billowed from under the back tires and the engine was screaming as the car fishtailed its way down the highway. When she shifted into second gear, Zeb thought he was already going over a hundred mph. The car settled into a straight path as she shifted into high gear. The speedometer stopped at a little over ninety miles an hour. Zeb was scared to death. He never thought such power existed. His idea of fancy was not a hopped up Corvette. He wanted a luxury car in a class all its own. Darlene was indeed the wild one he was told she was.

Darlene realized she had once again failed to impress her date. He sat in his seat as still as a park bench. “I get the message. Speed doesn’t impress you, does it?” said Darlene.

“Darlene, I am an A to B person. I enjoy luxury cars like Mr. Pigeon’s Packard.”

She slowed the car down to fifty mph and settled down. However, Zeb knew she got a rush out of tempting fate and would, again, stomp on the accelerator at the slightest provocation. “I am just a good old farm boy. Didn’t Carla tell you about me?”

“Yes, but when I saw you all dressed up, I thought you were city. In a way I think you need to do some repenting for leading her on like you did.”

“Is that what she told you?”

“Not exactly.”

“Look. Carla is the most beautiful woman I have ever met.” He was deeply offended because she did not believe Carla.

“Then why didn’t you come back and ask her out again after you took her to the movie? Do you know that before she met Paul, all she ever talked about was you. I couldn’t get a word in edgewise. She was going to marry you and no one else. She would constantly call her father and tell him to try and get you to come up here to see her.”

He was now paying a bitter price for starting to go with her. “Carla, what have I done? You got even with me real good,” he thought. “Tell me

Darlene, did Carla ever say she would get even with me?"

"Are you kidding, she does not have it in her like me. As a matter of fact, she would dump Paul for you in an instant."

"Are you joshing me?" said Zeb.

"I can see you know nothing about women. When we get hooked, we are hooked."

He was not going to make the same mistake with her he made with Carla. "Are you hooked on me Darlene?"

"Don't be silly, you are a nice kid, but the big city would eat you up in less than a second. We are going to have some fun playing the ponies today, and you can go back home racetrack trained by my friend Doc Holiday. He is the one who got me started betting the horses. He is as sharp as a tack when it comes to the ponies. He has books on every horse that has ever been to a track. You will see him nosing around the stables just listening. When he hears something that makes him believe he has a winner on his hands, he places a modest bet. Sometimes, I think he is so close to the horses, he acts like one."

He wondered why Darlene was attracted to this

Doc Holiday. “Darlene, may I ask you how old Doc is?”

“He is older than dirt, probably over sixty-five. Why?”

“I was just curious.”

“If you must know, he is my father figure. My real father is all business. Everything has to come down to cold hard cash. I want to have some fun before I turn old and gray.” Darlene pulled the car over to the side of the road and started crying. She was evidently tormented like he was. Zeb had penetrated one of her weak spots. After she regained her composure, she was quite receptive and began to get closer to him.

He was shattered when she reached into her purse and pulled out a flask that looked like it held a fifth of whiskey. She pointed it toward him and said, “Want a swig?”

“No, thank you.” he said. “Here I am going to a racetrack with an unstable whiskey drinking sot,” he thought.

“Do you have a problem with women who drink?”

He sat there waiting for her to bail him out of having to answer.

“That’s what I thought. I will park the booze and behave myself. Do you feel better now?”

“Good.” He smiled at her as she drove the Corvette up the track gate. The Corvette looked smart parked next to the ordinary cars in the parking lot. He felt rich as he got out of the car with her. They made their way to the track entrance where she let him pay the entry free. She realized it was important for him to pay no matter how poor he was. “I don’t think I can place a bet on any of the horses. Would it be alright if you did the betting?”

“That will be fine with me. When you see a horse you like, I will place the bet for you.” It was clear she did not understand he did not want to bet on the horses even if he could. He was afraid of angering her, so he didn’t explain why he did not want to bet on the horses at all.

They walked up to the raceway fence just as the racetrack startup theme sounded. He liked the excitement of the loud introduction. Darlene said, “I like the third horse in the first race.”

“You can go ahead and place your bet. I will wait until later on the betting.” He was sick to his stomach and hoped her Doc Holiday would show

up soon to rescue him. All he wanted to do was stall for time until he could get out of there. He hoped the other people enjoyed themselves, but he wanted to sit out the entire day.

A few minutes later, he heard a voice came from behind him, “Darlene, you came out to the tack after all.” Zeb turned and stood face-to-face with Doc Holiday. He was very short, weighed about ninety-five pounds, was clean shaven and dressed sort of like a jockey. His grayed black hair stuck out from his tight-fitting derby hat. She turned and replied, “Why you old soak. How on earth are you? I have not seen you for ages.”

Then she turned to Zeb and said, “Zeb this is my dear friend, Doc Holiday.”

“Pleased to meet you, sir.”

“Ready to play the ponies, Darlene.”

“You bet. I am ready to win a bundle.”

“The first post is less than five minutes away. I like the third horse in the first race.”

“Hey. I picked that one first,” she teased.

“What about you Zeb?” said Darlene.

“I will wait and see how it goes with you two. This is my first day at a racetrack.” he said. “And my last,” he thought.

Doc and Darlene walked over to the betting window and placed their bets. Zeb could not help but think she had already found someone for herself. He was old, and deep down inside she was evidently lonely. As they walked away he noticed Doc had a decided limp. He wondered if he had been a jockey in the past and had a bad spill. They waited until the starting gates opened before both of them started jumping up and down like little kids as the horses thundered around the track. As they had predicted, the third horse took first place. The odds were 11 to one. Zeb did not know they had bet over a hundred dollars and collectively they had won 1,100 dollars.

It did not bother Zeb that she had forgotten about him when Doc showed up. After a while, he walked out to her Corvette and sat on the ground beside it until the last race was over.

Later, when she came walking toward her car with Doc on her arm, he told himself he didn't care, but at least she could have gone through the motions for his sake. Yet at the same time, her behavior did help him understand her a lot better. At least he got away from the racetrack without letting her place any bets for him. That made him

feel as good as it seemed to make Doc and Darlene feel after they played the ponies.

She walked up to the driver's side of her car, leaned over and kissed Doc without even looking at Zeb. When the nuzzling was over, Darlene said good-bye to Doc then walked to the passenger side of her car and opened the door for Zeb. He got up, walked over to the car door and said, "Thank You." She did not reply. After he got in, he closed the door gingerly. He was real hot under the collar and just waiting for Darlene to say something. She got into her car, slammed the door and started the car. Then she floored the gas pedal several times rapidly. The Corvette was roaring like a fuel dragster.

Darlene



Darlene revved up her Corvette engine again and again. She was having a bad temper tantrum, and he was sure he was in deep trouble. All of the sudden the engine slowed to a rough idle. Then she settled down as she drove to the track entrance. But, he knew she was a volcano waiting to erupt at any time. After they passed the main gate and started toward the highway leading back to her dorm, she stopped the car at the stop sign. He thought she had settled down, so he was in for a relatively uneventful trip back.

She hesitated for a minute before she drove forward. Then all of the sudden, she turned right instead of left toward the dorm. She was heading away from Lexington. He got the message. She

was going to take him out in the country and leave him there. Darlene drove several miles down the highway and then came to a full stop straddling the road's dashed white center line. Again she raced the engine several times before she said, "Fasten your seat belt farm boy, 'cause you're about to go for a ride you ain't never going to forget. So, start praying I don't run off the road and kill both of us." She grabbed the steering wheel with a grip of iron as she let the hammer down. The speedometer rocketed toward the peg as she went through the gears like a pro driver. The Corvette darted onward like a scared rabbit. In a few seconds the needle on the speedometer hit the peg and the car was still accelerating. In a little over two minutes they had covered nearly five miles.

Zeb sat there frozen to his seat as he felt goose bumps popping up all over his body. A few seconds later, he heard the engine start slowing down as Darlene headed toward a small pull-off on the side of the road. She drove the car into the clearing and parked. "Here is where I get out and walk back to Lexington," he believed.

Darlene turned and stared directly into Zeb's

eyes and said, “You must really think I am stupid? I saw you sneaking around back at the track and trying to avoid me. What kind of person are you? Answer me!”

He was not about to reveal his inner most secrets in an effort to appease her. His skeletons were safely locked in the back of his mind, and no one, not even his own mother, was allowed to have a key.

“I am waiting for an answer country boy. Notice I said, ‘Boy.’ You ain’t tangling with a farm girl. You’ve got a city girl on your hands. Now, do I get an answer mister?”

His mind was working on a way for him to get her off his back. Like a chess master, he carefully weighed every move. Then, he said in a low nervous voice, “Darlene, I think you are a real nice lady. I do not think you are stupid in any way. As a matter of fact, I think you are very intelligent.”

“Stink weeds. Have you ever had your dreams shattered like a mirror in a rock crusher? You crushed me today, boy. I am not used to being brushed off. People treat me like a lady because I am somebody. Do you understand me?”

Huh? Zeb now had the clues he needed to

begin figuring her out. He realized she was really talking about Doc, not herself. So, Doc had an accident. What was his dream? He is small. Perhaps he had a bad fall and could never be a jockey again. She did not know about one of Zeb's neighbors who came from South American. Juan Domingo Pararez, the father, owned several racehorses. He was short and weighed 125 pounds. His walk, his *vaquero* boots, his bristly black mustache and his timeworn dark-brown cowboy hat told everyone he was a horseman of the first magnitude. He rode a horse like a rodeo star. The horses seemed to understand exactly what was expected of them. He did not have a lot of money, so he bought horses he could barely afford. Most of them were not real good runners.

He really liked Mr. Pararez's racehorses. He was very small for his age at the time when Juan would tell him about all the money he made betting on his nags. He did not believe all the tales, but Mr. Pararez did have a few horses that occasionally won a purse which seemed like a whole lot of money to him at the time.

Zeb always dreamed of being a jockey one day. But his tall lanky stature prohibited him from ever

trying. All he could think about was horses, that is, until one of his neighbors started clearing a field near his father's farm. He walked over to the field and asked what the clearing was for. Joe Browne, the owner, told him he had made enough money to buy an airplane. He was going to get an airplane when the landing field was ready.

Several weeks later he heard a loud noise in the air. It was an airplane. He had never seen one up close before. He raced to the edge of the new dirt runway and stood there waiting for it to land. He knew this plane was Mr. Browne's airplane and it was going to land right in front of him. The plane dropped down toward the runway like a magnificent condor coming in for a landing. Zeb did not know why gray smoke was coming out of the engine as it landed. It was because the engine was worn out and needed a major overhaul.

Over the next several months, Zeb rummaged through the junk plane parts Mr. Browne threw on a trash pile at the edge of his makeshift airfield. He was sure he was going to be a pilot someday. However, his father had other plans for him. He was going to be a cotton farmer or else. Building model airplanes became his passion. After trying

for years, he was never able to get even one of them to fly properly. He finally gave up building models for good when he turned sixteen.

He broke out of his trance and confronted the situation at hand. He had decided to confront her head on with what he suspected was causing her pain. “Darlene,” he said. “It is not me who you are bothered with, is it? It is Doc who had a bad accident you are referring to, isn’t it?”

Her eyes got as big as saucers and her face turned as white as a ghost. She just sat there and stared into space. He had hit the jackpot. Her venom was completely neutralized. She had sorely underestimated her country boy. Like a roadrunner, he uncoiled her, waited for the right moment, then he struck at a soft spot in her shield against the world.

“I did not hear your answer,” he said. The shoe was on the other foot. Her country boy was now in control and she did not know how to disarm him. She sat there in a daze for over five minutes. Her closet was wide open. She felt vulnerable, almost violated. After all, she was the city girl with all the wealth she could ever want. However, he figured out that she needed someone as much

as he did, but he instinctively knew he could not fulfill her needs. It might work for a while, but it would always come down to her temper and her money. He did not like being around anyone who could not control their temper. And, he surely could not be bought and paid for. His pride prohibited it. Finally, she said, “Zeb. Can you ever forgive me for acting like a brat?”

He thought for a while before he answered. “I don’t think you are a brat. You are having growing up problems like the rest of us. We don’t get a set of instructions when we are born and neither do our parents.”

“I am sorry I acted so out of control. I had no right to risk your life driving the way I did. Can we start over and try to make the best of what is left of the day?” she said in a sympathetic tone.

“I do not think we can ever start over, but we can try to end the day on a high note. I saw a nice restaurant on the way to your dormitory this morning. How would you like to have a sirloin steak with me at Happy Dan’s Restaurant?”

“I would like to very much.” They both settled down and began to appreciate the predicament they were both in. It was what a good slice-of-life

is all about. It's the struggle getting there more than the pleasure at the end both of them craved.

Darlene started to relax and stopped looking at him as a threat and started taking him as a nice country boy trying to adjust to the city. Once she got the car pointed back toward Lexington, she started to open up and began to explain what had really happened. She admitted she had not seen him sneaking around as she had claimed. She also explained to him about Doc and the kisses.

"Zeb, I want to be brutally honest with you?"

"About what?"

"I want to get straight with you. When I was kissing Doc, it was not what you think. I was mad at you for disappearing and leaving me all alone with him. He is a nice old man, but not hardly my type."

"Then why do you seek him out the way you do?"

"Truth is, I am lonely. I cannot go to my parents because my mom left dad many years ago to peruse her career. Later she died of heart failure. My dad is my lord and master. Imagine that, me with a proverbial silver spoon in my mouth, I get the leftovers no one else wants."

“Darlene, you do not have to take left overs. You need to work toward getting what you want. If I were you, I would call your dad and ask him to take this Corvette back and see if he will let you have a 1956 Chevrolet hardtop. You need to tone down a little too. I do not think you are a bad person. You just need some fine tuning on your people skills. Do you know how many people would give anything in the world to drive your Corvette?”

“Would you give anything to drive my Corvette Zeb?”

“I would be lying if I said no. Nonetheless, I will not drive your car. I would not feel right driving it.”

Darlene decided to put him to the test. She stopped the car next to the curb in front of a small farm house, then she leaned over and kissed him. She had already pulled the key out of the ignition, so she gently put the key ring in his hand. Afterward she suddenly sat up with a smile bigger than a slice of watermelon and said, “Your driving.”

He leaned over and put the key back into the ignition and said, “I will take the kiss; however, you are driving.”

“I can see why Carla loves you. You are solid. No wishy-washy in you whatsoever. I am sorry I called you a boy.”

“Don’t worry about it, I’m a construction worker and we insult each other all the time.”

“I did it again,” he thought. “I mean us guys insult each other all the time. I mean ... don’t worry, I did not mean it offensively. ... I put my foot in my mouth again, didn’t I?”

“Not really. You are being way too honest with yourself. Loosen up a bit. This world is nothing but a great big lie anyway. People like my father think society is full of cows and it is their duty to milk them for their cash.”

“Do you agree with your father?”

“Lord sake no. That is the biggest part of my problem. I have a fake life just like my father. Truth is, I really want to be knee deep in kids and be taking care of babies.”

“You are kidding. Then why are you going to college?”

“Can’t you guess why? ‘Cause daddy says so! If I do not go to college, daddy will tell me to hit the streets with no money. That is why.”

He now knew she had a lot more in common

with him than he had ever dreamed possible. Zeb wanted to get her back on the subject of Doc. There was something about him he wanted to know. “When we went to the track today, it seemed as thought Doc was expecting you to meet him there. Was Doc waiting for you at the track?”

“Is that why you walked off on me?”

“No Darlene. I do not gamble. My father would take off what he calls his Sam Browne belt and thrash me to within an inch of my life if I ever told him I had placed a bet on a horse. When I told you I would let you and Doc make the bets, I meant that you and Doc would make all of the bets instead of me.”

She gave a deep sigh of relief and said, “I should have asked you whether you gambled or not. My mistake.”

“I was a little vague because I felt so out of place among so many people. Why did you take me to the track in the first place?”

“I had Carla tell you to go with me so you could meet Doc because, from what she told me about you, I think you are a lot like him.” She was again not telling the truth.

He did not know whether to be insulted or to be flattered. He wanted to get off the subject of gambling; so he said, “What kind of accident did Doc have?”

“I feel so sorry for him. All of his life he wanted to be a jock. His whole essence was focused on his first horse race at Churchill Downs or Pimlico. On his fifteenth birthday, his mother demanded his father go into town and get him a present. His father said, ‘I ain’t going to get no present for that horse crazy kid.’ Later, his father agreed to take his mother to town and get Doc a present for his birthday. They started toward town in their junky old car. Doc was riding in the back seat. His father was drunk and literally drove their car into a concrete abutment at over fifty miles an hour. He evidently did not even see the bridge support. Doc slammed into the back side of the front seat on impact. His father and mother were killed instantly. Doc was so badly broken up he was lucky to have survived. By the time he was 16, he able to walk with crutches. Several years later, he could walk a few blocks using only a cane. Today he is a lot better, but he will never be able to get on a horse again.

“After the funeral, he went to live with his grandmother. When he turned eighteen, he got a job working in a grocery store. When he was 21, he hired on as a stable boy at a race track. If he could not have his first love, at least he could be close to it. He started nosing around the stalls and talking to the jocks. He learned the ropes of the horse racing circuit. He soon realized he had a knack for parlaying a few dollars into a small jackpot. He likes to play the handicapped horses. He says a lot of the them are like him, all broken up and useless has-beens. I try to cheer him up, but we soon end up at the betting window trying to outdo each other.”

“Do you love Doc?”

“He is a nice old man, but I do not think we could make it together. I look at him more like a substitute father than I do as a boyfriend.”

“Is it that or are you afraid of your father like I am?”

“You afraid? You are like steel. You will not budge an inch for anyone.”

“Darlene, I only wish my greatest abuse was no worse than a mere car crash. Let’s get off the subject, okay?”

"Where you ever assaulted?"

"I was physically abused and deprived of food. End of story. I don't want to talk about."

"We need to get off our past and cheer up."

"There's Happy Dan's Restaurant. I'm ready to eat. How about you?"

"You bet," said Darlene.

He realized she was more into gambling than he had first thought. Darlene drove the Corvette into a conspicuous spot where they could keep an eye on it. They went into Happy Dan's and waited to be seated. The place was packed. Both of them needed to be around a lot of people so they could mentally hide from their troubles.

They engaged in small talk once they were seated. The heavy conversation of the day had settling into the whispers of the night. Darlene looked a lot more relaxed than she did when they left for the track. His mind was heavy with more puzzling questions about what happened earlier. He knew all he wanted to know about Doc, so he started to focus on Carla.

"Darlene. I want to be bold with you." She thought he was going to ask her to go out again. She knew, they were not meant for each other, but

she could still hope he would change his mind.

“Yes,” she said in a soft voice.

“This will be between you and me, okay?”

“You have my word on it,” she said. “And you?”

“My lips are sealed. Did Carla put you up to taking me out today?”

She looked as though she had been stuck right in the heart. There was a long silence before she said, “Yes she asked me to find out why you dumped her. But, it is not what you think. She has been in love with you ever since she laid eyes on you. She wants to know why you lost interest in her. You owe her an explanation. ‘Please tell her for my sake?”

“The truth is Darlene, I’m not religious and she is.”

“That is what you think, do you? Let me tell you that she would give up her religion for you in a heart beat.”

“You said it yourself, I am just a country boy, but you are dead wrong. There is no way she would ever give up her religion for anyone, not even her own father and mother. Take it from this farm boy. I know.”

“Want to put it to the test?”

"No, I will not hurt her for anyone. I do love her, but what kind of life could I offer her as a broken down laborer? She is doing a good thing marrying Paul. I hear he is an upright Christian."

"You don't know the half of it. He gives me the creeps. He comes into our room and stands there with his fingers curled around his Bible like a soldier at attention."

"Darlene, I want you to ask Carla and Paul to take you to church tomorrow. If you agree to go, then I will tell Carla the truth and let the chips fly. Do you agree?"

"I suppose it would not hurt me to sit on a dingy pew and listen to a stale sermon. It is a deal for Carla's sake."

"Please give the preacher your fullest attention. And I do not want you to even think about your father once. I believe your answer is with Jesus. You will find yourself real soon. Don't ask me how I know, but somehow you will."

"I thought you said you are not a religious person."

"I am not, but give Jesus a chance. You of all people need Jesus."

The waitress came to the table and said, "Are

you ready to order?" Zeb said, "Could we have a dinner salad and excuse us a second. ... What would you like to drink Darlene?"

"I will have my favorite drink, a root beer float."

That took him aback. Zeb's favorite drink was a root beer float ever since Carla served him one when they first met. "The lady will have a root beer float with an extra block of ice cream, if you please. I will have the same."

The waitress said, "I will be back in a minute or two."

So Zeb, I will be 22 next month and I feel like I am going nowhere. What is it like for you?"

"I already know I will be an electromechanical engineer one day."

"And what does an electromechanical engineer do?"

"They design and sometimes help manufacture machinery."

"What kind of machinery?"

"Any kind of machinery. I want to design and build farm machinery."

"You jest. Why farm machines?"

"I am dead serious. I see a day in the future when cotton will be picked by a tractor with a

machine attached to pick the cotton and gin it at the same time. I envision fields with big mowers that cut down wheat and fill up a sack just like a vacuum cleaner. I see electric tractors that are small, fast and can be used on anything from a backyard garden to a small farm. I see huge pipelines specially designed to bring water from the mountains to the most arid places in the world."

"You're dreaming. There will never be any small electric tractors like that. Why do you want to design tractors?"

"My aching back inspired me."

"Your aching back?"

"My father forced me to work his cotton farm out in Arizona. I know there is a better way of picking cotton than to hire itinerant farm workers to work all day in the burning desert sun just to earn enough money to survive."

"How did your father make you pick cotton?"

"I either picked cotton and worked the farm or I would not be able to sit down for a week."

"We had better decide what we are going to order or they will start charging us rent on our table," said Darlene.

“I am going to have a sirloin steak with a baked potato, a slice of apple pie and a dinner salad.” said Zeb.

“I will have a prime rib dinner with mashed potatoes and gravy along with a slice of lemon meringue pie for dessert.”

He held up his hand for the waitress. When she came to their table, she said, “Ready to order?”

“Yes. The lady will have the prime rib cooked medium with mashed potatoes and lots of gravy and a large slice of lemon meringue pie. And I will have a double western sirloin steak well done with a baked potato filled to the brim with butter, a dinner salad with French dressing and a slice of apple pie.”

After the waitress left to place the order with the chef, they shared small talk until their dinner was brought to their table. They were so wrapped up in the moment he all but forgot about Carla.

When the meal was over, they went out to her car and headed back to the dorm. When she stopped at a red light, Darlene looked at him and said, “You look even better than when I first saw you this morning.”

“Yeah, you know what they say about looking

better at closing time," he thought. Then he said, "Thank you."

"Will you be going back to Hattiesburg in the morning?"

"The plan is to meet Paul tomorrow."

When they got back to the dorm, Sam and Emily were talking to Carla about her schooling and about Paul.

Sam announced it was time for them to go to their motel for the night. He asked Zeb if he had anything to eat. He told him about having a delicious steak dinner at Happy Dan's. They went down to the car and said goodbye to Carla and Darlene. Carla could not help but notice how Darlene put her arms around Zeb and planted a big Hollywood kiss on his lips. Zeb wondered what Carla was thinking. Then, he remembered the deal he made with Darlene. He gazed off into space as the chilling thought of having to fess up raced through his mind. "What have I done. I am afraid to even ask a girl out on a date. How am I going to tell Carla why I all but ignored her at the soda fountain back in Hattiesburg," he thought. Then they left for the motel. It would be a long time before he would get over his wild day with

Darlene. But, he could never say he wasn't warned about her. A smile came over his face as he thought, "Gee I was riding in a car that was going over 120 miles an hour. How exciting."

Darlene thought she scared me. Huh! Not me. Who am I kidding, I was real scared. Oh well, Tomorrow is Sunday. Maybe I will say a prayer or two before I tell her the truth. Then, he tried to put Darlene and Carla out of his mind. The day had been far too insightful to let a little fear spoil it.

Paul 13

The streets were very busy, as they continued toward the motel. They were very tired when they got there. After everyone got cleaned up, they went to bed and fell asleep in an instant.

At six o'clock in the morning, Sam woke up and sat down in a chair next to the front window. He pulled the curtains open and stared out the window. The day was not going well for him. He was deeply troubled about Darlene taking Zeb to the track. And he was worried about what Paul was like. At six-thirty, he could sit still no longer. He went over to his wife's side of the bed and woke her up. "Honey, I am going to go and have a talk with Carla. I will be back soon. Tell Zeb I had an errand to attend to.

Whenever he was troubled, it was always time for action. Sam had been short fused all his life, but after he embraced the Lord, he vowed he would think things over before he overly reacted to an unpleasant situation.

When the car came to a stop in the dorm parking lot, he sat there for a minute collecting his wits. Then he went into the dorm. The squeak of the stairs and the wooden floor in the hall told Carla someone was coming. A few seconds later she heard a knock at her door. She opened the door and said, “Is something wrong dad?”

Sam walked in and stood a few feet from her. She knew he was troubled when she saw the sterile look on his face. She said, “I am sure you did not come here at this hour to pay me a social visit. What is the matter?” Then Darlene turned over in her bed and said, “Who is it?, Carla.”

“It is my dad, now roll over and go back to sleep.” She knew her father was mad at Darlene, and not her.

This friendly little visit was about to turn sour. “Okay dad let’s have it. I know you are unhappy about something.”

“Can we talk down in the car?”

"Again, I thought got it settled yesterday.

"Please, I'm troubled and need some answers."

"Oh! All right."

They went down to the car where Sam said, "I had a hard time sleeping last night. Forgive me for staying on your case so much, but it is difficult for me to live with the idea of you being away from home and not knowing what is going on in your life."

"This is about Darlene, isn't it?"

"Uh ..."

"Just spit it, I am all grown up. I can handle it."

Sam hesitated again. He felt like a heel for bird-dogging her; but, he had to know. Finally he said, "Yes this is about Darlene. I can tell Zeb was upset yesterday. I need to find out what is bothering him. I feel guilty because I talked him into coming up here in the first place."

She could never sidestep her dad's feelings. She, also, would not risk her Christian values by lying to him. "Dad, the truth is, I wanted to know how Zeb really feels about me, so I put the pressure on Darlene to go out with him and find out for me. I did not mean for it to get this complicated. And I certainly did not tell her to

take him to the racetrack in her new Corvette."

"Did you know Darlene frequented the track?"

"Yes, she goes there all the time."

"It sounds to me like you still have a crush on Zeb. Do you have a crush on Zeb?"

"Dad, I fell in love with him the minute I first saw him. It got so bad that one night I had a dream I was kissing him. I woke up with my arms around the little divider wall between Darlene's bed and my bed. Dad, I was kissing a wall."

"Did you ever think of asking Zeb point blank how he really feels about you?"

"I already did, and he said I was beautiful and how he knew we were not meant for each other. That made me want to find out why even more. Am I so bad for wanting to know the reason. In a few weeks I am going to marry a man whom I do not feel the same way as I do about Zeb. I want to be sure. Can you hate me for wanting to know the reason?

"I talked to Darlene about it and she told me he was not interested in me and how they had a wonderful day together yesterday, and he even invited her to go to church with Paul and me tomorrow. She said he particularly enjoyed going

to the racetrack and he loved the speed of her new Corvette."

"I think you need to talk to Zeb one-on-one about this. I have known him for some time now, and he is a lot like me. That is why I had hoped you two would get together. I will stick my neck out and say he had anything but a good time yesterday."

"Are you saying Darlene is telling a fib?"

"Do you know if she is lying?"

"I don't know. She could be."

Sam said, "I have the answers I came here for. Zeb was asleep when I left the motel. Maybe I can get back before he wakes up." Sam left and headed for the motel. When he got back, they were both awake. Zeb was wondering what kind of errand Sam could have had in Lexington this early in the morning.

Sam opened the motel room door and said, "It looks like a great day to find a restaurant and devour a heavy-duty breakfast. How about the place we went to yesterday?"

Zeb was not happy with him for sidestepping the issue of where he had been, but he did not want to spoil the day. So he said in a bright-new-

day tone, “Sounds like a winner to me. No pun intended. ... I mean, Let’s go.”

“You took the words right out of my mouth. Let’s go.”

They had breakfast at the same café as yesterday. On a second look, the place was still a quaint little mom-and-pop restaurant. Nothing fancy, just good food and lots of it. After breakfast they piled into the Nomad and headed for the dorm. One could hear a pin drop if it weren’t for the sound of the engine purring like a content kitten. The air was full of emotions. All contributed to the sense of an outburst of unrest they each hoped would be defused before it escalated into a full blown argument.

When they arrived at Carla’s dorm, Darlene answered the door and said, “Zeb. Are you ready to go to church?”

His heart froze solid. “Why that little dickens,” he thought. “She set me up. She was supposed to go to church, not me.” He again mused at another one of her crafty little ploys. “I’ll fix her, I’ll go to church and be on my best behavior. What if Carla thinks I will start going to church? I have it,” he thought. Zeb said, “Remember ‘dear’, we agreed I

would accompany you, so you would not have to go to church without someone to hold your little hand." He could see he had stunned her once again. She had a reddish tint on her face. "How do you like them apples," he silently gloated. He enjoyed foiling her schemes.

She stood there for a minute as if someone had thrown a bucket of ice water over her head. Then she said, "Yes dear." He wanted this day to end immediately. He despised Carla for putting him on the spot with Darlene. The road ahead for all of them was getting bumpier by the minute.

A knock at the door disrupted them as the conversation reached an eruption point. Carla went to the door and opened it. There stood Paul with another person. "Hi Paul. Come in and join the party." She could see that Paul did not like her tart comment. He stepped into the room, then he walked over and stood near Carla. His fingers were curled around a large black Bible. Wherever he went, his Bible was always at his side. His hair was cut to a medium length and it was black and wavy. He had a square jaw like Abraham Lincoln, a black immaculately trimmed beard, and he was a ruggedly handsome man. Zeb believed Paul

was a worthy competitor for Carla's affections.

She asked Paul who he brought with him.

"Forgive me. This is my older brother, Vance Higgens. He has a law practice in downtown Philadelphia. He took a break from his practice to visit with the family this week.

"Did Vance's wife come with him," blurted Darlene.

"You will have to forgive my dorm mate she is a little impulsive to say the least," said Carla.

Vance said, "I don't mind. I am completely unattached at this time. My law practice keeps me too busy to have a social life. You caught me at one of my rare free moments." He was tall like his brother, but he was about twenty-five pounds heavier, clean shaven, and his hair was combed straight back. Vance was wearing expensive jewelry and was dressed in a tan suit with a red tie. He stepped forward and shook each one of their hands and said, "Nice meeting you."

Zeb looked at how Paul and Vance looked at each one of them. He noticed how Vance's eyes were glued on Darlene. There seemed to be a chemistry brewing there.

Paul and Vance, this is my father, Sam; my

mother, Emily and their friend, Zebadiah Smith. Paul you know Darlene and Vance, I am Carla.

“Zebadiah, I feel as though I am meeting a legend.” said Paul. Carla has said so much about you.”

“I have heard a lot of good things about you as well.”

They talked for thirty minutes before Paul said, “It is ten-twenty-five. We need to be heading for the church.”

Zeb said, “Paul why don’t you take Darlene to church in your car so Carla can be with her parents.” He was trying to get out of going to church anyway he could, but it did not work.

Paul replied, “No! Carla goes with me.”

She was stunned. What was happening? Why would He say such a thing to her fiancé?

Zeb, “You can ride with my brother in his brand new Chrysler,” said Paul.

He said, “Sam I would feel more comfortable riding in your car. May I ride with you?”

“I do not see why not.”

“Then it is settled. Darlene you can ride with Vance and I’ll ride with Sam.” Vance’s eyes were glowing with the idea of being with Darlene.

However, he had to put Zeb in his place first. “Don’t you think you should ask me first?” said Vance.

“I am sorry. I just wanted to get this settled. I could have suggested you ride in Darlene’s brand new Corvette. But you will need to put a brick under the gas pedal.”

Darlene jumped in and said, “Are you trying to insinuate that I drive too fast?”

“No. Not all the time.”

Vance said, “You drive a Corvette. I have never been in a Corvette before. Would you mind if we went to church in your car?”

Darlene asked Paul if Vance was a good driver. He said he is an excellent driver. Darlene said to Vance, “Close your eyes and hold out your hand.”

“What for?”

“Will you just close your eyes and hold your hand out?”

After he did what she asked of him. She leaned forward and boldly kissed him and then said, “I am wild and bold too.” Then she put the keys to the Corvette in his hand and said, “You’e driving.” The magic had started. Darlene was acting like a love sick puppy and Vance was obviously going

along with her. It looked like Darlene had met her match.

“Let’s go to church,” said Vance.

Zeb thought Vance was already preying on Darlene. He hoped he was serious about her because she is very spiteful and vindictive, lawyer or no lawyer.

Sam said, “Are we ready to go?” They went toward their respective cars and drove to West Grandview Baptist Church. It was a medium sized church located just east of downtown Lexington. The congregation was made up of shopkeepers, middle-income workers, several college students and a few college faculty members.

They arrived at the church within minutes of each other. Zeb took a deep breath and marched toward the entrance. He did not want Darlene to think he would chicken out of his promise. When he opened the door, he saw a lot more people than he had expected. He went in and took a seat in a pew near the front of the church. He wanted to give the preacher his best chance to convert him. However, he already made up his mind long before he got to the church door.

Paul escorted Carla to the pew behind him

which made Zeb feel even more uneasy about being in a church. Darlene and Vance took a seat in the last pew near the main entrance. Sam and his wife took a seat in the very first row next to the main aisle. All sat quietly as the preacher started the sermon by welcoming the new people to the congregation. He started the sermon in a powerful voice. He told of the need to repent and give one's heart to Jesus. Then they opened the hymnal and sang several hymns. Whereupon the preacher gave another short sermon. And then they sang, "Bringing in the sheaves. He will come rejoicing." ... "Bringing in the sheaves."

When the sermon was over, they gathered at the church entrance where they talked to some of the congregation members whom Paul knew. One by one they started leaving. And when there were only a few people left at the front entry, Darlene walked up behind Zeb and whispered, "I did my part, now it is your turn."

"I promise when we get back to your dorm, I will tell her the reason. I do not go back on my word even though you stuck me with having to come to church with you today," he whispered back.

Several minutes later, Paul said, “Are we ready to go?” Everyone agreed and they returned to the dorm.

When they were all in the room, Zeb said, “Could I talk to Darlene and Carla out in the hall alone for a minute.” Sam and especially Paul looked bewildered. “I guess,” said Paul, followed by Sam. He went over to the radio on the desk and turned it on, so they could not hear what Zeb was about to reveal to Carla. When they were out in the hall, Zeb said, “Carla, you wanted to know why I kept a distance from you back at the soda fountain, right?”

“Zeb. I had a crush on you bigger than Texas, I felt so cheap when you took me out, then hardly talked to me and then just dumped me after the movie.”

“I did not dump you. I knew it would never work out for us. Remember on the way back how you went on and on about your church?”

“It was because I did not know what else to say. I am not stuck on my church. You did not ask me about my church”

“You don’t think your church matters, but I know it does. The truth is, it’s hard for me to tell

anyone about it, but my father traveled with a faith healer for years. Then one day, he found out the faith healer was a fake and nothing more than a clever conman. By that time, he believed in faith healing so strongly that it devastated him forever. My father would go to pieces every Sunday ever since. He would bark orders at us as if he was a god himself and he expected them obeyed, or else he would beat us unmercifully. Every time I see a church, it reminds me of my father taking off his two-inch-wide belt and beating me with it so hard I thought I would survive it.

“Religion is only the tip of the iceberg. My childhood was even more horrific. I cannot tell you everything. It hurts me too much to talk about it. You need your church and Paul, not me.”

“Carla hugged Zeb and said, “My God, I do understand.” Then she went back into her room without saying another word. Darlene followed her and she did not say a word either. They visited for several more hours before Sam said, “It is almost three-thirty and we have to be getting back to home before seven o’clock tomorrow morning, so we need to shove off.” Zeb walked over to Carla and hugged her one last time and

said, “Good-bye. You take care of yourself and Paul.” Then her mother did the same and bid her good-bye as well. They all walked down to the Nomad and Zeb, Sam and his wife got in the car and waved to Carla, Darlene, Vance and Paul as they drove away. When they were out of sight, Vance said, “Darlene would you like to have an early dinner with me?”

“Sure, I think Carla and Paul have a little catching up to do.” Vance and Darlene got into his Chrysler and drove off.

Carla turned to Paul and said, “Now that you have met my parents and Zeb, what do you think of them?”

“I think your parents are good Christians. They both love you very much.”

“What about Zeb?”

Paul said, “Carla you are not fooling me one bit, you like him a lot more than you are letting on.”

“But what do you think of Zeb?”

“If I read him correctly, he really likes you a lot. There is something in his past that is keeping him away from you. I think he is a fine young man, but he is full of anxiety and is deeply troubled about something.”

“Do you think I would leave you for ?”

“Of course not, I have deep empathy for him. Perhaps, if he would come to the Lord like us, then he might be free of his worldly torture.”

“His father abused him something awful when he was a little boy. He will never see the world the same way we do. I can now live in peace with the world, and I will pray for him to come to the Lord.”

“Is that why he wanted to talk to you and Darlene out in the hall?”

“Yes. Now, can we get off the subject and talk about us?” She was reeling from what Zeb had told her, but it gave her closure. She knew the end of her relationship with him was not her fault. It was his fault. “Can we get something to eat?”

“How about Happy Dan’s?” said Paul.

“I am not in the mood for Happy Dan’s.” The truth is, she needed distance from Zeb. She also knew Darlene took Zeb there and she didn’t want to feel like she was following in her footsteps. “What about the mom-and-pop restaurant by the motel where my mom and dad stayed at last night.”

“Great choice. We need a place so we can get back on track with each other, don’t you think?”

"We do need to be alone with each other for a while. … Paul, I love you." They went to the restaurant where they discussed how the day went. Her problems did not seem as important as she had thought. She felt like she had just seen a scary movie and now it was over.

Meanwhile, Sam, his wife and Zeb were going over the trip up north. Sam said, "What did you think of Vance and Paul?"

His wife said, "I think they are good people."

"What about you Zeb?"

He didn't want to talk. He came to Lexington to find out about Carla and had Darlene sicked on him. The day had ended and he survived it. It was time to kick back and dream about what a wonderful day he would have when he went back to work on the room addition with Loren and Bob. Suddenly, the simplicity of construction work did not bother him as much as Darlene did. He did not like drawing the short stick in any situation. Today, however, was the shortest stick he ever had the displeasure of drawing.

"Paul is a real nice person, Carla is so lucky to have him. I think they have a real good future together, and Vance seems to be just what

Darlene needs." "He's exactly what she deserves," he wanted to say, but he knew better. "Thank you for taking me up to see Carla. The trip allowed me to close up some loose ends," he said. "And, I had a rotten day with Darlene thrown in at no extra charge," he thought."

Sam said, "Did you close one of those loose ends when you went out in the hall and talked to Carla and Darlene?"

"Yes, I told her why I believed it was best for us to say good-bye forever. That is all I can say for now."

"I can respect you wanting to keep it private. We do want to know how you are doing in the future. I hope you will come into the drugstore and keep us up to date on what is happening in your life and how you are doing."

"Is it me he wants to keep track of? Or does he want to keep track of me for Carla and Darlene?" he thought.

"I will come to the soda fountain and get a root beer float once in a while," he said.

Sam seemed to be satisfied with his answer for the time being, but Zeb knew Sam really didn't think Paul was the best suitor for his daughter.

They retraced their path back to Hattiesburg and at five-thirty in the morning Sam woke Zeb and said they would not be back in Hattiesburg by seven in the morning. “Would you like me to stop at a phone booth so you can call your boss and tell him?”

“No. It would not do any good,” said Zeb.

“I could drive you to your job so your boss can see we just got back from Lexington. Would it help you any?”

“It might.” Zeb wondered what he would do if he lost his job for not being back on time. Then he fell asleep again.

Home Again 

It was nine-thirty when Zeb woke up and looked around

to get his bearing. The sun was already beating in through the driver's side windows."Where are we?" he said.

"We are about two hours out of Hattiesburg. We should be there around noon if all goes according to plan. I have been driving all night trying to get you to your job as soon as I could. We'll pull into the next diner that looks inviting, so we can get some breakfast, and I can get a couple of cups of coffee."

Sam drove another seven miles before he saw a roadside sign that read: "Meridian 2" miles. I think we can wait until we get into Meridian before we stop for breakfast. They were traveling south on US 45. "When we get into town, we will

look for a café and a squeaky clean gas station. After we have breakfast and gas up, we will take US 21 south," said Sam. Five minutes later, he said, "Let's go to the restaurant over there. It looks clean and inviting."

"I am ready to eat," said Zeb, and then Sam's wife said, "I will settle for anything. I don't think I could stand being cooped up in this car for another minute."

They pulled into the diner for brunch. Sam told them he was going to have to take it easy for the rest of the trip because he was totally exhausted. He ordered two cups of steaming-hot coffee, hash browns, four strips of bacon and three eggs. Zeb had two chili dogs, a large root beer and a giant order of French fries, and Sam's wife ordered a deluxe ham sandwich with lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise; an order of French fries and a medium cola drink. She said, "I cannot wait until we get home so I can make some home cooked food again.

"Amen", Sam said. "Am I invited?"

"You'll be the guest of honor, dear." It was obvious they were a little punchy and in dire need of rest. The trip had tested their perseverance.

In less than a half an hour, they were once again heading south on the lookout for a road sign that read: “US 21.” They went almost through Meridian before Zeb said, “I see the turnoff. It’s over there.” He pointed to a timeworn sign which was leaning slightly to the west.

Sam drove toward the sign and turned onto highway 21. Just past the intersection, he saw a very clean gas station. He needed to gas up and get something to eat. To him, passing by an immaculate Texaco filling station was an unpardonable sin, if he needed fuel. He drove up to the first pump. When the attendant came out, Sam said, “Fill-er-up with regular and check under the hood.” They got out and stretched their legs. Zeb went into the station office in search of a sweet treat or two. He raided the candy counter and spent over two-fifty on a lot of candies and three sodas, then he took the treats out to the car and handed them out. Sam, for a change, did not say anything except thank you. By now, he was used to Zeb wanting to contribute a little something to the kitty.

After he was refreshed, Zeb again dosed off and Sam’s wife was not far behind.

At twelve-forty-five Sam jostled Zeb until he woke up. He said, “We will be at your job in less than five minutes. I thought you would like to be awake when we get there.”

Sam drove up to the house Zeb had been working on and parked the station wagon next to the curb. Loren’s truck was in the driveway, so Zeb knew he’d be able to talk to him. He got out and walked to the back where he had been working before they went to Lexington. He did not see Loren . Then he heard him talking to Bob. Zeb said, “Anybody home?” Loren and his carpenter came to the window and looked down at him. Loren said, “A bit late aren’t you?”

He felt like two cents before he looked up to see a big grin on their faces. Zeb was used to all the put-downs and the tart remarks many construction workers back then said to one another; however, it did not make him like the remarks any better. He looked up at them and said, “I am sorry, I tried to pedal a little faster, but I could not stay ahead of Sam’s car engine. It kept trying to run over me.”

“That is all right Zeb, I know you were not doing the driving and had no control over what time you

got back. I thought it would have taken you a lot longer to get here. A trip to Lexington from here is no easy run, even in a new car."

"Do I still have a job?"

"We poured the foundation on Friday morning. Then, it rained on Sunday. We got a diaphragm pump this morning and pumped the muck and rain water out of the foundation ditch. We will wait for it to dry out a little before we continue. Tomorrow, you can start making the forms for the stem. Bob will show you how. You will learn how to build them faster than you think. I have a lot of faith in you."

"Thanks Loren. I could use some rest anyway. I will be here at seven in the morning."

"You will need to start at eight-thirty. The ground is still a bit soft. Also, I have to stop by the lumberyard and get the wood for you to build the forms with. See you at eight-thirty.

"By the way, did you happen to meet any fancy ladies up in Lexington?" Bob asked.

"Yes I did, and she took me for a ride in her brand new Corvette. She is real rich and her father owns a huge car lot in Atlanta. And she has a real heavy foot when it comes to the gas pedal."

"Okay. I'll bite. How heavy?"

"Near as I can figure, we were doing a hundred and thirty." He was exaggerating a little.

"I do not believe a Corvette will do a hundred and thirty."

"It weren't no ordinary Corvette. Her father had it all souped up for her."

"Did she offer you a job in Atlanta?"

"I would not take it even if she offered me a job on a silver platter. She is way too wild for me."

Loren said, "We have to be getting back to work. You get a good night's sleep and be ready to work in the morning."

"Yes, sir." He was happy to still have a job, at least, for now. Many constructions workers exist somewhere between being well fed and near starvation, and he was not fond of the latter.

They drove off slowly as Sam aimed the car toward his house. Sam did not tell the others, but he knew the day was rapidly coming when he would no longer be able to drive straight through on long trips.

When they arrived at Sam's house, Zeb offered to help take some of their belongings into the house for them, but Sam insisted he and the Mrs.

could handle it. He told Zeb to go home and get some rest.

As he climbed the running board of his Model A, Sam's wife said, "Will you come here for a minute?"

When he was standing in front of her, she held out her arms for him to hug her. After they hugged, she said, "Sam and I wish Carla was marrying you instead of Paul. We think you are a real nice young man, and we are convinced Paul's very staunch religious ways will eventually rip them apart, but we are holding our breath." Then she said, "Here, Sam and I want you to have this." She put twenty-five dollars in his hand and folded his fingers around the money as if he was a small child. He knew Sam had put her up to giving him the money because he would never accept any money from him. Zeb needed to know he paid his share and Sam needed to know he had helped Zeb as if he was his father. She told him to keep in touch with them.

Zeb knew the trip had opened more wounds than it had healed. Much to his surprise, Carla wasn't going away from his mind as he had planned. He was afraid she would be stuck in his

thoughts for many years to come. And now there was the Darlene problem which added to his woes. He hoped the sparks he saw flying toward her from Vance's eyes would kindle a long lasting friendship. However, he did not believe Darlene would settle down enough to realize what it meant to be in a close relationship with a very rich lawyer who was smack in the middle of her playing field.

She was rich and Vance was rich, at least according to Zeb's standards. After all, he was not exactly rolling in the chips. He wanted Darlene to find what she was looking for. However, Zeb instinctively knew she was not for him.

Long before he hit the starter and pulled out of his father's driveway back in Buckeye, he dreamed of being rich and having someone to love him like his mother loves his father. However, his chances were slim since he drives a beat up 1929 Model A, and she drives a brand new Corvette. Yet nature seems to level all playing fields over time. Neither of them had a better chance of finding a loving spouse than the other.

When he climbed into his car, he noticed the

gas gauge was a quarter of a tank low. He shrugged his shoulders and thought it had leaked out while he was away.

He got the car running and drove toward home. Then he realized he was starving, so he turned around and went to the drugstore. Besides, he needed time to wrestle with the pros and cons of the trip. He was not sorry he went, after all he did get to go over 120 mile an hour in a brand new Corvette. That was worth the trip. But, he was not ready for seconds any time soon. He drove up and parked his car in front of the soda fountain, got out, and went in. He was shocked to see Sam at the cash register. He walked over to him and said, “I guess we both found our second winds.”

Sam smiled and said, “Just for that, I am going let you have it.” He did not think Sam was going to lay one on him. His thoughts went back to when his father would say, “Now! You are going to get it.” He stared off into space for a second as he relived his father unfastening his belt. In slow motion he watched him fold it up. His father raised the belt over his left shoulder, and then he felt his bottom sting like a whole hive of bees had stung him all a once.

“You look like you are in deep thought,” said Sam.

He came to reality in an instant and said, “I guess I need some rest.” Sam had no way of knowing that Zeb was again reliving his horrific past. No one would ever find out about the beatings he endured. They paled when compared to his inner torture.

Instead of thrashing him, which he knew Sam would not do, he walked him over to the soda fountain and told Connie, “Zeb is having a big drink and a sandwich on me.”

He walked back to the middle of the store with him and said, “Why are you so good to me?”

“With Carla getting married and my son about to enter business school, me and the Mrs. are feeling the empty nest.”

Zeb said, “I must go it on my own. Too many bad things have happened to me for me to trust anyone completely.” “I know it all too well. I would be proud to call you my son if I could, but I know you would not want me to.

Again, he felt the world closing in on him. He had no way of understanding what was happening to him. “Why, couldn’t my dad be a real

father to me? Why? What did I ever do to deserve being abused, beaten and starved most of my life. I never hurt anyone like a lot of the other kid around town did. Why didn't the other kids get beatings like me?" he mulled over.

He walked back to the soda fountain and Connie said, "Long time no see. Having another bad day, so you came in to see Connie?" He sidestepped Connie's idle chatter and said, "I will have a large root beer float and a Ham sandwich all the way."

She said, "I hope you have a smile on your face when I get back." When she came back, she stood in front of his table and set the root beer float off to one side and put the Ham sandwich in front of him and then set a large slice of cherry pie, with ice cream on it, to his left and said, "This is from Connie."

A half smile came over his face as their eyes met. He could see she was hoping for more than a piece of pie in return, but he was not ready to ask anyone out. She was a jovial person and had a gregarious personality. However, he was not ready to date anyone because he had not completely gotten over Carla and Darlene yet.

What he wanted was a cozy place with a girl who is the salt of the earth and easy going. He wanted someone like his mother. All of the women he met so far were either too far one way or too far the other. Like *Goldilocks and The Three Bears*, he was looking for someone who was right for him. Both Connie and Darlene weren't even close. He believed being a construction worker was holding him back. Zeb felt like he was in a prison where he would be doing hard labor for the rest of his life.

He saw people like Walter Pigeon and Darlene as having everything he desired. He also found deep solace in Frank's complete acceptance of God and the comfort his simple way of life gave him. Frank was free and looked toward heaven as a place where he will go one day. He was not in a prison. Why was he so happy and Darlene so miserable. After all, she had everything material she could possibly dream of, and he had nothing, yet both of them were alone.

Zeb was not a simple person. He craved a challenge. He could never be satisfied with a simple way of life. To him the struggle was the whole battle. That is the reason he left his father

to seek his place in the world rather than stay and continue to be humiliated and treated like dirt. His childhood memories were driving him to excel.

His mother would be devastated if she ever found out what his father tried to do to him when he was a toddler. He had a fear of his father more powerful than anyone could ever imagine. Zeb laid awake many a night afraid his father's shadow would appear in the doorway to his room where he and his three brothers slept. He would often see his father take off his belt, fold it in two and then drag one of his brothers out of their bed and beat him until his bottom hurt so much he could cry no more. The evil things he went through were buried deep in his mind. His emotions had a grip on him that would take years of soothing before he could finally put his horrible memories to rest. This is why he swore he would never hurt anyone for any reason except in self defense. Zeb was chastised many times for wearing a very narrow belt or no belt. They could not have imagined how painful it was for him to see someone wearing a wide black belt. He saw a wide belt as weapon that could make a painful assault on his backside.

Whenever he had a vision of when he was a small child, his breathing stopped, he would feel a rush of blood running violently up the sides of his neck, and his fear would peak out. He wanted to scream out for his mother, but he could not. His older brother got up in the middle of the night. He was trying to get a drink of water without his father catching him. How fortunate for Zeb that his brother bumped into the trash can his father brought inside the house at night to keep the neighbor's dog from rummaging through it. He was just four years old then.

Connie came to his table and tried to start a conversation by saying, "All tanked up are we?"

He wanted to give the cherry pie she gave him back to her, but he had already eaten it. So, he gave her a fake smile and said, "I am ready to pay up and scoot on out of here."

She shot back, "You do not owe one thin dime. Besides, what is your hurry? Connie is not going home for another hour," she hinted.

If it wasn't for Sam, he would have walked out the door of the drugstore and never be seen again. However, he was only kidding himself. He liked root beer floats and Sam's drugstore made

the best root beer floats in town. He said, “I would like to stay a while longer, but I need to check on my friend Mr. Frank back at the rooming house where I live. I am awfully worried about him. I have not seen him for three days.”

“You live in a rooming house. Which one?”

He was not going there at all. He hedged and said, “It is across town a little ways in the country near a highway.”

“Promise me you will come back and see me.”

He thought a minute about what to tell her, besides telling her off. After he thought it over, he said, “I will not make any promises, but I like root beer floats.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means I intend to come back soon.” He wanted to tell her when all of the ice melts at the south pole, but he was too kind in his ways to say that to her. He, also, wanted to tell her he thought she talked too much and said too many stupid things. Zeb did not have enough experience with people to understand that she just wanted to get attention. However, she was probably trying to get anyone’s attention.

“Thank you for the cherry pie and ice cream.”

“You’re Welcome. There is a whole lot more where that came from.”

He was not sure how he should take what she said. A lot of people say the stupidest things and not mean a word of them. Many waitresses like to be coy around their customers, not because they like them, but to help fill their tip trays with coins. In this case, it was probably because she had a big crush on Zeb and did not have the foggiest idea of how to let him know. She was trying though. This was 1956 and a girl was not supposed to ask a gentleman for a date. They were expected to be prim and proper about it. But Connie did not understand the rules.

After he parked his car, he walked up the steps and opened the outer door to the rooming house. Frank’s door was open and he was sitting in his big chair. He looked pale and weak. Zeb walked up to the door way and knocked on the open door. “Who is it?” Frank was looking straight at him. He did not say anything about his lack of sight. “No, not blindness. He has to be able to see,” he thought. All of Zeb’s troubles went out the window in an instant. “It is me Mr. Frank. Zeb. I stopped by to see how you are feeling.”

“In a weak voice he said, “Come in and have a seat. I’ve been expecting you. Did you have a good time up north?”

“I met this lady named Darlene and we went to the track and then I went with her in her new Corvette and then we had dinner.” Again, he settled for a half truth to spare his friend the sorted details about Darlene, the wild one.

“How is Carla? Her dad is worried sick about her. He does not like Paul. He thinks he is a religious snob.”

“How do you know?”

“I just know,” said Frank.

“I saw Carla and she looked happy to me.”

“Too bad you could not see the Lord and rescue her. Her dad wants you to get together with her awful bad.”

“Mr. Frank, you know I think you are one of the most wonderful unselfish people in the world, but I know I am not meant for Carla even if I accept salvation. And nothing anyone can say or do will ever change my mind.

“A lot of awful things happened to me when I was child. And one thing I can see as vivid today as I did when I was a little over ... ” He stopped

talking when he realized he had said too much already.

“Confess your sins to the Lord and you will be saved.”

“I am not of that bent.”

“You can tell me then, can’t you?” said Frank.

“No I cannot.”

“Is it so terrible you cannot even tell me?”

Zeb tuned out and said, “Perhaps someday. Not now. How has it been with you while I was gone?”

He reached for a pair of very thick glasses and put them on. “As you can see my sight is getting worse. It won’t be long now. I will be with my wife before next year. I know that as sure as I am sitting here. The doctor says I am in good shape for having chronic spats of liver failure. He said I will start to turn yellow soon. He called it jaundice. I am ready to meet Jesus.”

“Don’t be talking about leaving us, you have a long time to live yet. I do not want you to go.”

“I only wish God would give you the power to change my future, but my leaving this earth very soon is inevitable.”

Now he felt really bad. First Carla, then Darlene,

then Connie and now Frank. The clouds of gloom were closing in on his friend and there was very little he could do to make the sun shine for him. He said good-bye and left with his head hung low. After he got back to his room, he sat in his armchair. Life was a blur to him. His past was bad, but the future was turning out to be a runner-up to it. His dinner went down like a rock as he ran the past week through his mind. At least the weather was calm and partly sunny even if nothing else was.

A Big Job



Suddenly, someone started banging on his door. “Who on earth could be banging on his door this time of day?” Open up, this is the police!”

“What is going on,” he thought. “I did not do anything.” He got up and opened the door. Boots was standing there like a marble statue.

“Is that your Model A Ford out in the driveway?”

“Yes.”

“Where were you Sunday night at around 11 o’clock?”

“I was somewhere between Lexington, Kentucky and Hattiesburg.”

“A smarty one, are you?”

“No sir. Sam Martin, who owns the drugstore on Tenth Street in downtown Hattiesburg, took me with him when he went to visit his daughter in Lexington.”

“Likely story. The hardware store over on Warner Ave. was burglarized and your car was seen behind the store at 11 o’clock. Why was your car seen at the hardware store if you were somewhere between Lexington and Hattiesburg?

“Now, I am going to give you one last chance to come clean and tell me the truth. Where were you Sunday night at approximately eleven o’clock?”

“As I said before, “I was somewhere between Lexington Kentucky and my room.”

“I thought you said between Lexington, Kentucky and Hattiesburg before.”

“I think of Hattiesburg as here. I mean home.”

“Beginning to get confused are you? ‘Sure you are not hiding something from me?”

“No sir. I am not hiding anything from you.”

“I suppose you have witnesses”

“Yes sir. Sam Martin, his wife, Sam’s daughter

and her friends, the motel clerk in Lexington, several waitresses and at least five gas station people where we stopped and got gas along the way."

"Come with me, I have something to show you that might change your mind." They walked out to his Model A and behind the front seat was a small pile of hardware items with the store's labels still on them."

"Are you still sticking to the lame story you told me back in there?"

"Yes sir. I was in Lexington, like I said."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Zebadiah E. Smith."

"You are under arrest for burglarizing the hardware store on Warner Ave and this evidence is all we need."

Zeb cowered as the sheriff cuffed him and then put him in his patrol car and took him to jail. It was a small place with a front office and four cold, damp cells with antiquated locks on them. The office was plain with a small desk, a few chairs, a filing cabinet and a worn out typewriter.

"Sit down over here, Zebadiah.

"Now, we need to go over this one more time.

Where were you on or about Sunday night at eleven o'clock?"

"As I told you before, I was in Sam Martin's Chevrolet station wagon, somewhere between Lexington, Kentucky and here. We went up there to visit his daughter."

"Then how do you explain all of the hardware behind the front seat of your car?"

"I can't. I left my car parked in the driveway in front of Sam's house for the last three days while we were gone."

"And where is Sam's house?"

"It is behind his Drugstore."

"That house is less than three blocks from where the hardware store burglary took place. Kinda convenient, don't you think?"

"I really do not know how all the hardware got into the back of my car."

Zeb needed something to convince Boots he was telling the truth, so he threw out a few questions himself. "How much stuff was taken from the hardware store?"

"You ought to know how much was taken."

"Was it more than my Model A could hold?"

"Near as the owner could figure, there was at

least two pickup loads missing. The way I figure it, you made three or four trips and hid the tools and hardware somewhere, so you can sell them off later."

Zeb now knew why his gas gauge was a quarter of a tank low when he got back. Someone stole his car and used it to commit the burglary and either deliberately left some of the stuff in his car or was just plain careless. "Did you get any finger prints from the stuff in my car?"

"No we did not. After we get you booked, we'll get some finger prints off the hardware, and my experience tells me they will match yours?"

Zeb was scared to death the prints on the hardware would match his, even though he had never touched any of it. But in any event it looked like he would spend the night in jail. He would loose his job and, once again, he would be looking for another lousy job doing hard labor again, if he could get a job at all. "Now, we are going to put you in a cell for the night. The officer who reads the prints will not be here until he gets back from his vacation."

"When will he get back?"

"You're in luck, you only have nine days to wait."

His heart was pounding as he thought about being taken to a cell. “Nine days.” he thought. “May I make a telephone call?”

“Yes. One call.”

He took him over to the phone where he dialed Frank’s number. “Hello. This is Zeb.”

Frank said hello to him.

“Mr. Frank. Boots arrested me and took me to jail for burglarizing the hardware store over on Warner Ave. I tried to tell him I was either in Lexington with Sam or on my way back when the store was broken into. ... No. He still thinks I did the burglary.”

Frank told him to put Boots on the phone.

Within three hours they came to Zeb’s cell, opened it up and let him out. Sam and his wife were waiting for him in the lobby. “Sorry to make you come and get me out of jail.”

“Frances made a few phone calls. Then he called me.”

Later, Sam took Zeb back home. As soon as he went in, he walked up to Frank’s door and knocked. “Who is it?”

“It is Zeb, Mr. Frank.”

He opened the door and said, “Got into some

trouble, did you?"

"Yes. How did you get me out so soon?"

"I never told you, but my son is a lawyer. I told Boots I would go your bail and get my son to defend you.

"Did he listen?"

"No. I called Sam and told him the police picked you up. He told me the city police were there and he had verified your whereabouts during the burglary. That's more than likely the reason they let you out so soon.

"Boots is a good police officer, but he does get a little too exuberant once in a while."

"I hope they catch whoever did it, because they owe me a quarter of a tank of gas."

"I would get new locks for your car, because whoever took it may still have a key."

"I do not think they used a key. They probably hot wired it."

"Trust in the Lord and these trials and tribulations will be an opportunity to strengthen your immortal soul."

"I will try Mr. Frank. I have to be getting back to my room. Thanks for being there for me."

He put the key into the lock; however, this time

it was like no other. He tried to get some sleep, but he soon awoke to see his father standing beside his bed. He cowered under the covers but the vision did not go away. “You are one of my worthless sons. I told you, you will never make it on your own and you would eventually crawl back to me and work the farm. Now you are a jailbird and a failure. Come back home and take your punishment like a man. Like a man. Like a man.” When he came out of his delirium, he felt awful. Again he tried to sleep but the thoughts roared in his head.

By morning he got almost no sleep. How was he going to work hard all day with only a few hours sleep? He brewed a cup of tea and sipped it as he relived what had happened to him yesterday.

When he got to work at eight-fifteen, the foundation ditch was a lot drier. Loren had not come back from the lumber yard yet. Bob walked up to him and said, “Have any exciting things happen to you since yesterday?”

For a minute Zeb thought he knew about him being taken to jail. But, he would never tell him his night was spoiled by a lousy thief. “No. I had a

real exciting day," he said.

"Did not go too well, did it?"

"If you only knew," he thought before he said, "Could have been a whole lot better." Loren drove up in his pickup. It was heavily loaded with dimension lumber and a stack of three-quarter inch thick sheets of plywood. He got out and pointed to a small clearing in back of the house. "Will you and Zeb get some cinder blocks and line them up in four rows and place the sheets of plywood on them and then stack the rest of the wood next to the plywood? Then you can cover the wood with a tarp I have on the front seat of my truck."

Their eyebrows lowered as they went to get the cinder blocks out of Loren's .

"Bob, when the wood is unloaded, you can show Zeb how to make two strong sawhorses. He'll need them before he can build the forms for the stem."

"I have to go and find out about a bid the boss put in on a new job. If we get this one, I will have to hire at least ten men from different trades. It means we will have enough work to last at least fifteen months."

They unloaded the lumber before Bob showed him how to build a sturdy set of sawhorses. He did a much better than expected job on building them. Afterward, Bob took out a piece of paper and drew a sketch of how he wanted him to build the forms. He needed to make the forms so they would interlock and then cut pieces of 2×4 to nail on top to keep them from separating when the concrete was poured in and tamped down. He had cut out and assembled two sections of the forms before Loren came back with a smile on his face.

“What are you all happy about?” Bob teased.

“Merry Christmas, he replied. We are going to get to build a new apartment complex over on west 15th Street.

“Lunch is on me. I stopped by a Deli and had them make us some sandwiches and throw in a bunch of sodas. Let’s eat. We need to celebrate our new job. It is the biggest job I ever got in my life. I am on a cloud.”

Zeb already understood the feast today, famine tomorrow nature of the construction industry. However, the excitement for him went down the drain yesterday evening at the county jail.

They sat down and ate the food as quickly as they could. Both of them knew Loren expected production at all times. This luncheon was only a brief interlude from the reality of construction work. They knew that if Loren ever caught either one of them standing around, it could be curtains for their job.

At four-thirty Loren came back again and asked Bob to come with him so he could help him work out the details on the new job with the architect. Then he told Zeb he could go home early with pay. “You can keep work on the forms for the stem starting at eight-thirty tomorrow morning.”

“I will, he replied.” He needed time to decide what to do about his future. He was so fed up with Hattiesburg he was willing to go back and face his father. However, he was not ready to face him yet. His current predicament was placing too much distance between himself and the memories of his recent past. His childhood in Buckeye was no longer looking as bad as it once did. Time can make one’s worst memories all but disappear into the back of their mind.

After he picked up his tools and put them in his car, he headed for the soda fountain. When he got

there, Sam was faithfully standing behind the register waiting on customers. Zeb walked around the store pretending to look at products. After several minutes Sam waited on the last customer. He walked over to him after he finished and said, “Thanks for setting the police officers straight for me.”

“I only told them the unvarnished truth. You have at least twenty witnesses who can verify the fact that you were with us on the trip.”

“I feel so invaded. My life will never be the same. How could anyone be so cruel as to steal my only car and leave stuff in it to make me look guilty. I am so glad I went up to Lexington with you. I would still be in the slammer if it was not for you verifying my whereabouts during the burglary.”

“The Lord is with you. He won’t let anything bad happen to you.”

Zeb changed the subject and said, “I’m dry, I need a large root beer float.”

“Let me go and get it for you.” They walked over to the fountain. There was no one there to wait on customers. Sam went behind the counter and prepared him a huge root beer float with two

blocks of ice cream in a big malt glass. “How is that Zeb?”

“Super. I did not know you knew how to make root beer floats.”

“I spent many years behind this soda fountain counter before I bought this store back in 1940. World War II broke out shortly after I purchased it, and I had a real tough go of it the first couple of years. But over time I was able to make a go of it.”

He started feeling a little less sorry for himself. It was turning out that nobody ever had an easy life. It seemed as though everyone he ever met turns out to have had a trying past.

After he finished his drink, he told Sam he had to get back to his room and catch a little shut-eye.

In the morning, he woke up feeling a lot better. At least he was not in jail. A dense fog set in during the night and the shadows on the back window made him feel uneasy. The smell of his breakfast cooking on the stove reminded him of his mom’s breakfasts back home. He began to think of going back to Arizona again, but each time his mind drifted toward Buckeye, he would have a vision of his father standing in the

doorway with his finger pointing at him and saying you are one of my worthless sons. He found it difficult to breathe. It caused him to live in constant fear of the shadow that would suddenly appear out of nowhere. He could not hide from it no matter how hard he tried. It kept reappearing again and again when he least expected it. And each time he saw the vision it would be more vivid.

Zeb got up and went over to the top kitchen cabinet, opened the door and retrieved a small box which contained all his most valuable possessions. He slowly took the quarter size marbled blue, gray and white button his mother gave to him so long ago out of the box and held it up to the window light and said, “One day you will pay for what you tried to do to me, I promise you.” No one would ever find out why this button was so important to him. It was the key to his tortured past. One day he will have a jeweler make a pendent out of it. It would then become his shield against the fears that haunted him.

He finished breakfast and started toward work. When he got there at eight o’clock, he was eager to beat on some wood. His hammer had become

a device to relieve the pent up emotions within him. Loren walked over to him and said, “You did a good job making the sawhorses and the two form sections yesterday. I picked up the j-bolts for the stem while I was at the lumberyard. Will you go over to my truck and get them?

He went to his truck and got the burlap sack full of bolts and took them over to where Loren was looking down at the foundation. “Where do you want me to put them?”

“Follow me.” He walked over to the back door of the house and went into a room that once was a den. It was now cluttered with construction equipment and materials.

He pointed at the northeast corner and said, “Over there will do. We will need them sometime next week when we pour the concrete into the stem. I hope you’ll finish building the forms for it by then.”

“I will get them done as fast as I can.”

“Don’t get overly anxious. I want you to take your time and do a good job on them.”

He walked over to his Model A and got out his tools. Within a short period of time he had another form section cut out and assembled. He

looked up and saw Bob standing by the second story window looking down at him.

“Is there a problem?”

“No, but you can hurry up every chance you get.”

“Yeah right.” He was beginning to get a construction attitude himself. The razzing was getting a bit out of hand. Construction workers were turning out to be just a bunch of smarty jerks.

“Carry on then.” The afternoon went by faster than he had expected. He loved it when his day went smoothly. It gave him great pleasure to have finished another day without incident. His mind drifted off toward Carla, Darlene and Connie. “I wonder what they are doing,” he thought. Then he heard a car engine that turned his head. He saw a new Chrysler coming toward him. It stopped and parked behind Loren’s pickup. A stout man dressed in an immaculate dark gray suit and black tie got out of the car with a briefcase and came over to where he was working. “Is Loren around?” he said.

“Loren is in the house. He is probably upstairs with Bob, his carpenter.”

“Thanks.”

Thoughts churned in his mind. He wondered who would be coming to this messy place dressed in a suit and tie. Oh well, he shrugged. Then he buried himself in his work.

Several hours passed before the man and Loren came out the back door and shook hands. Then the man got into his car and drove away. Loren came over to Zeb and said, “He is the architect who is in charge of the new apartment complex we are going to build. I plan to give you a shot at being a full-fledged carpenter. I think you have what it takes.

He thought, “How much of a raise do I get.” Then he said, “I will do my best.”

“Great. I like to hear people who are enthusiastic.”

“What he really wants to hear is how much I will sweat for him,” he thought to himself before he once again started working on the forms.

By day’s end, he had three more form sections assembled and was working on a fourth. It was four-thirty and he was totally exhausted. Loren came over to him and said,“Ready to call it a day.”

“I am ready,” he replied. “I feel like an ice cold

soda."

"Tell you what, let's go to Marlene's Restaurant and I will buy you as big a soda as you can drink. We can take my truck." They got into Loren's pickup and started talking about the upcoming job and how Zeb liked Hattiesburg. He did not tell Loren he felt like a cog in a big wheel going nowhere, so he took the easy way out and said, "It is a nice town."

"The reason I asked is, the company is growing very fast and I am about to be promoted to super and Bob is going to be the new foreman. I will need a carpenter to replace him. Because you work so hard, you would make a good lead carpenter."

"What is a lead carpenter?"

"A lead carpenter is the one who motivates the workers and keeps them going."

He knew what a lead worker was. A lead carpenter was nothing more than a crew pusher. Someone who leads the workers to slaughter. He remembered the cotton fields back in Arizona where one of the pickers was in charge and was like a merciless god over the others.

"I would rather be a carpenter until I get some

more experience." What he really wanted to do was go to the drugstore and maybe find out why Connie was not there the last time he went there. Why he had to know about her was a mystery. He was a newcomer to boy/girl relationships.

They went into the restaurant and were seated by the hostess. The waitress was five-foot-five. She weighed 160 pounds and her appearance was hospital clean. Her dress was starched and snow white. She was wearing a white apron with a green border around it. When she got to their table, she said, "Are you gentleman ready to order?"

It puzzled him as to why she called them gentleman when his clothes were covered with dirt and sawdust. His hands were rough and chapped from exposure to the elements. But he dared not ask. Loren told him to order a meal with his drink. "It is on me," he said. He took the opportunity to order a French dip with au jus sauce, a baked potato and a dinner salad. And, of course, a large root beer float. They talked for over an hour before they got into his truck and headed back to his car. Even though Zeb liked his Model A Ford, he was beginning to want a newer

car. He could not decide whether he wanted a Ford or a Chevrolet. Maybe a new car would help him be more popular with the girls. But he would still be a semi-skilled laborer no matter what car he drove or what job title he had.

Loren took him to the new apartment job site and showed him around. He told him there would be a big rush to get the project done because the owner wanted to start renting out the units as quickly as possible. When they got back. Loren said, “Here we are. Will your car start okay?”

He felt insulted. His car was in good condition as far as he was concerned. On the other hand, he figured Loren was only looking out for him. “She runs good and she starts up real fast. I am proud of her.” The truth is, it did not start all the time. There were several times he wanted to push it off of a cliff. However, he also realized his car was his lifeline no matter what. On a few occasions it had been his only shelter and home. When he got back to his room, he fell fast asleep within minutes.

He woke up suddenly at seven-thirty and realized he had not set the alarm. It took only three minutes for him to get ready and head for

work.

On the way to work he started going over his life so far. It boiled down to: Get up, Go to work, Come home, Eat dinner and Go to Sleep and then repeat it all over again the next day. His life was beginning to be more like a groove in a record except in his case it was the same groove day after day.

When he got to work the next day, he continued working on the forms. By Friday he had the forms ready to set. If he had any luck at all, they would all fit together like a glove.

Once the forms were set on Friday, he and Bob placed a pair of 5/8 inch rebars near the top of the forms and fastened them in place. By quitting time, the forms were ready for concrete. They planned to pour concrete into the stem early Monday morning.

Nothing exciting happened all weekend. Before he knew it, Monday had arrived and he found himself standing behind a huge concrete mixer truck. Bob walked up to him and said, “Ready to buggy some concrete into the form and tamp it down?”

“What is a buggy?”

"You have a treat coming. *Buggyin*g is where you get to test your manhood. We wheel this wheelbarrow over to the back of the mixer truck and they fill it up with concrete, then we wheel it over near the form and take this #10 galvanized pail, scoop up a bucket full of concrete, walk over to the form and pour it in. Then after a couple of wheelbarrows full, we take this tamp and tamp the concrete in to make sure there are no hollow spots or big bubbles in it.

"Sounds real exciting doesn't it?" said Bob.

"It sounds just ducky," he said dryly.

Loren came over and stood beside Zeb and said, "Zeb, you want to go inside and get the sack full of j-bolts you put in there the other day?"

"Yes." A minutes or so later he came out with the sack and placed it next to the sawhorses.

"We have to put one of those j-bolts in the center of the form every six feet and leave three inches of it sticking out of the concrete. The bolts give us something to hold the 2×8 sill down."

"What is a sill?"

"It is the bottom board the floor joists rest on."

He thought he had better not ask too many questions about what things are.

“Now, let’s get started. Concrete must be poured as soon as possible after it clears the mixer truck. When they fill the concrete truck up at the batch plant, they only have an hour or so before it needs to be poured, or it will start to set up and eventually destroy the mixer.”

He put his canvas gloves on, grabbed the wheelbarrow and they started pouring concrete into the stem. By the time they had poured the stem, tamped it down and made some adjustments to the j-bolts, he was ready to go back to cutting down trees again. His back was hurting severely by the time he got back to his room. And he had never been so tired in his whole life. Was age catching up with him? Or was the work too arduous? In any event, concrete was not his friend.

Loren called Frank at eight o’clock in the evening and asked him to tell Zeb they would be taking the day off tomorrow to let the concrete cure a little. He was so happy to have the day off. By noon the next day his back hurt so bad he got into his car and went to the drugstore to get some liniment for it. When he got there, he took the opportunity to see whether Connie was

working. Instead of heading for the aisle where the remedies were, he walked over to a booth and sat down. Connie came over to wait on him. She was wearing bright red lipstick. He could not help but notice she was wearing an engagement ring. Was she going to get married? He dared not ask. “What are you going to have today?” she said in a very enticing voice.

“The usual. A tall root beer float.” When she brought the drink to his table, there was no mention of anything extra. He was wondering if Sam had told her to stop giving things away.

He sipped the root beer slowly in the hopes of getting an opportunity to find out if she had been off ill. She was depressingly lovely to him now, but was it too late? A few minutes later a 200 pound man, in his early thirties and dressed up real formal like came in and sat down in the booth behind him.

Connie came over to wait on the gentleman. After she brought his order to him, Zeb glanced at them and saw her sit down beside him for a minute while they talked. Twenty minutes later she came back and sat down beside him again. He turned sideways in his booth so he could

better hear and see what was going on. When he glanced at them, the man leaned over and kissed her and said, “I have to be getting back to work.” He felt left out, not because she had found someone, but because he had not found anyone for himself. He was almost finished with his root beer when Connie got up and walked to his table and said, “Will you be having another?”

“No, he said, I have a big apartment job coming up and I need to rest up for it. The boss said he is planning to promote me to lead carpenter. I think I’ll be getting a lot more money. He was clearly trying to impress her. And he was trying to hide the fact that he was still a high priced laborer.

She told him, in a soft voice, to come back whenever he needed another root beer. He could not understand why she was being so nice to him now. It may have helped before she became engaged. His mother would disown him for messing with an engaged woman. It was sorely evident he had never learned a thing about love. His father deprived him of that too. After he made a quick movement in his seat, his back reminded him he needed to get some liniment. He finished his drink and paid for it before he went over to the

drugstore section to look for a rub for his back. Sam was not there. Someone new was at the register. He was a small renaissance man in his early seventies. After he found the medicine, he walked over to pay for it.

“I have not seen you around these parts before, are you new here?” said Zeb.

“No. I am Thornton, Sam’s father. His mom and I came down from New York to visit with him. I wanted him to have the day off. He gets way too involved in his work. I own an imports store in downtown New York City.”

He thought, “Why can’t I have a caring father like him.”

“Connie, the waitress over there, has been off for a while, do you know if she has been ill?”

“She has been anything but ill. She is getting married this Sunday. They’re planning a big wedding. Her fiancé’s father owns an automobile dealership in downtown Hattiesburg.”

“A car lot,” he repeated. “Where have I heard ‘car lot’ before?” he thought. She was gone, and there was no use in him thinking about her anymore. Yet at the same time he could not understand why she was being so friendly toward

him? The thought that he may have missed an opportunity with her consumed him for a minute. Then he told himself, “No, I am happy for her.” However, like the sour grapes story, he really did not want her anyway.

When he got back to the rooming house, Frank’s door was closed and he could not hear his radio. Zeb knocked on his door several times and waited. When Frank did not come to the door, Zeb suddenly realized how all alone he really was. It scared him to think Mr. Frank died.

The next day he moped around his room all morning. He

was trying to think of something exciting to do. After a while, he decided to go out. A short drive always helped him cheer up. Frank's door was still closed when he walked by his apartment. "I hope he is all right," he thought. He did not want to lose his only real friend.

He watched the scenery go by his car window without being conscious of its impact on him. He was in a daze as he drove to here and there with

no particular direction in mind.

It was after dark when he returned to the rooming house. There were no lights in Frank's apartment. He was worried about him. Where could he be? What happened to him? The questions were coming to his mind and no answers followed. Time went by painfully slow. He was restless all night. When morning came, he got up and went to work. The stem was finished. What would he be doing today?

When he arrived at his job, he saw a huge pile of lumber. The wood made him feel better. To him lumber represented work. Lumber on a pile at a construction site was tantamount to job security in most cases. He got out of his car, took his tools over and put them on the sawhorses which were now the starting point for his day.

Bob came over to him and said, "Ready to put your back into toting some barges?"

"It is a bright sunny day and that is just what I got up this morning to do," he said, even though he did not know what a barge was.

Bob told him he called any big and heavy board a barge because they generally support a lot of weight like a barge boat. Also because barge

rafters hang over the edge of a gabled roof to hold it up. Actually, he probably did not know why they called them barges. A lot of construction workers like to bluff their way through material names because they do not want to suffer the humiliation of being caught not knowing the correct name.

“This is the most important part of laying out the perimeter of the room. The sill must be accurately bolted in place or the walls will not be straight and the homeowner will not be happy with us,” said Bob.

They took a sixteen foot long 2×8 board and set it next to the j-bolts and marked each bolt location with a carpenter’s pencil. Then they used a combination square to locate and mark the center of where the bolt holes needed to be drilled. When they got all of the boards marked, Bob told Zeb to follow him upstairs where he kept his drill. When they got to his tool box, he reached in and pulled out a brace with a three-quarter-inch drill bit in it and handed it to him.

“Let’s go downstairs and I will show you how to drill the holes in the sill.” When they got back to the sawhorses, Bob showed him how to use the

drill. Then he handed the brace and bit to Zeb and said, “You can drill the rest of the holes. If you have any trouble come up stairs and get me.”

“Yes sir.”

“I would like it if you called me Bob. I was never given an English title of knighthood or ever dubbed a baronet, so I feel uncomfortable being called a sir.”

Zeb took the brace and bit and began drilling holes for the j-bolts. It did not take him long to realize how Bob made it look too easy. The holes were not straight and a lot of them were not exactly centered where they were supposed to be. However, after several not so perfect holes, he started getting the hang of drilling holes in the wood.

At noon, he went upstairs and told Bob he had finished the bolt holes and was ready for something else to do.

“Now comes the fun part. What we need to do next is to cut strips of ninety pound felt and cut holes in them for the j-bolts. Then you need to coat the sills with creosote.”

“What is creosote?”

“It is one of the smelliest chemicals you will

ever have the displeasure to use. It's made from coal tar derivatives called *creosols*. That is where it gets its name from. Do not get any of it on your hands or on your clothes."

"Why do we have to use it?"

"It's used to keep termites from eating the wood and to help preserve it. So do not skimp on it when you paint the sills with it. We are going to coat the sills with three coats, which is what the plans call for."

Zeb was about to find out that labor was not the worst thing he ever had to do. Bob brought a gallon can of creosote over to him and handed him a big moth-eaten brush with most of its bristles worn down.

Bob said, "Grease them sills up real good," as he walked away with a conceited grin on his face.

It was not so funny to Zeb, especially after he opened the can of creosote and got a good whiff of it.

He was careful not to get any of the smelly stuff on his clothes or his hands. By the time he had the sills finished, the area smelled worse than a fresh blast from an enraged skunk.

When he walked upstairs to tell Bob he had

finished the first coat, he was wondering what kind of nasty job was in store for him now. He told Zeb to tear out the bath tub and the walls around it while the creosote dried. Bob told him to be careful when he broke out the black and white checkered ceramic tiles around the tub with his hammer.

“Broken tiles are like little razor blades. One small chip can take your eyesight away in less than a second, so be extremely careful.”

Within an hour he was choking on the dust from the old tile grout and the plaster backing he was chipping out. By three-thirty he had the walls around the bathtub free so he could break them down. With one big thrust he pushed the wall with the faucets in it over. Then he realized he had just broken off both the hot and cold water pipes. The water was shooting straight up at the ceiling and running everywhere. He darted downstairs to try and find the shutoff valve. There was no time to worry about snakes and black widow spiders as he reached into where he thought the shutoff valve was. He turned the valve as hard as he could and hoped he would not twist it off and cause a flood outside too. Fortunately it was the

right valve and it stopped the water. By the time he got back into the house, water was pouring out through a light fixture in the middle of the downstairs living room.

Bob was walking down the stairs as he started walking up. “Did you get the water shut off?”

“I think so.”

They got buckets and put them under the places where the water was leaking from the ceiling. Zeb got a mop and began cleaning the upstairs area around the tub, while Bob went out to his truck and got some pipe wrenches, removed the broken pipe fittings and put pipe caps on the leaking pipes. Then he turned the water back on.

Bob said, “We will go out and sit on the front porch for a while. You look like a jackrabbit being chased by a coyote.”

“I guess I got a man sized scare. Do you think Loren will fire me?”

“Things we do not expect happen all the time. He will be happy no one was hurt.”

After a while Bob asked him if he felt ready to go back to work again. He said, “I am as ready as I will ever be.”

“Good, you can go up and break out the rest of the walls. At least there will not be as much dust as before.” Zeb once again saw Bob grinning from ear to ear.

For the next two days he continued breaking out walls. Each day he would get to paint the sills with another coat of creosote.

The next morning he noticed a new worker was there. “Did Loren hire another carpenter?” he asked.

“No. He is the king of all construction workers. He is a plumber. There will be two vanities, a new tub, a sink in the corner of the room and several other bathroom fixtures. He is here to rough in the waste water pipes and the galvanized potable, drinking, water pipes before we cover up his rough work with our beautiful hardwood floor.”

Zeb could tell there was a lot of bitterness between the different trades. The following morning, it was time to finish the sills. His hands started to burn after he accidentally touched the creosote covered boards several times. He tried not to touch them, but he could not avoid getting some of the creosote on his hands and clothes. The sills were all in place and bolted down by the

time they called it a day.

He tried to wash the creosote off his hands with kerosene, but it did not remove all of it. He looked like he had played in a tar pit all day and smelled even worse.

When he got home, he spent what seemed like hours in the shower. When he finally got out of the shower nothing had changed. He now understood why bugs stay away from it. The next day things went a lot better. They started putting in the floor joists. They were 2 inch by 12 inch by 16-foot-long boards. They were heavy and about all the two of them could handle. Bob told him to be sure and crown every floor joist.

“Crown?”

“Yes, wood tends to bend either up or down depending on the grain. So we have to sight it in or put a string on the joist to make sure the bowed side is up. That way, when weight is piled on it, the joists will straighten out and be level. You will develop an eye for sighting in boards so good you will take it with you to the funeral parlor when you die a hundred years from now.”

He thought he might not live until he is twenty-one, if he did not stop doing construction work.

“Next, we are going to mark out the end caps, which are the boards we will be nailing to each end of the floor joists.

“We need to place a mark every sixteen inches and then put an X beside it. The X is to make sure we put all of the joists on the correct side of the mark. This is known as a sixteen-inch-on-center layout. Boards come in eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, and sixteen foot standard lengths. Every four feet divides equally into three sixteen inch divisions. But we do not have to be real accurate with it because we are going to be laying diagonal sub-flooring down before we put the oak flooring on top of it.”

They began laying out the floor. When they were about to fasten the end cap in place, Bob said, “Always remember, even the end caps need to be crowned. The crown always goes up. Always.”

The rest of the day went well. As the floor joists were nailed in place one after the other, Zeb was beginning to feel proud he was actually getting to building something. He was tired of cutting down sappy trees, digging ditches, ripping out walls and lugging around heavy materials for

someone else to use. It looked like it was going to rain. The breeze picked up a little and the puffy white clouds were being replaced by dark black thunderclouds.

“Think it’s going to rain?” said Bob.

“I hope not, I hate getting wet,” he replied.

“We have most of the floor joists in, let’s go home.”

“I will start picking up the tools.”

When he pulled into his parking place, he saw Agnes’s car in the drive. “What happened to Mr. Frank? Is he dead?” he thought.

When he walked in, Frank’s door opened and Agnes stood facing him as white as a ghost.

“What happened,” he said.

“Mr. Smith, it is not good. Frances is getting worse. He has been in the hospital. He got a little better and wanted then to allow him go home. But, they would not let him go home unless someone was there to watch over him. I brought some of my things over here so I could be here to take care of him. He wants to see you. He did not tell me why.”

Zeb walked in slowly and unsure of himself. There was no way of knowing what to expect

when he saw him. He hesitated as he walked into his bedroom. Frank's skin had turned a faint yellow. It looked like he had a light tobacco stain all over his body. Even the whites of his eyes were a faint yellow-brown. His eyes were all glassed over. Zeb knew it would end this way; but until now, it was not real to him.

"Hi Mr. Frank. It's Me, Zeb. How are you doing?"

In a weak voice he said, "Not too good." Then he said, "Before I forget, did Agnes tell you?"

"I haven't had a chance to talk to her lately."

"When I die, I have a thousand dollars put away in a savings account under your name. In the closet over there I have a typewriter I want you to have. I kept it with me all these years in the hopes I would be able to write a book one day. Someday you will understand what I already know. Never let it out of your sight. You will write a book and it will sweep the nation. It will tell the world about me and your struggle here. You may not believe it, but it was God who brought you here and you will meet him someday just like me when I die. For me, paradise is just a few minutes away. I am ready.

"Promise me you will go to college and learn to

write someday."

"If I promise you I will go to college, it may be a lie. I do not know where the future will take me. No matter how much I respect you, I cannot lie to you."

"You were always the good one. I hope the Lord finds you one day.

"When you first moved here, I took all the money you paid me in rent and put it in a savings account for you and then I added to it. Your account has one-thousand and eleven dollars in it. I want you to have the money so you can go to college."

"Mr. Frank, I won't take your money. I must earn it. If I do not earn money, I will never accept it."

"The account is in your name. Agnes. Will you go in the closet over there and get out my fruitcake tin setting on the top shelf, open it up and get the white envelope out and give it to Zeb. It contains his bankbook. I want him to have it."

"What about Edward?"

"I set aside two-thousand dollars for him. And I am leaving this rooming house and eighteen-hundred dollars to Agnes."

Agnes was shocked, this was the first time she

heard of it. She walked over to the closet and opened the door. Frank said, “It’s the big red tin on the top shelf. ‘You see it?”

She got the red tin and took out the envelope with Zeb’s name on it.

“Hand the envelope to him, will you?”

He took the envelope and said, “Thank you for thinking of me, but I cannot guarantee I will use the money to go to college.” He could never keep Frank’s money under any circumstances.

“Then use it to make a difference in someone else’s life,”

“Mr. Frank I have not gotten around to asking how you feel,” said Zeb.

“I feel like a truck ran over me. I am very weak, but my soul is on fire. It won’t be long now,” he repeated several times. It was quite evident his health was not good at all.

The conversation for the next half hour was slow and carefully planned. It seemed as though Frank was not there. He talked but what he said was mostly disconnected except for the money and what he was going to leave his earthly friends.

Agnes said, “He really needs to rest for a spell.

If he gets worse I can come over and let you know how he is doing."

"I will be here all evening." Once again he was in his room stewing over his troubles. He turned on the radio and listened to a few country songs before he fell off to sleep.

At ten-thirty, he woke to a knock on his door. It was Agnes. She looked as spry as a spring chicken. His mind was confused. Did she come to his room with terrible news about Frank, or was there some terrible thing she had pent up inside her like his anguish? What did she want? Certainly, she could not have a crush on him. She was old enough to be his great grandmother.

"May I come in?"

"Sure. Have a seat over there. How is Mr. Frank?"

"I guess you know he is drifting in and out of reality. Sometimes he is aware of himself and other times he does not even know who he is, what he is doing or where he is."

"I have known that for a long time. I try to cheer him up, but some days it fell on deaf ears. He would just go on about being with Martha, his wife. You know I cannot take his money. Agnes, I

want you to have it."

"I have my own money. What he really wants you to do with the money is for you to use it to make a difference in your life or someone else's life."

"Later, we will sit down and have a long talk. But for now, do you know how long he was married?"

"I thought it was for most of his life."

"No. He was only married to Martha for only three weeks before she died. Three years later, to the day, her grave was robbed. She was wearing expensive jewelry, a diamond engagement ring and a wedding band. No one knows what happened to the rings, her other jewelry, the coffin, or her body. The cemetery caretaker found the grave dug up and empty. It is a mystery as to what happened to the coffin and her body. They were never found, but the coffin lid was found thrown off to the side of the road. Sounds kind of weird doesn't it?"

"Did they ever figure out why the coffin lid was thrown off to the side of the road?"

"No one knows for sure. However, they figure whoever took the rings and the body used the lid

to slide her coffin into the back of a truck or into a big car," said Agnes.

"Could we change the subject for a while? This is getting a little too dense for me."

"Frances seems to be resting peacefully in his bed. He fell asleep shortly after you left. I know he was exhausted. We will talk about it some more tomorrow."

"Yes, tomorrow would be better for me. It is hard for me to loose the only real friend I have ever had."

"What about Bear? Isn't he a friend of yours too?"

"He made a man of me, but he never got real close to me. That reminds me, I need to call him tomorrow after work and find out how he is doing."

"I have to be shoving off. I want to be there if Frances wakes up."

He persisted, "I know you came and took him to church every Sunday. Were you ever close to Mr. Frank?"

"We were very close. We needed each other. I took him to church because his soul was tormented and so was mine. Now he is dying. I

do not know how to lose my brother."

"Brother?"

"Yes, Frances is my brother. We have been close all our lives. We even got married on the same day. His wife died shortly after we were both married. Several years later, my husband was killed in World War I. His death devastated me. I did not know what my sons and I would do."

"You have sons?"

"Yes. I really have to be going."

She scurried down the hall in a flash. She started crying into a small silk handkerchief before she went into Frank's apartment.

Zeb sat there in his armchair and began going over his new found information about Agnes and Frank.

He turned off the light and stared into the dark. His father's image suddenly appeared. "I told you, you would never amount to anything. You are one of my worthless sons."

"I am not worthless. You are the one who is worthless. What have you ever done to prove your manhood other than beat and starve your kids? Before I left Buckeye, you bullied me into believing I would eventually crawl back to you.

That is not going to happen.

“I am all broken up now because my friend is dying. But like when grandma died, it devastated me for awhile before I realized my fond memories of her gave me hope. She made me feel loved and wanted, while you hurt me and made me feel sick and alone.” He got up and took a swing at the vision before it disappeared.

The next morning he was somber as he threw a couple of eggs into his frying pan and watched them crackle to a life all their own. Then he fixed some hash browns and two slices of toast coated thick with cinnamon and butter. He washed his breakfast down with a cup of hot tea loaded with sugar before he got in his car and left for work.

The road seemed to glide under the tires of his car. The sky had cleared during the night and the sun was shining bright against the back window of his car as he drove to work. Bob was already lining up the day’s activities when he arrived. They would finish the framework for the flooring today. Then his thoughts drifted to Agnes and Frank. He wondered how they were. This would be the first time he ever had a friend who died. It would be

one of the toughest things he ever had to go through.

The day faded away as the sounds of the evening began to chant to him. After he went home, Agnes did not come to his room to bring him up to date on Frank's condition like she said she would. That worried him.

The rest of the evening went by quickly. Perhaps Agnes

was too involved with taking care of him to drop by and bring him up to date on Frank's condition. He was puzzled as to why her car was not there. Maybe she would drop by tomorrow. Before long he was sound asleep. Toting barges tired him out a lot more than he had expected.

When he awoke at eight, he knew he was in trouble. He was given strict orders not to come to work late. He dressed quickly, darted out to his

car and raced to work. When Bob saw him walking toward him, he said, “Not paying close attention to your alarm clock are you?”

“My best friend is dying of liver disease and it is a bit tough on me. I have not been getting much sleep lately.”

“That is all right, don’t let it become a habit.” They began laying the diagonal T&G, tongue and groove, sub flooring. Bob told him they needed to measure ten feet from each side of the northwest corner of the sill. Then he said, “I’ll take a chalk line and snap a line to work from. We will start at the line, which is a 45 degree angle in relation to the floor. Then, we will install the tongue and groove flooring in both directions from there. I will start on the long side and you can start on the short side. Got it?”

“I always get the short side.” he grumbled under his breath. “No.” he said.

“Here, I will show you.” He took a board and aligned the grooved edge along the red chalk mark and nailed it in place. Then he took another piece of T&G and showed him how to tack a small nail in the tongue to use as a spacer. “Do you know why I used a nail to separate the two

boards?

“Haven’t a clue.”

“The nail keeps a little gap between each board. This floor will expand and contract as it gets damp and dries out. If we jam the T&G up tight, the boards will buckle up when the floor gets damp and make bumps in the floor.”

He went to work on his short end of the sub floor. It took him a while to realize it was a lot harder to lay sub flooring than he first thought. The wood was not working with him at all. It was like trying to stuff too many clothes into a small suitcase. No sooner than he got one end of the board in place, the other end would pop out of the groove. He got very frustrated before Bob came over and showed him how to start at one end of a board and then slowly pound the tongue into the groove using a scrap piece of T&G to prevent the groove from being crushed by his hammer. He also showed him how to tack one end of the board in place rather than waiting until the board was all the way into the groove before he started nailing it off.

By quitting time they had most of the sub flooring tacked down. “Tomorrow, we will nail the

floor off solid. We just put a few nails in the boards today. It will take a lot more nails to hold it down securely. When we do the finished oak floor, it will go a lot easier; however, the joints must be very tight. This rough flooring does not need to be perfect."

Zeb felt a lift as he looked at what he had done. He took a deep breath and savored the smell of the freshly cut pine and fir. "Show me the man in a suit and tie who can look at what he has done and get a feeling like this," he thought. Then reality set in as he felt a sharp pain in his back. He was a construction laborer and would more than likely never be anything more.

"We did pretty good today. You need to get here on time tomorrow. Get a little closer to your alarm clock tonight."

He casually looked at Bob and saw him smirking again. It was another one of his cutesy remarks that were beginning to remind him of how hard he had to work to earn his meager paycheck.

The sun was low in the sky as he put his tools in his car and left the job site. What news would be waiting for him when he got back to his room?

Would he ever see his friend again?

After he drove home, he noticed Agnes's car was not there. That was not good news. He had to know, so he went up to Frank's door and knocked and then waited. After a while, he knocked a little harder. There was no answer.

The walk to his door seemed to take forever. Thoughts and worries consumed him. What could have happened? Why did she not tell him how Frank was doing?

All evening long he waited to hear foot steps down the hall. It was always another tenant walking to their room. He did not know any of the other tenants by name. Occasionally he said, "Hi." to them, but for the most part he stayed close to only a few people.

The night went by slower than a freight train going up a steep grade. By midnight, he was so sleepy he could no longer keep his eyes open. Again, he forgot to set the alarm; this time, however, he woke up at six-ten. He got dressed and after he had breakfast, he walked out to see if Agnes's car was parked outside. Her car was not there. That worried him. The situation was more aggravating than a dripping faucet. At nine

o'clock they were cutting the bottom plates and the 2×6 wall studs to length. Zeb asked why the walls were so thick. Bob told him they were weight bearing walls. "They have to be strong enough to support the roof and the second story."

"Oh." He was so excited about getting to stand up the walls and be building toward the sky. He and Bob also cut the jack studs, the window and door headers and the top plates before they began assembling the lumber into walls. Each time they fastened another wall section in place, it made him feel more closed in. Yet at the same time, the walls lifted his spirits. He could stand back and look at the framework and say to himself, "I built that." Bob was cutting the wood and he was nailing it together. Shortly before lunch he smashed his thumb with his hammer. It was not bleeding yet, but Bob told Zeb, he was going to have one doozy of a blood blister. He ran over to the hose bib, turned it on and let the cool water soothe his throbbing thumb.

Five minutes later, Bob walked over to him and said, "Ready to go back to work."

He wanted to say no I am in pain; instead, he said, "Lead me to it." They quit early because Bob

told Zeb he needed to get some ice on his thumb and then maybe some Merthiolate on it to keep it from getting infected if it started to bleed.

He stopped by the drugstore on his way home to get a few bandages in case he got hurt up again. When he walked in, Sam was behind the register as usual. He raised an eyebrow and nodded to him as he walked toward the soda fountain. Connie was behind the counter. She smiled warmly at him as he headed for his favorite booth. He sat there for a while before she came over to wait on him. He started off by saying he was sorry he did not pay more attention to her in the past. She said, “Don’t be too hard on yourself. The only reason I gave you the pie was because I knew you were friends with the Boss. When you went up to Lexington with him, I figured if I treated you good, he might give me a raise. That’s all. I had been dating Herbert for over a year before we got married. Waitress work is like being a nanny with an apron. You do what you have to in order to get bigger tips and a raise.

His ego went flatter than a pancake with no leavening to make it rise. Was she only after a raise or was he jumping to conclusions about

what she said? He felt like he had taken a fresh smack in the chops. He ordered a drink. At least a root beer float was something he could rely on.

As she strutted over to his table, she grinned like the cat that caught the canary. He forced a grin of his own, but she had no trouble seeing how deeply hurt he was. After she plunked his drink down on the table, he grabbed it with his left hand. A sharp pain shot up his arm. His thumb was again throbbing. Later, he finished his drink with an arrogant slurp, then he got up to pay for it. His hand was visibly shaking as he handed her a dollar bill and collected his change. His thumb again reminded him why he came to the drugstore in the first place. When he got to where the medications were, Sam came up and said, “How goes it? I have not heard from you in a while. Anything happening?”

“I am doing well. I have been very busy.”

“Does Frances’s condition have anything to do with it?”

“How did you know?”

“Agnes comes in here quite often. Last I heard Frank was back in the hospital again. She is worn to a frazzle. And she has not been sleeping well

or eating properly for weeks."

"I haven't been sleeping well either. I banged my thumb today. Do you have something to take away my pain?"

"Yes. It is in the pain reliever aisle. Sam showed him the pain medicines. ... Carla is coming here this weekend. Would you like to have dinner with us?" That was the last thing he needed to hear. "I would love to have dinner with you, but I have to be there in case anything happens to Mr. Frank. I would never forgive myself if I missed an opportunity to see him one last time."

"Then you need to drop by the hospital and see him on your way home. He is not expected to make it through the night."

"Why didn't Agnes tell me?"

"She has more than she can handle right now. Go easy on her."

After he gathered up a bottle of liniment, some bandages, a bottle of peroxide and a tube of salve for his thumb, he walked over to the register to pay for it.

"That will be three-sixty-five."

He gave him a five dollar bill. After Sam gave

him his change, he said, “Carla is going to have a baby. They are hoping for a boy.”

That was all he needed to hear. She was going to have the son he secretly wanted. His friend was dying and Connie read him the riot act. It was not a good day for him at all.

On the way home Zeb drove to the hospital and went in. They told him Frances was in room 37. The nurse escorted him to his bedside. Frank looked toward the ceiling and said, “Martha, you look as beautiful as you did the day we were married. It won’t be long and we’ll be back together again.”

Agnes was sitting in a chair near the window. She looked very tired and depressed. Her once rosy face was drawn up by stress and her immaculate attire was wrinkled and stained from where she had tried to feed her brother. Zeb sat down in a chair and said, “I need to get something to eat from the hospital cafeteria and then I will come back and watch over him so you can get some rest.”

“No. I will wait here until the end. The doctor said it will only be a matter of hours before he will be with Jesus.”

Just then, Frank looked up and said, “Lord I’m on my way.” A big smile came across his face, then his eyes closed and his head turned toward the window. Two minutes later his breathing stopped.

They both started crying. Zeb got up and put his arm around Agnes and said, “He has gone to a much better place than this.”

After a while, he asked her if she would be all right. She said she wanted to be alone with him for a while.

He went out and told the nurse that he thinks Frank had passed away. Several nurses followed the doctor to his bed. A short time later the doctor shook his head which told them he was gone.

Their pain was obvious. Later Zeb said, “Agnes, you will tell me when the funeral will be, won’t you?”

“I know Frances would never forgive me if I didn’t.”

He went out to his car and looked up at the sky and said, “Good-Bye Mr. Frank. I will miss you so much.” Then he drove home. Frank’s door looked so vacant as he passed by it on the way to his

room. He felt as thought he was in a haunted house where even the ghosts were asleep. A cold chill came over him as he opened his door and fully realized Frances was really gone.

He peeled some potatoes and put them in the frying pan and watched them pop and sizzle. He added some chicken wings, some bell pepper strips for flavor and put the cover on the pan. Somehow his mind was at ease, for he now knew exactly what he had to do.

The next day seemed a lot brighter than he had seen in a long time. They got the rest of the walls up and temporarily braced them off. “We’ll start on the let-in braces tomorrow. The braces will keep the walls from falling down,” said Bob.

He was glad to be finished for the day. After work, he went straight to the drugstore to order his favorite drink and a thick ham sandwich with all the trimmings. When Connie came back to his booth, he looked right through her as she placed his order in front of him. A waitress would never look the same to him ever again.

He wolfed down the food like he hadn’t eaten in a week. When she came over to his table again and asked him if he would like another sandwich,

he said, “Yes please.” He looked out the window and saw a familiar Model A Ford Coupe. He asked Connie if she knew who drives it. She said, “I have never seen it before.”

“It is owned by Jo Yong, I am doing some work on his house on weekends. He came to America after the big war. He is a very wise man. I wish I was like him. He is so at peace with the world.”

The conversation dried up before he went to the register to pay for his meal. She said nothing as she took his money and handed him his change. Before he left the store, he went over to the booth and laid a crisp dollar on the table for her. There was no particular reason why he did this. He just felt generous.

When he parked his car, he saw Agnes’s car parked under the tree. It seemed like a long slow walk as he headed for his room. He stopped and knocked on Frank’s door. Agnes promptly opened the door. She was again nicely dressed, only this time she was wearing black. She said, “I want you to be here when I open the envelope Frances left for me. I am afraid I will make a gruesome discovery.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Have a seat over there. ... Frances was quite the rowdy boy when he was younger. We will go over it all in due time.” She no longer had a cloud of gloom hanging over her. It seemed as if she was out of her shell and about to spread her wings. He had never seen her this way before.

“The funeral will be this Friday at two-thirty. He will be buried next to where Martha was buried. We are all bringing roses of tribute for his casket. It would be nice if you would bring one too, even though you are not a family member.”

“Will Mr. Frank’s son be there too?”

“Frances had no children. You are the closest thing he had to a son.

“Before he got married, he loved to tear apart cars and make them go faster and faster. He wanted to race them at the track, but our father forbid him to. One day he took a Model T and put a big engine of some kind in it and souped it all up. He raced up and down the streets all over town. A month or two later he got engaged to Martha. She was an only child and her mother could not have any more children.

“Frances promised he would settle down and give up fast cars. He bought a Reo truck and it

seemed like everything was in their ballpark. Six months later Martha and he were married at the same time Gilbert and I were married. Three weeks later they were in our father's garage where I heard him talk her into going along with him for one last ride in his hopped up car before he gave up racing for good.

"He raced the engine several times before I saw the car dart out of the garage like a thunderbolt. It sounded like a blood curdling scream as he took off down the street. A few seconds later, I heard the most god awful crash I had ever heard in my life. The car frame was too small for such a big engine. The old sway-bar front end was completely ripped from under the car. On impact the passenger side door flew open and Martha was thrown out of the car. She slammed head first into a tree a few feet from the car. She was dead before she fell to the ground.

"Frances never got over it. He spent the rest of his life as a near hermit. Somehow you touched something in him that made him come back to life.

"How could Frank be in your father's garage if he left his mother when he was little?"

“Frank didn’t leave his mother, they were close. Where did you get that idea?”

“I must have misunderstood something Mr. Frank said to me. ... Then if he did not have a son, who came over here all the time to see him?”

“He is my son. I have two sons. One is a lawyer and the other owns a car lot here in Hattiesburg.”

“Is he kind of heavy set and just married a girl named Connie.”

“No. He is my grandson? Do you know him?”

“I saw him briefly at the drugstore several weeks back.”

Zeb now had some of the answers he desperately wanted. He was on a roll, so he decided to ask another question in the hope of understanding why someone who had such a sour start in life turned to the Lord. “Then when did he embrace the Lord?”

“Once Martha’s mom found out her only daughter had been killed by the town rowdy, she told her husband and he went to see him. They got into a fight and Frances cleaned his clock good.

“The police did not take it kindly. He was now the town juvenile delinquent for beating up a

person of stature. Three months later he was convicted of assault, whereupon he spent two years in the state penitentiary. When he got out, One of the police officers went after him again and was instrumental in getting him psychoanalyzed. They coerced two psychologists into signing the papers declaring him unfit to remain in society, and then they said he needed to be put away for his own good. He was in the state mental institution for three months before he was released. After they let him out, he never drove a car again.

"He was released under my strict supervision. We were walking by a church on 22nd Avenue when we decided to have a look inside. After talking to Reverend Duncan, he started attending church regularly and that is when he came to know the Lord. He told me he was going to wait until he died to make it up to Martha. For the rest of his life he passed up many good opportunities so he could be with his beloved Martha when he died. I guess only he knows now."

"Well, It is a bit late, I need to be going Miss Agnes." The next day he picked up a newspaper on his way home. It had a write-up about Frank's

death.

Friday afternoon he and Agnes went to the funeral in her car. She drove so slow it made him feel very uncomfortable. She was wearing a 1920s veil and was dressed from head to toe in black, while he was dressed in the best clothes he could put together. The way he looked at it, Frank was in paradise and he was going to have to bang boards for the rest of his life if he did not find another way to make a living. The funeral was quiet while the preacher told of how Frank had risen to be with the Lord and gave a positive account of Frank's simple earthly existence.

The next day he awoke to a sunny day, and went to get a newspaper. They did a good job of telling his life story in a few words. Zeb was beginning to make sense of his lot in life. He called Bear and accepted an invitation to have dinner with Bear and his family after church Sunday afternoon.

He arrived early and took in Bear's house. Not much had changed since he last saw it. His third oldest son became a state trooper and one of his daughters had been admitted to a medical school in Virginia. Mrs. Carol was as friendly as ever and

it looked like they were doing well. The table cloths were new and the walls had a fresh coat of paint.

Bear walked up to Zeb and shook his hand with a vigor he had not seen in Hattiesburg for a long time. “How have you been?”

“I am doing well. I work as a carpenter’s laborer now and will be a carpenter soon. My boss has a big apartment job coming up. The future looks bright. How about you?”

“Can’t complain. I’ve been working steady at the school. I have had a lot of time off to fix up the place a little. The Mrs. deserves it.”

“I heard about Frances. He was a good old boy. It is a shame he had to leave us.”

“The preacher said some special words for him today. I really miss him. He was a real friend to me. Bear, I’ve been thinking of going back to Arizona. I miss my mom more than ever. She has had to put up with my father for far too long. It’s time I set things straight for her. The way I am now, I would even give you a good scrap in a fight. I plan to set it right with my father and teach him a lesson he will never forget.”

“You do not need to prove yourself to me or

anyone else. I saw you get your hands all blistered up and watched you hunch over in pain and keep on cutting down trees. You are a man in every sense of the word."

"My father was supposed to have had a heart attack and I think he is a fake. I need to set him on a new path."

"I think when you go back to Arizona you will see your father in a different light."

"What makes you say that?"

"Last month I had a heart attack myself. It probably saved my life when I took the job at the school. If I had kept on cutting down trees the Mrs. would probably be a widow now. The doc has me on a strict diet and I am doing well. But one never knows. Take it from your friend, soften your heart toward your father. He may be in more anguish than you may ever know." Bear showed him where he had cleaned out his storage shed and made it into a garage. He traded his pickup in on a 1954 Chevrolet four door. "She is a little over two years old. I bought her right." That started him to thinking about getting a better car himself. His Model A was worn out and on its last leg.

After Bear showed him the rest of the

renovations he made on the house, they sat down in the living room where he had a nearly new RCA television. “Bear must be in good financial shape. He has everything,” Zeb thought.

They talked and filled each other in on the events that passed since they had last seen each other. And then they reminisced on the hard times they had cutting down and hauling away trees. It was dark before they said good-bye and Zeb started back to his room.

His short break from the reality of life had come to an abrupt end. He was now on his way back to his empty room. Agnes would surely sell the rooming house and he would have to find another place to live. At least he had a job and his future looked a lot brighter. The noises of the night made him feel even more alone. He remembered how excited he was when he drove down Number 15 road long ago. He remembered the animal defiantly standing in the middle of the road. A warm feeling came over him as he pointed an ear out the window to absorb all the nostalgia of the night he could.

Apartment Blues 

It was eight o'clock when he walked up the rooming house

steps. A presence came over him as he passed by the door that had so many times opened to let him in so he could get some advice on whatever was troubling him at the time. His mind was heavy with memories.

Agnes's car was in the drive when he drove up a while ago. But he did not know if she would take it kindly if he knocked on her door. He did not know if he would have to find another place to

live. Would Agnes be a mean manager? Would she sell the place and move into town? Or would she leave the area altogether? She was a mystery lady. There had not been enough contact between them for him to know how she felt about him. Maybe she would fix the place up. It sure could stand a few patches and a coat of paint. “I can find out more on Friday after I pay my rent,” he thought. As he stared at the door, it opened and Agnes said, “I would like to talk to you for a minute, if you don’t mind.”

He walked over to where she was standing and said, “Is something wrong?”

“No. I just need to talk to somebody.”

“I like to talk. It helps make my boredom go away,” he replied.

“Come on in and have a seat in the armchair over there.”

“That was Mr. Frank’s chair and I do not think he would like me to sit in it.” He was not real sure there was no life after death, so he felt as thought Mr. Frank was watching him from somewhere up there.

“Oh, don’t be silly. Frances would want you to sit in his chair.”

"I will have a seat in this chair over here, if you do not mind." They sat there silently each waiting for the other to begin a conversation. A long time passed before Agnes said, "Zeb. I plan to run the rooming house like Frances did. I will take the money he left me and fix it up a bit. You do not have to worry about your rent. You can stay here rent free as long as you like. Besides I will need a handyman to help me out once in a while.

"I will not live here for free. I will pay my rent every Friday like I have since I moved here in 1955. I am glad you are going to keep the rooming house open. I am accustom to this place. It feels like home to me."

"With that being said, would I be too forward if I asked you to escort me to dinner? I need to get out of here for a while. We can go in my car."

"I do not know how to drive your car, but I would be more than happy to take you in my car."

"That makes us even. I haven't been in a Model A for over fifteen years. The experience might be quite insightful." "Where would you like to go Miss Agnes?"

"Oliver's Family Restaurant seems to fit the occasion." "For some strange reason dinner

sounds good to me, but we will go Dutch on the bill."

"I know you have a will of iron. Frances used to talk about you all the time. He said you reminded him of when he was a young man." They walked out to his car where he helped her mount the running board so she could get in. As they started out, Agnes began to sob. "What is the matter Miss Agnes?"

"Oh. It's nothing I suppose ... just memories. The sound of your car engine took me back to when I used to ride in my father's Model A. I do miss my dad."

They went to the restaurant and talked about their pasts during dinner. Both of them were careful to avoid talking about the funeral and Frank's passing.

When they finished dinner, they both felt better. On the way back, they embraced their thoughts in silence. It was quarter till ten when they said good night to each other. He slowly walked back to his room, opened the door and sat down in his chair as usual and stared out the back window in the dark. The weather worn garage he hardly noticed before seemed to fascinate him for some

uncanny reason. It glowed in the moonlit night. Seeing the garage in a new light was like when one passes by the same scenery day after day, then one day they see things they had failed to notice before.

Agnes could park her car in the garage after he cleaned it out and there would be enough room left for his car. After mulling over his thoughts for a while, he drifted off to sleep in his worn-out chair.

The next morning he arrived at work a little after seven-thirty. He walked around for a while. He felt good about all the work he had done over the past couple of weeks. The room addition was starting to take shape. His part of the work would be finished in less than three weeks, then he could start working on his first real job.

A week passed before they finished framing in the first story. The following Monday they began working on the second story flooring. By Friday they were ready to start building the walls for the second story. The room addition was giving him a lot of experience in the various phases of remodeling. While they ate lunch, Bob told him they would be cutting and fitting the ceiling joists

by Tuesday; and by Friday of the next week, they would need to have all of the roof rafters in place. He said, “I know it will be a lot of work, but Loren wants us to pour the foundation for the first row of apartments by the end of the month, so we need to hustle. We will to start working ten hour days beginning tomorrow and eight hours on Saturdays. So, chow down tonight. You’ll find the extra hours will make you eat like a starving wolf.”

The next day he told Bob he brought a lot of food and was ready for his first ten hour day. So far in his life, work never a big rush. But, he was about to learn two new words. I**ncreased production** makes some worker fear losing their job, and at the same time they conjures up the fear of sinking into a deep rut with no chance of ever getting out. Get up, go to work, eat, then go home and go to bed and then do it all over again day in and day out. Later he snapped out of his daydream to find himself climbing a ladder to begin work. He was not afraid of the height of the addition. As a matter of fact, he enjoyed tempting fate a little by being high off the ground. But, fear kept him from doing anything stupid, like believing he could not fall and permanently injure

himself. It was breezy all day. He could feel the new addition sway back and forth under his feet. Bob told him not to worry. The let-in braces would be more than enough to keep the flimsy framework from collapsing to the ground like a spilled bag of marbles. Although he was somewhat reassured, he still kept his hand on the wooden framework just to make sure.

Shortly after lunch three days later, Bob hollered up to Zeb for him to give him a measurement for the first rafter from the bird's mouth to the ridge. Zeb was in shock. How could he be expected to know what a bird's mouth or what a ridge was?

He looked down at him and saw him once again playing mister funny boy. He let his feeble attempt at humor blow away with the wind. Then he replied, "I thought you had an eye for measurements so good you did not need me to get the measurements for you."

"Get me the measurements. And I want them from long point to long point."

"I will, as soon as I know what long point, bird's mouth, and ridge mean."

"Okay. Long point is when a board is cut at an

angle. You measure the longest end-to-end distance. A bird's mouth is the v-shaped notch where the roof rafter rests on the top plate. And the ridge is where the two angles on the rafters meet to form the peak, ridge or top of the roof. Does that get your head out of the clouds? ... Now measure a rafter for me, will you?" The stress of working long hours was already making them a little grumpy towards each other.

"I got it. Now I am measuring it. What ever it is."

The sun was about to set when they put their tools in their vehicles. Bob told him he did a lot of work today. Most of the roof rafters were cut and tacked in place. His banged up finger was almost healed. He was content for a change. However, he was far too tired to be worried about his aches and pains. By Friday at 4:30, the framework was done and they were ready to start on the siding in the morning.

Shortly before they left for the day, Loren drove up and said they had given the room addition contract to a friend of the bosses who specializes in smaller jobs. He told them they needed to be at the new apartment project at eight o'clock sharp

on Monday and be ready to run like a racehorse.

Zeb was feeling like a root beer float on his way home. He drove into a parking place near the front of the drugstore. Traffic on the street was light. The soda fountain was busy when he sat down to wait for Connie to come over and wait on him. When she came to his table after over eight minutes, she looked like she was having a bad day. She told him she heard about Frances and how she hoped the rooming house where he lived in would remain open so he'd have a place to stay. She filled him in on the inheritance her husband got from Frank. She also told him her husband's father got a lot more. It did not take long for him to realize she did not know how much money her husband actually got. Zeb, himself, did not know how much either, or where the money came from. Perhaps Agnes gave him the money and said Frank left it for him. He didn't tell her how much money he received or how he planned to use it. However, he knew exactly what he was going to do with the money Frank gave him.

He ordered his usual and a roast beef sandwich with the works. This time he ordered a

big slice of cherry pie á la mode. He gobbled up the food and slurped his drink dry.

The trip back to his room seemed a little more exciting than usual. Tomorrow would be the first day he got to work on a big job everyone in town knew about. And if he was lucky, Loren would promote him up to a carpenter and also give him a hefty raise.

At seven-thirty Monday morning, he was eagerly waiting for the crew to show up. He noticed the site was covered with grade stakes. Two men were standing near the front of the construction shack that was built after Loren showed him around the place a month earlier. “Hi. My name is Zebadiah Smith. And you are?”

“I am George Mason and this here is my partner in crime, Matthew Lewis.” George was short and his partner was stout. They had dark facial hair. Both of them were wearing farm boy denim jeans and long sleeved shirts.

“What is your trade?”

“I am a rough carpenter and Mat here is a laborer. Loren told both of us to meet him here before eight.”

“There is actually someone out there who has

a job as bad as mine. At least, I am no longer all alone at the very bottom of the barrel," he thought.

However, after Loren arrived and they got their first day orientation on what they were about to do. All four of them ended up on the business end of a shovel digging out for the apartment's new foundation to a minimum depth of thirty-six inches and thirty inches wide. Bob was promoted to foreman and got a dollar and a half an hour raise. Zeb was promoted to frame carpenter and given a seventy-five cent an hour raise. But he was still pitching dirt out of a ditch in the middle of a sea of grade stakes. "There must be at least thirty apartments here," he pondered. "I will be digging holes in the ground for the rest of my life." he thought.

"Mom you are not going to believe this, I am now a carpenter and I got a seventy-five cents an hour raise, but I still have a shovel glued to my hands. It won't go away. Every time I get a new job, a shovel appears from out of no where and ends up in my hands," he whispered to himself. He knew she was not there and had no power to make the shovel disappear from his hands.

However, he needed to get it out anyway.

“This will not last long. I need to make beautiful things with my hands and work with real wood. I do not want to dig holes in the ground,” he continued.

By four-thirty they had finished digging out and leveling the bottom of over one hundred and fifty feet of ditch. As usual, Zeb set the pace by digging out and leveling almost forty-eight feet. The laborer came in second with thirty-nine feet and the other two split the difference to add up to a hundred and fifty feet.

They called it a day after they complemented each other on how much digging they had accomplished. Bob told them how fortunate they were for having to dig the ditch thirty inches wide. If the apartments were brick veneered and two stories high, they would have to dig the foundation out to a minimum of thirty-six inches wide and forty inches deep. They continued to dig the foundations for the next four days. The job was alive with more trades than Zeb could have imagined. He was glad the plumbers had to dug their own trenches. “They got the big paychecks, so they need to show what they can do with a

shovel," he quietly mused.

On Wednesday afternoon, he had his first encounter with a cable operated bulldozer. The roar of its engine quickly got his undivided attention. When he turned to see where the noise was coming from, he was staring directly into an eight-foot-wide blade of cold steel coming straight toward him. In an instant he jumped out of the ditch and ran to a safe location to consider his chances of surviving if it ran over him.

Bob and the crew threw out a big horselaugh at him. Mat said, "Never seen a 'dozer before?" He tucked his pride back in place and said, "I thought it was out of control because it was coming so close to us."

"You'll get used to being eyeball close to construction machinery," said George.

On Friday, Loren, who was promoted to superintendent, stopped by the project to see how everything was going. He was pleased at the progress being made. He walked over to Zeb and Mat and asked them to go over to his truck and unload it. The truck was riding low in the back from all the rebars loaded onto it. "You can place some concrete blocks in four rows and stack the

rebars neatly on top of them. Then you can cover them up with the tarpaulin I have on the front seat of my truck."

They planned to pour the foundation on Wednesday. Zeb told Bob he was anxious to get started on the forms for the stem after the concrete sets up enough.

Bob said, "We are not using forms for the stem. The pile of blocks you got to stack the rebars on is going to be used for the stem. The block layers will be here sometime next week to lay up the stem. You don't ever want to be a block layer. Those 8×8 x1666 inch blocks can eat through a pair of canvas gloves in less than an hour. Your hands would look like raw meat in less than a day. But, the good news is, you will get to fill those block cores with concrete. You will be able to sink your teeth into some real buggying this time. Just think of it as a brand new wrinkle on your horn."

That made Zeb feel like screaming. He was beginning to realize a carpenter was nothing more than a stevedore who specializes in wood and dirt. His gut began to burn and his stomach was churning uncontrollably. However, after he

ate something he felt a lot better. Large amounts of food were becoming an excuse for him to take a break from his toil. He was also turning to vigorous labor to keep his emotions in check. Doing heavy labor all day made it possible for him to get some sleep at night. That is except on weekends when he had a hard time falling asleep. Time off was turning into time to relive how much work he did during the week. His check was nothing more than a chain that bound his hands to a shovel and to any other dirty work that happened to came along.

Tuesday afternoon they were ready to pour the concrete into the first foundation and were almost finished digging the second. They finished laying out the rebars and tying them to the stakes they drove into the bottom of the footer.

Bob told the crew to take off early, so they could be back at seven in the morning ready to pour concrete. He also told them they needed to rest up for a long hard day tomorrow. Then, he walked over to Zeb and asked him if he had a pair of galoshes or rubber hunting boots. He told him he would need them to keep the concrete from getting into his shoes. Zeb promised to bring

rubber boots with him in the morning.

Wednesday morning at seven they were standing around waiting for the concrete truck to arrive. At seven-twenty the roar of the mixer truck cut through the morning air like an angry foghorn. In less than fifteen minutes, the truck had backed up next to the ditch and was dispensing its cargo into the foundation. They all looked like they had not taken a bath in a week by the time all of the concrete was poured. After tamping and leveling the concrete, each one of them grabbed a shovel and proceeded to finish digging out the rest of the second foundation.

The project plans called for seven separate four-unit apartment buildings, a rental office and a small ground keeper's storage area.

The block layers arrived on Friday morning and began laying up the stem. By Friday afternoon the first stem was blocked up and ready to have the block cores filled with concrete. Loren drove up, got out of his truck and told the crew to get as much work done as possible because the higher-ups were putting the pressure on him to get more done. He also told them the owner said the interest on the mortgage was costing him a

bundle every day. They were instructed to be on the job at seven a.m. Monday morning and be ready to buggy faster than greased lightening.

Zeb felt like a pincushion. It seemed like every time they wanted more production out of him they would needle him into working a little harder and a little faster.

Again, at shortly after seven the mixer truck dutifully backed as close to the ditch as it could. Loren brought out five new #10 buckets and two old wheelbarrows. He said, “We don’t get much life out of a pail these days. I had to buy all new buckets for this job.” Zeb thought, “Why you old cheapskate. You should be able to buy a whole truck load of buckets with all the money you are making from our sweat.”

They proceeded to buggy the concrete as fast as they could. The concrete poured out of the mixer truck like lava out of a volcano. Bob, the foreman, stood at the edge of the stem and tamped the concrete into the block cores with a six-foot 2×4. By ten-thirty all of the concrete was poured. Bob said, “Let’s take a twenty minute break. I am exhausted.”

Zeb thought, “We did all of the work, and all you

did was stand around and tamp a little concrete into the block cores and line up a few j-bolts. What a bummer."

After the tools were all cleaned up and the wheelbarrows were thoroughly washed out with a garden hose, they walked over to the construction shack and each one of them grabbed a shovel, walked over to the third ditch and took up their respective positions around the edges of it. At eleven-forty-five all of the shovels were pitching dirt into the air like a dog digging out a precious buried bone. Fifteen minutes later it was lunchtime. All of them were quiet during lunch. Each one of them was silently mulling over their own depressing station in life.

By quitting time they were all very tired. They said good-bye to each other before going home. The weather had been good during the starting days of the project. They hoped any bad weather would hold off for another couple of days. However, this was Hattiesburg. One does not move there for endless days of sunny skies and cool dry weather. By the following Tuesday, they had finished the third foundation and started digging the fourth. At four-thirty Bob told the crew

it was time to head out. They talked for half an hour before leaving.

Zeb got into his car and the battery was completely dead. Bob helped him get his car started. He knew he had better get another battery before he came back to work the next day. Construction worker don't like to be nursemaids to their coworkers. He hoped the his car would run long enough for him to get to the filling station so he could buy a new battery.

After he got to the station, he saw Todd filling up a 1956 Cadillac with gas. It was loaded with extras. The gentleman driving the car didn't even get out of his car. He was wearing a light tweed suit with not one winkle in it.

Zeb parked next to the grease rack while he waited for Todd. When he finished waiting on the gentleman, he said, "What do you need Zeb?"

"My battery is shot. Do you have a six volt battery for my car?"

"Yes I do. I have a rebuilt six volt battery for two-fifty or a new one for five dollars."

"Is the rebuilt battery a good one?"

"Never can tell about a rebuilt battery. They can last for years or for a few months. I will guarantee

it for six months."

"I will take the rebuilt one. I hate a car that won't start."

"Then I would get the better battery."

"You are probably right. Go ahead and give me the five-dollar battery."

"I cannot agree with you more." Then Todd got his trusty carrier and lifted the new battery into its place in the floor battery box. When Todd finished, Zeb started his car and pulled up to the gas pump where he told Todd to put in two dollars worth of regular gas. That will be seven-fourteen with the tax Todd told him. He counted out the money and said, "I feel a lot better because my car starts up real fast. I admit I was embarrassed when it would not start after work today."

"Yep. Runs like a top." He knew Todd was flattering his car. At least the car ran okay. It looked as though he was in a contest to see whether he or his car would last the longest. At this point in time, it looked like his car was winning.

Making Plans 

Four weeks passed before they finished pouring all seven

foundations. After the stems were all blocked up, they began *buggying* the concrete into them. A week and a half later all of the cores were filled.

The late summer heat had dulled their ambition to finish the project; however, there was intense pressure put on them to get the apartments built.

Zeb got back to his room early. It had been over a month since he talked to Agnes except

when he paid the rent. He was so preoccupied with his work he almost forgot about her. When he walked into the rooming house, he looked at her door and felt a need to talk to her. Zeb had made several soda runs to the drugstore during the week, but even Connie did not register on his mind. It was time to catch up on his social life no matter how tired he was. All he did during the past month was work, sleep, eat, and buy groceries.

He knocked on her door. No one answered. She was there because her car was parked outside. He knocked again a little louder than before. No answer. That was not good. Frank almost always answered the door eventually. Perhaps she was upset with him. A few minutes passed before he decided to give it up. He had already walked down the hall to his door and put the key in his door lock, when he heard, “Zeb did you knock on my door a minute ago?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Do you need anything?”

“Not exactly. I just wanted to talk for a while.”

“Me too. It has been lonesome around here since Frances left us. Come over when you like.

We can chat up a storm."

"Let me settle down a bit first."

"I will be home all evening."

Zeb really needed someone to talk to, anyone. After he got cleaned up and had dinner, he walked down the hall and knocked on her door. She came to the door and said, "I was in the kitchen doing some baking when you knocked on my door earlier. I have some brownies I just took out of the oven. Perhaps we can feast on them after they cool."

"I cannot refuse a fresh out of the oven sweet treat."

"It has been a while since we have had an old fashioned down-home talk. I have been busy with some of the people at church. They have been real helpful. It has taken a while for me to come to terms with Frances being gone. I have started to clear out some of his things. I am going to give his clothes to charity. Several times I have wanted to get out Frank's red fruitcake tin and go through it. To tell you the truth, I have been afraid to go into his room by myself since he died. I got to the door several times, but I could not go in. A warm smile came over her face as if she were a child

about to go on an adventure for the first time.

They bolstered each other as they went into his room. It was a complete mess and smelled of mold and mildew. They carefully stepped toward Frank's closet as if they expected a ghastly demon to appear from out of nowhere. Agnes let out a shriek that could be heard for blocks. But, no one came to the door to see what had happened. It was an unwritten rule to not poke one's nose into other people's business. That was the nature of rooming houses and cheap hotels.

"What is the matter Miss Agnes?"

"I must have tripped over some of Frances's junk."

"Sure smells bad in here Agnes."

"I know. That's one of the reasons I never came in here before." It took quite a while before they felt comfortable about poking into Frank's things.

"Zeb, I guess you know Frank was a pack rat. He always kept things in a sort of unorthodox order until a few months before he left us. That is why he had so much money. He hoarded it. The next depression was always just around the corner and he was not going to be left out like he was during the depression of '29. Another reason

he saved money was to give a reward to those who treated him well.

“Be that as it may. We came in here to take a peek inside his red tin of valueless treasures. Let’s get it done, OK,” said Agnes. They slowly and cautiously walked over to the closet where the red container was stored. Zeb reached out for the closet door and opened it. The thick smell of rotting wood, mold and mildew almost knocked him over. Agnes passed by him and reached for the tin. She hoped whatever writing it contained was still readable. She held the tin away from her body as if it contained an evil spirit. She took the container to the kitchen table whereupon she proceeded to open it. There were a lot of letters in it. One by one she went through them. They were letters Frank never mailed. She opened a letter and read it to Zeb.

Dear Martha,
Today is our fifth wedding anniversary. I love you more than ever. Our marriage grows stronger with each passing day. I had a good time at church with you today. I am glad you were there with me. ... love, Frances.
“What does the letter mean Agnes?”

“I guess it is time for me to come clean about Frances. After the accident they put him in jail and then he was sent to the state mental institution. They released him only on the condition I would be responsible for his behavior as long as he was out. That is one of the reasons I kept a close eye on him. They told me they believed him to be harmless, but sternly warned me to never turn my back on him, or he could strike me down in an instant. I have lived in fear all of my life. The truth is, he was out of touch with reality most of the time. I am quite surprised you did not notice his off the wall comments and unusual activities.”

“I knew he had funny ways, but I never gave it a second thought. I thought he was perfectly normal for his age.”

“I am going to open another letter.”

“Would you open the newest looking letter? I do not like a lot of suspense. I like getting to the point of things.”

“Okay.” She sifted through all the letters and found the newest letter. She took a letter opener and slit the envelope from end-to-end and retrieved its contents, then she read it to him.

Dear Martha,
Today is our sixty-first wedding anniversary. It is a shame I had to bother Agnes to take me to the doctor. The doctor says I am dying and there is nothing he can do about it. Can you imagine? I am dying. At least we can soon be together again in Heaven. ...

Her face flushed up like she was having a heart attack. “Zeb,” she said, “I am going into the other room. I have to make a phone call right away.”

She went into the living room and picked up the phone and told the operator to connect her to the Sheriff’s office. A moment later she said, “Sheriff. I would like you to bring the coroner over here with you right away. ...

“No there hasn’t been a murder, but I think I know where a missing body is. ... I would not have called you if I was not sure. Just get over here as fast as you can. ... No. You will not need to use your red lights and siren. She has waited this long; I think she can wait a few more minutes.... Thank You.”

“Why did you call the sheriff?”

“You will see I am right about this. Yes you will.”

Zeb was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable about being in the same room with her. She was sounding a little crazy herself. Maybe Agnes was a little out of balance too.

Ten minutes later the sheriff’s car pulled up in front of the rooming house. He straightened his back, pitched his head back and walked sure-footed up the steps to where Zeb and Agnes were waiting.

“What is this all about?” he demanded.

“Did you bring the coroner with you?”

“I cannot bring a coroner out here until I verify we have a body to deal with. Who was killed and where is the body?”

“Here Sheriff. Please read this line.” She pointed to a line in the letter she started to read earlier. He read:

... At least we can be together again. Heaven is just a prayer away. I know you are sleeping in the back of my Reo truck, but I’m sure Agnes will wake you up and tell you to meet me up in Heaven. ...

The sheriff said, “I read it. Where on earth did you find this senseless, disconnected, nutty letter?”

“I got it out of a fruitcake tin Frances kept in his closet.”

“Frances! My father had that nut committed many years ago. He belonged in a mental institution for the rest of his life. Too bad my father did not get his way.”

“Do you remember when Martha’s body vanished years ago without even a small clue as to where her body went?”

“Yes. My father said the mystery was never solved. What about it?”

“I am real sure I know where her body is. And I will bet those valuable rings are still on her fingers or lying in the coffin next to her remains.”

“Ma’am I think you need to see a shrink yourself.”

“All right, Frances always kept his extra keys in this tin. Let’s take them out and open the garage door and see who is crazy. Shall we?”

He looked at her as if she was completely off her rocker. However, he had known her for many

years, and he had seen her in church many times. He also believed her to be a very pious and level headed person. “We can go out to Frances's garage and put this ghost to rest once and for all,” said Sheriff Lancaster.

They walked out the back door toward the garage. Each of them was afraid of what they might find. Agnes said, “Zeb, do you have a hammer?”

“Yes ma’am. It is in my car.”

“Would you be so kind as to go and get it, because I am sure we will need it.”

“I’ll be back in a minute.” He went to his car and brought back his claw hammer.”

When he came back, Agnes said, “Could I get you to pound the rusty padlock on this door until we can get into the garage?”

He felt important as he broke the lock from the door with one powerful blow. Then he pulled the doors open with all the strength he had. The grass and weeds were blocking the doors as he continued to tug on them until he got both doors wide open.

The sheriff said, “I see a rusted out old Reo truck with a faded and rotted tarp over the truck

bed. What am I going to see under that tarp? A bunch of Frances's junk he horded!"

"Just go over and lift the tarp."

"Right. What am I supposed to see? Martha's body in a coffin resting on the truck bed?"

"Put it to the test."

Boots stomped and kicked the weeds growing just inside the garage door out of his way as he made his way to the back of the truck. He pulled up the tarp and found a coffin roped to the wood-slat truck bed. The rope was rotten and the canvas fell to pieces as he tried to lift it up. The coffin was in remarkably good shape for being there for so many year."

He turned and gave Agnes a scowl before he took a look at the coffin. He had been wrong which did not make him fell good. He tried to recover his pride by saying, "Frances must have cashed in the rings and ditched the body here in this garage where it has remained all these years. How clever of him."

"I think you will find the rings inside the coffin. Frances was impeccably honest. He would never steal his own wife's rings. He did not even have to let them be buried with her in the first place. He

could have purchased fake rings real cheap and substituted them for the real ones."

The sheriff asked Zeb if he could barrow his hammer. He took the hammer and pried open the makeshift lid Frances evidently had nailed on top of the wooden coffin; and as Agnes predicted, the tarnished wedding rings were inside the coffin along with her badly decomposed body. The rings helped identified the person in the coffin as being Martha, Frances's wife.

Agnes felt a little quizzical after seeing the body. Neither one of them expected to find what they had just discovered. It would be a long time before they recovered from this, if they ever recovered at all.

His day tomorrow would be even more painful for him. "That is the last straw. I am going back to Arizona. I have plenty of money and it is time for me to move on," he quietly decided. He and Agnes went back into the rooming house to take in what had happened. "I had no idea," said Zeb.

"Actually, Neither did I. All I had to go on was the letters he never mailed," replied Agnes.

"I have something to tell you Friday. It is real important to me."

“I think I will be better able to handle more bad news by then.”

“It is not bad news at all. Part of it is, I think you should sell this place and move into town or something.”

“Where will you live? I know Frances would want me to keep the place open so you can have a place to stay.”

Miss Agnes, “I guess I should tell you now, since I let the proverbial cat out of the bag. I have decided to move back to Arizona.”

“When?”

“I do not know. Loren says I will get a shot at being a finish carpenter before we get done building the apartments. I want to hang on until I find out if he meant it. Besides, I am making good money and would hate to quit while I am doing well. We will start laying out the sills tomorrow and begin working on the sub floors by the end of the week.”

The shock over finding Martha’s body settled down after several hours. Later, the sheriff knocked on the door and said, “Everything had been taken care of. Martha’s body will be returned to the cemetery for reburial since there is no

evidence of any foul play."

"At long last Martha will be buried next to Mr. Frank so they can be together again, "said Zeb. He told Agnes Mr. Frank may have removed her body so he could be near her in a spiritual way. He was also symbolically communicating with her through the letters he never mailed. He, more than likely, believed he could be close to her through prayer. That may also explain why he went to church every Sunday.

Agnes felt a strong sense of relief after hearing that and said, "You may be right about selling this rooming house. Today has changed everything. I have a younger brother in Abilene, Texas. He has been after me for a long time to come and visit him. I will write to him and see how it goes. You should write to your mother and tell her of your plan to move back home."

"I said I was going back to Arizona. I said nothing about going home."

"You should not feel that way."

"I do and that is that. I will write to my mother because it has been almost six months since I have written to her."

"You should be ashamed of yourself. Moms

always want to know how their children are doing."

"I know. But I do not want to get into it with my father until I am ready to give him a slam-dunk he cannot get out of. He spreads tyranny like an ill wind."

His eyes began to squint in anger as he remembered his father beating him with his belt again and again when he was a child. "One day you will pay for what you did to me," he said to himself back when he was ten years old.

"Is anything wrong Zeb? You look deeply troubled."

"I'll be okay in a minute. My grandmother passed away when I was fourteen. I don't take death very well." Again he was mentally running away from his past.

"Since the excitement has settled down, would you like to have a quiet dinner with me? Mind you, I am not asking for a date. Just some company. I want to get out of this place for a while," said Agnes.

"Yes, getting out of here does sound necessary given the events of the day." They had dinner and then said good-night to each other at shortly after

nine. He walked slowly toward his room as he went over the events of the day. The dark hall gave him an eerie feeling as he unlocked his room door, went in and flopped down in his chair. The wheels started turning in his head again. After sitting there until a little past two o'clock in the morning, he finally dozed off.

His alarm woke him up and reminded him it was time for him to get ready and go to work. When he arrived at the project, it was a beehive of activity. The push was on to get at least the first building ready for renters. That would make the area more secure and add additional pressure to get the project finished. Hammers flew all week as the carpenters pounded nails and cut boards to form the sill and the floor. By Friday morning they started laying out the diagonal sub-flooring. The wood was awful. It was wet and it curled and warped in every direction. Each carpenter struggled not to get too far behind the other workers. They knew the foreman always had the option of calling for their final pay. If the foreman does not get production out of his crew, he would be sent home himself.

By the end of September, the first row of

apartments was ready for tenants to move into. The next morning, Zeb saw a beautiful girl carrying boxes and bags of belongings into her apartment. She was only five feet tall and weighed a hundred and twenty-five pounds. Her long black hair was his favorite hair color and length; however, he knew he would be fired in an instant if he even suggested he was interested in her. It was even harder when he caught her staring at him. And of course, he was staring back at her. His head hung low as he shook his head no at her, then he walked away and accepted his fate. He was left out of everything that was fun and exciting. Yet there was no danger of him being left out of any dirty work though.

At work the next morning, Loren called Zeb off to the side and said he was sorry he had not put him on the trim part of the apartments. He told him he was happy with the way he put out the work when he needed it the most. Loren told him they were in way over their head on the apartment project and promised he would make it up to him when the apartments were finished. By now, he was used to hearing about bosses

saying they were going broke just to get more work out of their crews. Some of the men called it ‘singing the contractor’s blues.’

“I will believe the company is broke when I see it,” he thought. He received a letter from his mother telling him how his father had changed. He knew better. His father was one who only promise to do better after being threatened with awful consequences if they don't change their ways. He was a lousy cur who yelped for sympathy whenever he was about to be taken to task for his behavior.

The second apartment building was framed up before the one first was finished and the third was taking shape. Zeb was grateful he did not have to pour concrete anymore.

Two weeks later, Loren came over to Zeb and told him he’d be going to another job to work with his trim carpenter. He would be learning how to work with finish grade wood and learn first class trim carpentry. Loren told him to go to the new job site on Riverview Road. He gave him a map so he could find the house in the morning.

The colonial mansion was white with off white arched shutters. It was a gigantic place with a

long driveway and there was a brand new black Lincoln parked in the garage to the left of the house. The car looked so rich setting there.

He parked his car on the street and walked up to the door and rang the door bell. Eric Fredericks met him at the door and told him to come in. He introduced Zeb to the owners who were dressed up like royalty. They both said, “It is a pleasure to meet you.” After they went to where they would be remodeling several of the back rooms, he showed him what they would be doing. He told Zeb it would be good for him to get some better clothes. “This is not rough carpentry like you are used to,” said Eric.

Zeb thought, “What is the big deal? I am still going to be knee deep in dirt and breathing plaster and sawdust all day. But, at least I will get a reprieve from the outside elements.”

Eric showed him his back saw and miter box, his chisels, his brace and bit and his various other trim tools.

Eric, “Why are the teeth so small on all of your saws?” He told him there are three kinds of saws. “A rip saw has large teeth for rough cutting. The crosscut saw has finer teeth and cuts sort of in

the middle and a fine toothed saw is used for cutting finish grade wood. I have a table saw out in the garage for long cuts. I has a used washing machine motor on it. The saw is slow because the motor is too small but it is a lot better than using a backbreaking handsaw all the time.

“Are you ready to get started?”

“Show me the way.”

“What we will be doing is tearing out the old base, crown and shoe moldings. Then we will be ripping the old flooring out and putting in a new hardwood floor.

Zeb thought, “I am going to be doing all of the dirty work and be getting banged up from ripping out the old wood and you will get to do all of the gravy work. I sweat and you get to take advantage of it. That is what he really means.” Then he let his mind drift back to Arizona. He remembered how hard it was for him to find a job out there, especially in the summer. He planned to move back during the Christmas season when work was slack. Then he would be ready to come out of the chute in January, ready for action, that is, after he confronted his father about what he tried to do to him when he was a small child.

The next morning he got out his prized button and went to a jeweler in downtown Hattiesburg and asked him how much it would cost for him to make a pendant out of it.

The jeweler looked at the button and asked if there was a reason for making a 'button' into a pendant. He suggested a lot of other options which he sorely rejected. "No, I want this button made into a pendant I can be proud to wear. How much will it cost?"

When the jeweler realized he was very serious, he said, "Would you like it in platinum, gold or silver?"

"I like silver. Gold and platinum are more than he is worth."

"Than who is worth?"

"Never mind. How much for a respectable pendant and chain?"

"Depending on how fancy I make the pendant, it could run anywhere from ten dollars to five-hundred dollars."

"Can you do me proud for thirty dollars?"

"Consider it done. You can pick it up next Thursday."

The jeweler tried to question him again about

the button, but he said, “I will be in to pick it up next Friday.” And then he left without saying another word.

When he got back to the rooming house, he saw Agnes’s car in the drive, so he walked up to her door and knocked.

She opened the door and said, “Hi. How are you?”

“Okay, I guess. I got sent to another job. It is just another laborer job with a fancy name.”

“I received a letter from my brother and he says I can come to Abilene and live near him if I have a mind to. I also talked to a real estate salesperson and he says I can get seventy-five hundred for this place. I told him to go ahead and try to sell it for eighty-five hundred. I know you want me to sell the place and I thank you for telling me I should sell it.”

He was afraid he made a big mistake in encouraging her to sell the place. At the same time he was happy she would be moving to where she had relatives she could be with.

They talked for a while. When the conversation stalled, he went to his room to sort things out. With Agnes selling the place and the distance

between him and Bear widened, he felt quite alone and depressed. He once again he had nothing but his work to keep him company.

The next morning was Saturday. He called Bear to ask if he was entertaining visitors. Bear told him he was welcome anytime and told him to hurry and get there because they were putting on a big dinner and he was invited.

He was glad Bear invited him to dinner. That would give him some relief from his bitter isolation. His Model A always sounded so good going over the rough road leading to his place. When he drove into Bear's drive, he saw a for sale sign in front of the house. Was Bear going to leave him too?

He drove into Bear's drive and parked. Bear came to the door

as he got out of his car. "I haven't seen you for a while. You look tired. Has life been rough on you lately?"

"We have a push on to get an apartment complex finished as fast as possible. I have been putting in a lot of long hours. Last Monday the foreman sent me to a job where I am being trained to do trim carpentry." He left out the part where he was just doing menial labor for Loren's

finish carpenter.

They shook hands warmly and went into the house. Zeb could not let the for sale sign go unnoticed. He said, “I see you have a for sale sign out front. Are you selling the place?”

“The Mrs. and I talked it over, and we have decided we need to move her where she can survive if I pass away.”

“Come on Bear, you pass away. Get out of here.”

“No Zeb, it is a very real possibility. I had another heart attack a couple of months back, and the doctor says I need to get closer to a hospital just in case. Three strikes and your out.”

“I know an old man out in Arizona who has had seven heart attacks and he is kicking right on.”

“Enough of this! Got any good news we can talk about?”

“No. Just work, work and more work.”

“How about you?” said Zeb.

“I don’t have any good news either. I am fighting back the anger I have built up inside me over having to clean up a bunch of messy classrooms. To make matters worse, some of the faculty members are untidy too. A few of them

leave all kinds of trash for me to clean up. They seem to believe I am their servant. It is so humiliating. At one time, I could scurry up a tree faster than a squirrel. Now I can hardly climb up an eight foot stepladder without taking a rest break.

“What brings you out to see us?”

“I have to tell you straight. I am going back to Arizona. With Agnes selling the rooming house and Mr. Frank gone, I need to get closer to my mother. Do you understand?”

“Yes I do. I only wish I could go out to Arizona with you. But it is way too late for me. I have to do what is best for the family. When do you plan to leave? I don’t quite know yet. I thought it would be good for me to move back right around Christmas time.”

“Bad idea. Stores are all closed during the holidays and you could get stuck and have to wait until after the first of January before you can finish your trip. I would leave around November the first before bad weather hits.”

“I am not worried about the weather. I want to go through Fort Worth, Texas and into Arizona through the middle. I came here over the

southern route the last time. I want to see something different."

"If you try to go through Snake Canyon on US Route 48, you will probably have to have your car towed out of there. That will cost you a bunch of money. Your car is no longer powerful enough to make it up out of there. You may like her, but she has a lot of piston slap because your engine is loosened up inside. The cylinder compression is probably a little weak too. Even very powerful cars have a tough time going up the steep grade out of Snake Canyon. No. You n go the same way you came here. The southern route through Duncan, Arizona. Over the years, I have heard a lot of horror stories about truck drivers getting stuck in Snake Canyon with a burned up engine or a destroyed transmission."

"I believe you are right, as always. The southern route it is."

"I am famished. Are you ready to sit down and eat? The Mrs. has prepared a dinner fit for a king."

They had a feast on Fried chicken, corn bread, greens, black eyed peas, peach cobbler and lots of homemade ice cream. When the dinner was over, they all went into the living room and

brought each other up to date on what has happened to them since they had last talked.

It was after nine o'clock when they parted and Zeb was once again on his way back to his room. This time it was somehow different. He felt as though he had been to another funeral. Loneliness crept over him like a ghost out of a dark and dreary night. "Why can't I find someone who is right for me?" he thought, as his car bounced and rocked side to side over the dirt road.

When he drove onto the highway, the silence of the night made him feel very uneasy. Many times before he loved the trip through the trees on his way to Bear's place and enjoyed the uplifting drive back to his room. This trip back made him feel afraid and insecure about his future.

He made it home in less than twenty-five minutes. After parking his car, he went to his room. The radio offered little relief from his boredom. Even worse, this time the radio did not take away his loneliness like it had many times before. Several hours later, he fell into an uneasy sleep. What else is a construction worker supposed to do except to eat, sleep and come

home tired all the time.

The next morning found him in much better spirits. Eric may work his hide until it was thin and make him do all kinds of unholy jobs, but at least he was a trim carpenter. No longer would he be a pack mule pushing a wheelbarrow full of concrete around a dirty construction site. Loren had not mentioned a raise, but he knew one was sure to come very soon. His thoughts went back over his past failures in the romance department of his life. Carla, Darlene, Connie, and what was the name of the girl who moved into the apartment. He wanted so desperately to know who she was. However, like a king's servant, his mouth was sealed for fear of being severely chastised or, worse yet, get his final pay.

He stopped by a clothing store on the north side of town and bought several pairs of denim jeans and a new pair of engineer boots. Cowboy boots did not fit his fancy. Engineer boots are sort of like plain cowboy boots with a blunt toe and a full-sized heel instead of a tapered heel.

The next morning he was ready to start to work by seven-forty-five. The work went fast and the day melted away like a bucket of ice on a hot

summer day. By quitting time he had all the base, shoe and crown moldings removed.

Eric said, “That is enough for one day. ‘Time to head on out. ‘You want to help me gather up my tools and put them into my station wagon?”

Zeb did not like gathering up Eric’s ton of tools. He was beginning to realize trim work required a lot of special tools. And, soon, he’d learn how sharp and dangerous they are.

“Sure thing,” he said. After the tools were loaded into his station wagon, Eric gave Zeb a hand full of scrap boards and loaned him a nail set. Then he gave him a coffee can full of 6 penny finish nails and told him to practice driving nails into the boards and setting them without making any cat faces. “What are cat faces?” Zeb asked.

“A cat face is when you miss hitting a nail and dent the wood with your hammer. In trim work that is a no-no.”

“I see.” Eric showed him how to drive the nails straight without bending them over and how to use the nail set to drive the nail a little below the surface of the wood, so the painter can putty the holes shut to hide the nails.

It took him two and a half days to rip out the

old flooring in three of the rooms. Friday morning they started installing the new tongue and groove sub-flooring. T & G was nothing new to him. It was just another encounter with splinters and blisters. Eric told Zeb he needed him to work on Saturday. He agreed to work even though he did not want to.

It took until the end of the following week to get the sub-flooring finished. They began cutting the finish oak flooring and angle nailing it in place on Friday morning. Two weeks had passed and he still hadn't done any finish carpentry. November was only three weeks away when he told Eric he planned to move back to Arizona the first of November.

Eric said, "Tell me you are kidding."

"I cannot. I am leaving on Thursday, November the first for sure. It is written in cold hard stone. I'm sorry, but I must move closer to my family."

"I don't know what to say. It is so hard to find good help who will work as hard as you do. We'll miss you. However, I do not want stand between you and your family."

"Right. My heart cries big crocodile tears for you too. He just wants me here to do his dirty

work for him," he thought. "I will be fixing up my car for the trip in the meantime," said Zeb.

"Are you leaving right away?"

"Of course not. I will work up until the last day."

Loren drove up as they were packing up for the day. Zeb suspected Eric had slipped away during the day to call him.

His suspicions were confirmed when Loren got out of his truck and walked directly over to Zeb and said, "I hear you are going back to Arizona? Bob said you are leaving the first of November. Is that true?"

"Yes. I need to get closer to my family out in Arizona."

"Would it make any difference if I gave you a dollar an hour raise?"

"This is not about money, it is about family. My father had a heart attack and my mother does not drive, so I need to move back to Arizona so I can help her if my father dies."

"I wish you well, and if you ever decide to come back to Hattiesburg, look me up. You have a job waiting for you."

"Fair enough. I may take you up on your offer if things don't work out for me in Arizona." They

shook hands before he went back to work. Hauling materials around was more bearable, and routine, as he began counting the days before he could escape his upgraded laborer status.

Finally his last day to work was over. When he left the house it was almost done. He felt a sudden need to stay and see it through. “No. I am going and there is no turning back,” he decided.

November the first at 1:00 pm. he knocked on Agnes’s door and said good-bye. He told her he would stay the night and leave for Arizona in the morning. She said she wanted to see him before he left, so she could give him a going away present. Agnes also told him the rooming house was sold and she would soon go to Texas so she could be near her brother. They came together in a mother-to-son embrace. And then they said good-bye to each other.

Zeb got in his car and drove to the bank where he had over three-thousand dollars in his account. He drew out the thousand dollars Mr. Frank had left him plus two hundred dollars and put the thousand dollars in a fancy envelope. Then he went shopping for Christmas presents. When he finished wrapping them up, the entire

back seat of his car was full. Then he headed out to Bear's place. Bear would be home from the school by four-thirty. He drove into the yard and walked to the front door and knocked.

Bear and Mrs. Carol came to the door. Bear said, "What brings you here this time of day?"

"I had to stop by because I am leaving for Arizona in the morning. I got you and the kids something for Christmas." He went to his car and got out the presents and placed them neatly inside their front porch. He said, "There's a special present inside this box marked Mrs. Carol and Bear. He told them they were to open the fancy box tomorrow morning. It could not wait until Christmas.

"They both agreed."

Carol said, "Will you have dinner with us. I already have it on the table?"

"No. Mrs. Carol, I couldn't. It is hard enough for me to leave. If I have dinner with you, I might change my mind. I do need to go back to Arizona."

"We understand how you feel. We are going to have to move to who knows where ourselves, if this place sells."

She reached out and embraced Zeb and said, “You have yourself a safe trip. God be with you.”

Zeb was holding back on them as he drove away.

Carol looked at Bear and said, “I want to open the present Zeb left and see why it was so important to him.”

“No dear, he said in the morning.”

“I want to open it now. I have a strange feeling about the way he talked about this package as if it was real important.”

“Oh, alright.”

They went into the house and hid the presents in various places and then took the phone book sized box into their bedroom and closed the door. She ripped open the package and saw another package inside it with an envelope on it addressed to Mrs. Carol and Bear. She carefully opened the envelope and read:

Dear Bear and Mrs. Carol:

The long hot summer I spent with Bear cutting down

trees and working like a dog hardened me into a man. I will be eternally grateful for the

experience.

I don't know if you know Jo Yong. He is an oriental man who lives on the north side of town. One day last summer I met him in front of the drugstore. I instantly wanted his shiny Model A Coupe. I wanted to have his car at any cost. He told me he would not part with his car for any price.

Later he started telling me about the war and how he learned a discipline which made him feel better about himself and the war. I told him I was a tree man and was also telling him about how awful life was to me. He told me he would teach me how to control my inner self. We made a deal whereby he would teach me in his spare time. He has been teaching me ever since.

It was every bit as hard for me to tell him good-bye as it was for me to tell you good-bye.

Enjoy your Christmas presents and have A wonderful Christmas and New Year's day.

Your friend, Zeb

Tears were streaming down Carol's face as Bear gave her a big hug and said, "The boy is now

a man, we can't stand in his way. Let him go." He smiled at her and she gave a faint smile back.

"We came in here to open up the present and have a look, let's get to it." She tore open the second package and inside the big box was the fancy envelope. At first she thought it was a joke. Then she took the envelope out of the box and opened it. It contained ten one-hundred dollar bills. She gasp for air and said, "My God where did he get all this money."

Bear said, "Frances left it to him. He told me he would never accept it and I guess this is his way of not accepting it. I can understand his pride."

"We have to take it back to him before he leaves in the morning."

"Won't work, I know he is already on his way back to Arizona."

"How can you be so sure?"

"I am sure. He told me many times how he loved to drive at night. He will never change."

Meanwhile, Zeb drove toward the rooming house. When he got there, he told Agnes he has had a change in plans. He was going to leave right away. Agnes said, "Wait here." She went and got an envelope and handed it to him.

“What is this?”

“It is all the rent money you paid to me since Frances left us.”

“I cannot accept any money. I have almost two-thousand dollars of my own money in the bank thanks to Bear and Mr. Frank telling me I need to save up for a rainy day. You take the money and buy yourself some nice clothes for your trip to Texas.”

“You are a stubborn man and I will not argue with you. Can I have a hug good-bye?

They embraced and then he got into his car and drove to Todd’s filling station one last time. Todd was mounting a tire on a car when he drove up to the gas pumps. He said, “Need some gas Zeb?”

“Fill-er-up with regular and check the oil. I think she is a quart low.”

“A full tank is a lot of gas. Going somewhere?”

“I am going back to Arizona.”

“Sorry to hear you are leaving us, you have been a good customer. Have a safe trip back and stay away from Snake Canyon. I got stuck there many years ago. The cluster gear in my transmission turned into a hand full of metal

chunks. ‘Cost me a lot of money to get out of there.”

“Bear already warned me about Snake Canyon. I plan to go up the middle of Texas and drive through Abilene so I can see what kind of town Miss Agnes is moving to.”

“Is Agnes moving?”

“Yes, she sold the rooming house. She is going to where her brother lives in Abilene, Texas.

“Oh. I drained some water out of the radiator so you can put in two quarts of alcohol. I do not know how cold it will get around Dallas, Texas. I want to be prepared.”

When his car was gassed up, he was ready to head west when he remembered he had not told Sam he was leaving for Arizona. He drove toward the drugstore. If Sam wasn’t there, he would walk to his house in back of the drug store and let him know he was going west.

The drugstore was very busy when he arrived there. He got out and went in to have one last root beer float before heading out.

Sam was at the drugstore register waiting on customers when he entered the store. He did not want to miss him in case he was about to leave,

so he waited off to the side of the register until all the customers were waited on. Sam looked up at him and said, “Be with you in a minute Zeb.”

After the last customer left the register, Sam said, “What is new? How is the job going?”

“I quit my job today and I am leaving for Arizona as soon as I have one last root beer float for the road.”

“We will miss you. You will write to us, won’t you?”

“I will try to fire off a letter occasionally. But, there is a lot of dirt I need to clear out of my house first.”

“Are you referring to your father?”

“Maybe.”

“You need to consider your mother’s feelings before you open up a lot of old wounds between you and your father.”

“I know. I will keep a low head of steam when it comes to Herman, I promise even though he does not deserve it.”

They said farewell and he went over and had a drink, a big ham sandwich and some French fries. Then he ordered an extra sandwich for the road.

He was on his way at last. The road was long

and lonely as he rolled along at a little over 45 miles an hour. His car was a classic machine one would have thought would last forever. Even though he loved his car, deep down inside he knew it was on borrowed time.

The sun slowly sank below the horizon as he drove on. He was as wide awake as an owl after dark. The brisk night air stung his left arm as he continued west. He loved the feeling of security it gave him when he rested his arm on the driver's side window frame. It was his way of being at peace with his car. He had to go northwest for a long time on US highway 39 before he could turn and head west on US 80.

The night air sneaked in through every crack and around every panel in his car. It got bitter cold as the night air settled in. All he had to keep him warm was a tan army surplus woolen blanket. It was not long before he had to close the driver's side window. He shivered as he drove on. After going another fifteen miles, he saw a dilapidated old country grocery store. It was important for him to get some crackers, some munchies, several sodas, some bread and lunch meat. After he gathered up his larder, he went to the antique

cash register. There was a canister full of licorice sticks he could not resist. Ten of them found their way into his grocery bag before he paid up and left the store. Within a minute he was back on highway 39 heading for Jackson, Mississippi. It took a little over four hours for him to arrive in Jackson. “So far so good,” he told himself.

It was well past eleven o’clock when he saw the lights of Jackson fade away from his rear-view mirror. Once again he was alone. He thought about the people he knew on the other farms near where he used to live in Buckeye. Could he live in Arizona again? Or would he want to return to Hattiesburg where the trees where? One thing was for certain, the only people he could come back to were Bear, who had a bad heart; Sam at the drugstore and the crew. The rooming house would more than likely be closed and the gas station was so old it existed only by the grace of the local people who continued to frequent it more out of habit than a genuine need.

An hour and a half later, he saw a big sign that read: “Welcome to the State of Louisiana.” He took a deep breath as he crossed the border. Louisiana was so depressing to him. Some

people love the isolation of the road going through it. For him though, it only reminded him of how all alone he was.

Three hours later he entered Monroe. It was pitch dark and only a few lights were on as he slowly drove through town. He knew the reputation of law enforcement along the southern most routes. One could end up in the slammer so quick it would make their head swim. He longed to cross the Texas border where he felt safe. The law there seemed to leave him alone. At least he never saw any police officers hiding behind a road sign in the middle of nowhere. Before he knew it, he was entering Shreveport, LA. And in a few minutes later he saw a sign that read: “Welcome to Texas.” It would be a long and trying trip across the miles and miles and miles of Texas. It was big enough to be a country all its own. Five more hours and he would be in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. He was so anxious to see the two big cities.

It was ten in the morning when he drove into the Dallas city Limits. Things were going so well he believed the rest of the trip was going to be a snap. He bought some gas and had breakfast at

a truck stop. The night had taken its toll on him. He was groggy and was ready to fall asleep at any time. It was daytime. Getting a little shut-eye in Texas in late 1956 would be risky for him. There was always the fear of being busted for sleeping in his car no matter what state he was in. Being in no particular hurry, he puttered around town and waited for dark.

A second hand store caught his eye, so he decided to give it a once over. He was always interested in something new. While he was wandering around the shop a man in his early thirties who was short with a bristly mustache and had wavy black hair motioned for him to come over to him. He said he had a lot of stuff back at his place he wanted him to see. Like a fool, Zeb went with him to where he saw a boatload of fishing gear and other items. There was a real nice fishing rod he wanted and a two tiered fishing box full of all kinds of tackle. The man said he could have it all for ten dollars. Zeb said, “I want the fishing gear, but my father said I always need to get a receipt when I buy something. The man handed him a piece of paper and asked if Zeb would fill it out and he would

sign it. He filled out the receipt and the man printed Bob John on it. He thought the name to be a bit odd, so he asked him to print his address on it. Which he did. He had no way of knowing whether the address actually existed or not. They shook hands and Zeb left. The rest of the day was spent meandering here and there. Soon, it was getting dark so he would be able to head out of town in a few minutes. He stopped at a diner and got a large drink and a couple of sandwiches. Then, he started toward Arizona. Before long, it was obvious he was too tired to drive any farther. However, he wanted to make sure he was out of the city before he tried to find a place to park and get some sleep. On the outskirts of Fort Worth he saw a wrecking yard without a front gate in the fence around it. There was a space between two cars near the entrance. He inched his car in between them and shut off his car engine. From the road his car looked like one of the other wrecks in the front row. “Perfect. The law won’t notice me here,” he thought. He got out a bunch of his clothes and piled them on top of his army blanket and tried to go to sleep. It was bitter cold and the wind whistled through every crack in his

car. “Why couldn’t I have a nice station wagon like Sam has to sleep in?” he lamented. All night long the cold kept waking him up, then he’d dose off again. Before he knew it, morning had arrived along with a howling wind as his teeth chattered and his fingers ached from the cold. When he was awake, he tried to start the car but nothing happened. The new battery he bought was dead.

He got out and walked to the nearest gas station in the hopes of finding a good battery. After walking more than two miles in the bitter cold, he came to a gas station. It was about to open up for the day. The attendant was putting out the tire racks as he walked up and asked, “Do you have a six volt battery for a Model A Ford sedan?” Here he was standing there, after appearing out of no where without a car, asking a Texas gas station attendant for a 6 volt battery for a Model A Ford.

“I got one, but it is going to cost you.”

“How much?”

“Eight-fifty and tax.”

“I will take it.”

“Don’t forget about the two dollar deposit on the battery carrier. How far you got to carry it?”

said the attendant.

“About two miles up the road.”

“You will never make it. That is too far to carry a 6 Volt battery. They are way too heavy.” a customer said. “Which way is your car?”

He pointed west. “That way.”

“I will give you a lift as soon as I pay for my gas.”

“Thanks Mister. I could use a little good luck. This day has already been awful to me.”

He paid for the battery and the deposit, got into the man’s car and then they headed toward his Model A.

The man asked where he was headed. Zeb told him he was going west to be near his parents in Buckeye, Arizona.

When they got to his car, Zeb tried to give the man a dollar for the ride, but he merely said, “You owe someone else a helping hand. I trust you will help someone out in the future.” After which, he said, “I run a construction company in Phoenix, Arizona, so I need to shove off soon.”

“I will be looking for a trim carpenter job when I get there.”

“Ever work on power plants before?”

“No I haven’t.”

“We only use burly rough carpenters on power plant cooling towers. The work is brutal. But, I have a brother who is a building contractor in Scottsdale. He can always use a good finish carpenter.” He handed him a business card and said, “Look me up if you are ever in Phoenix.”

“What a deal,” he thought. “I am not even in Arizona yet and I already have a good job prospect.” He was floating in the clouds as he put the battery in his car and then drove back to the service station to claim his two dollar deposit for the loan of the battery carrier. His gas gauge was too low to start across the long trek between Fort Worth and Abilene, so it was time to tank up. He paid for the gas and got his deposit back before he once again headed west. Perhaps things were not as bad as he had first thought. He drove for six hours before he entered Abilene. It was a great big dusty town. Although Agnes may very well like it there, It was not his kind of town.

After he filled his gas tank up, he got a little something to eat and headed west on US 80 again. No sooner than he was five miles into a county near the Texas/Arizona border, he saw the

red light of a police car in his rear-view mirror. What could a police officer want with him. He pulled over to the curb and got out. Two police officers got out of their patrol car. One was a small built city police officer and the other was a giant who barely fit into his uniform.

The smaller one came over to him and said he thought Zeb was speeding. What on earth could he mean. His car was not capable of speeding. He had heard about kangaroo courts and stories of a police officer behind every bush before, but he believed the stories to be myths. The smaller officer said, “We also have a report saying you are transporting stolen goods.”

“What?” said Zeb.

“You were seen taking the goods from a house just outside Fort Worth.”

“What stolen goods?”

“Some fishing equipment.”

Now he knew why the man was so cagey. It was a good thing he got a receipt from him. “I have a receipt for the fishing equipment I bought from a man I met in a store in Fort Worth. We went to his house on the outskirts of town where he had a bunch of stuff he wanted to sell real

cheap."

"Let me see your receipt." He reached for his wallet and pulled out the receipt and handed it to the officer.

"You call this a receipt. Any second grader could write out a receipt like this. I am going to have to search your car for stolen goods. Zeb raised his voice and said, "I have done nothing wrong. You have no right to search my car."

"Now boy. I am going to give you one last chance to shut up and get out of my way while I conduct a lawful search of your vehicle. Are you going to cooperate or not?"

"I still think you have no right to search my car."

Then he saw the big officer take out a pair of white kid leather gloves and put them on very slowly as he grinned at him. After the gloves were on, the officer bolted forward and slapped him unmercifully until tears ran down his face.

"Funny thing about these gloves, they don't make a mark on a body. 'Just flusters them all up and makes their head look like a big red beet. These gloves help me stop criminals in their tracks."

The smaller officer told him he was under

arrest and said, “You should be real appreciative of us, because you’re going to spend the next few days cooling your heels in our jail. You can see the judge in the morning, that is, if you are lucky.”

They put him in the patrol car and were getting ready to take him to jail when Zeb said, “What about my car?”

“Now, If you say please real nice, I will drive your car to the police station parking lot. That is the best I can do.”

He wondered why they traveled in pairs. Then he realized one officer was there to stop the car and the other one was there to drive the vehicle to the jail parking lot. “That’s a good way for them to harvest lots of money for their county without having to send out a tow truck to tow in an old broken down clunker,” he thought to himself.

After thinking it over for a split second, he said, “Will you please drive my car to the police station parking lot?”

“Now that is more like it,” the big officer said. He drove his car to the parking lot, then they took him into a big room inside the station where another officer fingerprinted him and processed him in. Later, they put a tag with a chain attached

to it around his neck. It had his name and ID on it so they could take his photograph. Zeb abruptly said, “You chained me up just like a dog!”

After which, the medium built officer, who was doing the fingerprints said, “I don’t have to listen smarty remarks from the likes of you.”

“I didn’t do anything.”

Then he reached into a drawer and got out a pair of kid leather gloves and worked him over again. His eyes throbbed and his skin was stinging, but as he looked in the mirror on the wall, one could not tell how badly he was hurting inside. It would be a long time before he would ever come back through Texas again, if ever.

The next morning at eleven he was taken to see what he thought to be a judge. It turned out to be a justice of the peace who had a large wooden desk in the back of his furniture store. There was a Texas flag on one side of the desk and a United States flag on the other. The judge pounded his gavel on the desk and called the court into session.

The smaller officer gave an account of the stolen goods and the call he had received. He handed the receipt Zeb had given him to the

judge. He asked Zeb for his side of the story about the fishing gear. After he told his story, the judge said, “I believe your story. I find the fishing gear to be purchased legally, since there’s no evidence the fishing equipment was even stolen. The call could have been bogus.”

Then the officer went on about his speeding. Zeb knew better than to get the kangaroos hopping mad so he decided to let them rant. Then the officer told of how Zeb had given him a lot of lip and mocked him.

The justice said, “Fifteen days or seventy-five dollars for the lip. This court is adjourned.”

They took him back to the jail where they offered him a chance to pay the seventy-five dollars. He said he needed the money to get back home to his parents, and he said he would not pay the fine. After which, they took him up a narrow set of stairs to the jail on top of the police station. They opened the door and told him to get into a big cell in the middle of the jail. There was a narrow aisle around the main tank and several smaller cells were around the perimeter of the jail. The jail was packed with people on the bunks and a whole bunch of Hispanics were

everywhere. Once he got oriented, he began to feel out who was a danger to him. A young black man of small stature befriended him and said, “What did they get you for?”

“Speeding and giving an officer some lip.”

“That lip will get you every time.”

“What are you in here for?”

“If I loose my appeal, life without parole.”

“You are kidding. What for?”

“Three burglaries. Three strikes they call it.”

“Gee. I hope it goes well for you. They gave me fifteen days. Any chance of me getting out of here early.”

“This is Texas. A hundred years ago you probably would have been hung by your neck until you was cold dead. No. You are going to do the whole time right down to the very last second. So just take a seat and wait till your time is up. And when you get out, ‘get out of Texas and don’t ever look back.”

“Why are all the Hispanics in here.”

“They are Mexican citizens who got caught crossing the Rio Grande River a little south of here. They hold them here until the border patrol is ready to transport them back to Mexico. Quite

a little racket they got going on here. They get paid to keep them in this jail. Not to mention all the money they make from their ‘speed traps’ out there.”

“I noticed all the old cars in the parking lot outside. What do they do with them?”

“If they don’t have a driver’s license, they cannot drive their car. They wait till they get a bunch of them cars and then someone ends up with them for a song. That’s what they call law on the west side of the Pecos River.” Someone said, “Don’t listen to him, he is just beating his gums.” Zeb did not know what to believe.

The fifteen days went by very fast. He slept most of the time. He needed the rest, but he would have preferred to take his rest in much better surroundings. On the fifteenth day to the minute they let him out and he ran to his car. Jail spoiled the beauty of the wide open spaces Texas has to offer. His thoughts were transfixed on getting out of Texas and entering New Mexico as the battery he bought earlier started his car in an instant, which was way too slow for him.

He continued going west toward El Paso, Texas. In a few hours he would be in New Mexico. For now, he was mainly concerned about leaving that county's jurisdiction.

He breathed a sigh of relief as he entered Culberson County. His ordeal was over. He could now look forward to a new life in Phoenix, Arizona.

There was nothing left waiting for him back in Buckeye except his mother. Buckeye

was just an insignificant wide place in the road in 1956. Someday he may feel differently, but it would never be his home again.

He continued heading west. His thoughts were focused on crossing the Rio Grande River and getting out of Texas. His Model A was running good as he slowly progressed toward the Arizona/Texas state line. The sun was below the horizon as he prepared to drive straight through to the *Valley of The Sun*. It was the eighteenth of November. The weather was very cold and windy as his car chugged along. The wind gusts buffeted his car and made it rock back and forth as he struggled to keep it from being blown into a ditch on the side of the road. At the same time he worried about what waited for him in Buckeye and about Bear's warning he might get stuck going across country.

A highway sign read: "El Paso 58" miles. He was fixed on getting across the Texas state line. He promised himself a big meal to celebrate entering New Mexico.

Ninety minutes later his headlights lit up a large sign that read: "El Paso 8" miles and "State Line 14" miles. In less than a half hour he would

be in New Mexico. That thought warmed him as he stared out his windshield at the shadows of the night one last time before crossing into New Mexico.

Once he crossed the Rio Grande River, he put a big smile on his face and then he chuckled to himself. You think you hurt me. You did, but at least I don't have to live in your God awful little town.

He turned north and headed for Las Cruces, New Mexico where he stopped to fill up with gas. Afterwards, he stopped at an adobe building with a sign that read: "Tacos to Go." He stopped in and tried several of the Mexican entrées and ordered a big root beer, a big bag of potato chips and two more root beers to go. He was so hungry he gobbled down every bit of the food. When he finished, all he had left was one root beer.

His car started and sounded good as he headed west on US 70 toward Deming and Lordsburg, New Mexico. Three hours later both towns had faded into the back of his mind as he continued toward the Arizona state line.

An excitement came over him as he realized he would be entering Arizona in a few minutes.

Nearly a year and a half had passed since he left Arizona as a boy and now he was returning a man.

His mind drifted about like a cork in a rushing river. A car honked its horn at him telling him he had crossed over the dotted center line. He had not been paying very close attention to his driving.

“This is ridiculous for me to carry all this disdain for my father around with me all the time. I need to find out what my father tried to do to me before he dies, or I’ll never know what happened to me when I was a child.” His nightmares and visions needed to be put to rest.

When he saw the sign that read: “Arizona state line 10,” an exciting feeling came over him. He would be back in Arizona in less than twenty minutes. “Oh joy,” he thought. “Why did I ever leave Hattiesburg?” Deep down inside he knew it was because he felt like a neglected workhorse. He was trying to escape from having to do construction work, even if it was only for a little while.

The trees back east had become a safe haven for him to hide in. At the same time, everyone

around him was either dying on him or moving away. No matter how many trees he had around him, he was still all alone.

He crossed the state line and pulled into a gas station in Duncan, Arizona. The town was very small, but he liked the secluded high desert awareness of the area. The gas station was at the edge of town. He thought he had better top off the tank and get something to eat and a supply of food for the rest of the trip. It was an unwritten rule: Do not cross the desert without a full tank of gas, lots of water and plenty of non-perishable food. He was not taking any chances.

The night was making him drowsy as he drove toward Phoenix. The car was droning along at 47 miles-per-hour. Old cars need to be pampered a little or their engine will burn up. He was fully aware of what it would be like trying to hitchhike in a place where the next living thing was many, many miles away.

A sense of security came over him as he drove through the *San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation.* Contrary to the tales of the old West, he felt much safer on the reservation than he did at home.

As he headed west, the terrain was getting more rugged and mountainous. He would soon be going down the grade out of Globe and then through Miami and finally through the small mining town of Superior.

It was four in the morning when he drove through Superior and down to the desert floor. He would be in Buckeye before ten o'clock if all went well. By seven he was in Mesa and at eight-fifty he drove into Buckeye. Little had changed. The town was still a dusty little farm town. A sadness came over him as he drove down the long dirt road toward his father's place. He was so disappointed he wanted to turn around and go back to Hattiesburg, but he made his decision and he was going to stick with it.

His father's '39 Chevrolet station wagon and his 1949 step side pickup were in the yard as he drove up to his half-finished house. The farm was more horrific than he had remembered. It looked like a patchwork quilt that had gone wrong. It needed a lot more repairs than Frank's rooming house back in Hattiesburg. He found it difficult to swallow as he parked his car, got out and walked toward the front door. Zeb had been working on

some of the best homes in Hattiesburg. Now, he was standing in front of an unfinished shack.

When he got to the door, he knocked. His father came to the door and viciously eyed him up and down. He looked as though he was trying to think of something nasty to say to his son. After a long pause, his father said, “I suppose you came home broke and expect me to feed you.”

“Not in the least,” said Zeb. He did not want to tell him how much money he had in the bank back in Hattiesburg. “The size of my bank transfer might cause him to have a real heart attack,” he thought.

“Then why did you come back?”

“I want to see my mother.”

His father said, “Mama, you have company.” She came to the door and said, “Lord sakes, come on in here. How have you been?”

“I have been doing well.” The small talk went on for an hour before his mom said, “Have you had anything to eat?”

“The last time I had something to eat was in Duncan very early this morning. It is lunch time. Would you like me to take you and dad to lunch?”

“You know your father’s old country ways

would never allow you to buy him lunch."

"Yeah, I know all too well."

His father said, "I will treat you to lunch at Ickies Grease Joint."

"What is 'Ickies Grease Joint'?"

"It is a family restaurant on the east side of Phoenix. I get meals there real cheap."

"Cheap. That's my father alright," he thought. His father had a sarcastic name for every place he ever bought anything at. Zeb knew there was no such restaurant in Phoenix named Ickies Grease Joint.

"I am used to diners and drugstore soda fountains.

"There is a cafeteria in the shopping center downtown. We can go there to get something to eat."

"OK. I do need something different."

His father said, "We can go in my car." He got into his father's station wagon without saying a word.

The place was well furnished and was more like a café than a cafeteria. His father ordered a sandwich with fried onions on it. He ordered a pastrami on rye sandwich with everything on it

and a large root beer. His mother ordered a ham on rye and a glass of water.

They filled each other in on the events that had passed while they were away from each other. Zeb was very careful to keep the conversation as casual as possible. The last thing he wanted was to get into an altercation with his father in front of his mother. It was of no matter how he had so many tribulations during his absence. As usual, his father, Herman, kept steering the conversation in a direction which made him the center of attention. Zeb sat there and let him toot his own horn. When the meal was over, his father said, “I suppose you need a place to stay. You can sleep in the old shed out behind the house.” Zeb let his father’s sarcastic offer die of natural causes. His mother mentally backed away from his father as if she had been slapped in the face.

After they got back to the farm, they went out on the back porch where they talked for a while. At three o’clock, Zeb stood up and said, “I have to be heading into town to find a place to stay. There used to be a lot of rooming houses on Central Ave. in downtown Phoenix. Some of them were quite reasonable. He reached out and hugged his

mother. His father watched them like a sheepdog watching over its flock. After a little thought he realized his father was jealous of him and his mother. And it was painfully clear his father wanted him out of the way at any cost. Tears were forming behind his dry eyes. “What did I come back to?” he thought.

When he got to his car, he said, “I’ll find a place to stay and when I get settled in, I will come back and visit again.”

His mother said, “That would be nice. It has been a long time since we have seen you. You are welcome to come back anytime.”

His father butted in and said, “You’d better start looking for a job while you are at it.”

Zeb was visibly annoyed. He didn’t need to be told to get a job. When he was in Hattiesburg, his empty stomach taught him how to find a job real fast.

After he drove out to the highway again, he stopped and reached behind the front seat and retrieved the pendant with the button mounted on it. “This is what it is all about,” he whispered. “All of my plans for a final resolution are coming together.”

Only a few cars were on Central avenue, in Phoenix, when he went north on it. After he saw the Cactus Wren Road sign, he drove to the intersection and turned right. Just before he rounded the corner, he saw a sign in a window that read: “Rooms Available Inquire Within.” It was similar to the rooming house back in Hattiesburg, this one, too, was an old converted house. He parked his car in back and went to the front door and knocked. An elderly man answered the door. He was a little over five feet tall and had thin white hair. His skin was scarred from the desert sun and his clothes were tattered and were not very clean. “May I help you?”

“Yes sir, I am looking for a place to stay.”

“I saw you have Mississippi license plates. Are you new in town?”

“I lived down there for a year and a half. My parents live out in Buckeye. I just got back today.”

“I see. I only have one small efficiency apartment left. It is upstairs and the stairs are outside in the back of the building. Would you like to see it?”

“Yes. ... I like upstairs apartments.” As if he had a real choice. They went to the back of the

building and climbed the rickety steps. He opened the door and they went into the room. It had a small bathroom, a sofa bed, a stove, a dinky two basin sink and a tiny refrigerator. It reminded him a lot of his room back in Hattiesburg, MS. However, instead of being musty, mildewed and moldy, it was dusty and falling apart.

"Do you like it?"

He did not want to answer. His primary concern was cost. "How much?" he said.

"Twelve-fifty a week and a twenty dollar deposit. Do you have a job?"

"I do not have a job yet, but Glen Apperson, a contractor, who builds electrical power plants and cooling towers told me to come look him up when I got to Phoenix."

"Do you want the room?"

"I don't mind the twelve-fifty a week, but I can only count up to ten on the deposit." He remembered how he got a better deal from Mr. Frank when he haggled over the price. However, this was Phoenix and he did not want to push his luck. Getting a place to stay was more important than trying to chiseling a dollar or two off the price of the room.

He thought a minute and then said, “Yes. I suppose it will fly.” Then they shook hands on it.” One down, he had a place to stay. Now he needed to find a job. That was his biggest fear. Would it be as easy for him to find a job here as it was back in Hattiesburg?

“I want to warn you! If you have anything of value keep it hid. This is the big city.”

“I do not have anything anybody would want to steal.”

“Don’t bet on it. I had my clothes taken when I put them out to dry on the clothesline out back.”

That sent a cold chill up Zeb’s spine, given the condition of the clothes he was wearing.

“Come on down to the office and I will write you up a receipt. Rent is due on Friday by eight o’clock in the evening or there is a two dollar late fee.” They made their way down the stairs to his office. It was only a small secretary’s desk in front of a wooden dining room chair. The room was tiny and there was a fine coat of dust on everything in it.

“Here is your receipt for the ten dollar deposit and a week’s rent. I know Friday is only a couple of days away. Your rent is due on Friday just the

same. That will keep your rent a little in advance." He had heard it before from Mr. Frank at the rooming house. But, he did not think this man would be anything like Frank. It seemed as though there was not one friendly bone in his whole body. He was all business. As a matter of fact, he felt as though he would kick him out before the drop of a hat.

It took fifteen minutes for him to lug all of his belongings up the stairs. One of his most prized possessions was the pine plug he had pounded in the hole where Squeaky entered into his room and pilfered his bread. There was no particular reason for him to remove the plug. Perhaps it was somehow connected to Bear, whom he missed terribly. However, it was more because he was now so far away from Hattiesburg than it was from any fond memories of his recent past. A change of location sometimes make one feel better.

Since he was so close to the stores downtown, he decided to walk down Central Avenue until he found a soda fountain. He went about a half a mile before he spotted a drugstore with a soda fountain. It had green bar stool chairs and three

booths near the front window similar to Sam's drugstore back in Mississippi. He went in and sat down in a booth. After he sat there for several minutes, a man in his twenties came over to his table and asked, "What is your pleasure?"

"I will have a large hot chocolate, a toasted roast beef sandwich with lettuce, tomato and pickles; and an order of fries. He ate slowly as he stared out the window. Two girls came in and asked to use the phone book. That gave him an idea. He could look up the contractor he met in Fort Worth. He took out the business card he was given and waited until the girls brought the phone book back before he went up to the counter and asked if he could use it.

"Be sure and bring it back when you are done with it." He took the phone book back to his booth and looked up the construction company. He wanted to make sure the business existed before he wasted his time and energy trying to find his office. After he found the number, he went to the pay phone at the back of the drugstore and dialed it.

"Hello this is Zebadiah Smith, I talked to Glen Apperson in Fort Worth, Texas earlier this month

and he told me to look him up when I got to Phoenix. ... Okay. Thank you. ...

“Hello this is Zeb Smith. I met you in Fort Worth several weeks ago. You took me and a new battery to my Model A Ford. You told me to call you up when I got to Phoenix. I am here now. Is your brother doing any hiring? ...

“I will call you back in thirty minutes.”

Thirty minutes on the dot he called him back. “Hello this is Zeb again. ... You talked to your brother and he said, he will need a trim man after the first of the year. Okay, the second Monday after the first of January. I’ll be there. What is the address you want me to go to.” He wrote the address, in Scottsdale, on a napkin. A while later he said, “Thanks. I will be there and I will also look at some of the job sites you told me about. I pride myself in being on time.”

His money had to last until two weeks past January the first. That much time would more than likely force him to send for a bank draft from his account back east.

The night passed quickly. Before he knew it, the clock said ten o’clock in the morning. He thought he would go out and pay his mother

another visit. He saw his father out by his pickup truck when he drive up. “What happened?”

“I am afraid the engine burned up. I need to put a rebuilt short block in it. I had a heart attack last spring. It would be too dangerous for me to change the engine out myself and I do not have the money to hire it done. I do not know what I will do.”

“How do you know you had a heart attack?”

“Dr. Prescott told me so after he did an EKG on me.”

“I can change the engine block out for you. Glen told me his brother will not be hiring until the second Monday after the first of the year, so I will have to do some odd jobs until then just to keep me busy. I will change out the block in your truck for twenty-five dollars.” His father agreed, but they did not shake hands on it. And Zeb was not about to offer to his hand to his father. He was not replacing the engine block for his father. He was doing it for his mother’s sake. A moment later, he went to his car and retrieved the pendant with the button on it and put it around his neck. He could no longer wait. His father really had a heart attack. He walked over to his father. He felt bad

about what he was about to say, but he had to find out now or never. “Dad do you remember seeing this pajama button before?”

“No.”

“I was about four when I woke up suffocating and could not breathe. I saw your shadow leaving my room when I finally pushed the pillow off of me.”

“Are you trying to say I tried to smother you?”

“I am sure I pulled this button off of your pajamas. You tried to smother me with a pillow, didn’t you?”

“I never had a missing button on my pajamas. You must have been dreaming.”

“I only wish it was all a dream. Mom found this button where I was sleeping and gave it to me because she had already sewn a new one on your pajamas. This button came off when I grabbed for anything I could in an effort to get air. Fortunately for me, my brother tripped over the metal trash can you kept near the kitchen door to keep dogs and vermin from getting into it at night. Because I was so young at the time, it took years for me to figure it out. Does that refresh your memory?”

“I remember the trash can, but I do not know anything about you being smothered.”

“Remember the big gray boxes you built. I used to put a couple of blankets in and fall asleep in once in a while? I was in one of those boxes. Does that jog your memory?”

His face turned to a frown as he realized Zeb was telling the truth. “Yes. For years I thought it was just a terrible nightmare. We had been drinking heavily at a Christmas party before I came home late from our neighbors place. I remember thinking of how you were coming between mama and me. If it had not been for your brother bumping into the trash can, I’d have smothered you to death. Do you have any idea of how ashamed of myself I am. I have never touched another drop of liquor since. Will you ever forgive me for what I have done to you?”

He said nothing because he knew he could never forgive his father. He stood there stunned. Now he knew why he had so many nightmares over the years and why he always felt as though he was stuck in a big pile of sand sliding helplessly downhill. It was hard for him to accept what had happened to him. But what could he

do? He could not prove it and his father would simply deny it out in public.

Zeb said, “Don’t ever make the mistake of even thinking you can put you hands on me ever again, or threaten me in any way. I can now lift well over three hundred pounds, and I must tell you I am a student of the martial arts. After I find a martial arts studio, I will begin training again and continue working toward a black belt. Jo Yong, a friend of mine, has been teaching me full-contact karate for well over a year.”

“Do you intend to tell mama about the pillow?”

“No. She has more than enough to deal with already.” An uneasiness came over him as he thought about his father and what had happened.

Over the next week he worked on his truck and got it running for him and his mother. He learned a lot putting the rebuilt short block in his truck. It gave him some mechanical experience which would come in handy in years to come.

It was three and a half weeks before Christmas. He would be having Christmas dinner with the family this year. His younger brother either moved away or joined the military. He had no plans of getting any presents for the family

either. His family was not close no matter how much he wanted to be close to his mother.

The next three weeks went by like a streak of lightening. On Christmas morning he arrived early at his parent's house. The conversation was more like what one would expect at wake rather than between a group of family members. He pretended to be enthusiastic, but his heart was not in it. The day dragged on as his father told of his plans for the future, which usually turned out to be eating and then taking a nap. Zeb didn't want his life to be a living eternal rest. He wanted to do things and have fun. Dinner was served at one o'clock sharp. They ate the chicken his mother prepared along with mashed potatoes and gravy, cranberry sauce and yams. By five o'clock his father had run out of something to brag about, so Zeb said, "I need to heading into town. Tomorrow comes early and I have several thing I want to get done.

His father said, "Did you get a job yet?"

"I have to talk to Glen's brother soon. I am waiting for a finish carpenter job shortly after the first of January."

"I once looked for over six months before I

found a job. You need to get out there and look for a job now."

Zeb let his father's aggravating comments fly away like a flock of birds heading south for the winter. "Mom, I will try to drop by tomorrow afternoon." Then he got into his car and drove away.

Time was flying. Soon it would be time to see about the finish carpenter job in Scottsdale. He had already driven bye some of the job sites he was told about. The homes he would be working on were rustic looking but very luxurious. It will be difficult for him to convince Glen's brother he is a trim man, since he only worked as a finish carpenter's helper.

He walked to the soda fountain, went in and took a seat in the middle booth. A tall young girl who had black hair, was a hundred and twenty pounds and had an hourglass figure came over to his table. She smiled at him and said sheepishly, "Are you ready to order?"

"Yes. ma'am. I will have a cup of hot chocolate, a corned beef sandwich with mustard, lettuce, tomato and pickles."

"She blushed slightly and gave him a schoolgirl

smile and then walked back behind the counter."

"His heart was racing. She was real good looking. When she came back to his table, he could not hold it back. He said, "What is your name?"

"My name is Kimberly Winslow. But people call me Tiny. What is your name."

"I am Zebadiah Smith, Most people call me Zeb."

"Nice to meet you Zeb."

"I will not call you Tiny. How about Kim?"

"Yes."

"She is perfect," he thought.

Nancy 

She was so enthusiastic he could not help himself. He just had to find out about her. Fear crept over him as he said, “Have you worked here very long?”

“I started here last week. I had to get a job so I can pay my tuition at Phoenix College.”

“What do you like to do for entertainment?”

“I like being with my boy friend. He has a car he races on the racetrack in South Phoenix during the racing season. He likes to drive race cars. At least he do not smoke or drink. What do you like

to do for entertainment?"

"I like to get out and be alone in a quiet place by myself and soak in the outdoors. I really like cooking over a camp fire." He was trying to embellish his dull lifestyle. What he was really referring to was his father's farm and the crude concrete block barbecue pit located near the farm house. He wondered why she asked his name if she already had a boyfriend." Maybe she was not too enthusiastic about her relationship with him.

"Do you go camping alone?" she asked.

"I don't have anybody to go with me."

"That's a shame, I have a sister named Nancy. She likes the outdoors. She is the outdoor, ants and all, type. She is 'really' all alone. Would you like to meet her?"

He thought, "If Nancy looks like her then she must be very attractive too." After he thought about it for less than a heart beat, he said, "Yes I would."

"It is only fair for me to warn you that she is a little weird. She does not like racing, she doesn't like sports, she does not like boats and she doesn't like hunting. She just likes to walk around

the malls and do window shopping. She also likes going on long drives through the mountains up north. “I am not trying to play matchmaker. It is that she is so old fashioned she has a hard time with guys.”

“What do you mean by, ‘she has a hard time with guys?’ pray tell.”

“I mean nobody ever asks her out.”

That was no problem for Zeb because he always thought nobody wanted him either. “I would like to meet her, as she is.” he said. “I have to tell you. I am a carpenter and noting special.”

“Good. I will tell my boyfriend and we can go doubles this coming Saturday at six-thirty. We can take in a movie and then go to dinner afterwards. What do you say?”

He was afraid Nancy was aggressive like her. Kim sure had a big attitude for being such a small person. Things were beginning to look up for him. He had a good job prospect and now a date for Saturday night. “All right!” he said to himself under his breath.

“I almost forgot, my sister will eat anything that does not bite back. I will bring Nancy and you can meet us in front of the movie theater in the

downtown mall at six-thirty. Be sure and buy a ticket for her because she doesn't have any money. She helps our dad pay the household expenses.

Zeb was worried so he said. "How do you know your boyfriend will approve of us going doubles Saturday Night?"

"Trust me, he can take it or leave it."

He wanted to find out how old Nancy was? The last thing he wanted was to be introduced to an underage San Quentin quail. "May I ask how old Nancy is?"

"She is twenty-six going on sixty-six. She is a lot older than me. She just does not get it. A girl only gets what she wants when she makes it known what she wants."

He was ecstatic. Nancy sounded exactly like who he has been looking for all along. "Does she go to church?"

"Are you kidding. She is too out of touch for religion."

"Wow," he thought. However, he had heard good news before only to hear the bad news later. "What's the catch?" he thought. He realized Nancy was six years older than him. Would she

even be interested in going with him? Would she think he was too young for her?"

The sidewalk floated under his feet as he walked out of the soda fountain. He went back to his apartment and turned the radio on. There were a lot more radio stations on the air in Phoenix than there were back in Hattiesburg. His favorite station played popular music. The songs fascinated him. The music was a little wilder than the country music he was used to. He was a bit old for the rock and roll crowd, but he never had the opportunity to experience anything off the wall when he was at home. His father was still living in the dark ages. Modern music was not allowed in 'his' house.

He got into his car and drove around town looking for a nice restaurant to take Nancy to after the movie. He saw a very elaborate steak house in South Phoenix. It was close to the Rio Salado River and looked just right. However, with his luck she would be a vegetarian who spent most of her time doing yoga. Thoughts of Nancy kept turning over in his mind all afternoon. It was like back in Hattiesburg when he could not get Carla out of his head. "What did Nancy look like?"

Was she the one for him or just another passing fancy? He would have to wait until Saturday evening to find out.

The next morning he woke up bored and wanting to do something different. He got into his car and went out for breakfast. Getting breakfast at a restaurant was not a normal thing for him to do. He just needed to get out for a while. He drove around Phoenix for half an hour before he decided to go out of town. He went north on 9th street until he got to the Davis Avenue intersection, then he turned onto Rock Creek Road going north. Phoenix was in his rear-view mirror after he drove another two miles. The road sign read: “Rock Creek 35” miles. He continued north until he got to the town. It was a rustic little place. There was a small restaurant off to the right as he made a sharp left hand turn into the town’s main drag. When he got inside, it was decorated with a lot antique mining equipment. He sat at a table by the front window. The waitress looked a lot like Carla. “Here we go again,” he thought.

“What can I get for you today?” she said.

“Do you have a menu?”

“Yes. Here.” She handed him a small piece of paper with several handwritten options on it. The drover special was a dollar fifty. It came with a choice of bacon, ham or sausage; two eggs, two slices of toast, a short stack of hotcakes and coffee.

He looked at it for a moment before he said, “I will have the drover special. Can I get a root beer instead of coffee?”

“You can have a root beer for ten cents more.”

“I will have the drover special with a large root beer.” The breakfast did not last long after it was served. Within a half hour he was in his car heading back to Phoenix.

The streets were deserted as he drove in and parked his car near his apartment steps. Most people ate their lunch on the job back then, traffic at noon was minimal to nonexistent, especially in the summer. Cars were often old and unreliable. Even though gas was relatively inexpensive, driving around Arizona could burn up a lot of it. The streets were so quiet he decided to take a long walk down Central Avenue. It wasn’t too long before he passed by the soda fountain where he hoped to get a glimpse of Kim. He could not see

her from the front store window as he walked by it.

After his walk, he got into his car and went out to see his mother. When he got to the farm, his father woke up furious because he arrived there during one of his frequent naps. No one was allowed to make noise when Herman was sleeping. Maybe too many naps is the reason he had a heart attack. His blood vessels were a bit rusty from the lack of use. That was not going to happen to Zeb. He knew working hard made him feel better despite the labor of it. Few people could look at what they built, and say, “This building exists because I built it.”

After his father settled down, he started telling Zeb how he was going to get started on his new workshop tomorrow. But he knew tomorrow would never come for his father. He heard stories like this before. The new tale simply drowned out the old one. It was as if the purpose of a new project was to hide the embarrassment of failing to complete the previous one.

His mother’s ever enduring spirit kept him hoping his father would wake up one day and see how good his mother was. Yet he somehow knew

his father would never change. And worse yet, no matter how much Zeb tried to please his father, it would always be wrong.

At five o'clock, his mother announced, dinner was ready. They sat at the table listening to his father tell of the occults and how great they were. He had long ago declared himself a prophet. When dinner was over, the kitchen table was cleared and Herman was going to demonstrate how he could make it levitate. They were instructed to join hands in a circle before he uttered some strange words. Then they were told to place their hands flat on the table whereupon he began telling the table to rise. He honestly expected the table to lift up off the floor. Zeb thought he should tell him that if he had some of the wires used in old occult movies, it would make the table a lot easier for him to levitate. However, he spared his father the embarrassment of finding out that his status of prophet was self-inflicted. After several tries his father said, "I feel the presence of an evil demon holding the table down." Zeb knew he was the one his father was referring to. They talked for a while after Herman failed to levitate the table. Later after Herman ran

out of things to brag about, Zeb said good-bye to them and got into his car and started driving toward his apartment. He thought about tomorrow evening when he would be going out on his first date in Phoenix, that is, if Kim showed up at the mall theater with Nancy. It was an uneventful evening and by nine o'clock he was sound asleep. In the morning he fixed his breakfast, which by now he was quite good at fixing. After he finished eating, he puttered around under the hood of his car. Several hours later, he went up stairs to straighten up his apartment. He did not want his living space looking sloppy.

At noon he walked to the soda fountain to get a sandwich and a drink. He sat down in a booth. Kim was not there. A lady named Brenda was waiting tables. She was five-foot-three and weighed 195 pounds. She had straight blonde hair, a big smile and was extremely gregarious. One would expect her to be the life of the party. Brenda came over to his table and started chinning with him. He was not impressed and responded with a polite, "I will have a ham sandwich with fries and a root beer please." She

wrote down the order and walked away like a scolded child. He did not even want to hint at being overly friendly with her for fear that she might tell Kim and he would lose any chance he had to go out with Nancy. It was clear to him that having a girlfriend would cut down on his social options; however, that was exactly what he longed for. After he finished eating, he went to the register and was about to pay for his meal when he heard a familiar voice behind him say, “Remember, six-thirty tonight Zeb. I don’t want to be responsible for you standing Nancy up.”

He turned and saw Kim walking toward the counter.

“I will be there with bells on,” he said. He went home and counted the hours, then the minutes and then the seconds until he got to meet Nancy. With every passing second, he became more nervous about his first date with Nancy. It was five o, clock when he prepared a tide-me-over dinner. He did not want to stuff himself before his date at the movie.

At six o’clock he got into his car and headed for the mall. After he went to the entrance, he walked into the theater as he was told. Six-thirty found

him pacing back and forth waiting for Nancy and her sister. Fifteen minutes later neither Kim nor Nancy showed. He continued to pace back and forth like a father waiting at a maternity ward. He was about to give it up and write the date off as a cruel hoax at seven, when Kim came up to him and said she was sorry they were so late and hoped that she had not spoiled the evening.

On the contrary, he was happy to see them. They were dressed casual, and he was dressed in his best attire. He felt a little out of place, but was glad he was not poorly dressed. Kim said, “We would have dressed up, but who is going to see us in the dark. Do you know what I mean?”

“No I do not,” he thought. “That is okay, carpenters don’t get too many occasions to get all fancied up,” he said. Nancy was a little taller than he had imagined and a little heavier than he had expected. She was five-foot-ten and weighed 150 pounds. Her hair was long, straight and jet black. She had the same hourglass figure her sister had except her hips were a lot wider. Kim turned toward Zeb and pointed her hand toward her sister and said, “Zeb I would like you to meet Nancy, my ‘older’ sister.”

"I am happy to meet you ma'am."

"Oh for Pete's sake, can't you say Nancy. What do you think this is, the 1890s or something," barked Kim.

"That is okay," said Nancy. "He is being a gentleman."

"Nancy, I am pleased to meet you."

"Zeb, It's nice to make your acquaintance as well." Then she reached out her hand for Zeb to grasp. This set him aback. He did not expect her to put out her hand so soon. He wondered if Kim had put her up to it, since she went on about how out of touch with the world Nancy was.

"Good," he thought before he gently took her hand. Her hand was warm and a little sweaty as if she was afraid of him.

"Shall we go into the movie. I know it has already started but who watches movies anyway," said Kim.

"Do you think we should buy our tickets first." said Zeb.

"Cute," said Kim. "Zeb, this is my boyfriend Bill Ajo. He is of Spanish ancestry. *Ajo,* pronounced (āh-ho), means garlic in Spanish."

"Hi Bill. I hear you like the sports."

“I have spent most of my life trying to hit the big league. It is becoming quite clear that I am past my prime. But that does not mean I like sports any less.”

“Bill, I have not really decided what would be good for me to do in what little spare time there is left after working all day.”

“Do you have a job?”

“Not yet. I talked to a power plant contractor in Phoenix about working for his brother. He said to come in and apply at his brother’s office in Scottsdale shortly after Christmas. I plan to go and see him on Monday the 14th of January.”

“If you do not get the job, I might be able to use you in my auto shop. I pay $2 an hour or fifty-fifty for a mechanic. You are a boy, which means you know how to work on cars.”

“I only crawl under a greasy car when I cannot get out of it. Indeed,” he thought. “I will keep that in mind. I am sure something in my line of work will turn up.” If there was one thing he hated worse than labor, it was labor with grease, oil and solvents thrown in.

They went to the ticket window and purchased their tickets. All four of them sat in the eighth

row. After they were seated, they hardly spoke to each other.

Zeb felt as though Kim resented her sister because she was interfering with her life style. And she was also trying to control Bill like his father controls his mother. He felt sorry for Bill. It dawned on him that Kim may be jealous of her sister's stability and was trying to act like she was superior. He was beginning to understand that Kim was having a bad time of life and was taking it out on others.

When the movie started Nancy leaned closer to him. She felt warm as her arm touched his. He did not expect this from her. He thought she was a wall flower Kim was trying to get rid of. For him, Nancy was turning out to be exactly what he had been looking for all along. It was important for him to get her alone, so he could try to find out whether her actions were real or fake. When the movie was over, Zeb suggested that each couple go to dinner separately. Kim said, "That is what I had in mind." Her boyfriend obediently said, "What ever." That left Nancy, who did not say a word. When Zeb started toward his car, she followed him. He opened the door for her and she climbed

the running board and got in. After he got the car started, he said, “How do you like Phoenix?”

“It is all right, but I would much rather be in a cabin up in the mountains.”

“You like the mountains, do you? I like mountains too.”

“Yes. They are real and not dry parched desert.”

He had accidentally touched on a subject that got her a little riled. He meandered from here to there for over an hour while they talked about what they liked and disliked. Then he said, “I have a couple of personal questions I would like to ask you. I hope you will not get mad at me.”

“What kind of personal questions?”

“Did your sister tell you to put your hand out to me when we met.”

Anyone else would have told him to shut up and mind your own business, but she said, “If I tell you, would it make any difference?”

“Not in the least.”

“Yes and she told me to lean up against you during the movie. She is real smart about guys. I hope you are not angry with me.”

“Angry? On the contrary, I am grateful you told me. I am not a real go-getter when it comes to

girls either." With that said, they settled down into a more comfortable conversation between themselves.

"We have been driving around for over an hour. How about going to the Rivera Steak House in South Phoenix?"

"I always wanted to go there. They tell me it is so fancy inside. I would like that, but you do not have to buy me a steak if you cannot afford it. I know you do not have a lot of money because you drive such an old car and all."

"The reason I drive this car is because it has been in the family for a long, long time. It has been good to me and I don't get rid of anything, or kick out anyone who is good to me." However, he was really referring to his father kicking him out.

"Actually, I like your car. It runs good. That is what counts the most. What kind of car is it?"

"My car is a 1929 Ford. It is a forever car. I'm not poor."

They went to the steak house and had a wonderful meal. By ten o'clock it was time for him to take her home. When they got to her house on Holley street, he realized how poor Nancy's family really was. The house needed a lot of repairs. She

told Zeb her father worked in a masonry warehouse and how he had worked so hard there for over thirty years. It turned out that Kim was putting up a front to cover her own lowly existence. They got out of the car and walked to her door which was about to fall off its hinges. He put his arm around her neck and kissed her. Then he said, “It is okay, I got my mother’s permission first.” Then he winked at her as Nancy giggled a little at his comment.

“Could we get together tomorrow or some other day soon and do this again?”

“I would like to so much. You are a real gentleman and someday you will find someone nice for yourself.”

“What do you mean?”

“I do not deserve you. You are all dressed up and have a lot of money. I saw how much money was in your wallet when you paid for the dinner.”

“Do you think I am rich?”

“You said you were not poor, remember?”

“Yes. But that does not mean I am rich.” It was obvious she was extremely insecure and he needed to be very careful about what he said to her or he would be out of her life forever. “Would

you like to go out with me again?"

"I would like to go out with you again, but I do not want to feel like I am a burden to you."

"I promise you will not be a burden to me. All right?"

"Then ... Yes."

"Tomorrow is Sunday and I would like to take you out to my parents place in Buckeye. Would you like to meet my parents at around four o'clock? Say yes."

"Yes. I'd like to meet your parents. I'll be ready by four."

At three-fifteen, Sunday afternoon, he drove to her place on Holley street. When he knocked, she came to the door all dressed up. He was afraid to tell her his parents were cotton farmers and dressed the part. So, he said, "Why … you look like a million dollars."

They got into his car and he drove to his father's place in Buckeye. When the house was in sight, he pointed toward his father's place and said, "That house is where I was raised. I think my house is worse than yours and my father is a good-for-nothing egotist. Your father, as you told me, is a very hard working man." To lighten up a

little bit, he said, “Want to trade fathers.” She giggled at his comment.

He drove up and parked the car. By the time he shut off the engine his father was standing near the front door like a lookout guarding an outlaw hideout. A shocked look came over Herman’s face when he saw he had a girl in the car with him. They got out and walked up to him. Zeb said, “Dad, I would like you to meet Nancy Winslow.” And then he said, “Nancy I’d like you to meet my father Herman Zebadiah Smith.” He was five-foot-eleven, weighed 205 pounds, wore cheap reading glasses, had short white hair and a week’s growth of whiskers. He was wearing a long sleeved gray shirt, gray pants, gray socks and a pair of black scuffed up plain toed oxford shoes.

“Mama come out here. There is someone here you need to see,” said Herman. When his mother came to the door, she lit up with surprise. She walked over and hugged him. “Well, Aren’t you going to introduce me to your friend?”

“Mom, I would like you to meet Nancy Winslow. She is a real close friend of mine. And Nancy, I would like you to meet my mother, Mildred Alice Smith.” She was five feet tall, weighed a hundred

and ten pounds, had brown hair in a pageboy style, and wore wire frame granny glasses. She was wearing the 'Herman Smith required' house dress and shoes.

His mother smiled as they engaged in small talk. Each one of them knew Herman would go ballistic if they said one wrong word. Fifteen minutes later they went into the house. The house was as bad on the inside as it was outside. Many things were thrown about like a dust devil recently passed through. His parents didn't apologize for their untidy place. They acted as if the mess was normal. Both Zeb and Nancy were afraid to toss out a negative comment for fear of being put on the defensive themselves. At five o'clock his mother left for a while, then she came back to announce, "Dinner is about to be served." They all went into the tiny kitchen and squeezed around an unfinished wooden table with a daisy patterned table cloth on it. The dinner talk continued for several hours. It was seven-forty when Zeb said, "We need to be heading out." Fifteen minutes later they said good-bye to his parents and headed home. On the way back they talked about the visit with his parents. She said, "I

do not know why I feel so down about my life. My sister can live in denial. But, I have to face my poor existence head on."

"As you can see we are more alike than either of us could have ever thought. We have seen the down side of life. Now we can start looking up toward a better life." Before long he saw her house come into view. He suddenly realized his second date with her was almost over. When they got to her front door, she leaned over and kissed him and then said, "My sister didn't tell me to kiss you. I did it all by myself."

"Would you like to have dinner with me this Friday?"

He waited patiently for her to answer. She stood there as

if she expected him to say something more. “What is the matter?” he asked.

“I would like to go out with you again, but I work in the warehouse where my father works.” She didn’t look like she loaded cement and concrete blocks into trucks.

“Why should where you work make any difference?”

“I don’t know, I thought you would not want to

be seen with me because I work in a masonry warehouse."

"I am a plain old carpenter. Does that matter?"

"No."

"What do you do at the warehouse?"

"I work in the office. I write up the orders and collect the money."

"How about dinner Friday?"

"... Okay, but can we go to a Mexican food restaurant?"

"Yes."

"How did you get your job?"

"My father helped me get my job many years ago. They don't pay me a lot of money, but at least it is steady work."

"Would this Friday after work be a good time?" he said.

"I think so," she said.

"What time do you think you could be ready?"

"I can be ready by six-thirty. Okay?"

"Six-thirty is a good time for me. I want to tell you I will never be late like Kim was for the movie. Always remember I will not let you down. I don't like being stood up and I will never stand you up either.

“Well. ... It was not Kim’s fault we were late. It was my fault. I wanted to get all dressed up nice for you. But, by the time I would have been ready, it would have been too late. Kim was furious. Finally, she told me to either get ready in two minutes or be left behind. I got ready in less than one minute. I am sorry I caused everybody to be late.”

He felt like a fool for not finding out why they were late before he gave his ‘I won’t stand you up speech.’ “What else would you like to do Friday after dinner?”

“I would like to go to the mall and look at clothes and things. I know you probably do not like to window shop. What do you want to do?”

“I like to look at tools and hardware.”

“We could look at tools for a while and then go to the mall later. What do you think?”

“Perfect.” After a few minutes of small talk, he said, “Unfortunately it is time for me to be going back to my apartment. He leaned over and kissed her again. ... I really like being with you,” he said.

“I like being with you too.” This time she put her arms around him and said, “If this is all a great big dream. Please, don’t wake me up.”

“After a long embrace he pulled away and said, “I would love to stay here forever, but I must go. I will be here to pick you up shortly before six-thirty on Friday.”

“I will Be waiting. Thanks for a wonderful evening.”

“Good-bye Nancy. I will miss you until Friday.”

“Bye Zeb. I can’t wait until Friday too.”

He got into his car and slowly drove to his apartment. He parked and went up to get some much needed sleep. The next morning it was time to get ready and go to Scottsdale and apply for the trim carpenter job. It was important for him to arrive at Dan’s office before it opened up at eight o’clock. The only thing he hated more than asking a girl to go out with him was having to ask for a job. His anxiety was boiling over as he headed for the construction office. The sky was clear and the sun was barely above the horizon. It was twenty before eight when he parked his car in front of the office and walked up to the door. It was locked and he could not see any lights on inside.

He had hoped Dan would arrive early. It was five minutes until eight when he saw a new white pickup truck pull up and park on the north side of

the building. A medium built man got out of the truck. He was clean shaven and wore a dark-gray suit. Zeb kept his eyes on him as he walked toward his office. He was looking for any nuance of friendliness. Suddenly, Dan said in a robust voice, “Are you here to pick up the bid on the North Mandarin house?”

“No sir. I am here to apply for a trim carpenter job.”

“Sorry, we are not hiring. I have a man coming in today who moved here from back east. Perhaps, in a few weeks there might be something come up if he does not work out.”

“I’m Zebadiah Smith. I was told to come here and put in an application around the middle of the month.”

“Did you just move here from Mississippi?”

“Yes I did.”

“Well then, let’s go inside and have a talk. The bid I was talking about is a big job and will require some top-notch carpenters. Do you think you’ll make me a good trim man?”

“I will give it my best effort.” There was no way he was going to tell him he had only been a trim carpenter’s helper for less than a month. He had

been practicing driving nails and cutting boards like Eric did back in Hattiesburg. And, if his luck held, he might even be good enough to last a week. However, he was not going to back down now.

They went into the office where they discussed Zeb's work experience. Abruptly Dan stood up and said, "Got your tools with you?"

"Yes sir, I take my tools with me everywhere I go."

"Can I see them?"

"Yes." He was dumbfounded as to why he wanted to see his tools. On the way out to his car, he asked, "Can I ask why you want to see my tools?"

"I have been in the building business for over twenty-five years and have learned that a craftsman's tools are a better indicator of their ability than anything they say."

He thought, "What if I bought my tools from a craftsman who retired? What kind of indicator would those tools be?" Zeb opened his car door and showed him his toolbox.

"... Well," he said, as he stoked his chin. "Your tools are a little weak for a trim man." He thought

a minute and said, “let’s go back into my office and talk some more.

“Have a seat over there Zeb. My brother is good judge of character, and he has never steered me wrong. I am going to go against my judgment and give you a chance. However, I am only going to hire you as a trim helper if you want the job. I will start you at a buck and a half an hour. If in two weeks time you get your tools up to par and prove to me you are good enough, I will promote you up to a finish carpenter and pay you two-fifty an hour. On the other side of the coin and above all, if you are not sure you can give me a first class job on installing a piece of lumber, don’t be a hero and mess up a piece of expensive wood. I do not expect to have to buy any materials twice.”

He knew he was a small shovel trying to do the work of a bulldozer; however, it was a once in a lifetime chance for him. “I will treat your materials as if my job depends on it.”

“Your job does depend on it.”

“When do you want me to start?”

“Today. I will take you to the Cantski residence. It is a hundred and fifty-thousand dollar custom

built mansion just off Camelback Road.

“You can get something to eat in Scottsdale before I take you out to the job site. Be sure and write down the directions as you go. If you don’t, you may not be able to find your way back. Roads on the foothills of Prickly Pear Mountain are like a maze. It is very easy to get lost up there.”

“I expect you to be back here by nine-thirty.”

“You can count on me. I’ll be back as soon as I get something to eat and a couple of root beers.”

“This isn’t Mississippi. Always bring a lot of food and water. It’s a long drive to town to get food and water. Also, sodas may be tasty, but especially in the summer heat, there is nothing like an ice cold cup of water. You will be amazed at how quickly you will get thirsty, so you need to bring a jug of ice water with you every day, even in the winter,” said Dan.

“I will bring a keg of ice cold water before I start to work in the morning.”

He was beginning to wonder if these fancy houses were for him and if he could do any of the wood work on them.

After he got back, he said, “I am ready to start.”

They went to their respective vehicles and

drove west on Camelback Road for five miles before Dan signaled he was about to make a right turn. When they got to the house, it was massive and rich looking. They got out and went into the house where he was introduced to the crew.

“Zeb, this is my finish carpenter, Jeffrey Goshen; my plumber, Michael Kingman; and my bulldozer operator and Steven Markland. They go by: Jeff, Mike and Steve.”

“Howdy.”

“Jeff, Zeb is going to start today as your trim helper. I figure you could use the extra help since we are getting a little behind schedule.”

The word schedule was familiar to him. He knew it really meant production. He was beginning to realize his livelihood depended more on production than the quality of his work.

“Take a little time to show him around then you can start him out on some sanding and show him how to cut a clean miter joint.

“Zeb, I will stop by tomorrow afternoon and see how you are doing.”

That sent a rush of blood through his body. Trim work was not going to be easy for him. However, after he walked around the house, he

noticed the workmanship was not as good as he had first thought. The house had a fancy look about it. He hoped this house would give him a chance to hone his woodworking skills.

Dan and Jeff went into the other room and talked to each other in a low voice. That could only mean he was on strict probation and the slightest mistake could send him packing.

When they came back into the room after they finished talking, Zeb asked, “What do you want me to do?”

“We will be hanging interior doors for the rest of the day. Here is the key to the garage. Open it up and start bringing in the doors. I marked all the sizes and door swings on the hinged side of the door openings.”

He took the key, went to the garage and opened it. It was packed solid with cabinets, doors, lumber, hardware and plumbing fixtures. A stack of moldings was piled knee high next to the south wall. In order to get to the doors, he had to move several cabinets, many boxes of hardware and a few bathroom fixtures. Hardware was scattered all over the floor in a haphazard manner. Casings were piled on top of door jambs

and door stops. Hinges and locks were scattered on the garage floor like a toddler's toys after several hours of play. After he moved enough wood out of the way, he picked up a door and carried it into one of the bedrooms. The door was too small to fit into the door opening even if he tried. His frustration was beginning to mount. Once again he was a pack mule carrying things around for someone else to use. It was time to tell Jeff he did not know the first thing about doors and also tell him he had never worked on a fancy house like this one. He walked into where Jeff was and said, "Can I talk to you?"

"Sure. What's up Zeb?"

"I have never worked on a fancy house like this in my life. The homes back in Mississippi are quite different."

"I will teach you what you need to know. I think you can do this kind of work. Just don't do anything until I show you how. Do not worry if you cannot do some of the work. You are only a helper anyway."

"Thanks for the reminder," he said under his breath. "I won't do anything unless you tell me to," he said.

“Follow me to the master bedroom.”

When they were in the bedroom, Jeff took out his ruler and measured the door opening and said, “Now this is a 32 inch door opening. As you will notice the opening is 35 inches wide. The extra space is for the door frame also called the jamb. A door opening cannot be too wide or the feather edged casing will not be wide enough to cover the crack around the door frame.

“Now for the door swing. Watch this.” He leaned his back against the hinge side of the door and said, “Doors usually swing into a living room, a kitchen, a bedroom, a den, or a bathroom. Closets and utility room doors can go either way, but more often than not they swing out.” With his back against the hinge side of the door, he said, “The next step is to swing your arm the way the door swings like this. Which arm am I using.”

“Your right arm.”

“Correct, so this is a right-hand door to us. But beware, when a door swings in, some people call it the opposite. For instance, to some people, this swing-in door would be called a left-hand-reverse door or in our terms it is simply a right-hand door. Simple isn’t it?

“Yes. I think I get it. If I lean my back against the hinge side of a door opening, then my arm moves like the door and what ever arm I use is the swing of the door.”

“Good. Get your ruler and measure the openings and put the correct doors in each room. We will sort out the jambs, doorstops and casings later.” He gave Zeb a grin and said, “You will get the hang of it a lot sooner than you think. I can tell you are a real go-getter. Speed is what carpentry is all about. The faster you are the better off you will be. Oh, one more thing. Do not ever lean a door against a wall standing up. Always lay doors on their side next to a straight wall. Can you tell me why?”

“Nope.”

“If you stand a fir door upright it will, over time, sag toward the wall. Once the door is sagged or warped, it’s only good for firewood. Occasionally a door can be straightened, but it will never be the same.

“By the way, the doors in this house are called rustic two panel doors. Do not ask me why, because I do not know.”

He was beginning to feel a lot better about his

first day as a trim helper. At four-thirty they picked up their tools and headed for their vehicles. Jeff had a handsome red Ford pickup with a big toolbox built into the front of the bed. Zeb wanted a new truck so bad, but he was sure Nancy would want him to get a newer car instead.

Just as they were about to leave, Dan drove up and said, “How goes it Zeb?”

“I had a good day.”

“Great, you can go on home now, I want to have a word with Jeff for a minute.”

His generosity could only mean one thing to him. He was checking up on him which worried Zeb. His night would not be the same after seeing Dan come to the project. However, he figured all Jeff could do was fire him. It would not be the end of the world even if he did get canned.

It was six o’clock when he got back to his apartment. He took a shower and headed for the soda fountain. He needed a drink and a roast beef sandwich with a pound of meat on it. He was starving. Carrying doors around took most of the starch out of him. The walk to the soda fountain was slow and leisurely. Kim was working when he got there. She said, “Would you like to do

doubles again?" She evidently did not know he had a date with her sister this coming Friday. It was apparent she and her sister were not on the best of terms.

"Nancy and I already have a date."

She looked surprised. He decided not to say anything else unless she forced him into it.

"What can I get for you?"

"I will have a large root beer float, two orders of fries and two roast beef sandwiches." He wanted to use his large food order as an excuse to tell her about his new job. Then he said, "I started to work on a hundred and fifty-thousand dollar mansion off Camelback Road and I am starved."

"Glad to hear you got a job. Nancy looked for a job for a long time before dad got her a job in a cement warehouse."

"What's wrong with working in a warehouse?"

She shut up immediately. Her attempt to make him feel bad about her sister had backfired on her. Zeb was already quite defensive when it came to Nancy. He liked her a lot and often thought of getting married to her one day.

The rest of the week was more moving doors, moldings and lugging big heavy cabinets around.

Friday morning came faster than he expected. He spent the whole week wondering what Jeff and Dan talked about. He did not know how close custom work needed to be coordinated. This meant the whole crew must keep things going in order and on time. Hanging doors before painting the walls could result in paint getting on the stained trim and a lot of other things could happen if the proper sequence were to be broken.

At four-thirty Dan drove up and handed Jeff their pay. A few minutes later, Jeff came over to Zeb and gave him his check. He said, “We are done for today, I will see you at eight o’clock on Monday.”

His next date with Nancy was only an hour and a half away. It did not take long for him to get ready and head for her house. When he drove up, he saw the curtains open and close quickly. She knew he was coming. The door opened before he had a chance to knock. She stepped out and a large framed gray headed man in his late forties followed her. She turned to him and said, “Dad this is Zebadiah Smith.” Then she said, “Zeb this is my father. Marian Wade Winslow.”

“Howdy. ‘Pleased to meet you sir.”

They chatted for a short while before her father said, “I need to lay down for a while. I will see you both later. Have a good time.”

“Why did he need to lay down?” He looked healthy.

“Are you ready to go?”

“Yes,” she said. A strange silence came over her after she answered him. They were almost at the taco stand before he said, “Why so silent?” She was so insecure it scared him.

“My dad is not in the best of health. He is too old to be lugging around cement and too young to retire. He worries me so. Mom left us when I was only five, he has taken real good care of me. I do not want him to die.”

“He seems to be a good man. I only wish my father was as good to me.”

They drove up to the outdoor taco stand and had their dinner. Afterward, they went to a hardware store and several other stores to look at tools. Then they went to the mall. An hour later they were still looking at clothes. Before he knew it, he found himself standing in front of a jewelry case filled with wedding rings. Nancy had a lot more on her mind than an occasional date.

Slightly before nine he said, “We need to be getting back. Tomorrow will come early.” When they got to her house, the lights were out. He leaned over and kissed her. Then he put his arms around her and kissed for the longest time. “Would you like to go for a Sunday drive with me? I promise I will not drive too far out of town.”

“Yes. But I won’t hold you to that promise. I like the high country this time of year. Maybe we could go for a drive in the mountains, if you think your car can make the trip.”

His car was so old it would more than likely barely make it up the mountain grade, but he was proud of it.

He said nothing before he put his arms around her again and kissed her for at least five minutes. Zeb and Nancy were deeply in love.

He wanted to get out of town on Sunday as quickly as possible, so he asked her if she could be ready by seven on Sunday morning. She said, “I can’t wait to see the mountains again. I would love to get out in the snow. Maybe we can get stuck in a mountain cabin. Don’t you think?”

“Maybe.” He did not want to dampen her spirits. “Would you like to go to Flagstaff and do

some shopping up there?"

"Yes! Yes!" He didn't want to leave her, but he needed to get back to his apartment. His world was rapidly changing. The idea of being married to Nancy was beginning to grow on him. He wanted to be with her forever, but he was afraid something would go wrong and it would end his relationship with her.

Saturday evening he stocked up his car with all kinds of food, some warm clothes and two thick blankets for their trip in the morning.

At six am. Sunday morning, he got ready and drove to Nancy's house. She came out dressed in a warm coat and ski pants. She told him there was a snowstorm coming in and she could not wait to get up in the mountains and get snowed in. Zeb was more practical and thought of the consequences of getting stranded in the snow. He said, "I think it wise to take Black Canyon Highway straight to Flagstaff and spend the day around town. That way we won't get stuck knee deep in the snow and freeze to death."

He opened the door for her. She got in and they drove off toward the mountains. After they left the valley floor, his car chugged relentlessly up

the grade toward Flagstaff. At times the car would not go over fifteen miles-an-hour, but Nancy was ecstatic. She was in her own little world. Three hours later they had only covered ninety miles. They still had over forty miles to go. The road was getting steeper and steeper. Two hours later they entered the Flagstaff city limits. The roads were already covered with snow and difficult to drive on. Zeb suggested they find a place to take a breather and get something to eat. She pointed to a nice restaurant and said, “How about the café over there?”

He said, “Great. Let’s eat.” The place was packed. There was a small radio on a shelf behind the waitress stand. The news came on and announced, “Black Canyon Highway is snow packed. Three snowplows are working to keep the road open.”

They ordered a late lunch and then it was back out in the snow. When they were back on the road again, Nancy leaned over toward him and said, “I’m cold. Keep me warm.”

They drove northeast alongside the railroad tracks until the buildings started to thin out. Nancy said, “Keep going out into the snow.”

He said, “We need to go back to town so we can do some shopping. I saw a lot of shops we could spend the rest of the day looking through.” He was trying to get her mind off the snow. They spent several hours in Flagstaff shopping. Then, Zeb said, “It is five o’clock, we need to be going back now.” They headed back to Phoenix after Zeb stopped to gas up and get a few goodies for the trip back. It was not easy for him to go down the grade to Phoenix. The narrow tires on his car made it a bit of a challenge going home. Several times the car weaved back and forth, which caused their hearts to skip a few beats.

An hour later they were out of the snow. The closer they

got to Phoenix, the more Zeb realized he was in love with Nancy. At nine o'clock, they arrived at her place. The porch light was on when they drove into her driveway He parked his car then they walked toward her door. Her father came out and said, "Have a good time up north?"

"We had a real fun time, dad," said Nancy. "The snow was so exciting."

Her father gave her a warm smile and said,

“Zeb, Would you like to come in with Nancy for a while?”

“I would love to, but I must say good-night and head on home.”

They embraced and then he teased her about going up to Flagstaff and getting stuck in the snow next weekend. She said, “Anytime, Zeb.”

“Just joking. How about taking in a dance sometime this week?”

“I do not know how to dance.”

“Me either. We can go to the dance school on Springfield Road and take in a lesson or two. They have a partners dance on Wednesday night. “Wednesday night at seven?”

“Yes.” Somehow she knew he had the time and place for the dance already picked out. Just the same, she was anxious to go.

When he got to work on Monday, Jeff asked him if he did anything exciting over the weekend. He told him about the trip to Flagstaff and how the snow almost trapped him there. Then, Jeff asked if he took anyone along on the trip. Zeb told Jeff about Nancy. It didn’t take him long before he started ribbing him about his old car getting stuck in the snow with his girlfriend in it.

“Did you have a hard time keeping your tires above the snow?”

He sidestepped Jeff’s remark and said, “I just wanted to please my girlfriend. She likes the mountains and snow.”

“Did you plan to stay overnight with her?”

“I will never tell. I am ready to pound some nails.” Once he started working, the day didn’t go well for him, it seemed as though everything he did went wrong. At one point Jeff scolded him for banging a piece of wood against the wall as he went through a bedroom doorway. By quitting time he was totally exhausted. He headed straight for the solitude of his room after leaving the job. After he got home, he decided to go for a walk to help him relax.

When he came to work early the next morning, Jeff told Zeb he was being sent to another job tomorrow. He told him Dan had a tract housing project he wanted him to get started on. He gave him a small piece of paper with the directions to a huge housing project located in Glendale. He told him to see Chester Logansport, the foreman. He would be working on over a hundred bungalows. Jeff told him the work would be fast

paced and worthy of his ambition. Each house only had a few shelves, six doors and a hand full of baseboards. Jeff told him there was a rush on the get the tract finished. You will be getting two and a quarter an hour; however, the project is a rat race and the job site looks like a battle field.

The first row of houses were ready for trim. Before the project was finished, he will have worked on over seventy of these tiny homes. This was a big project and just the break Zeb needed to hone his finish carpentry skills without being afraid of being fired over making a mistake on an expensive piece of wood. He was tired of the finicky nature of custom housing. At least he would no longer be a pack mule toting Jeff's building materials around. Tract housing seemed to be a way out for him at the time; however, he had no idea how tired he would soon be getting.

After he drove to the project early Tuesday morning, the difference between custom homes and tract work was sorely evident. Concrete block fragments, scrap boards and roofing shingles were scattered everywhere. The area was a complete disaster. He had to be careful where he walked as he made his way to where the crew

was working. Ditches were open and deep. One slip and he could fall into a ditch and be buried alive if the walls caved in after he fell. He could hear plumbers talking as they were putting pipes in the ground for sewer, gas and water. Every so often, a trench caved in and had to be dug out again. He walked up to where the crew was working and asked to see the foreman.

"I am the foreman. What's it to you?"

"My name is Zebadiah Smith. I was sent over here to start as a trim carpenter."

"Who sent you?"

"Dan Apperson."

"Just testing you. I knew you were coming here today."

Zeb did not believe him. He thought the foreman really did not know about him coming there to work. By now, he had gotten used to construction workers being treated like lepers. "Where do I start?" he barked back at him. That was the only way for him to handle a belligerent foreman. If he showed a little back bone, they would either back down or come out swinging. Frankly, he did not care which option they chose.

The name is Chester. Then he said in a gruff

voice, “Well! Don’t just stand there, get out your tools and start hanging doors in the first vacant unit with a trim package in it.” He had never hung a door in his life, and he did not even know what a trim package was. What was he going to do?

After thinking about it, he said, “Chester, I have never hung a door before, and I do not know what a trim package is.”

“You are a trim man are you not?”

“Well. It depends on how experienced you mean. I want to be a trim man awful bad.”

“Okay. I will put you with someone who will train you a little. He will show you how to do some of the stuff and you can watch how he works and copy the rest. Remember, the name of the game out here is hurry up every chance you get. I am putting you with my best trim man and I expect you to learn real fast. The term we go by is slam-bang, which means slam it in and put a little muscle behind your hammer when you are driving nails into the wood.”

“Yes sir.” He was grateful for the opportunity to keep his job as a trim man, actually he was a trim carpenter’s helper but evidently Chester did not know he wasn’t a carpenter. The title made him

feel a lot more like a craftsmen and less like a miniature pachyderm.

His first day went smooth as he got adjusted to the fast pace of slam-bang carpentry. It made him sick to see how shoddy these little homes were being built. The crew called them cracker boxes. However, the lowest priced model was well beyond his financial means at the time.

By quitting time, he was a lot more tuckered out than he thought he would be. The next day would be more of the same agony. Every muscle and joint in his body ached as he got into his car and started home.

On the way, he stopped at the soda fountain to get several sandwiches and a drink or two before heading in for a much needed night's sleep. He walked to a booth and sat down. Kim came over to wait on him. He really did not want to see her, but he had no choice.

"What can I get for you?" she said.

There was something bothering her. Nonetheless, he was just too tired to pry it out of her. Being polite and aloof was the strategy of the day. He ordered a big meal and devoured it without much ado. When Kim came to collect the

dishes and clear the table, she said, “Seen Nancy lately?”

There was a long silence before, he said, “Yes. We plan to go to a dance tomorrow.”

“Where do you plan to go?”

“We are going to the dance school on Springfield Road.”

“Do you mean the old folks ballroom dance hall?”

“Yes.”

“I wouldn’t get caught dead in that place. It is ... well ... an old folks place.”

“Nancy seemed to like the idea of going to the dance hall with him,” he thought. He wanted to tell Kim he and Nancy would enjoy going there together. But after some additional thought, he decided to keep quiet. She was probably having a bad day, so he was not going to let her spoil his plans for the Wednesday night dance.

After he paid for the meal, he drove home without even looking back once.

The next morning when he woke up, every muscle in his body was stiff and sore. When he got to work at seven-forty-five, the crew was gathered in a group in front of the first house they

would be working on. They were pitching insults at each other. Each one of them was trying to build up their ego by spitting out toxic comments aimed at putting down the slower and weaker workers. At eight sharp the foreman shouted at the top of his lungs, “Let’s get to work.” Zeb forgot about how much his muscles ached as he bolted to his feet eager for another day of toil. His partner showed him how to hang doors, how to fit shelves, and how to cut and fit base boards. It surprised him at how easy trim work was after he was allowed to ease out of his fear of being fired.

By Wednesday after work, he had gotten a lot better at hanging doors and installing shelves. He was able to drive most of the nails without making any hammer marks on the wood. After work, he headed home to get ready to pick up Nancy and take her to the dance. She was really on his mind a lot more than he had ever expected.

At a quarter till six he drove into her yard and got out. She came to the door after he knocked. She was dressed up real nice and so was he. They looked real good together. The weather was cool and dry. The evening air cooled them as he

drove to the dance studio.

When they got there, only a few people had showed up. It was not an exciting crowd. On the other hand, there were not as many people for them to make a fool of themselves in front of. They went to the main entrance where Zeb bought their tickets at the door. The dance floor was scratched up a bit, but nicely polished. The walls were old and slightly water stained. The ceiling needed a coat of paint and the doors were a bit banged up from many years of use. The podium was old and the record player had five loudspeakers placed near the ceiling around the ballroom. He walked over to Red, the MC, and asked him to play some slow music because he and his girl did not know how to dance. Red told him very few people who came there really knew how to dance well and assured him they would feel right at home. He also told Zeb he turns down the lights and turns on a lighted rotating mirror ball for atmosphere.

Red made him feel more comfortable after he announced that the first dance would be a line dance. It would start in ten minutes, then he encouraged all to go to his refreshment counter

in the northwest corner of the ballroom.

Zeb asked Nancy if she would like something to drink. She said, “Yes. I would like a cola drink and some cookies.”

They went to the counter and purchased their goodies and had a seat in the dining area, which consisted of a few used kitchen tables and chairs to sit on. They discussed some of the local events that had happened during the past week. Zeb told her about his new job and how many houses they were working on. It seemed to impress her, only he left out the part about his aching back and sore muscles.

When the conversation died down, they sat there waited. After a long pause, Zeb said, “Nancy, I don’t want to seem too forward, but I really like you a lot. Do you think we will get married one day?”

“I do not know? I like you a lot too. Do you like babies? I have always wanted to be a mommy ever since I was a little girl. … Sorry I don’t mean to sound pushy.”

Things were moving along a little too fast for him. Zeb junior sounded too close for him just now. He needed to slow things down for the time

being. “Don’t worry, I think about babies once in a while myself, then the reality of diapers and baby bottles usually sets in real quick for me.”

“Me too.”

“I have thought of a Zeb junior at times. It will take me some time to get used to the idea of having a son.”

“What if I have a girl? Would you feel the same way?”

“I know my mother would be very happy with a baby girl, grandchild.”

“That is not what I asked.”

“Yes, a girl would be as welcome as a boy.”

“And my second question is: If we were to get married, would you cheat on me like Billy boy?”

“Do you mean Bill, Kim’s boyfriend?”

“Promise me you will not tell her.”

“I promise.”

“Yes, cheating Billy. He tried to get me to go out with him while Kim was working. I told him never to ask me for a date again. I also told him if he ever asked me or anyone I knew out again, I would tell Kim and the whole town. He never asked me again.”

“Nancy, I am a one woman man. I know it

makes me a lot more vulnerable. But, I believe in marriage, and I'll take any marriage vows very seriously. I hope you do too."

He was beginning to realize she's been living in a fantasy land of babies and marriage for so long he wondered if she would ever settle back down to earth again. Or was it a front to cover up a sinister past. One dance date was not enough time for him to get to know her well enough for marriage.

Just then, Red announced the first dance was about to start and called for everyone to line up. The girls in one line and the boys in another. After the music started both of them started to relax and enjoy the evening. The next dance was a slow waltz, which was followed by a medium fox-trot and then followed by a snappy tango. They sat out the tango. By eight o'clock he had figured out that the dances would start out real slow and then get faster and faster. When the number of dancers on the floor thinned out to a certain level, the MC would call out, "The next dance will be a slow dance." Then the dance floor would fill back up again.

At eight-thirty an intermission was announced.

Again all were invited to the concession counter and purchase some sweet treats and drinks. No alcohol or tobacco was allowed in Red's dance hall.

Zeb escorted Nancy over to the snack counter where they ordered another pair of drinks and chatted again. This time they stayed off the subject of babies and such. He changed the conversation to a future date. "Would you like to do this again sometime?"

"I would like very much to go out with you again."

"Would next Wednesday be all right with you."

"Yes. I really like dancing."

After the intermission, they finished out the evening by dancing almost every dance. By ten o'clock they both got the hang of dancing most of the various dances. Red came over to complement them on how quickly they had picked up on some of the dance steps. Zeb told him they watched the other dancers and copied what they were doing. He invited them to come to the regular dance lessons on Tuesday and Thursday nights. Red also invited them to come to the Friday night dance. He told them a lot more

people came to the dance on Friday nights. Zeb told him he could not make it because he had too many things he had to do on Fridays, but he told Red they planned to come to the dance next Wednesday evening.

The week went by fast and by Friday afternoon he was to get his first pay at the new job site. He was surprised to see how much money he got. He got in his car and went to the bank where he deposited some of his money, Then he went to the store and got a big box of chocolates for Nancy. Then he took them to her place and knocked on her door. She came to the door and said, “What a surprise. I didn’t expect to see you until next Wednesday.”

“I thought I would bring you this box of chocolates.” Then he handed the box of delights to her.

She said, “Thank you.”

Then he said, “Would you like to go to the mall and walk around for a while?”

“Okay. But give me a minute to freshen up first.”

“Would you like to step in while you wait?”

“Yes.” The place looked very ordinary and

clean. There were only a few decorations, the furniture was timeworn and the ceiling light fixtures were dingy.

“I know the place does not look very nice. My father has not been able to work on it for many years.”

“Do not think a thing of it. Your house looks fine to me.” He was flattering her. Someday he dreamed of owning one of those mansions he had been working on.

When she was ready, they went to the mall. There were a lot of shoppers there when they started walking around. After several hours, they ended up in the jewelry store again where Nancy drifted toward the wedding rings. He followed her like an obedient puppy. The sales person came over to them and said, “Is there anything I can show you?”

“No. We are just looking,” said Zeb.

Nancy said, “I would like to see this wedding ring set.” She pointed to a medium priced diamond ring set. She held the promise ring up to the light and watched the light bounce off the diamond’s facets. A joy came over her face followed by a smile of sheer delight as she slid it

on her wedding ring finger. Zeb took note of how she was reacting to the ring and said, “Do you like the rings?”

“They are so beautiful.”

“Just say yes and the rings are yours.”

“You do not even know how much they cost. Do you?”

“I will in a second. How much for the set?”

“The set goes for a hundred and ninety-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents.”

“It is too expensive, isn’t it?” Nancy said.

“You haven’t said yes yet.”

“Yes.”

“I know we haven’t known each other for very long, but does yes mean you will marry me?”

“Yes. It means I accept your marriage proposal.”

He asked the jeweler how much of a deposit he needed to hold the rings until Monday afternoon.

“I will need at least twenty dollars to hold them for no longer than next Friday at closing time.”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a twenty-dollar bill and handed it to him and said, “We will take the wedding ring set.”

Nancy looked at him in disbelief. She thought

he was kidding. A smile came over her face when Zeb put his arms around her and said, “Well, Mrs. Smith, where do you want to go from here.

“Let’s go look at the tools. I know you like tools.”

“Somehow tools do not interest me right this minute. I have different thoughts.”

“Zeb. You don’t want a fancy wedding, do you?”

“Do you?”

“No. I just want a few people to come to our wedding, but I do want to be married in a church.”

“I thought you were not into religion.”

“Not really. My mother was married in a church, so I want to be married in a church too.”

It was now obvious to him just how much she missed her mother. He realized she was hanging onto a few fragmented memories of her. He said, “I would like to get married in a church as you planned. Do you have a church in mind?”

“Yes I do. A preacher lives two doors down from my house and I want him to marry us in his church,” said Nancy.

“Okay. When do you want to tell him?”

“How about tomorrow morning around ten o’clock? We can go to his house and see if he is

at home, so we can ask him to marry us."

He had forgotten how he did not want to get involved in a church; however, this was for Nancy. He was going to look the other way for her sake.

They walked around the mall until it closed. He drove her home and then drove to the drugstore. After he parked he realized the drugstore closed hours ago.

When he got back to his room it was so empty without Nancy. He was so attached to her that he did not realize how dull and empty his life had been. He was on his way to a wonderful new life. However, he was haunted by the feeling Nancy will disappear in a puff of smoke.

He awoke at seven in the morning to find he had not been dreaming. He got the wedding ring receipt out of his pocket and placed it on the table in front of him. Money was no problem for him. With what he had saved and the money he transferred from his account back in Hattiesburg to his bank account in Phoenix, the combined total came to a little over 2,500 dollars. The bank was only a few blocks down the street from his apartment on Central Avenue. Nancy would find out about his

stash one day, but for now he kept his finances to himself like Todd, at the service station, had told him to several years ago. Saturday morning he and Nancy went to the preacher's house and knocked on his door. He came to the door and said, "Nice to see you Nancy. How are you?"

She said, "I am doing well. I would like you to meet my fiancé, Zebadiah Smith."

"It's my pleasure to meet you Mr. Smith. Getting married are you, Nancy?"

"We were hoping you would marry us after we get our marriage license."

"When would you like the ceremony to take place?"

"We have not exactly set a date yet. Zeb, what date did you have in mind?"

"Just as soon as we get the rings and work out the details. Don't you think we need to tell your father first?"

"No. My father knows all about it. I told him a long time ago I was going to marry you someday. He told me to let him know when the wedding is to take place so he can at least have enough time to get his suit ready." Zeb realized that the casual way in which he ended up at the jewelry store

was as planned in advance as surely as he orchestrated his dates with her.

After talking to the preacher for a few minutes, they went to her house where they talked to her father and discussed the wedding arrangements. It was to be nothing fancy, just a few flowers and a couple of people. Her father said he would have a small reception for her and Zeb after the wedding. They agreed to get married at the end of March on Saturday the 30th. Then they drove out to his parent's house where he reluctantly told his father he was getting married. After he gave the location of the church, his father started shouting at him and refused to attend a church wedding. He said, "Your mother and I got married at a justice of the peace and I do not see any reason to spend a lot of money just to hear a preacher say 'I now pronounce you man and wife.' Marriage is in the mind, not on a piece of paper."

He wished his father was married in a church. Perhaps he would have treated his family better if he had been married in a church. They left his father's place after the altercation over their wedding. Both of them were bitterly disappointed because his father's fangs came over them being

married in a church.

Zeb told Nancy it was not his father's fault. However, like so many abused people, Zeb tried to justify his father's crude behavior. "When my father was young, he joined a roving ministerial group and got so involved that when he found out they were hucksters purporting to be religious faith healers, he went to pieces and never fully recovered."

Deep down inside he knew there was no excuse for his father's behavior. Try as he might he could not understand what made his father go to pieces the way he did. After he took her home, he spent the rest of the day in his apartment brooding over his father's lack of interest in his wedding.

It was dark before he fixed himself a hamburger, some potatoes and a can of green beans. After he choked down his dinner, he went to sleep in less than five minutes. His work kept him tired all the time. There will soon come a day when he is going to have to admit his youth has expired, and all he can do is stand back and watch as younger workers take his place.

At daybreak he found himself milling around

with the rest of the crew at the housing project. As usual, they were making nasty remarks at each other. Tract housing did not have the same level of worker conduct as custom housing.

It was eight o'clock when the foreman called out, "Let's butcher some wood!" Zeb and his partner went to their house and started earning their aches, pains and blisters the hard way. Their unit was almost finished by break time. At break the crew all sat facing each other on a dusty living room. Some of them sat on the trim package, while others leaned against the inside walls. Markus, a small thin painter with a bushy mustache and paint blotches all over his clothes, said, "Zeb, what's happening? Had any good times lately?" He knew better than to tell him he was getting married. His dates with Nancy was just the ammunition Markus needed to harass him to tears. "No, I thought I would work on my car, but I lost interest when I found out how much work it needed."

"What about getting a girlfriend instead of your junk car? You need to be like me. I am real popular with the ladies."

"I am not very popular with the girls because I

don’t need a dozen of them so I can brag about how many I have.” That did it for Markus. He was trying to coax him into a scrap so he could verbally put him down.

Ten minutes later the foreman called out, “Get on you feet and make the boss some money!” Then the crew jumped to their feet and started working. While they worked, they said very little to each other. All of them knew getting caught standing around, whether talking or not, could mean a short day with a little gas money. In other words, they would have to look for another job.

After a few minutes, Zeb and his partner moved into another house to begin trimming it out. He was getting the hang of being a wood butcher. Speed was the name of the game and he was playing with a full house. Some of the crew started calling him the flying Z because he was pounding nails like they were going out of style. He also knew that the faster carpenters were the bulls of the woods. Other workers did not like to bump heads with stronger and faster workers lest they end up in a world of mental hurt.

It was a little past noon when someone hollered, “There is a house on fire.” A worker

appeared in every doorway trying to get a glimpse of the burning house. Five minutes later, a fire truck siren filled the air. The fire truck couldn't get close to the burning house because of the open ditches. To make matters worse, the nearest fire hydrant was five-hundred feet away. By the time the fire truck was able to start putting out the fire, the house had already burned to the ground.

Zeb said to his partner, "At least the fire company saved the other houses."

"Ain't no skin off my nose," his partner replied.

The stench of smoldering asphalt shingles and burnt wood filled the air as Chester walked up to them and said, "What's everybody doing standing around gawking at a burned down house for. Get back to work!" The day melted into evening as he focused on his work and getting married. Days were going by way too fast for him.

Little was said about the fire for the rest of the week. Word had it a painter had thrown a lighted cigarette down near a can of flammable paint thinner. He was told they had fired one of the painters for smoking in one of the houses while he was painting it. He was afraid of being fired. It was well known that if one got fired, they would

have a difficult time getting another job.

The end of the month was coming up on him fast. All of the arrangements were made and the wedding was scheduled for Saturday afternoon the 30th of March, 1957 at one-thirty. He found out her father had invited all of the people where he worked, most of his relatives and a few close friends. The wedding was growing in size and complexity. He also found out that a room at the famous El Casa Granito Hotel in San Diego, California would be where they would be spending the first night of their honeymoon. Life was getting more difficult for him as he sped toward married life.

Zeb and Nancy were staying close to each other by going somewhere together every night. His apprehension and his desire to get the wedding over with were weighing heavy on him. Rumors surfaced that Zeb was going to be the foreman on a new project being built in North Phoenix. They were going to build a row of small homes, for working people. They were going to be built along Elk Road just off 9th street. The houses were no-frill units with a small lot. They had almost no back yard and the front yard was about

five steps deep and the lot was a little wider than the house itself. They were selling for ninety-five-hundred dollars.

He did not want to be a foreman. It was the last thing he wanted to burden himself with. Even though he was a very good worker, he didn't want to be in charge of a crew. As he had heard, on Friday afternoon, Dan came to the job and told Zeb he would start as foreman on the Elk Ridge Estates project on Monday morning. He also told him he would have two carpenters working under him and when he proved he could do the job, he would add two new trim men to his crew. Dan informed him he would be getting three dollars an hour starting Monday.

He liked the feeling of being in charge of the crew. The sense of being the boss grew on him as he headed for his apartment. After he got ready, he went to the soda fountain to get something to eat and get a root beer float to celebrate his new job. When he sat down in his favorite booth. Kim gave him an angry glance. But she did not matter to him at the time. Several minutes later she came to his table and said, "Seen Nancy lately?"

“What do you mean by, ‘Seen Nancy lately?’ ”

“Nothing, I have been feeling a little bit down lately.”

He immediately knew something bad had happened and wanted to know all about it. Kim started to cry and said, “I caught my boyfriend with a slinky blonde twice my age.

Even though he empathized with her, he was not going to get in the middle of her lover’s squabble. He was not exactly sure how Nancy would take it even if he did got involved in her dilemma.

“Well, Kim. Someone else will come along and you will forget all about your troubles. Such is life. One day we are on top of the world and the next we are down in the dumps. So cheer up, tomorrow will bring something new for you, you will see. I have been there many times myself.”

“I know, but it hurts today.”

“You could come to the dance with us Wednesday night. Perhaps you could meet someone there who won’t cheat.”

“I would rather die first!”

She tried to change the subject. “What are you going to have? Let me guess. A root beer float

and a double-meat ham sandwich with the works."

"Close enough." Since she was already shattered because her boyfriend got caught cheating on her, he decided not to tell her about his new job title. Besides, he wanted to tell Nancy first.

After he finished his meal, he headed for Nancy's place. It did not take him long before he was knocking on her door. She came to the door all dressed up. He was very glad he got dressed up before he came to see her.

She said, "Come in my husband to be."

"Well, just for a minute." They went in and sat close to each other and spent the next five minutes embraced and kissing each other. When they came up for air, Zeb told her the news about his foreman's position, and more importantly about the raise he would be getting.

"I feel awkward saying this, but here goes. "Honey. Would you like to go to the mall for a while and then get something to eat?" said Nancy.

"Why should you feel awkward saying honey to me? Is it that difficult for you to say?"

“You have not addressed me as honey yet. Is it easy for you to say honey?”

“You got me there. It will be hard for me to get used to it as well.

“Do you want to look at tools before we go to the mall?”

“A foreman does not use tools. They lead a crew. I want to go to the mall and look at clothes. I need to look the part.” Again, he was only dreaming. He did not know he was only going to be a working foreman, which meant he would be working with his tools.

“Somehow I do not think you will ever give up looking at tools altogether. It is in your blood and I know it.”

“Yes dear. I suppose you are right. Be that as it may. Are you ready to go?” said Zeb.

“I am ready. ... Honey.”

“Well dear, our car awaits.”

They walked around the mall for a few hours and then headed south on Central avenue to McDowell Road where he turned east until they saw a barbecue restaurant they agreed was right for the occasion. After they went into the barbecue restaurant, they sat down at a table

near the west wall. The waitress came over to them and said, “Welcome to Marty’s Fine Barbecue. What can I order for you?”

I will have two Barbecue sandwiches and a large iced tea. The lady will have a barbecue sandwich with a cola drink, a baked potato, a dinner salad and a side of mixed vegetables. And I would like to add a side of mashed potatoes with gravy and a chef salad.

They sat there for a while before he realized she had something on her mind. Finally, she said, “Remember when I told you about Kim’s boyfriend trying to pick me up.”

“Yes.”

“He got caught cheating on her.”

He was half torn between telling her and having her find out he knew about it all along. If he didn’t tell her, she might find out about Kim telling him earlier and then he would have to explain why he was in the drugstore in the first place.

He finally said, “I know. I was real powerful hungry after I got off work, so I stopped in at the soda fountain and got something to eat. Kim told me all about it. I invited her to go to the dance

with us so she can maybe find a new boyfriend."

"What did she say?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes I do!"

She said, "I would rather die first." Nancy broke into a smile and chuckled uncontrollably. The idea of her having someone and her sister being out in the cold made her feel good about herself. It was a cruel thought for her, but she was always the one left out and now Kim had no one. "I do not think it will take Kim long to find someone else. She is young and attractive. Perhaps that is the reason she is having a hard time finding someone who won't cheat on her."

"Zeb. When you first met Kim, you wanted to ask her out didn't you?"

"Yes, but she had a boyfriend. As I told you before, I am a one woman man. No one else matters to me as long as I am with you."

"Would you leave me for her?"

"Are you kidding. She cannot hold a candle to you. I trust you. I do not trust her. I love you. I feel sorry for her, but I can't really help her."

"That is true. You did invite her to go to the dance with us." Then she again put on a great big

simile.

“What are you so happy about now?”

“I can see the look on my sister’s face when you invited her to a dance with us. I only wish I could have been there to see it for myself.”

“Then you are not mad at me for stopping in and getting something to eat.”

“No honey, I am glad you got something to eat. I do not ever want to see you or our kids go hungry.”

“What kids.”

“The ones we are going to have.”

He got very silent as he pondered. Kids. “I don’t want our kids to go hungry either. I want to be a good daddy.”

“I know you will, that is why I love you so much. You have daddy written all over you.”

Zeb was not sure he had daddy written all over him. He was feeling more like he had afraid of kids written all over him. Like it or not, children were in his future, whether he wanted them or not, as sure as the sun sets in the west.

Nancy and Zeb were inseparable all weekend long. They were together every chance they got. Before he knew it, it was time to go to his first day

of work as a foreman. He was afraid of failing. How could he tell other people to “Get to Work?” However, if he didn’t get his crew to start working, he would not have a job himself.

The two men were waiting for him when he arrived at the first house to be trimmed out. They introduced themselves as Albert and Mark. Both of them had many years of fast paced carpentry experience. He felt confident around them. They seemed to respect him even though he was half their ages. Both men told him they did not want to be either a lead man or a foreman. They said they were just working stiffs and had no interest in setting the world on fire. His new crew spent the next ten minutes bragging about how good they were at trimming houses. Zeb said, “By quitting time the proof of your skills will be in your day’s work.”

“We will do you proud Zeb.”

“Relax, I don’t bite.” At eight o’clock sharp on his dollar watch, Zeb said in a normal voice, “Let’s get to it.” It was his first call to get a crew started. Just because he only had a two man crew, his job did not feel any less exhilarating to him. He was the boss now and he felt like a roaring lion. Both

men worked hard for him. It looked like his job as foreman was going to be a shoe-in. That is until Dan stopped by at the end of the day. He said, “I know your men can get a little more done in a day. You need to give your crew a pep talk tomorrow before they start to work. Tell them I expect more wood on the walls at the end of a day.”

“All right, I will tell them what you said.” The next day went a little better. Albert and Mark said they did not blame him for telling them they needed to increase production. “We have heard those words most of our life,” said Albert. Mark told him the heat would be off after the boss gets a few paychecks from the project under his belt.

Albert said, “You’re going to make a good foreman Zeb. You are not pushy and have humility. But be forewarned, there are some workers out there who will push their luck and try to take advantage of your good nature.”

“I don’t think so! I cut my fangs on uprooting trees in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I went home many a night with my hands so stiff I could not close them up. As my friend, Bear, said to me, ‘The first man I fired made me cry all night long,

but now I don’t even blink an eye.’ ”

Albert settled down a little. Their speed had increased a lot by the end of the week. They were getting used to house trimming and were starting to cut corners in order to increase production. Zeb was working with them, which made thing go a lot faster.

Dan came to the project on Wednesday at quitting time. He told Zeb how pleased he was at the amount of work being done. Zeb told him he was going to get married this Saturday afternoon and was going to spend his honeymoon in the El Casa Granito Hotel in San Diego, California. He would be away from work for three days.

Dan said, “Are you sure three days is enough time off for your honeymoon?”

“Yes. My fiancée doesn’t like fancy shindigs. She's a real down to earth girl. She likes malls, mountains, and snow.”

“Three days doesn’t seem long enough for a honeymoon. When will you be back?”

“I will be back to work on Wednesday morning. We are getting married on Saturday afternoon. Then we will spend the night at the Hotel in San Diego.”

“Good luck and congratulations on your marriage.”

Friday came very fast. While he was picking up his tools for the day, Dan drove up and walked over to him and said, “I got you a little gift for your honeymoon.” He handed him an envelope with a golden bow on it. Dan told him to open it right away. He opened the envelope and there was a hundred dollar bill inside it along with a note that read:

Thanks for all you have put into your work. I appreciate what you’ve done for me. Have a great honeymoon and come back to work soon.

Sincerely, Dan

“I don’t know what to say.”

“Say, see you next Wednesday morning ready for work. By the way, when you get back, I will have three new trim men for you. All of them have a lot of experience and good references. They should work out for you. If they don’t, fire them.”

It was becoming crystal clear his luck with the crew was about to run out. He will soon have to face the fact he will have to fire somebody. The thought of being required to can a carpenter did not excite him at all. However, he put it out of his

mind and tried to focus on his upcoming marriage.

Saturday morning he was getting ready to go to the church when he thought he would get a quick meal at the drugstore. He put on some casual clothes and started walking toward the drugstore. When he sat in a booth, Kim looked at him and did a quick shoulder high wave of her right hand and gave him a big smile. A while later she came to his table and said, “What is the order of the day?”

“The usual.”

She said, “Guess what?”

“I don’t know. What?”

“I have a new boyfriend. His name is David. I met him at church last Sunday. He is a nice stable guy. He treats me like a lady. I admit he is not wild like Bill, my old boyfriend, but I have grown up since then and look at life a little different since I accepted Jesus as my personal savior.”

“You joined a church?”

“Yes. The same one you and Nancy are getting married in this afternoon.”

“Are you coming to our wedding?”

“Yes I am. I will leave here in an hour and I will

be there when you and Nancy get married.

"I invited David and some of his family to the wedding too. You don't mind, do you?"

"No. After all, you are Nancy's sister." However, he was beginning to feel the pressure to go to church. But, it would have to wait until they got back from their honeymoon, so he could find out how much influence Kim was going to have on her sister.

Zeb left the drugstore filled with questions about Kim. It

was difficult for him to relax after talking to her. The food filled his stomach, but she haunted his mind. She had changed everything and became a threat to his way of life. He was afraid she would come between him and Nancy. He mentally tuned out and thought, “This is my wedding day, and I am supposed to be happy. So be it. I will not let my wedding be spoiled by fear.”

He went to his apartment to prepare for the

ceremony. He did not want to be married in a church. On the other hand, he wanted Nancy to fulfill her dream of getting married in a church like her mother. His future was financially secure, but his emotions were heading into a thunderstorm. He put on the tux her father had rented for him, got into his car, which he had spent hours polishing the best he could and headed for the church. When he got there, he had a hard time finding a parking place. Where did all the cars come from? His wedding was supposed to be simple. After driving around for several minutes, he found a parking space and squeezed his car into it. He felt like he was walking to a convention as he headed for the church entrance. He started to sweat and feel like he was about to make a big mistake. When he entered through the main entrance of the church, he saw that nearly every pew was filled. It was a good thing he did not need to find a seat for himself. He looked around to see if his mother was there. And he tried to see if his father changed his mind and decided to attend their wedding. Neither his mother nor his father had showed.

It was twenty minutes before the wedding was

scheduled to start. He felt so out of place among all the finely dressed people, most of whom he did not even know. All of her relatives and most of her fellow workers were there. Even Kim had more friends there than he had guests. His guest count so far was zilch. He forced a smile as he walked toward the preacher's office. He quietly knocked. Reverend Wallman answered the door and said, "Zeb. How nice it is to see you. You look troubled. Is anything bothering you?"

"Yes. No one came to see me get married and it looks like all of Nancy's relatives are here. I feel so left out."

"Oh. Don't worry. I know there are a lot of people out there who are here for you too. The Lord is with you, and I promise you He will prevail. You shall see."

"Have you ever married anyone who had nobody come to their wedding?"

"Many of the ceremonies I have performed over the years had only the bride, the groom and a few witnesses attend."

"I see. I guess it's not very important after all." But Rev. Wallman could see how hurt he was. "The Lord is here with you. I know He will ease

your pain."

"May I use your telephone to call my mother, so I can find out if she is coming? It pains me so not to see her here."

"By all means, pleasure do."

He picked up the telephone and then dialed his mother's number. "Hello, this is Zeb. ... Is Mom there? ... Hello Mom. Are you coming to my wedding today, It's about to start? ..."

"Why not? Can't you go against dad just this once? ..."

"I see." He gently placed the receiver on the phone base as his eyes began tearing. The preacher put his arm on Zeb's shoulder and said, "Son, I know you are troubled just now, but if you will pray with me, I know everything will come to sunshine in the presence of the Lord."

In less than a minute, Zeb relaxed and got a hold of himself. He strengthened his resolve not to become a victim of his father's cruel ways. How could his father influence his mother so much she could not attend her son's wedding?

"The preacher said, "Are you ready to go to the altar?"

"Yes I am," he said, with a determined voice. "I

will not let anyone spoil my wedding."

They walked together out of the church office and headed for the altar. When they got near it, Zeb continued walking toward the church entrance where he saw Kim with several people. When he got close enough to her, she said, "Zeb, this is David, my friend. And this is his Father, Reverend Clark." David was six feet tall and quite handsome. He had brown hair and was wearing a dark blue suit and a tie. Reverend Clark looked like his son except he was older and weighed a little more.

"Pleased to meet you Reverend Clark." The very word reverend sent a chill over him. Was his marriage going to end up being a life-long struggle over religion? Would Kim's new boyfriend try to convert him? He loved Nancy dearly, but what would she say if he asked her point blank about going to church? For now, he forced himself to concentrate on his wedding.

"Nancy told me you did not expect many to come to your wedding because it was supposed to be a stand up ceremony. I can fill in on your side if you would like."

"I'm a construction worker. I do not expect

much out of people. Thanks anyway for your kind offer to fill in for me."

"Zeb, is your car out front?"

"I had to park it down the street."

"If it would be all right with you, I will quickly find out who is parked out in front of the church and get them to move their car, so I can drive your car up to the church entrance and park it there for you."

"No. I drive a Model A Ford two door sedan."

"I drove a Model A for many years when I was young."

He reluctantly handed him the key and said, "You have to give her a little choke to get her fired up."

In less than seven minutes, the Wedding March filled the church and afterwards the preacher began the ceremony.

Reverend Clark slipped outside and parked Zeb's car on the church driveway near the main entrance.

At exactly 1:30 Zeb was standing next to the preacher as he said, "Who among you is here to give the woman, Nancy Lee Winslow to this man, Zebadiah Emmanuel Smith?"

Her father spoke up and agreed to give her away.

“Will you come foreword?”

When she was in front of the altar, the preacher said, “Is there anyone among you who will come forward to state any reason these two should not be wedded in Holy matrimony? If so, Let them come forward now or forever hold their peace.”

There was no response.

Rev. Wallman continued. When the ceremony was almost over, he said, “Do you Nancy Lee Winslow take this man, Zebadiah Emmanuel Smith, to have, to hold and to cherish so long as you both shall live?”

“I do.”

“Do you Zebadiah Emmanuel Smith take this woman, Nancy Lee Winslow, to have, to hold and to cherish so long as you both shall live?”

“I do.” “Zebadiah, do you have a ring to place on Nancy Lee Winslow’s left hand?”

“I do.”

“You may place the ring on her finger and repeat after me. With this ring I thee wed. ... ”

“No one has come forth to state a reason why this woman and this man should not be united in

Holy matrimony. With that said, I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride."

After the kiss, The preacher said, "I now introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Smith, man and wife."

They both stood there for the benediction. Rev. Wallman told of how they would be successful and how the Lord had blessed their marriage.

Nancy's eyes were glowing with pride. Zeb knew she was extremely happy. He took his new bride by the hand and they went out of the church together in a traditional shower of rice.

In a few minutes they were on their way to her house for the reception. The driveway was clear and there were no cars to be seen. The place looked deserted. They got out of the car and went into her house to find it filled with people. Her father, some of her relatives, her fellow workers, and to his surprise, Zeb's crew, Dan, Jeff and several other workers he knew were there. On a table in the middle of the room was a neck high pile of beautifully wrapped gifts. They opened all of the them and then thanked everyone for coming to their reception.

Life was good to them. They were on their way

to a very happy and loving life together. Two hours later, the guests began to leave one or two at a time. By five-thirty, only her father and the couple remained. To their surprise, her father said, “I reserved and paid for a room for you in San Diego tomorrow; I also rented a honeymoon suite for you tonight at the Cactus Winds Hotel located on Central avenue. Your honeymoon suite is on the third floor where you will have a great view of Phoenix.” He handed Zeb the room key and said, “Take care of my Nancy for me. I will miss her.”

“We will come and visit often. I promise,” said Nancy.

One could see how deeply moved her father was by his daughter’s marriage. He was already missing her presence in his house, even before she left on her honeymoon. Kim had moved out when she was eighteen, and with Nancy moving out, her father will be going home alone for the first time.

Her father said, “I am not much at fixing a big dinner, so if you will let me, I will take you both to dinner.”

Zeb said, “You have done so much for us I

could not let you pay for our dinner."

Nancy's eyes turned to fireballs as she said, "Dad, I want to go outside and have a word with my husband!"

Zeb felt like a whipped pup and wondered what he had done wrong to make her so angry. When they got outside, Nancy said, "I know you don't want to impose on my father. Nonetheless, You are going to accept his offer, aren't you?"

"Why."

"His house is empty now. He just wants to prolong the inevitable. He needs us to at least be there for him once in a while. 'You understand?"

"Do I ever. I blew it, didn't I?"

She said nothing for a while before she said, "You are going to tell him we will have dinner together, aren't you?"

"Yes I will."

When they got back inside, he said, "I will accept your kind offer to take us to dinner. Because you have done so much for us, I must insist on leaving the tip."

"Nancy, I knew you were marrying a real man. But, you have also married a good one."

They went to a fancy restaurant where they had

prime rib and Filet Mignon dinners. They discussed their future and what they planned to do. Nancy did not bring up the subject of babies, but Zeb knew they were on her mind just the same.

After dinner, she hugged her father and Zeb warmly shook his hand. At the same time, he was fully aware he would one day be feeling exactly what her father was feeling right now. They went their separate ways after the meal. Zeb and his new wife went to the Cactus Winds Hotel and her father went home for the first time without his daughter.

The night went well for them and they enjoyed each others company until after midnight before they drifted off to sleep for the first time together. It was five o'clock when Zeb woke up. He woke Nancy up as well and said, "We need to have breakfast soon. It is a long drive to California and we need to pack up and get started before it gets too late to make it to the hotel. They stopped at an all night truck stop on their way out of Phoenix and had breakfast. After they finished, Nancy said, "Have you ever been to California before?"

"No. Have you?"

“I have never been out of Arizona in my whole life. That is one of the reasons I love you. You have been everywhere.”

“Not really. I have only been to Hattiesburg, Mississippi and all the states in between. It looks like both of us are going to be real excited when we see the ocean for the first time. I hear it is so big the eye cannot take it in all at once. The Hotel is not on the ocean, but your father told me you can see the ocean from the top floor balcony.”

“We are going to see the ocean, aren’t we?”

“You’ve got it. I will make sure you put your feet in the ocean before we come back home.” said Zeb

“You are an adventure. I love you very much and I am glad I married you.”

“Honey, I love you so much I can hardly stand it.” Zeb had packed a lot of extra car parts and other things he needed to cross over the desert between Phoenix and San Diego. He made sure they had at least three gallons of water for the radiator and two gallons of water to drink. He also made sure they had a lot of snack foods just in case his car broke down.

“Ready to go to California?”

“I can’t wait,” said Nancy.

They slowly drove west toward Yuma, Arizona. The road was flat and dusty. Nancy already knew his car was only good for about forty-five miles-an-hour average at best. At that rate it would take over nine hours if he drove straight through. However, he had no intention of driving all the time. They planed to stop at some of the curio shops along the way and also stop at some scenic places as well.

They huddled as close to each other as the gearshift would allow them to. She kept her arm on his shoulders until the circulation in it forced her to take a rest. They stopped at a curio shop when they got to Yuma. The shop carried a lot of Indian jewelry, assorted keepsakes and other novelties. Nancy saw a silver necklace made by a Native American. Even though it cost over thirty dollars, she had to have it. Zeb was obligated to pony up the thirty dollars to buy her the necklace.

Before they went another mile he saw a nice gas station where he put twelve gallons of gas in their car, checked the oil and checked the water in the radiator. He made sure the tires were inflated to the correct air pressure and then they were off

again.

Nancy said, “I am real hungry, do you think we could stop soon and get something to eat?”

“What’s your pleasure?”

“I want a hamburger, some fries and a drink.”

“Consider it done. Tell me when you see a restaurant that suits your fancy.”

Before they drove three blocks, Nancy saw a hamburger stand. She said, “How about that one?” They have giant burgers. The sign over there says so.”

Zeb drove the car into a parking space. They got out and went in, placed their order and then had a seat. They started talking about how the rest of the trip would go and what they could expect to see along the way. After Zeb got their food, they took their time eating lunch. The trip was beginning to get old. It would be another five to seven hours before they would be in San Diego if all went well. They agreed to drive straight through. Nancy said, “You bought me this beautiful necklace. I could not ask you to stop at any more souvenir shops.”

“We can make up for it when we get to San Diego.” Zeb was beginning to tire of staring at the

windshield and turning his head to the side so he could catch a glimpse of the desert as it passed by. The weather was cool and calm. Virtually nothing was said for the next three hours. They had to cross over several small mountain peaks on their way to the hotel. The temperature dropped slightly as they started up the grade between them and the California coast. The cooler air made them feel more awake and they soon started talking again. However, it was not happy talk. They were exhausted and just wanted their long boring trip to be over.

The car faithfully went up the grade at less than twenty-five miles an hour; however, it was not long before he had to shift to second gear as they continued up the grade at a little over twelve miles-an-hour. It looked like they would not get to the motel before the reservation deadline.

Three hours later they were within fifty miles of San Diego. The car was going a lot faster than before, but Zeb knew better than to let his car go too fast down a grade. His father always told him, “Always go down a hill in the same gear you went up the hill.” He always followed his father’s instructions despite how badly he felt about his

childhood.

At seven o'clock, they arrived at the hotel. They were worn out and ready for a good night's sleep. The Model A is one of the most lovable vehicles ever built. However, times had changed and people wanted big six and eight cylinder engines, and they wanted more creature comforts inside their cars too. But, Nancy was only interested in being with Zeb. It did not matter how she got to California as long as he was with her, and he felt the same way about her.

When they drove into the hotel parking lot. He felt a little uncomfortable in front of such a luxurious place. On the other hand, Nancy was ecstatic. She had never dreamed of being able to stay in such a fancy place. They went into the lobby and checked in at the clerk's desk. Then Zeb said, "We need to go down to the beach and find a seafood place so we can get some crab cakes. Have you ever eaten crab cakes before?"

"No. And I am not in the mood to try them now."

"Are you interested in going to a seafood restaurant?"

"Yes, but I don't want to try anything new right

now. The long trip made me feel like I do not want anything to eat. Well, maybe a tuna fish sandwich would be okay."

"You've got it." They drove over the bridge to the ocean as Zeb promised. She took off her shoes and stood there as the water rolled over her feet. Afterward, they walked up and down the beach looking for seashells, like millions of other tourists have done ever since the ocean was discovered years ago. Within an hour, all of his pockets were full and her purse could hold no more. They put the shells into a bag and placed it on the back seat of their car. Then, they began to search for a seafood place. It did not take long for them to find a quaint little restaurant with a view of San Diego Bay. The smell of freshly cooked seafood filled the air.

"Look Honey, they even have fish nets strung up on the walls." The wooden chairs matched the sea motif of the small restaurant. A boat anchor was hung on the wall by the restaurant entrance. Several porthole windows were installed in appropriate places throughout the dining room. The table cloths had a seafood theme embroidered into them. The napkins were

decorated with an embossed ship's wheel. And the place had driftwood decorations everywhere. The floor was hardwood and painted with marine spar varnish to make it look like the deck of a ship that had been at sea for many years. The hostess came over to them and said, "How many in your party?"

"Two," said Zeb.

The hostess escorted them to a cozy table with a view of the bay. She evidently knew they wanted to experience the moment. After being seated, the waitress came to their table and placed a menu in front of each of them and said, "Are you ready to order?"

Zeb knew this restaurant was not anything like a soda fountain. But he was not about to forget about having a root beer float. "Could you give us a moment to look over the menu?"

"Raise your hand when you are ready to order."

"We will."

They studied the menu and discussed what they were about to order. Nancy leaned over to him and whispered, "Kind of pricey, aren't they?"

"Don't worry about the price," he whispered back to her.

“But, I do worry about the prices. I have had to live on so little for so long that it will take me a long time to get used to having even a few small luxuries.”

“I will tell you when we are running off the deep end.”

“Yes dear.”

“What are you going to have?”

“The deep sea bass dinner looks good to me.”

“I thought you said you wanted a tuna fish sandwich.”

“Yes, but I changed my mind. The bass dinner looks good to me now.”

“What do you want to drink? A glass of wine?”

“No I do not drink. But, you can have a glass of wine if you like.”

“Not a chance. I have seen too many people’s lives go down the drain over alcohol. We will leave the beer and wine for the paying customers,” said Zeb.

“Good. What are you going to have?”

“Lots of crab cakes and a root beer float.”

He raised his left hand and the waitress came to their table and stood in front of them.

“Are you ready to order?”

“Yes. The lady will have the deep sea bass dinner with an order of fries and a dinner salad with French dressing and a large cola drink.

“And I will have five crab cakes, an order of fries and a baked deep sea bass entrée with a large root beer float.”

“We do not have root beer floats.”

“Do you have root beer?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have vanilla ice cream?”

“Yes.”

“I will have a large root beer and a serving of vanilla ice cream, so I can make my own root beer float.”

Nancy’s eyes lit up at what he had said. He knew he had displeased her again. After the waitress left to place their order, he said, “What did I do wrong this time?”

“I know you ordered a lot because you are a construction worker and need to pack in the food, but you could have left out the wisecrack about making your own root beer float. She is just a waitress, not a god.”

“I am sorry I upset you, but it is in my nature to tell it like it is. I will try to tone it down, at least,

when we are out in public."

"I am a little touchy about being so far away from my dad for the first time in my life. I know he is all by himself. Please bear with me."

Leaving her father was going to be a lot harder than she thought. She was torn between the two men she loved the most. So he said, "When we get back to Phoenix, I will take you to your dad's house first thing so you can check on him. Fair enough?"

She sat there for a minute and said nothing. He knew she wanted her daddy there now. After he thought it over for several minutes, he said, "I will tell you what; we can call your dad from the hotel. 'All better now?"

"I don't want you to think I cannot live without my father. It is just ... going to take me a long time to get used to not having him around. You know, I even work in the same building with him."

"I know how you feel. You will never know how much it hurt me not to have any of my family come to our wedding."

Oh! Yes I do. No matter how many people came to our wedding, nothing could stop the grief I felt because my mom could not be there to see

me get married."

He thought it was time to change the subject lest they dwell on this sour note too long. "The weather is sure nice here in San Diego, isn't it?"

"Yeah the weather is fine, but I do not like being around so many people. It makes me feel like I am in a cage."

"We can fix that when we get back to Phoenix after we visit your dad. How about going up to Flagstaff and visiting the pine trees again?"

Her eyes lit up like Christmas morning. "Do you really mean it?"

"Yep." The waitress came back to their table with a huge serving tray in her right hand. She looked like she was worn out. Her white apron was a little wrinkled and had several stains on it. She was wearing a light yellow waitress dress with white rickrack around the edges. She was also wearing think glasses. Her sight was poor and she did not use her left arm. He wanted to know if she had been injured in a traffic accident, but he knew better than to be forward and inquire about her arm. He was sure he would have to sleep on the floor if he caved in to his curiosity.

They leisurely ate dinner. When they finished,

Zeb left a dollar and a half tip and headed for the cash register near the restaurant exit. After he paid the tab, they went back to the ocean and again began looking for more sea shells in the dark. The only visible light came from beach resorts and hotels alone the shoreline. Once they found all the shell they could stow, they headed for their car where they deposited them in the bag of shells on the back seat. Zeb could not resist the moment. The lights of the night and the atmosphere were too much for him. He put his arms around her and kissed her for over ten minutes.

When they got back to the hotel, they went to their room and turned on the television. In a few minutes they were busy and not really paying much attention to it. Later they cleaned up and retired for the night.

At seven o'clock in the morning they got up feeling as though their batteries were fully charged. They packed their belongings and put them in the car. After checking out of the hotel, they went to a small restaurant for breakfast. After they ate, it was time to head back to Phoenix.

The Construction Prison CD

He drove to the highway leading out of San Diego. They had driven over 30 miles before they started up the foothills. He pulled into a gas station to fill up with gas and check the oil, tires and water. Ten minutes later, he went into the station office to pay for the gas and get some goodies for the trip home. Then they again started toward Phoenix. Two hours later there was nothing but trees on both sides of the road. Suddenly the car started making a squealing sound.

Zeb stopped the car, got out and then opened the hood. He tried to find out where the sound was coming from. It did not take him long to find out the water pump was making the racket. He felt like kicking himself for not replacing it before they got married. His failure to fix the water pump when he knew it was worn out caused them to be stranded on the side of the road. He felt responsible for their dilemma as Nancy said, “Are we stuck here forever?”

“It is just the water pump kicking up a fuss. I

am afraid I am going to have to replace it. I had hoped it would last until we got back to Phoenix. I Guess I was wrong. Oh well. We have to let the engine cool down and then I will have to replace it. It is a good thing it is not July."

"Where are we going to get a new water pump?"

"We do not have to. I have a bunch of spare parts in the back of the car under a tarp."

"Will it take long to fix the car?"

"We should be on our way again in three hours if all goes well." They sat there and talked for almost an hour. Then Zeb got out his wrenches, the used water pump and the gasket shellac. When he got out of the car to see if the engine was cool enough for him to work on, Nancy was standing right beside him. He turned to her and said, "Don't you want to stay inside the car out of the weather?"

"I want to help."

"Help do what?"

"I want to do my part and help you fix our car."

"Yeah. Right." He decided, he would put her on the spot by handing her the wrenches. Then he said, "Be my guest."

“Which bolts do I take out? There are a lot of them. I do not want to ruin our car.”

He got a bucket from the back of the car and put it under the engine to catch the precious water-alcohol mix when the water pump was removed. He then pointed at the bolts which held the water pump in place and said, “These bolts.” She surprised him at how quickly she removed the water pump. When she handed him the pump, she said, “I did my half, now it’s your turn.”

“You are awesome.” The sun was high in the sky as he replaced the water pump. After the car was ready to drive again, he climbed in and started it up, then he said, “It runs like new again.”

Nancy looked at him with a big grin on her face.

“What are you grinning about?”

“We make a good team, don’t we?”

“That’s the way it is supposed to be, isn’t it?” Then they continued going toward Phoenix. The miles went by rather fast. They were near Alpine, California when Nancy said, “I am starved. If there is a restaurant in Alpine, can we stop and get something to eat?”

“I am hungry too. We are almost out of snacks,

so I need to stock up on them."

"I do not want snacks. I want real food like a hamburgers and hot dogs."

"Real food?" When they got to Alpine, both of them were grateful to see a lodge like store and restaurant. They entered the restaurant side of the building. It looked like jolly old England inside. It also had a mountain atmosphere about it. After they ate their meal, it was time to get going again, but Nancy wanted a memento. She said, "We need to get something to take back home."

"Okay. Whatever you want."

They visited the shop beside the restaurant where she found a souvenir silver spoon with a local emblem on it. Zeb bought it for her along with three dollars worth of snacks. Soon they were on their way again. The trip was routine until they reached the Arizona state line. As they crossed over the Colorado River, the sign read: "Entering Arizona." Both of them breathed a sigh of relief after they crossed the bridge that separates Arizona from California.

They stopped in Yuma for dinner. When they finished, he gassed up the car and drove twenty-five miles before he started up a small mountain

grade and then back down to the desert again. Two hours later they heard a loud pop and the car wobbled back and forth as Zeb tried to bring the car to a safe stop. The car drifted off of the highway and bounced off of a large rock and then slammed into an embankment on the other side of a gully. It was a wake-up call for both of them.

“Are you hurt?” he said.

“No. Are you?”

“I am a little shook up.” He got out of the car to check for any damage.

“Is it bad?” said Nancy.

“I do not see any damage except for the front wheel, but we are going to have an awful time getting the car back on the road again.”

Back then, only a few drivers were brave enough to cross over the desert during the day, but he was grateful it did not happen during the night. They might be there for many hours before a single car or truck came along. In the fifties, many trucks traveled during the night so they could avoid traffic and beat the summer heat. The open roads away from big cities were usually deserted in the afternoon. Most people where in the towns trying to find something to eat or just

taking a break from a long hot drive.

Instinctively he looked in the back of the car to see if his precious water supply was still in tact. Afterward, he took another look to try and figure out how to get the car back on the highway.

Nancy said, “Do you know what caused the car to land in the ditch?”

“The passenger side front tire blew out. I am afraid the tire and wheel are a goner.”

“Do we have another one?”

“Yes. But I might have to patch the tube and pump it up. We will see.”

“That will be fun, won’t it?” she said sarcastically.

“Not really.” He got out his little folding army shovel and started digging the dirt and rocks from behind the left front driver’s side tire and the opposite right rear tire so all of the wheels would be firmly on the ground. After he finished, he started the car and tried to back it out of the ditch, but it just rocked back and forth. He let out on the clutch over and over again, but it was hopeless.

“Is it going to move?”

“I don’t think so. Do you know how to drive?”

“My dad tried to teach me several times.”

“Well. You are going to learn how-to drive right now.”

He put the car in reverse, then he showed her how to pump the clutch to get the car to rock back and forth so she could back it out of the ditch. Then Zeb got in front of the car and told her to start rocking the car. He pushed fiercely on the front bumper. This time he was grateful for being a construction worker. After several attempts the car took off and climbed out of the ditch. But Nancy did not know how to stop it. Fortunately she floored the gas pedal and the engine choked out. The car came to rest in the middle of the road. Zeb took a look at the tire again. It had a hole in it as big as a baseball. To make matters worse, The wheel was bent and several of the spokes were broken when it hit a big rock before the car came to a stop.

He told Nancy she did a great job getting the car onto the road, and told her he was going to start teaching her how to drive when they got back to Phoenix.

He took the spare tire off the back of the car and checked it out. Fortunately it was in good

shape. Unless something else was broken or the axle was bent, they would be on their way in a short while.

After he got the tire changed, he had to pump it up a little with a hand operated tire pump he always kept in the car.

“Well,” he said. “We sure are having a wild honeymoon, are we not?”

“Yes we are. Running off the road was about as exciting as being bitten by a rattlesnake.” Zeb began to realize Nancy was getting fed up with his car breaking down all the time.

Once the car was ready and given a final inspection, they were once again on their way home.

Several hours later, they were just outside of Slate, Arizona when a police patrol car turned on its red lights and blew its siren at them. Zeb pulled the car over to the side of the road and waited for the police officer to come to the car window.

“Did I do anything wrong officer?”

“This is a 25 mile-per-hour zone through here. I clocked you at over forty-five miles-an-hour.”

“I’m sorry. I did not see a 25 mph speed limit

sign."

"Well it is out there. You just didn't see it. I am going to have to write you a citation for speeding. The fine is fifteen dollars. You can pay the fine at the court house when you drive through town. Remember, don't forget to pay or you will be stopped again on the other side of town." He wrote out the citation and held it out toward Zeb for him to sign. He signed it and like a kid who scoffs at authority, he let out a verbal barrage as soon as the officer was out of sight. Then he backtracked to find the speed limit sign the officer spoke of. There was a small inconspicuous speed limit sign off to the side of the road. He had fallen into a tourist trap without warning. He longed for Hattiesburg and wanted all police officers to be like Boots. At least he tried to stay within the law. Arizona had a lot of very good police officers; however, back then, several towns in the Old West had a reputation for being less than fair with travelers.

They drove to the courthouse where he paid the fine. But having to pay the fifteen dollar fine caused him to despise police powers. He no longer believed they were out to help the public.

Now he believed some police officers were out to take people by harvesting revenues for their districts. Then there was Boots who was indeed for the public despite a few minor mistakes. For the time being, he was somewhere in the middle. The bitterness of the moment would eventually be tempered by the passing of time.

He turned north and an hour later he turned east toward Phoenix. Soon the lights of Phoenix came into view. They were worn out and were looking forward to spending their first night together in his apartment, which was now their apartment. It was late in the evening when they drove into downtown Phoenix. There was an all night truck stop on one of the access roads to Black Canyon Highway where they stopped to eat. Then they went to their apartment. He had a feeling she was not impressed with his rundown living space and his antiquated car. “We will move into a better place as soon as I get a few more paychecks under my belt.” he said.

Nancy seemed to be satisfied with the prospect of having a better place. “When are we going to see my dad?”

“Tomorrow, after I find a wheel and a tire for

the car. I do not like driving a car without a spare tire. Besides he is already asleep. “Well Mrs. Smith, shall we go down and get the rest of our things out of the car?”

“I always want to do my half.”

He thought this my half thing was becoming a dividing line between them. For now, he just changed the subject by saying, “Lead the way.”

When all of their belongings were brought up to the apartment, they looked to see what was in the refrigerator. There was almost nothing. Zeb always kept his groceries low to prevent food spoilage. On the other hand, he ate often because he was driven by his fear of having to go hungry again. He hated to waste anything. His childhood memories of being hungry for years on end always haunted him. He trusted no one when it came to food, especially his own father. Hunger had caused so much pain in his life. No matter how much he ate, he was always ready for more.

Nancy said, “We can take a shower and have some fun.” It did not matter how exhausted Zeb was. By now he knew better than to displease her. “Can we rest for a while first? It was a long hard trip from San Diego. I am bushed.” Besides, “What

about your father?"

"He is already sound asleep like you said. I will give him a call in the morning to let him know we are here and safe." They talked for ten minutes before she again said, "Ready to have some fun."

He said, "You said Ready to have some fun. Let's get it done."

"It is not a get it done situation. It's supposed to be fun."

"Fun it is." They got cleaned up before they raided the refrigerator for what little there was to eat, then proceeded to bed down for the night. An hour later they were both sound asleep.

The next morning they woke up at eight and discussed what they were going to do. The plan was to get breakfast. Go grocery shopping and then head north to Flagstaff on the third day of their honeymooning. Then Zeb remembered he needed a new tire and wheel before they could leave town. He told her he would be back in an hour or two. She said, "Where are you going?"

"I am going to a few wrecking yards on Carter Avenue and see if I can find a tire and wheel for the car real cheap."

"Cheap! Cheap! Why don't you buy something

new for a change?"

"No. New is not any better, besides Model A parts are hard to come by."

"What about a new car?"

"We don't have enough money to buy a new car. Perhaps someday we will have the money for a new car, but for now we have a good car."

"We can buy one on time payments."

"I do not want to go into debt. If you wanted someone with money, why didn't you marry somebody who has a lot of it?"

"I did not mean to offend you. It scared me when we had the flat tire out in the desert."

"I will be back in a little while."

"Oh no you won't. I am going to go with you."

"You want to rummage through a junk yard?"

"Yes. Wherever you go, I want to go too."

"Okay, get your 'wrecking yard' clothes on and we will go together."

On the way, he stopped at the warehouse where her dad worked. They went in and were greeted by her father. He came up to them wearing a yard wide smile of delight after seeing Nancy. They went into the office and started talking. Five minutes later Zeb said, "I hate to

leave you, but as Nancy told you, I need to find a wheel for our car. I will be back in a little while."

Nancy realized he was not about to take her with him to a wrecking yard. Actually, she had no fondness of going to one anyway. She said, "Hurry back." They embraced and then he got into their car and disappeared.

He went to three wrecking yards before he found a suitable wheel with no tire for five dollars. Zeb paid for the wheel and then he proceeded to a tire store where he bought a new tire and tube. The mechanic mounted the tire on the wheel and put it on the car for ten-fifty. He paid for the tire and went back to pick up Nancy.

After a chat with her father, they got into the Model A and headed for the supermarket on Central Avenue where they bought a lot more groceries than he was used to. She reminded him there were two of them now and not just one. He said, "You are right. I will get adjusted to the changes in my life sooner or later."

They went back to the apartment to have a late breakfast and prepare for their trip to Flagstaff. The trip up the grade was slow and routine. When they passed by the highway patrol office on the

west side of the road in Flagstaff, Zeb had an uneasy feeling come over him. He was beginning to have bad thoughts about police officers. He felt they were out to get him. His trust of them was starting to wane. He shook off his feelings, since he did not want his day spoiled by his new found disdain for authority.

A few block further, they saw a quaint two story motel on a small hill with a view of the San Francisco Mountains. “The motel over there looks good to me,” she said.

“I like being downtown. When I was in Hattiesburg, I lived among the trees in a rooming house. Mr. Frank, the owner, always made the place seem like home, but I always wanted to live where Sam, the drugstore owner, lived. His house was near the center of town.”

“Not me. I like the seclusion of a forest.”

Zeb went into his infamous how’s the weather mode of conversation. She was really a country girl and he was a city boy after all. He didn’t say anything as he drove up to the motel office and rented a room for the night. They packed up their belongings and went up the stairs to their room. Once inside, they freshened up and then went

shopping. After an hour of shopping, the novelty had worn off, so they decided to take a drive to Lake Elray so they could maybe skip a rock or two. The road was narrow and not very smooth. When he drove the car off the road to park, he started thinking his marriage was getting too routine. He wanted something new and exciting to happen. Nancy, however, was ecstatic about being among the trees. She took the opportunity to remind him of his promise to get a place in the pine trees someday.

"We can't live up here. I am a construction worker and in the winter construction comes to a screeching halt after the first snow. We would starve all winter every year. Do you want to risk starving during the winter months?"

"No, but we can at least stop at a real estate office and find out how much a place would cost?"

"Anything you want."

When the lake was in sight, both of them remarked at how nice it looked. Nancy said, "Now isn't this a lot better than Phoenix? There is life up here and not just a bunch of rocks and dirt."

"I agree with you, but I have to make a living for

us, and Flagstaff is a tough go. It is very expensive to live up here; besides, I make a good living in Phoenix. Why give up a good thing?" On the way back Nancy suddenly said, "There is a real estate office that does not look expensive."

"No. I am not going into a dumpy real estate office. If we are going to buy a place, I want it to be from a decent sales office." Zeb spotted a nice hole-in-the-wall real estate office. He drove up to it and parked. They went in and introduced themselves to Milane L. Williams. She asked them what kind of property they were looking for. Zeb told her they wanted something in the trees. Milane said, "If a property up here has one small tree on it, the price doubles. That's the way it is up here in the Flagstaff area."

"How much is double?" Zeb asked.

"We have a new listing on a small one bedroom cabin. The asking price is a little over fifteen thousand."

"Fifteen thousand dollars. That is almost the price of a two-thousand square foot home back in Phoenix," he said.

"What do you do for a living?"

"I am a construction foreman."

“How about a lot you can build a house on?”

“Sounds interesting. But we just got married and we will have to see how our finances work out.” He was just trying to find an excuse to get out of there gracefully.

“I have a bargain lot listed for twenty-three-fifty, but it does not have water. And the water table is too low for a well.”

“How big is the lot?”

“It is seventy by a hundred and ten feet.”

“I see. We need to talk this over in private.”

“Here is my card. If you have any further questions feel free to contact me at anytime.”

He bade her good-bye and they left. After he got the car started, they discussed the prices they had heard. Nancy was stunned. “I had no idea places were so expensive up here. I always thought the farther away one got from a big city, the cheaper the price. I guess I should have listened to you.”

“I wasn’t sure of the property prices myself. Some of the guys told me about how expensive property was up here. Now I know they were telling the truth. That does not mean we have to give up on getting a place in the trees. We just

have to look somewhere else. There are lots of long needle pine trees back in Hattiesburg."

"I cannot leave my father," she said without hesitation.

"You said you wanted trees. I can get a huge lot in the Hattiesburg area with millions of trees on it for around seven-hundred dollars."

"Do you think I have been stubborn ever since we got married?"

"Not in the least. We need to get adjusted to each other. Both of us cannot have everything we want, so we have to find ways for each of us to have most of what we want. We will work this out so you can have your trees someday soon. We have learned how expensive property is in Flagstaff. The next step is to look somewhere else for a cabin."

She got closer to him like one getting closer to a newly kindled fire. The night chill was setting in and the sun slowly disappeared from the sky as they made their way back to their motel room. The price of property had put a damper on their desire for property in the trees; however, it in no way stopped them from dreaming of owning a cabin in the pines. After they got back to the

motel, Nancy said in a low tone, “Are you hungry?”

“Yes, I need a root beer float.”

By now, Nancy knew a root beer float usually meant he was troubled and needed to sooth his feelings. Was he mad at her? Or was he mad at the property prices? She had to know. “Honey, are you upset with me? You don’t sound excited.”

“I am puzzled at why trees cost so much up here.”

“Think about it. How many trees are in Phoenix?”

“There are trees every where within in the phoenix area.”

“How many are pine trees with beautiful green needles?”

“Not too many.”

“There is the answer. A few trees and a lot of people who want them. It’s the law of supply and demand, you see.”

“Would you like to get close and friendly?” said Zeb.

“I thought we were going to get something to eat first.”

“We will get something to eat, then we can get close and friendly!” Said Zeb.

Z. Hof

Back Injury



It was dark when they went looking for a restaurant. Zeb

was beginning to realize his money was going out a lot faster than it was coming in. He wanted to tell Nancy they were getting to the point where he would have to dip into their nest egg. He did not want to worry her, so he decided not to tell her they were getting low on money.

“What do you want for dinner?” Zeb asked.

“Do you really want to know?”

“Yes. Please.”

“I want to go back to the motel room and have a quiet cold cut dinner there. I don’t feel like anything fancy tonight. You have to go to work in two days and you need to rest up.

They bought some food and drinks then went back to the motel. Zeb said, “It is fun time.” They enjoyed each others company. Later it was time for them to get out the groceries and have a quick meal before they retired for the night.

The night passed quickly. At six-forty, Zeb woke to find Nancy crying.

“What is the matter honey?”

“I ... I suddenly realized I am not a kid anymore. Life is getting too difficult with the car breaking down all the time and the police chasing us everywhere. And I don’t want to go back to work anymore. We have had such a good time, I am afraid it will suddenly end.”

“What about your dad? Don’t you want to work with him anymore? I hardly ever see dad at work. He works out in the warehouse and I work in the office.”

“Well, you have to let them know you are quitting. And you have to give them at least two weeks notice. After you think about it, you may

feel differently when you go back to work day after tomorrow."

"Tell me the truth. Do you want to go back to work at that messy housing project?"

He thought before he answered. "Yes and no. Yes, I like being a foreman. It took me a long time to become one. I worked so hard to get to be the boss, I would hate to give it up."

"Boss. I have seen the foreman at the warehouse cower after the owner chewed him out for low production."

She struck a nerve in him with the word production. His eyebrows dropped like a wilted flower. Then he fired back with, "I don't have to worry about the boss taking me down a peg or two," as he held his hand out to her with his fingers crossed over each other. Me and the boss are like that.

"And what is the no?"

"If I had a choice, I would build us a cabin by a stream in the mountains so we can live happily ever after. But, we only have enough money for a weekend camping trip once in a while."

"I guess I have my answer, I am going to keep working and save my money for our cabin up in

the mountains."

A big smile came over her face at the thought of living among the pines the high country.

They quickly packed up and made the boring trip back to Phoenix. No sooner than they got back to their apartment, she said, "We need to get a newspaper and see if any cabins are for sale up in the mountains."

"Okay, but this is Phoenix and I do not think there will be any cabins advertised in the paper here."

They walked to the drugstore to get a paper and Zeb had to have his favorite drink. After they sat down in a booth, Kim came over to wait on them. She just could not resist talking about how happy she has been since she joined the church. Evidently Kim was really covering up her jealousy. Nancy was getting to go everywhere and Kim was stuck having to work and to church with her boyfriend. However, Kim did not know about all of the car troubles and the run-in with the police. It was apparent Kim was not as happy as she wanted others to believe. She put a menu in front of each of them and said in a sassy tone, "What are you having?"

“We don’t know yet. Would you give us some time to look over the menu?” Nancy replied. She knew full well the menu was not very complicated.

He was surprised at how she reacted toward her sister. She was quite tart with her. Nothing was said for some time and then finally, she said, “The truth is, my sister and I never really got along. She has always been uppity toward me. She thinks she is God’s gift to humanity.” There was no way he was going to put his two cents into their business. At least she did answer his question about going to church without saying a word about it. If she was bent on going to church, she would have taken the opportunity to reply to her sister’s comment about church.

They ordered their meal and finished quickly. Neither of them was comfortable around her sister at the moment.

A faint breeze cooled them as they walked back to the apartment. Zeb said, “Nancy how do you feel about going to church? Do you believe in God?”

“I believe in God and my church is in the mountains God made for us. I feel more reverent

up in the mountains than anywhere else on earth. What about you?"

"I am not sure. Some people say I am an agnostic. I know I do not like church protocol though."

"Then why did you agree to be married in a church?"

"It was so you could be married in a church just like your mom."

Although he did not get a full answer to his question, it was a satisfactory answer. They were almost home when he saw the car. What on earth happened? A puddle of water was under it. "Not again," he thought. But, he was not going to panic. He walked to his car, opened the hood and removed the radiator cap. Most of the radiator's water/alcohol mix had leaked onto the ground under the car.

"What's wrong with the car this time?" she said dryly.

"I think the radiator sprang a leak. I am going to take a look and see if I can find it." He ran his hand over every inch of the radiator and did not find even one wet spot. The muscles in the back of his neck tightened as he feared the possibility

of a creaked cylinder head or worse yet a crack in the engine block, both of which occasionally happened to vehicles in Arizona, mostly during the summer heat. Then he began running his hands under the water pump and the radiator hoses. No leak. He asked Nancy to go up to the apartment and bring down a big pan full of water. By the time she returned, he had gone over every inch of the engine and checked the oil for frothing, which would indicate water had gotten into the oil pan while the engine was running, and more than likely it would mean a blown head gasket or a crack somewhere in the engine's water jacket. Nothing out of the ordinary was found. When she came back with the pan of water, he poured it into the radiator. Nancy peered into the engine compartment and said, "Is it dead?"

"No, it is probably something simple."

"We need a newer car. This is getting ridiculous."

"Will you give up on the cabin to have a newer car which may cause the same problems?" She did not answer.

"I have been working on machines all my life. I

would not know what to do if things did not break down and give me something to do." He was embellishing the truth and she knew it. But she decided not to say anything to him about it. After he filled the radiator with water, he ran his hand under the bottom hose and sure enough it was wet near the engine. He grinned and said, "It will be fixed in a minute." Then, he retrieved a roll of black tar tape and a towel from the back of their car. When the hose was dry, he wrapped the tape tightly around the leak in the hose. "There. That should do it," he said.

"Are you going to just leave the hose taped up?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Why not? Because this is our car now and I ride in it. I don't want to be stranded on the side of the road ever again. Tomorrow we are going to a car parts place and get a new hose even if I have to pay for it and replace it myself." Her displeasure of his car was alive and well. He knew better than to argue with her. He always loses.

"Tomorrow morning, first thing, I will get a new hose and install it. Happy now?"

"Sorry. I do not know what has come over me. I am not normally this way. It's not like me to fly off the handle."

"We have been going here and there too much I guess. Maybe we need to settle in for a day or two."

"I do not think it is that."

It was a long shot, but he would try it out on her. "Would you like to go up to Flagstaff after I get paid next Friday?"

"We need to save our money for the cabin."

Uh-oh. He was going to build a cabin whether he wanted to or not. They went upstairs and spent a quiet evening and night together. By nine o'clock in the morning, Nancy was ready for them to get the radiator hose. Zeb said, "I thought I was going to the parts place and get the hose."

"We are going to get the hose and then we can stop and get some groceries, that is, unless you don't want anything to eat for dinner." The thought of running out of food stung him like a mad hornet. The fear of going without dinner was so deep-rooted in his mind it caused him pain at the slightest thought of having to go hungry again. He did not answer her. Within a few minutes they

were in the car and on their way. It took several hours to get the hose and buy their groceries. They bought a lot more than usual. There was no complaint at the cost of the food this time. Both of them were happy to see the shelves stocked up. They ate a big meal and spent a lazy evening being with each other and catching up for lost time before going to sleep.

It was five-thirty when the alarm went off. It had been arranged for him to take Nancy to her father's house and then her father would drive her to work at seven-thirty.

He had to be pounding nails at eight o'clock sharp and at the same time keep the crew busy. After the novelty wore off, he felt no better about being a working foreman then he did being a carpenter. But at least he was no longer a laborer.

Within an hour after he started working, he tripped over a board on the floor and fell on a pile of materials lying in the middle of the room. His arm was severely bruised. It hurt so much he wanted to scream, but he did not. He didn't want to appear weak in front of his crew. His arm was black and blue and severely swollen by noon. At least the crew did not make fun of him like others

had in the past. He was the boss and they could lose their job over a stupid comment. The truth is, he would have taken the comment in stride and blasted a nasty remark right back at them so fast it would make their head swim. He was a seasoned construction worker by now.

At lunch, a plumber named Ron, asked if anyone wanted a building lot up near Christopher Creek. He touted it as being located on a hill and having a good road up to it.

"How big is your property?" said Zeb.

"It is only a hundred by a hundred and fifty feet. And to be honest with you, it has a fifteen foot right of way in the front and a ten foot electric company easement in the back."

"So it is really a hundred by a hundred and twenty-five feet."

"Yep."

"What is the damage."

"It ain't damaged."

"No. I mean how much are you asking for your lot?"

"I will take two-fifty in cash at the bank. I mean two-hundred and fifty dollars and it is yours."

"Sounds like a good price for a piece of land."

The crew started laughing at him.

“Why all the chuckles?”

“Do you know where Christopher Creek is?”

“I think it is up north somewhere.”

“It is a hundred and fifteen miles northeast of here as the crow flies. And the roads up there are mostly dirt.”

“A few miles of dirt road should not be a problem.”

“Try at least thirty-five miles of dirt roads. They ain’t but a hand full of people up there in the whole area.”

“Well then, I will need a map with the directions to your lot so me and the Mrs. can take a look at it, come Saturday.”

“I would not take a lady up there. You might get stuck in a pothole in the road. On second thought, I will lead you up to my lot. You might get lost in their forever, if I don’t.”

He realized this Ron was no salesperson. “Where do you want me to meet up with you, so we can go up to your lot. You surely ain’t taking your Model A up there. Are you?”

“The Model A Ford is one of the cars that pioneered America. They have been driven over

just about every inch of dirt road and highway in America. Are you sure your fancy new truck will make it up to Christopher Creek?"

"I don't have a problem with that since my engine is twice the size of yours. Anyway, meet me at the intersection of Scottsdale and Thomas roads. We can drive out to the Bush highway and then on up to Christopher Creek. Mind you, it ain't much of a highway."

"What time?"

"When the owls sleep at seven o'clock in the morning."

"How about eight?"

"Eight o'clock will work."

Zeb's arm was swollen and looked awful. By four-thirty he had been reminded of how hard trim work was. The crew had packed up for the day as the job fell silent except for an occasional burst of small talk between a roofer and a painter. As he was about to get into his car, Dan drove up. His truck came to a screeching halt a few feet away from him. He looked like he had something on his mind.

"What's up Dan?"

"Got bad news. The tract owners went into

receivership at two o'clock this afternoon."

"Receivership. What is receivership?"

"It means this project is in the hands of the courts. They have been sued for non-payment."

"Did they go belly up?"

"You can safely say they went down the tubes."

He was worried about his job. It might have gone out the window. "Does this mean I have to look for another job?"

"Of course not. You work too hard to stand in line at the employment office. Tomorrow, I want you to go out to the custom house you were working on last month and help Jeff finish it up."

"You know I am not good enough at trimming to work on those fancy houses. Do I have a choice?"

"You can join my framing crew on another job I have going down south. It is rugged work though. They will be putting up trusses and framing in walls."

"It cannot be any worse than cutting down trees in a swamp infested with millions of mosquitoes. What time do I start in the morning. My framing crew starts at six."

Dan told him how to get to the project. When

he finished giving him the directions, a half a keg of 16d box nails and a box full of 8d common nails, Dan said, “You will work up a healthy sweat tomorrow, so bring lots of water.” Then, he got into his truck and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

At least he still had a job. It would have been a lean future for him if he had to look for a job. His mind drifted toward home and his new wife. What would she think about him having to be a framer. In less than a week his hands would be badly blistered and rough. He really wanted to take the trim job, but he knew it might mean getting fired in a week or two down the road.

The trip home was doleful. He dreaded having to tell Nancy of his demotion to a worker again. But, construction workers always have to look forward to lean times. Their future is always somewhere between a feast and an empty table.

He drove into his parking space and walked up to be greeted by his wife. She came to the door all dressed up. It was clear she had plans for the evening. After he came in and flopped down in the easy chair, she said “How did your day go?”

“Not so good. I banged up my arm real bad, the project went down the tubes, I got demoted to a

carpenter again and worst of all I am now a framer. A lousy framer."

She tried to console him by saying it did not matter to her what he did as long as he was there for her. He wasn't buying it, because he knew she was as devastated as he was. "Come on and take a shower so we can sit down to the nice dinner I made for us." They embraced and he dutifully took a shower and then he came to the table with a smile on his face. Did you really mean it about not caring what I did for a living?"

"Yes. Except I know you will do great things one day." After dinner they settled next to each other on a couch they had bought at the thrift store. It was not much, but before they got married, she did not have a fancy couch at her father's place either.

"What are you thinking about?" she said.

"Oh. I almost forgot. We are going to Christopher Creek on Saturday morning to look at a lot to build our cabin on."

"Do you really mean we are going to have a cabin?"

"I made a promise, didn't I? Yes I meant it. A plumber has a lot up near Christopher Creek he

wants two-hundred and fifty dollars for. Before you get all happy about it, you need to know the lot is located on a dirt road a long way from town."

"My dream of a cabin in the mountains is going to come true." He knew she was ecstatic about the idea of owning a mountain cabin; however, he also knew the lot was not in a desirable location. But he could collect some scrap wood from the job if Dan would let him and build a small shack he could call a cabin in order to make her happy. The evening went by quickly. Before they knew it, it was five oclock in the morning and he had to hurry to get to his job on time. At five-fifty-five he drove up to where the trusses were and got out of his car. A scruffy looking medium built man in his thirties with huge arms, a coal black beard and short black hair walked toward him and said, "You must be Zeb. I am Henry Sedgeway, the foreman. I have heard a lot about you. Ever put up trusses before?"

"No. Back east they do mostly conventional framing."

"You are in for a surprise. We can have all of the trusses up and the sheathing on a roof before

a conventional framer can cut and put up ten rafters. It is called bang and go.” By now he knew every foreman had a sarcastic name for high production carpentry.

“Been there, Done that. How many are in your crew?”

“There are three of us including you.”

“Not much of a crew,” he thought. His own crew was only five men. He wanted to bolt and run like a horse at a racetrack starting gate. The sight of trusses and the pile of dimension lumber made him feel like a pack animal again. The neatly stacked lumber also took his mind back to Bear’s pile of firewood. The wood reminded Zeb he needed to call Bear and find out how he is doing.

Once the foreman called for the crew to start to work, the job site filled with activity as they started muscling the wood in place on the freshly cured concrete slab. By the end of the day the outside walls, the trusses and the plywood sheathing would be done. No grass grew under the feet of this crew. At lunch they sat in what little shade they could find under a small tree near where their vehicles were parked. “Henry, do you

know where my crew went?"

"Dan had to lay them off for a while until the housing tract gets new financing. I understand the owner is trying to get some money so he can start back up again. People come out here to Arizona with a wad of money and think they are millionaires. First thing you know they are in court filing for bankruptcy. You'd think they would learn their lesson; but as sure as there is water in a river, they're back at it again a few years later."

"I understand you just got married. Is she good to you?"

"She is a real fine lady." They spent the rest of the day framing up walls and putting up trusses. By quitting time they had the shell finished and were working on the inside walls. The homes were being built with plywood roofs. Not so long ago, they would have been using one by twelve inch sheathing which was awful to deal with. It warped, split and the knots in the wood would fall out, then they would have to nail little sheet metal patches over the knot holes.

At two-thirty the foreman said, "Pack it up and get out of here." The men did not even stop to ask why. In a flash, they packed up their tools and

headed out faster than a hundred mile-an-hour wind.

Zeb drove home and walked up the stairs, opened the door and went in to wait for Nancy. Her father would be bringing her home soon. The empty apartment made him feel lonely again. He always feared Nancy would not come home one day in the future. He kept having dreams where she was wearing a long white gown beckoning him to come to her. He would always say to her in the dream, “I am not ready to go yet. I need to raise the children first.” Then she would start crying as she faded away.

In less than ten minutes he heard a car drive up. He looked out the window and it was Nancy and her father. They came up the stairs where he greeted them.

“Come in and sit a spell,” Zeb said to her father.

“No. I have to get on home and fix my dinner and then lay down for a spell. I have not been feeling well lately.”

Nancy said, “I can fix us something to eat. We do not get to see you very often, won’t you reconsider?”

“Well, just for a little while.” They caught each

other up to date on the trivial events of the recent past. Zeb did not say a word about his job. Nancy did not bring up the subject either. When they finished eating, her father said, “I really have to go. You can come over anytime you like.”

Nancy looked so lost as he walked down the stairs to his car. She turned to Zeb and said, “Got any good news?”

“I only wish. Unless still having a job is good news.” The rest of the week was like a slow dripping faucet. His spirits were lifted on Friday when Henry handed him his pay. At least he got the same hourly amount as he did when he was a foreman. When Nancy got home, he told her he got paid and they needed to have dinner out, but she was not going to have it. She planned to take the money for dinner and put it in the bank so they would have enough money to build their cabin. He said, “No. We are not. We will put half the cost of dinner in the bank and go to a burger stand and get a couple of hamburgers and a root beer float.” Nancy said no more. She knew exactly what a root beer float meant. After they went to the bank, she said, “Anything wrong honey?”

“No, nothing is wrong. We are just doing great!”

“Honey, I love you more than anything. And you know I would do anything for you. Is there anything I can do for you?” she said.

“Can you make me an engineer or a lawyer or a doctor or an accountant? Can you make me a somebody?”

She was shocked at what he had said. “No I cannot make you a doctor or a lawyer, but you can make yourself anything you want to be. All you have to do is try.”

“Yeah. Right. The harder I try, the worse off I get. I envy all those people who sit around the house and do nothing.”

“Are you willing to go hungry like they do when no one will give them a handout?”

“Well ... No.”

“You need to have a little faith in yourself. Give life your best shot and when it is over you can at least say you tried.”

“Ready to get some us burgers?”

“Ready,” said Nancy.

They drove to a burger stand and ordered four burgers, some fries, a cola drink and two large root beers. He ate three of the burgers and then ordered another. Nancy stopped at one burger.

“You really think I am a big pig, don’t you?”

“I think you are working like a dog and need a lot to eat to keep up your strength. Just look at your hands. You cannot hide them from me. I know you are having a hard time at your job. Look at me. I have been stuck in that warehouse ever since I started working at 19. I am going on 27. Do I complain? No I do not! Do I want to complain? Yes I do. Will it do me any good? No! It will not do me any good.”

He wanted to crawl under a rock when he saw the people in the cars on both sides were staring directly at them. He grinned at them and then looked straight out the front windshield of the car until both of the cars left.

Saturday morning they got ready to meet the plumber at the intersection as planned. Nancy was happy about going up to the mountains again. Zeb had prepared the car for the trip with all of his spare parts, plenty of water and a lot of good things to eat in an emergency. He knew she hated getting stuck on the side of the road, so he was taking no chance of being stranded on a dirt road in the middle of the forest.

They went to the to meet Ron. At eight o'clock

Ron drove up to their car and said, “Ready to go up north?”

“Ready.” He didn’t introduce his wife to the plumber. He wanted to keep her private.

The trip started out on a paved road. As they got closer to Christopher Creek, the road got narrower and rougher. They were bumping and wobbling along behind Ron’s truck. Zeb dropped a ways back as the grade got steeper. It was turning out to be a rough trip. Nancy sat there rocking side to side with the car as it traversed the road. Mile after mile passed under the wheels of the car as he slowly drove on.

It was almost noon before they saw a sign that read: “Payson 10” miles. Twenty minutes later they were in town looking for a place to stop and take a break. They found a small mom and pop where they met up with Ron. They all went in to get something to eat for the rest of the long trip.

“Well, I see your car made it this far. But, we still have another thirty miles to go before we get to my property.”

“We will be right behind you.” A half an hour later, they once again started toward the lot on the hill. It took another hour and a half to get

there. The road was very bad and they had to be careful not to run into a ditch on the side of the road. The ditches were dug to prevent the road from washing away during a heavy rain, which did not occur very often. Ron stopped in the middle of the road and got out. They stopped behind his truck and got out as well. He said, “This here is Wild Stallion Lane and this is as far as we can go. They looked at what resembled a driveway with a great big V washed out of the middle. “We will have to go on foot from here,” said Ron.

“I thought you said the road was good,” said Zeb.

“It was a real good road when I bought the property.”

“How long ago?”

“Gotta be over five years ago, I think.”

He was beginning to feel as though he was trying to sell him a real estate dud. They walked up to where the road made a horseshoe bend and took a look at the lot. He showed them where the property lines were and then they looked out through the trees to get a glimpse of the valley below. “It sure has a good view from here,” said Nancy. “I like it. You said you wanted two-hundred

dollars for this lot?"

"I told your husband I would sell it for two-hundred and fifty dollars, but since I got laid off yesterday, you can have it for two-hundred in cash at the bank."

Nancy said, "Honey, I want to buy it."

"We will meet you at the bank on Monday," said Zeb.

Zeb did not realize she had a good business sense about her. He was proud of how she handled the deal. She saved him fifty dollars on the lot.

They shook hands to clinch the deal. Ron said, "Do you think you can get back from here. I have some friends I want to visit in Payson. Here is my phone number, you can call me on Monday and we can arrange to meet at the bank and close the deal. I will bring the deed with me."

"If your wife's name is on the deed, she will have to sign the deed too," said Zeb.

"I ain't been married for over twenty years. It's just me and my three hunting dogs. That is why I bought this lot in the first place. I wanted to run my dogs up here, but the sheriff made me think differently. I ain't been up here since. Well, I will

be expecting your call on Monday." He got in his truck and drove away.

Zeb looked at Nancy and said, "That was brilliant. You got him to agree to fifty dollars less than he told me."

"It was not brilliant. The lot isn't worth even a hundred dollars. But after Flagstaff, I figure the area around here will develop into something someday. Then we will have a real valuable hillside lot for our cabin with lots of trees on it."

"We need to get going." They got into their car and left. The trip back was dusty and bumpy until they were about to enter the last bend in the road before turning onto the main road back to Christopher Creek. Without warning the car slid off the left side of the narrow road. The car came to a stop in the drainage ditch. He asked Nancy if she was all right. She told him she was a little shaken up. He got out to see how bad the accident was. The car was not very far from the road.

He got back in the car and tried to rock it back and forth for a while before he realized he needed to make a dirt ramp from the car wheels to the road. He got out his army shovel and after

making a path from the wheels to the road, he told Nancy they only had one chance to get the car back on the road. She was to rock the car back and forth like she did on their honeymoon and he would give it a big push. She got behind the wheel and started letting out on the clutch like she did before while Zeb pushed on the bumper as hard as he could. After several minutes the car was on the road again. But when Nancy looked out the window, she saw Zeb lying face down on the ground. “Are you all right?” she called out.

“No. I felt something snap in my back.” He tried to get up but he could not.

It's Time



It was a pain like no other he had ever known. His life was again turned upside down. He would have to wait until a doctor told him how bad he was injured and if he would ever be able to work again.

"Do you want me to try to drive back to Payson and get some help?" said Nancy.

"There is no guarantee you will ever be able to find your way back here again. Go to the car and get out my handsaw and bring it here, will you?"

“What are you going to cut with it?”

“I’m not going to cut anything, you are.”

“Cut what? I don’t understand, but I will get it for you.”

In less than a minute, she came over to where he was and said, “I have the saw.”

“Okay. Put it by the car and then you can help me turn over.”

She placed the saw near the car, came back and sat down beside him. “I do not think you should try to turn over. It is too dangerous. You could break something permanently.”

“Yes, but another car might not come by here for days. Besides, I do not think I am hurt real bad. It feels more like a pulled muscle than something more serious. She gently pushed on his hip and shoulder as he slowly turned over onto his back.

“I feel a lot better,” he said. “I will lay here for a minute. Meanwhile, you can go get my saw. Then find a small tree a little bigger around than a quarter. Be careful with the saw. Keep the blade away from your hands. When you get it cut down, cut a walking stick about your shoulder height. And then cut another one the same size.”

She found a small pine tree that was just right. It did not take her long to cut two stick for him to use as crutches. “Do you feel any better?”

“A little. It does not hurt a lot unless I move. I think it is a good sign. Help me sit up, will you?” She gingerly helped him get into the sitting position. Then he said, “We are half way there.”

“You are impossible. You aren’t half way there. It is over 30 miles of rough road and 90 miles of paved highway before we get back to Phoenix; and worse yet, you will not be able to see a doctor until Monday.”

“I am as tough as nails. It is time to get on my feet.” He reached out and grabbed one of the walking sticks, and then he slowly pulled himself up. When he was standing, she handed him the other stick. It took more than a minute before he began inching himself toward the car. Nancy opened the door for him. When he was three feet away, he reached for the door. He eased himself into the driver’s seat, then he carefully lifted his feet into the car. She put the saw back and placed the sticks crossways on the back seat. He pulled the door shut, then slowly pushed the clutch to the floor, and then tried to push the starter button

as he grimaced in pain. He remembered how Jo Yong had taught him how to control pain. It was time to put those lessons to good use. But, try as he might, the pain was too severe for him to put it out of his mind. His back hurt the most on the right side.

Honey, “Please step on the starter button with your left foot. As soon as the engine fires up take your foot off the starter.”

She pushed the starter button and the car started. The pain was intense as he pushed the gearshift into first and released the parking brake. He gradually let out the clutch, and once again they were on their way back home. When we get near the next intersection you need to be ready to put your foot on the brake when I holler, “Stop!” A little before they turned onto the main road, he said, “Put your foot on the brake!” The car came to a stop at the very edger of the intersection. Once he made sure the way was clear, he let out the clutch. The car slowly moved onto the dirt road leading to Payson. They proceeded at less than five miles an hour. He kept the car in first gear because he was afraid he would not be able to hold the clutch in long enough to shift into

second gear. After several miles he forced himself to shift the gears, because it would take six hours at five mph to reach Payson. He mustered a faint smile as he said, “Still think the mountains are a fun place to be?”

“I still like the mountains. Right now I am worried about you.”

“Everything will be back to normal in a day or two. I am not ready for the graveyard yet. Besides, I have to live so I can suffer some more.” She did not say anything until they got back to Payson where he stopped at a little grocery store so she could get some rubbing compound for his back and some food.

She came back with the rub, some sandwiches makings and four sodas. He only drove a few blocks before he found a nice secluded place to park so she could put some of the medicine on his back. He sat there for several minutes while the rub soaked in. Then she washed her hands using some water from his water keg before she made some sandwiches. After they finished, he started the car and headed straight for home.

“Feel any better?”

“I feel a lot better. Not good enough to win a

foot race mind you. He said he was going to take her to the driver's license place and get her a learner's permit so he could start teaching her how to drive. She said, "We have to get back home first." However, he was only reacting to the dilemma of the moment.

"My family has worked the fields for generations and unfortunate events have followed them every step of the way. You get used to being hurt and having thing go wrong all the time. She knew he was covering up for having a bad day. In a half an hour they were well on their way home. By now he could at least shift the gears with great difficulty. Four hours later they were at the steps leading up to their apartment. It took him a long time to climb up the steps. She opened the door as he hobbled in and laid down on their sofa bed. Nancy did not say anything. She knew how much pain he was in. At the same time, she wondered when he would be able to go to work again. She worried she would have to stay home and care of him. He said, "I'm hungry. Can I have something to eat?"

"You are always hungry."

"I bet you are hungry too."

“As soon as I wash up, I’ll start dinner. Then I will call you when it is ready.”

An hour later she went to check on him. He was sound asleep. She did not want to wake him because she figured he needed the rest. She was sitting in the armchair when he woke up at nearly midnight. They talked about his chances of going back to work on Monday. He told her he did not want to see a doctor. I will be just fine in a couple of days.

She said, “You have worried me half to death. You are going to see a doctor on Monday.”

As they ate dinner they discussed the trip up north. Zeb said he would work on some drawings so they could get an idea of what their cabin was going to look like. She insisted it be two stories high, so they could see the entire valley from their second story window.

The rest of the evening was somber. One could only hear the noise of the refrigerator and the muffled sound of cars going up and down the street. Sunday morning came early. There was only an occasional car on Central Avenue and most of the side streets were silent. After both of them were fed and fully awake, Zeb said, “Want to

go for a walk?”

“Does that mean you are feeling better?”

“Yes, but my back still hurts like an infected tooth.”

“Infected tooth. Can’t you say it hurts bad?”

“It hurts like an infected tooth. Why should I say it hurts bad?”

“Forget it. You are too feisty for me to argue with. Why don’t you take a cold shower or something?”

“Hey. That sounds like a good idea. Care to join me?”

“You are incorrigible. But I am glad to see you’re getting better.” The rest of the day went by like a spring rain. They awoke on Monday morning and got ready to go and find a doctor for him. She already had a doctor, so she suggested they try her doctor first. He called Dan and told him about hurting his back up in the mountains on Saturday and how he needed to see a doctor. Dan told him to keep him posted on the outcome. He also told Zeb they got the housing tract back on line, and he would not have to do any carpenter work until he got better.

Soon they were at the doctor’s office. The

receptionist had him fill out a form and instructed him to have a seat.

Nancy said she would join him in a minute. She said, “I need to see the doctor too.”

“What do you need to see the doctor for?”

“I have been feeling nauseous and tired. It is probably noting, but I want to hear it from the doctor.”

They went into the examination room when both of their names were called. When Dr. Brumbell came into the room, he said, “Hurt your back, did you?” He was a heavy set man in his fifties, had a head of gray hair and wore a white doctor’s smock over a white shirt and black trousers. His shoes were black cap-toed oxfords.

“Yes, and it hurts real bad.” He told him the details of how the accident happened. The doctor did an examination, and then they took some x-rays. After the results were read, the doctor said, “Your back is not broken. You have a pulled muscle and it is going to be sore for quite some time. I see from your chart, you are a carpenter. You will have to be on light duty for a while. But in a couple of weeks you will be as good as new.

Then the doctor questioned Nancy about her

condition before he did an examination and some tests. Afterward, he said to Zeb, “Do you think you are going to like being a daddy?” He was ecstatic. “Zeb junior,” he said.

Then Nancy broke him out of his delirium. “I always wanted a baby girl,” she said.

“I did not think of a girl. Bye-bye junior,” he thought.

She said, “We can do some shopping for baby things on the way home.”

The doctor said, “Not so fast. You have a long way to go before you will need any baby things. Near as I can figure
You are only in your first trimester. You have more than two trimesters to go, so you need to concentrate on your health.”

He could not resist the opportunity to find out how she really felt about the cabin. He said, “Do you really want to take some of the money to build the cabin and buy baby things with it? Besides we cannot be one-hundred percent sure you are going to have a baby. Not all babies are born. I had a brother who did not make it.”

Dr. Brumbell said, “Zeb. Will you come out in the hall with me for a minute.” When they were

out in the hall, Zeb got a severe tongue-lashing from the doctor. He told him that although what he said was likely the absolute truth, his wife does not need to hear any negative comments right now. “She will be going through a lot over the next year or so. You need to work together for the sake of your baby.”

“Sorry. I will have to work on my carpenter attitude. ... Doc, I have been puzzled about something. My wife seems to be irritable at times and she says it is not like her. Could the baby be causing her to be crabby.”

“I would be surprised if her pregnancy did not cause her to be a bit touchy at times.”

They went into the room again. Dr. Brumbell said,“Mrs. Smith, I want to see you in four weeks. The receptionist will set an appointment for you.”

He paid the bill. Then he asked to use the phone to call his boss to let him know how he was. Zeb told Dan the details of his pulled muscle. He also told him he would be back to work very soon. And he was not about to keep quiet about their baby. By the time he got off the phone, Dan had heard it all.

As they walked to the car he said, “Can you

imagine, I am going to be a daddy."

"Don't forget I am going to be a mommy too." Nancy could not wait to tell her sister, Kim, about her baby. When they got to the drugstore, Kim came to the table with her usual snooty attitude. Nancy said, "You know what?"

"What?"

"I am going to have a baby."

Kim was stunned. She didn't know what to say. "Really."

"Yes. Dr. Brumbell said so. That makes it official."

Kim shocked Nancy when she said, "I am so happy for you." Kim's maternal instincts were kindled, and for once she was all for her sister. "You are going to let me come and hold your baby when it arrives, aren't you?"

"Of course. We are going to see dad this afternoon and tell him the news."

They had a quick sandwich, fries and a drink each. After they finished eating, it was time to go to the bank and close the deal. The teller handed Zeb his passbook after he made a two-hundred and twenty dollar withdrawal. Nancy glanced at his bankbook and noticed he had more than

twenty-six-hundred dollars in the bank after the withdrawal. “Why didn’t you tell me you were rich.”

“I am not rich. It is our money, but it is also our nest egg. We must have money in the bank in case something bad should happen to me. If I loose my job, our money could go away faster than a dust storm.”

A half hour went by and still no sign of Ron. Nancy was anxious to have the deed to their cabin lot in their names.

They sat in one of the bank chairs for another fifteen minutes before Ron came in the front door carrying a frayed portfolio.

He immediately walked over to where they were sitting. “Ready to close the deal?”

“We are ready,” said Zeb.

They walked over to the bank officer’s desk where Ron said, “We need to transfer a deed. Can you help us?”

“Yes,” said the bank officer.

Fifteen minutes later the deed was transferred. Ron stood up, reached for Zeb’s hand and said, “Sorry I was so late. You are a man of your word.”

“So are you,” Zeb replied.

Nancy’s eyes were lit up as they left the bank

with the deed to their cabin lot in hand. She was going to have a baby and her dream cabin was just around the corner.

Over the next week, Zeb found his strength and the pain was gone as long as he moved slowly.

The following Monday he was back on the job by eight o'clock. The crew was full of questions and comments. The painter said, "Strained your milk last week, did you?"

"No. I did not strain my milk. I pulled a muscle in my back pushing my car out of a ditch up near Christopher Creek last week.

"Larry Wintersburg, the bulldozer operator, said, "We hear you are going to have a baby."

"Where did you hear such a ridiculous story?"

"Dan told us a couple of days ago."

"Don't believe everything you hear. I am not going to have a baby. Boys do not have babies, but my wife is going to have a baby in a little over six months if everything goes according to plan."

"I bet you can't wait to be kept up all night listening to a baby crying."

"Our baby is going to be a good baby. He is not going to cry all night long."

"Where did you get the idea your baby will be a

boy? I have three daughters and each one of them was supposed to be my first son."

"Okay. You got me there. I just want a son real bad. And to be fair, my wife wants a baby girl."

Zeb called the crew to work. The days melted into weeks and before he realized it, the time had come for Nancy's second checkup. Everything was fine. Another appointment was set for six weeks. They were looking forward to each new appointment. He was getting closer to becoming a dad. As scared as he was at the thought of being a father, his desire to have a son was much stronger. However, he had to face the fact that all of his children may well be girls.

Dan was waiting at the job site with another man when Zeb drove up. After Zeb got out of his car he said, "What is happening Dan? Anything new."

"Got some good news for you. We got the contract on a couple of custom homes out in Scottsdale. They need your expertise as a foreman."

"How important of a job is it?" He was fishing for a way out of going to Scottsdale again. The idea of going through a gate to work on a fancy

house did not make him feel very comfortable. Dan sensed Zeb was not happy at the news, so he told him he would be getting another half a dollar an hour raise. Zeb forced a grin of approval, but he was trying to put it out of his mind by focusing on his cabin and Nancy. He took advantage of the moment when he said, “I bought a piece of property up in the mountains near Christopher Creek a while back, and I wonder if I could borrow some of the company’s heavy equipment when I get ready to build a cabin on it?”

“When you get ready, all you have to do is ask. But you will be responsible for any tools you borrow. Do you have anybody to draw up the blueprints?”

“I thought I would read a few books and wing it. It is just going to be a small two story cabin, not a custom home.”

“I do not want you to build a shoddy cabin. You make a sketch of what kind of cabin you want and I will have my architect draw up a set of plans for you at no charge. Do you have electric up there?”

“The nearest power is about ninety feet away.”

“Ninety feet is too far for an electric drop, wire, to reach without an extra pole. I have a temporary power pole with a meter can and fuse box on it. I will let you borrow it until you get your permanent electric box put in. That way you’ll have power until you get your electric service wired up and connected to the power pole.”

“I do not have a way to get it up to my lot, let alone get it put into the ground and wired up. We will cross that bridge when the time comes. Winter will be upon us soon. One does not usually start building a cabin in the winter. We will talk about this again in the spring.”

He could not wait to go home and tell Nancy the good news about the raise and the electric pole. But, he did not want to tell her how much he despised working on custom homes. By quitting time he was embroiled in bad thoughts about his new job, the cabin and Dan’s offer to help him with building their cabin. Nancy was asleep when he got home. Her growing baby was putting a lot of strain on her. She was letting the apartment slide and was not dressing attractively.

Zeb thought he would surprise her by preparing a chicken wing dinner for them. She woke up

after almost two hours. It was eight o'clock when she sleepily sat down to eat. He filled her in on his new job. It seemed to perk her up a little, then she started to cry. "Did I say something to upset you?"

"I am tired of baby. I want it out."

"You only have a couple of months to go. Then you and I have the rest of our life to live in our cabin. I asked Dan if I could borrow some of the company tools when we build our cabin and he said I could. He also offered to draw up the blueprints for us at no charge, and he will even lend us a temporary power pole."

"We cannot live up there anytime soon. You are just trying to make me feel better, aren't you?"

"You can't fault me for trying."

It seemed like only a couple of days had passed when it was time for another doctor visit. The baby was healthy and on schedule. Monday morning she told her boss she would be leaving her job at the end of the month, so she could take care of her baby when it was born. She knew it meant the cabin would have to wait a little longer.

The next morning, he went to the job site early. It was getting harder and harder for him to choke

down the onerous protocol. Zeb felt trapped. He could not go up to their cabin lot because she would not be able to see a doctor if anything happened. They made several routine trips to her dad. But they did not visit his mother very often and each time he went there, he felt as though he was returning to the scene of his horrific childhood. The tree leaves up in the mountains were beginning to turn and he wanted desperately to take Nancy up there to see the spectacular colors. No such luck. Their baby's needs came first.

The doctor told Nancy he wanted to see her in four weeks because her delivery date was getting closer. He said she would be coming in for a checkup every other week during the last month. As the baby's birthday came closer, she was getting more and more apprehensive about giving birth. The final seven weeks before she was to have the baby went by way too fast for her.

Before long, Christmas was just around the corner. She wanted her baby to be born on Christmas day; however, the doctor said her chances were very remote. It was difficult for her to go Christmas shopping with Zeb. She wanted

him to do if for her. Zeb reminded her of when the doctor said it would be safe for her to do some shopping as long as she did not overdo it. They went to the mall where he parked the car as close to the main entrance as he could, so they could make a quick toy run for the baby just to please Nancy.

He failed to remember the chewing out he got from the doctor. Nancy wanted a big tree with a bunch of lights on it; however, he told her their apartment was too small for a big tree, which was not the best way to handle the issue. It only reminded her of how small their place was. She knew her baby was going to need more space after it was born.

She asked her father to wait until the baby was born before getting a lot of Christmas gifts. But, she said a few small gifts would be okay.

His father did not show any sign of inviting them over for Christmas. Monday afternoon his mother called and wanted them to come out for Christmas just to talk if nothing else. “Yep. That’s my old man all right. Everything boils down to either money or brag time. His gift to the world is supposed be his gift of gab.” he thought.

On Christmas morning they went to her father's house where they exchanged a few gifts. Later in the afternoon they had a light lunch. In the afternoon they had an insignificant dinner at his parents farm. Zeb apologized to Nancy for the lousy environment at his father's place. But, she said, "Your mother was happy we came and that is what really counts."

Before he knew it, New Year's day had passed. Nancy's due date was just five days away; however, four hours after they went to bed for the night on the third of January, 1958, she woke up in a puddle of water. She gently jostled Zeb at three-fifteen in the morning and said, "Honey. It's time."



She said, “Are you awake? ... Honey it’s time. We need to

so to the hospital very soon. She again jostled him. This time Zeb woke up with a start and said, “What do we need to go to the hospital for?” Then he felt the wet spot.

“My water broke like the doctor said it would. The baby is coming.”

It suddenly hit him like a sip of bitter coffee. He got up and got ready in less than twenty-five seconds. Then he said, “Let’s go.”

“Don’t you think you should wait until I get ready first?”

“Yeah. ... Right. ... Okay.” She dressed quickly and they rushed to East Central Hospital. After they got to the hospital emergency room. The lady at the ER desk said, “Can I help you?”

“Yes, my doctor told me to go to the hospital when my water broke. Well, my water broke.”

The nurse asked if she had called her doctor.

“Not yet.”

“We will call your doctor as soon as you are admitted. What is your doctor’s name?”

“Dr. Brumbell.” The nurse brought a wheelchair for Nancy to sit down in and be taken to a room after Zeb filled out the appropriate paperwork. Nancy was embarrassed as she told the nurse she did not want to ruin their wheelchair.

The nurse said, “Do not worry about this wheelchair. It has gone through all kinds of mishaps. Is this your first baby?”

“Yes.”

“Is this gentleman your husband?”

“Yes he is.” She was frightened and he was as scared as a cat being chased by a bull dog.

Before too long they were upstairs in the

maternity ward. She was taken to room 112 where they helped her into a hospital bed. Then a nurse checked her blood pressure and her pulse. She said, “My name is Jan. You can relax, I have had five kids of my own and the first one is the scariest.

Zeb caught himself pacing the floor. “I don’t have to be afraid of anything?” he said to himself. His thoughts were giving him very little help with his anxiety over becoming a daddy. This was his first venture into fatherhood.

Forty minutes passed before Dr. Brumbell came into the room to see her. He examined her and said. “You are in good condition, and your baby will be in your arms very soon. The nurse will call if you need me.” And then he left.

She was flabbergasted. He left her and Zeb there all by themselves. Jan came in and realized Nancy was not feeling very comfortable, so she said, “A first baby delivery usually takes longer than a second or third. Right now she did not want to hear about a second or third baby. She had enough on her hands with this baby.” Zeb came over to her bedside and put his arm around her shoulder and said, “Everything is going to be

all right." He did not know whether or not their baby would be all right. However, he was taking the living in denial approach again.

Her labor contractions were too far apart for her to have the baby anytime soon. Three hours passed before Jan called the doctor to bring him up to date on her condition. She asked the nurse where her doctor was.

"He went back home."

"My doctor left me here all alone," she said.

Nurse Jan said, "We will call your doctor when you are ready to deliver or if we need to."

Another hour went by before the nurse came in to check on how she was doing. Nancy told Jan the contractions were getting a lot closer together.

"How close."

"About twenty-eight minutes apart."

Jan took Nancy's blood pressure before she did a quick examination. Then she wrote the information down in her chart. "I will come back in about an hour. If you need a nurse just pull the red cord beside your bed."

"How close am I to having my baby," she said.

"No one knows for sure, but I guess it may take

another three to five hours, or more."

"Five hours. ... Five hours!"

Zeb said, "Would you like me to get you anything."

The nurse said, "She can't have anything except crushed ice. I will get you a cup of ice and a spoon if you like?"

"Can I at least have some orange juice to flavor it with?"

"Not unless your doctor says so." Then she stealthily slipped out of the room.

"Having a baby is cruel. Don't do this. Don't do that. It's like I am a machine that needs a little oil once in a while."

"You are not a machine. You are my wife and I love you very much." Then he put his arms around her and kissed her. That seemed to satisfy her for the time being. However, he could see the strain of it all was beginning to show on her face. He, too, was beginning to feel the pressure of not being able to help her, except to give her a little moral support.

The nurse checked in on her each hour for the next three hours. Each time the contractions were getting closer and closer. This time, Jan, said, "It

is time to call your doctor." Nancy's fears went through the roof when she realized it was almost time for her baby to be born. She patted her tummy and said, "Hang in there for a little while longer and mommy will be able to hold you in her arms real soon."

A half hour later she could hear Dr. Brumbell out at the nurse's station. His voice helped to her relax a little. Five minutes later he came into the room and said, "How are you doing?"

"The best I can for having a baby."

"It will not be too much longer."

"Have you thought of a name for your baby?"

"We do not know whether the baby will be a boy or a girl."

"Well then, you can come up with a name for each gender." He examined her and said, "You are dilated to six centimeters."

"What does dilated mean?"

"It means you will be taken into the delivery room very soon."

"Can my husband be with me."

"I am afraid not." They began discussing baby names after the doctor left.

"How about, Zebadiah Emmanuel Smith, Jr.

What do you think?"

"I don't want a Zeb Junior. How about Zebadiah Lee Smith?" he said, with a big smile on his face.

"I like the name Zeb Lee. Now we need to come up with a girl's name."

"How about Jan Lee Smith?"

"I don't like it."

"How about Carol Lee Smith?"

"That sounds better. Where did you come up with the name Carol. Certainly not from another nurse, I hope."

"Not at all. Remember me telling you about Bear? His wife's name is Carol. Speaking of Bear, I need to call him and tell him about our baby after it is born."

Three quarters of an hour later, the doctor came in and did another examination. He instructed the nurse to get Nancy ready to be moved to the delivery room. Zeb leaned over and kissed her one last time before they took her away. He said, "My thoughts will be with you." Then they wheeled her off into the unknown. "I am not going to be nervous." he told himself. "Not me. I am a construction worker and I am going to be tough about this." But as sure as daylight, he

found himself pacing up and down the halls. One of the nurses said, “Would you like something to drink. We have orange, grape and apple juices.”

“No thank you. I do not think it would stay down very long.”

An hour and a half later, Jan came out and said, Would you like to see your new son?”

“A son. Yes please. By all means.” She escorted him to the hospital viewing windows with the crisscrossed metal wires embedded in them. She pointed to one of the babies and said, “Meet your son.” The baby did not look very good to him. It was all wrinkly and reddish all over. The nurse said, “You have a beautiful, healthy baby.”

He stood there for at least fifteen minutes mulling over his new role as a father. He wanted to get closer to him, but the glass window kept him out. A little while later, he went to the nurse’s station and said, “I’m Zeb Smith and I was wondering how my wife is doing.”

“You will be able to see her very soon.”

“Have you come up with a name for your baby?”

“We agreed on Zebadiah Eman ... I mean Zebadiah Lee Smith.”

“Zebadiah Lee Smith is a very nice name.”

Then he started pacing the halls again. Some time later, they wheeled Nancy into a different room and he dutifully followed her and the nurses. After they checked her pulse, blood pressure and did a mini-exam, the nurse said, “Pull this red cord if you need help.” And then she left the room.

“Oh. Honey, did you see our baby?” said Nancy.

“Yes I did. He is handsome and healthy.”

“He looks just like you. They gave him to me for a minute after he was born. Zeb Lee made me feel ten feet tall.” At one o’clock in the afternoon, her father came into the room and said, “I here you have a new son.” Zeb had slipped out and called him earlier.

They both agreed with him. When the conversation died down, her father said, “Zeb. Nancy needs to get some rest. You and I can go and get some baby things for your son.”

They spent several hours buying a lot of necessary things and a lot of unnecessary things for the baby. Then they took the baby items up to the apartment. Zeb invited her father to have a bite to eat with him, but he turned him down. “You

don't need to cook anything for me. Would you like to go to a restaurant to celebrate the occasion?"

"I know better than to argue with my father-in-law." Then his thoughts went out to his mother and father. There was no sign of them at the wedding and now he feared there would be no sign of them coming to see their brand new grand baby. He told her father he had to make a few phone calls before they went to dinner. He first called his mother. "Hello. Is mom there? ... Hi mom, Nancy had her baby. She had a boy, Zebadiah Lee. Are you going to come and see him? ... What! Can't you escape the old man's tyranny just this once? ... But did he ever stop to think that I never approved of the way he treats you?" He slammed the phone down on its base and tried to hold his temper. Zeb felt alone as Nancy's father asked, "What did your mother say?"

"My mother is not going to be able to come and see her own grandson."

"Your mother will somehow show up. No man can keep a woman away from her first grandchild."

Well, I have to make another phone call and then we can go. He went and got out Frank's red tin Agnes insisted he take with him, and retrieved Bear's address and phone number. He picked up the phone and dialed his number. A woman answered the phone in a voice he did not recognize. "Is this the Waterman residence?" he said. ... "Oh. This is the phone number I know him by." ... "You get a lot of calls asking for Bear. ... I see."

"Can I ask if you know where he lives now?" ... "Can you give me her number?" He wrote down the number and placed the paper next to the phone so he could dial it up. Her father said, "Has anything happened?"

"Someone else has Bear's phone number. Bear was my old friend and boss back in Hattiesburg, MS. I have to call his wife, who now lives in downtown Hattiesburg. This is a call I do not want to make. I am afraid, Bear may be sick or something." He dialed the number and said, "Hi. Mrs. Carol. This is Zeb. I got your number from the people who have your old phone number. Can I talk to bear?" ... "Oh, I am so sorry to hear that. How did it happen?" ... "A heart attack after he got

home from the school." ... "How are you and the kids getting along?" ... "I am glad to hear you are doing well. What happened to the house?" ... "Did your get a good price for it?" ... "I'm glad you got a good price for your place. Well I wanted to tell him I have a new son. His name is Zebadiah Lee Smith." ... "Yes." ... "Well. You take care of yourself and your kids. I have to go. Bye."

"That was Bear's wife. He died of a heart attack five months ago and his wife, Carol, finally sold their house and moved into town. I know it is rough on her because she does not drive. I am taking his death real hard. He was the last friend I had back in Hattiesburg."

Her father said, "A seafood dinner may help get your mind off your troubles. Tomorrow will be a brand new day and in time your sorrows will heal."

They had a seafood platter deluxe. After they finished, both of them went back to the hospital and paid Nancy another visit. She had a good meal herself and looked like she was feeling much better. They talked about their son and how important it was for him to be raised properly. Nancy told Zeb his mom came by and saw their baby. He was dumbfounded. How did she get

away from his father. They visited for a while, and then it was time for him to go back home to their empty apartment. He could not believe he was now a father, but he had to share the news only with himself, Carol, his mom and Nancy's father.

On the 5th of January, Zeb and Nancy went home with their baby in tow. Monday morning he called Dan to tell him the good news and begged off work for a couple of days until he got adjusted to his new son. The next couple of days were hectic. Getting used to changing diapers and heating bottles on a stove, that was once reserved for cooking dinner, was a big adjustment for both of them. Neither of them complained though. Their only concern was for Zeb Lee.

It seemed like no time at all had passed before it was time to see the doctor for Zeb Lee's first checkup. After the doctor examined the baby, he said, "You have a healthy little boy." I want to see him in six weeks for another checkup. You can set his next appointment at the front desk.

By now, Zeb and Nancy were so busy with Zeb's work, diapers and feeding times that little else was getting done. The next well baby checkup soon arrived, and after they left the

doctor's office, Zeb told Nancy he wanted her to learn how to drive as soon as possible. He did not want her to be distraught if he were to suddenly die. Three weeks passed before Zeb took off from work to take her to get her learner's permit. After they let Grandpa Winslow baby-sit Zeb Lee, he drove her out to a country road where she got behind the wheel to began her driver's training. It did not take long for her to get the hang of it and seven weeks later Zeb took her to the driver's license testing center. After she passed the test, Zeb said, "Would you like to drive us home Mrs. Smith?" He got to hold Zeb Lee on the way home after stopping at her father's house to pick him up. Holding him was more of a pleasure than he could have ever imagined. Some daddies have the reputation of being cold toward very small children and do not relate to them until they are at least ten. Zeb was different. He had been through so much as a child that he would lay down his life to keep his son from ever being beaten with a belt like he was.

The days melted into weeks and then into months. Three months later, Zeb Lee had doubled in size and was a little chunky for his age. It was

obvious he had not missed any meals like his father did when he was a child. He was an active little boy and smiled a lot.

Dan called one evening and said, “I have a surprise for you. I want you to come to the office tomorrow after work and we are going to have a little celebration.”

“Dan is finally going to have a party for our Zeb Lee,” he thought. It was a nail biting wait until he packed up and headed for Dan’s office after work. When he got there, all of the different crew members were waiting around a table full of food, sodas and deserts. His lead carpenter said, The super quit and you are going to be the new superintendent. Zeb was disappointed. He wanted the party to be for his son.

“It looks like everyone is here,” Dan announced. “I have good news. A vacancy for superintendent has opened up and I have decided Zebadiah Smith is the best man for the job. What do you say Zeb?”

“Thank you for your confidence in me and I will do my best to meet your expectations.”

“Here is a little promotion bonus and a little helping hand for your son.

"And to help you get around to the various job sites, you are going to get my old truck. I ordered a new one last week and it came in today. I understand your wife drives now. So, after work tomorrow you can come to my office and drive it home."

He stood there in shock for a minute or two. Nancy was going to be surprised. The party lasted for three hours and after everyone left, he opened the envelope and held the check for five-hundred dollars up to the light to see if he was dreaming. And as he placed the check back in the envelope he noticed a note. It read:

Zeb:

You have done a magnificent job as foreman. Along with your promotion, you will be getting a dollar and a half an hour raise starting today.

Dan

He was taken aback. What did he do to deserve all of this. For the moment he was just going to take it all in.

Nancy was happy for him. And she knew they needed the extra money to buy all of the things

their son needed.

When Zeb Lee's six month checkup was finished, the doctor said, "Your son's next checkup will be four months from today. But, if he should get sick, do not wait, bring him in right away. Many parents wait too long before they take their kids to see a doctor and also they think over-the-counter remedies can cure anything. OTC medicines can work very well, but they are virtually ineffective against some illnesses.

The next four months went by very fast. His new job made him feel very good about life. He was well aware he was still a high priced construction worker and at anytime he could be out of work again. He suffered under no illusion he would be a superintendent when retirement day came. Ten more days and Zeb Lee would be a year old. It was time to start getting some birthday presents and for Nancy to bake a cake and smear it thick with a coating of chocolate icing. Zeb Lee might get a taste of the cake and a bite or two of ice cream, but he was far too young for a lot of sweets.

Her father and somehow his mother sneaked out to attend the party. It was the first time he

had a chance to hug his mother in over six months. He was happy to see her. One of his mother's Hispanic neighbors, who was going to Phoenix to shop, drove her to the party while his father took one of his frequent all afternoon naps.

Only two people came to his first birthday party. At least his mom and her father were there to wish their son a blessed future. They were seated around the room talking about Zeb Lee when he burst out with, "Ma-ma-mum-mum-mum."

Zeb Lee said, "Mama." Nancy was so proud of him. They were served a light dinner before they gathered around the cake. Nancy lit the big candle in the middle of the cake, after which they joined in to sing, "Happy Birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday dear Zeb Lee. Happy birthday to you, and many more.



Why?

Life for Zeb and his new family was good. His job was very secure. All were in good health and they had a lot to build their dream cabin on.

Everyone brought presents for Zeb Lee. He made a mess when he tore them open, but that was what they expected him to do. He got a pull string puppy, some blocks, a busy bee toy, a carpenter bench with a wood mallet and several baby items from Zeb's mom. His mother said she wanted to be practical about buying birthday

gifts. His mom left early when her neighbor came to pick her up, so she could be back before his father woke up.

It was near dark before the party ended. Nancy told Zeb she needed to lay down for a while. He realized she had worked hard on baking the birthday cake, preparing the dinner and straightening up the apartment before the guests arrived. She slept for several hours before he saw her tossing and turning. He went to her bedside to see what was the matter. Within a few seconds she sat up suddenly and said, “Honey, hold me.”

“Are you all right?”

“I had a terrible dream about you and your old car.”

“What about my car?”

“You were on your way to get some tools so you could start working on our cabin and your Model A got crushed by a big truck. And you were in it.”

“Don’t worry about your dream. I have had all kinds of dreams where bad things happen to me and nothing really bad has ever happened to me yet.”

They talked about their future and how grateful

they were to have plenty to eat and a little money to spend on extras. The day ended with them turning in for the night. The next several months were little more than the passing of time. His job was secure and Dan's business was booming. Arizona was on a roll. The population was slated to double in the next ten to fifteen years and housing projects were sprouting up like spring onions. The days were very mild, which made it comfortable for their evening walks pushing Zeb Lee in his buggy.

When breakfast was over, he hurried off to work. She went back to sleep only to be awakened at ten o'clock by the phone ringing. She picked up the phone and said, "Hello ... Oh. Hi Mr. Smith. ... I see. You would like us to come and visit you." She did not know what to tell Zeb's father. "Well, Zeb is not here right now. I will have him call you when he gets home. ... Good-bye."

She could not wait to tell Zeb his father had a change of heart and wanted to see their son after all.

At five-thirty, she heard him coming up the stairs.

When he got into the apartment, she said, "I

have good news for you."

"I will bite. What?"

"Your dad called and he wants us to come out to his farm and bring Zeb Lee with us. I told him you would call when you got off work."

The news hit him harder than an anvil being dropped on a cartoon character's head. "Just when I wrote him off for good, he pops up to mess up my life again." He walked off in a huff and disappeared out the front door. Nancy opened the door back up and said, "Did I say something to get you upset?" He stopped for a second and said, "No." Then he continued walking down the stairs. She waited for more than two hours before he came back in and sat down in his chair.

"Are you ready to talk?" she asked.

"I guess."

"All your father wants to do is see our son."

"For what? So he can starve him and beat him like he beat and starved me."

"Your father sounded very conciliatory over the phone.""Honey, you don't understand people like him. They slap you in the face with one hand and then give you a bouquet of flowers with the other

hand in the hope of being forgiven. I will never forgive him for what he did to me when I was a kid."

"I did not do anything to you, did I?"

"No. You're a perfect wife. That is why I went for a walk. I needed some time to cool down." A few minutes later he picked up the phone and called his father. "Hello. Nancy tells me you want us to bring Zeb Lee out to your farm. ... We can come out there this Saturday about noon. ...We will see you Saturday at noon."

"Are you satisfied now? I am going to take you and our son out to see their grandfather. He does not deserve it, but I will go out there for my mother's sake. How my mother could ever put up with him for all these years, I'll never know. Oh, and do not ever let Zeb Lee be alone with him. He is slipperier than a greased eel."

Saturday morning saw them getting ready to go and visit grandpa. The only sounds made during the trip to Buckeye were from the car and an occasional outburst of "mum-mum" and "da-da-da" from Zeb Lee.

His mother and father were on the porch waiving at them when they arrived. Zeb Lee was

sitting in his mom's lap. Nancy held his hand up and moved his arm in a waving motion back at them.

No sooner than they got out of the car, his father asked if he had a job yet. His father's broken record comments about getting a job were getting a bit old. Zeb only told his father he had a good job working on houses and nothing more. If his father found out he was a superintendent, it would only lead to more snide remarks about not working like a man.

At three o'clock they all sat down to a table full of food. As usual his father took the biggest half of the chicken breast and gave Nancy the other half. He got two drumsticks. After dinner they all took a tour of the farm. Zeb Lee got a very bumpy ride in his buggy. Zeb was looking for an opportunity to talk to his mother alone for a while. He wanted to find out why his father suddenly changed his mind about their son. His father was bragging to Nancy about how manly farm work was and how he was a master farmer.

Zeb and his mom stopped to talk while Nancy and his father walked on. He said, "Mom. What made dad change his mind about seeing our

son?”

“A year ago your brother, Mat, got into an argument with him about manhood and it ended in a fight. When the fight ended, Papa told Mat to get out and to never come back. Mat packed up his clothes, hitched a ride into town and joined the Air Force. He is a drill instructor and is stationed at Lackland AFB in Texas.

“But why did dad change his mind about seeing us?”

“Well, after he found out our neighbor took me to see your son, he started yelling and threatened me. I told him that was the last straw. I was either going into town to see you and your son or I was going to pack up and leave him.”

Zeb put his arms around his mother and said, “I am sorry it came to that. You can always come and stay with us.”

“I would never want to be a burden to your new family.”

His father walked up to them and told Zeb that Nancy learned a lot about farming. He said, “If I were to teach her, She would make a good farmer someday.”

Zeb thought, “She is a good construction

worker's wife already." He said nothing.

Once the tour ended, Zeb said, "I have to work on the car this afternoon, so we need to be heading back home." He was stretching the truth again. The car needed a lot of work; however, there was nothing pressing. He hugged his mother and then told his father they would come out to visit again if he so desired. His mother was the driving force behind his offer. On the way back home they discussed the visit. Nancy was starting to doubt whether Zeb's childhood was as bad as he made it out to be. However, he knew his father was a master of deception and brinkmanship.

They visited Nancy's father seven times and his father and mother twice over the next three months. On April 20, 1958, he got an offer to start working as project overseer for one of the bigger reconstruction companies in Phoenix. The owner said he had heard how good Zeb was at running crews. Their office was located in a very big low-rise office building. He would be working with crews who would be remodeling office spaces in different buildings around the city. But the word remodeling was a bitter word among

construction workers. They called it tenant improvement or reconstruction instead. The outfit was willing to give him a two-dollar an hour increase in pay to join them. He did not want more money. He was happy where he was and turned them down flat with no chance of ever changing his mind.

The next morning, Don told Zeb to have his crews come to a meeting at his office. All of his crews were to attend. The meeting time was set to begin, as usual, at five-thirty after work on Friday.

At quitting time he told his crews they needed to be at Dan's office at five-thirty on Friday after work.

Friday afternoon everyone was there. Dan announced the business was doing very well and has been growing steadily since he started the company over fifteen years ago. And he told the workers they were going to get two gifts from him. One was a new mason's level and the other was a bonus which was adjusted according to their job in the company. There was plenty of food, desserts and soft drinks. The meeting ended at seven. He rushed home to tell Nancy the

good news. After he got home, he embraced her and told her Dan had a meeting and gave out gifts. She was not impressed with his new expensive level. “Oh. I almost forgot, I got an envelope I think may have some money in it.” He opened the envelope and removed the card. It was a thank you card and a check for two-hundred dollars. The card read: “Great job Zeb. Thanks. Don.” She was happy he got the check. He said, “Now we can get started on our cabin.”

“No. I do not want a cabin just yet.”

“I thought you wanted a cabin real bad.”

“I have changed my mind. I want a nice car instead.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Zeb Lee needs a better car to ride in.”

“So be it. We will get a nice car. We can go looking for a newer car at the end of next week.

On Friday after work they drove to Saguaro Avenue to look for a car. After looking at over twenty cars, Zeb stood before a 1952 Chevy Coupe. He was salivating at the thought of owning it. But Nancy said, “I want the 1953 Chrysler Windsor we saw at the other car lot. It is bigger and has a big back seat for when my dad

rides with us. Besides it is a hundred dollars less and has ten-thousand miles on it. This car has over fifty-thousand miles on it and it sounds bad."

"There goes my Coupe," He thought. They went back to the car lot and made a down payment on the Chrysler. They agreed to come back and pay the rest of the five-hundred dollars on Monday after they went to the bank. Nancy gave him a big smile of approval. He did not know she was only doing this because of her dream about his car being crushed in an accident. She thought if he no longer had the Model A, he would not be killed.

On Monday they paid for the car and applied for the title. When they got home, he parked their Chrysler behind his Model A and to the left of the company truck. Nancy looked at him and said, "Now we can now sell your car because we have a newer one. We do not need two cars and a truck."

"I don't own Dan's truck and I am not selling my car." Nancy would never understand how his car allowed him to escaped from under his father's iron thumb. It was always ready to go whenever he needed it. His car was his security blanket.

Over the next several weeks Nancy started

driving the Chrysler. Zeb started drawing the plans for their cabin. He did not tell her, but he intended to go ahead with the cabin despite the newer car.

Within three weeks he was ready to start digging the foundation for their cabin. On Saturday, May 24th he told her he was going up to the lot and start working on the road, and then start laying out the foundation. He invited her to go along with him. Nancy said, “No! I do not want you to go. If you must go, then I need to stay here and take care of Zeb Lee in case you get killed.”

He said, “Okay.” And then walked out the door. Then he came back in and kissed her good-bye. As she watched him drive onto Central Avenue, she had a strong feeling she would never see him again. He was defying his wife for the first time. His mind was heavy with guilt, as he drove toward their cabin lot. Perhaps Nancy was right. Maybe he should sell his car. Soon he turned onto the Bush Highway and was heading toward Payson. Two and a half hours later a car was in front of him lugging slowly up the grade. Soon he turned onto the dirt road and continued going toward Christopher Creek. He put a handkerchief over his

face, but it offered little relief from the smothering effects of the dust that filled the air. Before long he saw the car in front of him pull off to the side of the road and park. He wanted to stop and help because he saw steam pouring out from around the hood. The car was severely overheated. But he did not dare stop. He had to maintain his speed in order to be able to climb up the steep grade to their cabin lot. A few minutes later, he saw a flat spot off to the side of the road where he could park and see if his car's radiator needed water. Seconds after he pulled off the road, a huge truck loaded with logs roared by him. He had heard of logging truck having their brakes fail, but he never imagined how fast those trucks could go down a steep grade when their brakes were burned out. He stood there shaking. Nancy was right. Had it not been for him seeing the overheated car down the road, he never would have pulled off the road to check the radiator water level. He would have been parts all over the road. His hand shook as he checked his car's oil and water. Finally, he got back into his car and carefully inched his way back onto the road and continued up the grade toward their cabin site.

After driving for less than five miles, he saw a place where he could turn around and head back to Phoenix. The car purred its way down the grade. It was not long before he started into a curve where he saw the logging truck turned on its side. All of the logs it was carrying were scattered and the truck's cab was crushed in against a big pine tree. Several people were there trying to get the driver out of the wrecked vehicle. He slowed to a stop so he could help. One of the people standing there motioned him to drive on because there was no room for any more cars to park.

A couple of hours later, he was securely on a level road. He was very thankful for being spared a certain death. When he got back to their apartment, he was apprehensive as he slowly opened the door. Nancy was sitting in the armchair listening to the radio.

"I thought you were going up to the lot to work on our new cabin."

"Well, I changed my mind about going up north. I think I am going to sell the cabin lot as soon as I can."

"Uh-huh. And why this sudden change?"

He was not about to tell her about his brush with death. “I changed my mind!”

Nancy was clearly put out by his leaving her all alone. She decided to go shopping and invited him to go with her. After several hours, they saw most of the merchandise in the mall. She said, “I want to see if my dad is home.” They left the mall and headed for her father’s place. When they got there, he knocked on the door. After the door opened, Zeb Lee said, “Dada.”

“No this is grandpa,” Nancy corrected.

They went into the house and sat down. The conversation was focused on Nancy and Zeb’s future. They were listening to the evening news when the announcer said, “A middle-aged man was killed in a Black Model A Ford today. The car was stopped at a stoplight on a Black Canyon Highway overpass when a truck filled with landscape rocks overturned and crushed the car under six tons of boulders.”

“Imagine that.” Zeb said. “I feel sorry for his relatives. On the way up to the cabin lot today, I almost bit the dust myself. I was driving toward our lot when I saw a car boiled over with steam coming from around the hood. It scared me. So,

several miles up the road, I decided to check the water in my radiator. No sooner than I came to a stop and got out, a runaway logging truck whizzed ... Before he realized it, he had blurted out what he wanted to keep from Nancy.

He figured he had better finish the story so he said, “When I got back into the car, I went a little farther up the road before I decided to turned around and head back home. I hadn’t driven very far before I saw the truck on its side and the logs were scattered everywhere.”

A knock at the door startled them. It was Kim. “Dad, have you heard the news?”

“Yes I did?” he said.

“I thought it was you Zeb. After all how many people drive a Model A this day in age?”

He proudly said, “I drive one.”

Kim sat down as Zeb sarcastically said, “How do you like the weather?” His fondness for Kim was no where to be found. He realized Kim probably called their apartment and got no answer, so she showed up here.

They talked for several hours before her father said, “It is time for dinner. Would you like to find a restaurant and go out for dinner.”

All agreed to go. When they got there, Zeb parked his usual offer to pay for the dinner routine. Nancy had him trained to remain silent when it came to issues concerning her father.

On the way, Kim said, “I like your new Chrysler. It sounds good and smells real nice inside. I wish I could afford a luxury car like yours.”

“Kim. You will have a nice car someday,” said Nancy.

“The way things have been going lately, I doubt it. My boyfriend left me for another girl in his church and they are talking about closing the drugstore, since some of the bigger drugstores have taken so much of our business away.”

Nancy thought back to when her sister had a boyfriend and she had a job in a warehouse and nothing else. She did not rub her good fortunes in. Instead she invited Kim to spend some time with them. She knew how much it hurt to be alone. When dinner was over, Nancy said. “Would you like to go shopping with us Kim?”

“I need to be getting back home after we get back to dad’s house. It is a bit late. Dad, thanks for the dinner.”

Before Zeb knew it, Monday had arrived and it

was time to head for work. The projects were progressing right on schedule and he could depend on having a job. Four months had passed since his ill-fated trip up north. He was once again thinking about building their cabin in the mountains. However, winter would soon put a damper on any building activities. Saturday morning he told Nancy he still wanted to build their cabin. Since the Model A accident did not happen to him, he thought it was safe to venture up north and start to work on their cabin. She said, “No way. We are not building a cabin.”

“Then I am going to buy a truck.”

“Does that mean you are will get rid of your Model A?”

“Do I have to?”

“Yes. We cannot have two cars and two trucks.

“I will give Dan’s truck back to him and sell the Model A, then I will buy a truck. Let’s go look for a truck right now before you change your mind.” Little did she know, he already had a 1953 Chevy step-side truck in mind. He saw it parked at a gas station with a for sale sign on it. The sign read: “For Sale $550” Within fifteen minutes Zeb pulled their Chrysler up next to the Chevy truck. Nancy

looked at him in disbelief. “You had this all planned out in advance, didn’t you?”

“Certainly not I.” They went into the gas station and talked to the owner of the truck. He said the truck was sold. Zeb said, “Did you get a deposit on it.”

He said, “Well. No, not yet.”

“We can put a deposit on it to prove we are serious. And we can get you the cash before tomorrow night.” He looked like he started salivating after the word cash. “How much of a deposit are you talking about?”

“How about seventy-five dollars if we decide to buy it?”

“Sold,” he said.

“We need to make sure it runs good before we decide whether or not to buy it,” he said. Zeb got the keys and started up the truck and looked under the hood. It was a real clean truck and sounded like a dream. They went back into the station where Zeb asked if he could drive it. “Yes, but I will need a fifty-dollar deposit on it to make sure you will come back.” Zeb said, “You do not need a deposit. My wife is not going with me and our Chrysler will still be here.”

He thought a minute and said, “Don’t run out the whole tank of gas on me.”

After he drove the truck for a mile or so, he returned to the gas station. Nancy said, “How did it go?”

“The truck runs perfect. I want to buy it.”

They went in and talked to the owner. Zeb said, “We like the truck a lot. However, we can only come up with five-hundred-dollars in cash by tomorrow.

He scratched his head for a while before he said, “You drive a hard bargain. The best I can do is a hundred down and you can have it for five-hundred and twenty-five.”

“Will you give us a receipt for the hundred and shows the balance due of four-hundred and twenty-five,” said Zeb.

“Sure. Sure.” Within five minutes he put the receipt in his pocket and the sale was closed. They drove around for a while and discussed the benefits of having a truck, before they headed home again. The next month passed without incident and Zeb got a hundred dollars from a car collector for his Model A. He felt as though he had lost a lifelong friend. His ‘53 Chevy truck

reminded him of Bear's truck and how he had felt riding in it. In a symbolic way he was becoming more like Bear every day. He was heading toward a bright future with all of the trappings.

Zeb Lee had completed most of his childhood checkups and was crawling all over the place. It would not be long before he was walking. He had already made several attempt at standing upright for a second or two. Their lives had settled into mommy, daddy and baby. On Friday thirteen weeks later Zeb went to work feeling on top of the world. Dan came out to the job and handed out the paychecks. He thanked him for bringing his check to him. Dan left the job site just before the crew packed up for the day. Most of the time they all went to the same bank to cash their checks. Zeb usually lagged behind because he had to get a root beer before he cashed his check. When he finished, he went to the bank to find several of his crew members at a teller window. "What gives?" he asked.

"Our checks are no good. There is no money in the bank account to cover them."

Zeb went up to a teller and tried to cash his check with the same result. Insufficient funds. An

hour earlier Dan gave no indication there was a problem. He asked the teller if he could use the bank's phone. He called Dan and said, "What happened. Our checks are no good. ... Okay."

He told the crew Dan knows nothing about it and was on his way there. When he arrived, he talked to a bank officer and they went into a small office on the west side of the bank. Forty-five minutes passed before they came back out. Dan came over to the crew and verified there was no money in the bank. "Evidently my bookkeeper withdrew all my money and disappeared. I had enough money in my private savings account to cover all of your checks; however, my company has been destroyed."

"Why me," Zeb thought.

"Do we still have a job," asked several crew members?"

"It means Don is out of business and all of you and I do not have a job anymore."

Monday morning he was in the state employment office shifting back and forth in a cold hard wooden seat waiting for his name to be called.

Z. Hof

A sequel to the
The Construction Prison
is Being Written.

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Glossary

This glossary is intended to add meaning to the construction terms used in this novel.

Construction terms vary somewhat depending on the area where the construction work is being done.

Buildings in Alaska must be more weather protected than homes in Florida, however, hurricanes and rain must be taken into consideration in Florida. In Arizona, buildings must be built to withstand desert sun, dust and dry conditions. These conditions, along with local needs, affect the kind of materials used and what they are called.

#10 galvanized pail: A 10 quart galvanized pail,

sometimes called a water bucket because many of these pails are used to dip water out of a water source, such as a well. A real wishing well is an example.

8 Point Saw: An 8 point saw has 8 teeth, or points, for each inch of the blade. 8, 10 and 12 point saws were common. A 12 point saw has very fine teeth and is usually used for trim work. An 8 point saw is usually referred to as rip saw, because it cuts faster than a fine toothed saw.
90 Pound Felt: 90 pound felt was used on roofs that were not steep enough for shingles. Today it is usually called rolled roofing and is still used on flat or almost flat roofs. It often has a fine rock coating, most often white in color. The rolls are 3 feet high by about 33 and 1/3rd feet long, (a.k.a.) a square of roofing which is 100 square feet.

Alcohol: Alcohol is what many people called antifreeze back then.

Baloney cap: A bologna cap is the end, or thick end slice on a tube of lunch meat. A few grocery stores in the old days would either save the end

caps and meat scraps for their families to eat or save them for less fortunate customers or save them for pet food. **See Illustrations**

Barges: Slang: “Tote them barges.” Carry a big piece of lumber. Also a barge rafter or fly rafter is a rafter that hangs over the edge of a gabled roof. It supports the roof sheathing. It is held in place by the fascia at the bottom and the ridge board at the top. Other rafters are called common or main rafters. They support the roof itself and rest on top of the wall plate on the outside walls. **See Illustrations**

Batch Plant: A place where concrete is mixed and dispensed from a hopper into a concrete mixer truck. Then a precise amount of water is added to make the concrete before the truck is driven to the project.

Black Canyon Highway: Black Canyon Highway was the name for the road that is now Interstate 17 that goes through Phoenix, Arizona.

Bolt of cloth: A bolt of cloth is a roll of cloth. One

would not generally hear this term unless they work in some area of the textile industry.

Bottom Plate: The bottom plate is a board that is the bottom part of a wall that holds up the wall studs.
See Illustrations

Breaker Box: A circuit breaker box or fuse box back then. Any electrical box that holds circuit breakers, wires and often houses the main electrical power switch.
See Illustrations

Brinkmanship: The art of getting concessions by holding an opponent at the brink of hostilities. This works by exploiting one's desire to settle an altercation without a fight. Ex: To hold a country at the brink of war to gain concessions from them. Sanctions are similar in nature.

Buggyin or Buggying: A slang term used to describe moving concrete in a wheelbarrow, sometime called a buggy, and then using a bucket to carry the concrete to a form and then

dump it in. Often times the concrete is carried up a ladder to pour a concrete beam on top of a wall or to pour concrete into a form on a second story. Buggying is all but extinct. Construction workers have got to love those wonderful machines that can pump concrete up higher than a four story building.

Burr-zang: A created onomatopoeia word that attempts to imitate the sound an old fashioned screen door spring makes just before the door slams shut.

Bush Highway: The old road that went to Payson, Arizona. Part of it sill exists where it went near Saguaro Lake. However, the road from Mesa to Payson is now called the Beeline highway or State Route 87.

Cable Actuate Bulldozer: Before bulldozers had hydraulic cylinders to raise and lower the blade, they used a thick steel cable and a gearbox, usually connected to a PTO power take off, to raise and lower the blade. The disadvantage of a cable actuated bulldozer was that there was no

way of forcing the blade down like hydraulically actuated bulldozers do. Cables bulldozers are all but extinct.

Cat Face: Cat faces or hammer marks are when a worker misses a nail and bangs the wood instead, or when the nail is driven in too far and the hammer sinks into the wood surface leaving a dent in it.

Ceiling Joists: Large boards that are usually placed on 24 inch centers and are used to hold up the ceiling of a building. **See Illustrations**

Composition Shingles: Ordinary everyday roofing shingles that are made out of asphalt, felt (pressed fibers) and a thin coating of minerals, (a.k.a.) sand like rocks. Composition shingles come in a variety of colors. But white is often used, especially in the southwest.

Creosote: Is a yellow to brown oily wood preservative made from coal and wood tars. Many telephone poles were treated with this nasty smelling stuff to protect them from the

environment and insect damage. If a telephone pole is black or dark brown, it more than likely was treated with creosote.

Cure Concrete: To allow concrete to set up and then harden. A good concrete cure is critical, especially on multi-story buildings and any other use that requires maximum strength. Concrete hydrolyzes. (to decompose chemically in the presence of water). A curing compound is sometimes sprayed on the concrete shortly after it is poured to aid in the curing process. Concrete is said to be cured within 36 hours; however, this can vary depending on the climate. A good benchmark for a full cure is 28+ days.

Dimension Lumber: Dimension lumber is any lumber that is cut into popular sizes and lengths as found in a lumber yard, or it can be ordered in specific sizes and lengths. The latter is usually delivered in a lumber package, but it can be any piece of wood ordered cut to a specific size. Dimension lumber is usually cut to length in two foot increments. Ex: 6, 8, 10, 12, 14 and 16 foot lengths are standard. And, 2×4 (pronounced 2 by 4), 2×6, 2×8, 2×10 and 2×12 are standard heights

and widths. Home improvement centers usually stock a large supply of dimension lumber.

Feather Edged Casing: A fancy door casing that sort of tapers in steps toward the door. It is easy to confuse it with a colonial casing which has a deep concave and convex molding pattern on it. In early times, these casings had Plinth blocks at the bottom of them to keep a mop from causing a dirt buildup in the door casing grooves.
See Illustrations:

Fin: Slang for a five Dollar bill. Usually said informally.

Hitched: A slang word meaning to get hitched or married.

Hollow Ground: Tools are said to be hollow ground when part of the metal behind the blade is ground away so the tool can cut better. **See Illustrations**

Hot Wire: Hot wire means to bypass the keyed ignition switch on a car and wire the coil directly

to the battery, and then use a tool like a screwdriver to actuate the starter solenoid to start the vehicle. Modern cars make this extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Joist: A joist is a beam that supports either a floor or ceiling, and is usually cut out of a fir or pine tree.

Log Chain: Chains that have hooks on each end of the chain so it can be wrapped around a log and be hooked. The slip hook is the larger one and the other hook is smaller so it can lock into a chain link. A log chain is similar to a trucker's chain. The difference is the trucker's chain has two small hooks that lock into the chain links. **See Illustrations**

Low-rise, mid-rise & high-rise: Refers to the height of a building. A low-rise is said to be from 1 to 4 stories high. A mid-rise is usually considered to be from 5 to 20 stories high. And a high-rise building is considered to be any building above 20 stories. This is a general explanation; however, some would argue as to where the story

number dividing lines are.

Merthiolate: Merthiolate is an antiseptic compound.

Meter Can: **A** meter can is a round container the electric company puts an electric meter in. **See Illustrations**

Diaphragm Pump: A construction worker just has to love a diaphragm pump. They are pumps that work like a toilet plunger. They move a large volume of water at a low pressure. A twin diaphragm pump can move an incredible amount of water in a very shot time. **See Illustrations**

Ooga Horn: A word that imitates the sound of an antique car horn. There are different spellings of this word.

Pea Sized Gravel Concrete: A special kind of concrete mix that is poured into a narrow form, such as a stem. It must be mixed with small gravel so the concrete can flow into small crevices and will not easily form air pockets that weaken the concrete. Today this kind of concrete

is usually pumped into the form by a huge concrete pump. Concrete pumps have all but replaced buggying.

Piece Rates: Piece rates are when one gets paid for completing a certain, usually a very repetitive, task. Most constructions workers hate even the suggestion of working on piece rates. Example: Getting paid for installing each door in a house separately as a piece. Ten doors at five dollars per door gives one $50.00.

Plumbing Fixtures: Bath tubs, sinks, permanent cabinets, and vanities. Any fixed or permanent bathroom item that is installed.

Project Overseer: A person who is almost totally responsible for a project being not only completed, but on time. Similar to a general superintendent in position. Today, in some fields, overseers can earn over $100,000.00 a year. However, the stress can be trying on a body.
Putt-Chee-Kah: I created this whispered word. It is an onomatopoeia word, which is a word that sounds like the sound itself. A made-up word that

imitates the sound of a Model A Ford engine.

Ruler, Folding: During the fifties, tape measures hardly existed. A folding ruler is usually made of wood with steel or brass hinges that fold into 6 inch segments. The standard folding ruler is 6 feet long when fully extended. However, some rulers have an extension that adds up to five inches to the length. This kind of ruler is used to measure inside dimensions such as closet shelf lengths. These rulers are still available today and can run $25 or more. **See Illustrations**

Running Board: A flat full length step built in between the front and back fenders. They were used on many old time cars. There was one on the driver's side and one on the passenger's side of many old-time cars.

San Quentin Quail: An under aged girl. The common saying was "16 will get you 20." Meaning a 16-year-old girl will get one 20 years in jail.

Sawbuck: A kind of trestle used to cut logs or

boards on. There are various kinds of them. However, the double Roman numeral X kind is the most common kind used for logs. Also a Ten Dollar bill**. See Illustrations**

Shell Framing: To build the outside walls and the roof only. The inside walls are not included in a shell structure. Some companies specialize in building shell structures even today. These buildings can be used for manufacturing, for storage, as a garage, or for utility purposes, Back then some companies built shell homes, then the owner would either finish the inside themselves or hire it done separately.

Short Block: The basic main block of an engine without the cylinder head and all of the things such as the carburetor, the alternator – (the generator back then), the water pump and the starter. Short blocks are difficult to replace.

Sill: A board that rests on top of the stem and supports the floor joists. A sill can be treated with a wood preservative that acts as a moisture barrier and also to prevent terminate damage.

See Illustrations

Single / Double Bit: An axe bit is the sharp edge of an axe blade. Each sharp edge is called a bit.
See Illustrations

Solvent: Various liquids used to dissolve a substance. A solvent is an agent that was often used to clean auto and machine parts. Today many cleaning solvents have been replaced with powdered cleaning agents that are washed out with water. This change was likely for environmental concerns.

Spot Labor Job: A.K.A. day labor. One would go to the employment office to be called out for a temporary labor position. Some employment offices had spot labor offerings. Spot labor is similar to temporary laborers or temps of today.

Squeeze: An alcohol based soapy like mix in a can used to heat food. However, some chose to abuse the intended use of it and squeezed the alcohol out through a sock or a cloth rag. Squeeze was considered a cheap and dangerous

alcohol drink. It can cause blindness and other serious health issues.

Stevedore: A person who unloads cargo from a boat or a ship.

Stud / Jack Stud: Studs are the vertical boards that go between the top and bottom plates on a wall. Jack studs go from the bottom plate to a window or a door header on a weight baring wall, usually an outside wall**.**

See Illustrations

Super Heterodyne Vacuum Tube Radio: A vacuum tube radio that has 455 kilocycle (kilohertz today) intimidate frequency amplification stages that were dubbed the IF amplifiers. This was coupled with an oscillator that operated through a pentagrid converter vacuum tube (A radio tube with five grids). In layman's terms: A type of old fashioned vacuum tubed radio widely used before the invention of the transistor.

Top Notch: Top notch or top drawer refers to the best people in a given field. One who is extremely

skilled at their trade, such as a master carpenter or a master painter etc.

Tudor and Fordor: Names that describe a two door or a four door vehicle**.**

Varnished Up: When gasoline sets in a car for a long time it can clog up the car's carburetor by coating all of the parts inside it with a sticky or dried out substance sometimes referred to as varnish. Normally varnish is a wood coating liquid that drys to a shiny finish. Another term is stale gas.

My Book List

The Construction Prison CD

Housebuilding, A Do-It-Yourself Guide

by R. J DeCristoforo
ISBN 0-8069-6512-6

I found this book to be an excellent **overall support reference for this novel** because it gives one a good idea of how a building is and was put together. This book includes a lot of construction terms. It also includes a liberal amount of excellent illustrations.

NOTE: There may be several editions of this book.

A Great Book That Helped Me Deal With My Own Children is:

Backtalk

by Audrey Ricker, PhD,
Carolyn Crowder, PhD
ISBN 0-684-84124-X

This Book covers the
"4 Steps to Ending Rude Behavior in Your Kids"

Colophon & Info

On quotation marks: Example: “I talked to my uncle Jedd today. **He said, ‘This is an another Quote within a Quote.’** I agree with him,” I said.

An apostrophe in front of, or behind a word indicates jargon, or character/s left out, or a missing word, or words. Example: **‘50 is really: 1950.** Or **‘You see it?** Is really: **Do you see it?** etc.

On Ellipses: The First Character talks. ... Means an unseen character talks. Ex: An unseen character on the other end of a telephone.

Also: “I’m waiting for an answer. ... In this case, it

means a pause or break in the conversation.