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Alan and me: a memoir of the depression years

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Alan and me:
A memoir of the depression years

by

Leroy Kenneth Berryhill

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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This memoir covers my years as a farm boy in the Great Depression, from 1933 when I was four years old to 1947 when I turned eighteen. My memories of experiences and feelings during those years, recalled from more than half a century ago, are more impressions and perceptions than facts. I have tried however, to use accurate dates and descriptions with some documentation for events and times besides my own memory filtered as it is, through the sieve of sixty years.

Those depression years contained a combination, a mixture, of wonderful and terrible experiences for myself and my family. I am aware of my good fortune in being born and raised in a large and essentially loving family. Our fights were honest fights. My whippings were honest whippings. What would now be looked upon as physical abuse was at that time considered to be necessary discipline.

Much of the poverty, illness and other problems that plagued my parents, passed harmlessly over my head, surrounded as I was by caring adults and older children. I was aware of my family's difficult circumstances, but except for my concern that my parents would die, I did not suffer from adult-type worries. I always assumed that as long as my parents were alive, they would take care of me. Even my worry about my parents dying was reduced by my sure knowledge that my brothers and sisters would take care of me.
Writing these memoirs has caused me to think with new awareness of the many children here in the United States and across the world, who for various reasons cannot assume their parents will take care of them. Some parents can't and some won't. The children suffer and often become flawed adults. This fact makes me slow to judge people before I hear their full stories.

I have also recalled and written in this memoir about experiences in my life that were very hard for me, experiences that caused me sadness, fear, shame and guilt. I believe, though, that even these experiences and feelings have benefited me in some ways.

My life changed after 1947. I left the farm and my family for college and the wider world. I became a teacher, returned to college for medical school and became a practicing physician. Eventually I became a psychiatrist and lived in a city. Thousands of patients have paid me the immense compliment of confiding in me their most intimate feelings, their worst fears and guilty secrets.

I am sure my first eighteen years, both the good and the bad, helped me become a more understanding physician, a more compassionate and effective psychiatrist. I have shared the worry, the shyness and the guilt that have tortured so many of my patients.

I grew up in a time and place without television, without drugs and almost without crime and senseless violence. There
was sex and violence on the farm with the breeding, birth and butchering of animals, but there was purpose and reason for it. It was not, however, an easy time for me to grow up or for my parents to raise their family. The problems of the 1930's were no less than those we face now; they were merely different.

We cannot go back to those times and indeed, most of us would not choose to. But there are valuable insights to be gained by examining life as it was a half-century ago. Perhaps we can learn to live in ways that give us the benefits of that culture, yet allow us to avoid its deficiencies and mistakes.

I wrote this to tell my own story. I hope others will do likewise. Our young readers especially, need as many viewpoints as they can get to round out their views of the world and to improve their understanding of our society as it was, as it is and as they want it to be.
Mama saved us from the mortgage in 1934. The mortgage that I used to think was hiding in my parents' bedroom waiting to pounce on any unwary child who might wander by. I first heard Mama speak of it in September of '33 when I was a couple months past four years old and the depression was at its worst for us.

"Whatever are we going to do, Wayne, about that mortgage?" Mama's voice trembled.

I didn't mean to eavesdrop but I lay hidden in a cozy warm space behind the big black cookstove in the kitchen of our old farmhouse. There, out of my parents' sight, I slowly nibbled a handful of raisins pilfered from Mama's pantry. With nine older brothers and sisters, I enjoyed sneaking what sweets I could while my siblings were in school.

"I don't know, Iva," Papa replied, running one hand through his thinning gray hair. "We have three months to figure something out." Then he caught sight of me and nodded toward their bedroom door at the far end of the room. "We'll talk more about it later," he told Mama.

We lived on a quarter section of land in Winnebago County six miles from Buffalo Center. That farm had always been home to us. My brother Alan told me we had the deepest, blackest dirt in the whole state of Iowa. He and Papa were proud of that.
After Papa took his team of mules and went back to the field, I crept out from my hiding spot. Mama sat at the table, staring out the window. Her gray eyes lacked their usual sparkle.

"How big is the mortgage, Mama?" I asked.

"Oh, Dear Child, you weren't supposed to hear that," she exclaimed. "Don't you worry, Papa will figure out what to do. Now would you like to comb my hair before your brothers come home?"

I delighted in combing Mama's hair. It was long, smooth and dark with a few streaks of gray but my delight was in the stories she told while I combed, of her and Papa's life clear back before I was born. She showed me the large oval wedding picture on the far wall of the parlor, taken twenty four years earlier, in 1909. In the picture Papa sits straight up with his hands on his knees and his coal black hair is combed to one side. His slightly jutting lower jaw and massive shoulders give him a look of confident determination accentuated by the merest hint of a smile.

Mama is standing, slender and beautiful at his side, her right hand resting lightly on his shoulder. At twenty she is fourteen years his junior but both have the youthful look of happiness and hope. She tells me she was a schoolteacher near the farm Papa rented. He saw her drive up to the school in her buggy each day and soon contrived an excuse to meet her.
He asked for a drink of water and a few months later they were married.

In the spring of 1909 immediately before their wedding, Papa bought the farm and built their little house with help from the neighbors. First he built the huge kitchen and basement, then he added two bedrooms over the kitchen. Ten years and five children later he added the parlor and his and Mama's bedroom across the west end of the kitchen, with two dormitory-like bedrooms above, one for boys and one for girls.

In the center of the parlor sat a round oak dining table that opened into a long oval for Sunday dinners. Through the week with the table closed, its covering cloth drooped to the floor. When it got too hot for me behind the kitchen stove, I would creep under the dining room table to hide with my purloined sweets.

A furnace in the basement heated the kitchen but a tall pot-bellied iron stove sat in one corner of the parlor with flames flickering through the isinglass in the latticework of its door. On winter evenings when we drew close together around the stove and played 'Ships Sailing' or 'Proverbs', the leaping flames sent their warmth seeping through our clothes. Sometimes Alan, seven years older, let me sit on his lap.

In the summer of 1933 when Mama was pregnant with my baby sister, Glenda, I was moved from the baby bed in Mama and Papa's bedroom into the boys' dormitory upstairs. During the four years in my parents' bedroom I either slept very soundly
or I erased all memory of what went on, because I had no idea how Mama got pregnant; indeed I had no inkling she was.

One day she said, "Lee, you're old enough to move upstairs with your brothers."

I was delighted. I had longed to join Clint, Gerry and Alan but because I slept in Mama and Papa's bedroom, I was considered a baby and was excluded from boys' activities. I rushed upstairs to inspect our bedroom. There was a west window and a north window, a tall cupboard for clothes and two big double beds. Which bed would be mine? Who would be my bed partner? I knew I'd have no choice; Alan, at eleven, was the oldest boy living at home and he would decide.

When the boys came home from the school across the road, I was bursting with my news. "I get to move upstairs to sleep."

Clint, only two years older than I, glared at me. "You baby, you're too young to leave your mama. You'll prob'ly cry all night."

"You'll sleep with Clint," Alan decided. "You might wet at night and I don't want anyone wetting in my bed."

Clint didn't want anyone wetting in his bed either and I promised I wouldn't. It had been months since I had wet my bed but the thought was still scary. I went to sleep with Clint lying two feet from me, as far away as he could get. I wakened in the dark, feeling a hand on my stomach, moving down. It reached my penis and grabbed hold tight.
"Hey!" I yelled. "Let go of me."

Alan woke up. "What's going on?"

"Clint grabbed my weenie," I complained.

Clint denied it and I don't think Alan believed me but the next morning I told Mama and she informed Papa. "Alan," Papa said, "you better separate those two youngsters." That is how it happened that I slept with Alan for the next nine years. He warned me I'd go back to Mama and Papa's bedroom if I wet but I never did.

Sleeping with Alan marked a turning point for me. Though seven and a half years apart, we were kindred in a way neither of us ever was or could be with Clint or Gerry. Alan and I joined immediately in a natural competition with those two middle boys. My union with Alan was a happy one but it led to my first whipping by Papa.

A week after I moved up to the boys' dormitory, I awoke as Alan threw back the covers and jumped up. He bounded to the north window and pushed up the sash with his left hand while his right hand searched the fly of his undershorts. Then he was peeing out the window.

"Why are you doing that?" I asked.

"Couldn't hold it," he answered. "I drunk too much root beer."

"You could of used the pot under the bed," Gerry pointed out.
"Sissies use a chamber pot," Alan said. He shook off the last drops and tucked himself back in his undershorts. I was fascinated and decided I would follow his lead.

The next morning I got out of bed, went to the north window and opened it. I lowered my shorts and proudly peed through the screen proving to my brothers that I was no sissy.

"Lee, you idiot," Alan shouted. "Stop!"

Clint and Gerry were laughing. My control was not yet complete and having loosed my stream, I could not immediately shut it off. Too late I realized my dilemma as a strong north wind blew my liquid waste against the house and even back through the window into our bedroom.

"Here," Alan ordered, "use this." He thrust the pot between my legs and I knelt on the floor. Then I heard Papa charging up the stairs.

"Who's been peeing out the window?" he demanded. No answer was needed as his eyes surveyed the scene.

"Lee didn't know about the chamber, Papa," Alan lied feebly for me. "He won't do it again."

My whipping was not severe compared to later ones. It did let me know, however, that the joys and privileges of joining my brothers were balanced by responsibilities and consequences. When Papa left and I lay crying in my bed, Clint opined I was too young, too much of a baby to stay in the boys' dormitory. I was old enough, however. Old enough to take my whipping and know not to tell on Alan.
Almost twelve, Alan claimed to know everything and I believed him. Lying in bed at night with an arm around his waist and my body spooned to his, I could ask Alan anything, and I did.

"How many stars are there in the sky?"

"Millions."

"How far away are they?"

"A billion billion miles."

"How big is the world?"

"It's part of the universe."

"How big is the universe?"

"Infinity."

"How big is infinity?"

"Infinity doesn't have any end. It goes on forever."

------------------------

"Al?"

"Yeah?"

"Anna Frerichs says we go to heaven when we die." Anna was our neighbor and she sometimes gave me a ride to Sunday School.

"Our souls go to heaven."

"Don't our bodies go to heaven?"

"No, our bodies go in the ground."

"What happens to our bodies in the ground?"

Alan frowned. "They rot and the worms eat 'em."
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I recoiled, removing my arm from around his waist. "I don't believe you." My stomach felt queasy.

Alan shrugged. "Don't then." I did believe him. I put my arm around him again and pulled myself close.

"Why do people get married?"
"To have a family."
"Do I have to get married? Sometime?"
"No, you can stay single."
"Do you want to get married?"
"Not now. Not yet."
"Will you someday?"
"Yeah, prob'ly."
"Can I live with you?"
"Sure."
"Even after I'm grown up?"
"If you want to. And if you help me with the farm work."
"I will," I promised.

For several weeks after I heard Mama and Papa talk about the mortgage, I worried silently. I went to their bedroom and looked in, afraid to enter. When I had slept there, it was cozy but now the room seemed strange. I could see their big four-poster with its featherbed and quilt. At the foot of the
bed was my old baby crib waiting, although I did not know it, for a new occupant. There was also a solid walnut bureau Mama brought with her when she married Papa. On the bureau sat a kerosene lamp with a slightly smoky glass chimney like the lamps in the kitchen and parlor.

I loved those lamps. When cold winter evening threw a gray cloud over the house, Mama lighted the lamps. They cast a warm golden glow over the rooms and their dimness hid the cracked windows, the clothing piled in corners and the general disorder that was so clearly revealed by the bright light of mid-day.

At the head of the bed was a nightstand with towels, washbasin and chamber pot. Papa's easy chair was by the bed. I couldn't see anything under the bed or anywhere in the room that I thought would be scary to Mama or Papa. The closet door was shut and I decided the mortgage might be curled up in there but I did not have the courage to open that door. I tiptoed out. I would ask Alan about the mortgage.

I went to bed earlier than Alan but that night I tossed about, willing myself not to sleep. When Alan came to bed, I snuggled close to him, though his butt was cold and made me shiver.

"Are you still awake, Lee? It's past ten."

"I couldn't get to sleep."

"Why not?"

"I was just--wondering."
"What about?"
"It's something Papa won't talk about. And it scares Mama."

"What do you mean? Come on, Lee. Out with it."

"Well...Al, what's a mortgage?"

"It's money. Money Papa and Mama have to pay every year for the farm."

I knew about money. I knew we almost never had any.

"What happens if they can't pay it?"

"Then we get kicked off the farm like the Shields family at Denison last spring."

I remembered that. It was one of the activities I missed because I slept in Mama and Papa's bedroom. Papa took my brothers and went to the sale. They came home and told about it. That Shields couldn't pay for their farm and the sheriff sold their things. Alan said Mrs. Shields cried. Not out loud but tears ran down her face while the cows and horses were sold. Mr. Shields didn't say anything. He kept his arm around his wife's shoulders and puffed on his pipe.

The Shields boys said they were glad they wouldn't have to do chores any more. Even I knew that wasn't true. They weren't lying; they were just making the best of things. We all had to do that once in a while.

Like when there weren't any presents for birthdays, we said we didn't want any. Or the times we went to the Winnebago County fair and didn't have any money so we said we
just wanted to look. The worst was the year there weren't any presents at Christmas.

None of us complained or cried. We just said our Christmas presents got lost in the mail. Mrs. Shields was the only one I heard of who cried in front of everybody like she didn't care any more.

Alan told me the mortgage had to be paid on the first of December and he kept track of the months for me. I worried all through November but on Thanksgiving Day Papa was happy. He told the older children he had gotten the money together for the mortgage payment and Alan told me.

Papa sold most of the corn and nearly all the pigs to get enough money for the payment. He kept several loads of corn that he shovelled into the cellar to burn in the furnace. Usually we burned coal but that winter we couldn't afford coal. Corn kept us warm all right but it burned faster than coal so Papa had to get up several times in the night to shovel more corn into the furnace.

Our grocery bill for the whole year at Wilson's Grocery in Buffalo Center was paid, too. Papa paid it with the check from the government program. I didn't know what a government program was but I knew a check was money and Papa said it came from President Roosevelt and it saved our necks. Papa bought a lot of groceries for Thanksgiving and Mr. Wilson put a sack of candy in free when Papa paid the bill.
In 1933 we had a good Thanksgiving dinner. Some years we only had chicken or pork with potatoes and gravy but that year we had turkey with dressing and oranges and cranberry sauce. Mama made raisin-apple pies and let me eat a handful of raisins. Papa sat at the head of the table and Mama sat across from him. Mama and Papa sat on chairs but the rest of us used benches. My older sisters, Frances and Marian, shared a short bench on one side and we four boys had a long bench across the table from them.

Papa had on a clean blue workshirt with the sleeves rolled up and a pair of brand new Oshkosh B'Gosh bib overalls. He looked good. His hair was gray and thin but I could see the muscles of his arm tighten when he picked up the platter of turkey and I thought of how strong he was.

Papa and Mama almost never went to church and usually we didn't say grace at meals. That day, though, Papa glanced across the table at Mama and asked her to say a blessing and she did. She and Papa bowed their heads and closed their eyes. So did my sisters but none of my brothers did, so I didn't either. Papa couldn't see us with his eyes shut and he was the only one we were afraid of.

I especially remember that good Thanksgiving because the next year Thanksgiving was awful. Nineteen thirty four started out bad and got worse. The spring weather was wet and cold. We couldn't raise many pigs because we had so little corn left.
One thing after another went wrong. The hay got rained on and hail hit the corn and oats. Papa said we'd be lucky if we could pay the grocery bill but there was no way we could make the mortgage payment. We thought of the Shields family and wondered if we would have to give up the farm and leave.

I asked Alan what Papa would do if we got kicked off the farm.

"He'll take any job he can find," Alan answered. "He'll go anywhere he can find work."

"We'll all go along with him anywhere he goes," I stated firmly.

"No," Alan said, "I heard him tell Mama you and Clint can stay with Aunt Jenny. I suppose Mama and Glenda will stay with Papa. The older girls can stay with families in Buffalo Center and work for their board, but Gerry and I will have to stay with Uncle Harry." Alan didn't like Uncle Harry. He was papa's oldest brother and was even more strict and gruff than Papa.

One Saturday in late October when it was raining too hard to pick corn, Papa took me with him to town. We rode warm and dry in the buggy pulled by our best team of horses. I sat on the seat between Papa's legs and he let me hold the reins. Before we started out I heard him tell Mama, "It's the only chance we have, Iva. I've got to try it."

We drove directly to the bank. Papa made me stay in the buggy while he went in to talk with Mr. Sapp, the banker.
When he came out, I'd never seen him so pale. He was trembling and the jaw muscles were bunched up tight on each side of his face. They twitched when he bit down on the kernels of corn he carried in his jacket pocket after he quit chewing tobacco. He didn't say anything to me on the way home and he held the reins all the way. I thought from the way he looked I shouldn't say anything either.

When we got home, Papa sent all of us out of the house while he talked with Mama. After supper Papa said we had to decide what we were going to do. He said we could stay on the farm until March first but if he could find work before then he would take it. He said he would try to keep us all together but if he couldn't find work, he would have to send us to live with relatives.

Mama said, "Wayne, I still think we should write to Mr. Carhart. After all, he holds the mortgage."

"No!" I had never heard Papa speak so loud and gruff to Mama. "It's no use and we're not going to beg from any more bankers."

"Mr. Carhart's not a banker," Mama said.

"Mr. Sapp is, and he told me Carhart won't give us another penny and Mr. Sapp won't either. We're done, Iva. It's over with and I don't want to hear any more about it."

A week later when all four of us boys were lying in bed trying to sleep, Alan said, "Mama and Papa are still fighting about that mortgage."
"What's there to fight about?" Gerry asked.

"Marian says Mama went ahead and wrote to Mr. Carhart yesterday and Papa's mad about it," Alan explained.

Papa hardly spoke to Mama for the next couple weeks. When Mama spoke to him he just grunted. None of us felt much like talking. Papa drove the buggy to a different town every day looking for work; Thompson one day, the next day Rake, then Woden but there weren't any jobs.

Thanksgiving Day was awful. Mama fixed a pretty good meal with fried chicken and potatoes and gravy but Alan was the only one that ate much. He was beginning to grow and nothing stopped him from eating. My stomach hurt and when I tried to eat, I couldn't swallow. I kept thinking about having to leave Mama and go live with Aunt Jenny.

Every day Mama went to the mailbox and brought in the mail. We never asked her while Papa was around but when Papa was outside Marian or Frances would ask, "Did you get a letter, Mama?" And every day she said, "No, not today."

On the last day of November Mama came back from the mailbox holding the letter in her hand. When Papa saw her bringing the letter in, he went out to the barn.

Mama sat at the table and opened the envelope as we crowded around. She took the letter out and read it aloud:

Dear Mrs. Berryhill,

Thank you for your letter of the 15th. I was sorry to hear of the troubles you and your husband have had as you have always been honest and fair with me and I hoped things
were going better for you. I do understand how difficult it has been for you with ten children.

I am too old to run the farm myself so I do not want it back. Instead I will write a new mortgage and add this year's interest to the principal. Perhaps next year will be better. It certainly can't get much worse.

With my best wishes for you and Wayne and your family, I remain. 

Sincerely yours,
David Carhart

Alan was flying out the door headed for the barn but Mama stopped him. "Alan," she said, her voice sharp and clear. Alan pulled up like he'd been lassoed.

"What, Mama?"

"You children stay here. In the house. I'll tell Papa."

We did as we were told but we watched out the window. Mama went inside and closed the barn door. I guess there are some things we don't need to know. Neither one of them ever told us what went on or what was said in the barn.

After about fifteen minutes they came out and Papa had his arm around Mama's waist. That's the closest I ever saw him come to hugging her. They both had their heads up and Mama was smiling. Papa wasn't smiling but he looked like himself for the first time since that day we went to the bank.

We all worked together for thirteen more years to pay off the mortgage. We had a mortgage-burning party on December 3rd, 1947, after Papa and Mama made the last payment.
They both lived their last years in comfort, secure and proud in the knowledge that they owned the farm free and clear of any mortgage. Every one of us children felt good that we played a part in that accomplishment.
Alan called Gerry and Clint and me to meet him in the barn. "Marian has something to tell us," he said. "She knows how we can make some money."

We gathered in the old barn, stamping our feet and blowing on our fingers in the November cold. We always listened to Marian's ideas because she was four years older than any of us boys. She was bigger and stronger too, even if she was a girl. I think it was her smile though, and the quick hugs she gave us that made us want to follow her.

Alan was eleven, the oldest of us boys and nearly a foot shorter than Marian. He walked and talked with a swagger that convinced us younger boys that he was all but invincible but he couldn't fool Marian. Inside the barn the warmth of the cows' bodies and odors of hay, grain and manure created an environment both familiar and comfortable. We didn't mind the manure smell but Mama made us leave our shoes on the back porch.

Alan sat on a one-legged milk stool and leaned against the wall of the barn while Gerry and Clint wrestled on the straw.

"Watch out for the cowshit," Alan growled as I sat down beside him hugging my knees and allowing my body to touch his leg.
Marian came in and closed the door, shutting out most of the already diminishing light of late afternoon. I wiggled with anticipation while we waited for our eyes to become accustomed to the semidarkness.

"Hey be careful," Alan said, cuffing me lightly on the head and throwing one leg out to keep from falling over. "I don't want to fall into that stuff."

I liked the barn and the animals. The building wasn't painted and I knew it was much smaller than Potter's big red barn a quarter mile down the road but I didn't care. It was large enough to hold our cows and their calves. The lean-to built against the cowbarn sheltered the bull in his pen, our four horses and Papa's team of mules. Alan and Marian could both drive a team of horses but Papa was the only one who could make the mules do what he wanted them to.

Marian's eyes had grown used to the dark and she stood in front of us, shifting her glance from one to another. She smiled and two dimples danced in her cheeks. Stars sparkled in her eyes and I thought she was the prettiest girl I knew.

"Listen, guys," Marian ordered. "We need money, right?"

"Sure!"

"Darn right."

Gerry and Clint stopped wrestling. I nodded in agreement. It was 1933 and I knew even at four, that money was important but hard to come by.
"All right, here's the plan. We'll form a club. A trapping club. We'll call ourselves the "Bloody Butchers" and I'll be president."

"Hey, you can't decide everything," Alan protested.

Marian stood up, towering over us. She was five feet six and weighed a hundred and sixty pounds which were well distributed on her brawny frame. Now her voice got sharp.

"OK, we'll vote. All in favor of me for president raise your hand." Every hand except Alan's went up. "That's settled then."

"Sure, you can be president and you can keep your dumb club." Alan was headed for the door.

"Wait a minute, Al." Marian was in control but she needed Alan and they both knew it. With him she had a club. Without him she had herself and three little boys. "You can be vice-president, Al and next year we'll trade."

Marian and Alan laid out the trapline up and down the creek on our farm. Every morning Gerry and Clint ran the trapline before school while Marian and Alan headed for the field with their team and wagon. The two of them stayed out of school through October and November to get the corn picking done. Together they could pick two loads a day like Papa. They took turns shovelling the first load at noon but at night Papa shovelled their load after his own.

Gerry and Clint milked the cows and fed all the animals. I was exempt from chores for two more years, which infuriated
Clint. When I turned six and started school, I would also start milking but for now I got off scot-free.

After supper the five of us gathered in the basement of the house to skin that morning's catch and take care of the hides. Mama didn't like for us to skin the animals in the house but we couldn't take a lantern to the barn. We caught mostly muskrats but once in a while we caught a mink.

Marian and Alan took turns skinning. "String up the rat," Marian ordered.

Clint held the dead animal by its back legs while Gerry quickly tied twine around its ankles and hung it from nails we had pounded into the floor joists overhead. Alan cut around each leg and down the inner thighs to meet in the middle. "This one's a male," he observed. "Here's his peter."

I knew a male had a peter and I wanted to see what this one looked like. I craned my neck to look but all I could see was blood and fur. I wanted to ask Alan to show it to me but I wouldn't with Marian there. On the farm we saw a lot of sexy things going on with the animals but Papa wouldn't let us say anything about it in front of the women and girls. He wouldn't like it if he knew what Alan had said in front of Marian.

Alan peeled the fur off over the animal's head and stretched the pelt on a bluntly pointed board Gerry and Clint had prepared. My job was to carry the bloody carcass outside and down to the field behind the barn. The first time Alan
told me to do it I couldn't believe he meant it. "Lee, take this thing down to the field behind the barn and throw it away."

"What!" My body rebelled and I backed away, thrusting both hands behind me.

"Heck, you want to belong to the club don't you? You've got to do something."

I turned to Marian but she was no help. Clint teased, "The little sissy's afraid of a dead animal."

I realized no one was going to help me out. I forced my fingers to take hold of the naked and bleeding rat. Disgust rocked my stomach but I clamped my jaws shut. Slowly I trudged up the stairs and out the back door. I wanted to share in the money but even more I wanted to belong. I wanted to be a 'Bloody Butcher'.

For me walking into the dark was not the scariest part. Carrying the dead body was. I had known for a while that birds and animals died and I wondered if Mama would ever die. Behind the barn I ran a few feet into the field and threw the dripping carcass as far as I could, then turned and ran back to the house.

That night in bed with Alan in the boys' bedroom I snuggled close to him and waited until Clint and Gerry's deep, even breathing told me they were asleep in the other bed.

"Al," I whispered.

"Huh? What d'you want?"
"How...how could you tell it was a male? That muskrat we skinned."

"Because I saw his peter. Didn't you see it?"

"No. I looked but there was too much blood. How big was it?"

"About a half inch--just a little bigger than yours," he teased.

I clasped Alan's waist tighter and wormed myself against him. I was glad I could ask him questions even if he did tease me some. "Will you show me on the next one?" I asked.

"Mhmm," he murmured but I knew he was nearly asleep. I shook him to wake him up. I wasn't done asking questions yet.

"Do people die, Al? Like animals do?"

Alan grunted something I took to be affirmative. I shivered and was silent for nearly a minute. Then I whispered, "Will Mama and Papa ever die?"

Alan didn't answer and I didn't say any more. I wasn't sure I wanted to know.

Shortly before Christmas, the ditch froze over and we quit trapping. Mr. Jordison, the fur buyer, came by one evening and asked to see our furs. Marian spread out the muskrats and mink like so many pearls and diamonds. Mr. Jordison's eyes glistened as he watched Marian comb the furs with her fingers.

"One hundred dollars for the lot," he said, whipping out a hundred dollar bill with a flourish.
Marian eyed him coolly. "A dollar fifty apiece for sixty rats and eight dollars each for the five mink," she said. "That's a hundred and thirty dollars. They're worth it for sure."

"Girl, you're trying to hold me up," he grumbled. "I can't waste my time with you; I've got to get on over to Robinsons. He's got three or four hundred rats for me."

I began hopping up and down about to wet myself in fear he was really going to leave. Marian was unperturbed.

"Go ahead," she told him. "I can send these furs to Chicago and get a hundred and fifty for them."

Mr. Jordison frowned. "You drive a hard bargain, Young'un. I'll give you a hundred and twenty. Or let me talk to your dad."

"They're not Papa's furs," Marian replied. "I said I'd take a hundred and thirty and that's what I want."

Mr. Jordison moaned, a sound that reminded me of Topsy when she was having a calf. "Good Lord, you'll drive me into bankruptcy for sure. I tell you what, let's split the difference, a hundred twenty-five."

"Sold!" Marian stepped forward and shook hands with the man.

Now the deed was done, I hated to see the furs go. However the sight of all that money relieved my sadness and I began to worry that my brothers might decide I hadn't earned a full share.
In the last light of day we retired to the barn where we began discussing the money and soon started to argue. Gerry and Clint wanted to cut down my share while Alan suggested he and Marian should divide the biggest part and spread the rest among us smaller boys.

Marian was adamant. "We started out in this all together and we'll stay that way. Share and share alike," she declared and I sighed in relief.

We began to gloat over our money but Marian said we had to chip in to buy Christmas presents for Mama and Papa and then we should all buy presents for each other. Gerry was more of a saver than any of the rest of us and he didn't like Marian's idea. "Why should we buy presents?" he asked. "I want to save my money."

Marian looked exasperated. "Because otherwise we won't have Christmas," she said.

That settled it. We decided to get Papa a chess set and a monopoly game. Alan and Gerald wanted to play chess and they could all read so they could play Monopoly but I couldn't. I didn't think much of Papa's gifts but I was excited when Marian and Alan said we'd get Mama an ice cream freezer.

Marian made us promise not to tell Mama and Papa what we were going to get for them. Then we did our chores in the dark. I didn't have to do any chores but I stayed with Alan until he finished milking. My membership in the "Bloody
Butchers' was my first experience of being included and I savored it.

We tramped up to the house and took off our shoes on the back porch. Inside, Mama was bending over the cookstove stirring a frying pan of sliced potatoes. Papa sat at one end of the big kitchen, leaning back against the wall in a straight-backed chair. His feet were up on the warm water reservoir. Francie sat beside him as he looked at the Des Moines Register in the flickering yellow light from a kerosene lamp. He would pick a headline that interested him and she would read the whole article out loud. We bustled into the room smiling but quiet.

The kitchen was large, sixteen feet by twenty, but the big square cookstove and a round dinner table took up much of the space. We jostled each other as we hung our coats and caps on hooks in the shadows around the edges of the room. I smelled the frying potatoes and freshly baked bread, thought of the presents we would buy and felt supremely happy as one of the newly rich 'Bloody Butchers'.

"What's making all of you so pleased with yourselves?" Papa asked.

"We sold our furs," Marian replied.

"And we divided up the money," Alan said.

"We're going to buy Christmas presents," Clint declared.

"We know what we're getting for you," I added.

"Pipe down, you guys," Alan warned.
I knew I'd better not say any more within hearing of the others but I could not stay quiet. I drew a chair up by Mama and stood on it. Reaching both arms around her neck I pulled her ear close to my lips.

"An ice cream freezer," I whispered. "That's what we're getting you."

"That's nice, Dear," Mama said but pandemonium broke out all over the room.

"He told!" Clint howled.

They surrounded me and pulled me off the chair, all trying to pummel me at once. Papa and Francie were laughing but Mama made the others stop whacking me.

"Of course he's too young to keep a secret," she told them. "You should have known."

"Then he's too young to be in the club," Clint said.

"Kick him out," Gerald agreed.

They did kick me out. The vote was unanimous but Marian gave me my share of the money anyway. I had to sleep with Francie in the girls' bedroom for three nights. Then we had a cold snap and Alan came and got me to sleep with him again.

The 'Bloody Butchers' club was over for that year. The next year Alan was president and he let me in again. I had to leave though, when they talked about secret stuff.

All of the years of the depression we children made our Christmas money trapping and selling furs. Papa didn't give
any of us an allowance or pay us for working on the farm but he didn't take any of the money we earned, either.
Miss Gjerstad frowned. She was heavyset and with her lined face and gold wire rimmed spectacles she looked at least as old as some of our parents. From behind her desk she glared at those who dared to meet her gaze.

I was not one of them. I had come joyfully to school with Clint and Gerry expecting nothing but friendship and approval. My brothers' tales of school had always sounded exciting and fun. My expectations were unrealistic so perhaps no teacher could have fulfilled them. Certainly Miss Gjerstad did not.

Folding her arms across her chest she frowned and said, "Tie your shoestrings, Lee, or you'll trip on them."

I had wanted to start to school the previous year, 1934, but Mama said I was too small for first grade and we did not have kindergarten in our one-room rural school. I was sorry Alan would not be with me but he was eager to start high school in Buffalo Center. He and Francie left the house on foot at seven each morning to meet the B.C. bus a mile away, leaving Clint and Gerry to finish chores.

I felt handsome in my new shirt and overalls and smiled as Mama combed my hair. I could not remember the long curls Papa had cut off when I was two but my hair was still slightly wavy. Mama smiled back at me and said, "If you do as well as you look, I'll be pleased."
"I will, Mama," I promised.

It was the end of August and still hot enough for Clint and me to run off to school barefoot but Gerry wore shoes. He said it wasn't dignified to go barefoot. "I don't care if it isn't dignified," Clint said. "It's easier to wash cow manure off my bare feet than off my shoes."

Gerry said I was lucky to start with a new teacher but Clint disagreed. In an argument with Alan or me Clint always agreed with Gerry but he had his own ideas and often disagreed with everybody.

"Miss Smith was all right," Clint said. "Miss Gjerstad may be worse. Her name is sure harder to spell." Sometimes Clint was right, and this was one of those times.

Mr. Hartman was president of the school board and when Miss Smith resigned to go back to college, he urged the board to hire Miss Gjerstad. "She looks fierce," Mr. Hartman told Mama, "and that's good. Maybe she'll scare some good sense and common decency into your boys and the Potter boys."

Mr. Hartman's daughters, Carolyn and Dorothy, were often teased by the older boys in school. Dorothy and five boys including myself entered first grade that fall. We had never had any other teacher so we accepted Miss Gjerstad's unhappy and irritable ways. My brothers and the Potter boys were less charitable.
At first recess Tommy Potter said, "Man, she's crabby. She didn't need to jump all over me just for talking to Billy."

Carolyn Hartman, a plump third grader, tried to make excuses for the teacher. "You boys don't help any. If you didn't whisper, she wouldn't need to scold."

The boys were not appeased. "If she wants to scold, we'll give her something to scold about," Clint threatened, and almost immediately they did.

"Harold," Billy Potter whispered when the teacher's back was turned, "pop her with a spitball."

Harold Johnson was slow-witted and tried always to do as he was told by anybody and Billy knew this. With Billy grinning and nodding encouragement, Harold lumbered to his feet, drew back his hand and let fly just as Miss Gjerstad turned around.

Splat! Right in the forehead. I gasped as a titter ran through the room and Billy nearly fell out of his seat laughing.

"Billy told me to," Harold sputtered trying to share the blame, but Billy wasn't having any.

"I didn't tell you nothing," he declared.

I watched in awe, never having thought pupils would dare to do such shenanigans. That evening at supper we talked about it.

"Gee, and I missed it," Alan mourned.
"It's a good thing you weren't there, Mama said. "I wouldn't want you involved in any such goings-on."

"Why not, Mama? Papa did when he was my age."

Mama pierced Alan with a sharp glance and her gray eyes darkened. "What your Papa did when he was thirteen was wrong and he will tell you so himself."

I looked at Papa. His hair was gray and his face was lined and leathery from more than sixty years of sun and wind. His tall, still muscular frame filled out his blue chambray shirt. Could he ever have been a small dark haired teen-ager like Alan, just beginning to stretch above five feet?

We stayed quiet while Papa chewed his food, looking straight ahead. Finally he swallowed, cleared his throat and said, "Your Mama's right, Boys. You don't need to repeat every mistake I made."

"What did you do, Papa, when you were thirteen?" Gerry asked.

Papa looked down at his plate and the lids shuttered his eyes. "He broke--," Alan began.

Now Mama's eyes snapped. "That's enough!" Her voice was sharp and we knew she meant business. "There's been too much talk of bad behavior and we'll have no more of it." She shifted her glance to each of us in turn. Then she smiled and said, "Have any of you had something nice happen today?"
Later that night when we went to bed, me with Alan, and Clint with Gerry in the other bed, we three tried to get Alan to tell us what Papa had done so many years ago.

"What did he do and how do you happen to know about it, Al?" Clint asked.

"I know because Papa told me," Alan replied. "Last month when we were hauling hay together. I can't tell you what it was though, because Mama wouldn't like it and I don't think Papa would either."

Alan was more afraid of Mama's disapproval than he was of Papa's whippings. I was more afraid of Papa's whippings. Try as we would we couldn't get Alan to tell us any more. In a short time Clint and Gerry were quiet.

"I wish you were still going to school here with us, Al." I hugged his chest.

"I'm glad I'm not. God, I couldn't wait to get out of there."

"Do you like high school?"

"Oh yeah, it's great. Lots different from grade school. You've seen the schoolhouse. Ten times bigger than this one here and made of brick."

"What's it like inside?"

"Long wide hallways, and rooms all over the place. Kids and teachers. Lots of them. All kinds."

"Are the teachers nice?"
"Most of them. There's one, Coach Baldus, who's not so hot. We call him Bald Ass," Alan chuckled.

"Clint and Gerry say Miss Gjerstad's worse than Miss Smith," I ventured.

"She must be a real witch then. I bet Tommy and Billy won't let her get away with it though."

I was quiet for a moment. Then I said, "I didn't like it when Harold hit Miss Gjerstad in the face with a spitball."

"Why not? She probably deserved it."

"I don't know. She looked...surprised and...sort of scared. I thought she was going to cry."

"Christ if she cries the first week, she'll never last," Alan declared. "What did she do?"

"She sent Harold home but she didn't do anything to Billy. He told Harold to do it. I heard him."

"You didn't tell her that, did you?"

"No, I was afraid to. I was scared Billy would beat me up," I admitted.

"Yeah, he probably would. Shit, Lee, you should never tell on any of the guys. You've got to stick together, especially us and Potters. She'll make your lives miserable if you don't."

I was uncomfortable siding with Billy but I didn't want to go against what Alan told me and I sure didn't want to get beaten up. I don't know who told on Billy but I was glad
someone did. It might have been Carolyn Hartman. She probably told her father.

Miss Gjerstad sent Billy home the next day. Mr. Potter whipped him and Mr. Johnson whipped Harold. Mr. Hartman called a meeting of the schoolboard and Mama went to it but she wouldn't say what went on. Tommy Potter said Miss Gjerstad threatened to quit but the board convinced her to stay on.

It was not a great start in our school for Miss Gjerstad. We were all quieter after the first week but things didn't get any better for me. I tried but I couldn't get Miss Gjerstad to like me. Alan told me I shouldn't try. "I told you she's a witch, Lee. She's never going to like you."

"You don't know her, Al. She's not that bad."

"Well Tommy and Billy say she is and Clint told me she wouldn't let you go to the toilet."

My cheeks got hot. I hadn't wanted Alan to know about that. "I don't think she saw I had my hand up."

"Oh she saw you all right. Clint said you waved your hand around a long time before you wet yourself."

Tears stung my eyelids and I couldn't think of anything to say. She had made me get a mop and clean up my mess and I had struggled to keep from crying throughout the whole humiliation. Alan put a hand on my shoulder and I blinked back the tears. "It wasn't your fault," he said.
I felt both better and worse. Better because he understood and worse because I admired him so much and now he knew how humiliated I had been. I cried openly.

"Don't tell Mama and Papa, Al," I said.

"I won't," Al said, "but you've got to promise you'll get right up and go if you need to whether the teacher gives you permission or not. You can't let anybody treat you like that."

I promised I would do what Alan said but it wasn't easy. We were supposed to get permission before we went to the toilet and some of the boys would go every period if they could get away with it. The privy was in the far corner of the schoolyard and they could spend ten or fifteen minutes on each trip.

Miss Gjerstad watched me pretty close after that and always nodded right away if I raised one or two fingers. That was the signal and I didn't use it unless I really needed to go.

The first year of school wasn't much fun but it was an awakening for me. Reading and arithmetic were easy and I took to books and studies quickly. Social life was something else.

At recess we first graders played by ourselves. There were no second graders that year and the older kids wouldn't play with us.
One day as we burst out the door into the September sunshine, Lester Johnson shouted, "I get the swing," and ran to one of them.

I ran to the other one but Grant Ostrander, ambling along behind me said, "I call the other swing."

I got to it first and climbed in. I turned and grinned at Grant. "You lose. Too bad," I said.

"No I don't," he replied calmly. He stood directly in the path of the swing, not a foot from me. He had a round, open face and I did not think he looked angry. "I called this swing and it's mine," he said. "Get out."

"I got here first," I said but my voice was thin, almost whining, to my own ears.

"I don't care. I called it." Grant took hold of the swing with one hand. "Or do you want to fight?" he asked.

I looked him over. He was only an inch or so taller than I was but considerably broader, heavier, more muscular.

"Oh all right," I said, "you can have it." My capitulation was observed by the whole school.

I walked from the swing to the teeter-totter where Galen Potter and Harry Miller were going up and down while Dorothy Hartman watched. Was I expected to teeter with Dorothy? I was used to playing with my three brothers and the Potter boys. My sisters were much older except Glenda who was still a baby. I had never been around a girl my own age.
"Do you want to teeter?" Dorothy asked and a quick shy smile lighted her face.

I looked around. The other boys had stopped to watch. I could hear the scornful gibes rising in their throats. 'Lee's playing with a girrrrlll'. I didn't know the right answer. I looked down, turned halfway and mumbled, "No, uh, no I don't feel like it right now."

Dorothy's smile faded. She started to walk away. I had hurt her feelings and I was sorry. The right answer was 'yes' I realized and I opened my mouth to say it as Grant slid out of the swing.

"I'll teeter with you, Dorothy," he said. "Lee, you can have the swing."

Dorothy smiled at Grant, her face sunny again and they climbed on the teeter-totter while I retired in total confusion.

However, I was not confused in the classroom. I could read and spell and knew my numbers. When Miss Gjerstad asked questions, my hand went up. Sometimes others knew the answer but I enjoyed beating them to it. I was lightning fast at addition and subtraction and I could sound out any word in our reading book. Dorothy and Grant were almost as quick as I was but Galen, Harry and Lester were far behind. They never volunteered and if they were asked, they seldom knew what to say while Grant, Dorothy and I waved our hands and whispered, "I know, I know!"
It was no wonder those boys became morose and hostile. Even Miss Gjerstad finally figured it out. After two months she divided the class in half. Lester, Galen and Harry were separated from us.

Harry was shy and said very little. Galen and Lester hated being in class with us but they also hated being separated into a lower group. They didn't want to fight with Grant and they couldn't fight with Dorothy so they concentrated on me.

Galen was the youngest of the Potter boys so he and I had been friends before school began. When the class was divided, Galen and Lester cornered me on the playground at recess.

"Come on, Lee. We're going down behind the barn," Lester announced.

"What for?" I asked, instantly alarmed.

"You'll find out," Galen said, "Come on." He grabbed my arm.

"No," I resisted.

Lester took hold of my other arm and they hustled me to the barn that housed the ponies several of the older boys rode to school.

"What do you guys want?"

"We're going to beat the piss out of you," Lester told me.

"What for?" I repeated. My voice quivered and I hated it.
"You think you're smart and we're going to show you you're not," Galen explained.

"Put up your dukes." Lester had his fists raised and he danced toward me, snapping one hand at my nose.

"No fair, two on one," I stalled.

"OK, one on one," Lester said. "I'll take you by myself."

Lester was built strong and heavy like Grant. Galen was taller but not quite as heavy. I was the smallest in our class including Dorothy, by five or ten pounds.

"I don't want to fight," I said.

As Lester advanced on me the blessed bell rang, ending recess and we ran back to our classroom. "This isn't over," Lester warned.

That evening I begged Alan for help. Clint and Gerry had already told me I had to fight my own battles. Alan listened as I told him what happened. He shook his head.

"I can't help you, Lee. I think you'll have to fight them."

"But I can't, Al! They're a lot bigger than me."

"Then I guess you'll have to take a beating," he said. "There is one thing you can try, though. You can challenge them to wrestle."

"But I can't beat them wrestling either."

"They won't hurt you as much wrestling," Alan pointed out. "Not likely they'll draw any blood."
I wasn't happy with that advice but it was the best I could get without going to Mama and Papa or the teacher. I wouldn't do that. I didn't want my parents or the teacher to know the humiliating truth.

During first period next day Lester and Galen smiled and nodded at each other as I watched them out of the corner of my eye. My stomach tightened and I could not sit still. At recess they danced around me.

"Come on, let's go," Lester demanded.

"I don't want to fist-fight," I said. "Let's wrestle instead."

Lester frowned. "Hell, no! There's no hitting if we wrestle. I told you we're going to beat the piss out of you."

I began to sweat. "You afraid to wrestle me, Lester? You're bigger than I am. How about you, Galen?"

"Sure, I'll wrestle you," Galen replied. I think he was relieved. He was not as bloodthirsty as Lester.

Lester was mad and still wanted a real fight but after Galen agreed to wrestle, Lester finally went along. Behind the barn Galen and I rolled on the ground a few minutes and he pinned me. I wasn't hurt; I even started getting warmed up and excited.

Then Lester rushed at me. I tried my best against him and we wrestled hard. I got on top of him once and I think it scared him. It would be awful for him to get pinned by me.
He was too strong and heavy for me though, and he was finally able to hold my shoulders to the ground.

After that Galen and Lester were friendly to me again. The pecking order was established and it was exactly opposite on the playground from what it was in the classroom.
Clint and Gerry and I kept after Alan to tell us what Papa had done when he was thirteen. Alan wouldn't tell us, but after a few weeks the four of us convinced Papa one rainy Saturday to tell us himself. Papa told us the story after we cleaned out the horse barn. We had turned the horses out and all worked together.

"Why did you tell Alan," Gerry asked, "if you won't tell us?"

"I told Alan," Papa said, "when we were hauling hay together a couple of months ago, along about the middle of July. Alan was finishing eighth grade and was worrying about high school."

"I asked Papa if high school was hard," Alan interrupted, "and Papa said he never went to high school."

"You didn't go to high school, Papa?" Gerry asked.

"No," Papa said. "I never went past the sixth grade."

Clint and I gasped. Gerry's eyes widened. "I'm in sixth grade," he exclaimed. "You mean you never went any further than I am right now?"

Papa sighed and his face was somber. "It's raining too hard to do any work outside," he said. "Let's go up in the haymow where it smells better and I'll try to explain it to all of you."
One by one we climbed the ladder to the sweet smelling red clover, timothy, and alfalfa mixture that was stored in the haymow above the cattle. Papa sat with his back against the wall of the barn while we lounged about on the hay but no one wrestled like we usually would.

"Didn't your papa make you go to school?" Gerry asked.

"My father was dead," Papa explained. "He died nearly fifty years ago. Things were a lot different in those days. There weren't many schools and we had to walk three and a half miles. We worked in spring and fall so we only went to school during the winter months. December through March," Papa said. "Field work started in April and went on until Thanksgiving."

"Did you quit school when your papa died?" Gerry asked.

"Almost," Papa said. "Mama thought I needed school but I had to stay home and help with the field work since I was the only boy at home."

"Where were your brothers, Papa?" I asked.

"Harry was in the army," Papa replied. "And Isaac was only eighteen but he had gotten married a few weeks before my father died."

"What did he die of, Papa?"

"They called it apoplexy then but nowadays they'd call it a stroke. He was only forty-seven and I was twelve," Papa said.
"Twelve!" Clint exclaimed, "That's younger than Alan is now. Could you and your mama run the farm without him?"

"Yes," Papa said, "Mama and I could do the work. But I think I needed a father to make me behave. After my father died," Papa continued, "I helped Mama farm the forty acres that weren't too swampy but she wanted me go to school in the winter."

Papa went ahead and told us how he had gotten into trouble. He was thirteen but only in sixth grade. The teacher, Mr. Weaver, was a middle-aged man who, according to Papa, had been a ne'er-do-well farm hand for one family or another in the neighborhood until he was hired to teach the school.

Mr. Weaver and Papa did not get along. Papa admitted it was partly his fault. He teased the girls, whispered to the other boys, and seldom studied. Mr. Weaver had almost no experience and little patience in dealing with children. His abrupt manner had an acceptably immobilizing effect on the girls but caused a rebellious uprising in Papa. The two of them headed quickly toward a collision.

It happened, finally, toward the end of a cold February afternoon when Papa tried to enliven a boring day. He and another boy played catch with a ball when Mr. Weaver was helping another student and had his back to them. When the teacher turned and saw Papa stretching to catch the ball, he lost his temper. One thing led to another until Mr. Weaver
grabbed Papa by the collar. Papa had a temper, too, and he pushed Mr. Weaver, who stumbled backward, tripped over a desk and fell.

When Mr. Weaver fell there was a 'snap' and he cried out. He was unable to get up and lay on the floor with his leg at an odd angle. Papa was shocked at what he had done. He ran out of the school room and took to his heels.

Papa stayed out in the fields as long as he could stand the cold. With no hat, coat, mittens or overshoes he had to keep moving or freeze. He knew he had hurt the teacher and he feared he would be jailed, possibly, he thought, for the rest of his life. Finally, though, the cold drove him home.

"Golly, Papa," Gerald said, "What did your mama say?"

"She didn't scold," Papa said. "She told me the trouble I was in was too serious for scolding. The schoolboard wanted to put me in jail."

"Did you have to go to jail?" I asked.

"No, they decided I was too young to be put in jail with grown men," Papa said. "The board told Mother I was expelled forever and Mama agreed."

"You were lucky, Papa," Alan pointed out. "You didn't want to go to school anyway."

"That was exciting, Papa," Gerald said. "Why didn't you tell it to us before?"
"I thought I was lucky," Papa said, "but I've found out I wasn't. And your question, Gerald, brings up another - why am I telling you now?"

"Why ARE you telling us now?" Clint asked.

"I never told anyone except Alan before today. Not your mother, not your older brothers and sisters, not a soul."

"Mama knew," Alan said.

"Yes, she knew," Papa said slowly, "though I often wished she didn't. My mother told her. I was too ashamed to tell her."

"Ashamed of being kicked out?" Gerald asked.

"More than that. I was ashamed of fighting, ashamed of hurting the teacher -"

"How bad did you hurt him?" Clint interrupted.

"His leg was broken. He could have died and then I WOULD have been jailed. Anyway, I was ashamed of being expelled, of not finishing sixth grade, and of not being able to read and write much more than my name."

"Are you still ashamed, Papa?" Gerald asked.

"I hate to ask Mr. Wilson at the grocery to make out a check for me, or to ask the banker to read a contract out loud," Papa said, "but since I found out the cause of it, I'm not ashamed."

"What was the cause of it, Papa?"

"How did you find out?" The questions boiled out of us.
"I always thought I was too dumb," Papa said. "I thought that was why I couldn't read and why I hated school. Then last winter in Femrite's Five & Ten I picked up this pair of reading glasses." He pulled a pair of plain spectacles from the bib pocket of his overalls. "With these the letters are clear. I can read now."

"Did you buy them last spring, Papa?"

"Why haven't you been wearing them?"

"I've been wearing them for my lessons," Papa said. "Your mama's been teaching me to read after you children are in bed. She says I'm a good reader now so I decided to tell you boys the whole story. And to tell you not to make the mistake I did."

"We can all read, Papa, we don't need glasses," Clint said.

"I know," Papa replied. "You're the lucky ones. You all do well in school and I don't want any of you to get in trouble and get expelled. I'll get all of you through high school," Papa vowed. "Then I hope you'll go on to college."

"But I don't want to go to college, Papa," I said. "I want to farm. With you and Alan."

Papa eyed me grimly, and his jaws crunched on a kernel of corn. For a moment I feared he might scold but then he shook his head. "Farming isn't good right now. It's the best work a man can get with no education but every man should have a
choice. You go to college, then if you choose to come back and farm so be it."

That night when we went to bed we talked about college. Irvin, our oldest brother, had started college but had to drop out because he didn't have any money. Ada and Boyd each had one year of college but were now working at jobs they could have gotten without any college. I couldn't see that going to college had helped anybody. "Do I have to go to college, Al?" I asked.

"No," Alan replied. "When you're eighteen, you're on your own. You can do what you want."

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

Before Alan could answer Clint piped up, "I'm going to college. I don't want to farm."

"I'm going, too," Gerry chimed in. "I want to be an engineer."

Alan finally answered. "Not me," he said. "I'm going to take over the farm. In five years when I'm eighteen, Papa will be sixty five and he'll need help. To heck with college. Who needs it?"

"Sure," I echoed, "who needs it? I'll stay here and help you."
I stood on the bank by our swimming hole watching with a mixture of longing and despair while my brothers and the Potter boys waded and played together in water that did not quite cover their butts. They laughed and shouted as the bigger boys pushed the smaller ones under. I was seven, the youngest of the bunch and each day I thought, "Tomorrow — maybe tomorrow I'll go in."

"Come on, Scaredy," Billy Potter called. His reckless eyes and the challenge in his voice goaded me. "You can't drown in this little bit of water."

For weeks the fear of drowning had been my excuse. Now in the hot Iowa summer of '36 with our corn crop burning up and the water in our swimming hole not high enough to cover my navel, this excuse was no good. I wished I was as big and brave as my brother, Alan. Then I would not be afraid of being teased and laughed at.

Papa and us boys all wanted it to rain. We worried along with Papa about the corn but we were also concerned about the water in the swimming hole. Swimming in the sunshine was a lot more fun, Alan said, than a bath in the washtub in the kitchen on Saturday night. For boys brave enough to swim naked, the creek offered one of the few forms of recreation we could afford. It was ours, it was free and the older boys used it all summer long.
Streams like this one wandered across our gently rolling farmland in a lazy fashion well suited to the desires and habits of boys in summer. They fingered every field and drained the swamps, coalescing below Algona to eddy aimlessly in the stagnant pools and whorls of Union slough. The creek that ran through my childhood was a small natural brook that had an influence on my life out of proportion to its size. It meandered across our farm following the gravitational pull of what slight downhill slant it could find in the near-level fields.

There were other waterways that had been dredged straight and deep along roads or fence rows so they wouldn't interfere with a farmer tilling his fields. They served their purpose, sucking up extra moisture after heavy rains but we looked down our noses at them, calling them ditches. For that's what they were - drainage ditches - dug or dredged with no care taken for beauty or for all the other values our creek held for us.

Our neighbors, the Potters, had a ditch that ran straight along the road separating their farm from ours, but even they admitted it wasn't much good for swimming and trapping and hiding out doing the things we liked. In our creek and along its banks my brothers and the Potter boys played and teased each other and told stories. I lay on my back in the grass, listening as the older boys told tales of their romances and fights. I tried to figure out whether they lied or if they just told stories and why their story-telling was okay but I
was not to 'go telling any stories' to Mama when she asked me if I took any raisins from the box on the pantry shelf.

The Potter boys liked to swim with us in our swimming hole, a spot where the creek widened into a circular pool twenty five or thirty feet across. This place belonged to us boys. We allowed no girls there and only grudgingly tolerated an occasional adult. We chased each other up and down the tall cottonwood and poplar trees and hid in the white-flowering elderberry bushes that leaned toward each other, nearly bridging the creek at the points where it entered and left the pool. Later we ate the purple elderberries, oblivious to the stains. The bushes parted on the near side allowing us a wide sloping grassy space where we lay browning our bodies in the sun.

Grown-up boys sometimes came back to check on the hundred year old oak across the creek on the far side of the pool. This tree had huge branches going out from the trunk in all directions, level with the ground, The branch that grew out over the creek was about ten or twelve feet above the water. Over the center of the swimming hole this branch had been whittled flat by half a century of boys scraping with pocket knives. When the water was up, Tommy Potter and Alan stood on that branch, showing off and proud because they weren't afraid to dive in head first. We younger boys watched them and bragged to each other that we'd soon be up there.
Potters' ditch had a big deep hole along the road where a person could swim but all the trees and bushes had been dug out by the dredger. We didn't want people to see us so we wouldn't swim there. The Potters did a few times. Then some guys in a car came by and took the boys' clothes and hid them. After that the Potter boys swam with us.

It was the same with smoking; we didn't want anyone to see us doing that either. We rolled our own and most of us started when we were seven or eight. We used cigarette papers at five cents for fifty if somebody had a nickel, but lots of times we used a plain writing tablet left over from school. Once I tried newspaper but the printing ink made awful poison-smelling smoke.

We couldn't smoke in the house, of course, and we knew better than to sneak into the barn or any of the other buildings, so the bushes down at the creek were the only protection we had. The swimming hole was almost half a mile from the barn and we didn't want to go that far to smoke so we found a weeping willow along the creek bank only about eighty rods from the barn. Its leafy branches hung to the ground like a green curtain, enclosing an open space around the trunk where we sat and smoked in splendid isolation.

The best smoking was in September when we used either Indian tobacco made from ripe sour dock seeds, or dry corn silk. Sour dock grew three or four feet tall on the banks of the creek among Canada thistles standing guard with sharp
little bayonets, and milkweed plants whose pregnant pods sent seeds parachuting on every breeze. We liked to go barefoot and shirtless well into September and it seemed to me the thistles' main purpose was to keep us from gathering sour dock seeds. When Mama asked me how I got my arms scratched up, I had to tell her a story.

Our creek was also a good place to find fish and birds and animals for our trapping club, the Bloody Butchers. The trapping club and smoking with the other boys were fun but I did not feel comfortable at the swimming hole. I started going there in 1936 when I was seven, but I didn't undress or go in the water. I would have gone in with only my brothers but I didn't want to be naked with the Potter boys. Tommy and Billy Potter said mean things and grabbed at each other and teased their little brothers. I was pretty sure if I took my clothes off, they would tease me, too.

I thought that when I turned eight, I would go swimming. That next summer, after my birthday, I tried to talk myself into it but I couldn't. At night in bed I'd tell myself I didn't care what the Potter boys said but the next day I always got scared and lay on the grass again.

I wanted to talk to Alan about it but not with Clint and Gerry there. Finally one Saturday in July they got up before Alan and me. I snatched the chance to talk to Alan alone.

"Al?"

"Yeah."
I was silent. I didn't know how to start. "What did you want?" Alan asked.

"Well, Al why...why do Tommy and Billy Potter grab at each other's weenie and sometimes they grab at yours?"

"Hell, they're just teasing."

"They tease their little brothers, too and I don't like it."

"They don't hurt anybody, Lee."

"No, but...Al, I want to go swimming but...I don't want them to tease me."

"Don't pay any attention to them. They probably won't even notice you."

Nineteen thirty-seven was a better year for corn. We had enough rain in June and July and a big rain in early August. Alan said the water was ten feet deep. The other guys could all swim and they thought I was just afraid of the high water. They called me a big baby and Alan asked me if I was ever going to learn to swim. I finally told him I would when the water went down so it wasn't over my head. I thought that would be a long time but in a couple of days Alan stood in the middle of the swimming hole and the water came only to the nipples on his chest.

He called to me, "Take off your clothes and jump in, Lee. I'll help you learn to swim."

I took off my shirt and overalls but what I had been afraid of began to happen. My penis came up and I knew Tommy
and Billy were going to point at me and laugh. When it started to do it, I turned my back and skinned out of my underwear. Then I covered myself up with both hands and jumped into the middle of the pool.

Alan was only a head taller than me so I thought the water would come just to my chin but it went over my head. I gasped and took in some water. I needed to breathe. My lungs were about to burst and my head felt dizzy. I stuck one hand up above the water and waved but nobody came out to get me, not even Alan.

The current tumbled me head over heels and my face came out of the water. I got a breath of air but then I went under again. I thought I was going to drown and I couldn't understand why Alan would let me die. When I came up the next time, I was near the outlet of the pool and a branch was sticking out over the water down close. I grabbed and missed but grabbed again and got hold of it. I pulled myself to shore and crawled out, coughing, sputtering and mad as hops but not scared any more about anybody seeing me.

"Why didn't you come and get me, Alan?" I hollered. "I nearly drowned!"

"Hell, I knew you could make it," Alan said. "If you got in any real trouble, I'd come and get you."

Billy Potter grinned. "If you stood on a rock like Al did, your head wouldn't have gone under." Billy and Alan laughed at the trick they had played.
I groused around on the bank for a while but the others were having so much fun I wanted to go in again. I wasn't worried any more that the Potter boys would tease me so I waded into the shallow water near shore. I was glad Alan said he'd save me if I was really drowning so I asked him to show me how to glide on my stomach and splash with my feet. After I practiced a while, I could get around the pool nearly as good as anybody. I felt like one of them now.

When we got dressed and started home, Alan said, "Lee, you better not tell Mama and Papa about the deep water."

"Why not?" I protested. "I want to tell them I learned to swim."

"That's okay," Alan assured me. "Just don't make a big deal out of it."

I nodded. I didn't want to get Alan into any trouble. As soon as we got in the house, I told Mama I knew how to swim.

"That's good," she said. "Now I won't worry about you down there."

I ran outside and found Papa leading his team of mules to the barn. I learned to swim today, Papa," I said.

"You did? At the swimming hole?"

"Sure."

Papa stopped and gave a slight tug on the reins. Then he tipped his cap back and scratched the few hairs he still had
on the top of his head. He looked me up and down, measuring me like a pig for market.

"Pretty deep wasn't it, Boy? Over your head, I bet."

"Doesn't matter how deep it is, Papa, once you know how to swim."

He was quiet then, waiting for me to go on. I turned a little pink and looked down, ashamed of the story I wasn't telling.

After a few seconds Papa's face softened and he said gently, "Were you scared?"

For a moment I wanted to climb up in his arms. I wanted to tell him I was scared of a lot of things. Of him and Mama dying. Of my weenie standing up and the Potter boys teasing. Of the trick Alan pulled and me almost drowning.

I didn't, though. Papa and I never talked much to each other.

I said, "Heck, no, Papa. What's there to be scared of?"

Besides learning to swim and getting over my shyness at being naked with the Potter boys, another good thing happened that summer. I went to Bible School at the Congregational Church and Anna Frerichs was my teacher. Anna had taken me to Sunday School once in a while ever since I was four years old, but she was never my teacher. This summer in Bible School she was my teacher for the first time. I almost didn't get to go, though, because Papa and the new minister didn't get along.
Papa liked the old minister, Rev. Boomgarden, because he talked to Papa about crops and livestock and didn't pressure Papa to go to church. Papa never said anything against religion but he said he could be just as religious out in the field as he could in church and a darn sight cheaper.

Well, that summer Rev. Boomgarden retired and the new minister, Rev. David Farrington, came to call and invited all of us to church and Sunday school. He drove a nice car, a '36 Ford Alan said. Rev. Farrington wore wire rimmed glasses and a suit that Papa said looked brand new. Mama offered him a cup of coffee but he looked at our chairs and benches and said he just had a cup at Anna Frerichs' house. Sure, I know he might have snagged his suit but I still think he should have sat down even if he didn't want any coffee.

Papa came in from greasing a wagon and Rev. Farrington held out a pink and pudgy little hand to introduce himself. Papa wiped axle grease off his fingers on his overalls and they shook hands. Then Rev. Farrington didn't want to wipe his hand on his suit so he stood looking at the black grease on his hand. Finally he pulled out a nice white handkerchief and wiped his hands.

Rev. Farrington asked Papa how much he planned on giving to the Lord this year.

"What's my fair share?" Papa asked.
"Everything we have comes from the Lord," the pious preacher replied. "Many people consider a tithe to be fair. That's ten percent."

"Can't do it, Reverend. Sorry," Papa said.

"How about one hundred dollars?"

"Too much."

"Fifty?"

"Still too much. Maybe next year," Papa said edging toward the door.

"Just a minute, Mr. Berryhill," Rev. Farrington was not giving up. "I see you take the Des Moines Register. What does that cost? Don't you think you should give as much to the Lord as you pay for the newspaper?"

Papa turned to Iva. "How much is it, Iva?"

"Eighteen dollars a year," she told him.

"Do we have that much in the checking account?"

"Yes, and a little more."

"All right," Papa said, "give the Reverend a check for eighteen dollars. I guess we can spare that."

Later Mama said she was glad Papa decided to give something. Papa said he couldn't think of a good reason not to at the time but that he really felt he got more good out of the Register than he did from the church.

I went to Bible School at the Congregational Church every summer from second grade through seventh grade. Our neighbor, Anna Frerichs, invited all of us boys when I was in second
grade but I was the only one who wanted to go. I rode with Anna and she was my Bible School teacher for several years.

Anna Frerichs was a good woman, short, heavy-set with a rocking or rolling gait, but more to the point, she always smiled and I felt she liked me. I had wanted and expected this from Miss Gjerstad in regular school but there I was disappointed. Anna was important to me. She was the first person outside our family that made me feel I was worth something.
Papa's face flushed as he turned away from Alan and me.

"We can't afford to buy a tractor," he said. "That's all there is to it."

I wanted to let it drop, but Alan wouldn't. He stepped in front of Papa and looked him in the eye. "We can't afford not to," Alan said. "All the neighbors use tractors."

"Yes," Papa replied, "and see what happens to them. Johnsons got a tractor and the next year the sheriff sold them out."

"Please, Al," I whispered, tugging at the tail of his jacket.

Alan waved one hand at me. "Be quiet," he ordered. He reached out and laid his hand on Papa's sleeve. "You make it out worse than it is, Papa," he declared. "It's been three years since Johnsons sold out, and that was because of the drought."

"We had the same drought they did," Papa said. He jerked his arm free. "But we didn't owe anybody a thousand dollars for a tractor," he added, "and our horses ate hay and oats we raised ourselves."

It scared me to hear Alan and Papa argue. I had to crane my neck to look up at them. I was surprised to see Alan was as tall as Papa. Alan turned 16 in March, and it seemed to me he had grown six inches overnight. None of us had ever argued
with Papa, not Mama, not Irvin who was married, or Boyd in college in Iowa City. Alan had not been afraid of Papa the way Clint and Gerry and I were, but he had always obeyed without arguing.

We had all felt the bite of Papa's willow whip and I had feared it as far back as I could remember. Papa didn't whip me until I was four years old but in my mind I could not separate the fear and pain and humiliation of being whipped myself from the fear I felt earlier watching Clint and Gerry dance up and down with their pants around their ankles. Papa held one thin arm in his left hand while his right hand, holding the whip, went up and down. Clint and Gerry howled before the whip ever touched their bare bottoms.

But not Alan. I never saw him dance and never heard him shriek or howl. Papa whipped him, I saw that. He stood there and took it and I admired him but I knew I couldn't do it. When I got to be four and my turn came, I howled and danced just like Clint and Gerry did.

The night after the argument when Alan and I went to bed, I felt the muscle of his arm. It bulged and rippled as he bent his elbow at my touch.

"Golly, you're strong, Al."

"Yes," he replied, "and I'm getting stronger every day. I'm the strongest person in our family."

"You're not as strong as Papa."
"Yes, I am. Papa's going to be 64 in August and he's got a sore back. It hurts him every time he tries to scoop grain or lift a pail of milk."

I was silent thinking about Papa getting old. Then I said, "You wouldn't ... you won't fight with him, will you, Al?"

"No, I won't fight with Papa," Al said, "but I won't let him whip me, either. I think he knows that."

The next day Papa told Alan to feed and harness both teams because they were going to get the ground ready for spring planting. I thought Alan would say 'no' but he went right ahead and did what Papa said. For the next two weeks Alan stayed out of school to help put in the crop. Alan cussed the horses some but he didn't say any more about getting a tractor. He and Papa joked and laughed together just like they had before.

One night in June, after he and Papa had been hauling hay all day, Alan was tired and hot but he seemed happy. He was smiling to himself as we all trooped upstairs to bed.

Gerry stripped to his undershorts and pushed up the north window by the bed he shared with Clint. "It's hot as the devil in this room," he complained. He lay panting on top of the sheet. "What's making you feel so good, Al?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing special," Alan answered. "It'll cool off soon with a cross breeze," he added as he opened the west window by our bed.
"Oh yeah?" Clint said. He always agreed with Gerry, the same as I always agreed with Alan. Clint wiped one hand across his forehead and flung the sweat at Alan and me.

"Look," Alan said, "can't a person smile without you guys jumping on him?"

I knew there must be a reason Alan wasn't bothered by the heat like we were. I figured he did have a secret, and wanted to keep us guessing.

"Tell us, Al," I begged. "What is it?"

Clint and Gerry kept quiet. They knew if we were ever going to hear Alan's secret I had the best chance to get it out of him.

"Well," Alan said, "there is one thing Papa and I talked about."

"What was that?" I prompted him.

"Our old car," Alan said. "It'll hardly run any more. Papa's going to buy a new one when the '39 models come out in September."

"No! How will he pay for it?"

"I thought you wanted a tractor!"

"What will it cost?"

"What kind? What color?" One question tumbled after another.

"It's not a sure thing," Alan conceded, "but we're raising a lot more hogs this year and they're doing well. The price is better, and right now our crops look good, so Papa
said we'll know by September. If everything goes right we can get a new car."

"What made him change his mind?" I asked. "He told us we can't afford a tractor."

"A car doesn't cost that much," Al explained, "only $600. And I ... well ... I told him I didn't like to farm with horses but that I'd work hard this summer and pick corn this fall and help him put in the crop next spring if we could get a new car."

"Why do you want a new car?" I asked.

I was still worried about the mortgage. I heard Mama and Papa talk every year about saving up money for the payment in December.

"Al's got a girl," Gerry said.

"You shut up, Gerry," Alan ordered, "or I'll come over there and pull down your shorts." Gerald scooted under cover and turned over facing the wall. He bunched the sheet up around his neck in spite of the heat.

"So you blackmailed Papa," he said.

"Hell no, I didn't blackmail him!" Alan declared. "I never said I wouldn't help him if we didn't get a new car."

I didn't feel like hugging Alan's waist so I turned the other way and went to sleep. I felt bad, but I couldn't have said why.

That summer everything went well except for my ringworm. The weather was good and we got enough rain, and the pigs
stayed healthy, but I got a big runny sore on my head and lost a lot of my hair. Papa took me to see Dr. Eile. I had never been to the doctor before and I was worried because the Potter boys said the doctor would strip you naked. He didn't, though. He didn't even touch me.

Papa said, "This boy's as scruffy looking as a runt pig, Doc. Think you can do something for him?"

The doctor peered down at the top of my head through his spectacles and said just one word, "Ringworm."

He got out some salve and gave it to Papa. They talked about me like I wasn't there.

"Has he got any other sores?" Doc asked. "Sometimes they get 'em on their stomach, or crotch, or buttocks."

"I don't think so," Papa said. "He goes swimming with the other boys and they haven't said anything."

"Well, dose him with this salve twice a day, and he should heal up before school starts," Doc directed.

"How much will it be?" Papa asked.

"Five dollars," Doc answered promptly. Then, "You think he's worth it?"

Papa grinned. "Not likely. Hogs are only eight cents a pound. I don't think he'd bring five dollars."

Papa and the doctor both laughed. Papa took out his billfold and counted five ones. I could see he didn't have any more.
The rest of the summer went all right. My sore healed up in August, and the price of hogs stayed around eight cents. I figured if it got to eight and a half, I'd be worth five dollars. The price started going down in late August, but Papa and Alan got almost all their hogs sold before the price dropped too much.

They started the old car and Papa drove it to Costigan's Car Lot in Buffalo Center. They came home in a brand new, tan Chevrolet. Alan was driving, and looking like he owned that car. I got in the back seat and smelled something I'd never smelled before, like cinnamon and lemon and gas fumes. It was the new car smell, and I thought it was wonderful.

A couple days later school started and Alan went out for football. He hadn't been able to do that before, and he'd been too small anyway. Now he drove our new car to school and drove it home after football practice. On the day before their first game, Alan told us he was the fastest runner on the team and was going to be the star. Gerald went to high school, too, and he said Alan was just bragging, but I believed Alan. I figured Gerald was jealous.

When Alan came home from school that evening I followed him around helping him with chores and asking questions about football. He was pretty quiet and went to bed right after supper, even before the rest of us did. When Clint and Gerry and I went upstairs I jumped in bed with Alan. He growled at me and I was surprised he was still awake. To make him feel
better I asked him how many touchdowns he thought he would score.

"None," he said. "I won't be playing."

"Why not?" I asked. "Aren't you the fastest runner?"

Clint and Gerry sat up in their bed across the room.

"Why aren't you going to play?" Clint asked. "Are you in trouble?" Alan did misbehave some in school.

"No, I'm not in trouble," Alan said.

His voice was gruff, like he was mad or else about to cry. I hoped he was mad.

"We had football physicals today. Doc said I didn't pass."

"What do you mean?" I was indignant. "You're big enough, and strong enough, aren't you?"

"What didn't you pass?" Gerald asked. "Was it your heart?"

Alan sighed. "Doc says I've got a hernia. He says I need an operation."

"What's a hern-ya?" I asked.

Alan was lying on his back. He took my hand and put it on his stomach. "Doc says my guts are coming out. I'm flat all over," he said, "except here."

He moved my hand down and to one side. I felt the hard, tense muscles of Alan's belly, then a soft swelling low on the right side. It was a squishy bulge like half of a rotten orange. I snatched my hand away.
"Why do you need an operation?" Gerry asked.

"Doc says that hernia will get worse. He says it could get caught in there, and I'd prob'ly die."

Alan's voice was getting rougher.

"Then you'll have to have the operation," I said.

"I can't," Alan muttered. "We haven't got the money.

Doc said it'll cost $300."

"We still have the corn," Gerry said, "and a few of the pigs."

"That's for the mortgage," Alan declared. "It's my own fault. I wanted that new car, and now . . . "

We heard Papa coming up the stairs and everybody froze.

"Jesus, we're in for it now," Clint whispered.

Alan sat up on the edge of the bed and I bit the pillowcase to keep from crying. Papa came into the room carrying a lamp in one hand and his willow whip in the other. He set the lamp on the dresser and its flickering flame threw Papa's huge shadow across the room.

"What's going on up here?" he asked gruffly. "Who's been making all that racket?"

The room was silent for a moment, then we all began talking at once.

"Al's got to have an operation."

"He's got a hern-ya."

"He can't play football."

"He might die."
"Shut up, you guys. Just shut up," Alan told us.

"Be quiet, all of you," Papa said, but he didn't sound angry like he usually did before he whipped us.

"Now, Alan, what's this about an operation?"

"Heck, it's nothing, Papa. I've got a hernia, but it'll be all right." Papa frowned. For several seconds no one said a word.

Then Papa said, "Stand up, Alan."

I started to get out of bed. I was afraid Papa was going to whip Alan and I was going to beg him not to.

"The rest of you get back in bed."

I jumped back under the sheet. Alan stood up, and Papa turned the flame a little higher.

"Where is the hernia?"

Alan pulled down his shorts.

"Right here, Papa."

I craned my neck to see. The bulge was a lot bigger when Alan was standing up. Papa felt it.

"That's a bad rupture," he said. "A truss won't hold it. You'll have to have an operation."

"I can't, Papa. We have to pay the mortgage. I made you buy the car and I even wanted to buy a tractor . . . ."

Papa put one hand on Alan's shoulder. "You didn't make me buy the car," he said, "I made that decision myself. And I'll make the decision about your operation. You've got to have it."
"But what about the mortgage?"

"Well, we've had tough times before," Papa said. "Your mother figured out a way to make the payment four years ago. She'll figure out a way this time, too."

"Thank you, Papa."

Alan's voice was low, but I heard him. He was crying like a big old baby, and in the dim light from the lamp I could see Papa had an arm around Al's shoulders.
The next morning after Papa found out about Alan's hernia, he went to see Dr. Dalmage about getting the surgery done and about paying for it. While Papa was gone, Mama called Boyd and talked to him. Boyd had left just two weeks earlier for Iowa City to start college to be a doctor.

All of the older ones in our family left home to make their own living when they graduated from high school. Boyd had graduated eight years earlier in 1930 and went to work for Dave Pink and Bert Edwards. Dave and Bert farmed across the road from each other about six or seven miles away from our place. Neither of them needed a full-time hired man but between them they provided Boyd with full employment.

Boyd was small, 5'7" and 140 pounds, but he was an excellent hired hand. Besides being smart, quick on his feet and strong, he really cared about his work. He wanted to have his own farm some day and he took care of Bert's and Dave's crops and livestock as if they were his own.

From Sunday night to Saturday evening Boyd stayed with the Pinks or Edwards family depending on who he was working for. On Saturday evening he would come home and stay 'til Sunday afternoon. If there was an empty bed, he'd sleep in it. If there wasn't, he would sleep on the floor or, in summer, in the haymow of the barn.
Boyd didn't have a car and neither did Papa in those years so Boyd usually ran back and forth between home and his work every weekend. He could run the six or seven miles in less than an hour and he said it kept him in shape. He was quite athletic and enjoyed softball and boxing. He never lost a boxing match and I was convinced he could be Champion of the World if he wanted to.

Boyd never did a wrong thing as an adult, so far as I know, but according to Mama and Papa he was a stinker as a boy. In 1920 when he was seven, cars were not seen much on our country roads. When Boyd heard one coming he would run to the road and dash in front of the on-coming car. He stood still in the center of the road forcing the car to either hit him or stop. More than one driver chased after him cursing loudly but Boyd dashed into a nearby corn field and disappeared.

After Boyd worked three years for Bert Edwards and Dave Pink, he had an experience that soured him forever on farming. Bert Edwards gave him a sow and some corn for part of his wages. The sow had nine piglets and Boyd gave them excellent care. They grew and thrived and after six months they reached 200 pounds and it was time to sell them. But this was 1932, the worst year of the depression and hogs were at an all time low price of $2.50 per hundred pounds.

Boyd didn't want to sell at such a low price so he kept them three more weeks. By then they weighed well over 200
pounds so he had to sell them, but the price had fallen even more. He sold his beautiful hogs for only $2.20 per 100 pounds and had just $45 as his wages for the whole summer.

Boyd swore he would never farm for such low prices. He looked for a job in Buffalo Center and found one. For the next few years he worked as a clerk in Schutter's Furniture Store and helped out as an assistant in Mr. Schutter's Funeral and Embalming Parlor.

Boyd bought a car when he went to work in town. He still came home every Sunday and he always brought a ten cent sack of suckers for us. Boyd spent the little money he had saved working for the farmers on his car, but he immediately began saving again.

During the eight years he worked for farmers and then for Mr. Schutter I don't think he ever had a date. I suppose if he had dated he couldn't save any money for college. Now that he had decided he would never farm, he was determined to go to college.

While Boyd was working for Schutters, Marian graduated from high school and began teaching school. Marian had lost some weight after she was president of the Bloody Butchers but she was still on the heavy side. Nevertheless she was pretty and smart and never lacked for suitors. She didn't want any of the young men to get serious so she organized activities that involved several of her boyfriends at the same time.
In the same way she had organized the Bloody Butchers Trapping Club she now planned the Marian and Boyd Playhouse Troupe. She cajoled her sisters, Francie and Edith, to take part in the plays and this attracted additional young men. Marian was the director and Boyd played the lead in their first production, a comic farce called "The Dutch Detective."

I recall some rehearsals in our kitchen late on Saturday nights. A sheet was strung across the room as a curtain. I was allowed to pull the curtain and I once saw a young fellow behind it trying to steal a kiss that wasn't in the script.

When they had rehearsed enough, Marian organized a basket social at our school house. All the young women brought food baskets and these were auctioned off to the men, who then had a date for the rest of the evening with the girl whose basket they bought. Some girls told their boyfriend what their basket looked like, but some men bought their baskets blind. Not all were pleased. Richard Potter said, "At least the food was good."

After the basket social the 'Marian and Boyd Playhouse Troupe' put on their play. It was successful in raising money for the school and it also produced entertainment for the actors and actresses at no cost.

Marian was an excellent teacher. She was fun, she was full of ideas and she was always in charge and in control. Her students might be loud and raucous but they were following her lead and they were learning.
Some of the parents, however, did not appreciate her irreverent attitude and free spirit. She smoked cigarettes, she occasionally swore and she had been known to drink a beer. None of this in school of course, but in those days a teacher's life was regulated by the school board 24 hours a day.

During her second year of teaching, in the spring of '38, her schoolboard president heard stories about her and called on her at the school as she was dismissing the students at the end of the day. The board president told her what he had heard and said there must be no more reports of such behavior or her contract would not be renewed.

Marian decided she would not have her private behavior dictated by a 'fussy old farmer' and informed the president she would not return to that school in the fall. The man was surprised and tried to make amends but Marian had made up her mind. She was going to stop teaching and go to college.

Marian had saved no money during her two years of teaching (she was paid only forty dollars a month and was generous with me and my brothers at Christmas and birthdays) so she explored the tuition at various colleges. She found that the University of Iowa nursing school allowed student nurses to work for board and room and had very low tuition. She told Boyd she was going to move to Iowa City in the fall to go to nursing school.
Boyd had said when he had $500 saved he was going to college, too. In the summer of '38, after eight years of work, his savings reached that magic number but he was undecided what to study. One day Jake Lee, a farmer Boyd knew well, came into the furniture store. Jake looked at a davenport but said he'd have to bring his wife in to see it the next day.

As Jake turned to leave, his right thumb struck lightly against a dresser and a spasm of pain crossed his face. Then Boyd noted the thumb was purplish red and swollen.

"What happened to your thumb, Jake?" he asked.

"I got a sliver," Jake replied. "My wife pulled the sliver out but now it's infected."

"You better see Dr. Dalmage about it," Boyd suggested. "That looks mean."

"Oh, no, I'll just soak it. That's probably what Doc would tell me anyway."

Jake left and Boyd got busy with other customers. He didn't think about Jake and his infected thumb again until midnight. That's when he got the call from Dr. Dalmage to go pick up Jake's body. Jake had finally come to the hospital, his whole arm throbbing with pain, about 8 p.m. According to Dr. Dalmage, Jake was in shock from infection and never improved. Three hours later he was dead.

"Could you have helped him," Boyd asked, "if you had seen him earlier, say at noon?"
"Yes, I think I could," Dr. Dalmage said. "I could have opened it up and drained it. He would have at least had a fighting chance."

Boyd knew then that he would study to be a doctor. He and Marian talked several times that summer and made plans to go to Iowa City together. Marian would live at Westlawn Nursing Dormitory and Boyd would join the Jefferson House Men's Co-op. Neither of them had enough money to finish more than a year of college and they could expect no help from Papa but they were undaunted. On August 20th, 1938, they loaded their possessions, mainly clothing, in Boyd's car and headed for Iowa City.

Alan's need for an operation arose only two weeks after Boyd and Marian arrived in Iowa City. Papa's faith in Mama's ability to solve our financial and medical problems was well founded. She called Boyd immediately and told him she had heard that a person could get free medical care at the University. Boyd promised to look into it.

He called Mama back in two days. As we listened to her conversation with him, we could tell she was happy with the news Boyd gave her.

She hung up the receiver and turned to Papa. "Boyd says the medical care there is good, it's free and it's simple to arrange. We must go to the relief office in Forest City to get state papers. Alan will take the papers with him and go
to Iowa City where Boyd will meet him. Boyd has everything arranged and will watch out for Alan."

Mama and Papa were relieved and Alan was too, even though he was scared about going to Iowa City and having an operation. He was glad it would be free so Papa would have money for the mortgage. He pretended he wasn't scared at all but I could tell he was. The Potter boys tried to joke with him but he was too irritable and scared to take a joke.

"They'll just put me to sleep and when I wake up it'll be gone," Alan explained.

"What will be gone?" Tommy smirked, "the hernia or something else?"

"Damn you, Tommy," Alan growled and he wasn't smiling.

Papa took Alan to the bus in Forest City with a box of clothes and an envelope full of papers from Dr. Dalmage and the welfare office. Boyd met Alan's bus in Iowa City and took him to Jefferson House. Next day he entered the hospital and ten days later he came home on the same bus. Papa met his bus and brought him back, pale and weak from lying in bed, but very happy. We were all glad to have him home and over the hernia, over the operation. Alan felt so glad to be well and still have the money for the mortgage, he didn't even care any more that he couldn't play football.

That night when we went to bed Alan let us look at his scar. The right side was flat now like the left side. He
looked different though. They had shaved off all his hair and it was just beginning to grow back.

"It itches like the devil," Alan said, "but it feels a damn sight better than a hernia."

I missed Boyd's Sunday visits and the candy he brought us but I think I missed Marian more. She was so jolly and generous. She enjoyed celebrating birthdays and holidays with us younger ones. I know it was important for them to go to college but I thought it was too bad they went away.
Fourth grade surprised me. Miss Serhagl surprised me. When I started first grade, I expected to like my teacher, to be liked by her and to enjoy every minute of school but that was not to be. Miss Gjerstad and I did not get along.

For three years we sparred with each other. It was as much my fault as hers, I suppose. After her first week at our school went badly with discipline problems involving the older boys, her crackdown, backed by the board president, hit everyone. I took her anger as a personal attack and imagined she hated me particularly.

I often read books like UNCLE REMUS silently at my seat. When the fox got stuck to the tar baby, I was so engrossed I laughed out loud. Miss Gjerstad glared. No noise was permitted except during recitation. "Lee, we'll have no more of that. Stay in at recess. You can laugh all you want then."

I was hurt, not by having to stay in - she let me read and I liked it better than going out where I was often teased. What hurt was her scolding, the anger and rejection I felt. I know now, that I was spoiled by four adoring older sisters and by a loving and all-forgiving mother. At the time I didn't think I was spoiled. I thought my trouble was all Miss Gjerstad.

After three years of covert battle, I expected nothing different from the new teacher hired in 1938. Miss Serhagl
stood before us in September, beside her desk not behind it. She wore glasses, her hair was in a bun and her dress was subdued in style and color. Solid dark blue and perfectly fitted to her figure. I was not consciously aware yet of girls' figures. Oh, I knew they had them; the older boys talked about that sort of thing all the time but I attached no significance to their talk. I was aware however, that a calm and pleasant atmosphere surrounded Miss Serhagl.

For several weeks I watched her, holding my approval in abeyance, waiting for her to attack and seeking an opportunity to "get even". Miss Serhagl maintained an even-handed and even-tempered attitude toward every pupil. Billy Potter was one of the older boys and he tried a stunt with Miss Serhagl but it backfired for him.

The second or third day while Miss Serhagl was holding recitation with the first grade, Billy drew a picture. When the teacher's back was turned to us, he showed the picture to his friends who began to smirk and giggle.

Without even turning around Miss Serhagl said, "Billy, would you please bring me your art work?"

Billy was too surprised to argue. He took the picture to her and she studied it briefly, then showed it to us. The picture was of a woman, labelled 'teacher', kissing a boy, labelled 'Harold'.

"This picture shows good expression and positioning, Billy, but," here she turned to look at and speak directly to
Billy, "an artist does not label his characters. He allows
his audience to imagine them into their own existence,
whatever that may be. Do you understand, Billy?"

"Uh—Yeah—I— I mean yes, Miss Serhagl," he stammered.

"I want you to stay in at recess," she told him, "so I
can discuss this further with you."

We never found out what more Miss Serhagl said to Billy.
As far as I know, neither of them ever spoke of it to anyone
else. Billy never became a model student, but his worst
transgressions after that were occasional whispers to his
buddies and some teasing of us younger boys on the playground.
The rest of us decided if Miss Serhagl could handle Billy, she
could handle anybody and no one gave her any trouble
thereafter.

Not giving the teacher any trouble, however, is different
from really working and cooperating with her. My three years
with Miss Gjerstad had not led me to want or expect to work
cooperatively with any teacher. Mama had become schoolboard
president and had hired Miss Serhagl. She told me I should
give this new teacher a chance and I said I would. I took my
time though, waiting and watching from September to January.

As November's chill became December's freezing cold, I
shivered in my old denim jacket with its ripped lining and
missing buttons. When the Bloody Butchers Club sold their
furs in mid-December, I planned to buy a new, warmer jacket.
First I needed to pool money with my brothers to buy Mama and
Papa each a Christmas present and then I bought a present for each of my brothers. By that time I was down to a few dollars, definitely not enough for a nice jacket. I decided to wait and save my money until I could get the jacket I wanted.

On Christmas morning we opened presents and I got a large box from Alan, Gerald and Clint. I was a little mad at first because I thought they should each get me a present. When I got the box open, however, I was overjoyed and overwhelmed. They had seen me looking at the jacket in Henry Winter's clothing store and had gone together to get it for me. It was a bright blue corduroy with real sheep fleece lining, gold buttons on the sleeve and a zipper against the wind. I was able to keep warm in twenty below zero cold.

Of course I wore the jacket to school the first day after Christmas vacation. I showed it to the other boys at recess and they agreed its fleece lining was what I needed. They were appropriately envious and I was pleased. I would never have considered showing the coat to Miss Gjerstad but when the boys praised it, I thought about showing it to Miss Serhagl. I decided not to finally. It would be too painful if she did not show enthusiasm for it. Yet I wanted her to see the coat and praise it. Finally I devised a way to allow her to commit herself without my having to ask for it.

During the last period of the day I began reading a good story and stayed a minute after so I was the last child to
leave. Fully dressed against the cold, my hand was on the door knob when Miss Serhaegl stepped into the boys' hall to check on us as was her custom.

"Lee!" she exclaimed. "You have a new coat."

"Yes, Miss Serhaegl, my brothers got it for me."

"How nice! How really, really nice for you! It looks very warm. That's a sheepskin lining, I believe." She fingered the fleece on my collar.

"It does keep out the cold," I said, basking in the warmth of her approval.

"It's beautiful, too," she continued, "but I'm especially pleased it's so warm. Lee, I worried about you in December. That old jacket of yours couldn't keep you warm."

"No, Ma'am, it didn't," I reported honestly. "This jacket is a shade of blue I like, too," I said. Then I was embarrassed and took off running with only a wave of my hand for a goodbye.

I continued to read voraciously and Miss Serhaegl worked well with me. She praised me when I merited it and criticized me when I needed that. She directed me in research, using Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia and historical biographies from our school's small library until we used all the material available. Then she got me a card to use at the Buffalo Center library and directed me in the use of that resource.
As I struggled through fourth, fifth and sixth grades, the eighth graders graduated each year and there were fewer children in school older than I. Near the end of sixth grade I began to gain a little confidence. I was still teased by the older boys in school but by the end of sixth grade I was able to face their teasing without crying.

When I finished sixth grade in May of '41, I felt equal to anybody and superior to most. I wish everyone could have a time like that. I think it's a bit like the way my manic patients that I treat now feel when they are high - like they could whip the world and that this feeling will never end.

It lasts only a short while for my manic patients and it ended for me later that summer. I have never felt quite that way as an adult but as a twelve year old it was about as close to heaven as I could get.

I had hit a low point at the end of third grade, due in large part to years of skirmishing with Miss Gjerstad. That may be what convinced Mama to run for the schoolboard and hire a new teacher. I struggled through fourth and fifth grades with encouragement from Miss Serhagl who replaced Miss Gjerstad and was my teacher for the next five years. I had continuing social problems even through sixth grade, but I gradually felt a little better able to deal with them.

When I faced the bullies and didn't cry a week or so before school ended, I was accepted by the rest of the school and even by the bullies. For a boy who had been on the
outside looking in for six years, this was heady stuff and I didn't handle it very well.

I enjoyed feeling included and being one of the gang but I did not enjoy the activities of the gang. When they grabbed a younger boy and made him kiss a girl or when they chased a boy saying they were going to take his pants off, I went along with them but I tried not to take an active part. Sometimes the boy did not cry and I felt all right about it but if the boy cried, I felt like a real cruddy scrounge.

Miss Serhaql liked me and that was a big help. I did excellent research projects and scored well on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, which I think was pretty new then. When Miss Serhaql praised me, I felt what I recognize now as being "in love", except it was better because there was no sexual element, no anxiety or frustration.

Among my academic successes I even scored one victory over Clint who was two years ahead of me. I won a township spelldown in which Clint was entered. He won more spelldowns than I did but I treasured my lone victory. And it happened to come in the spring of my sixth grade year.

The final feather in my cap and one that meant a great deal to me emotionally was a growth spurt. It wasn't really a spurt, a spurt implies quickly adding several inches whereas I grew just one inch in six months. But at least I left the stagnation of the previous three years behind.
For a few weeks that summer I had visions of streaking past my taller classmates to reach the hallowed stratosphere of six feet by age fifteen. Alas, that was not to be. I continued to grow two inches a year for the next seven years to eventually reach five feet ten inches but by age fifteen I was barely five feet two.

My contentment that summer made me oblivious to Alan's problems. He had been going with Margaret Drake for three years and I knew, although I didn't like it, that he was planning to marry her. I had nothing against Margaret except that she took a lot of Alan's attention. I was not quite twelve and could not understand (perhaps because I did not want to) what Margaret's great attraction was for Alan. He tried to explain it to me but he could as well have been talking German.

In late May Alan went to Margaret's graduation and I guess they went out somewhere afterwards. Anyway Alan didn't get home until after midnight. I woke up, at least part way, like I usually did, and murmured the same thing as always, "Did you have a good time, Al?"

Usually Alan would say, "Yeah, we had a great time" or "Yeah we went to a movie." This time he just said, "No," real quiet.

I woke up all the way. "Why not?"

Alan was silent and I knew he was thinking. I waited and finally he decided to talk.
"I asked Margaret to marry me. I thought sure she'd say 'yes'. I even got her a ring, not an expensive one but I'm sure she doesn't care about that. If she loved me, the ring wouldn't matter."

"Did she say 'no'?"

"She didn't say 'no' but that's what she meant. She said we can't get married yet. She wants to go to college and she wants me to go, too."

"I guess you could go to college," I said. "Boyd did."

"Yeah, but Boyd wanted to go to college. I don't."

"Did Margaret say why she wants to go to college?"

"Yes." Alan pointed at the ceiling directly above us where, in the moonlight, I could dimly see a crack and a stain from rain that seeped through the roof. "That's why. She said she doesn't want to live in this house. She says it's too crowded and too...ramshackle. The worst of it is she's right."

I stayed quiet. I didn't like for anyone to criticize our house and I didn't see why anyone would not want to live there with us.

"No, that's not the worst of it," Alan went on. "The worst of it is she doesn't want to marry me even if we don't live in this house. I told her I'd get us a trailer and set it in the yard, but she's determined to go to college."
"Can you marry her after she goes to college?" I liked this solution because Alan would stay here with me while Margaret was in college.

"No."

Then he groaned, an awful sound I'd never heard before. I got an empty feeling in the pit of my stomach as I began to realize the torment Alan was going through.

I felt sorry for him and sorry I had been so self-centered I had wanted them to break up. I did not want Alan to be in torment and I was now willing to give him up if Margaret would marry him.

"I can't wait four years." Alan sounded angry. "I've waited three years already."

"What do you mean, you've waited three years? Waited for what?"

"You're too young to understand. You're only eleven. I want to get married. I wanted to get married three years ago but we were too young. I waited three years for Margaret to graduate. Now we aren't too young and I won't wait four more years."

Alan and Margaret still went out together the rest of the summer but Margaret didn't come to our house any more and I could tell Alan wasn't happy. Margaret planned to go to college in September but before that, in August, I ran into serious problems of my own.
On the second Sunday in August every year we had a Berryhill family reunion in Webster City. We all looked forward to it. Mama and Papa enjoyed visiting with Papa's brothers and sisters and catching up on family news and gossip. We boys liked playing with our cousins and eating huge amounts of food.

Mama baked pies on Saturday, and on Sunday morning she killed, dressed and fried several chickens. By nine o'clock seven of us were scrunched into the car, three in front and four in the back with the food in the trunk. We drove to the park in Webster City, arriving a little before noon.

We were shy with our cousins at first because we saw them only once a year. But as we watched our parents laughing and joking with our cousins' parents, we relaxed in the pleasant security of our parents' happiness. By the time we had eaten our fill we were at ease with each other.

After we ate we played games so wild I don't know why we didn't get stomach aches. We played tag, softball and horseshoes and even wrestled. I felt stronger than other boys my size and gloried in my new confidence and independence.

About two-thirty one of the cousins suggested we go to the swimming pool. Alan was talking with the men and Clint and Gerry didn't want to swim. I swam a lot in our creek and was eager to show off to my cousins, but I did not have a swim
suit. This was no problem in our creek but here I knew a suit was required.

"You can rent one," my cousin said, "for just fifty cents."

I had saved my money and brought exactly fifty cents with me. Happily I fingered my two quarters and ran to the pool with my cousins. The pool was only a couple hundred yards from our picnic spot and I had become a fair swimmer so I felt secure. With my confidence and happiness I felt indomitable. I was eager to vanquish my cousins in the water.

We rushed to the line at the entrance. My cousins went to the line for people who had their own suits. I joined the line to rent suits. When I reached the desk at the head of the line, the girl there was chewing gum furiously and looking across the pool at the bronzed bodies of teen-age boys cavorting on the diving board and in the pool. I wanted to rush in with the others so I slammed my two quarters on the counter.

"Size twelve. A boy's suit, any color." I said.

"Seventy five cents," she replied.

"What?"

"Seventy five cents. Twenty five to get in, fifty for a suit. Next," she called, looking across the pool.

I grabbed my quarters and stumbled away, my face flaming with embarrassment. I began walking rapidly toward the picnic
area, eager to put distance between myself and my humiliation and hoping I was not observed.

"Say, Boy! What's the matter?"

There were other boys some distance away but none close by. I looked in the direction of the voice which was adult and masculine.

A man, perhaps in his thirties, nicely dressed and clean, was sitting on a park bench about ten feet from me. He had a clear and close view of the counter area where I had tried to rent a suit.

"Yessir?"

"Aren't you going swimming with your brothers?"

"They aren't my brothers, they're my cousins." I was embarrassed to say I lacked money but I couldn't think of a lie. "I don't have enough money."

"That's too bad." His voice was kind and his face, I thought, showed concern. "Come sit on the bench. We can watch them from here."

I didn't want to watch my cousins having fun without me but the man had not made a request; he had given me a direct, though not gruff, order and I was used to doing what adults ordered me to do. Slowly I approached him. I was not afraid but I was somewhat shy and quite embarrassed at not having the required sum of money.

He patted the bench and I sat down. He was slender, wore tan pants with a sharp crease, a brown leather belt and a
white short sleeved dress shirt, open at the neck. A few light brown curly chest hairs showed and his forearms were covered with shorter hairs of the same golden color. I thought he was extremely handsome.

"What's your name, Son, and how old are you?"

"Lee," I replied. "I'm twelve. I turned twelve two weeks ago."

"You aren't very big for twelve. Do you know how tall you are? How much you weigh?"

"I'm four feet eight inches," I replied, proud of that extra inch I had grown. "I haven't been weighed for a year. I weighed eighty pounds then."

"I'm Donald," he said and extended his hand, which I found surprisingly soft and clean, not like a farmer's hand, not like my own. "How much money do you need in order to go swimming?" he asked.

"A quarter," I told him. "I've got fifty cents for the suit but it costs twenty five cents to get in."

Donald reached in his pocket and took out some coins. He looked at them and frowned. I craned my neck to see the coins but he slipped them back in his pocket. Disappointed, I sat back against the bench.

Donald's face brightened. "I know!" he exclaimed. I have a dollar. With that and your fifty cents we can both go in."
I was delighted. I didn't want charity, though I would probably have accepted it, but he made it seem we were partners pooling our funds.

"OK!" I jumped up.

At the counter Donald took my fifty cents and put a dollar bill with it. "Two suits, one man, one boy."

"How old? Ten?" She was still chewing.

"Twelve," I replied irritably. She gave us two suits, identical except for size.

"Have you been in a pool before?" Donald asked.

"No."

"Take this basket," he said, handing me one and taking one himself, "and come along." Donald obviously knew his way around. We went into the men's dressing area.

"Go in that booth," he said, pointing. "Take the number off of your basket and keep it in your swim suit pocket. Put your clothes in the basket and hand it in at the window. Shower before you go in the pool. I'll be in the next booth."

Donald smiled and gave the back of my neck a slight squeeze, pushing me gently toward my dressing booth. I smiled back and went in. Quickly I got out of my clothes and into my suit. I came out, handed in my basket and went to shower. Several men and boys were showering, some naked and some in suits. As I showered, I surreptitiously gauged the genitals around me, glad my own were hidden in my trunks.
As I finished showering, Donald came in carrying his trunks in his hand. His pubic hair was curly and golden, his penis large and limp. I headed for the pool.

"Wait up, Lee. Wait for me." Again it was an order not a question. I stopped. I was used to doing as I was told. Although I was embarrassed at seeing Donald naked, I liked him. He had been sensitive to my wish to dress alone and I had enjoyed the light pressure he put on my neck with his hand, much as Alan often did.

He hopped into his suit and we walked to the pool. I saw my cousins at the far end, the deep end, and started in their direction but Donald took my hand. "Let's stay here."

I frowned. "I want to go to the deep end with my cousins."

"Hey, Buddy," Donald exclaimed. "I can't swim. But buddies got to stay together, we're partners, remember? Come on, we'll have fun."

I wasn't pleased but I didn't want to disappoint Donald so I went along with him. I was still not suspicious. He had been kind and sensitive and I was sorry he did not know how to swim.

We did have fun even staying in the shallow end. The pool was less crowded there and Donald took my hands, twirling me around. We submerged and swam underwater. I was surprised how well Donald swam beneath the surface.

"You swim good on the bottom," I told him.
"Yes, I just can't stay on top. I swim like a rock," he laughed. All too soon Donald's teeth began to chatter and he said, "Lee, I'm getting chilled. Let's go out."

"You go ahead," I said. "I'll find my cousins."

"No," Donald said, taking a firm grip on my hand, "we're buddies and we'll need to stay together. Your folks are probably worried about you anyway so it's better if you go on back to your picnic."

I was pretty sure my parents weren't worried about me. They surely assumed I was with my brothers or my cousins, but I could not argue with Donald's strong grip. I left the pool with him, not real happy but not suspicious or afraid.

We presented our numbers and got our baskets. Donald put a hand on my shoulder as we walked to our cubicles. "I'll see you out front after you're dressed," he said giving me a little push toward my dressing room. I went in and turned to close the door.

As the door swung to, Donald stopped it and pushed it open enough to stick his head in. "Hey," he whispered, smiling at me, "these booths are all full. Can I come in with you?"

As an adult I can think I should have said, 'no' but I doubt it would have done any good. He was not going to be denied and he pushed his way in before I could answer. As an adult I could say I should have screamed and hollered but whether that would have saved me or would have resulted in my
death I don't know. I don't know whether Donald was basically violent or gentle. He handled me gently but I did not resist his touch.

Donald sat on the corner shelf in the cubicle and smiled at me. I looked down. He reached out his hand and put a finger on my nipple and slowly rubbed it. "Does this feel good?"

I shook my head but my penis, jerking and swelling against my swim trunks gave the lie to my answer. I had not known my nipples would do that. I felt a growing excitement.

Donald's gaze shifted from my face to my crotch and observed the bulge there. "I'll help you get that suit off," he said.

He fumbled with the knotted string as I became more uncomfortable. I knew what Donald was doing was wrong but it felt exciting and I was ashamed of my uncontrollable response. With the knot loosened Donald stripped the suit down to my ankles.

"Step out of your trunks," he said.

As I did so I covered myself with my hands. Donald took hold of my wrists. "Don't hide yourself," he said, kneeling in front of me. "You needn't feel embarrassed or ashamed."

Firmly yet with a certain gentleness, he moved my hands to my sides. He looked up at my face and his expression was serious.
"Believe me, Lee, I would never hurt you," he said. "You are a handsome boy."

Strangely I believed him. Not that I was handsome but that he would not hurt me - physically at least. I sensed no desire on his part to do me harm.

Donald rose to his feet and removed his trunks, revealing his own excitement. Then he sat on the corner bench again and pulled me onto his knee. As he manipulated my penis and testicles, my excitement increased in spite of myself. I tried to disown the feelings of pleasure flooding through me.

"Do you like it?" he repeated.

I shook my head but again I knew I was not being entirely truthful. I did like it but I hated myself for liking it and I hated Donald even though I liked him, too. I felt lost and scared, uncertain which of my feelings I could trust.

Donald lifted me off his knee and stood up. "Touch me like I did to you," he said.

I couldn't quite make myself do it so he took my hand and ran it back and forth along his penis. I refused to look at his penis but I felt it jerk and throb. When he let go of my hand, I let it drop.

"You can get dressed," he told me.

As I dressed I felt torn in a complex war of emotions. I had nothing then that I could compare my feelings to but now I would compare them to those of a patient of mine who committed incest with his teen-age daughter.
"After I did it," that man told me, "I felt like scum. Like a god damn pig. But before, it felt so good I just didn't let myself think."

When I was dressed, Donald asked, "Are you still hard?"

I shook my head and whispered, "No." That was the truth; I had shrivelled as soon as my underwear covered me.

"Let me see." Donald calmly unbuttoned my pants and reached in. As he did so I leaped again to full erection.

"Oh yes, you are," he chuckled. "Do you know what that is for?"

I shook my head.

"That's so you can put it in a girl and make a baby."

He buttoned my pants himself, then took my hand and we strolled out past oblivious men and boys in varied degrees of nakedness. I could not look at them.

Outside the building Donald stopped and put one hand on my shoulder. He smiled and gently squeezed the muscle there. It reminded me once more of Alan and I felt again that confusing and ambivalent mix of emotions.

"You really are a very nice boy," he said. Then he was gone.

I walked mechanically to our picnic area. I tried to get angry at Donald and hate him but I couldn't. I kept seeing him smile and felt the warm touch of his hand on my neck and shoulder. I got mad at myself instead. I was certain I had committed a sin, that it was my fault and that if anyone knew
what had happened, they would look at me like I was a snake or a slug. I resolved never to tell anyone and never to let myself think about what had occurred.

In recent years, especially since about 1975, I have talked with many people, both adults and children, who were molested at an early age. In almost every case the molester used methods similar to those of my abuser. The feelings of the children in reaction to the experience, were distressingly similar to mine.

However, I believe the children who have talked about their molestation have suffered less and have gotten on with their lives better than if they had remained silent. It's good that children feel more free to talk about such episodes now.
During early summer in 1941 I looked forward to September and the start of seventh grade. I knew Billy and Huxley would be gone and I would be one of the 'big boys' even though I was neither tall nor heavy. I also knew Miss Serhagl would be my teacher again and in the past three years I had become very comfortable with her.

After the family reunion in August, however, I lost my confidence. I disliked myself and thought that others disliked me or would if they knew the truth of what had happened.

The only times I felt half decent were when I was studying or writing papers. I could forget everything else, which was what I wanted, and immerse myself in history, geography and literature. Miss Serhagl gave me helpful pointers for writing papers and I could always count on realistic praise from her when I finished. If the paper didn't satisfy her, it wasn't finished.

Alan broke up with Margaret when she left for college early in September. After he talked to me the night of her graduation, he kept pretty quiet. He seldom smiled so I knew he was unhappy. After Margaret left, Alan went out once or twice a week but I did not know who he went with or where they went.
A couple weeks after Margaret left, Alan came home late one night and I woke up when he stumbled against the dresser by our bed. He cursed out loud and when he climbed in beside me, I smelled a strange odor on his breath.

"What's that smell, Al?" I asked.

"Beer," he replied. "I'm drunk as hell."

He laughed but I did not like the sound.

"Alan!" I exclaimed. "Papa doesn't want you to drink. He doesn't want any of us to drink."

"I don't care."

"Do you like to drink?"

"Sure. It feels good. The girls like it, too."

"Did Margaret like it?"

I kind of knew he wouldn't want to talk about Margaret, but I wasn't prepared for his reaction.

"You shut up, Lee." He hit me in the ribs with his fist, not hard but he was a big man and it hurt. "God damn it, just shut up."

Alan had never hit me before. He gave me a swat on the seat once in a while and sometimes he poked me to get my attention but almost every time he touched me, I liked it. I was hurt more by his anger than by the blow to my ribs.

I turned my back to him and tried to sleep. After several minutes Alan turned toward me. He reached around my waist and pulled my back against his stomach.

"I'm sorry, Lee," he whispered.
I was glad but still I pretended to be asleep. The whole next year was a hard one for both of us. Alan often came home with that same smell on him and he started smoking. He had quit three years before when he began going with Margaret. I felt like I didn't know him any more. We weren't close like we had been and it was hard for us to talk.

That was partly my fault. I was trying not to think about Donald but several times every day I thought of him and of what had happened. I was determined not to let anyone know so I didn't talk much. My thoughts kept going around in my head. I would think over and over, 'I should have said this' or 'I should have done that' but I couldn't change anything and by December I wasn't feeling any better. Then the war came.

The war seemed to burst upon us suddenly on December seventh but I remember Mama and Papa talking about Hitler way back when Miss Serhagl first came to be our teacher in 1938. I heard them mention Czechoslovakia and England, France, Poland and Russia. I knew Germany made a deal with Stalin and in school we talked about Poland and France being overrun by German tanks.

None of it seemed real or like it would ever involve us. I couldn't imagine actually getting into a war even in September of 1940 when President Roosevelt called for all young men to register for the draft. Everything changed when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. It all became very real.
Alan wanted to volunteer and enter the army right away. Papa advised him to wait a bit and see what happened. Because Papa was over sixty five and had a bad back, the draft board gave Alan a deferment. "I'll stay home one year but after corn picking next fall I'm going in," Alan declared. Papa tried to talk him out of it but the more they argued the more determined Alan became so Papa quit arguing.

I listened to my brothers and the Potter boys talk and thought our soldiers would win the war before a year passed. I was pretty sure it would all be over before Alan went to fight. I sure hoped so.

Yet day by day, week by week and month by month our forces retreated in the Pacific and in North Africa. Our newspapers and radio tried to make it sound as good as they could and my brothers said our soldiers were just drawing back to regroup and attack. I knew we were losing battles. I could hear it in my brothers' voices. I thought if Alan did go in, he would turn the tide and we would win. But throughout 1942 the best of the war news wasn't very good.

In June of '42 I went to Bible School as I usually did at the Congregational Church. This was to be my last year. We had Bible School for a full week and it turned out to be a good week for me for two reasons. One was my religious conversion and the other was my first positive thought about girls and sex. Both occurred on Friday, the last day.
During the week I became friends with Gene Fredricks and Richard Elman. Gene was a big muscular boy who joked a lot and could talk with anyone, adult or child, male or female. I enjoyed being with him and listening to him talk with girls.

Richard on the other hand was small and quiet like me; in fact he was a trifle smaller. We had a lot in common and I enjoyed not being the smallest person in a group. I helped them with Bible study even though I knew very little about the Bible. I could read fast and understand and retain the material. When Rev. Farrington asked questions, I would whisper the answers to Gene and Richard. Rev. Farrington didn't want to argue with us so he divided the class into groups and put Gene and Richard with me.

I gained respect for Rev. Farrington when he caught me writing a dirty note to Gene. I was afraid Rev. Farrington would tell Papa and I knew Papa would whip me. However, Rev. Farrington kept me in at noon and talked with me seriously about acting sinful and confessing and being forgiven. I was happy he did not tell Papa and I respected him for confronting me and dealing with it himself.

I had continued all through the year to feel sinful about the episode with Donald at the swimming pool. When Rev. Farrington said I could confess my sins to God and be forgiven and start over, I began to feel some hope. I did not confess but I allowed myself to think about it.
Friday was our last day and Rev. Farrington gathered our class together and said he wanted us all to have a chance to be saved. He asked us to bow our heads and close our eyes and we did. Then he talked about us all being sinners but that if we believed in God and Jesus, we would be forgiven and would live forever in heaven after we died.

My trouble was it didn't make sense to me. I didn't believe God and Jesus were real. Rev. Farrington asked all of us who believed to raise our hands. Then he said there was only one person in our group who did not have his hand raised and he prayed for that person. I knew I must be the one but I didn't think Gene and Richard believed all the magic stories we had heard during the week. I opened one eye halfway and peeked. On my right Richard had his hand up. On my left I saw Gene with his hand up and his face turned to the ceiling with his eyes shut and a big smile on his face.

I was half convinced. I had come to respect Rev. Farrington and he was praying hard for me to raise my hand, so I did. The minister rejoiced and praised God and told us to get up and go in peace. I asked Gene if he really believed and he said he did. That pretty well convinced me and I did have a good feeling of being forgiven. It lasted to some degree for several months but gradually faded as I kept reading about science and evolution. I thought there might be a God all right but I did not think He created the world in six days. I do give Rev. Farrington and my temporary faith
some credit, though. They gave me good feelings about myself and enabled me to relate to Lydia Limberg that day better than I had to any girl before.

When Gene and I came out of the church, we were feeling forgiven and happy. Lydia and several others were waiting for their rides and Gene smiled and talked to them like he always did. They smiled back but I noticed that Lydia looked right past Gene and smiled directly at me. I was feeling so good that instead of looking down, I looked in Lydia's eyes and gave her a big smile in return.

Gene went on home and I waited for Anna Frerichs who always gave me a ride. Lydia came and stood by me, smiling and talking. I surprised myself by being able to keep up a line of normal, though rather feeble small talk. Lydia was a couple inches taller than I, with short blond hair and breasts that were beginning to push out the front of her dress. Her mother drove up and as Lydia said goodbye, she reached out and touched my hand.

She got in the car and they drove away but I saw her looking back waving to me. I waved and smiled and felt a warm feeling in my crotch. For the first time since last August I did not feel bad when I thought about sex.
Alan had an occupational deferment through 1942 but he was angry and frustrated. He and Papa were not getting along. Alan continued to go out with a lot of different girls and he was smoking right in front of Papa. Papa didn't know about Alan's drinking until he got arrested for fighting and public intoxication sometime in September. Papa got upset and I know Alan was ashamed but he wouldn't admit it.

I asked Mama why Alan was acting that way and she said he was still upset over breaking up with Margaret. I said he ought to get over it and Mama said it wasn't that easy to get over losing someone you love.

In some ways I wanted to talk to Alan about what happened at the swimming pool but we weren't close any more. I knew if I talked to anybody, it would be Alan but when I was friendly, he was mad and when he was friendly, I was mad.

After he was arrested, Alan had a big argument with Papa and said he would stay home only until corn picking was finished; then he would go to the Army. The war was not going well and Alan felt he was needed to help fight.

Tommy Potter decided to volunteer along with Alan and when we finished picking corn in November, they went to Ft. Snelling in Minneapolis for their pre-induction physicals. Alan passed but Tommy didn't so Alan prepared to go for induction by himself.
Alan's last day at home was kind of strange. He and Papa had made up and Alan seemed calmer and happier than he had any time since his breakup with Margaret. However, I still felt an awkward coolness between him and me.

All through that day, a Sunday, I followed Alan, aching to talk like we used to but there were always too many people around. I went to bed early hoping Alan would come upstairs soon and we could talk. He stayed up late, though. Clint and Gerry came to bed and went right to sleep but I lay awake, waiting.

About midnight Alan came upstairs and crawled in beside me. He thought I was asleep so he turned his back to me. I snuggled close to him like the old days and put my arm around his waist, tight. But I didn't know what to say.

"Hey," Alan whispered, "why aren't you asleep?"

I had to answer and it broke the dam that had held me silent. "I'm sorry, Al. I mean about your breakup." I knew enough not to mention Margaret's name.

"That's OK. I think I'm getting over it. It's been more than a year."

"I'm glad you and Papa aren't mad at each other any more."

"Papa and I were both wrong," Alan said. "I was wrong to drink and smoke so much but Papa was wrong to try to make me follow his rules. I wish he could make me follow them but he can't so it's useless to try."
"Why do you wish he could, Al? I thought you liked smoking and drinking."

"No, I hate it. Sometimes I wish I was little again and Papa could whip me and make me stop all that stuff."

"You liked going out with girls, didn't you?"

"Not that much. I liked going out with...my first girl but we didn't have sex. I'd like to go back and start over but I can't. I want to get married when the war is over. I'm going to look for a steady girl. I want to love the girl I marry."

I think it was because Alan was talking to me again like he used to or maybe it was because he was going away and I didn't know when I'd see him again. Anyway I wanted to tell him about Donald. I'd been stewing about that longer than Alan had been upset over Margaret but Alan was getting better and I wasn't. I had felt some better after Bible School but as my faith faded, I worried as much as ever about what I had done with Donald and what Donald had done to me.

"Al, can I tell you something?"

"Sure."

"Something...bad? You won't get mad?"

"Lee, I'm not going to get mad at you."

"I don't want to tell you here. Clint and Gerry might wake up."

"OK, we can go downstairs."

"Mama or Papa might wake up. Can we go outside?"
"It's cold outside, but we can go to the barn."

We got out of bed and dressed and went downstairs. Even with our jackets it was chilly running to the barn but inside the building the cows and horses made it warm. There I was finally able to tell him. I told Alan I felt bad because I did not say 'no' to Donald and didn't fight with him. I admitted it felt good while he was doing it but I felt like scum afterwards.

"Did he hurt you, Lee? Any at all?"

"No, Al. I think he didn't want to hurt me. I think he liked me."

"I suppose he did, the bastard. Lee, can I look at you to make sure you're OK?"

"Yeah, if you want to."

"I better. Come here to the window where it's light."

I moved by the window where bright moonlight streamed in, unbuttoned my coat and lowered my pants.

After a brief examination Alan said, "You're fine, Lee. If that son-of-a-bitch had hurt you, I'd hunt him down."

"Al?"

"Yeah."

"Why did it feel good when he did it but afterwards I felt bad?"

Alan sighed. "Sometimes sex is that way. For me, too. I'm a poor one to give you advice but I'll try. You can have
sex as soon as you want and as often as you want; I just
hope... I hope you never do it with a girl you don't love."

We went back to the house and upstairs to bed. I had
never felt closer to Alan and I never slept sounder than I did
that night. In the morning I was late getting up and was
nearly late to school. School was good but I hadn't been able
to enjoy it fully because of my worry and guilt.

After my talk with Alan I blossomed in school. Miss
Serhagl was fun for me to work with and I could tell she liked
working with me. Country kids attending one-room schools had
to pass written examinations at the end of eighth grade. I
knew I would pass but I wanted high scores so I read and
studied a lot. It seemed like fun, not work.

We took the tests on May 1st and I learned two weeks
later that I passed but I was not told my scores. We had an
end-of-the-year school picnic at which Miss Serhagl announced
she would resign as teacher of our school. She had accepted a
position in the Buffalo Center Post Office. I was glad she
didn't quit before I graduated. My five years with Miss
Serhagl were the opposite of my first three years of school.

There was a lot I wanted to say to Miss Serhagl but when
I stood before her, I couldn't say anything. I wanted to hug
her but I never had and I didn't know how she'd react. I
stood in front of her, blushing and with downcast eyes. She
put out her hand and I took it.
"You've been very enjoyable to teach these five years, Lee."

"Thank you, Miss Serhagl."

She put her other hand on my shoulder and I liked that.

"Now I want you to do as well in high school as you did for me here at Kayser Independent."

"I will, Miss Serhagl."

She dropped her hand from my shoulder and I released her other hand. Then I walked away. I hope teachers are able to use that sixth sense that tells them, with their backs turned, when students are misbehaving, to understand and feel the affection that thirteen year old boys can't tell them about.

I left the next day by train from Buffalo Center, going to Popejoy where my oldest brother, Irvin was farming. He would pay me one dollar a day and I hoped to earn enough to buy a calf for my 4-H project. I did not know Irvin very well. To me he seemed quite stern and strict, a lot like Papa.

Papa did not have a tractor and I had not even learned to drive a team of horses because I always worked with one of my brothers and they drove the horses. Irvin taught me how to handle a fractious team and also how to drive a tractor, including checking the oil and gas and keeping it greased.

I made plenty of mistakes with the tractor. I broke the hitch on a harrow, trying to pull it sideways out of a muddy spot. Irvin helped me correct my mistakes and never whipped
me. Besides learning to drive a team and a tractor, I learned
to work hard and to respect Irvin for his hard work and
knowledge of farming.

In the middle of June I received a letter from Mama. She
said Miss Serhagl had asked if I wanted to go with her to the
eighth grade graduation exercises in Forest City a week away.
I thought I would like to see Miss Serhagl again but I
remembered standing tongue-tied in front of her. I would be
embarrassed if I couldn't think of anything to say on the ride
to Forest City and back. I know now I should have gone. I
have regretted missing that graduation more every year for the
past fifty years.

I used the excuse of work. The corn and beans needed
cultivating and hay was ready to be baled. What I did not
know, my family did not know and Miss Serhagl herself did not
know until she arrived at the graduation was that I was to be
honored as the top-scoring eighth grade student in Winnebago
County and Miss Serhagl was to be honored as my teacher. She
had thought I was likely to be the top student and that was
why she invited me to go to the event with her. She did not
dare tell me that beforehand in case I wasn't first.

Miss Serhagl accepted my honorary certificate for me and
she was honored as my teacher. She brought the certificate to
my parents and when I heard about it, I was sorry because I
felt I had disappointed Miss Serhagl by my absence. My
pathologic shyness had struck again. I vowed to overcome this affliction during my four years at the high school.

I have been grateful to Miss Serhagl from fourth grade in 1939 to the present, 1995. She is in a nursing home and I visit her when I go back to Buffalo Center. As part of her amazing teaching ability, she had the gift of making each child feel special.
When I started to Buffalo Center High School as a freshman in 1943, I expected some teasing from upper classmen. Alan had told me I'd have to take some of that. I missed Alan and although he seldom wrote to me, I wrote to him when I needed to and he sent messages to me in his letters to Mama.

He also sent money, a little every month — five, ten or fifteen dollars, whatever he had left at the end of the month. He told me to use the money to buy hogs and hog feed. He would provide the money if I would do the work. He would be my partner and when he came home, we would raise hogs together.

I had some friends at the beginning of ninth grade, all boys, but the friendships were fragile. Gene Fredricks and Richard Elman knew me from seventh grade Bible School but I realized I would have to earn their respect in the more competitive atmosphere of the high school if they were to continue to be friends with me. I felt the most important area to work on was athletics but my best ability was in academics. I decided to work on both.

I had never played football and had never seen a game but Alan and I read the Register's accounts of Nile Kinnick's exploits at the University of Iowa. Talking with Alan about the Iowa football games helped me understand the rules and the object of the game. I was scared to death to go into the
locker room, to dress, undress and shower with thirty or forty other boys, most of them two or three years older than I. To this point my experience with older boys, other than my brothers, had not been good. Surprisingly, my classroom work, which had caused me problems with the boys in elementary school, now helped me out.

Gene Fredricks and Billy Bechtol were two popular and athletic boys who needed help in algebra. I was ready and willing to respond to their needs. Gene used help effectively, studying with me and only asking for help when he got stuck. Billy Bechtol was different. He would pretend to study with Gene and me but I ended up doing most of his problems and he just handed them in.

Billy was very small, actually an inch shorter than I was. In spite of that, he was brash and pugnacious, willing to fight anybody and a leader in classroom misbehavior. Because I helped him with his algebra, Billy invited me to go out for football with him. I admired Billy's courage and figured if he could play football, so could I.

Billy was a fast runner and his small size wasn't too much of a handicap for a halfback but I was slower and Coach Anderson put me in the line. I found the two hundred pound juniors and seniors hard to move.

During showering and dressing after the first practice, I supposed there would be some teasing of those of us who had to expose our pale and hairless pubic areas. However, Billy
acted so self-assured no one seemed inclined to tease him. I stuck close to Billy and no one teased me either.

However, Howard, another freshman a little taller than me but equally undeveloped, had a hangdog look that showed he was scared. He got his butt snapped with a towel and the big guys made remarks about his little bare weenie. He was about to cry when Coach Anderson came in and broke it up. I began to see my attitude had contributed to the teasing I got. I determined to change and become more like Billy Bechtol. My progress toward that goal turned out to be slow going and erratic.

I kept up football practice for a month, running the six miles home each night. Papa didn't mind me coming home late even though Clint and I were the only ones at home to help him. I think he was a little bit proud of me because I went out for football.

Nevertheless Papa insisted I quit football early in October to help pick corn. Clint and I missed about a month of school to get all the corn harvested. In October when the weather was nice, picking corn was fun. There is a rhythm to picking corn fast. If you hit the rhythm right, it's possible to go steady all day without tiring.

You grab an ear with your left hand, draw the husking hook on your right wrist across the ear and grab the naked ear with your right hand. Break off the ear with a quick snap and in one continuous motion toss it against the bangboard of the
wagon as you reach toward the next stalk with your left hand and cluck your team forward one step.

If you repeat those motions ten thousand times in a day you will have picked about one hundred bushels. I have never been musical and have never been able to dance but I think I know what music and dance feel like to those who appreciate them. I have occasionally felt close to ecstasy in the perfect rhythm of corn-picking in bright October weather.

But in November we often had rain, sleet and snow. Our hands froze in wet mittens and we spent miserable ten- or eleven-hour days in the field. Clint and I didn't mind missing school in October but when November's cold weather hit, we told Papa we needed to get back to school. Papa knew us well and paid no attention. We went back to school when the corn was all picked.

Upon my return to school I found a lot had changed. Basketball, in which I had no interest, had replaced football. Billy Bechtol had flunked his first algebra test and dropped out of school. The other fellows on the football team, who had been reasonably friendly when I was with Billy Bechtol, seemed now to have forgotten who I was and ignored me. Even Gene Fredricks had other friends and I felt pushed aside.

One boy had been friendly to me in September but I had been too busy with football to pay him any attention. He was Donald Bosma, a country kid who was quiet but very bright. Now in my loneliness I sat by Donald at lunch and we talked.
I found him interesting and friendly but he told me he was thinking of dropping out. He had spent the first eight years in a one-room school and the high school was frighteningly large and unfriendly.

"Gosh, Donald, don't drop out," I said. "You're the brightest guy in our class."

Donald smiled self-consciously and colored a bit. "I watched you in September, Lee," he said. "You know how to make friends. I wish I did."

I think for me Donald had the most potential for friendship of anyone in the class but the next day he was gone and did not return. When I realized he had dropped, I wished I had been more friendly to him in September. With Donald Bosma and Billy Bechtol gone and Gene Fredricks involved with other friends, I was back to square one. Donald's comment had surprised me. I had never considered myself good at making friends but I was aware that I had worked hard at it in September. Now I would have to do it again.

We had open noon hour which meant we could walk the two or three blocks downtown after we ate. We gobbled our food in five or ten minutes and then raced to either Snell's Drugstore or Liverca's Pool Hall. The older boys preferred Snell's because girls gathered there. For those of us still shy with girls the pool hall was much preferred.

There, men in dirty work clothes shuffled cards, smoked, chewed and swore as they played Euchre, Rummy, Poker and
Pinochle. An unshaded light bulb swung back and forth over each table, throwing wavy shadows of the card players on the rough board floor. Spittoons were everywhere but the chewers missed them as often as not.

Our parents did not allow us to go to the pool hall. The school had a rule forbidding us access to that den. But George Liverca, who ran the place, allowed us entry. In fact, although George never looked at us or spoke to us, we knew by our own grapevine that we were welcome so long as, and only so long as, we followed his rules. Ministers, school officials, the mayor and police all condemned the pool hall so our parents did, too. However, I'm sure many parents knew we went there, yet it was never raided so I think our parents approved of the way George ran it.

He sold cigarettes and adults were allowed to bring in an occasional beer but George kept us boys clean. Any fourteen- or fifteen-year-old boy who took a single drag from a cigarette or a taste of beer in George's place would be out of there for a full year. Such was our desire to be there that even boys who smoked and drank elsewhere on a regular basis were scrupulous at adhering to George's rules.

The place was utterly masculine, and if we did not learn any new words, we learned the latest phrasing and nuances of sexual talk and swearing from adult men. We also learned to play eight-ball and billiards but mostly we leaned against the wall, listened to the talk and absorbed the maleness of it.
We preened and bragged to each other in the safety of our womanless redoubt as we prepared ourselves for more direct contact with girls. Each of us planned that at sixteen we would get a driver's license, begin dating and experience being alone with a girl. When that time came, we would forsake George's place to congregate with girls at Snell's.

As for me, an undeveloped fourteen-year-old freshman, I couldn't quite figure out why I wanted to be alone with a girl. I remembered vaguely a year before when, as thirteen-year-olds, Lydia's hand gave me my first slight but delicious thrill. That seemed a slender reward, however, for all I would have to go through to attain it.

I could only hope, in Alan's absence, that I could absorb enough maleness in the pool hall to make me one of them. For several weeks I enjoyed the pool hall but felt I was making no headway at becoming a man. Then a change occurred.

It began in the school cafeteria when Mr. Anderson, who was monitoring the place, wandered out of the room for a minute. A group of freshman and sophomore boys used that minute to advantage. They threw apples, carrots and sandwiches at each other as more and more boys joined in. I had no intention of getting into it until a potato sailed toward me. Automatically I reached up and caught it; automatically I threw it, hard, at the back of Ronnie's head.

At that moment Mr. Anderson dashed back in and caught us red-handed. I couldn't deny my involvement and six of us were
marched to the superintendent's office. I was surprised to find myself in the company of five popular hellions who, until then, had scarcely been aware of my existence.

One by one we were called into Mr. Smith's office and had our hands whipped. Three boys cried and three did not. I did not. Those boys grudgingly admired me and among my classmates I got the first faint beginnings of a reputation as a tough guy. Papa's whippings had toughened me.

I was dumb enough and desperate enough for friends to feel flattered. That night when I discovered, in my routine self-examination, the first soft fine hairs of puberty, I was ecstatic. I wanted to tell someone - to brag. Alan was the only person I could trust to take me seriously and not laugh, so I wrote to him.

The last half of the school year was considerably smoother for me. I settled down and studied hard. My whole body grew and developed and I began to have faint feelings of actually wanting to be alone with a girl.

Clint and I stayed out of school several weeks in April and May to help Papa plant the crops. I got back to school in time for final exams and ended the year with decent grades.

Two or three times during the year I had thought fleetingly of Miss Serhagl. I had not seen her for almost a year. I took my report card and headed for the Post Office.

On entering the building I was gratified to see only one customer. He was at the window, talking to Miss Serhagl.
Quickly I noted she looked the same; handsome, smart, professional.

The man left and I walked to the window. Miss Serhagl was looking down, finishing up the man's request. "Hello, Miss Serhagl," I began.

She looked up and her eyes widened. Then she smiled faintly and said, "Why hello, Lee. It's good to see you--finally."

My face flushed. "I'm sorry, Miss Serhagl. I got...busy."

"Oh I know, don't apologize," she excused me. "I'm glad to see you anytime. How did the year go for you?"

"I brought you my report card. Would you like to see it?" I pushed the yellow envelope under the iron grillwork between us.

She nodded. "Certainly I'd like to see it." She took the envelope, removed my card and quickly scanned it. "A ninety-three average," she noted. "That's not bad considering how much time you missed. I suppose you were helping with farm work?"

"Yes, Miss Serhagl."

She looked again at the card. Then she said, "What's this "D" in Deportment?"

I told her about the food fight. I was honest about my part in it. I always tried to be honest with Miss Serhagl.

She listened, then asked, "Why did you do it, Lee?"
"Gee, I don't know, Miss Serhagl. It just seemed like the thing to do - to join in."

"I think I understand," she said. "I'm sure you work hard to fit in. But you know, there are some people who are not worth working hard to fit in with. Those fellows with you in the food fight - they may be all right or they may not. I want you to be true to yourself, Lee. Don't try to fit in with everyone."

"I won't," I promised.

"This is a good report," she said, as she handed it back to me.

Pleased by her praise, I smiled at her as I took the envelope.

"But you can do better," she continued. "I know you very well, Lee, and you are better than that report shows."

People were coming in. "I will do better, Miss Serhagl. At least I'll try," I promised as I turned away from the window.

I dashed out and hurried to catch my bus. I suppose I could have felt bad about being lectured, but I didn't. I knew her praise and her criticism were both on the mark. It was a good report but I could do better.

Miss Serhagl cared for me enough to tell me the truth.

I saw Donald Bosma again in 1972 at our 25th high school reunion. He had entered the Army in '46, got a GED (General
Equivalency Degree) and started college while he was in the Service. Later he finished college as an engineer, married and had a family. Best and most surprising, he overcame his shyness and became at ease speaking to anybody. I was pleased that he wanted to come back and see those of us who had spent a few weeks with him twenty-nine years before.
May 21, 1944. United States forces push through Italy. American Navy bombards Wake Island. I took delight in each Allied victory. Although Alan was not yet overseas in the fighting, he was in the Army; he was a member of the team and I enjoyed telling everyone about him. It seemed to me that since November, 1942 when Alan joined up, the war had gradually gone better for us.

The Des Moines Register handled its propaganda mission well. It minimized but did not deny, our reverses and emphasized our advances and victories. In this way it remained credible with those of us who wanted to believe. Throughout the war I regarded the Register stories by Ernie Pyle and Gordon Gammack as gospel.

In late '43 the Army doctors found Alan's left leg had bad varicose veins. He was given the choice of stateside desk duty or surgery. The surgery would enable him to serve on active duty overseas. Alan chose to have the surgery and go on over. He did not tell us until after the surgery was done. He 'didn't want to have any arguments with Mama and Papa about it'.

"Damn fool boy," Papa said. "He had the perfect excuse and threw it away." That's what Papa said to Mr. Potter but I could tell by the way he said it he was proud of that 'damn fool boy'.
Several Buffalo Center families had already lost sons and brothers. A little later that year, in July of '44, Lydia Limberg's brother, Willis, was killed when his bomber crashed. He was Lydia's only sibling and his loss was devastating to the family. Lydia, the girl who first set my heart aflame with the touch of her hand two years earlier, became sad, quiet and withdrawn.

Before Willis died I had entertained a rather formless plan to make contact with Lydia again. She did not go to my school and I did not attend Bible School in '43 so I had no opportunity to carry out my plan. After Willis' death, I didn't know what to say to her. I'm ashamed to admit I ignored her. I felt guilty because I was glad it was her brother, not mine who died.

Alan wrote to us almost every week. Most of his letters were addressed to Mama but he often included messages for the rest of us. His letters usually told of his activities and concerns and he seldom wrote in an emotional or philosophical way. One exception was a letter Mama received shortly before Christmas in '43 when Alan had been in the Army thirteen months.

Mama never shared this letter with us but I came across it years later, in 1984, after Mama had died and we were sorting her possessions.

Dear Mother,

I can't help but think of you as I sit here looking into my fire. I wonder if you are all right and in good spirits. When I think back of all the things I could
have done and didn't, I wonder when I'll get a chance to make it up. I hope that some day I can give you some of the things you deserve. I can remember now all the sacrifices you made, just so I could have the car at night or something like that. Some day this war will be over and we can all come home again. I feel like I have grown up in the last year or so and am ready to make any sacrifice necessary to make life better for you.

I don't know why I write this type of letter. I try to keep these thoughts to myself, but every once in a while I wonder just what you are doing. I always picture you doing some of the general housework -- doing the washing or preparing a meal. I only wish I were there to do that now. I suppose Glenda helps you quite a bit now and since you are through picking corn it should be a little easier till spring, but then don't try to do too much. If the boys and dad are too busy, you could hire some help. I don't suppose Gerald will farm much more, either.

The next problem starts tomorrow afternoon, so I'd better get some sleep tonight. I'll write you just as soon as I have time and you folks do the same.

Here is wishing you a merry Christmas, Mother, and a happy New Year.

Your son,

Alan

Alan had ten days at home with us at the end of May in '44. We knew he would go overseas after this furlough and my parents knew this might be the last time they would see him. I however, had perfect confidence in God and Alan. More in Alan than in God.

I wavered back and forth in my religious faith. When I was first saved, along with Gene Fredricks and Richard Elman in '42, I had for several months a wonderful absolute faith. I didn't worry about death; I knew I would live forever. I didn't worry about Alan; I knew God would take care of him. Over a period of six or eight months my faith diminished and I decided those religious stories about living forever were allegorical, not factual.
After Alan went in the Army and especially after he volunteered to have surgery and go overseas, I tried to regain my faith. I wanted to use all the help I could find to get him through the war safely and back with me on the farm. I found prayer helpful and reassuring although I never regained a solid faith in a personal God.

When we picked Alan up at the train station in Buffalo Center, I felt shy with him. This was his third furlough in the eighteen months he had been in service. Each time I saw him after being apart several months, it took two or three days for us to get comfortable with each other.

He had gained weight and was huge at six feet four inches and two hundred twenty five pounds. He picked me up under one arm (I was a little over five feet and about a hundred pounds.) but when he saw I was embarrassed, he put me down. I was enamored of his dress uniform. Olive in color, shining brass buckles and buttons, sharp creases and spotlessly clean, to me it was beautiful.

Alan couldn't wait to get out of his uniform and into a pair of overalls. He delighted in pitching manure, milking cows and driving a team. I did not understand and asked him why he didn't wear his uniform.

"I love the farm work," he replied, "and overalls are a better uniform for that than anything the government provides."
He and I talked over the pigs I was raising for him with the money he sent me and I told him I was raising a calf of my own as a 4-H project. I kept records of my calf and of my and Alan's pigs for my Agriculture class. He praised me for doing a good job.

Alan took Papa's car and went out every night. He came home late but when he got in bed, I noticed his breath was OK, not stinky with beer. By the third night I was getting comfortable with him so I asked why he went out every night.

"I spend the days here with you and the family," he said, "but I like to see my friends at night."

"I'm glad you're not drinking."

Alan laughed. "I don't need to drink any more. I sometimes have a beer but I have a good time without getting drunk. Girls fall over each other for my uniform. I could get laid every night if I wanted to."

I didn't know what 'getting laid' meant but I could imagine.

"Anyway," Alan went on, "I don't want to have sex with just anybody. I want a special girl, one I can come home to after the war is over."

"Have you found one?" I asked.

Alan lay quiet beside me for a few seconds. Then he said, "I think so. I just met her tonight. I have another date with her tomorrow night."

"Is she pretty?"
"She's beautiful. But better yet she's real sweet. She's young, just seventeen but I'm only twenty-two. When I come home, she'll probably be eighteen or nineteen."

"That's old enough to get married," I said.

"Whoa, Boy," Alan objected. "I just met her tonight, don't marry me off already." He grabbed me around the waist and tickled me so I knew he was happy, not mad.

Alan went out with Norma every night for the next week. Actually they didn't always go out; sometimes Alan spent the evening at her house with her family. They liked him a lot but Norma's pa didn't want her out every night and Alan agreed.

Norma came to our house once in the daytime and Alan took her to Irvin's house for supper one evening. I was in school when Norma came to our house, so I didn't see her. Mama said she was very pretty. I asked Mama if Norma was nice. I didn't want Alan to marry anyone who thought our house was too crowded or too ramshackle. Mama said sure she was but I don't think Mama knew what I meant. She had never heard what Margaret said about our house.

The last night of Alan's furlough he came home about one o'clock. I was asleep but I waked myself up because I wanted to talk to him. The week had gone by fast and every day felt more and more like old times. Alan was happy and sober and he didn't smoke at all anymore..
There were a lot of questions I had stored up over the months Alan was away. Like whether I should smoke cigarettes. I knew Papa didn't want me to but Alan had smoked and I used to think I would when I got to be sixteen. I had quit smoking corn silk years before. I was almost fifteen now and had chances to smoke with guys outside the pool hall at noon. But Alan didn't smoke any more so I thought maybe I shouldn't. I didn't like beer and I didn't like people getting drunk so I was sure I wouldn't start drinking. But I was still mixed up about sex.

I wanted to ask Alan when I should start having sex with girls. I wondered what a 'safety' was that I'd heard guys talk about and whether it was the same as a 'rubber'. I was beginning to think that with the right girl maybe sex could be fun.

I lay beside Alan in the bed and it felt comfortable, yet I couldn't ask him the questions. I don't know why. Alan put an arm around my shoulders.

"You're a nice kid, Lee," he said. "You've been a good brother to sleep with and helpful to talk with. You're a good listener, did you know that?"

"It's easy," I said.

"Maybe it is," Alan replied, "but I don't think it's so easy when I'm mad or sad. We've been together over ten years. Do you remember when you tried to piss out the window the first week you were up here?"
"I remember."

"And the wind blew it back at you." Alan chuckled. "You know when the war is over, I plan to marry Norma so you and I probably won't sleep together again. I wanted you to know I liked sleeping with you."

I couldn't say anything but I gave Alan a long tight hug. I felt happy and close with him.

Next morning we picked up Norma and took Alan to the train. He spent most of the time kissing Norma but once he walked over to me and put an arm around my shoulders. He led me off to the side away from other people, pulled a small box out of his pocket and put it in my hand.

"I'm not going to need these any more," he said. "I'm going to be true to Norma. I don't know if you'll need them before I get back but if you do, I want you to have them and use them."

He shook hands with Papa, hugged Mama, kissed Norma and jumped on the train. Then he was gone. I fingered the little box I had shoved deep in my pocket.
Alan's letters came with an APO number in the return address so we assumed he had shipped out. His letters were censored and he couldn't tell us much. When he got to England in August of '44, he was allowed to write and let us know he had arrived. They were safe from spies and U-boats.

Our troops had landed in Normandy on June 6 and our family followed their progress through the Des Moines Register and on radio news programs. We had never had a radio but when Alan left after his furlough in 1944, Papa went out and bought one. We listened to Bob Hope and Jack Benny and Fibber McGee but mostly we listened to H.V. Kaltenborn and Walter Winchell.

More people in and around Buffalo Center got the telegrams. The station master delivered them. He got so he could hardly do it and asked the postmaster to deliver some. There was a shortage of teachers so Miss Serhagl had gone back to teaching, fourth grade in the Buffalo Center school this time. I was glad she didn't have to deliver any of the telegrams.

Our troops pushed on through France, taking these little French towns, Carenton, Montbourg, Crisbecq. There was fierce hand-to-hand combat the Register said. Alan was still in England.

In October we got a letter from Alan dated September 20 saying he was in France. He said they were close to the front
but not in the fighting yet. I knew Alan was in Company A of the 89th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron of the Ninth Armored Division. I watched the Register for stories about that Division but I didn't see any in November or December.

Alan continued to send me money every month. In January '45 he got a battlefield promotion and doubled the amount he sent. I used the money to buy feed for the hogs I was raising for him. I sold the market hogs but saved back several gilts or young sows to raise litters in the spring. I put the extra money in the bank so Alan and I could use it when he got home. The radio and newspapers were saying the war in Europe would be over by spring.

I was having a good time in school my sophomore year. I liked my classes and hanging out at the pool hall at noon. I thought about sex a lot but I was too shy to even ask a girl out. I wanted to talk to Alan and hoped he would come home as soon as the war in Europe ended.

The big German offensive started on December 16th. Mama and Papa and I were surprised the Germans could still fight so hard. We didn't get any letters for a month and we read in the Register that the German High Command stated they had annihilated the Ninth Armored Division. Mama cried and Papa looked grim. I said I didn't believe it.

Then we got a letter dated January 16th. Alan was in a temporary field hospital with a minor leg wound. He had been too busy to write and there had been no way to get a letter
mailed. He told us he fought all through the German offensive, which has become known as the "Battle of the Bulge". He fought most of the month near Bastogne and received his leg wound about a week after the German offensive was halted. He said he would be in the field hospital less than a week and would then return to the front.

Mama cried more than ever because she had thought he was dead and now he was alive but had probably already returned to the front lines. I told her she needn't worry. He had made it through the big offensive and I was sure he would be OK the rest of the way.

On March 1st the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force released information about the Ninth Armored Division. We recognized it as propaganda but felt proud anyway.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—WITH THE NINTH ARMORED DIVISION—JAN 4

THE NINTH ARMORED DIVISION, RECENTLY REMOVED FROM THE SECRET LIST, HAD A FLAMING INTRODUCTION TO BATTLE. IT CRASHED HEAD-ON INTO BATTLE IN THE CURRENT RUNDSTEDT OFFENSIVE AND EMERGED WITH THE ADMIRATION OF EVEN THE ENEMY HIMSELF. THE NINTH GAVE AN ADMIRABLE ACCOUNT OF ITSELF. IN THE VITAL SECTORS OF THE FRONT AT BASTOGNE, ST. VITH AND ECHTERNACH THERE WERE NINTH ARMORED COMBAT TEAMS FIGHTING.

THE GERMANS, FINDING NINTH ARMORED TROOPS FIGHTING IN SUCH WIDELY SEPARATED SECTORS OF THE FRONT, GAVE THE DIVISION A NAME—GERMAN PRISONERS SPOKE OF THE NINTH AS THE "PHANTOM DIVISION". IT WAS EVERYWHERE, THEY SAID, AND THEY NEVER COULD TELL WHERE NEXT ITS BLOWS WOULD BE FELT.

Alan's letters told of his reconnaissance work. He and two other fellows carried a radio and went out ahead of our front lines. When they found the German positions, they radioed back to their buddies to blast away. As the artillery
began firing, Alan and his buddies ran back to the Allied lines. Alan wrote that the danger for him was about equal from German fire and from our own artillery he was calling in. We got a couple of letters in February and one in the middle of March.

Dear Folks

France

2-12-45

Received your letter of the 1st today. That isn't too bad time. Yes, I am in the Ninth Armored Division. If that is censored, it is the one you mentioned. And I am in the Third Army. I heard that German report on annihilating us but we sure fooled them. Save all of the clippings and pictures that you see and I'll explain them when I get home. I guess it would be silly to tell you not to worry cause this aint no playground. My leg is completely healed now. In civilian life I wouldn't even gone to the doctors.

How are my bonds coming by this time. I have taken out another bond per month now. I should get two every month starting with Feb. I'll keep that up as long as I keep these stripes.

I'll write again when I have time. Keep the home fires burning. I had a nice letter from Marian today.

Love

Alan

Alan also wrote that our forces had won back all the land we lost in the German offensive and were pushing toward Germany. He said Germany couldn't last over two or three months and he would probably be home for corn picking in the fall. In his January letter he asked Mama to buy Norma a nice Valentine's Day gift. Mama got Norma a very pretty brooch.

In March I asked Papa if I could get a learner's permit and a permit to drive to school. Clint already had a driver's license so I didn't need a permit but I think Papa could tell
how much I wanted it. He said I could and that I could get my driver's license in July when I turned sixteen.

I began planning how to ask Jeannie Murray for a date. I still liked Lydia Limberg but I felt ashamed of myself because I hadn't talked to her since her brother, Willis, died. I had not noticed Jeannie during our freshman year, but in September of the sophomore year she came and sat by me one day at lunch. She talked and joked with me as if she liked me and didn't seem at all worried about being teased for liking me.

I knew Jeannie was Catholic and didn't date anybody but I thought she acted as if she'd be willing to go out with me. I didn't mind her being Catholic. I was undecided about believing in God and figured there wasn't much difference between Catholics and Protestants.

I had planned to wait until fall when I had my license before I asked Jeannie out but in late March she asked me if I planned to go to the spring dance at school on April 1st. I asked if she was going and she said 'yes'. I said I would go if she would be there.

Jeannie had long silky dark brown hair and brown eyes that sparkled when she smiled. I was only five feet three or four inches tall but Jeannie was an inch or two shorter and I was glad. I warned her I didn't know how to dance but she laughed and told me not to worry, she'd enjoy teaching me.

The next day was March 31st, the day before the dance. There was a lot of talk in the halls about who was going with
whom. I couldn't say I was going with Jeannie but I was glad she wanted to be with me and wanted to dance with me.

After Jeannie and I ate lunch, she went to the study hall to finish an assignment while I went outside. When I came out of the school building I felt the unseasonable warmth of the sun and looked up at the blue sky with a couple white clouds. The world was good and I was falling in love.

Donald Berhow asked me to play catch with him. He had a baseball and I borrowed a glove. We started throwing and catching; we both knew the game so we didn't have to talk. Each time we threw we took a step back and threw the ball a foot higher. First one to miss a catch lost.

We were about a hundred feet apart when I saw Galen Potter. He walked straight to me and stood two feet away. He had red hair and his freckles stood out because he was so pale. He was one of the Potter boys that lived on the next farm to us so he was a friend but not that good of a friend. I mean, to stand so close.

I arched the ball toward Donald and stepped back one step. Then I turned to Galen, not exactly frowning but with at least a question in my face. I wasn't sure I could trust Galen.

"Is it true what I heard about Alan?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. My ears were ringing and I was a little dizzy. I wondered what he could possibly have heard. I didn't like the tone of Galen's voice. "Maybe Al got drunk'
I thought. 'Maybe he robbed somebody or raped a girl'. "What did you hear?"

Donald had caught my throw although it was a little high. He stepped back and launched the ball long and high toward me.

"That he was killed," Galen said.

I stood perfectly still, looking directly into Galen's eyes, searching for a hint of joking or teasing. I saw the ball rolling lazily through the sky. Donald had thrown it the right height and distance. The ball came in at shoulder height. I continued looking at Galen without moving and the ball hit my arm. I felt a jar and the world tipped sideways. I didn't see how the ball could hit so hard when it had come so slow, so slow. It bounded to the ground and rolled away.

"I won!" Donald shouted. "I won and you lost, Lee."

I knew Galen wasn't joking. Potters didn't like all of us but they liked Alan. "Where did you hear that, Galen?" I asked.

"Snell's Drugstore," he replied. "Dave Snell said the telegraph man was just in there. Said he'd been out to your place."

I took off running as fast as I could. I prayed as I ran. 'Please, God, don't let it be. It's all right if he got drunk or if he robbed or raped somebody. Just let him live!'

I arrived at the drugstore and rushed inside. Then I stopped as everybody in the place went silent and fell back from me. I walked over to the ice cream counter where Dave

Mr. Snell nodded slowly. "Yeah, it's true. Poor old Al. I'm sorry, Lee."

It was the 'sorry' that did me in. I had been determined not to cry. The tears came and I wiped them on my sleeve. "What should I do?" I asked.

"Use my phone," Mr. Snell said, motioning me to it. "You should call your folks and ask them what to do."

When Mama answered the phone, her voice sounded normal. My heart leaped. 'Alan can't be dead,' I thought, or Mama wouldn't sound so normal.

"Is it true about Alan?" I asked.

"Oh." Now her voice was flat and I realized that in answering the phone she had forgotten for a moment. I was sorry I had reminded her. "Yes, Lee. It's true."

"What should I do, Mama?"

She was silent a moment. Then in a tired, weak voice she said, "There's nothing you can do here. Just go on back to school. Come home on the bus tonight."

I don't know if that was the best thing to do but it was the best Mama could tell me and I did what she said. I left the drugstore and returned to school.

I guess I went a little crazy then and stayed that way for over a year. The rest of that afternoon I clowned around
and joked with my friends. They didn't laugh, though. They backed away and left me alone. The way I had acted with Lydia when Willis died.

Two weeks later Jeannie came and sat down by me at lunch and I remembered the dance. I did not apologize. She smiled a slight, tremulous smile. I looked away.

"I'm sorry, Lee."

"Don't be," I snapped.

"I can't help it," she said. She was sitting close to me and put one hand on top of mine.

I stood up. I had no sexy feelings and realized I'd had none in the past two weeks. "I've got to go," I told her. I turned and walked away. That evening I took the little box to the woodpile and chopped it to pieces.

We held a memorial service at the Congregational Church. Rev. Farrington had left and Rev. Engels had taken his place. He didn't know Alan or any of us but he preached a good enough sermon, I guess. Mama wrote a nice eulogy. I would have said a lot of different stuff. I'd have told them about his drinking and smoking and having sex with a lot of women. I wanted to throw it in their smug faces, sitting in the pews so sad and pious. I knew what they were thinking. 'I'm glad it's her son. I'm glad it's his brother. Not my son. Not my brother.' I knew because that's what I thought about Willis and Bennie and all the other boys that died before Alan.
The summer after tenth grade was a blur. I remember very little other than Clint running across a field of alfalfa to where I was mowing with a team of horses. It was August 9th. He told me the United States had dropped an atomic bomb on Japan and they were going to surrender. I guess a lot of people didn't realize atomic bombs would change the world but Clint and I did. We talked about the end of the war and about the United States' supremacy over the whole world. It was what I had wanted for Alan. I thought he would have liked that.

I don't remember the end of the war in Europe but I'm told Germany surrendered May 8th. After April 1st it didn't matter. I know it should have mattered and I know it did, to a million soldiers and their families but I was self-centered enough that it just made me angry. Mad. Furious.

I had no one to be mad at. Oh, there were the Germans but they were defeated and Hitler was dead. God. Yes, I was furious with Him. I cursed this Being I didn't believe in.

I did not cry in front of people and before September I stopped crying in the night. I'd dream Alan was alive and we'd get a telegram that he was dead. I would wake in a sweat and think for a moment, 'God, I'm glad that was just a dream'. Then I'd remember and bite the pillow case and sob.
I went to Rev. Engels' house one evening and asked why God allowed so much suffering in the world.

"Sit down, Lee." Rev. Engels stepped to his bookcase and picked up a Bible. He began reading from the book of Job. He read on and on. I thought, 'What in the devil does this all mean?' Aloud I said, "What does this all mean?"

"It means everything that happens to us is a test; everything that happens is for our good."

I jumped to my feet. Not trusting myself to speak, I turned and stalked out, slamming the door behind me. I doubt that either Rev. Engels or I understood what was going on.

Toward the end of August my sister, Francie, had a baby boy. She named him Alan. That little baby didn't look much like I remembered Alan. I was sorry Alan never had a baby but I was glad one was carrying his name.

In September I started my junior year. Jeannie and I ignored each other pretty much the way Lydia and I had for over a year. I was sixteen and felt nothing sexual but I had a lot of energy I couldn't always control. Once while I was standing in lunch line, a freshman bumped into me. I grabbed his shirt and slammed him against the wall just as Miss McKenna came around the corner. "Why Lee, what's going on?" She had a puzzled frown, more surprised than angry.

I let go of the freshman and stood silent, refusing to say a word. Actually I didn't know what was going on.
"I'm sorry, Miss McKenna," the freshman said. "I bumped into him and he grabbed me."

"Go on to lunch," she said to him, "and Lee, you come with me." We walked to her office and Miss McKenna talked. "You've always been a top student, Lee. Never in trouble, never in fights. What's wrong?"

I remained tight-lipped, staring at her. She talked some more about my good family and how disappointed my parents would be if I were suspended. Finally she sighed deeply. "Well...I should send you to the office but I'm not going to. Lunch is over; go to your class."

I got up and left, secretly glad, feeling I had won. I had not spoken. I went to Trigonometry class and there I heard that Herbie and Florence were getting married. They had to, everyone said. Herbie was my age, sixteen, and Florence was fourteen. Herbie moved to Buffalo Center a year before and was immediately popular. Tall, slender and darkly handsome, he was a star pass-catcher on the football team.

Florence was a pretty little thing, a ninth grader. They dropped out of school, of course. You didn't go to school either married or pregnant in those days. Grant and Ronnie and Don were on the football team and they felt bad for Herbie. I didn't. "Why didn't he use a rubber?" I asked. I thought of the box Alan left me. Grant just shook his head.

Don was the football team's quarterback and he was involved in my next run-in with a teacher. Miss Bohn was new,
had only two years of college and according to hallway gossip was just twenty years old. I could believe it; she was tall, willowy, voluptuous and looked about eighteen or nineteen. She wouldn't have been hired if there hadn't been a severe shortage of teachers.

By January locker-room talk was that she had been seen with Don, the quarterback, in nearby towns at night and that he was frigging her. I thought it was probably true because she showed blatant favoritism to him as well as to the whole football team.

The question she asked the class that day was, "Who is Secretary of State?"

Don raised his hand and I got interested. I knew President Truman had just appointed Jimmy Byrnes as the new Secretary of State but I doubted that Don knew it. If he gave the wrong answer, Miss Bohn would have to tell him so, and I knew she didn't like to tell him he was wrong.

I didn't raise my hand and Don's was the only response so Miss Bohn called on him.

"Cordell Hull," he said.

I could hardly contain myself. I punched Gene Fredricks in the ribs and whispered, "He's wrong."

Miss Bohn smiled at Don. "That's right," she said.

"Hey!" My hand shot up. I half stood as I called out, "Donald's wrong. Cordell Hull is not Secretary of State."
Miss Bohn paled slightly and frowned. "Sit down, Lee. Don's answer is correct."

I sat back, fuming. I didn't think it was decent for her to go out with a student and I didn't like her showing favoritism. I went home and looked in the Des Moines Register until I found the story about Jimmy Byrnes, the new Secretary of State.

I brought the clipping to school next day but my first class was English, taught by Miss Jensen. She was another young teacher and was a friend of Miss Bohn. When Miss Jensen saw me, she said, "By the way Lee, Miss Bohn asked me who is Secretary of State and I told her it's Cordell Hull. She said you thought that was wrong."

I walked to the front of the room and stood close to Miss Jensen. Reaching in my shirt pocket, I handed her the article. She paled as she read it, then she rushed out. I knew where she was going.

Miss Jensen came back and handed me the clipping. I waited eagerly for the period to end. This was the most fun I'd had in a year. I went to Miss Bohn's class one minute late to make sure all the students would be there. Miss Bohn was grim.

She looked everywhere but at me. "Miss Jensen showed me a clipping from the newspaper this morning," she said brightly, trying to make it sound like a news flash. "Cordell Hull has just been replaced as Secretary of State."
"I brought that clipping," I whispered to Gene Fredricks. "It happened a week ago."

Gene bounced out of his seat, waving his hand. "Miss Bohn, Miss Bohn," he called. "Who was right yesterday, Lee or Don?"

"They were both right," Miss Bohn declared.

"No we weren't," I said coldly. "Don was wrong. Cordell Hull was not Secretary of State yesterday. He was replaced a week ago."

Except for Don and Miss Bohn, the class was enjoying the show. Miss Bohn said, "We'll have absolutely no more discussion of that topic. Now let's proceed to today's lesson."

I knew I was being a prick. I caused trouble wherever I could, for teachers and authorities anywhere, including at home. I was not getting along with Papa or with Clint. In March, a year after Alan died, I went completely off the track.

Clint had graduated in May of '45 and had stayed on to help Papa with the farm work. Papa paid Clint but he did not pay me although I worked nearly as much as Clint did. What I ignored was that Clint and all my brothers had worked as hard as I was working and got no pay until they were eighteen. I demanded that Papa pay me and he refused. "Then I'll move out," I threatened.

"Go ahead," Papa replied.
I had forgotten Papa was not a man to back down because of an ultimatum. I had to look for a place I could go. None of our neighbors was in obvious need of help and I hesitated to ask. My oldest sister, Ada and her husband, Martin, farmed six miles west of us. That was still in the Buffalo Center school district so I asked her.

Ada talked it over with Martin and they said 'yes' but of course I would still receive no pay. I packed my things and moved.

Mama said, "Remember, Lee, you can come home anytime."

"Sure," I said, "on Papa's terms." I had no plans to ever return.

Two weeks later I got into my biggest hassle in high school and was suspended. Gene Fredricks and I were often in trouble together and this time he was in it first. Jack Humm, a not too bright boy who was neither friend nor foe to me, brought a live mouse to school in a matchbox.

During Miss Jensen's English class he showed us the box. While Miss Jensen was writing on the blackboard, he opened the lid and a small gray head poked out. Gene held out his hand and Jack closed the box and gave it to Gene. Gene slipped the box onto the corner of the teacher's desk and as Miss Jensen turned to face the class, we waited for her reaction.

Apparently the box did not attract her attention, for she proceeded to teach us about Samuel Johnson or Samuel Taylor Coleridge or some such person. When Miss Jensen again turned
to write on the blackboard, I took the box, opened it and removed the mouse. Holding it by the tail, I dropped the beady-eyed little creature into a glass jar with a few coins on the bottom that was sitting near the center of Miss Jensen's desk.

'There! Let her try to ignore that,' I thought to myself.

Miss Jensen returned to her desk and her eyes fell immediately on the glass jar with a small furry animal leaping up to grasp its rim. His tiny claws scrambled to hang on as his hind legs beat furiously against the side of the jar and he emitted high-pitched squeaks and squeals.

Miss Jensen's reaction was all we hoped for and more. Unknown to us she had a horrid fear, actually a phobia, of mice. She covered her face with her hands, backed into a corner and uttered one piercing shriek after another.

We three conspirators were appalled and momentarily immobilized. Don, ever the resourceful quarterback, leaped up and grabbed the jar. He dumped it into the wastebasket by the door and said, "I'll take it away, Miss Jensen."

As Don left, the superintendent rushed in, brought out of his office by Miss Jensen's screams. Mr. Smith went at once to the teacher, who had wilted from screams to tears and sobs. Class was dismissed and we went to study hall to await the inevitable.
In a few minutes Jack's name was called over the loudspeaker, followed in a few more minutes by Gene Fredricks and finally my own name, all with orders to report to the office. When I arrived, Jack and Gene were sitting outside the inner sanctum. Gene gave me a wan smile but Jack looked away.

`So,' I thought, `Jack broke down and told.' The secretary waved me on in.

Superintendent Smith was a tall, thin, sandy haired and steely eyed former sheriff. He didn't waste any time. "All right, Lee, what was your part in all this?"

"I put the mouse in the jar, Sir," I admitted. "But I didn't know she was so afraid of them. I wouldn't have done it if I had known."

"What part did Gene and Jack play?" he asked. I figured he already knew but I wasn't going to tell.

"I can't say, Mr. Smith."

"You can't or you won't?" he persisted.

"I'm not going to say any more."

"All right." The Superintendent who towered eight inches above me standing, now sat down. "I did not expect this from you, Lee."

`Here comes the good-family lecture,' I thought.

Mr. Smith continued, "I might have expected this from your brother Alan, he was a wild one but..."
I had my head turned away. Now I turned to glare at Mr. Smith. I stepped forward and leaned across the desk. My knuckles were white on the desk top.

"Go ahead and whip me, Mr. Smith." He looked startled but he didn't move. "Just don't try to tell me anything about Alan."

Mr. Smith's eyes clouded. I'm sure he felt bad as soon as he said it. I'm sure he forgot Alan had died. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean anything against your brother."

Now tears sprang to my eyes. Determined not to cry in front of this man, I squeezed my eyes shut and turned away from the desk.

Mr. Smith gave me a moment to compose myself before he continued. "I've got to suspend you, Lee. The same as Jack and Gene, three days each. Bring me a note next Monday signed by one of your parents."

He stopped and I nodded. He waited a moment for me to speak. When I did not, he said quietly, "You may go now."

I stayed home at Ada's for three days and told her truthfully that I was suspended and why. She wrote me a note and Mama and Papa never knew one of their children was kicked out of school for three days.
I had one more hassle with my teachers in the junior year before I started to settle down. It happened near the end of the school year in May of '46. It was Miss Bohn again.

We were studying history and our book referred to the ice age and to our caveman ancestors. I found this lesson interesting and was paying attention for once. Miss Bohn suddenly stopped her lecture in mid-sentence, looked around at the class and asked, "Who of you believe the theory of evolution?"

I raised my hand immediately and expected everyone else to do so. I thought that fossils and archeologic studies had established evolution as a very likely fact. To my mind this theory helped make mankind's rise and domination of the world more understandable.

I looked around at the other students and was amazed to see not another hand was raised. They were all looking at me. Miss Bohn said, "Why, Lee! Don't you believe in God?"

Her question irritated me and I wanted to argue so I said, "Maybe I do and maybe I don't, Miss Bohn but the theory of evolution doesn't rule out God."

"Oh yes it does," Miss Bohn protested. "The Bible says God created the earth seven thousand years ago. So the theory of evolution is wrong."

"No," I said, "the Bible is wrong."
"Oh dear!" Obviously if I did not believe the Bible, I was outside the pale of Miss Bohn's experience and understanding. The bell rang and we filed out. Most of the students ignored what went on in that class but Art Beekman made one last effort. "Lee, you don't really believe that evolution stuff, do you?"

"Sure I do, Art. Haven't you read about it?"

"Yes, but...it goes against the Bible."

"Not necessarily," I said.

I didn't say any more and neither did Art. Although neither Miss Bohn nor anyone else ever mentioned the incident again, it had an effect on me. I felt a gulf had opened between myself and the other students.

About this time I began to settle down. I think there were several factors. Clint volunteered for the Army and left the farm. Papa needed me and asked if I wanted to come home and I said 'yes'. I think the main thing that helped me however, was a talk I had with Grant Edwards, who was married to my sister, Edith. He visited me when I was still living at Ada's house.

Grant had recently returned from the service. He was drafted in '44 and was discharged in May of '46. He dropped in at Ada and Martin's house and said he came to see me. Martin needed to go to Blue Earth to get a piece for his tractor and asked me to do the milking. Grant offered to help me and we went to the barn.
When we finished chores, Grant sat down on a bale of hay and said, "You know, Lee, I didn't want to go to the service but it did me some good." He patted another bale beside his and I sat down.

"How did it do you any good, Grant?"

"I finished up my education," he said. "I hadn't finished high school before. Now I have my high school diploma and I learned a lot of carpentry, welding, all kinds of construction skills. And in the service we had really good sex education — films, books, lectures and a lot of bull sessions."

"You did?" I was surprised. "I thought all you soldiers did was fight."

"We had a lot of classes and lectures. Do you have any questions? Is there anything you want to know?"

"Gee, I'm not sure," I said. "What did they teach you?"

Grant talked to me for the next two hours. All about sex. Most of it was things I had heard some about but did not understand. Some was new to me like menstruation. A lot was stuff guys joked about but didn't explain so I hadn't known how much was true. I had heard about 'the curse' but didn't know what it was. I had heard of girls having 'the rag' on but I didn't know why.

Grant told me these things including the reasons for them. He told me about men and boys ejaculating. I was almost seventeen but I had never ejaculated and didn't know
males did that. I had heard boys joke about 'jacking off' but I had no knowledge of what it was or how it was done. As Grant explained these things to me, I listened, fascinated. He told me about venereal diseases and how pregnancy occurred. He wasn't Alan but I liked him and I appreciated what he told me and that he didn't joke about it.

As Grant talked and I listened, the jokes and vague sexual references and innuendoes I had wrestled with for years fell into place. Grant described every bit of female and male anatomy and how each part worked. When he was talking I felt sexually stimulated and aroused for the first time in over a year.

At the end he said, "I learned some things I needed to know so I thought it might help you, too."

"I think it will help," I said. "In fact I think it already has. Thank you, Grant."

Two weeks later when Papa asked me about coming home, I was ready. I knew I wouldn't get paid until I was eighteen but now that seemed right. I wanted to help Papa pay off the mortgage.

My senior year at Buffalo Center High went a lot smoother for me. I went out for football and made the team. I dressed, undressed and showered with thirty other guys without worry or problems. I couldn't quite remember any more why those things had ever bothered me.
I started paying attention to Jeannie and Lydia again but neither one responded. They smiled and waved but they didn't stop to talk. I didn't worry about that either. I went alone or with Gene Fredricks to basket socials and dances. Once in a while I spent some time with one girl or another but I didn't get much involved with any of them.

The superintendent called me to the office in April of '47 a month before graduation. I didn't know of anything I had done wrong so I wasn't worried but I was curious. He told me I was valedictorian of the class. He said, "I had my doubts about you last year, Lee, but you've done very well this year."

I was pleased and a bit surprised. I had paid no attention to anyone else's grades and very little to my own. Two days later Mr. Smith called me in again. He was embarrassed and apologetic. He said there had been a miscalculation and my grades were second to Louise Miller's by one tenth of a point. I shrugged. It didn't make a big difference to me. I felt sorry for Mama and Papa, though. I was their third salutatorian and they were proud when we thought I was going to be their first valedictorian. Papa said he wondered if there was any skullduggery going on but neither he nor I made any complaint to the school. That wasn't our style.

In late April Papa asked me if I planned to go to college. I said no, I thought I would stay on and help him
and would probably take over the farm when he retired. He was going to be seventy three in August.

Papa started fumbling for words. He had always spoken out pretty direct and I wondered now what was wrong.

"Well, umm-uh-that may not work out, Lee."

"Why not, Papa?"

"You see, when Clint left for the Army a year ago, I told him - you know a soldier always gets his old job back and so now when Clint comes home in November, I've got to - he has a right -"

"You promised Clint the farm when he left for the service?"

Papa flushed and looked down. He suddenly appeared old. I had always known he was old but he had never looked old before.

"Yes," he said. "I thought it was the right thing to do."

I was furious. "Why didn't you tell me it was only for a year and a half when you asked if I wanted to come home?"

"I thought you knew," Papa said softly.

I was mad but it was more because of my competition with Clint than any great desire to farm. When Alan was killed, I sold all the livestock I was raising for him and of course I had to give up the idea of him and me farming together.

Mama told me the Farm Bureau was offering a scholarship and asked if I wanted to apply. It was for Iowa Teachers'
College in Cedar Falls. I thought about it over night and asked Mama to send in my application. Two weeks later I was notified I was a finalist and needed to go to Des Moines on May 20th for an interview.

I had never been to Des Moines. Papa needed the car that day so I took the bus. The return bus left Des Moines at noon and my interview was at 1:30 so I had to either stay overnight or hitch-hike home. I decided to hitch-hike because my graduation was that night and I didn't want to miss it.

I found the building and had my interview at 1:30. I didn't wait for the results but started hitch-hiking home right away. I got a couple good rides and was only twenty miles from home by four o'clock. I got out of one car and the very next car to come along stopped for me. It was a young woman maybe three or four years older than I and she was alone.

She was good at asking questions and soon I was telling her about being in Des Moines for the first time in my life and about wanting to get home by seven o'clock because I was graduating that night. When she found out where I lived, she said she would be driving within two miles of my house.

"You have plenty of time," she said. "We could even stop at my place and have coffee. She smiled and put her hand on my knee. She was slender, blond and well built. I got a quick erection as her eyes flickered across the front of my
pants. I wished I hadn't chopped up that box of rubbers Alan gave me before he left.

"We better go into town first," I said. "I need to stop at the drugstore and pick up something."

"No need to do that," she said. "I have everything we need at my place. Her hand had gradually worked its way halfway up my thigh. I moved closer to her and put an arm around her shoulders.

"That's great. Is there anyone home?" I asked.

"No, my parents are out of town. And my husband's in the army," she added.

My stomach flip-flopped and I started to soften. I couldn't help but think of Alan and Norma. Then it seemed like Alan was there in the car with me and I could hear him saying, "Lee, you can have sex as soon as you want and as often as you want. I just hope you never do it with a girl you don't love."

"If you're married to a soldier," I stared straight ahead, "I think I better go home."

"Why does that make a difference?" she asked.

"It just does," I said. "I guess I don't want to cheat a soldier."

She took her hand off my leg and grasped the steering wheel. "Suit yourself."
She didn't say another word and neither did I until we approached my corner. "Here's where I turn south," I told her.

She screeched to a stop without a word and burned rubber as soon as I got out. I walked on home.

"How did it go?" Mama asked.
"Fine, Mama."
"Do you know if you won?"
"No. They'll send me a letter."
"You made good time, Son."
"Yeah, just three rides."
"You were fortunate."
"I guess so, Mama," I said.

I heard from the Farm Bureau a week later that I had won. I started making plans to go to college, but I worried about Papa's back. Clint would not get home until December 1st and I knew Papa couldn't get the corn harvested by himself.

I wrote to Margaret Sayre, the chairperson of the scholarship committee and asked if I could stay home first quarter and start college December 1st. I said I would make it up next summer and she said I could.

While Papa and I were harvesting soybeans in September a government car drove in the yard. Papa said he'd better go see if Mama needed him to deal with the government people. He and Mama didn't care much for government people after Alan died.
Later Papa told me the government was going to bring Alan's body home. We would have a funeral with military honors. He said we had a choice but Mama wanted Alan to be buried here in Buffalo Center beside the spot where she and Papa would eventually be buried.

The government wasn't sure they could arrange to bring Alan home by December but they said they would try. In early November we got word Alan's body would arrive with a military escort late in the evening of December 2nd. Clint expected to get home November 30th and we let all the others know the funeral would be at 1:00 p.m. on December 3rd. I wrote to Iowa Teachers' College asking permission to start three days late and it was granted.

Papa and I sold all of our hogs and corn and scraped together enough money to pay off the last of the mortgage. Mama and Papa went to Forest City on November 20th to make the final payment. They brought the mortgage paper home with them and we decided to have a mortgage-burning ceremony right after the funeral when all of the children were home.

Boyd was a doctor in Kentucky by that time and Marian was a nurse in Texas. They both planned to fly home December 2nd. Everyone else lived within one hundred miles of Buffalo Center and would drive to the funeral on December 3rd.

Everybody gathered as expected and Alan's casket came with an escort on the train December 2nd. On the 3rd of December a whole lot of relatives gathered at the farm along
with Alan's brothers and sisters and Mama and Papa. We took his casket, draped with an American flag, to the Congregational Church and then to the cemetery. The day was cold and blustery as we took the flag off the casket and the honor guard from the local VFW fired over the grave as he was lowered into the ground. I've heard 'Taps' played many times since then, usually when it's 'lights out' at a camp. Those are happy times but I always feel the same melancholy mood that settled over us on that gray December day as the haunting melody seeped into our bodies and our bones.

After the service we went back to the farm and burned the mortgage. When the mortgage paper had gone up in smoke, Papa went out to walk the farm. The December cold was so bitter that most of my brothers and sisters stayed in the house with Mama but Marian, Clint and I went with Papa. He walked across every field without a word and we followed him equally silent. When he stopped, Marian said, "It's finally all yours, Papa."

"The deed's in my name," he replied, "but the farm belongs to your mother as much as it does to me."

We went back to the house and I told Mama what Papa had said. I know it pleased her. We talked about the raisins I used to steal and eat behind the stove. I wanted to comb her hair again, but I didn't do it.

Burning the mortgage was satisfying to us and we all thought it was satisfying to Alan's soul or spirit if he had one. I thought if anybody had one, Alan did.
People began to leave around 4 o'clock. Gerald had driven up to the farm from Ames where he was attending Iowa State College and he planned to go back that evening. He had agreed to give me a ride to Highway 20 and I would then hitch-hike east to ITC in Cedar Falls. I had never been to Cedar Falls. Except for my trip to Des Moines, I had never been a hundred miles from the farm. Gerald was eager to get started and was sitting in the driver's seat warming up the motor. I put my suitcase in the back seat.

"Wait just a minute, Gerry. I'm going to say 'goodbye' to Mama and Papa." I went in and found Mama. She hugged me with tears running down her face but neither of us could say anything.

I shook hands with Papa and he said, "Work hard and take care of yourself."

"I will, Papa," I said.

I went back and got in the car with Gerry and sat there a moment looking out at the farm. I was leaving everything that was familiar to me. I wondered if I could take Alan's spirit to college with me to bolster my confidence.

Then I saw the creek where Alan hunted and trapped, the barn where the Bloody Butchers met and the old house where he crawled in bed with me so many nights. I realized this was where Alan belonged. He had never been to college and had never wanted to go there. I would not try to drag him along with me.
"Let's go, Gerry," I said.

I would be on my own.