

W.P. KINSELLA



Red Wolf,
Red Wolf

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For my friend Kay Harper,
the sister I never had —
thank goodness.

KNOCKS AT THE DOOR A STRANGER

Baba Drobney, my Yugoslavian grandmother, used to tell me stories. I was an only child, raised on an isolated homestead in Northern Alberta in the late 30s and early 40s. My parents, though neither had been beyond grade eight, were readers, and they, together with my Aunt Margaret who lived with us, read aloud to me a great deal. Baba Drobney, who did not read English, was the storyteller and oral historian of the family. Since I had no children to play with — the nearest family with children lived several miles away — until I was 10 years old and moved to the city, I thought I was a small adult. I created my own fictional friends and made up stories about them. Sometimes in the evening Baba Drobney and I swapped stories, she setting hers in her native Yugoslavia, in the hills near Dubrovnik where she grew up, the seventh and final daughter of a wine merchant, while I set mine in the one place I knew, rural Alberta.

Baba Drobney knew the art of storytelling. She would begin by describing the farm or village home of the main character. Whether the hero of the story was Josef the shepherd's son, or Katrinka the cheese-maker's daughter, Baba Drobney set her scene carefully: Josef or Katrinka would, at the end of the day, be sitting at the table, perhaps a tasty soup bubbled in a cauldron over the hearth fire. Everything was at peace, the world unfolding as it should. "And then," Baba Drobney would say, springing the trap, "knocks at the door a stranger."

From that moment the story leapt forward, whether the caller was a neighbor, a priest, a prince, a pedlar, a soldier, a band of Gypsies, a spirit, or a talking animal, their arrival forever changed the life of Josef or Katrinka.

Until I came to write this introduction I hadn't consciously thought of Baba Drobney's tales for many years, and I had no idea how indebted I was to her until I set out to introduce the title story "Red Wolf, Red Wolf." The first thing I discovered was that the story begins with a stranger, Enoch Emery, knocking on the door of author Flannery O'Connor.

"Red Wolf, Red Wolf" came about because of my admiration for Flannery O'Connor, probably the best short fiction writer the United States has ever produced. A few years ago fellow writers Merrilee Summers, W.D. Valgardson and I formed a loosely organized group called The Enoch Emery Society. The only requirement for membership was an admiration for the writing of Flannery O'Connor (enforced), and a promise to, once a year, dress up in a gorilla suit and go around shaking hands with people (not enforced). I have for many years listed The Enoch Emery Society on my resume, and it appears in various directories and Who's Who, world wide.

Enoch Emery was a terminally lonely young man in O'Connor's story "Enoch and the Gorilla" which was later incorporated into her novel *Wise Blood*. In the story, Enoch sees people lined up in front of a theater to shake hands with a man in a gorilla suit, The Great Gonzo, and he decides the way

to popularity is to dress like a gorilla. After The Great Gonzo insults him, Enoch steals the gorilla suit and is last seen standing at the side of a road puzzled and disbelieving, after frightening off a couple of young lovers by offering to shake hands.

Looking over the more than 200 short stories I have written, the complication of a stranger suddenly appearing in the main character's life, and altering that life forever, happens with great frequency. Baba Drobney taught me more than I ever realized.

In "Evangeline's Mother," Henry Vold first has the teenage daughter he hardly knows thrust on his doorstep, then her friend Evangeline appears, and finally Evangeline's mother, the combination ultimately changing Henry's life forever. In "Driving Patterns" a young woman's brief encounter with a stranger colors the rest of her life.

In "Lieberman in Love" Lieberman is the stranger who appears at the office of a female rental agent, he is also the stranger who picks up a prostitute on a downtown street, his relationships with the two women forever altering his life. "Elvis Bound" is a story where life imitates art. Elvis Presley is the stranger who disrupts the love life of a ballplayer and his wife, a woman who may or may not be Elvis' daughter. While my story was written in 1984-85, there is currently a woman grabbing headlines by claiming to be the E-man's secret daughter.

"Billy in Trinidad" is a story where Billy the Kid is one of the strangers who alters the life of a former Wells-Fargo clerk in Trinidad, Colorado, in 1880. In the story that is my favorite, "Mother Tucker's Yellow Duck," a young man meets a stranger in a park, a sweet, undemanding woman, who in the spirit of W.B. Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, represents the essence of a generation, for the story is my farewell to the 60s, the most exhilarating decade I have lived in. Glorianna and Mac live an idyllic life until Mac, unable to enjoy paradise, lets another stranger rearrange his life.

I was fielding questions after a reading recently when I mentioned getting an idea for a story. Someone in the audience asked me to define "Getting." How did I come up with ideas? they wanted to know.

Glancing at the stories in the book I can see where most originated. "Red Wolf, Red Wolf" for instance, was probably influenced by Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, since I begin the story by having a fictional character confront the author who created him.

"Truth and History" was, I'm sure, influenced by another Pirandello play, *Right You Are If You Think You Are*. The idea that there can be two or more perfectly logical explanations for an event has always intrigued me. "Butterfly Winter" came about because I watched a documentary on the Monarch butterfly, and I hope it will be a chapter in a future novel.

I use little autobiography in my fiction; I always maintain that my life is too dull to write about. Consequently, the stories that interest me least are "Apartheid," and "For Zoltan, Who Sings," because each contains some autobiography, or are based in part on incidents in my life. I once traveled to a mental hospital outside Boston to rescue a friend who had a breakdown while on a business trip. "Zoltan" I catalogued much of my friend's story. Zoltan existed, and did indeed sing several times a day in an exotic foreign language. "Apartheid" is much angrier than I usually let my stories get as I tried to recount fictionally my frustrations in dealing with petty and insensitive academics.

"Lieberman in Love" was precipitated because I saw a hooker eating a cookie in front of a Mr. Fields Cookie Store on Kaiulani Avenue in Honolulu, while earlier the same day I had encountered a very beautiful rental agent. I had no contact with the hooker and probably spent three minutes with the rental agent, but I wanted to write about both — that is the wonderful thing about being a fiction writer, I simply kept the images in my mind but invented all the details. "Oh, Marley" came about because I read an article in a *National Enquirer*-type magazine about a very large woman who was

stabbed numerous times but suffered no serious injury. I wanted to imagine how that incident affected her life.

The first germ of “Billy in Trinidad” originated when I read a small, privately printed collection of reminiscences of old people living in a nursing home in El Paso, Texas. One of the women mentioned that when she was a young girl, Billy the Kid had lived in her father’s rooming house in Trinidad, Colorado. By coincidence my wife has relatives in Trinidad, Colorado. We visited there in the fall of 1985. Though there are rumors of Billy the Kid spending time there, none are confirmable, but I do find some interesting history to weave into the story. Sister Blandina was a real person who in her retirement years wrote her memoirs, and the Purgatory River, and Fisher’s Peak exist today.

I didn’t realize that I was already serving my apprenticeship as a writer, when, long years ago, by the light of the coal oil lamp and the heat of the kitchen wood stove, Baba Drobney would balance me on her ample knee and begin, “Jaroslaw the tailor was the richest man in our village. He was sitting at his table, drinking tea with honey and goat’s milk in it and watching the sun set. He had a beautiful wife, a son who he hoped would follow in his trade. Jaroslaw was counting his blessings and was content. Then, knocks at the door a stranger...”

W. P. Kinsella
White Rock, B.C.
May 5, 1987



RED WOLF, RED WOLF

... we make things up and then they happen.

— Jane Burroway

Milledgeville, Georgia. 1983.

First of all I want you to know that I amounted to something in my life, just like I always knew I would. I was created from tough stock. None tougher. She was doing what she did right up until the day she died. And I reckon I will be too. She fought that red wolf who was stealing her life away from her. She fought it with all the strength of her body and her mind.

“I wouldn’t ordinarily have thought this possible,” is what she said to me, not long after I came to live with her.

“No ma’am,” I said. “Not ordinarily. I was created from tough stock, that must have been the reason I come.”

“I reckon,” she said, but she had her brows creased, her eyes squinted in puzzlement. “Why you? Why you?” she went on. “Why not somebody else? *They* were all created from tough stock.”

“I think it was because of the way you left me, ma’am. Others you abandoned in predicaments, but none so worse off as me.”

“I reckon,” she said, but it was easy to see my explanation didn’t satisfy her.

I knew I’d find her. Animals *do* have instincts. I hoped it would be soon, because I’d been shooed off, screamed at, abused and threatened for quite a few days, ever since I found myself beside the highway, staring across a valley at the skyline of Atlanta, dressed in a gorilla-suit and longing for human contact. On about the tenth day I knocked on the back door of this new-painted farmhouse. A shape appeared behind the screen of the door; they could see me, but I couldn’t see them.

“Howdy,” I said, sticking out my paw, “I’m just hankering to be friendly.”

“Well, I reckon,” said a lady’s voice. When she pushed open the door I saw she was tall and angular, with reddish hair pulled to the back of her neck, the top of her head hid by a straw sunbonnet. She had small, lively eyes in a long, freckled face. She started to laugh, but then she held it back, for she had seen something in me nobody else had. She realized that no matter what the reason I was on her doorstep, I was serious as could be about it.

“I’m right pleased to meet you, Mr. Gorilla,” she said, setting aside that laugh like dumping a dirty dish into a sinkful of suds.

“You got more burrs in your fur than I believe is legal here in the state of Georgia,” she went on, grasping my paw with her own solid, long-fingered hand. I noticed that the back of that hand, and when her arm was visible outside her long-sleeved blouse, was blotched red. I’d seen me the red wolf for the first time, but I didn’t know it then.

"I reckon I'm not in as good a shape as I once was," I volunteered. "I been traveling some."

~~"I suspect a curry comb would do you a world of good,"~~ the lady said, again without a trace of laugh. Then she surprised me by saying, "What can I do for you, Mr. Gorilla?"

"This is my first time, ma'am," I said, letting go her hand. "Ain't nobody ever been friendly to me before, so I don't rightly know what to do next." I picked up some green foxtail, a piece or two of cinder, and some cotton from out the fur on my belly.

"Well, don't look at me," said the lady. "I've never in my life had a gorilla for a gentleman called. However," and she smiled, only it was a friendly smile, not a making-fun-of-me smile, "if y'all a housebroken, and if a gorilla drinks coffee, I was just about to have a cup myself."

"I'd thank you kindly for the coffee, ma'am," I said, and I wiped my feet on her rubber-tiled doormat that had WELCOME painted on it in white letters.

That's how Miss Regina found us, her daughter and a gorilla sipping coffee at the kitchen table.

"Why Mary Flannery," she said, "I didn't know you had company."

Miss Regina was like that, still is actually; she could walk in to find the President of the United States himself, or a gorilla, sitting at her kitchen table, and she wouldn't let it faze her a jot.

"I do believe I'll have a cup of coffee myself," she said, crossing the room to the stove.

"Mama, Mr. Gorilla here just stopped by for a friendly visit."

"Howdy," I said, and stuck out my hand. And for the second time since I put on the gorilla-suit, somebody shook hands with me. Miss Regina's hand was small and soft, but it had a willowy strength to it. Just touching her caused me to tear up and my breath to come short. I was glad the pink celluloid eyes of the gorilla kept the ladies from seeing my tears.

Eventually Miss Regina went about her business, and me and Miss Flannery walked to the yard where she set about tending her peacocks. They was rattlin' and whistling and acting like a parade was passing by, but weren't they beautiful. One fanned his big old tail and it looked like a Chinese screen seen at a museum I visited once. That fanned tail blinked like it was lit from behind, while dozens of blue and green eyes winked as if they had their own life. I was standing on the edge of the grass and hunched up dark as a cloud inside my gorilla-suit.

"There seems to be an exceptional coincidence afloat," Miss Flannery said to me, as she scattered a handful of grain to the gibbering peacocks. "I've recently had a book published in which I wrote about a boy in a gorilla-suit who was simply dying to shake hands with people." She stared at me squint-eyed, extending her long neck in an imitation of one of her birds.

"I knew you was the one the minute you opened up your screen door to me," I said, and I burst out with more talk than I aimed at anybody in my entire life, as I told her about travelin' around Georgia searching for days and days for somebody who'd shake my hand. "I was so afraid I wouldn't find you," I ended up.

"Is this a joke?" she asked, pushing her neck further forward, staring my costume right in its pink celluloid eyes.

"I don't know whether you know this or not, ma'am, but when a book gets itself published, well, some characters get lives of their own."

"My book's only been out a week," she said, then flushed scarlet at the very idea she might have believed me. "Did my editor hire you?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"My publisher?"

I shook again.

"Some friends of mine? New York? Atlanta?"

“No ma’am.”

The peacocks, full of grain, went patty-footing it away. We climbed to the back porch where Miss Flannery sat in the shade on a white-enamelled porch swing, while I leaned on a porch pillar. The swing creaked back and forth.

“If,” she said, eyeing me balefully, her lips sealed up like they’d been zippered. “If I believed for one minute what you say is true, then you’d be called Enoch Emery.”

“That’s right, ma’am.”

She laughed in a hearty, genuine way. “I’ll be,” she said.

“I reckon you will,” I replied, holding up my end of the conversation.

“Tell me, Enoch, do *characters* always find the authors who created them?”

“Most of them don’t have to,” I said, though I wasn’t sure how I knew that.

“But you did.”

“It was on account of the way you left me, ma’am, abandoned me, if you will. Weren’t nobody in the world was going to shake my hand but you. So I *had* to find you.”

“A character only an author could love,” said Miss Flannery. She stayed silent for a long time, staring me up and down with her jolly, puzzled eyes.

“You permanent?” she finally asked. “What if my book goes out of print. I ain’t exactly a famous author.”

“Gone,” I said.

“Gone where?”

“I don’t rightly know, ma’am. To sleep, I reckon. Can’t be too bad a place for I don’t have no powerful fear of it.”

“I don’t reckon my book will stay in print more than a few months. You better enjoy yourself while you can.”

Over the next few days Miss Flannery helped me to clean myself up some, though I wasn’t ready to come out from inside the gorilla-suit.

“I have to admit I don’t like the implications,” Miss Flannery said. “I don’t like them one bit. I don’t like the idea that I created you. That you didn’t exist until I wrote you down on my typewriter yonder.”

“You believe in the supernatural, don’t you?” I countered. I knew she did. She had beads and crucifixes and other religious paraphernalia laying about. And her shelf of books. She read books but couldn’t even pronounce the titles of, about things like theology and philosophy and psychology.

“I do, indeed,” she said. “What troubles me is I’m unsure which side sent you to me,” and she looked at me with a squinty, twisted-up smile, but that smile held no malice, never did, never could.

“Maybe I’m one of them *travails* the Bible is so fond of mentioning.”

“Maybe you are. Seems like a good word. It was women who mainly suffered travails, and they had to do with sickness and birth, and Lord knows I’ve had my share of sickness, and now you turning up this way is a birth of sorts.”

Miss Flannery always joked about staying one jump ahead of the old red wolf, which was her way of talking about her illness.

“*Lupus* means wolf in Latin,” she told me. “Lupus the disease is a kind of T.B. of the skin,” and she showed me her hands which had red sores on them, like a bad rash or the eczema. I learned that her daddy had died of the disease and that there wasn’t much could be done for it, except stay out of the sunshine and rest a lot.

“The old red wolf she ebbs and flows, some days I’m chipper as a sparrow, on others I sit in front of my typewriter and every finger feels like it weighs five pounds.”

“My insides look just like my outsides,” she said to me once, extending her poor, red-blotched hand toward me. “That red wolf just plumb tires me out, Enoch. Tires me out. I don’t know how much longer I can stay ahead of it.” That was the closest to self-pity she ever came in all the years I knew her.

I’d been Miss Flannery’s guest for about three weeks, when, one morning over coffee at her sunlit kitchen table she said to me, “The thing is, Enoch, what *are* we going to do about you? Do you know what would happen if I turned you out on the road? I don’t guess I could be held legally responsible for you. What do you reckon?”

“I don’t guess you could,” I said. The coffee cup was a tremblin’ in my hand when I said that. I knew I’d just wander ’til I died if she turned me away; they’d find this long, thin, starved-to-death gorilla in some small town garbage dump. Much as I wanted to I didn’t say anything else. I couldn’t bring myself to ask for her mercy, couldn’t ever give her a moment of guilt if she decided to get she of me.

“I wonder if I should let your being here become public knowledge. Do I claim you as a relative? You can just see me saying to some of the church women who come to call, This here’s Enoch. I wrote him up and he come to life.”

I felt truly fearful at that moment.

“I reckon there must be somethin’ I could do to earn my keep. I have to admit I’m not dumb,” I said. “It ain’t like I haven’t been to school. I remember I was right smart when it came to describing some place I’d like to visit, which was the city of Atlanta, which is what Teacher asked us to do in fourth grade.

“I was mighty quick at ciphering too. It was just that we got moved off from one farm to another a couple of times each year, and what with my daddy being a convict and all. After fourth grade papa he didn’t see much use for me to go to school regular except when the law threatened. Papa could print his name when he had a declaration to sign at the Ordinary’s Office, I seen him do it. ‘No need for you to have more learning than your old man,’ was what he said to me.

“Of course there was that Bible School I went to. Academy was how the Rev. General Bucephalus Jones described it. God’s own little angel-soldiers of holy light was what the Rev. General Jones called us. We had angel wings on the shoulders of our tunics. ‘Those who are pure in spirit will fly through the air with the greatest of ease,’ the Rev. General told us. Couple of boys who thought they were pure in spirit leapt from the top of the guard tower, and another boy tried it from the third floor of the dormitory, but all they got for their troubles were compound fractures, and the dormitory jumper, name of Bond Chute, ended up in wheelchair, head lolling, drool running out the corners of his mouth.”

“Nobody says you’re dumb, Enoch. But you are a secret, and going to have to stay that way as far as I can see.”

“I don’t mind bein’ a secret,” I said. “I’m too shy. I can’t go out *there*,” and I pointed toward the highway and the world. “Not unless I was on the sneak. I can’t live in *their* world. I can only live in yours.”

“Well, shy ain’t the end of the world,” Miss Flannery said. “We just got to find you something to do with your life where shy don’t matter a crumb.” She smiled at me, her mouth all twisty with serious thought.

“I’m shy too,” she said. She let it go at that. But years later, when both traveling and the old re wolf were taking their toll, she said to me, “Why I’d never leave Andulusa if I had my way. But I have to go out and let folks stare at me occasionally, let them ask dumb questions and make my stories out to be a lot they ain’t and never was or ever will be. But it makes them feel smart to put their own interpretations on my stories, and who am I to spoil their fun unless what they say goes to waste beyond-foolish, which it does more often than you’d guess.”

“You ain’t gonna make me go then?”

“Course not. What we got here is an unusual situation. I just been thinkin’ aloud on how to handle it.”

I breathed easier than I hardly ever had, and I’m not sure my gorilla face could smile but I sure tried to make it grin, and behind that face my own was smilin’ fit to eat a pie at one bite.

“I reckon there’s somethin’ I could do would make your life more bearable,” I said.

“Like what?” said Miss Flannery, eyeing me up and down.

“Like take off my gorilla suit.”

“You sure you’re ready to do that?”

In answer I undid the six snaps that circled my neck and lifted off my gorilla head.

“Well now,” said Miss Flannery, “you look exactly as I described you in my book.”

“Can’t look no other way,” I said.

“That is plumb creepy, Enoch,” she said, but she smiled when she said it.

I pulled my arms out of the sleeves and let my long, white hands rest on the table top.

“How do you feel?” she asked. “Do you feel real?”

“Are you my friend?”

“I reckon I am *that* at least.”

“Then I feel real as grits. And I feel more relaxed than I ever have. But not enough to go out *there*” I added quickly.

“I’ll have to do my best to see you won’t have to, Enoch,” she said, reaching across the table to hold one of my pale hands.

It was Miss Flannery who found the ad in one of her church magazines. *LEARN TAXIDERMISTRY AT HOME IN YOUR SPARE TIME FOR FUN AND PROFIT*, was what it said. *Taught by a man of Christian principles, Dr. Horton W. Hathcock, D.D. Veterinarian*. And the ad gave a box number in Rome, Georgia.

I took me that course and I learned to be a taxidermist. I amounted to something, as I always knew I would. Subject matter was a bit of a problem at first. Sometimes in the dead of night I used to sneak out and collect road kills, consequently some of my first work was a little lopsided, and as often as not bug-eyed, but it weren’t my fault, and Miss Flannery was quick to acknowledge that.

“You’ll do some right good work, Enoch,” she said to me, “soon as something dies of its own free will, or we find you a customer.”

Finding customers was not easy. Miss Flannery and Miss Regina couldn’t suddenly announce an interest in taxidermy and suggest that their church friends bring their own dead pets or their husband’s hunting kills over to Andulusa to be stuffed and mounted.

I solved my own problem though, I advertised in the very magazines Dr. Horton W. Hathcock, D.D. Veterinarian, frequented.

TAXIDERMISTRY WORK YOU’LL BE PROUD TO DISPLAY
Leather Tanning

Fur and Hair-On Tanning
Satisfaction Guaranteed

EMERY TAXIDERMISTRY & TANNING
Nearly 30 years experience

The last line was the only lie.

“I figure every ad should be allowed one harmless falsehood,” Miss Flannery said, though Miss Regina disapproved. While we was making up that ad Miss Flannery and me laughed like little kids who invent a limited-membership club, with initiations and secret handshakes.

“Pointless giggling,” Miss Regina called it.

Miss Flannery arranged a post office box number in Atlanta, and had a brochure printed up that I sent out when I got queries. She also arranged for the contents of the box to be forwarded to Andulusa once a week. Once I had a few satisfied customers I put their testimonials in my ads. I have never met or talked to one of my customers.

These last few years I even teach a bit myself. I made up a correspondence course and advertised along with my regular ad for the taxidermy business.

What with us both being only children, me bein’ an only child twice, if you understand my meaning, I guess we were closer to brother and sister than any other relationship. The years at Andulusa flew by. Miss Flannery wrote her stories while all the while the old red wolf wore her down the way wind erodes open land, slow and easy so’s you’d hardly notice, until all of a sudden the top soil is gone and ain’t nothing left but twisted roots and rocks.

What does Miss Flannery really think of me? I used to ask myself regular, lying on my single bed in the basement, listening to a country station from Atlanta, smelling the twitchy odors of my tanning chemicals. Miss Regina treats me like I was an ungainly pet. She fusses and complains about the odor my work creates, but then she squeezes my arm and says, “Oh, Enoch, I don’t know what we’d do without you.”

One afternoon, about my fifth year at Andulusa, Miss Flannery put the shoe on the other foot.

“What do y’all think of me, Enoch?” she asked.

“In what way?” I said, though I knew right well what she had in mind.

“You been a glimpse of God to me,” she said. “I look at you and I think I get an inkling of what God must feel when he stares down at His world.”

“You know, Miss Flannery, sometimes of an evening when we playin’ a game of Chinese checkers or Parcheesi, I steal a glance at you and I feel a little toward you what you must feel toward the God you believe in. I know for a fact you created me. And you’re pretty sure He created you. Difference I got proof.”

“And I got all the proof I need. So I reckon we’ll stick to Chinese checkers from here on.”

And we did. Though I sure did worry some about what would happen to me after Miss Flannery was gone.

“The old red wolf is closing in on me, Enoch,” she said to me the last time I saw her.

Miss Regina had come out of the bedroom a few minutes before and said, “Mary Flannery wants word with you.” Miss Regina was pale and worried and I’d heard her on the telephone an hour before making arrangements with the hospital.

I crept into the bedroom, walking careful as if I was stepping on Miss Regina’s best china.

“For goodness sakes, Enoch, I ain’t dead and gone yet. You don’t need to pussyfoot.” But she wa

too weak to raise her head from the pillow when she said it. Though she did force a smile.

“I think it would be plumb criminal if you were to die soon as I do,” Miss Flannery said. “I’ve read about these selfish old kings in Biblical times who had all their wives and all their slaves killed so they could all be together in the hereafter. And I don’t care what you think is gonna happen, I won’t have no truck with those sort of ideas, let me tell you...”

“Characters can’t function in the real world after their creators are dead,” I said.

“How do you know?”

“I was created knowing that, ma’am.”

“I see,” she said. “Well, I think you’re wrong, Enoch. We have spent years making you useful. You have harnessed your ambition so as to amount to something. You have an occupation. You’ll carry on just fine after I’m gone. See if you don’t.”

Miss Flannery turned out to be right. Though I don’t know what I’m going to do after Miss Regina goes to her reward. Even if the town of Milledgeville, or the university decides to keep this house for a museum, as there is a right lot of talk of them doing, I don’t suppose they’ll want me. The kind of folks who would set up a museum ain’t the kind who would believe in me anyhow. They’ll be shocked and surprised enough just to find that *someone* has been living in this huge old house of Miss Regina’s all these years, right in downtown Milledgeville, right under everyone’s curious noses.

I think myself that I’d make an excellent custodian. I could wear a uniform, like I did when I worked at the zoo all those years ago. I could act real shy and polite and I could escort little groups of white-haired ladies and long-legged graduate students, each of whom hankers to touch their hands to something of Miss Flannery’s, on tours of the house.

We’d have to rope things off so they couldn’t touch the furniture, the china, the books. I could explain which things belonged to Miss Flannery, which came originally from Andulusa. And I could tell little stories about her, like how on one of the last days of her life, when she was writing her story “Parker’s Back,” I found her one morning slicing up an onion with a paring knife, peeling off the brown outer layer, studying it and each further slice she peeled off.

“I just wanted to see if what I thought was true,” she said, which didn’t explain much to me at the time, but when I read the story I understood.

One time a couple of years ago, I put on a clean shirt, pulled a hat down over my ears, and sneaked out of the house way before dawn. I was at the university when it opened and I gaped just like a tourist at Miss Flannery’s bookcases and geegaws that they have on display in a special room. That room had a carpeting with peacocks on it, and wouldn’t Miss Flannery have loved it though.

Miss Regina just shakes her head in wonder at all the tourists that come to Milledgeville to gawk and to study about her daughter as if what she wrote was Gospel.

“I tell you, Enoch,” she said more than once, “up at that room at the university there will be a whole row of small Japanese men in blue suits and striped ties, sitting straight-backed as the chairs they’re on, studying Mary Flannery’s papers and making notes in upside down-looking writing.”

The first time a Japanese edition of one of Miss Flannery’s books arrived at the house we both chuckled over it.

“These squiggles run up and down the page,” Miss Regina marvelled, “and the book’s printed upside down. You read back to front.”

“It’s a wonder to the soul that anyone can read chicken scratchings like that,” I said.

I guess my being a caretaker, or even living on here after Miss Regina is gone is more fantasy than reality. Even though I bet I’m the only person alive who knows every nook and cranny of this house

knows its history, which addition was built onto which addition, and when, and by who.

~~“Me and Enoch sends our love,”~~ Miss Flannery one time signed a letter to a close friend. The friend just thought it was a clever joke. She knew literary characters don't come to life.

“How come you don't invent another story about me?” I asked, after I'd been at Andulusa for a few years.

“You're family now, Enoch,” she said, “and I never write about family.” I think she meant the part about my being family. I was kind of like a kid brother, somebody she could be happy to help out. She was proud of my successes and so was Miss Regina, though she didn't like to say so out loud.

But Miss Regina's glad to have me about now, even though she often says, “Honestly, Enoch, it's like having two shadows, the way I turn around and you're always there.”

I believe she thinks of me as a pet; to Miss Regina I'm like one of the animals I preserve and shape and make last forever, a reminder of her daughter, a pet all clear-eyed and slicked down, one that don't cause no trouble by clawing at the curtains or making mayhem with the rugs.

Even with an occupation I know I can't make it out in the real world. I suspect it's because of how I was created. Being a fictional character ain't the easiest of lives. I've kept my gorilla-suit. It's hanging in a closet in the basement, preserved, brushed, and moth balled, in as good a shape as it ever was.

The thought of being on my own is scary though, I could put on the suit and set out to find somebody to shake my hand and take me in, which is what I reckon I'll do when I'm thrust out on my own. But as far as I know, Miss Flannery was the only one who was ever going to help me. Ordinary folks ain't partial to hand-shaking gorillas. The one hope I got is that somebody else will write about me. That's the only possible ain't it? I'll make myself believe it is anyway. I'll set out knocking on doors, searching until I find the new writer. I will. It's worth a try.



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Mrs. Baron pushes open the screen door and steps out on the verandah of her house, which is tall and square like a five-gallon gas can. The strong, new spring that old John installed on the door in April pulls it shut behind her, with a bang. She walks carefully across the battleship-gray boards and sits down on the porch swing. The swing groans gently.

“Jack? Jack?” she says to attract my attention, though I can tell by the angle of her head that she is staring past me at the acres of July corn that whisper in a feather-like breeze.

“Yes, Mrs. Baron,” I say from near the front gate, where I’m tending a bed of snapdragons, some yellow as canaries, others the color of maroon velvet.

“The memorial service is at four o’clock and I won’t be there, and neither will John. But I’ll give them something to think about. Mrs. Baron will give them something to think about all right. They can’t push me, but old as I am, I only bend.” She pauses, rises from the swing, and comes to the top of the porch stairs. She is wearing beige running shoes, loosely laced, and her swollen feet make ominous bulges in the canvas.

“Do you see this comb?” she says, turning her head so I can just make out the outline of a yellowish comb holding her ermine-white hair in place. “Haven’t worn this in a coon’s age, I thought this morning. I found it down in the bottom of a dresser drawer. It’s ivory; it was part of a set John gave me when we were courting, over 60 years ago.”

“It’s very nice, Mrs. Baron,” I say, not knowing what she may be expecting of me.

The last few days since John died, she’s been telling me all sorts of things, keeps having me come back to do work around the yard that I don’t ordinarily do. She talks to her daughter, too, as though the daughter could understand everything that was going on. Maybe she considers us a little alike, Missy and me. Missy’s mind never grew up, and a lot of people don’t think I’m very bright, talk real loud to me when they meet me on the street or in the general store. “Jack Clarke lives all alone in that big old house,” they say, “full of books, and he plays the piano late at night. Been to the university, but all he does is odd jobs,” and they speculate about what’s wrong with me to live the way I do.

“Mrs. Baron, indeed,” she says from the top of the steps. “Now it’s all right for *you* to call me Mrs. Baron, Jack. But do you know *I’ve* gotten to thinking of myself as Mrs. Baron! I wonder how that came about. Sometime in my 60s or 70s, people stopped calling me by my first name and I became Mrs. Baron. Until I was about five, I was called Baby Marylyle. Did you know that? My closest sister was seven years old when I was born. When I was young I was Marylyle McKitteridge. I remember how I labored learning to write and spell a difficult name like that. I used to sit at papa’s roll-top desk in Onamata. I’d bite my lips white, and press a stubby pencil into my scribbler, making what m

mother used to call sleigh tracks on the paper.

~~“I remember hearing that name called one time — I won a book prize, a copy of *Little Women*. Was it at school or at church?”~~ She pauses to consider her own question. Ordinarily I’d find some work to do somewhere else on the farm, but I think I should listen to her today. She’s had a bad week. Mrs. Baron has; she’s just bursting with grief and rage, and she’s got to let some of it out. I figure listening is the best thing I can do.

“I remember hearing my name called another time. ‘Marylyle McKitteridge,’ the voice said, and I walked across the stage of the Onamata Community Hall, not the one that’s there now, the one that was burned down in 1922, and received my high-school diploma, an ice-blue ribbon around my waist, and a homemade corsage of bachelor’s buttons on the shoulder of my white satin dress.

“I was in love with John Baron. The bachelor’s buttons were for him. ‘As blue as your eyes,’ I told him later, as I rode home, close by his side on the seat of that tall black buggy. All that humid summer, I worked at the desk in papa’s office,” and suddenly she smiles, radiantly as if she’s looking at a new baby. “And once in a while I’d stop and write versions of my name: Marylyle Baron, Marylyle McKitteridge Baron, Marylyle M. Baron, Mrs. M.M. Baron, Mrs. John Baron.

“And in the fall I became Mrs. John Baron. Over 60 years ago. Now people talk to me as if my Christian name was Mrs., and without noticing, I’ve accepted it, until it’s become part of me as comfortable as an old slipper.”

She sits down slowly on the top step, and, like a car changing lanes without signalling, her conversation veers away. “I’ve got tea inside, Jack, would you have a cup with me?” but she does not wait for a reply. “Father Rafferty would have known what to do. He was a real priest, tall and majestic, his black cassock sweeping the ground, swishing over the grass in time to his long strides, the silver cross at his waist flashing in the sunlight.”

She goes on talking about Father Rafferty for a long time. My memories of him are a lot different than hers. I remember an old man, stooped as the crook of a cane, half-blind, half-deaf, his cassock drizzled with food stains. I think there was some controversy about him refusing to retire. About the time I finished high school, 10 or 12 years ago, a big car pulled up at the rectory, which is in Onamata though the church is out of town, and they took Father Rafferty away. It was lunch hour, and we watched a couple of little nuns carry out boxes of his possessions and fit them into the trunk of the car, and a couple of young priests, big as football players, came out one on each side of Father Rafferty, guiding him firmly into the car, his palsied old head bobbing up and down like a baby bird’s, his toothless mouth complaining.

“‘Rules are not *always* meant to be followed,’ he said many times. He used to sit right in there at the kitchen table, playing cribbage with John and sipping dandelion wine. ‘Them over there,’ and he would wave his hand in whatever direction he thought Rome might be, ‘what they don’t know doesn’t do them the least bit of harm,’ and he’d smile, and wink one of his big, blue eyes.

“That new priest is young, and has a face long and bony as a year-old calf. He wears overalls and a checkered workshirt, just like you Jack, and he tries so hard to be one of the people. But all he knows about is following the rules. It doesn’t matter a bit how he dresses; it’s rules that are important to him, and people come second.

“He at least put on his collar when he came out here and explained to me, over and over, why the rules of the church forbade John being buried in consecrated ground.” She turns back toward the door, her feet turned out like a duck’s. “Come in, Jack. The tea’s on the table.”

I follow her through the hall, which is dark with high varnished baseboards, and into the kitchen, which still has a tall, black-and-silver cookstove, with a warming oven and a reservoir. The kitchen

spotless, and there's a large window above the table, one that I installed for her a couple of years ago. ~~As we drink tea, we can watch bees droning over her flower garden, which is full of golden marigolds, sweet peas, and cosmos. Close to the house are hollyhocks so tall that their heavy flowers bump against the bottom of the window, like soft fists.~~

"Mortal sin!" she goes on. "When I was a child, Thaddeus McGreevey died in some state of mortal sin, though I never fully understood what it was that made him an outcast. He was a tiny old man with a whiskey drinker's red face and bleary eyes, who lived in a log cabin, eight or ten miles south of here. It's part of one of those conglomerate farms now, cabin's been gone for 50 years or more. His wife left him, long before I was born. He didn't remarry, that wasn't the problem. Mother used to complain about him taking in an Indian from the Sac-Fox Reservation over by Tama. I saw them together in town. The Indian was fat, with warts on the side of his face, which was big around as a frying pan, and he wore McGreevey's old clothes.

"When McGreevey died, the men of the congregation had a couple of secret meetings that my papa went to but wouldn't talk about. There was even a rumor that the bishop was coming down from Des Moines, but he didn't.

"Finally after all those meetings, they decided to offer McGreevey to the Protestants, and when Mother told them that McGreevey had left his farm to the Indian and \$2,000 to St. Emmerence of Onamata, they told the Catholics to keep him.

"Thaddeus McGreevey was buried outside the cemetery fence in a stone and strangle-grass nigger man's land." Her voice breaks. "And they wanted to put my John in the same place."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Baron. I wish I could be of some help." She seems hardly to hear me.

"Of course, we'll be happy to have a *memorial* service for Mr. Baron," the young priest told me. "He was one of the real old-timers around here," he went on, rubbing his hands together, rattling off, saying a good deal more than he meant, just for the sake of saying something.

"'You do as you like,' I told him. 'John helped build the church when he was a boy,' and as I said that, I could picture John, up on a ladder where he never should have been at his age, applying the coat of cream-colored paint to the steeple. But they have no shame, none of them, they don't take any of that into consideration.

"I don't know much about your religion, Mrs. Baron," I say, "but it seems to me they haven't treated you very fairly."

"When I'm through, they'll remember Mrs. Baron around Onamata for a few years. I'll give them something to think about. Everybody wants to be remembered some way, Jack. Even you, I bet you like to be remembered. There was old Dressler. Ha. You must remember him. There I go, talking about him as if his first name was *Old*. What was it? Norman? No."

"Norville."

"That was it. Thank you, Jack. Sold his farm and moved into the Lions' Club old folks' home in Onamata. They say he got a million dollars when he sold his land, owned two sections he did, and he donated every cent to the University of Iowa Medical Center in Iowa City. They've built something there called the Dressler Pavilion," and she stops to laugh, a harsh, ironic laugh. "Sounds like some place where they'd hold 4—H shows and bake sales.

"Old Dressler sits in an easy chair in his little room and cackles about how part of the University of Iowa is named for him; he must be close to a hundred by now. His kids don't come to see him anymore, since he did that, not even on Christmas or Father's Day. 'Let the medical school send somebody to see him,' one of his daughters said. They got together, the four of them, and hired

lawyer, but he said old Dressler was sane, and if they sued they'd only embarrass themselves."

~~I smile to myself as I drink my tea. Old Dressler, as she calls him, is a shirt-tail relative of mine. And, for the most part, she has the story correct.~~

"I'd embarrass myself if I sued. Believe me, I've thought about it. Only, who would I sue? How would I go about suing the Catholic Church? Would I have to sue the pope? Would they have Italian lawyers in red robes? No, even if I had the nerve, it would drag on for years and years. They'd make me drag on knowing that I'd have to die sooner or later. I'm 81 already, a year older than the century, that's how I remember. It doesn't seem possible that I've got a 60-year-old daughter.

"Where is Missy?" I say, maybe to take the conversation away from the church and John, or maybe just to keep her talking.

"Missy's in her room playing with her dolls. Keeps her room real neat, has her jigsaw puzzles stacked up tidy as you please on the shelves John built above her bed. Her and John used to work the puzzles, had one on the go on the dining-room table all winter every winter. And she dresses and undresses her dolls; them Barbie dolls were a godsend and I can whip up them little dresses quick as you please on my sewing machine, and Missy smiles fit to break your heart when she sees a new one. The doctors told us not to expect Missy to live beyond 40 or 45, but she'll be 60 on her next birthday. Has a heart condition, but otherwise she's healthy."

She talks on about how she learned she couldn't have children and how they came to adopt Missy. "John came up from the fields when Doc Spangler dropped us off; Doc drove me into Iowa City and brought both of us back. John's face was black as an African, with pink holes for his eyes, and I can still see him, the way he peeled back the blanket and peered down at that little pink-apple face — I could just see him fall in love. He carried her like an armful of rose petals and I didn't mind when the field dust rubbed off his shirt onto the blanket.

"At first John was worried that Missy staying a little girl in her mind might have been a punishment heaped on us for going out and getting ourselves a child after God told us we weren't supposed to. John would never hear of adopting another. But we've never been sorry we had Missy. Kids grow up and as soon as they start school, they find out parents aren't gods at all, just dumb farmers, and they keep that attitude until they get out on their own and discover how tough life really is. Missy's been our sweet child for 60 years.

"I don't have anything to explain to Missy. It's nice and it's sad, too, to see the way she acts. I think she realizes that John is dead, but she's able to put it out of her mind. I wish I could. Them last weeks he used to take Missy by the hand and her and him would walk down to St. Emmerens graveyard, there behind the church. I'd watch them and they could have been husband and wife walking off to town, only thing that gave it away was that Missy would skip every once in a while like a little girl, and as they walked she'd be talking so earnestly, up into John's face.

"At the graveyard, John explained real carefully to her that he was going to die in a month or so, and he showed her the spot where he was going to be buried — right next to his papa and mama, and how the spot next to that is reserved for me. The one next to that is for Missy, but he didn't mention that. Sometimes Missy really seems to understand. 'It will prepare her,' is what John said, and she agreed with him.

"Everybody tries to give you the run-around when you're old, Jack. Did you know that?"

"Yes," I say.

"John and I, we had to pry it out of them, the business about how sick he was, I mean. They were all so hopeful, after the exploratory operation, talking about rest and recuperation and how he'd be weak for a few months. 'If you got something to explain, you better say it to me,' John told the

doctor. The doctor launched into a new lot of gobbledy-gook. ‘You afraid to say cancer, youn fellow?’ was John’s reply. Finally, they told him he had only a month or so left.”

“This tea is sort of a bribe, Jack,” Mrs. Baron says, looking straight at me. “I never thought I’d get so old I couldn’t drive that rattle-trap of a pickup truck, but they took my license away last fall, said my eyesight wasn’t good enough. Those flowers I’ve had you working on don’t need nothing done to them that I can’t do. All I’ve been doing is getting up my nerve for two days, pacing around in here like a coyote in a cage and watching you in the yard doing work I could do.”

Mrs. Baron leads the way out to the machine shed, and eventually finds what she wants, which is a long length of aluminum-colored cable, the kind of stuff that was one time used as guy-wires on telephone and power poles. She is wearing a rumpled pair of mauve stretch pants and a blouse the color of owl feathers. Her wrists are no bigger than a child’s, and tufts of white hair float around her face as she works, busy as a mother hen.

“Wonder why you don’t see guy-wires anymore,” Mrs. Baron says as she and I wrestle the cable to the pickup truck and lift it into the back where it wiggles around like a dozen snakes. “Drive me down to the church, Jack,” she says, then launches into another story as we drive the mile of gravel road between corn fields.

“‘Now Mrs. Baron,’ that young priest said, his brown eyes as solemn as a cow’s, his hands clasped in his lap. ‘I want you to know that it’s nothing personal. I don’t make the rules,’ he said, and looked toward the kitchen ceiling, and there was just the faintest flicker of a smile on his face. Oh, he made me so mad.

“‘You’re a devout woman, Mrs. Baron,’ he said. ‘I’m sure you understand the theological implications. But just in case you don’t...’ and he launched into an explanation that took him all the way back to the time of Christ, and his conversation was splashed full of Latin phrases, like throwing chocolate chips into cookie batter.

“It’s funny how people are always ready for change before those in charge. That’s why governments are forever being rooted out of office, Jack. And the church would fall the same way except, long ago, someone was smart enough to invoke the magic of God’s name. The poor simple ignore the parts of church doctrine they can’t accept. Oh, Jack, it will take the church hundreds of years to catch up to the people.”

“I don’t know much about matters of religion, Mrs. Baron,” which is what I imagine she wants to hear.

“The people recognized the foolishness of marriages being made in heaven. Doctrines like that were established when life expectancy was about 30 years or less. The same thing with birth control. Young women don’t have monstrous families anymore, yet they still attend church. I bet many of them carry their little discs of pills right into church with them — they’ve decided that *they* are right and the church is wrong, because those doctrines were coined when the world was underpopulated and are no longer logical. But the church fathers backed themselves into a corner by claiming the doctrines were the word of God.

“And now there are women daring to ask for a place in the church — daring to talk about the possibility of women priests, of women being more than producers of children and cooks for church suppers. ‘Could anyone know less about women than a group of male celibates?’ I read that in a magazine; it didn’t mean much to me then, but after what they’ve done to me and John... ‘Somebody has to drag the church into the 20th century,’ that article said. I surprised myself by not even arguing with the priest. My chest felt like it was full of fire, like I might explode, but I listened and nodded.”

and sent him away thinking himself a diplomat.

“I had John cremated. Had to send the body to Iowa City, to the Beckman-Jones Funeral Home for that. I picked out an urn, a small one, scarcely bigger than a bottle of aftershave. It’s a pleasant blue, little like John’s eyes.”

We pull into the churchyard and I begin untangling the cable and removing it from the truck.

“St. Emmerence Church is nearly as old as I am, Jack. A delegation of farmers rode a hundred miles on horseback to Des Moines, and persuaded the bishop to send them a priest. Onamata then was a general store, blacksmith shop, and a half-dozen houses set at odd angles around them like rocks fallen from a cairn.

“Drag the cable around the east side of the church, Jack, where nobody’ll see it. Not that anybody would come around this early in the day.

“The bishop sent Father Rafferty; he was just a tall, awkward, flaxen-haired boy. He used to send the communion wine crashing to the floor in Ned Brannigan’s parlor — that’s where the first church services were held in the Onamata district. The same families built the church; built it two miles east in a grove of trees right on the Iowa River, where they planned to move the town when the railroad came through. But *that* railroad was just a rumor and the town ended up a mile to the south, and St. Emmerence of Onamata was left out here on the river bank all by its lonesome. I think that’s why it’s been kept up so good. Been painted every five years for as long as I can remember.”

The church is a rich cream color with brown trim. It’s small, as churches go, only about 15 by 30. It has only one door, and there are six windows, evenly spaced, three to each side. Each window has solid stained glass. Mrs. Baron opens the door, which is unlocked, and we walk inside. The church smells of varnished wood and incense.

“Each of them windows was donated by a family in the church,” Mrs. Baron says. “We could have had one of them if we’d wanted, but we chose to donate the new organ instead.”

The door is at the back of the church. There are rows of pews to seat about 30 people, a small altar at the front, and in the corner at the rear of the church, just to the right of the door, sits an organ. It’s not as big as a piano, made of blond wood, and it has a shiny bronze plaque on the face of it. It looks like it’s about 20 years old.

She runs her gnarled hands over the plaque. “I could do what I want to do now,” she says. “But I don’t want you to be a part of it. No use giving us both a bad name.”

We climb back in the truck and head for the farm. “‘Feels like rats,’” she says suddenly. “John said that to me after the operation, holding his big, square hand against his chest. ‘Rats inside me, nibbling away, making me hollow.’”

“It must be very painful for you,” I say.

“It’s easing pain that’s hard. John eased his own pain, shortened his life, by what, two or three weeks? And I don’t blame him for it. But the church is so unforgiving. You’d think they were the telephone company or some government department the way they follow rules. A lifetime of faithful service John gave them. For 40 years, before the church was raised up and the partial basement and the furnace were installed, John used to get up at five o’clock every Sunday. When the roads were blown closed, he’d be bundled up in a mackinaw, high up on the seat of his tractor, or before that he used the team, hitched up the cutter, the horses lunging against the drifts.

“But there wasn’t a morning when that church wasn’t warm when the priest got there, and by the time the congregation started arriving, the old heater would be glowing pink as a piglet and the church so warm people had to take off their winter coats. After the service, there’d be puddles of melted snow

under the pews.”

As I stop the truck in the farm yard she says to me, “Will you go down to the pasture and catch the horses for me, Jack? I’ll try and harness them myself, but I may need some help with that, too.”

Two horses graze in a pasture below the house. Barney and Babe are black and shiny as telephone poles and they’re at least as old as Mrs. Baron, if their age was in human years. They have white patches on their necks where collars have rubbed, and there are soft edges of white along their jaws and around their tired-looking eyes.

Mrs. Baron insists that she can harness the horses alone. “It’s not like the truck; they can’t take away my license to drive horses.” As she struggles with the harness, she talks on.

“The last time I saw John alive he said to me, ‘You go on to town, Mary Me Lyle,’ using the special name he invented for me when we were courting. He was the last person in the world who used my first name. ‘I’ve kissed Missy and give her a dollar to spend in town. Now I’m going to walk to the pasture,’ and from behind the big green chair in the parlor he took out his shotgun. It had green and red flying pheasants on the stock. ‘Too many crows about, I’ll try to do in a few,’ he said. I felt a hollowed out inside, as if his cancer was eating at me, too. His eyes were sunk deep in his face and I could see the pain there, bubbling up in his eyes, no matter how hard he tried to hide it.

“‘If I’m not here when you get home, don’t you come looking for me — phone the Timneys down the way, Stan and his boys will come by,’ and he put one hand on my arm and leaned in and kissed my cheek, the sharp white stubble around his mouth prickling like nettles.

“I watched him walk off, swinging his left leg awkwardly, as he always did. And then I looked over and could see Missy bouncing like a child on the seat of the pickup. I went out and got her and we walked to the highway where Ann Timney picked us up on her way to town.”

Now, I watch Mrs. Baron and Missy walk off to the road and make their way along the ditch, which is full of red and white clover, toward the churchyard a mile away, the harness of the horses jingling like fairy bells. When they disappear into the grove of trees that marks the churchyard I get in the truck and drive slowly after them. I want to be close by if she needs help. I park the truck and approach from the back, walking along the banks of the Iowa River. It drifts silently, the color and smoothness of Chinese silk.

Missy is in the churchyard, petting the velvet noses of the old horses, making sweet, bird-like sounds they seem to understand. I peer in the door, and see Mrs. Baron busy winding the cable around the organ, encircling it twice. The ends curl angrily around her ankles as if they have life of their own. She drags one end out the door. She sees me.

“This is my business, Jack. Between me and the church. I don’t need no help.”

“I won’t help or hinder you. I’ll just be here if you need me.”

The other end of the cable is more of a problem. The last six inches are like a long bolt with a steel circle at the end of it. She taps that circle against the corner of the nearest stained glass window.

I lean against the door jamb. “This window was donated by the Channings,” she says. “Last of the family is long dead and buried. I remember old Mrs. Channing liked to wear large, flat, blue hats, big black buggy wheels.”

The window design is a crucifixion scene, the reds rooster-comb bright, the greens like you might find behind the bar in an Irish saloon. A semi-circular piece of amber glass cracks and drops from the window, making a swishing sound as it lands in the tall grass. She pushes the cable through the break, then goes out and drags each end to where the horses stand, heads down, wheezing quietly in the bright July sun. Missy agreeably steps aside, her hands clasped in front of her, head cocked to one side like a curious bird.

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