

Part 1 - Times and Places

Chapter 9 - The Farm

For several summers, I am allowed to go to a working farm between Hagermann and Dexter, NM. Aunt D and Uncle W welcome me for a week or two. I do not know why they are Aunt and Uncle. I think they were related to Granny or her husband.

Mother takes me; Father never comes.

I have a Daisy BB rifle. I make fishing rigs to catch perch and crawdads.

I am an excellent shot. I target the English sparrows. I spare the other birds. I also became an expert at lying in wait for field mice peeking their triangular heads out of the stacked maize piles. I put only one BB in the chamber so that there are no rolling shots in the chamber. I wait until I hear a rustle. I slowly position the rifle in that direction. I know the mouse pathways through the maize stalks. I wait until I see the tiny head. From about 10 to 15 feet away, I pop them. One week I bagged 27 field mice. Uncle W was happy. It taught me patience.

One day, Uncle W tells me to climb up the inside wall of the barn to the top rafters. There are pigeon nests up there. He tells me to take the feathered young ones and drop them down to him. I leave the little ones alone. He wants the almost-grown squabs which cannot fly. The adult pigeons are not happy and buzz me. That night, Aunt D fixes the squabs. They are delicious.

Sometimes, I help Uncle W irrigate the rows from dirt canals. We start up the big well. The water gushes out and flows down the dirt canals. Metal tubes are placed along the dirt canals bridging into the the canal. They become siphons to get the water to the rows.

When the well is shut off, I get a piece of bacon and tie it on a string. I patiently wait on the edge of the canal at the well. Eventually, a crawdad will pinch and start eating the bacon. I slowly bring him up until I can flip him out. Then the tricky task of getting hold of him. I hate getting pinched. Once I subdue the little lobster, I harvest the tail and peel it. I use it as bait in the reservoir for perch.

I am up every morning at daybreak. I sleep on the screened porch on a cot. I fall asleep exhausted at nightfall. I do not remember ever taking a bath there. Aunt fixes a lot of chicken and dumplings. This farm is the place where I feel most free.

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