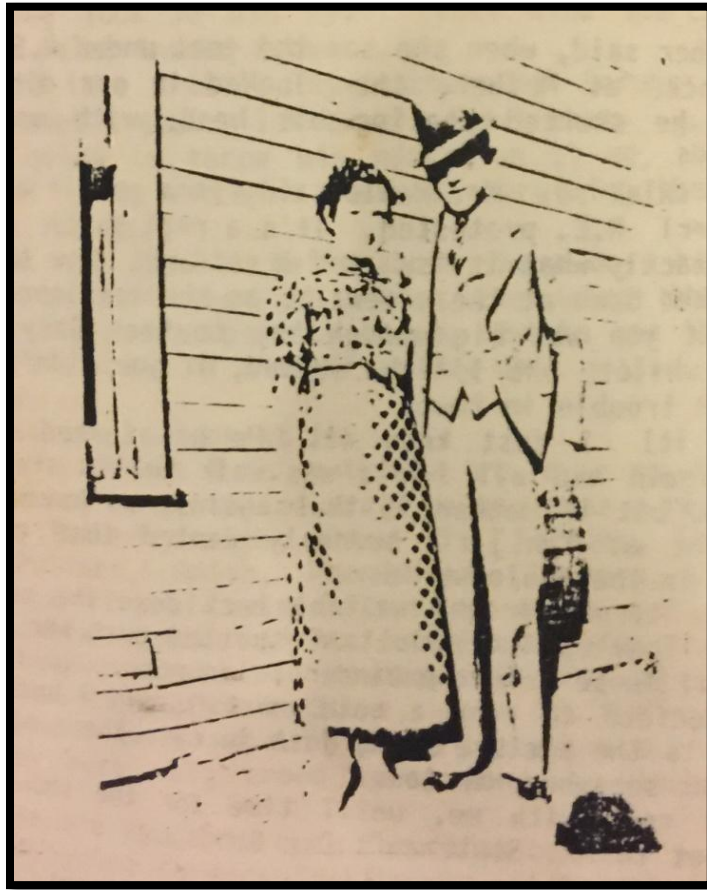


DUST

CHRISTMAS 1944



It was the week before Christmas, 1944. I was five years old, but there seemed to be little for which to look forward to in my compressed world of one seven mile long road between our house and that of our Grandparents. Mother had told R.E. and I that Santa Claus would not be able to come to our house this year but she had saved her sugar ration stamps so she would be able to make Christmas candy, date-loaf, Peanut-brittle, and Brown sugar, that would be good.

Dad told us to go to bed earlier in the evenings so he wouldn't have to burn so much firewood trying to keep the house warm late in the night.

(It'll be cold in the morning, when I wake up there will be ice on the bucket of drinking water again, and that long cold walk from the back door to the little house just over the hill will chill me to the bone before I can return to the hot morning fire in the wood stove, where I will stand scorching myself on one side while the other side feels like I am leaning against a block of blue ice.)

Crawling into bed and pulling the heavy handmade quilts up tight around my neck to keep the cold from coming in while I laid shivering trying to generate enough heat to warm a spot where it would be warm enough for me to sleep, I began to play my winter night game of trying to

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imagine familiar shapes of things in the ice that had formed around the edge of the window panes during the day when the heat from inside the house met with the cold air from outside, blowing around the glass where the putty had cracked, allowing small pieces to fall out. Sometimes it would be the dark clouds moving across a moonlit sky that would challenge my imagination to find the figures familiar to my sight. Rolling over on my back, I lay with my head sunk deep into the feather pillow while watching my breath create small clouds in the bedroom air through the moonlight flooding in from a silver crescent in the sky.

Rasp. Rasp. Whispers. Tap. Tap.

R.E. what's that noise?

I don't know. Quit fanning the blankets you're letting cold air in.

But there's something trying to pry into the house.

No, go to sleep, we'll see what it is in the morning.

(Christmas candy, that will be good, and a warm fire. Dad will probably tell us some stories, maybe Mother will read us another Hardy Boys mystery, that will be good. But there won't be any chocolate because of the war in Europe. Maybe we will have a real big snow, then the house will be warmer with a blanket of snow on the roof and the cracks on the north side packed with snow. And we could have a big bowl of snow ice cream. My thoughts began to slow down as sleep closed in around my mind.)

"Wake up, Gary! Wake up. Come see what I found in Mother's closet!" R.E. shouted as he ran out of the bedroom with his long johns flapping behind him.

(What could he have found that has him so excited? There isn't anything in Mother's closet except some smelly old shoes, Grandma's sewing machine, and of course Mother's shotgun.)

Gary come on, there isn't much time.

(R.E. can pick some of the worst times to be excited. I'm sleepy, it's cold, and I've got to go!)

R.E. pulled back an old blanket careful not to bump the shotgun, and there it was. A real barn! With doors that slide open. So that's what the apple crates were for. Dad had said the apple crates were for kindling wood to start the morning fire. There was also a hammer, saw, and nails, well that's what was making all the noise last night.

Quick go look out the window to see if they're coming.

Running to the window, I wiped the frost off from the pane to look out, and there he was, coming out of the barn with two buckets of milk. The man that was bigger than Santa Claus, all 120 pounds of him. (Who cares if Santa Claus won't be able to fly on Christmas Eve, 1944.)

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R.E. he's coming up from the barn.

Quick! Help me put it all back!

You put it back. I've got to go!

YOU CAN'T BUY CHILDREN WITH MONEY,
BUT WITH LOVE YOU CAN OWN THEIR WORLD.

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