HAPPY BIRTHDAY LEANDER

 "Leander, come on over here! It's time for your birthday party." He heard his mother call.

As he made his way through the yard, a big molasses stack cake, with four candles burning, came into view, sitting on a cardboard box.

 "Happy birthday, Leander! He heard her say, and she began to sing, "Happy birthday, Leander. Happy birthday to you."

"Blow out the candles and make a wish, Leander, " she encouraged.

Taking a deep breath, he blew hard. Each flame bends away from the candle and disappeared, leaving a stream of smoke twisting upward. Looking into her clear, brown eyes, Leander spoke,

"Yea wan'a know what I wished for, Ma?"

"If ye' tell, Leader, it won't come true," she replied with a smile.

Knotting his head in understanding, Leander watched as her small hand, gently cut a piece of cake. Handing it to him, her long, black hair fell around her small, pale face.

 A smile grew over his face, as he reached for the cake. She turned and walked quietly away, through the yard, up the steps, and through the kitchen door, out of sight. As the bang from the screen door announced her departure, Leander impulsively stood and began running around the yard. Making a sharp turn, he felt himself slipping and flying throughout the air. Hitting the ground with a thud, he could hear the tear of his shirt. Twisting to a sitting position, he responded to a burning sensation, and examined the blood oozing from his elbow. Focusing on the depressed cake still in his hand, he dropped it to the ground. Near where the cake landed, he noticed a bare spot. It was a mound of sand, and there was a hole in the top of it. Red ants were moving through the hole. They were moving in a line, into the grass. Watching one ant come close to the cake, it climbed onto one side of the cake, and made its way back to the mound. Watching another ant exit the hole, he watched it as it moved through the grass. It moved along a worn path to a butterfly, lying motionless in the grass. Leander picked the butterfly up and examined it closely. He heard himself speak aloud, "it's not moving. It's dead."

 Feeling of the wings of the butterfly, he noticed a white, powdery substance left on his finger and thumb.

 "It's dead, " he heard himself speak again.

 "Guess I'd better bury him."

 Feeling his body lift upward effortlessly, he began to walk around. Looking for something to dig with, he found a small twig. Moving nearer the house, he began to dig a hole. After a few moments of digging, he began to place the butterfly into the hole. Covering it up with dirt, he broke the twig, tied it into a cross with strands of grass, and pressed it into the ground near the grave.

 Leander spoke aloud, "Oh God, take this small fellow to heaven."

Leander stood to his feet and began to run around the yard again, in a big circle. In a few minutes, he noticed an older boy crossing the fence and walking toward him.

 "Donnie's a big boy, but he's nice." Leander thought to himself.

 As Donnie came closer, he began to speak,

 "Look here, Leander. Look what I've got!"

 Opening his hands, Donnie revealed a big frog, and spoke,

 "Something, uh?"

 The frog moved and jumped to the ground.

 "It's a frog!" Donnie explained smiling.

 Watching the frog jump, Leander jumped back and felt his heart beat faster. With large, brown eyes, growing bigger, he stooped down and examined the frog more closely. Picking up a stick, Leander impulsively gouged the frog vigorously. Drawing back, he came down forcefully with a blow. The frog flattened under the force of the stick. Donnie jumped back with eyes big and moth open, "Hey! What are ye doin? Why'd ye do that for?"

 Looking back to the ground, the frog lay motionless. Donnie turned silently, and trotted toward the fence. Flipping over, he continued to run, until he was out of sight. Leander glanced back to the ground, picked the frog up by the back leg and carried it over to the place where he had buried the butterfly.

 Digging a hole beside the butterfly, he dropped the frog into the hole, and quickly covered it. He then stood and felt he begin to run again.

 In a few minutes, he hears the familiar voice,

 "Leander, It's time to come in."

 Entering the house, he looked into his mother's eyes.

 She smiled and spoke, "Did you eat the cake, Leander?"

 Not answering, he continued through the room and focused upon Mrs. Jones. Watching her face grow into a smile, he listened as she began to speak,

"Hey, Leander, come here and let me look at you. How old are you today?"

 "I'm four years old," Leander replied holding up four fingers. Mrs. Tade suddenly appeared through the back door. Leander stepped back to make way. She entered, and walked toward the kitchen table. The familiar greetings began, and Leander felt himself drop to the floor. Crawling around on all four's like a dog, he barked as if chasing a rabbit and listened for a response.

 "Leander!” he heard in a high-pitched voice.

 "Come here, I want to see ye' a minute."

 Traveling under the table, Leander stood and looked into the eyes of Mrs. Tate. Examining the wrinkled face, and streaked, gray hair, he looked expectantly into her eyes.

 "Look here, Leander, " she began, "What ye' been doin' today?"

 Leander took a deep breath and began to explain,

 "I had a birthday party!"

 Hearing the room echo with laughter, Leander dropped to the floor and crawled off quickly barking like a dog. The room echoed with laughter. As the room returned to quiet, Leander stopped in the corner and listened as the women talked.

 "Remember when Alvin painted Fustus brown?" He heard his mother say.

 "Ha, Ha, Ha!" came the reply.

 "Do you 'member what he said?" his mother continued.

"What yea' been din' today, Alvin? I said, and he said,

 "Just Pantene' the baby! " Ha! Ha! Ha! Can you believe that?" I like TA' never...got that paint off a' Justus. Why, I scrubbed for hours. He had painted him brown all over! I had to use kerosene!"

 "For goodness sake! Mrs. Brown charmed in.

 Mrs. Jones spoke,

 "Well, do you remember when I let my Charlene baby-sit for Ruby? And, Billy set the kitchen on fire? Boy, that was something'. I fussed at her all night, after I whipped her good."

 "Talking' 'bout setting' something on fire," Leander heard his mother reply,

 "Remember when Fustus and Leander set them feathers on fire? And, got under the bed and watched them burn!"

 "Ha! Ha! Ha! " they all echoed.

 "how 'bout the time Ollie drowned the rabbits?" Mrs. Tade spoke between laughs.

 "Yeah," his mother replied, "Cloyd went over there and couldn't find them baby rabbits? He saw Ollie over there and said, 'Ollie, you seen my rabbits?' and Ollie said, 'They can't swim!' 'They can't swim!' "

 "Ha! Ha! Ha!" the women laughed feverously.

 "Hey, how about the time Leander told ye 'tie doggie', tie doggie' and you tied him to the clothes line pole and he took his pants off and went to the big woods!" Cass said with a laugh.

 "Yeah," his mother replied, "I liked to never found him. He'd gone so far."

 "Care for another cup of coffee, Cass?" she continued.

After A while, Lender heard the chairs begin to move. The floor screeched, and Cases spoke, "Well, guess I'd better get over and fix supper. The 'Old Man' will be home soon."

 Looking over toward Leander, she spoke with a smile,

 "You be good, you little 'scaly-wag'."

 As she left, Mrs. Tade raise out of her chair and followed

 "Yeah, better get over and wash some clothes. Seems like they pile up quicker'n ye can get 'um done."

 Leander watched as the women walked through the door and onto the porch. In a few minutes. he watched his older brother; Fustus walk through the door.

 Howdy, Fustus, " Leander spoke with a smile.

 Fustus acknowledged the greeting with a nod, and moved toward the kitchen. In a few minutes, his oldest brother, Alvin entered.

 "Y’all was up and get ready to eat. Your Pa will be in soon." his mother called.

 As Leander waited his turn at the wash pan, he watched the door swing open and in entered his dad. Cloyd Hollandsworth. He was a large-boned, thin-framed man of fifty. His head was held straight and his dark brown eyes glared forward. His slightly gray hair, receded and streaked backward on the crown. His forehead was lined with stern seriousness. His face was thin, lined and worn from many days in the field, winter and summer. The weather seemed to have drawn his blood close to his skin, giving a blood red color to his complexion.

 Leander followed his lean frame as he made his way quietly to the was pan. Everyone fell silent and cleared the way. Leander searched his face for an indication of mood.

 Sitting down at the table, Leander stole a glance around the room and marked the silence. As everyone began to sit down into their habitual chair, Leander waited until everyone was seated before he began to fill his plate. Bowls of pinto beans, mashed potatoes, rolls, greens, and dumplings filled the table in front of him. As everyone settled in and began to eat, Leander began to eat also, and listen.

 "Pass the biscuits," broke the silence.

 After supper, he and his brothers went into the living room and began to play. Fustus got down on his hands and knees and said, "Ye' want 'a ride a horse, Leander?"

 "Yeah," Leander replied and climbed up on Fustus' back.

 After romping around for a while, he heard his mother say,

 "Time for you boys to wash up for bed! Who wants to be first?"

 After a long bath, Leander made his way up the steps. As soon as he entered the room, Fustus picked up a pillow and threw it into his chest. Alvin picked him up and threw him into the bed. Bouncing to his feet, Leander began to jump up and down on the bed. Jumping high in the air, Fustus waited until he sprang again, and hit him with a pillow, knocking him into the bedpost with a crash.

 Giving out a yell, Leander grabbed the pillow and threw it back. Letting out a laugh, he watched it bounce off of Fustus' head.

 Alvin caught the pillow before it hit the floor and swung it toward Fustus, knocking him to the floor.

 "Hey, you boys!" came the deep, loud voice from below,

 "You'd better git ta' bed!"

 Leander watched Fustus and Alvin freeze in their position.

 They smiled and began to say, "Shhh..ha...ha...shhh...haa, ha...ha.."

 After a short pause, Alvin pushed Fustus to the bed, and in a few minutes, a pillow fight had resumed.

 "IF I have to come up there, I won't waste my time!"

 Came the booming voice from below, "I'll bring my belt!"

 Becoming calm suddenly, Leander watched Alvin and Fustus grow silent and the smiles left their faces instantly.

 "Guess we'd better stop!" Alvin spoke quietly, and began to undr3ess for bed. Bending down to the edge of the bed, Leander began to say his nightly prayer.

 "Now lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord, my soul to take. Amen, Bless Mom, Dad, my brothers, the frog and the butterfly

Amen.

 ORANGES IN A DREAM

 I can see myself lying in the bed. An orange floats overhead...from the dresser, beside the bed.

On top of the dresser, there sits a brown paper bag, full of oranges. I reach out; but I return my hand to my side. Motionlessly, I stare at the brown, paper bag, bulging with oranges.

THE TENTH BIRTHDAY

 As the light began to brighten the inside of Leander's eyelids like a big screen, sounds began to filter into his consciousness. Noticing a wet spot on the pillow where he lay, Leander rolled over and flickered his eyes open and shut.

 "Yes, I am in my own bedroom, in the house, and a new day has dawned. It is my birthday! I'm eight today."

 The voices began to get louder and Leander began to recognize his mother talking softly,

" I have to go to the store today."

 His father replied, "Don't forget to set down some nails."

 Leander rolled out of bed and looked for some pants to put on. Slipping on his clothes, he walked down the steps and entered into the kitchen.

 "Well, what are you doin' up?" his mother asked.

 "I don't know," Leander replied scratching his head.

 Sitting down at his regular place, Leander watched his mother slip a plate in front of him. Breaking two biscuits, and dipping out a spoon full of gravy, he stole a glance toward his father. Watching to see the expression on his face, it was the same solemn, determined look.

 Sitting very quietly, he waited until he spoke.

 "Got a little chilly last night," he mumbled.

 Stack that firewood today, boy," he spoke toward Leander.

 Quickly slipping his shoes on, Leander followed his father out the door toward the wood box. Watching him walk toward the field, he began to fill the wood box.

 After filling the wood box, he worked his way up the steps, through the front door, through the living room and into the kitchen. His mother quickly opened the door of the wood stove and reminded him,

 "Don't drop any."

 Placing the wood into the cook stove, he watched the brown flames cover the new wood. A brown smoke started to filter into the house. His mother placed the lid back over the stove and nodded toward the kitchen table,

 "Finish your breakfast and go and wake your brothers."

 Leander smiled and hurried to finish eating. Hurrying up the steps, he entered the room, and grabbed the big toe of Fustus. Somewhat more gently, he touched the shoulder of his oldest brother, Alvin.

 "Get up! It's time to go to school."

 "If you pull my toe again," Fustus growled, "You won't be goin'."

 "'bout time you got up." Leander replied and walked out of the room proudly.

 After washing his face and hands, Leander sat down at the table and waited for his brothers to enter. In a few moments, Fustus entered the room. He looked toward Leander with a frown,

and snapped,

 "If you do that again, you won't see another morning."

 "What's wrong, "Leander asked, "Can't you take it?"

 "Can you take the whippin' I'm goin' ta' put on your head?"

 Fustus answered seriously.

 Without answering, Leander slipped on his coat and walked out onto the front porch. Walking down the steps and through the gate, he tuned into the sounds of the morning. Not hearing the rush of water, he knew that the creek was not running very fast. Listening again, he could hear the beautiful song of a cardinal. Looking around the tree tops, he finally found the brilliant red bird. Tuning into his sight, he found him perched in a tall poplar tree on the other side of the creek bank. Hearing the bird sing such a happy song, he felt the impulse to sit down and listen.

 "I can't do that!" he thought aloud. Dropping his head, he began to walk slowly down the dirt road toward school. Step by step, Leander developed mental pictures of the events from yesterday. Lost in thought, he came into view of the church. He followed the line of the church building upward until he was focusing upon the steeple, and observing the bell inside. Passing by the church, he came into view of the school. Quickly, he crossed the street and looked around at all of the children playing on the playground. watching several boys playing with a ball, he walked up to the nearest boy and began to talk,

 "Can I go on sides?"

 "Yeah, go on Steve's side," one of the boys answered.

 With that, the boys played ball until the clang of the school bell. As the cow bell rang, they ran quickly to the door. Leander lined up with the rest of the children and Mrs. Brown, the teacher gave the signal to enter.

 Entering the building, he made his way to his seat, Sitting down, he waited for Mrs. Brown to enter. As she appeared in the doorway, a deep silence came over the room. Everyone looked forward, toward the middle-aged figure.

 "Good morning, boys and girls," came her familiar greeting.

 "Good morning, Mrs. Brown," the class returned together.

 "Everyone stand, please, for the pledge of allegiance."

 Mrs. Brown turned and faced the flag in the front corner of the room. The class stood, faced the flag, and began to say the pledge in unison. Leander looked around the room and began to stare out the window.

 "It sure is a pretty day," he thought to himself. It sure would be nice to be up in the woods."

 "Bow your heads for prayer," Mrs. Brown called out.

 Bowing his head, Leander listened as Mrs. Brown began,

 "Dear God, help us through this day with your wisdom and guidance. Allow us to gain your favor by working hard and improving our ability to understand your will. May we learn honest, love and understanding. May we always think upon you and give you thanks for our many blessings. I Jesus' name, Amen."

 "Amen," the class returned in unison.

 "O.K., boys and girls, get out your reader."

 Reaching into his desk, Leander pulled out the dusty, brown book. Opening the book up to the next story to be read, he began to read the first paragraph of the story,

 "There was once a little boy who was asked to do a great deed. He was asked to go into a castle and pick up the treasure of gold found in the castle. If he could get the gold, he would be able to keep half of it for himself.

 "You must go by several guards before you come to the gold," the little boy was told by the old king. "You must first go by a guard with large eyes the size of oranges." If you show the guard that you are honest, he will trust you to go to the next room. If, when you get into the second room, you show the second guard, with ears as big as grapefruits, that you understand him and accept him, he will let you go into the third room. If when you get into the third room, you show this guard, with a mouth as big as a washman, that you love him and care about him, he will let you into the room that contains the gold." As the little boy entered the first room, he met a guard with eyes as big as oranges,

 "Who goes there?' asked the guard as the little boy entered the first room.

 "it is I,"

 the little boy answered proudly.

 "Why are you here?"

 a loud voice asked.

 "I come to seek the gold. The king told me that I would be able to keep half of the gold, if I would only come to the castle to get it."

 "Indeed," the first guard with eyes as big as oranges replied,

 "I have never heard such an honest answer."

 "Tell me, what will I be able to say to you. If I don't let you enter. I will be punishing you for being hon3st. I must let you enter, even if I do so at the risk of being punished myself."

 With that, the guard raised his battle ax away from the door and opened it up.

] Enter through the door, the little boy saw the second guard with ears as big as grapefruits.

 "Who goes there?" came the same question.

 "It is I," the little boy answered.

 "What is your reason for being in this room?" the second guard asked.

 "I come to seek the gold for the king." the little boy replied.

 "And what do you intend to do with the gold? the guard asked.

 "I will give half of the gold to the king, and the other half I will be able to keep for myself." the little boy answered.

 "And, you would risk your life for the gold? you certainly are a foolish little boy. Don't you know that I am sworn to guard this door with my life?"

 "Oh, yes sir, I understand. That is probably why you have such big ears. With such ears, you can certainly hear anyone coming through this door."

 "Yes, and I could repel you with one single stroke. Yes, that would be an easy stroke."

 "But, why did I meet a guard before I met you? And I am told that there is yet another guard after you. Is it because you have a big heart and would not kill me? For, would you not have already raised your ax and split me in two? Would you be able to stand here another day? And, why are you standing here anyway, day after day? Have you been standing here for very long?"

 "Yes," the guard began with tears swelling up in his eyes,

 "Nobody seems to care. I've been here since I can remember. Nobody to talk to. I am very sad. Nobody likes me."

 "But, sir," the little boy added, "Perhaps somebody will come along that will understand you>"

 "You are right, young man!" the guard with ears as big as grapefruit continued, "You do!"

 "Perhaps, then soon sir, you will let me pass. I do understand why you will. I certainly understand why you would let me "

 With that the guard raised his ax and let little boy pass.

 Entering into the third room, the little boy saw the third guard with a mouth as big as a wash pan.

 "Who goes there?" the guard asked with a mouth as big as a washtub.

 "It is only I," a meek voice replied.

 "What are you doing in this room?" the guard asked in a calm voice.

 "I am here to get the gold for the king." the little boy answered.

 "Well, how is it that you were able to get past the first two guards? the guard continued.

 "Nobody has ever been this far. How did you do it?" the guard with a mouth as big as a washtub asked.

 "Oh, that was easy," the little boy answered, " I showed the first guard honest, the second one understanding and now I am going to show you love."

 "And, how did you know to do that? the third guard asked.

 "The king told me that I was to do it that way." the little boy explained.

 "And, knowing that myself, won't I know that you are only trying to trick me into thinking that you love me. Do you think that I would be so silly to fall for that?"

 "No, kind sir, " the little boy explained,

 "I certainly would not try to trick you into thinking that I love you. I know that one must be honest and understand those that they love. That is why I tell you. I prove my love by confessing the truth. What other way is there?

 "Well then, if I ask you what you plan to do with the gold, wow would you answer?" the guard asked.

 "Well," the little boy explained, "I have sworn to give half of the gold to the king. I believe I owe him that much for telling me where the gold is. I Believe that I deserve the other half for being able to be honest, to understand and to be able to love. Knowing that much about me, how could you question that I would not use the money in a wise manner. You must agree that I will put it to better use than let it sit in a castle with three guards around it. Do you agree?'

 With that, the third guard lifted his ax and let the little boy pass.

 As the little boy came back out on the room carrying the gold. He looked for the three guards, but, he could not find a one of them. Taking the gold to the king, the king praised the little boy for his courage and gave him the half of the gold as he promised.

 Before he let him leave, the king asked,

 "How did you do it, young man?"

 " I gave the guards what the gold could not buy. I gave them what few people have, as you suggested, Oh king."

 "And, what are you going to do with your part of the gold?" the king asked.

 "With your permission, sir,, I want to return it to the castle. There is a greater need to guard honesty, understanding and love more than anything I know. This wisdom is worth more than the gold."

 "Yes, I have been foolish. Take my part also, and place it where it come. Then you return, you may marry my daughter and live in my castle forever. And, you may be my guardian of truth, understanding and love."

 After a long time of reading silently, Leander closed the book and looked around the room. Mrs. Brown caught his eye and he quickly dropped his eyes to the floor.

 "O.K., boys and girls, get out your spellers." Mrs. Brown requested in a low voice.

 Leander's mind wandered back to the story that he just read.

 "Boy, what a story. Imagine, a guard with eyes as big as oranges!"

 Working on the spelling lesson for a while, Mrs. Brown called out again,

 "O.K., boys and girls, get out your writing pads."

 Writing went by, and Mrs. Brown announced,

 "O.K. boys and girls, get out your social studies book."

 After another period of reading orally,

 "Get out your math books!" came the command.

 Leander found himself adding and subtracting.

 Finally, the day came to an end and Leander walked out on the playground, and felt of the knife in his pocket. Pulling the knife from his pocket, he clicked the large blade open and gripped the blade between his thumb and fingers of his right hand. Looking for somewhere to throw the knife, he walked toward the store across the street. Walking around the store to the back door, he measure off three paces, and turned and faced the door. Gripping the knife again. He drew it over his shoulder, and threw it with force. The knife turned on and a half times, slammed into the door, and dropped to the ground. Walking forward, he stooped picked the knife up, and examined it to see if there were any cracks in the handle. It was O.K. Stepping back five paces now, he threw it again. The knife turned twice this time, and the point of the blade stuck with a deep, heavy thud. Walking forward to pull the knife out, suddenly, the door swung open and Mr. Music steeped out,

 "I'm goin' ta' tell your dad!" he spoke in an angry tone.

 Leander's mouth fell open as he watched him slam the door shut again.

 "Well, that's a whippin' when I get home," he spoke aloud.

 "I guess I should a' known better! I never thought nothin' about it. I didn't even think about it!"

 On the way home, he thought and thought, but, there was no getting out of it. Lost in thought, the walk passed quickly, and soon, the house was coming into sight. Entering the kitchen, he smelled the beans and cornbread an spoke,

 "Hey, mom, can I have some of those beans?"

 "No! You wait 'til your dad gets home," she replied.

 "Well, guess I'll go out and play," he answered and walked outside. Looking toward the field, he could see several boys playing. Jumping off the back porch, he ran toward them.

 "Can I play? he asked running up to Richard, his cousin.

 "Yeah, you'll have to be it, though!" he replied.

 "All's out gets in free!" Dickie yelled.

 "What you doin' over here, anyway?" Leander asked looking toward Richard>

 "Me and my brothers are stayin' all night." he explained.

 "Paw and maw had to go check on Grandma."

 As the other boys began to appear from out of the darkness, Leander saw that Fustus was playing too. The other boys gathered around and Richard kicked the small cream can. The boys took off running in every direction. Running after the tin can, Leander returned it to the circle drawn in the mud in the backyard and began to count,

 "One, two, three..." all the way to ten. Then, he began to search for somebody hiding. He searched around the back of the garages over on the railroad track and near the creek bank. Leander looked everywhere. Not seeing anyone behind the garages, he came back to the front and caught a glimpse of somebody hiding behind the house. Being careful not to look in that direction, he walked slowly toward the can. As he got nearer the can, he was also getting closer to the house. When he entered the circle, he turned around quickly to check behind himself. Then, he whirled back around and broke into a run toward the house. As he was running, he could see somebody run from behind the house toward the front. Leander saw him as he turned the corner to go out of sight in front of the house.

 "It's Richard!"

 Running back to the circle, he then place his foot on the can and spoke loud enough for Richard to hear,

"One, two three, on Richard!"

 Waiting to see if Richard would come in, Leander looked around to see if he could find anyone else. Up on the roof of the house, Leander heard a thump. Making sure that nobody else was in view, he ran around to the back of the house where he could see anything on the roof plainly.

 "It's Ollie!"

 Running back to the front of the house, Leander said loudly,

"One, tow three on Ollie on top of the house!"

 "Ah..." Ollie cried out as if in pain.

 "Come on in, Richard! I saw you running around the front of the house." Leander called.

 Waiting to hear a reply, he stood near the can.

 "I'm coming." Richard said after a long silence.

' "Somebody come in and kick the can and get me and Ollie out!"

 he yelled as if he were talking to someone.

 Figuring another boy was behind the house, Leander started walking again. Looking around occasionally to make sure nobody would come running from behind him to kick the can, Leander looked behind the wood box. Suddenly, from behind him, Billy ran out and sprinted toward the can. It was a foot race to the can. Billy gave a laugh and raced on ahead of Leander and 'BAM' the can went sailing twenty yards in the air. Everyone took off running in every direction! Leander ran after the can and placed it back in the circle, Quickly counting to ten, he ran toward the garages, and seeing Richard and Ollie jumping over the bank into the creek, he whirled around and ran back to the can.

 "One, two three on Ollie and Richard in the creek!"

 "This time, I am going to be more careful and not get too far from the base, “Leander thought to himself.

 "Hey, you didn't count to ten!" Richard complained as he came from behind the garage. Ollie followed behind him; but, he just smiled and sit down in front of the garages.

 "Yeah, I did!" Leander replied calmly.

 Looking in every direction, he could see nothing. Backing off from the can about twenty yards and looking to the side of the garages, Leander walked back toward the base.

 ":What you goin' ta' do, hug the base all night?" Richard said with an angry look.

 "Hey, shut your mouth," Leander snapped back.

 Walking past the can, he moved toward the house and quickly bent down to look under the floor.

 "It's Billy!" Leander sprang to his feet and ran toward the can. This time, he had the advantage. Billy had to come out from underneath the house! Putting his foot down on the can, he called rapidly, "One, two, three on Billy!"

 Billy came trotting up behind him, slowed to a walk and let out a groan.

 "It's up to you, Fustus," Richard said rather irritated.

 No sooner had Richard said that when the familiar voice,

 "It's time to come in!" came from the direction of the house.

 "Ah, no, mom! Can't we stay out a while longer!" Leander pleaded.

 "No, it's time to eat!" she returned.

 Leander sadly looked over to Richard, Ollie and Billy and spoke loudly,

 "All's out gets in free!" he shouted in defeat.

 Walking toward the house, Leander could see Fustus coming out from behind the wood box.

 "I would have never looked there," he thought to himself.

 As Leander walked through the back gate and up the steps to the kitchen, he could hear someone kick the can and the scuffling of feet.

 Sitting down at the table, Leander could see his father sitting in his favorite chair in the living room.

 "Go was up for supper, Leander," his mother spoke quickly.

 "Got any water?' Leander asked.

 Without replying, his mother filled the wash pan with water and handed it to him. Washing the black dirt off his hands, he glanced into the mirror and noticed three black rings around his neck. Going back over to the table, and sitting down, he watched Fustus enter the room. Fustus looked proudly toward Leander and commented,

 "Didn't catch me, did ye'?"

 Without replying, he watched him sit down.

 "Wash your hands, Fustus!" Leander said quickly to beat his mother from saying it.

 "Mind your own business!" Fustus growled as he got up to wash his hands.

 "Time for supper!" his mom called into the living room.

 His dad entered the kitchen and looked straight toward him! A pang of fear shot through his stomach as he watched him sit down at his usual place. After everyone sat down, the room fell silent as their dad began to pray.

 "Father in heaven, we thank you for the food before us. We thank you for the strength to prepare it and the wisdom to appreciate it. Thank you for the seasons that help it to grow. Thank you for the food from the earth. Thank you for a healthy, happy family. Amen."

 The boys sat quietly and watched their dad dip out a cup of pinto beans, pour them into a bowl and pass them to Alvin, the oldest. He dipped out another cup full, poured them into a bowl and passed them to Fustus. Leander accepted the next bowl and finally his dad reached Tommy the last bowl. As his dad was pouring himself a bowl, Alvin broke the silence,

 "Work hard today, dad?"

 ":Yeah, pretty keen." his father answered.

 Not chancing a comment, Leander dropped his eyes to the table and spooned up another mouth full of pinto beans.

 After supper, he walked out into the yard and looked up toward the sky. The stars were shining brightly and the moon was beginning to peak over the mountain. Sitting and staring, he heard the screen door screech open and the heavy footsteps on the porch came toward him. Looking over his shoulder, he could see his father walking toward him.

 "Come here, boy!" his dad spoke seriously.

 "Mr. Music came by a while ago," he continued.

 Leander's heart pounded. He felt his mouth go dry. He tracked his hands as they moved to the buckle of the belt. Unbuckling the belt, he pulled it through the loops in one move. Placing the buckle in the palm of his hand, and bringing the tip of the belt to his palm, the belt doubled and dropped to his side.

 "Come here, I said!" he repeated.

 Gripping Leander's left arm firmly, he drew the belt back and 'POW" it struck him firmly on the seat of his pants.

 "I'll teach you some respect, boy!" he yelled between licks.

 Not knowing whether to cry or not, Leander flinched with each sound. He tried to place his hands behind his back; but, the belt struck his right hand.

 "I'll whip you 'til you cry, an' whip you 'til you quit cryin!"

he spoke as he shook him by the left arm.

 Leander felt a tear swell into the corner of his left eye, and now in his right eye. He tried to resist, but, his face began to cry. Being angry with himself, he heard the crying sound grow louder. Sickened with himself, because he was crying, he struggled to control the crying, and managed to recover his face from the terrible look, but, the tears continued to steam down his cheeks.

 Feeling the grip on his left arm loosen, Leander stood motionless, with his head down. His father walked away.

 In a few moments, the screen door screeched, and the voice drifted through the night air,

 "come in and take your bath, Leander."

 Entering through the kitchen door, he took his clothes off and stepped into the tin tub of warm water sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor near the wood cook stove. Soaping down good, he began to play with the Ivory Soap. Trying to make it jump out of the water by squeezing it. He then paddled the water around him, in a whirl. After playing for a while, he rinsed himself off, and reached for the towel. Wiping dry, he stepped out and slipped the blue jeans on and quickly buttoned them up and listened. He could hear Fustus, Alvin and his dad talking; but, he could not make out anything. Feeling a little tired, he tiptoed up the steps and slipped into the bedroom. Slipping into the cold sheets, he removed his clothes, lay back and stared at the ceiling.

 Leander began to think in a clear, mental voice,

 "As my body quiets, and my heart settles, I can hear myself breathing. I can feel the air going into one side of my nose and then to the other. I can feel my body shrink. I feel smaller than I know I really am.

 THE WITCH IN A DREAM

 I am lying in the living room. I see my feet on the floor, and my back in resting on a stool. A woman enters. I can't see her face. She picks me up and lifts me toward the stove. I look in at the glowing fire. She starts to lift me, and stick my feet into the stove. She has my feet in; but, I grab onto the sides and resist. I struggle. I resist.. She picks up the stool and presses it against me. She struggles to push me in. I hold on. I resist. The images fade.

 A SATURDAY AT TWELVE

 As Leander opened his eyes, he looked around the familiar surroundings, and finding the pants he had taken off the night before, he slipped them on and walked down the steps. Seeing his mother and father sitting at the breakfast table, he spoke,

 "Mornin'"

 "Mornin'," came the reply.

 "Did you put on the pants I laid at the foot of your bed?" his mother asked. Smiling she continued, "Happy Birthday, Leander".

 "Yeah," he replied.

 "No you didn't! They're short pants!"

 "Ah, mom, not short pants, I'm twelve years old!"

 "Get right back up those steps and put on those pants, now!"

 "Oh mom, " Leander pleaded, "I didn't see them."

 Watching him move up the steps, she continued,

 "For a twelve year old boy, he sure seems to know how to fib a lot."

 "Yeah, he needs to be taught to be honest," his father replied.

 "We need to pay more attention and catch him in one."

 "Aren't you being a little hard on them, Cloyd?"

 "Yeah, I am! You have to teach 'em to work! You don't want to spoil 'em, do ye?"

 "No, I don't,"

 "Well then, why don't ye' give me a little help! I can't do it by myself! Ye' got'a help me!"

 "I want 'um to grow up honest and hard workin'. I want 'em to have respect and be respected! They'll thank me some day and understand why!"

 "O.K., Cloyd, I'll try to help. But, they don't listen to me like they do you!"

 Looking up the steps, they watched him as he skipped every other step.

 "I got a little work to do today, Leander," his father called to him. "You can help me."

 Leander's eyes dropped to the floor as he spoke,

 "O.K., Pa"

 After eating breakfast, he followed his dad out the back door. His dad handed him a bucket,

 "carry this." he spoke. They walked through the back gate toward the garden. Following along, he watched his dad pick up a sack of dog food from the shed, throw it over his shoulder and move toward the dog lot. After feeding and watering the dogs, he followed toward the garden. His dad motioned for him to come closer, and spoke,

 "Fill this bucket up with these rocks and get them out of the garden."

 Hearing this, Leander knew that he was in for a hard day. Making his way through the garden, he began to pick up the rocks. As the bucket filled and gained weight, he spread his legs for balance and one step at a time, made his way to the edge of the garden. Placing the bucket down, he drew a deep breath and straightened his back. Looking up the hill, he watched his father stoop over, hoeing out a row for the turnip seeds.

 "Start throwing' these rocks out!" his dad spoke pointing toward the row behind him. Seeing a few rocks under his feet, he began to throw them down the hill. Moving back up the hill, he came to a big, flat rock. He smiled and turned to look where it would roll. Seeing a clear path to the creek, he began to struggle with the rock. Standing it on its side, he gave it a shove and watched it roll off toward the creek. Starting slowly at first, the rock began to gain speed. Bou8ncing high, it began to gain even more speed. Bouncing off the ground now, it streaked toward the creek. Jumping over the ledge, bouncing high, the rock landed in the creek with a loud, 'crack'. Leander stood amazed. He smiled and looked to see if his father had seen the great accomplishment. But, his dad was still bent over, digging another row.

 Looking down, he could see the rabbit cages near the woodshed. Turing around and looking up the hill, he watched his father dig. Looking back down the hill, he could see the dogs standing in the dog lot.

 ":Where's Mable and Sally?" Leander called out to his dad.

 "They run last night," his father answered without looking up.

 Moving a few steps toward the dog lot, Leander could faintly hear a whining sound.

 "Puppies!" he yelled aloud in a happy voice.

 Running down the hill effortlessly toward the dog lot, he flipped over the gate and found himself bending down and looking inside the dog house. Picking up one of the puppies, he spoke aloud, "Boy, I'm tellin' ye'! They are nice."

 With its eyes closed, the puppy's wrinkled, fat face let out a whine and squirmed to be free.

 "O.K, buddy, I'll let you down."

 Watching for a while, he heard his father call out,

 "Hey boy, we got work to do!"

 Leander placed the puppy back into the dog house and moved toward the garden.

 After working in the garden the rest of the morning, he watched his dad make his way toward the dog house.

 "I got another job for you now," his dad spoke.

 Following to the dog house, Leander watched as his dad poured out the dog food, and, turned to him and spoke,

 "I want you to go over and feed the rabbits."

 "O.K.," Leander replied.

 He made his way to the shed and searched for the rabbit feed. Finally finding the feed in the corner of the shed, he dipped out a half bucket, and carried it toward the rabbit cage. As he rounded the woodshed, the cage came into view. Placing the bucket down, he opened the door to the cage and began to place feed inside. Seeing several baby rabbits inside a small box inside the cage, he picked one up and began to pet it. As he was examining the baby rabbit, his father came into view,

 "hey boy, put that rabbit back! Don't you know she'll eat that baby if you handle it!"

 "What!" Leander replied in shock. "Eat it! My, My. what a stupid mother."

 Placing the rabbit back, he nodded his head in disbelief, picked up the empty bucket and made his way to the house. Entering the kitchen, he found the whole family sitting around the table.

 "Wash your hands, Leander," his mother said.

 Leander washed his hands quickly, wiped them off on his pants and sat down in the remaining empty chair.

 Dipping out a plate of beans, he looked toward Alvin and spoke,

 "Pass the bread, please."

 He watched his dad cut off a large slab of fatback and slide it onto his plate. As he watched a frown came over his face. Searching his father's face for a frown, he continued to eat.

 "You want to play marbles?" Leander asked Fustus.

 "Yeah, I'll play. How many you got?" Fustus replied.

 "I got enough," Leander answered.

 "Well, let's go." Fustus answered and slipped away from the table. Checking to make sure he had cleared the plate, Leander slipped back from the table and made his way outside. He watched as Fustus drew a seven foot circle with a stick and place three marbles in the middle.

 "Put up, or shut up," Fustus said in a challenging voice.

 "Her's my three." Leander responded.

 "What'd yd' do, this mornin'? Fustus asked as he bent down to test his tally.

 "Worked in the garden, feed the rabbits. Did ye' know Buggle Ann's got six puppies?"

 Yeah, Dad's goin' ta' kill 'em, though." Fustus replied.

 "You ready?" he continued.

 "Yeah, I break first," Leander answered. "Kill 'em?"

 "Yeah,' Fustus explained, "They got the wrong daddy."

 Leander put his knuckle down on the circle and shot as hard as he could at the pile of marbles in the middle of the circle. "Bang' went the marbles as they scattered into the circle. Fustus studied the marbles closely and picked out the one closest to the edge of the circle, closed one eye to aim, and gave a shot.

 "Wrong daddy?" Leander spoke in a puzzled tone.

 "Yeah," Fustus continued to explain, "The daddy of them pups was Buggle Ann's dad, ye' know."

 Watching Fustus take aim at the next marble, Leander nodded as if he understand.

 "Did ye' know that rabbits eat their little 'ens if ye' handle 'em?" Leander asked knowledgeably.

 "Why sure, everybody knows that, " Fustus answered.

 "Look!" he said as one went flying out of the circle. "I'm going ta' clean up." Picking up the marble and sticking it into his pocket, Fustus bent down and continued to shoot.

 "Hey, that's a 'steely'! Where'd ye' git that?" Leander complained.

 "From Richard," Fustus answered and he improved his aim on the next shot.

 Leander continued to watch as Fustus shot every marble out of the circle. Filling of the remaining three in his pocket, he looked around sadly.

 "I'll race ye' to the store," Leander invited.

 Fustus raised up after shooting out the last marble and replied,

 "Yh, no. I don't What's a race?"

 "Nauh, guess I'll go find somebody my own age to play with. Scared to loose ye marbles? See ye' later."

 As Leander watched Fustus walk toward the house, he looked around to find something to do. Seeing nobody in sight, he moved toward the house.

 "Mom, ye' dot a dime? I want ta' go to the store.

 Looking out the kitchen window, he added,

 "Hey mom, is someone moving' into Mr. Brown's house?"

 "Yeah, it's Reverent Walker and his family. He's goin' to' be the new preacher for the church."

 "Where's Mr. Brown gone to?

 "Didn't say."

 As Leander reflected, a mental picture developed of two boys. He could see them carrying chairs into the house that Mr. Brown had lived in.

 "Hey, mom, they got a couple of kids! One of them is red-headed."

 "That'd be his two sons, I guess. You be nice to 'um."

 "Uh, can I go up to the store for a while?"

 "Yeah, why don't you pick up some salt and nails for your dad."

 As his mother went for the money, Leander took another look out of the window. He could see that it was a bright summer day. The sky was deep blue.

 His mother taped him on the shoulder and spoke,

 "Here's two dollars. That ought to get pound of sixteen penny nails and a five pound bad of salt. You can have the rest."

 Sticking the money into his front pocket, he hurried out the back door. As he bounced off the back porch and flipped over the wooden fence, he heard the screen door slam behind him. Giving a glance over to the house, he could feel the water cool around his bare feet. The mud slipped between his toes, and he broke into a run toward the store. Watching the black dirt road below his bare feet, he felt the wind hitting him in the face and a whiz blowing in his ears. Watching the world bounce in front of him, his breath grew louder. He could feel the rocks slapping the soles of his feet. And, then, he hit a big, sharp object. His leg give way, and he stumbled and began to favor one foot.

 "I believe it would be better to slow down. Not in any hurry," he spoke aloud. Slowing to a walk, he stopped to see if he had cut his foot.

 "Always stumping my toe, cuttin' 'um on glass, nails...."

 Assured that his foot was O.K., Leander slowed down to an even slower pace as the church came into view. Making his way up to the church, he sat down on the broad, concrete steps and looked around. Kids were playing on the school ground. He noticed a familiar face walking toward him.

 "Mornin'" Mr. Duncan spoke with a smile.

 "Morinin'," Leander replied feeling a smile grow over his face.

 "How come you're not in school, boy?"

 "it's Saturday."

 "Ah, that's right. My, sure looks like another fine day."

 After a moment of thought, Mr. Duncan continued, "Say, uh, how would ye' like ta' have a job?"

 "What's that?" Leander asked rather hesitantly, remembering the last time that he had worked for Mr. Duncan.

 "Mrs. Duncan has been complaining about the water standing in front of the house. I wonder if you'd carry me some rocks out of the creek, so I can build a wall."

 "Yeah, Mr. Duncan. Me and my brothers will do it. When ye' want u s to get started?"

 "Come up here first thing next Saturday. I'll show you what I want done."

 Mr. Duncan rubbed his cheek, rubbing the gray whiskers upward, and spoke again,

 "Ye' dad got anything ta' wet a feller's whistle?"

 Leander replied with a concerned look,

 "I guess you'd better ask him, Mr. Duncan."

 Mr. Duncan nodded his head in understanding, smiled and continued to walk toward the store. Leander watched him out of sight. In a few minutes, Calvin came from around the corner of the church. Walking up the steps, he sat down beside him and began,

 "Leander, what ye know?"

 "Not much, just sittin' 'round."

 "What 'ta play a little poker?" he asked excitedly.

 "Yeah, uh, let me go to the store and I'll be back there later on. Whose playin'?"

 "Me, Ex, Wize and Otis."

 "O.K., I'll be back there after I go to the store."

 Getting up and walking toward the store, Leander watched Calvin slip back around the corner. Entering the store, he saw the familiar figure, Evelane, ringing up some groceries. Acey, his uncle, was standing near the pop-belly stove talking to some other men. As he passed by, he could hear him saying,

 "When I' went up there, them deer come out of that Short Holler and cross into Harmon's Branch."

 "Is the road purty good up there, now?" the other man spoke.

 "Not bad."

 Going on back to the back of the store, Leander filled a brown paper bag with nails, picked up a bag of salt and returned to the cash register. He noticed the jar of rock candy on the shelf near the cash register. He could feel his heart pick up a faster beat. A mental picture of telling Acey and the boys about stealing some candy and eating it in front of his friends, prodded him onward. A nervous smile came over his face. Placing the salt and nails on the counter, he looked at Evelane's rosy cheeks.

 "Hi, Leander, How'z ye' mom?"

 "O.K., I guess."

 "You been doin' O.K.?"

 "I reckon,"

 As Leander watched Evelate turn to pick up the nails to weigh, he could hear the men talking near him. He tried to slow his heart, and swallow, but his mouth was too dry. He looked around,

 "Nobody watchin'" he thought.

 His heart pounded harder, and impulsively, his hand entered the jar. He picked up a hand full of candy and quickly stuck it into his pocket. As Evelane turned around, Leander squirmed and reached for the two dollars in the other pocket. Not listening to Evelane continue to talk, he looked toward the door, reached his hand up to receive the change, he stuffed it into his pocket without looking at it, picked up the bags and stepped toward the door.

 "Thirty steps away!" he thought to himself. He could now hear Acey talking, but couldn't understand any of the words. He could see the door growing bigger. Closer and closer, Acey began to motion to him and call his name. Every time Acy called, a pang of fear shot through his stomach. He felt himself grow numb and light. Reaching for the door, now he stiffly opened it up and stepped outside.

 "Safe!" he thought to himself as he passed through the door. A nervous smile grew over his face. As he rounded the corner, he felt for the change, a quarter and a nickel. Walkng toward the back of the store, several boys came into view.

 "O.K., put up, or shut up!"

 "Goin' ta' play 'tom'."

 "Nicle Anney?"

 "Yeah,"

 "I'm in,"

 "Put in, Lou!"

 All the familiar voices drifted toward him. Sitting in the circle with boys, now, Leander watched Lou as he place his nickel in the pot.

 "You in, Leander?" Lou asked.

 "What 'ye got in the bag, Leander?" Calvin asked grabbing the bag.

 "Just never mine!" Leander replied jerking trhe bag away from him.

 Leander reached in his pocket, and pulled out his change.

 "Mom sent me to the store."

 "Is that where you got the money?" Lou returned with a loud laugh.

 "No, I got money, Boy!" Leander snapped back. Remembering the candy, he continued,

 "Hey, look what I got when Evelene was ringing me up! "

 "I got a poke of tobacco, yesterday," Otis commented.

 "I got a pocket knife!" Lou added.

 "Just deal the cards!!!" Lou shouted with irritation from the braggin.

 As Lou reached for the cards, a loud voice came from the side of the building,

 "O.K., boys! Hold it right there! I told you not to play cards out here!"

 "It's Marvin Yourk!" one of the boys shouted.

 As soon as the boys recognized the voice, they broke into a run. Leander threw the candy toward the creek grabbed up the nails and salt and sprang from the porch, hitting the ground in a run down the back alley. Watching his feet hit the ground, he jumped over the creek and scampered up the side of the bank and ran down the railroad tracks hitting every fourth tie.

 "If I can make it to the woods, I'll be long gone!" he thought to himself.

 Scampering up the hill through the bushes, he passed by the first row of trees, and slowe to a trot, and then to a fast walk. Leander pulled the bag up to his face and opened it to see if the salt and nails were O.K.. Cradling the bag securely, he turned to walk toward the house. As he passed by the new neighbor’s house, he could see the two boys staring at him.

 "A preacher's boy! I bet they're a bunch of sissies! Boy, I bet that'll be something. I bet they can't do nothin'."

 After a long, silent walk, finally the house came into view. Entering the house, he set the bag down in the kitchen and walked out onto the front porch and sat down.

 "I wonder what I can do now?" he thought to himself.

 Fustus was walking up the road. Leander walked out to meet him.

 "Hey Fustus, what ye' up to?"

 "Not much. What you doin'?"

 "Nothin'. Let's go over and jump the creek."

 O.K.!"

 Leander picked up a wooden clothes line pole and drug it behind him toward the creek.

 "Let's play chicken!" Fustus suggested with a smile.

 "Let's see if you can do this one!" Fustus challenged. And he took a runny-go, planted the pole in the middle of the creek and sprang to the other side. With his heels hitting the edge of the creek on the other side, a little splash came up, but, Fustus didn't get wet!

 Leander looked at the long pole in his hands, and the creek in front of him, took a deep breath and began to run toward the creek. Planting the pole in the middle of the creek, he felt himself leave his feet, moving forward, but, now slowing and moving backward, and now down, 'splash' right in the middle of the creek.

 Fustus gave a big laugh and Leander waded up the bank. Fustus gave another big laugh and picked up the pole. He began pacing up and down the creek, looking for a good jump. Finally, he steeled on a sizeable jump. Taking a long runny-go, he placed the pole in the middle of the creek and leaped effortlessly across to the other side. Landing high on the other side of the bank, he smiled and spoke,

 "Try that one!"

 Leander looked over the jump closely he backed up and took off fast! Placing his pole down, he closed his eyes as he felt himself spring into the air. Opening his eyes as he peaked, he saw that he was going over to the other side. Looking toward the bank on the other side, there was a bush, and there was a snake, with it's mouth wide open! He could see the big round, brown ball, with a wide mouth, open, white as cotton!

 "OH!" Leander cried out as he let go ot the pole with a reflex action. Finding himself splashing down into the middle of the creek with his feet extended in front of him, he landed on the water with a loud splash. Springing to his feet, effortlessly, he could not feel his body as he backed off.

 Pointing at the snake in the bush, he yelled out,

 "Snake!"

 Fustus jumped backward saying,

 "Where?"

 "Right there," Leander replied shaking.

 Leander turned and walked toward the house. Fustus called,

 "Show me! I'll kill it!"

 "Nah, I'll not mess with it!" Leander spoke with out looking back.

 Fustus spoke again, "Let's jump off the garages!"

 "O.K." Leander replied and changed his direction toward the garages. Muscling himself upon the roof of the rabbit cage, he stood and grabbed the edge of the roof of the barn. Muscling upon the roof, he joined his brother on the peak of the roof. The boys went over to the edge of the roof and looked over.

 "That's a pretty good fall," Leander spoke. Looking at the ground twenty feet below.

 Feeling a pang in his stomach, Leander turned to Fustus and asked, "You goin' first?":

 "Yeah," came the confident reply.

 Fustus approached the edge, and sprang off the roof.

 Hitting the ground with a thud and falling forward, he rolled over and laughed,

 "See?" he spoke proudly, "Nothing to it!"

 Leander took another look at the ground and felt his legs bend. Lowering his body to the security of the roof, he slid toward the ground. As he approached the edge of the roof, near the rabbit cage a loud

 "Chicken" rand out from the ground below.

 Dropping to the roof of the rabbit cage, Leander jumped to the ground.

 "I'll never play 'chicken' with you again" Fustus complained.

 As Leander opened the kitchen door, he focused upon a silver tub in the middle of the floor.

 "Where you been?" came the stern question from his mom. I told ye' ta' be home before dark! Get upstairs and get some clean clothes! Look at you! What ye' been doin' anyway!"

 After cleaning up, he ran up the steps and climbed into bed. It was not long before he was fast asleep.

 A HUNT AT THIRTEEN

 As the light began to filter through the window near his bed Leander jerked to a sitting position and looked around.

 "Well, another day. I must get goin'! Got a lot to do."

 A smile came over his face as he slipped on his bibbed overalls and began lacing his boots,

 "It's my birthday! I'm thirteen"

 Descending the steps, he entered the kitchen and found his mother moving from the stove to the table.

 "Mom, can I go huntin' today? It's my birthday." he coaxed.

 His mother smiled and nodded her head in approval.

 After a hurried breakfast, he moved to the outside, unchained his big, black hound dog, 'Drive', and glanced up the sharp hill beside the house. He took a long breath and glanced toward the head of the hollow called 'Harmon's Branch'.

 Picking up the ginseng hoe, he started walking up the path toward the hollow. Drive threw his tail up over his back and broke into a run ahead of him.

 "Git 'um up, Drive," Leander shouted.

 As he made his way up the branch, he thought,

 "Copperheads layin' in these hollers, 'bout now."

 With each step, he looked for a coiled, brown body. Holding his breath and moving branches out of his face, he picked his way up the hollow. After about a half-mile up the hollow, he climbed up on the bank, about twenty feet from the branch, and started looking for ginseng.

 "Might find a four-prong through here."

 As he walked slowly along, he took the hoe and parted the thick weeds in front of him. As he stepped across a rotten log, he saw a bunch of ginseng, a few feet in front of him. He examined the weed closely.

 "Standing about a foot off the ground d, 'three branches spreading near the top, each branch with five leaves, three leaves the size of a peach leaf, two leaves the size of a quarter, a pod of berries stemming out of the middle of the branches, red berries, the size of raisin, a green stem. Yeah, it's a three-prong! Sure would like to find the daddy of him!"

 He took his knife put of his pocket and bent down to dig the root. Looking around the whole time, in hopes of finding another bunch, he finally pulled the root out of the ground. Measuring it to be about the size of his middle finger, he quickly stuck it into his pocket and looked around again to see if he could see any more. Catching a glimpse of a jagged, green leaf, he made his way down the hill.

 "Another three-prong," he called out.

 As he made his way up Harmon's Branch, he began to hear a faint bark on the other side of the ridge.

As he crossed the ridge, he could hear Drive barking.

 "He's in the next swag, barking tree'd." he thought to himself.

 Walking in the direction of the barking, he grabbed onto small trees to balance himself as he walked down the other side of the mountain. Making his way to the branch of the hollow, he neared the beginning of the stream of water that flowed out of the hollow. Stopping to listen for the bark of Ole' drive, he heard the deep, choppy bark fill the hollow with a muffled echo.

 "Sounds like he's tree'd in the ground. Hope it's not in a rock cliff."

 As he made his way around the side of the swag, a long rock cliff came into view.

 "In a rock cliff, just like I thought. Drive didn't bark like he had much hope for that one."

 As he neared the rock cliff, he could see the dog's tail wagging at the bottom of the cliff. Walking to the cliff, he grabbed Drive by the collar and began to pull his head out of the groundhog hole.

 "Come on, Boy1, Got to let this'n go. Can't get him. In a rock cliff!"

 Breaking loose, Drive plunged back into the hole barking every breath.

 "Come on, boy! Let's go find another'n."

 Leander grabbed Drive by the collar again, and lead him away from the hole. After holding him for a few minutes, he released him and warned,

 "Leave it alone, Drive! come on!"

 Drive wagged his tail in understanding, and began to walk away from the hole with his tail between his legs. Giving one more final bark and whine, Leander spoke again,

 Leave it alone!"

 With that, Drive turned and started toward the branch. Making his way down the hill toward the branch, he looked down at another big four-prong.

 "Woo wee!" he yelled. "What a pretty bunch of ginseng!"]

 Bet I walked right over it. Berries as big as your fist. I bet this'n has got a root!"

 Stooping down to dig the bunch of ginseng, he looked around[nd hoping to spot another bunch. Digging the root out, he measured it to be as big as two fingers. He smiled and stuffed it into his pocket. Feeling of his pocket, he figured he had found about twenty bunches. Looking around, he examined the timber.

 "Looks like a pretty good stand of timber, hickory, oak, and walnut."

 Making his way to the ridge now, he sat down on a mossy chestnut log, and listened for Drive's bark. Hearing the leaves rustle in the distance, he gazed out toward the next ridge. Straining to see something moving on top of the hill above him, he began to hear a rustling of the leaves. Turning to face the top of the hill, he listened more closely. Searching the tops of the trees and the surrounding forest floor, the sound fades as Drive came bursting through the leaves from a different direction.

 Looking toward the sky, he figured the sun was two hours from setting. He turned and began the long walk home. Drive seemingly aware that the hunt was over, followed his footsteps, with his head down and his tail low. Descending the mountain in a straight path toward the house, the rocks, briars and branches busied him until , he was soon approaching the house.

 Tying Drive to the dog house, he dropped the hoe in its place and moved toward the house.

 "Did ye' catch anything?" his mother asked.

 "Nah, they was in a rock cliff. I dug some 'sang!"

 Reaching into his pocket, he pulled the roots out and handed them to his mother. Cupping her hands together, she received the roots and admired,

 "Got some purty 'uns here."

 "Yeah, reckon I do!" he replied proudly,

 "Uh, where's everybody at?"

 "they're over there in the holler, makin' liquor," she replied with a frown.

 "Guess I'll help tomorrow," he answered thoughtfully.

 After supper, he made his way up the steps and into the bedroom. Slipping off his bibbs and kicking the boots to the side of the bed, he stretched out and stared at the ceiling. As the eventrs of the day flashed through his mind, he started to develop a strange feeling.

 "I can't believe this is really me, living, in this body."

 Trying to think of something else, he felt himself roll to his stomach.

 "May[be it will go away. No, that won't do. I believe it's going to happen. I am going to have another one."

 He felt a pang of fear shoot through his stomach. His body was growing smaller.

 "It's ME! IT'S REALLY ME. I AM LIVING. I AM! I, I I really am! I LIVE. I am going to someday die. I AM! I am much different, for God's Sade, It's ME! I am alive. I am alive. I am not that "ME"

that lives in the daylight, playing fussing, Mom, Dad, Alvin, Fust us, Tommy."

 As he continued to whirl and whirl deeper and deeper into himself, he became more and more frightened. Closing his eyes tighter, he began to see a dark whirling black hole. In his mental voice, he continued to think, "My heart is beating fast. I can feel my breath, faster, not able to stand it anymore!"

 Sitting up in the bed, he looked around and felt the room return to normal size. Lying back down again, he anxiously awaited to see if sleep would come. In a few moments, the awareness returned.

 "It's me, It's me. A feel an awareness of my throat. It is stretching. It is not right. I cannot make it relax. A spiral developed, deeper and deeper. It's really me, not Leander, but a real living being. The fright returns. If I could stay this aware of myself in real life, how strong I would be. Nothing would bother me! I would be right! After this, I will be stronger.

 After these thoughts, Leander was released into sleep.

 Falling to sleep, Leander began to dream. In his mind's eye he could see a figure appear in front of him, with raised arms, he felt himself spring off the ground and begin to fly. He sailed a few inches off the ground. He was flying. He could now see the ground below him. Up, up, higher, higher. Looking down, the land was now far below. Watching the mountain top coming nearer, it looked like he would crash into it. Struggling to avoid the crash, he arched his back and, to his relief, he sailed upward and out of danger. Now on the other side of the mountain, he sailed downward. But, he was too high! He struggled to gain control and gently, he went downward. With a comfortable height now, right above the ground, he sailed along. As the ground began to get close, he arched his back and gained altitude. He felt better. He felt he was in control of the flight. Then, he saw a tall pine approaching. A crash? A Collision! Ho, he saw himself raise high above the tree. Sailing, sailing, soaring through the air, it was very pleasant. He was in control.

 The muscles of his eyes relaxed and he went into a deeper sleep, breathing in and out, tossing to his side and back on his back. After about twenty minutes, his eye muscles began to contract again and mental pictures came into his awareness.

 "I see a figure, a person standing. I know that it is me. in the distance, a young boy approaches. It is Calvin. I am on a bicycle. He approaches, straddles the front wheel on the bicycle. He grips the handle bars, and looks at me.

 "Get off and let me ride!" he speaks.

 "Get off my bike, Calvin!" I see myself answer.

 As he laughs loudly, he draw his arm back and swings toward my face. I duck, jump to the ground, grab his arm and swing him around and around. Effortlessly, I swing him high and let go. He sails off several feet, hits the ground, and rolls onto his back, motionlessly, I look and smile; but now he gets up and starts chasing me. I start to run. I am running, running. He is after me.

 FOURTEEN AND GROWING

 As the light became brighter, Leander began to move himself around in the bed. He suddenly sprang to a sitting position.

 "What time is it? Got'a git goin'. Don't want to miss breakfast!"

 Slipping on the bibbed overhauls at the side of his bed, and slipping on the wool socks, he began to lace his boots.

 :Another school day, and it’s my birthday! Fourteen! And, Alvin, he's twenty. Fustus, he's sixteen. Tommy, I believe he's eight."

 His mother's voice echoed up the stairway,

 "you boys better get up. Time to' go ta' school."

 Sliding down the banisters on the stairway, he hit the floor with a thud. Moving into the kitchen, he found his mother moving about the stove, and the smell of bacon and eggs filled the room. Moving to the bench, he focused upon his father, sitting straight and leaning away from the back of the chair slightly. Looking to the center of the table, he took a closer look at the biscuits and impulsively, reached for the bowl. Breaking the biscuit into small pieces, he dipped out three spoonfuls of gravy and began to eat. Seeing Fustus and his dad busy eating, comforted him to know that he was doing the right thing. Looking up, his father spoke,

 "you boys gotta' help milk before school."

 The stern voice quickened Leander's movements. He looked up and smiled as he spoke,

 "Fustus, you can’t milk, can you?"

 Laughing, he awaited the response.

 ":I can milk better'n you, boy!" Fustus snapped with a frown.

 Looking through the window, the dim, gray light glittered through. Patches of dew covered the green grass and the green leaves, hanging on the trees stood still in the September air. A cool, cloudy day was suggested. Finishing the last spoonful, he flinched slightly as the kreek of the chair broke the silence. As his father raised up, everyone’s head seemed to follow upward. Fustus jumped up and started toward the door.

 "Finish your breakfast, Fustus!" came the order from his mother. Looking at his plate, Fustus sat back down and picked up his spoon and complained,

 "Ah mom."

 "If ye' git it out, ye' got'a eat it!" Leander spoke with a smile.

 Looking at his clean plate, he gulped down the last tow inches of milk in the glass, scooted his chair backward, stood and walked toward the door. Finding his brown jacket hanging on the nail, he slipped it on and pulled the door open. As the cool air hit him in the face, he looked upward to predict the weather. A blue sky, with the sun shining brightly, Leander descended the proch steps and made his way to the barn. Swinging the barn door open, he looked around and found the cows already standing near the stalls. The cows began to low as he moved through the barn. Opening the stall gates, he let one enter into the stall with its calf, and then the next. The calves began to 'baa' like sheep as their mothers entered.

 Noticing movement from the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of Fustus entering the barn. As he approached, Fustus spoke,

 "I'll strip Strawberry. You strip Mollie. The first'n ta' finish can start on Betsy, O.K.?"

 Being conscious of the probable result, due to previous agreements, Leander silently agreed by moving toward Mollie's stall. Dipping a bucket of feed from the sack in the manger, he placed it in front of Mollie and began milking. After a few squirts, the loud ping from the milk hitting the bottom of the bucket muffled. The calf stood in the corner and watched.

 "You got it all, didn't ye'?" Leander spoke looking toward the calf.

 With a few final squirts, he opened the stall gate, and slapped Mollie on the side.

 "Get out'a here!" he spoke sternly. Moving to the next stall, he dipped out another bucket of feed from the sack in the manger, placed it in front of Betsy. Leander moved the stool to her side, placed the bucket under her utter, and began to squeeze a large stream of white milk, one stream and then another. As he milked, Betsy’s' tail swished to the left, and then to the right, catching Leander right in the mouth. The soggy hairs caught him with his mouth half open, and the stubby, bony tail made a thud as it hit. Catching the tail, he placed the end of it behind his bent let, trapping it, and continued to milk.

 "What's wrong with you, Betsy?" he complained.

 As the tail occasionally tugged to be free, he returned to milking. With the bucket two-thirds full, he stood, and guided Betsy out. Looking around, he confirmed that Fustus was already gone. Closing the barn door behind him, he made his way toward the house. Setting the milk bucket on the porch, his mother opened the screen door and spoke,

 "They didn't give too much, did they?"

 "About one gallon" Leander replied, "Uh, is Fustus gone already?"

 "Yeah, he is. You have a good day, Leander. I might have a cake for ye' when ye' git home, O.K.?" his mother returned.

 "Yeah, it's my birthday. I'm fourteen, ye' know!" Leander boasted.

 "Better hurry, you'll be late," She spoke with a smile.

 Leander turned and looked down the dirt road toward school. With no movement in the air, a slight rustle on the leaves reminded him that it had not rained in several days. Looking down the road, Fustus was not in sight. The fresh boot tracks in the dusty road, he could tell that Futus was setting a fast pace.

 "Maybe I can catch him," he thought to himself. Impulsively, he found himself moving into a slow trot. As the wind picked up in his ears, he listened to his feet smack the ground. His vision jarred and smoothed, as he tracked the road in front of him. Moving faster, he felt sweat begin to trickle from his temple and down his cheek. Continuing to run, his thoughts began to focus upon school, and Mrs. Cox. His pace slowed, and his trot reduced to a walk. A mental picture of Mrs. Cox, standing in front of the classroom came into view. He could see her pointing toward the blackboard. He could hear her raise her voice and look sternly around the room. He could see her face closely now. He looked at her thin, pointed nose, small chin, and wire rim glasses, hiding small, gray eyes. Standing her tall, thin frame, covered in a long, flowered dress, and high laced black boots, and thick brown stockings, he could hear her speak,

 "get out your spellers! Get out your readers! Get out your writing!" Seeing the people seated around the class, developed an image of Mary Jane. His heart quickened and his pace picked up. There she sat, looking toward Mrs. Cox.

 "She's sort'a fat," he spoke aloud. "But, she's pretty."

 Leander was now passing by Mr. Duncan's house. The smoke from the chimney streamed upward, making a long, flat, white bluish cloud, above the house. Looking to the ground, he could see four sets of tracks now.

 "Duncan's already left," he spoke to himself.

 He quickened his pace.

 Looking to the left of the creek, the sun was half way down the mountain; but, the right side was still dark. The birds rustled the leaves and flew out of the brush in front of him. The church came into view and he looked anxiously toward the school house. He could hear children's voices. He was not late.

 Approaching the playground, he carefully made his way to the door of the school building. As he neared the door, Mr. Dickens, the principal, appeared through the window and began to ring the bell to come in. Instantly, the children collapsed from chaos into an orderly line. Leander flowed with the stream and waited for the signal to enter the building. Filing through the door, he climbed the steps, and into the classroom. He made his way to his seat, in the back, near the window. The room was warm. Sitting down, he watched as the room began to fill with students. Leander examined each one as they entered the room. When Calvin entered, Leander's eyes squinted, and he tracked him to his seat. His stomach shot a pang of fear and his hands tightened into a grip. A flash of the argument on a previous day passed through his mind. Calvin looked toward him with a dominating smile, and Leander broke eye contact with him immediately. Looking out the window, and then to his desk, the pencil quivering in his hand, caused a gritting of teeth. Laying the pencil down, he stretched his arms backward, and glanced toward the door. Seeing Mary Jane, his eyes widened. Tracking her through the room, he watched her sit down, near the teacher's desk. As she sat down, she turned toward Leander, smiled widely and spoke,

 Drawn nearly out of his seat by the soft, high pitched, happy voice, he spoke, "Hi."

 As she turned to the front again, he kept his eyes focused on her long, black, shiny hair. He tried to drop his head; but, too late. She caught him staring. She stood and whirled to walk toward him. Leander felt himself sinking into his seat. She cam straight toward him. He felt his heart race as she drew nearer. Looking toward her white teeth, dancing as she spoke, he was captured by the movement and the smile. He looked cautiously into her brown eyes as she spoke,

 "Leander, do you have a sheet of paper? I forgot to bring any!" she spoke.

 Quickly, he tore several sheets from the writing pad, and handed them to her.

 "Thanks," she spoke softly and whirled around. Walking back toward her seat, as she sat down, the class suddenly hushed, and froze into position. Mrs. Cox made her entry into the room. Walking toward her des, the class became rigid and awaited her greeting.

 "Good morning, class," she spoke solemnly

 "Good morning, Mrs. Cox." the class responded together.

 "Well, I see we're all here today. Let's all stand for a word of prayer and the pledge." she continued.

 As the class stood, Mrs. Cox began to pray,

 "Thank you Lord for another day. We thank you for all of the blessings. We pray for strength and wisdom. Keep us through the day. Guide and direct us in your Holy Will. We give you all the praise and glory. In Jesus' name, Amen."

 Leander began to speak in a monotone voice,

 "I pledge allegiance to the flag," feeling his chest vibrate with the sound, he lowered his voice to hear the others continue to echo, "Of the United States of America." Leander raised the strength of his voice, "For which it stands, on Nation, Under God, With Liberty and Justice for all."

 As he lowed himself into his seat, he heard the familiar instructions, "Now, class, get out your reading book. We are going to read orally today. Mary Jane, I would like for you to begin on page eighty-seven.

 As Mary Jan's voice began to flow through the room, slightly muffled by the flipping of pages. The noise decreased, the soft, delicate voice began to dominate the room. concentrating upon the tone and rhythm, Leander's attention flowed with the sound. Looking toward the back of her head, he continued to follow her voice. As she came to the end of the second paragraph, Mrs. Cox interjected,

 "Thank you, Mary Jane. Calvin, would you please continue."

 As Calvin began to call the words, Leander felt his head drift toward the window. He looked into the blue sky, and the sun shining onto the playground. As a mental picture of the forest floor entered his awareness, his thought pattern was suddenly interrupted by the familiar voice,

 "Leander," a pang of fear shot through his stomach.

 "Leander, do you know the place?" Mrs. Cox repeated in an irritated tone. "Well, I see you don’t know!" Follow along, please!" she spoke with a frown. Then, she paused, searched the room and focused upon Sue Lynn.

 "Would you real please, Sue Lynn?"

 Sue Lynn began to read, and her voice drifted through the room and everyone followed each word with their finger, nervously. Following each reader for a seemingly endless time, Mrs. Cox spoke,

 "O.K., class, we will begin a new story tomorrow. Please read the new story silently before putting away your reader."

 Leander looked at the first page and began to read silently.

 Reading the first sentence, he found his head drift upward. Seeing everyone' head downward, lips moving, fingers pointing, he could hear Calvin saying the words aloud.

 "Read silently!" Mrs. Cox emphasized.

 Leander's head dropped automatically toward the book.

 The room fell into silence. Hearing the noise of a book being slipped into a desk, Leander was cued to close his book. Putting his book away, he looked toward Mrs. Cox. She was busy flipping through the book in front of her. He breathed a sigh, and a voice startled him.

 "O.K., boys and girls, it's time for recess. You may be excused."

 As everyone stood and walked toward the door, Dennis called to him,

 "Come on, Leander, let's play some ball.

 Seeing the football in his hands, Leander shook his head in agreement and broke into a run toward the far side of the playground.

 "Whose going' ta be on sides?" he yelled excitedly.

 "We playing' tackle?" Dennis asked looking toward Calvin.

 Calvin replied, "'a course! I get first choice."

 "No, I do!" Dennis objected.

 "Ah, go ahead!" Calvin returned with contempt.

 Dennis responded immediately, "I'll take Ronnie."

 Standing patiently, Leander awaited for his name to be called. As the choices dwindled, finally Dennis called his name. Splitting into two groups, Leader took his normal place on the line.

 "you got first choice, so we receive!" Calvin yelled firmly.

 Putting up no resistance, Dennis place the all in front of him. Lining up behind the ball, Leander watched Dennis fall back several steps, run forward and kick the ball down the field. Converging on the runner, Calvin, and seeing him come toward him, he plunged toward his feet. Calvin sprang over top of him and he lifted his arm over his head, and his feet slapped into his arm. Calvin flipped forward and down to the ground. As he picked himself up and rubbed his numb arm, the bell begin to ring.

 "Ah," the boys spoke together.

 "Come on, let's run a play," Leander encouraged.

 "Nah, better go!" Dennis spoke sadly.

 The boys walked slowly toward the school. Lining up, boys in one line and girls in the other, Mrs. Cox waited silently with her foot patting up and down. She crossed her arms and began to glare at the boys. With a frown, she spoke,

 "you boys straighten up that line! Do we have to take all day to get ready to come in?"

 As the movement slowed, Mrs. Cox looked to the girls' line with a smile and spoke, "O.K., girls, you may go in."

 As the girls entered, the boys line froze into position.

 "O.K., boys , enter quietly."

 Returning to his seat, the room returned to quiet and Mrs. Cox stood in front of her desk. Viewing each student, she opened the book on her desk and spoke,

 "O.K., boys and girls, do you know how to spell the words in this week's lesson? Are you ready for the test?"

 "I'll get mom to help me tonight," Leander thought to himself.

 Waiting for the next instructions, he felt his head turn toward the window. The sky was blue, but, a few clouds were now visible, and the light seemed to dim.

 "O.K, boys and girls, lest see who knows the words. Let's close our spellers and I'll see who is ready for the test. The students in the front, looked toward Mrs. Cox with a smile. Leander stole another glance out of the window, and awaited Mrs. Cox's voice.

 "How do you spell 'believe?" Mrs. Cox spoke with a challenge. As she searched the room, several hands waved. She continued, "No, let's not raise our hands. I will call on you. Everyone is supposed to know them. Uh, Calvin, how do you spell 'believe'?"

 "Well, Uh, I believe," Calvin began. The class broke into laughter.

 "Boys and girls!" Mrs. Cox scolded with a stern voice.

 "we are being serious, now, Give Calvin a chance."

 The class shifted to watch Calvin struggle with the spelling.

 "Uh, I believe it is spelled 'b-e-l-e-v'" Calvin pronounced as he raised his inflection on 'v' to denote uncertainly.

 Mrs. Cox's smile faded as she searched the room. Focusing upon Dennis sitting beside her desk, she repeated, "Dennis, will you spell 'believe'?"

 "b-e-l-i-e-v-e-" Dennis uttered rapidly.

 "Thank you, Dennis. That is correct!"

 Looking somewhat more pleased, she glanced toward the book and back to the class.

 "Ronnie, how do you spell 'relieve'?" relieve

 "R-e-l-e-v-e?" he spelled doubtfully.

 "No!" she responded quickly. "I've told you over and over, watch the silent letter!" Mrs. Cox snapped.

 "Why must we make a mistake over and over?"

 Looking to the left of her desk, she continued,

 "O.K., Wanda, how do you spell 'relieve'?"

 "R-e-l-i-e-v-e" she answered.

 "That's right. Well, I do hope the rest of you will study. Write the words. That will help.

 So. let's get ready for Social Studies. Get out your Social Studies book and turn to page one hundred and fourteen."

 Mrs. Cox sat down behind her desk and scooted forward. She gazed around the room and spoke,

 "Leander, since you have trouble keeping the place, we will start with you."

 Not raising his head, Leander focused upon the words and began calling them out. One after another, ignoring the occasional soft giggle from around the room, he continued calling the words as fast as he could. With his voice in a monotone pitch, he laboriously continued until finally, Mrs. Cox interrupted,

 "O.K., thank you, Leander. Let's let you pick it up from there."

 As Robert began to read, Leander took a deep breath and let it out nervously. Knowing that he would not be called on to read again, he slowly eased his head up to view the window. Disappointed to see streaks of rain, and covered in a fog, he returned his head to view the classroom. Looking toward Mrs. Cox now, the back of Mary Jane's head came into focus. He sat motionlessly staring at the back of her head. Her long, black hair curled down the back of the chair. Sitting in a trance now, he lost awareness of his body and his mind became aware of a mental picture of the hollow leading toward his house. Suddenly, it occurred to him.

 "It's my birthday! I'm fourteen!"

 As this though entered his thinking, he continued to think, "I wonder if dad will give me a birthday present. I guess I'm too old for that. I won't mention it to anyone. I won't tell anyone."

 Still lost in thought, he was startled into awareness as the class stood.

 "Where ye' goin'?" he asked as they moved toward the door.

 "It's lunch time, Leander! Come on!" Robert responded looking back over his shoulder.

 Suddenly, Leander realized, "I didn't bring my lunch."

 Looking around, he moved toward the cloak room.

 "Where's ye' lunch?" Robert asked.

 "Ah, I'm not hungry." Leander explained.

 Moving through the cloak room, he pretended to check his coat. Moving back toward his seat, his mouth watered as the paper bags rattled. The smell of sandwiches filled the air Impulsively, he stood and moved toward Mrs. Cox. As he approached, he spoke,

 "Mrs. Cox, may I be excused?"

 "Yes," Mrs. Cox replied without looking up.

 Moving quickly now, he focused upon the door. Nearer and nearer, he opened the door and moved to the outside. Taking a deep breath, he looked toward the sky, and a steady breeze swept across his face. Soft rain fell upon his eyes. He walked freely toward the huge oak trees. He moved through the trees and rounded the back side of the furtherest tree, leaned against it and looked toward the sky.

 "A crow is a strong bird," he thought to himself as he watched a crow fly overhead.

 "They stay out in the weather year round. How do they do it?"

 Continuing to admire its flight, a limb shook above him, and water fell in a spray. Looking toward the branch above his head, a squirrel moved back to the fork and began to drop shells, seemingly unaware of his presence. As the brown hulls fell, they sailed toward him. He tracked them as they sailed downward and hit the ground in front of him. Standing for several minutes with a blank stare, he turned and slowly moved back toward the school. Moving up the steps and through the door, paper bags were being wadded and whispers filled the room.

 "O.K., boys and girls, let's put away our lunches and return to our studies, please." cam the voice of Mrs. Cox.

 Leander moved to his seat, sat down, and mechanically pulled out his math book, opened it midway and stared toward the front of the room.

 "O.K, boys and girls, your assignment in math is to do the test on pages one hundred forty six and one hundred forty seven. When you have finished, you may check your work. You may begin."

 Busy with the math, one problem after another, the time passed quickly,. As he completed the last problem, Mrs. Cox spoke, "O.K., boys and girls, turn in your work. Please be sure to put your name on it. Get your English book out. We will be studying poetry. Today. You may be reading on page two hundred and one."

 Leander passed his math paper forward, exchanged his math book for the English book, turned to the page, and with a sigh, looked toward Mrs. Cox. Mrs. Cox began,

 "Yes, boys and girls ," her voice seemed to change to a voice of hope. Laced with pride, she spoke in a happy tone,

 "Poetry! Isn't it wonderful. You have a nice collection of poems here. I would like for you to memorize this poem on page two hundred and one. Be prepared to recite it in front of the class by Friday. You may use the remainder of the class time to memorize this poem. Please use your time wisely."

 Leander began to memorize the poem, one line at a time. Reading one line and looking up, saying the words and checking the wording, he would move to the next line, and repeat the words.

 "O.K., boys and girls, it's time to go home. Get your things ready to go home. Don't forget your spellers and the poem."

 Surprised at how fast the time had passed, Leander picked up his speller and English book and moved toward the door. Mrs. Cox moved toward the door, and stood to watch the children leave. As Leander made his way to the door, he looked toward Mrs. Cox. As she waved to someone outside, he passed by unnoticed. Leander made his way through the playground. Passing by the church, he opened the English book to page two hundred and one and continued to study. Starting with line one again, he began saying the words over and over. Step by step, line by line, he continued to memorize. As he came into view of his house, he could say the poem without missing a word. He finally began to quote the poem, word for word.

 As the spots of sunlight covered the hill,

 the leaves lay silent under the oak trees.

 A rustle, no longer still!

 a rushing noise through the frozen leaves.

 The valley below echoed with a graceful pace

 of thundering hoofs and branches breaking.

 The valley momentarily returns to quiet, not even a trace.

 The leaves rustled with each step it was taking.

 A furry brown head, with horns bending over his face,

 searched for a sight or sound out of place.

 With ears erect and eyes open wide,

 he looked up the hill and tried to decide.

 He looked to the left and then to the right,

 but, the danger was overhead and out of sight.

 If only the acorn that lowered his head,

 had been lying somewhere else instead.

 And, if only the wind had been blowing favorably that morning,

 Anything to have give him warning!

 That two-legged form was too smart.

 Sitting quietly, bent on violence,

 He aims the hollow barrel toward his heart.

 A deafening 'BOOM' burst the silence.

 The sting of death streaks toward his heart.

 The bullet penetrates his thick, brown hide,

 but misses his pounding heart,

 Entering above the front leg, on the right side,

 the shock triggers an automatic 'DEPART'!

 Rearing, he whirled around,

 the right leg made it hard to start.

 The third spring, high off the ground,

 was accompanied by another 'BOOM BOOM' echoing sound.

 The whistling bullets and the staggering pain,

 the faster the pace, the quicker the gain.

 Streaking over the hill and out of sight,

 a desperate sound echoed the witness of continued flight.

 Springing up the next rugged hill, he dropped his tail

 and stopped briefly to see if everything was alright.

 Returning to the familiar trail

 that he had traveled earlier that morning,

 He moved quickly along, but, nearly fell,

 giving him reason for further warning.

 The warm blood dripping upon the leaves, had an unfamiliar smell

 reminding him of a warm summer day, when it was raining.

 As the blood continued to flow red,

 he passed by the hollow chestnut snag,

 On a hot day, a good place to bed

 even for a stag.

 Acorns, leaves, all night he had fed,

 But, he would like to now find a bed.

 Moving along the side of the hill,

 he was compelled onward by the unending pain,

 The blood squirted downward, and continued to stain,

 A red path, easy to follow.

 He moved above the cliffs covered with moss,

 And into the next hollow.

 Here, he was born, or very near.

 And the rotten log, so easy to cross,

 his front hoofs didn't even clear!

 Moving steadily over the trail, a familiar sight,

 he passed by a shrub, where he had scraped the bark.

 No time to sharpen his horns just right.

 He left on the shrub, a red streak as his mark.

 The hot burning pain propelled him to continue in flight.

 He would never leave the hollow, when it was dark.

 The hollow where it all began.

 With the wind in his ears, and his white tail in the air,

 Over the hill and through the trees, one final run.

 He did not know to ask if it was fair,

 He did not know if it was a great plan,

 To question his fate, he wouldn't dare.

 Was it of God, or was it of man?

 "Well, " he spoke aloud, "That was hard. I believe I've had enough for one day. The Spelling is not until Friday. I don't have to study."

 Entering the kitchen, he smelled the cornbread and pinto beans. His father was sitting at his regular place and his mother was moving around the stove.

 "Howdy", Leander spoke,

 "Did you have a good day, Leander?" his mother spoke with a smile.

 "Yeah, pretty good," he replied, "Boy, am I hungry!"

 Looking at his father sitting quietly huddled over a cup of coffee. His mother spoke again.

 "Wash ye' hands, Leander. Supper's jest 'bout ready."

 Moving to the wash pan, he asked, "Where's Alvin and Fustus?"

 "They'll be late, I reckon. They're workin' for Mr. Duncan this evening, fixin' a ditch or somethin'."

 Leander looked around and asked, "Well, how 'bout Tommy? Where'd he git to? I know he's not workin' too!" Leander spoke irritated to be left out.

 "He's cleanin' the barn. I'll call ''em in a minute," his mother explained. Settling into his chair, Leander followed the movements of his mother as she sat the table. His dad looked over toward him, turned, and reached for the cornbread. Breaking off a large piece, he crumbled it onto the plate in front of him, and began spooning out the pinto beans. As he let the spoon slide back into the bowl, Leander copied his movements, precisely, crumbling the bread and spooning out beans. Foot stomps on the porch outside, announced the arrival of Tommy, Alvin and Fustus. They walked in sweaty and dirty.

 "Hurry up boys, and wash. Supper's on the table." she spoke.

 "We been workin'" Alvin spoke proudly.

 "Yeah, old man Duncan gave us a dollar a piece!" Fustus added. As they sat down, their father looked up and spoke,

 "You boys have work to do here! You'd better see to it that some of this work 'round here gits done. I don't want ta' see Tommy, seven years old, havin' ta' do your work! You milk them cows an' chop some kindling' for ye' mother, this evening!"

 Nodding their heads in understanding, they glanced at each other nervously, and then stared toward Leander and Tommy as they smiled.

 Pushing away from the table, Leander moved through the kitchen to the back porch. Following his dad toward the barn, he watched him pick up a bucket, scoop it full of rabbit feed and walk toward the woodshed.

 "How 'ze the rabbits? Leander spoke.

 "O.K., I guess," came the reply. "You feed the dogs."

 Leander altered his course and moved toward the house.

 "Mom, where's the scraps for the dogs?" he yelled.

 "Here's all I got." she answered pointing to a bucket on the porch. Picking up the bucket, he made his way toward the dog lot. As he approached, the black and brown spotted dogs began wagging their long, white tails and barking loudly. Opening the gate, the dogs bunched around the trough and eyed the bucket. As Leander emptied the bucket, a slurping, sucking sound ensued, and an occasional growl. Watching the dogs eat for a few minutes, he picked up the empty bucket and returned to the house. Setting the bucket on the porch, he was met by Alvin, Fustus and Tommy. Coming through the door, Alvin spoke,

 "You gotta' help, too!"

 Moving back toward the woodshed, he followed his three brothers.

 "Leander, you fetch them planks beside the barn. Fustus, you get the axe. Me and you'll split, an' Leander and Tommy can stack." Alvin continued.

 "Yeah," Fustus agreed. "Me and you can split. An' they can stack!"

 Carrying a load of planks from the barn, one slipped in the middle and began dragging the ground. Leander smiled and continued toward the woodshed. As he approached the shed, he dropped the planks and quickly whirled back toward the barn. Looking over his shoulder, he watched Fustus place a plank on the chopping block. Alvin drew back with the double bit axe and swiftly swung it toward the plank. The axe struck the plank with a crack, and Alvin struggled to free it . Returning with a second lad, Leander looked toward the sun. He judged it to be an hour before sunset.

 "Probably, we'll need two more loads," he spoke to Tommy.

 Dropping the second load with a crash, he smiled and walked slowly toward the barn. Tommy tagged behind.

 Are ye' helping', Tommy?" Leander asked.

 "Yeah," Tommy assured him, "I've been carryin'!"

 Dragging the load, Leander dropped it to the ground and watched as Fustus had his turn chopping.

 "Start packing' it to the house, Leander!" Alvin ordered.

 "O.K., Tommy, let's carry a load." Leander responded.

 Making several trips back and forth, darkness began to set in and finally the familiar voice,

 "O.K.,, boys, time to come in!"

 Leander moved toward the house and spoke,

 "What ye' goin' ta' do tomorrow?'

 "I'm goin' ta' go down an' talk to that Army feller. I'm thinkin' of joinin' the Army when school is out."

 "In the Army? Why e' goin' ta' do that?" Fustus replied.

 "Ye' don't think I'm goin' ta' stay here all my life, do ye?" Alvin replied satirically.

 "well, I didn't know." Fustus returned thoughtfully and continued, "Well, where wil you go?"

 "Ah, guess down in Georgia. That's where they have their training."

 "Georgia, I wonder what it's like down there?"

 "How should I know." Alvin replied with a smile.

 Listening to the talk, Leander entered the kitchen and made his way up the steps.

 "March right back down here and clean up before you go to bed, Leander!" came a voice from below. Moving down the steps, through the hallway and to the kitchen, he was the whole family sitting around the table, and a cake in the middle. Everyone began to sing,

 "Happy birthday, Leander!" they all yelled.

 "Make three wished!" Tommy yelled.

 Sitting down, he drew a deep breath and blew hard. The candles puffed out quickly, leaving small traces of smoke. Everyone shouted,

 "Alright, Yeah!"

 "Ye' got three wishes. What did ye wish for?" Tommy asked with wide eyes.

 "If ye' tell, they won't come true," he answered with a smile. "But, I hope we all have many more years."

 Moving toward Alvin and Fustus, the smell was unmistakable. Their red, shiny eyes and wild gestures witnessed, they were drinking. And, when his father came over and slapped him on the shoulder, the pores in his face open, and talking with every breath, he was definitely drinking. Looking around, the half-gallon fruit jar of moonshine had been sitting near the sink all along.

 "well, guess I could have a sample of that shine now that I'm fourteen, uh?"

 "Well, just a taste," his father answered with a smile.

 Turning the jar upward, he gulped and gulped. The burning sensation, and eyes watering, he continued to gulp.

 Grabbing the jar from his hands, Alvin yelled, "Hey, boy, he said a sip!"

 Laughter filled the room.

 "Take it easy, Leander! There's more where that come from!" Fustus echoed.

 Watching the jar pass around the room, Leander felt like he was the only one in the room. Blocking out the sounds around him, he felt the urge to withdraw. Moving through the kitchen and toward the steps, laughter followed him. Holding onto the rail of the steps, he moved upward to safety. Watching the ceiling spin, Leander lay back onto the bed. He was sound asleep in a few moments.

 MARY JANE, IN A DREAM

 I see a person standing with their back to me. It is me. Walking toward me, a girl, with long, black hair. It is Mary Jane! She approaches and silently falls into my[ arms. I hug her, kiss her and fall back softy onto the ground. Squeezing each other tightly, we roll over and over embraced, we stop and I look into her eyes, brown with white background. I look to her lips, so beautiful. The narrow lips, small mouth, I lean forward and kiss and kiss...

 THE DEER HUNT AT SIXTEEN

 Leander woke up suddenly, and spoke aloud,

 "is it daylight?"

 Looking toward the window, he could see no light shining through. Breathing a sigh of relief, he jumped up, grabbed his bibbed overalls, and slipped them on. As he continued to dress, he thought to himself,

 "Still time."

Slipping down the steps to keep from arousing the family, he developed a mental picture of where he would go. Grabbing his boots beside the door, he slipped them on with an occasional grunt, and pulled the coat from the nails beside the door. Picking up the bow and quiver leaning against the wall, he opened the door and closed it behind him. He found himself in darkness. A sudden stillness came over him. Leary of the new, unsure environment, he gazed upward at the hazy sky. The moon was shining, and a few clouds floated around it, making the moon seem to move. As he stepped off the porch, a steady, cool breeze caught him in the face, making his breath hard to catch. In his improving night vision, the path up the dark hollow came in clearer. Placing one foot in front of the other, he listened to the grass crackle with each step. The white, glistening dew shined like a light cover of snow.

 The rushing sound of water seemed to get louder. He became somewhat hypnotized by the monotonous step after step. Gripping the bow tighter, he reached the end of the path. Pausing, he gazed upward to detect the dark form of the mountain. The climb was about to begin. Following the rocky creek bed, he made his way up the mountain. As he continued to wind upward, the light seemed to become dimmer. The small branches seemed to rake his face out of nowhere. After about eighty steps, the bank of the hollow was clearly silhouetted by the starry sky. Now ascending slowly toward the spur, he began to breathe heavily. Stopping to notice his heart pound vigorously, he breathed four deep breathes and observed his breathing to slow. Waiting for his heart to settle, he searched the sky for a trace of daylight, but, it failed to appear. Listening for a rustle in the leaves, hearing only a rustle from the wind. Leander continued to climb the hill. With each step, he turned his feet sideways and dug into the leafy, loose dirt. Feeling a slight give with each step, he counted each step. After forty steps, he leaned against a tree and took four deep breaths. While he waited for his heart to slow, he gazed at the sky, demanding a little more light to aid his cause. After several steps, he finally topped the small spur, and with a sense of short-term accomplishment, looked back into the dark hollow. The new position made available more light and he could see the trees and brush more clearly. But, the climb had just begun. Gazing upward, he felt himself moving forward again. Taking forty steps, he stopped again and wiped the sweat from his face. Making shorter steps now, he began to push himself forward, by pressing his arms against his thighs with each step, and, occasionally grabbing onto a branch to pull himself forward.

 After several more bursts up the mountain, he began to see the light silhouetting the crest of the spur. His journey was nearly over. He would soon be to his destination. Sensing the end of his toil he moved more rapidly up the mountain. Finally, the grade flattened and he found himself on the spur. Walking another fifty yards, in the deeply trenched deer path, he enjoyed the new, easy walking to the beginning of another grade, up the mountain toward the top. But, he was appreciative that he would not have to climb the final two hundred yards to the top. He was at his destination, a large water oak, so big that two people could not reach around it and touch fingers. About fifteen feet up the tree, a large fork had formed, providing five foot of room for a person to sit or stand.

 Leander had carefully selected the spot after many days of research on the habits of the deer. He had seen several deer in the area and knew their basic movements. He was aware that they spent the night grazing in the fields during this time of year; and as daylight nears, the deer ascend the mountain to bed down. They would, in fact ascend similar to how he had done, but, with a great deal less difficulty, and surely, with greater speed. So, he judged they would pass straight under his tree, and, hopefully, right after daylight.

 As if to escape the danger of the dark forest, he climbed the tree with the aid of the spikes that he had carefully place in the tree, earlier. In a few minutes, he found himself in the fork of the tree. Developing a sense of well-being and accomplishment, he leaned back to allow his body to cool.

 Shifting his attention to sound, he searched the area for sound, only the rustling of the leaves from the light breeze. He readied the bow and arrow, and waited for the deer to come. In the sky, there was a twinkling of the stars, but, the moon seemed to be fading in power. Dawn was on its' way. A new day was dawning, the day of the deer.

 Searching the sky, he faced unconsciously toward the east. As his gaze focused on the mountain, and the valley below, a flicker of light came and went. A pulse of light announced the great event. Then, another flicker turned the sky silver. Waiting in endless silence, and expectation, the entire sky suddenly brightened with a dim, gray flow. And, after a long endless wait, the glow increased slightly. The sky slowly took on a pale, blue color. Several dark clouds now started to turn lighter, as if someone was turning the light up one notch at a time. A fog below became visible and the black trees started to turn silver, and now, brighter. It is daylight!

 Leander's uneasy feeling brought about by the darkness seemed to be relieved with the daylight. Now, he had a new sense of security[y. He noticed that the sweat on his face was cold. His hair was damp and stiff. Breathing out, he knew he would get a slight chill when he cooled down. He began to concentrate on every sound as it occurred. With each sound, he would turn and try to locate its' source. In a trance-like state, he was a slave to his senses. Helplessly, he was forced to direct his attention to each sound, moving his head in that direction, attempting to locate the source visually, then, turning to another sound.

 In such a manner, he heard a sound over the hill.

 "It is distinctly something!" he thought. "It movers, stops, and moves again. Not loud, but louder than a chipmunk, maybe a squirrel? or a deer?"

 Frozen in that direction, he searched, listened and searched. Seeing a squirrel coming from behind a tree and running down a log, he spoke aloud,

 "Nothing but a squirrel!"

 Noticing a numbness moving into his feet, he began to move his toes in an attempt to warm them, but, the feeling was going out of them slowly. Placing his hands in his coal pockets, he leaned back and sighed a disappointing breathe.

 Suddenly, in the distance, a rustling of leaves cam into hearing.

 "Undoubtedly, a big animal! Big!" he thought.

 Looking to the left and right, and facing down the hill, he thought,

 "The deer are walking!"

 Locating the sound to be coming up the hill, along the same path that he had previous[sly ascended, he heard another rustle, and another. Suddenly, there it was! A magnificent animal, darting its' head to the left and to the right with its big rack extending far over its head! To the left and to the right, the deer came zigzagging up the hill. His heart began to pound as he turned to face the approaching deer. As the deer came closer, his heart pounded louder. Looking at the tip of the arrow resting on the notch of the bow, he could see it quiver.

 "Calm down, calm down," he spoke to himself."

 But, it was useless. His mouth was dry and he was shaking all over. Sniffing the air nervously, the Deer slipped closer. He could see its rack clearly.

 "An eight pointer," he though.

 "Its time to pick a shot!"

 Pulling the string back, he aimed right above the front leg. The deer moved between two trees, with its mid-section and neck exposed. The deer stood nervously, looking about as if it sensed something was wrong. Leander aimed and felt his fingers loosen. The arrow whistled toward the deer. Quickly moving the bow to see where the arrow would go, he heard the arrow hit a leaf and continue toward the deer. The deer gave a leap and bounced over the hill.

 "Missed again," he spoke aloud and leaned back against the tree.

 "I missed again! Or, maybe I hit it? I'm not sure."

 After about an hour of searching for a sight or sound of another deer, he finally decided to go down and look to see if he could see a sign of blood. Descending the tree, he walked over to the spot where the deer had been standing. There, ten feet further down the hill, was the arrow, stuck in the ground. Quietly, he pulled it from the ground and placed it back into the quiver. He spoke aloud,

 "Well, that's better than not seeing one at all. If I do that every time, I'm bound to get one sooner or later, surely."

 Hearing a rustle of the leaves above him, he stopped and searched the hill above him.

 "Something big is coming down the mountain," he thought to himself. "It sounds like a deer."

 Taking a few quiet steps toward a tree, he noticed that his breath was getting louder with his heart pounding. He focused upon a black figure coming toward him rapidly. It was a huge, black bear, with tremendous speed, it crashed through the brush. As the bear passed by, and out of range of his bow, he had an urge to follow. He was frozen in his tracks. He could only gaze in the direction of the bear. Making his way down the hill, he spoke aloud.

 "I should have had my rifle."

 Lost in thought, he made his way homeward. As if coming out of a trance, he saw his house coming into view. As he made the final walk across the open field, his concentration drifted. Feeling g detached, he began to zigzag. The image of the bear burned before his eyes. Walking by the barn, he met his father.

 "Did ye' git any?" came the friendly voice of his father.

 "No," Leander responded excitedly, "But, boy did I see the game! I saw a deer and a bear!"

 "A bear, did ye'? Well, we'll have to see about that!"

 came the serious response. "If a bear gits to usin' around here, I'll have ta' kill him! Can't have 'em killin' my cows!" his father continued to explain.

 Leander nodded in agreement and moved toward the house. Entering the door, he made his way toward the kitchen. His father followed him in, and sat down beside him and spoke,

 "Did ye' git a shot at that bear?"

 "I didn't get a shot at the bear, but, I got a shot at that eight-pointer, but missed 'em."

 I don't see how ye can shoot them things with an arrow. Butchering them up and runnin' off to die. Why don't ye take that rifle and go ahead an' kill one, an' git it over with?" his father answered.

 Unable to reply, Leander looked up as his father continued.

 "You're sixteen today, uh?"

 "Yeah, I am." Leander replied expectantly.

 "Well, what are ye goin' 'a do when ye' git older?" his father asked in a solemn voice.

 "I, uh, guess I'll go in the army, like Alvin, I guess." Leander spoke thoughtful.

 "Well, ye' know ye' can't stay here."

 "I know," he assured him. I'll probably go to the army."

 After eating supper, Leander went up the steps, kicked his boots off, removed his clothes, and flopped onto the bed. In a few moments, he was released into a deep sleep.

 THE DREAM

 I feel so uncomfortable. I can hear a noise, a loud ringing, and a buzzing. I feel like I'm moving rapidly through a long, dark tunnel. I am outside of my body! Yes, a funny feeling. I see a little boy. I can't make out his face. Running on top of a steep mountain, a cliff is up ahead. As I come closer to the cliffs' edge, I can see a tall tree top and down below, a drop off straight down, with no bottom in view.

] Somebody is after me! I must jump for the treetops. I feel myself falling, toward the tree, closer, closer. I see a branch in front of me. Grabbing only the branch, my arms jerk violently. A loud crack, feeling the limb give way, I, I grab onto another branch. It breads too. Seeing a grapevine, hanging onto the tree, I grab; but, it is breaking, I can't slow down. Falling, falling, floating, floating, I can see the bare ground below, sloping off sharply. With a strange sense of safety, I begin to feel my feet touch the ground. My feet are sinking into the loose dirt. I am sliding down the hill. I am gliding downward. As my heels dig in, I try to stop. I continue to slide down the hill, leaving a large trench with both feet. I continue to flow down the hill.

 I see in the distance a large, steel frame with a platform standing high above the ground. It's some sort of frame for a coalmining tipple. It is a platform with a lot of men standing on it. The platform is standing high above the ground. As the platform lights up the hillside with a bright light, I can see a fire burning below. Men’s' voices are yelling, screaming! The platform is collapsing onto the raging fire. Men are screaming! And, after the crash, the voices die out. The echo of the screams and yells continue to fill the air and fade away. THE TRIP TO TOWN AT SEVENTEEN

 The sound of a bird seemed to be getting louder and louder. The rush of a September breeze began to arouse Leander from a deep sleep. The light began to filter through his eye lids, brighter and brighter. As he began to filter through his eyelids, brighter and brighter. As he began to collect his identity, he monitored his body. His head throbbed slightly and his eyes ached.

 Opening his eyes slowly, he could see the room, the window and the field illuminated by the sun. The sky was gaining a deep blue, and a fine mist was hanging at the foot of the mountain. Leander stretched his arms above his head and pushed himself out of the bed.

 "Another day. Guess I'd better get goin'. Got a lot to do today."

 As he thought about what he might do that day, a mental voice came to his consciousness,

 "Guess I could go to town. I could go to the store for dad, and maybe stay for the dance."

 Leander dressed, went down the steps and entered the kitchen. His mother was moving about the stove, and his dad was sitting at the table.

 "Mornin'," Leander spoke.

 "Mornin'," his father replied,

 "Did you finally decide to get up? If you'd start gettin' ta bed a little earlier, you'd get up earlier!" he continued.

 "Yeah, I know," Leander answered,

 "Dad, can I go to the store for ye'?"

 "Well, I guess after ye' get your chores done, it'd be O.K. You can pick up some salt and nails."

 Smiling, Leander picked up a biscuit and crumbled it into his plate. Spooning out some gravy and pouring it over the biscuits, he looked toward his father and spoke,

 "Heard from Alvin?"

 "He's doin' O.K., I reckon. He's got a room in a hotel, the Fancy Lounge. I thik he said."

 "Is he still workin', buildin' that house?"

 "Yeah, reckon he is." his father answered.

 "Want me to see if I can see him?" Leander asked.

 "Well, ye' could if ye wanted to," his dad spoke without looking up. Leander finished eating and walked toward the door.

 'You be careful," his mother called out as he passed through the door. "You get back here before dark. And don''t be drinkin'!"

 "Yeah, O.K., Mom, " he replied, "Say Mom, where’s my ginseng? I believe I'll sell it today."

 "I'll put it in your dad's saddlebags. You take good care of them saddlebags. Don't loose 'em!"

 In a few minutes, she returned carrying the saddlebags and spoke, "Here, Leander. The ginseng is in there."

 Accepting the saddlebags, he smiled and walked toward the door. Walking to the barn, he saddled Ted, and began the long ride to town. After riding for a few miles, he noticed that Ted was perking his ears up. Snorting sharply, he stopped suddenly, and started pawing the ground. "SSSS" came the sound in front of him.

 "Huh OH! I know what that is! Easy boy, easy!"

 Patting Ted on the neck, he slid off the saddle and pulled the reins. Ted backed up and as Leander walked in front of him and , lying in the road, a big, black diamond rattler lay quiled and ready to strike. There it lay, the size of a bucket, it's arrow-pointed head following his every move. WIth it's tongue slithering in and out, it began to sing nervously as he slipped the saddlebag from behind the saddle. He patted Ted’s neck and spoke,

 "It's a big one, Ted! I'll take care of him, thought!"

 Picking up a stick, the size of a cane, he moved toward the rattler. Pointing the end of the stick toward the rattler, he moved the point in front of the snake's head. As the stick came closer, it shook it's tail, giving a slight warning, and struck toward the tip. Uncoiling, the black body came forward and instantly, Leander moved the stick over it's body and pressed it to the ground. Slipping the stick closer to trap the snake by the neck, he moved his hand downward, snatched the snake by the neck and lifted it upward.

 "Boy, what a big one!" he spoke aloud with excitement.

 Opening the flap of the saddlebag, he dropped the rattler in, and closed the flap quickly. Moving back to where Ted was standing, he threw the saddlebag over his back and remounted.

 Continuing toward town, he thought to himself.

 "Well, I say, how about that for luck!"

 Moving along at a faster pace, the creek slowly began to increase in size. Time seemed to stand still. After riding for what seemed an endless time, he could see a log house come into view.

 "Wonder if old man Dalton is home?" he thought to himself,

 "Haven't seen him in a while."

 As he passed by the house, he remembered that Mr. Dalton had never paid him for a job that he had done a year ago. Passing by the house, he saw no sign of anyone. He spurred Ted to a faster pace. Looking overhead, the sun was beginning to drop downward.

 After riding for another mile, he could see a wagon up ahead. Keeping his eyes on the wagon, he could see a small gray-headed man standing in front of the horse. It was Mr. Dalton. Bending over, he seemed to be looking at the horse's left front foot. Approaching closer now, Leander spoke,

 "Hello, Mr. Dalton, How ye' doin'?"

 "Not so good, Leander," he answered in a weak voice.

 Lady Bird's favorin' her leg. I'm afeard ta' make her pull any further. I'm glad ye' happened along. Maybe you can help me."

 "Uh, I'm sorry, Mr. Dalton." Leander replied. "But, I got ta' git ta' town! Uh, I , uh, I have to get some sulfur for my dad. One of his best dogs is sick. If I don't get it back soon, an' that dog dies, I'll be in real trouble." Mr. Dalton looked at him sadly and dropped his eyes to the ground.

 "Well, uh, I hope it'll be O.K.," he answered.

 Smiling to himself as he guided Ted around the wagon, he spurred Ted to a quicker pace toward town. Looking over his shoulder, he watched Mr. Dalton unhitching the horse. He spoke aloud,

 "Hu, I can't take time to fool with that old man! He never did pay me for that last job, anyway. He's the stingiest old man I ever did see!"

 Smiling again, Leander spurred Ted to a quicker pace toward town.

 Making his way through the first row of houses now, he guided Ted toward the main street of town. Passing by the church, he rode toward the school ground. Riding up to the swings on the playground, he slipped from the saddle to the ground. Throwing the saddlebag over his shoulder, he turned in a circle to view the street. Noticing a young man sitting on the ground near the swings, Leander walked toward him. The boy looked up and began to speak,

 "Hey, come here and look at these two ants fighting over this piece of bread. They're really having at it."

 Straining to see the ants, Leander replied,

 "What are you talkin' about, boy?"

 "My name is Charles. I come here all the time. I like to come here and play with the squirrels. Are you a squirrel hunter?"

 Not allowing time for an answer, he continued,

 "You can give those nuts right out of your hands! They are nothing' but tree rats. They're fat! Whoever heard tell of a fat tree rat. Are you a squirrel hunter?" Charles repeated with concern.

 "So what if I am, boy! So what!" Leander yelled. "Why don't you get on out 'a here, anyway! Leander continued. "Go home to your mother, where you're supposed to be, you little sissy!"

 "A fat tree rat! How ridiculous. Whoever head tell!" Leander continued to mumble as he turned and began to look up and down the street.

 "All of these people. Where're they goin', I wonder."

 Leander focused upon a sign across the street, 'HARDWARE', and walked toward it.

 "Maybe I can sell my rattler over there,": He thought to himself with a smile.

 "I know Mr. Music will be glad to see it!" he continued with a laugh.

 Walking toward the store, he straightened the saddlebag and looked through the window. A bell clanged as he jerked the door open and walked toward Mr. Music.

 "Yes?" Mr. Music spoke in an unconcerned tone.

 Leander slid the saddlebag from his shoulder, and spoke,

 "I got something here, I know you goin' ta want!" Leander spoke mysteriously.

 As Leander moved the saddlebag closer to his face, he could visualize it lunge from the bag, but, removing it slightly out range from any real danger, he opened the flap a little wider, and watched Mr. Music lean over and jump backward with eyes wide and mouth down. Anxiety and shock filtered over his face.

 "Get that thing out of here!" he yelled. "Get it out of here, now!" Leander smiled contently as he closed the flap of the saddlebag.

 "You're not afraid of a little old timber rattler, are ye' Mr. Music?"

 Turning toward the door, Leander spoke with a laugh,

 "I'll sell him to ye' cheap! Make mighty fine eatin'!"

 Continuing to laugh, Leander made his way through the door and into the street. Noticing several tables sitting in front of a store across the street, he thought to himself,

 "An outside eatin place. Never have tried one of them. Guess I could go over and have something." Walking toward the tables, a sign hung from a porch overhanging the tables, THE FANCY LOUNGE'.

 "Say, I bet Alvin, yeah, Alvin stays there."

 Sitting down at the nearest table, Leander looked around, searching for a familiar face. In a few minutes, a waitress approached and spoke,

 "May I take your order?"

 Leander looked into her clear, sparkling eyes, one blue and the other brown. She smiled with thin, red lips, Her face, outlined with long, silky blonde hair, was smooth and clear. A dimple in her right cheek attracted his attention to her even, sparkling, white teeth.

 "I say, may I take your order?"

 "Ye got anything to drink?" he finally answered.

 "We have coffee, juice and milk," she responded.

 "I mean, do you have liquor? he spoke proudly.

 "No, you can get liquor inside, but, we only serve dinner and wine out her."

 "That'll be fine. Uh, do you ever see Alvin around here?"]

 "Alvin? No, I don't believe I know him"

 "Well, he stays here, and he's my brother. I say, you'll see him sometime. Say, uh, you goin' ta the dance, tonight?"

 "Well, I reckon not. Got ta' work, ye know."

 "Well, I say, uh, how about next week?"

 Looking into her eyes, he thought to himself,

 "If I only could say the right words, I know she would go out with me."

 "No! I don't think so!" she replied with a frown.

 "How much does a bottle of that wine cost, by the way?" he asked with a trembling smile.

 "I really don't know. We serve a glass before dinner, for about a $1.00 We don't usually sell it by the bottle. Why don't you just go into the hotel? They serve drinks in there."

 Realizing that he did not have any money anyway, he stood and spoke

 "Well, if you don't sell it by the bottle, I guess I'll go somewhere else.!"

 Walking out into the street, he remembered the ginseng roots in the saddlebag. Slipping the saddlebag from his shoulder, felt of the soft bulge of the snake through the right side of the saddlebag. Opening the flap on the other side, he reached into the bag, and stirred the roots and spoke,

 "'Bout a pound, I figure."

 Looking up and down the street, he spotted a sign "MURPHY'S JUNK YARD' on the other side of the street, five building down from the store. Walking across the street at an angle, he returned the saddlebag to his shoulder and watched the sign grow closer. In a few minutes, he found himself opening the door of the wooden building, and entering a dimly lit room. Sitting opposite the door, behind a wooden desk, a short, heavy-set man moved a cigar stub to the corner of his mouth and spoke,

 "What can I do for ye'?"

 "Ye' buying' any ginseng?" Leander asked hopefully.

 "We might be. We're just speculating' on it. Price is down. We've been given' twenty dollars a pound. Ye' got much?"

 Leander slipped the saddlebag from his shoulder, and opened the flap on the left side. The man leaned forward, pressed against the desk and pushed himself forward. As he straightened into a standing position, his loose-fitting flannel shirt rode upward, exposing a harry, bare pop-belly stomach.

 "Put 'em on these scales," He spoke pointing to a scoop sitting over a small scale on the desk.

 Leander scooped the roots out and place them on the scale. The hand on the scale swayed back and forth and settled in one spot. Leaning forward, the man announced,

 "Exactly ten ounces."

 "How much it that?" Leander asked impatiently.

 Eyes shifting to the left and right, the man answered,

 "Twelve dollars and fifty cents."

 Leander held his hand out with a smile and responded,

 "That'll be fine."

 The man reached into his pocket and pulled out an inch of bills folded into a wad. As he unfolded the bills and turned the corners with his thumb, Leander watched the hundreds, twenties, tens, and fives move through his fingers. At the bottom, he pulled two fives and two one dollar bills, and handed them to Leander. Jingling loose change in his pocket, he pulled out a fifty cent piece, handed it to Leander, and spoke in a inquisitive tone,

 "Where'd ye' find all a' that 'sang'?"

 Leander stuffed the money into his pocket, slipped the saddlebag over his shoulder, shifted his eyes to the left and right, and answered,

 "Up Harmon's Branch."

 Pausing a moment, he continued,

 "Say, ye' wouldn't want ta' buy a rattler, would ye'?"

 "A rattler?" the man answered in surprise.

 "Yeah, a big, black 'en! Ye' want 'a see him?"

 "Ye' mean ye got it in that saddlebag?"

 Watching the man's pupils increase in blackness, he continued,

 "Yeah, boy is he a big 'en, seven feet and three inches around the belly."

 "Well, uh, I guess not. We don't usually buy snakes. I don't know where they do, 'round here."

he tried to explain.

 "Well, that' O.K." Leander replied. "Uh, I'll see ye'."

 Walking toward the door, he thought to himself,

 "I wonder if that fat old man gave me the right count? I Doubt it! Havin' that much money, he couldn't do right. I guess that'll do, though. Enough to buy something. Guess I can go back over to the hotel, now. Maybe Alvin's there by now."

 Walking back toward the hotel, he angled across the street. Entering the lobby, he focused upon a short, thin man, with gold, wire-rimmed glasses. The man scribbled in a notebook in front of him and didn't seem to notice as he moved in front of the counter. Finally, he looked up and spoke,

 "Yes, may I help you?"

 "Yeah, uh, ye' say ye' uh serve drinks here?" he asked expectantly.

 "Uh, there's a bar over there," he replied nodding toward a door to his left,

 "But, you have to be eighteen to go in there."

 I, uh, I just want ta' see if my brother, Alvin, is in there." he explained.

"Be O.K., if I just go in and look?"

 "Well, I guess it'd be O.K. But, you be sure and come right back out!"

 Leander nodded in agreement and walked toward the door. Entering a large room, full of round tables, wooden chairs, and a long bar, he couldn't see but one man in the room. Walking toward the bar, the tall, heavy-set man, with long curly hair and a beard, watched him approach. Rubbing a glass with a white cloth, he spoke,

 "Can I help ye'?"

 "Yeah, my brother Alvin, he lives here," Leander explained.

 "Have ye' seen him?"

 "Well, as you can see, he's not in here." the man replied with a wide smile.

 Looking around the empty room, Leander nodded in agreement and continued,

 "Well, uh," He spoke nervously, "Uh, how 'bout a beer?'

 The man looked into his eyes, paused and spoke,

 "Uh, you a little too young to be in here, ain't ye?"

 Breaking eye contact, and looking to the left and right, Leander struggled to answer,

 "Well, that man outside let me in, didn't he?"

 "Yeah, guess he did. Well, I guess it's alright."

 Pausing for a few more seconds of thought, he picked up a glass, moved it under the spout, pulled the lever and the beer surged downward. As the foam raised to the brim of the glass, Leander smiled nervously. Pulling out the bills from his pocket, he picked out a one dollar bill, and placed it on the counter. The man slipped the glass in front of him, picked up the bill and moved in font of the cash register. Watching the man punch buttons on the cash register, Leander picked up the glass and began to gulp. Swallowing forcefully, one gulp after another, the glass raised and the beer flowed. With his eyes watering, he slammed the empty glass down on the counter, took a deep breath and ordered,

 "I'll have another!"

 With a concerned look, the man re-filled the glass, picked up the two quarters and returned to the cash register. Leander picked the second glass up, turned it upward and, in a few seconds, the glass was empty.

 "Ah," He breathed loudly, Fill 'er up there, again!"

 The bartender looked at him, shook his head and spoke,

 "they’ll be fifty cents."

 Lender reached into his pocket, pulled out a bill, and flipped it on the counter.

 "I got plenty of money." he boasted.

 The bartender filled another glass, picked up the money and returned to the cash register. Leander picked up the third glass, and forced the liquid down.

 "Fill 'er up again!" he spoke, but, the room started to change. It seemed to grow smaller.

 Pulling out another bill, he pushed it toward the man and spoke,

 "I said, I'd have another!"

 "Hey, easy there. Ye know that's high powered stuff!"

 Leander felt his face stiffen as he tried to speak,

 ":Uh, yeah, well, you should try some of my dad's tomato wine. That’s high powered!"

 The room began to spin slowly and he gripped onto the bar slightly, to steady himself.

 "I thought you was comin' right back?" cam a voice from the door. Turning around Leander saw the thin man from the lobby walking toward him.

 "Say, he let you come in!" the bartender spoke in an angry tone.

 "Uh, you can't stay in here. boy. Get on out 'a here!" the thin man yelled.

 "O.K., I'm goin! Hold ye' horses!" he spoke, but the words came out slow and muffled.

 "You go on, and don't come back!"

 "Hey, O.K., Man! I'm goin". Keep ye shirt on!" he mumbled.

 Leander walked toward him and waved his finger in front of him.

 "Ye know ye' shouldn't talk that way to payin' customers!" he slurred with a laugh.

 "Payin' customers," the thin man repeated satirically. You'll probably be a customer, but not today.!"

 "I got something here in this saddlebag that'll interest ye," Leander challenged.

 "You and your saddlebag hit the door!" the bartender added firmly.

 Moving toward the man, Leander slipped the saddle bag from his shoulder, opened the flap and held it in front of him. The rattler, responding to the opening, gave a loud rattle and coiled to strike. The thin man jumped back and yelled,

 "Joe, throw him out 'a here!"

 The bartender moved toward him, but Leander pulled the saddle bag back and spoke,

 "I'm goin'! Keep off 'a me!"

 The bartender stopped and yelled,

 "Get out! And don't come back!"

 Leander backed to the door and moved through the lobby into the street. He noticed dizziness as he moved through the street toward the school grounds.

 "Guess I'd better git on home!" he spoke aloud. "Had enough fun for one day!"

 Staggering, he made his way to the horse. Finding Ted tied to the swing, he moved in front of him, loosened his reins, slipped the saddlebag over his back, and pulled himself into the saddle. Giving Ted a sharp kick, he galloped across the playground into the street. Jogging through the town, he gave out a loud 'HEE HAH' and kicked Ted harder. The road was hardly visible in the darkness. Pulling the reins to slow the pace, he spoke,

 "Well, guess you'll have to find ye' way home, Ted. I can't see a thing!"

 After riding for a few miles through the darkness, Ted stopped suddenly, and Leander fell to the ground. Awakened by the sudden jar, he looked around and realized that he had been blacked out. Straining to see a large, dark object in the road ahead, he focused upon a large object silhouetted around at the top, and he spoke aloud,

 "I believe it's ,uh, I believe it's Mr. Dalton's wagon. It's O.K., we can go around it. "

 Leading the horse around the wagon, Leander re-mounted, and continued the journey home. After another few miles of riding, Leander recognized the surroundings and spoke out,

 " I believe this is where I caught that rattler."

 Pulling the reins to stop, he removed the saddle bag and slipped to the ground. Opening the flap, he threw the snake forward into the darkness. Hearing it slither off through the leaves, he smiled and re-mounted. Patting Ted on the neck, he spoke softly,

 "I believe that trip to town took the fight out of him, don't you?"

 Nudging Ted forward, he continued to ride homeward. After another mile of riding, the house came into view. Relieved to have the trip over, Leander removed the saddle and reins, gave Ted a slap and watched him gallop toward the field. Walking silently toward the house, he tiptoed up the porch steps, kicked off his boots, and stepped quietly through the front door. Quietly placing his boots down beside the door, he moved up the steps into his bedroom. Flopping onto the bed, he rolled to his back, and instantly, he was sound asleep.

 Floating down the mountain, I can see a creek bed below. I feel myself floating down he mountain. I can see the creek bed. now. It is a small stream.

 As I slow down, I am in a small stream, running down the creek, frantically. I am scared! Somebody is after me! I am running. The water is splashing with each step. Looking ahead, I can see the steam entering a cave, ant the foot of a mountain ahead of me. Splashing on, I enter the cave. Everything suddenly becomes quiet. I slow down to a walk, and listen to the voices behind me.

 The voices are saying , "He went that way! Hurry! Hurry!

 As I continue through the cave, I can see a fork ahead.

 "People are after me!" Being right handed, I take the right fork. I break into a run again. As I keep running, the voices seem to fade. And, I see a light ahead of me. As I run to the light, things begin to clear. The voices are gone. I am out of the cave. I am now running on a small dirt road through a thick forest. I am running through a forest of thick shrubbery, like human hair, as high as my head, but unpenetrateable. The light is rather dim. I see a star like object skipping along the horizon above the wall of 'hair'. It is skipping along to the beat of a strange noise, 'rrrrrrrrr,rrrrrrrr." The noise seems to be getting louder, "RRRRRRRRR," "RRRRRR

" it is getting louder. The light is getting brighter, brighter. I, me, I don't want to go! Got to go back! Got to finish. Just a while longer.

 A LIQUOR RUN AT EIGHTEEN

 The light brightened his eyelids and sounds filtered into his consciousness. Leander rolled over and flickered his eyelids open. He sprang from the bed, pulled his bibbed overhauls on and stepped into his boots. Bouncing down the steps, he spoke to his father,

 "Paw, I'm goin' ta' town ta' talk to that army man, ye' want me to make that liquor run for ye'?"

 After a few moments of thought, he replied,

 "Boy, you know they watch us, don't ye'? If ye git caught, they’ll send ye' ta' prison!"

 I can do it, Paw, I'm eighteen!"

 "Well, O.K.," he agreed.

 "But, I want that money back here by tonight, ye understand?"

 "Yeah Paw, you can trust me!"

 Taking a deep breath, Leander walked out, and toward the woodshed. Pulling off the canvas over the wooden case, he examined the pints of moonshine. After tightening the saddle onto Ted, he filled two brown paper bags full of pint bottles and stuck them into each side of his saddlebags. Leander mounted and began the trip to town.

 After a long ride, taking a taste of the moonshine occasionally, Leander passed by the familiar white church. Making his way toward Fancy Lounge, he felt a little beside himself.

 Stopping in front of the saloon, he slipped a pint in his coat pocket and made his wat to the door of Fancy Lounge. Entering the door, the smell of cigarettes and a loud ringing of stringed music flooded in around him. Walking through the room, many voices, laughter, people dancing surrounded him.

 A young, red-headed girl walked up to him and spoke in a soft voice,

 "Buy me a drink, there little feller?"

 The girl, not looking over fifteen, smiled and looked him in the eyes. Leander pulled out the pint bottle from his coat, and spoke,

 "Get a glass."

 She grabbed the bottle and spoke,

 "That'll not be necessary."

 "I made it myself," he spoke proudly.

 Looking into her shiny, light blue eyes, he examined the sparkling, bright teeth as they danced up and down. Her long, red hair, fluffed and fuzzy, swayed with the movement of her body.

 "Say" he began to hear her speak,

 "You are Leander Hollandsworth, ain't you? Bet you've never seen me before. I'm Sofie Shoalter. You know, Lester Shoalter's girl? You know my paw, don't ye'?"

 Developing a mental picture of Lester Shoalter, Leander looked at her and spoke,

 "I'm eighteen years old, ye' know!"

 "Really?" she answered. "You don't look it."

 Pausing for a moment, she looked at him straight in the eyes,

 "Why don't ye' come over and visit me sometime, Leander? My Paw will be glad to' meet ye'. He knows your dad."

 Leander couldn't find the words to answer. He felt for the bottle and pulled it out. Taking a big drink, he drew a deep breath, and passed it to her, and spoke,

 "I'll see ye' later. I got some business to take care of."

 "Leander walked out the door, took another deep breath, and spoke aloud,

 "I guess I'd better deliver that whiskey and git on back home."

 Walking out to where his horse was tied, he untied the saddlebags, and walked back into the bar. Walking over to the bartender, he spoke,

 "I brought you a load, Mr. Phillips."

 "Are you Hollandsworth's boy?" he asked.

 "Sure am. Pa's lettin' me make the run, this time."

 Looking into the saddlebags, Mr. Phillips continued,

 "Well, you listen boy, the next time you bring anything in here, you bring it around the back, you understand?"

 Leander nodded in agreement.

 "How many ye' got here?" Mr. Philips asked.

 "There's seven pints in each side." Leander answered.

 Mr. Phillips counted out twenty dollar bills, reached them to him and pointed toward the door,

 'You better git on out'a here, now."

 Leander crammed the money into his front pocket and walked toward the door. As he left, he felt one of his feet stumble on a chair leg. The moonshine was taking effect. As he climbed into the saddle, the surroundings seemed to spin and blurr. Riding by the sheriff's office, he felt himself slip from the saddle and hit the ground with a thud. Finding himself pushing up off of the dusty ground, he strained to focus upon a figure walking toward him.

 "It's the sheriff!" went through his awareness. His heart jumped to his mouth. Remembering that he had a pint of moonshine in his pocket, he struggled to get up and move toward the stirrup hanging from Ted's left side. Realizing that he was not able to jump into the saddle as he usually could, he tried to steady himself and appear sober. Before he could throw the bottle away, the sheriff was on him, too close. He would be seen throwing it away! He would be giving himself away! But, if he kept it, he would be caught with it on him. Caught in a bind, he put his hands in his jacket pocket, and felt of the bottle, and watched the sheriff come closer.

 "Hey, there," the sheriff called out.

 "Havin' trouble?"

 Walking up to Leander, the sheriff looked him up and down. THe sheriff repeated,

 "Havin' trouble, neighbor?'

 Walking up to Leander, the sheriff looked him up and down. The sheriff repeated,

 "Havin' trouble, neighbor?"

 Searching for words, his tongue would not speak. His mouth was dry. Squeezing the pint bottle in his pocket, unconsciously, he looked into his eyes.

 "How much have ye' had to drink?" asked the sheriff.

 "none."

 Realizing the sheriff would be unlikely to believe that, Leander quickly addded,

 "Uh, one or two, sheriff."

 "Well, I believe you've had more than that." the sheriff replie. His voice reflected anger from the obvious lie.

 ""I believe you'd better tie up your horse and come over here with me." the sheriff said in a calm voice.

 Leander grabbed Ted's reins and started walking toward the nearest hitching post, opposite the sheriff's office. Looking over his shoulder, he noticed that the sheriff was waiting on him in the middle of the street. He walked Ted over to the hitching post, and tied him up. Kneeling down, he crossed under Ted to the other side and quickly pulled the bottle of moonshine out and dropped it near the hitching post. The sheriff studied his walk as he made his way back to the middle of the street.

 "What have you been drinkin' , boy?" the sheriff asked as Leander approached him. Not receiving an answer, the sheriff continued,

 "I'm goin' ta' hav' ta put ye' under arrest for bein' drunk in public. You’ll have to come with me, over to the sheriff's office. We'll have to put your horse in the stable.

 Afraid that the sheriff would find the moonshine, Leander spoke in a nervous voice,

 "Ted will be O.K., sheriff. I won't be over here long anyway, will I?"

 "Well, like I say, I'm placin' ye' under arrest. You're drunk! You can't even sit on a horse! You won't have no use for him tonight. We'll take good care of him. You don't want him standin' out here all night with a saddle on, do you?"

 Fright overcame any other sensation, Leander shuddered,

 "Under arrest? what for? Come on."

 As they walked toward the jail, the sheriff called out to the deputy standing in the door,

 "Go over there and pick his horse up, Sampy. I believe he's decided to stay all night with us."

 Glancing around occasionally, Leander watched the deputy cross the street. Stealing a final glance, as he entered the door of the sheriff's office, he watched the deputy pick the pint bottle up and hold it up to the light. His heart jumped to his mouth,

 "Two years in prison! Oh, my God! Oh, no! I can't believe this! This is not really happening! But, It's not a dream. Oh, my God!"

 "Hey Sheriff!" the deputy called from across the street.

 "Come here and look at this!"

 Watching the sheriff walk out to meet the deputy, Leander placed his hand over his heart, to try to quieten it. It was beating so hard. He was auable to talk and his heart pounded louder and louder. As the sheriff returned to the office, he had a grim look on his face. Sitting down in front of the sheriff's desk, Leander began to enter a state of shock. Holding the pint of moonshine in front of Leander, the sheriff asked,

 "Is this yours?"

 Thinking that he could talk them out of it by being honest, Leander answered meekly,

 "Well, maybe it is, and maybe it’s not."

 Waving the bottle in front of his face, the sheriff pressed his questions,

 "We found it under your horse!"

 "well, maybe it is, and maybe it’s not," Leander repeated, still hoping for mercy.

 "Look, I'm just a farm boy, don't ruin my life!"

 Now begging frantically, he continued with a trembling voice,

 "Give me a break! If you've ever given anyone a break, give me one!"

 The sheriff turned his back and nodded to the deputy,

 "Go fetch Judge Ballard. He'll want to know about this one."

 Leander fell silent. He crossed his arms and legs and sat motionlessly staring into the wall. Noticing that he was practically sober, he realized that he had been scared out of his drunken stupor, in a hurry. Then, he remembered about the moonshine, and a chill went through his stomach. He began to twist in the chair. After a long, silent wait, finally the door swung open and an elderly man entered. Dressed in a long, black overcoat and a black cowboy hat, Leander assumed this to be Judge Ballard.

 "What ye' got for me tonight, sheriff? the white-haired man mumbled as he took off his hat.

 The sheriff answered by nodding toward Leander. Then, the deputy entered the door with the saddlebags in his hand,

 "Look what else he had on his horse!" the deputy announced holding a bottle in his hand. Leander looked at the bottle in disgust,

 "I've never seen that before! Where'd that come from?"

 You're really tryin' ta' stick me, aren't you?":

 The deputy opened up the bottle and sniffed over the opening,

 "Yeah, it's the real stuff."

 "Is it yours, too?" the sheriff asked.

 "You know it's not!" Leander said strongly.

 "What about that other one?" the sheriff returned, pointing toward the pint found near Ted.

 Threatened by all of this new evidence that he knew nothing about, Leander answered with an angry voice,

 'None of it! What do you mean?"

 Staring at Leander, finally the sheriff nodded to him,

 "Well, come on. Let's go."

 About that time, the judge spoke up,

 "Uh, we're goin'ta hold you for begin drunk in public. It'll be twenty dollars to get you out. We're goin' ta have them bottles looked at, to see if your fingerprints are on any of them. If we find your fingerprints on any of them, we're goin' to charge you with trafficking with moonshine."

 "Fingerprints?" Leander echoed.

 "Yeah," the judge answered without looking up.

 "Do you want us to tell someone you're in jail? You want someone to come and get you out?"

 "After thinking a few seconds, Leander answered,

 "Yeah, tell my brother, Alvin to come and git me out 'a jail. He's livin' over in the hotel, across the street."

 "The Fancy Lounge?" the sheriff asked.

 "Uh, yeah, I think so." Leander answered.

 With that, Leander walked back toward the cell without being asked. As the sheriff followed behind him, the sheriff asked him in an amazed tone of voice,

 "Say it's not yours, hey?"

 As Leander watched the cell door swing to a close with a clang, he answered more determined than ever,

 "No, I've never seen none of it!"

 As he laid down on the concrete slab, no pillow or mattress, he stuffed his hands into his pockets and stared into space. Lying there without moving muscle, every five minutes, he thought,

 "Two years in jail."

 The thought would flash through his mind and his stomach would quiver and his heart would beat faster. He took a deep breath and sighed,

 "Oh, my God! In Jail! Boy, I've really done it this time."

 Then, he began to talk aloud.

 "Oh, God! Please help me! I've really done it this time. I'll never drink again. I'll go to church! You'll see. If you will git me out of this. You'll see! It won't be like before! I mean it this time! Help me, oh Lord. I really need your help, now. You'll see. Please help me! Have mercy."

 Worrying and praying, praying and worrying, for over an hour, he reflected upon his present state,

 "I was too drunk to stay on a horse an hour ago, and now, I'm in a situation too real to bear, too real to be a dream. I won't wake up. This is real. It is not a dream. This is worse than facing death!"

 After an endless period of waiting, finally, the sheriff walked back to the cell and opened the door. Without speaking a word, Leander walked toward the front office. There stood his brother, Alvin, waiting for him. Leander walked toward the door.

 The sheriff spoke out,

 "I have a year before I have to charge you on that moonshine. If it comes back with your fingerprints on it, we'll take you to court for moonshinin'. Your trial for drunkenness in public will be on the twenty-fifth of September."

 Looking at Alvin, the sheriff continued,

 "You his brother?" he asked.

 Alvin nodded his head.

 "Well, what is it, judge, to git him out?"

 "Ah, ten dollars, I guess." the judge responded.

 Alvin handed him the money, and motioned to Leander to follow him to the door.

 "Where's my horse?" Leander asked with an irritated voice.

 "He's in the stable, across the street. You'll have to pay to git him out. Stable rent, ye' know." the deputy added.

 Leander and Alvin walked out the door, into the street.

 "Boy, am I into it, now," Leander complained to his brother.

 "Ah, bein' drunk ain't nothing'," Alvin tried to comfort.

 "Yeh, they caught me with a bottle of moonshine!" Leander explained.

 "And, they they brought in some that I'd never seen."

 "Oh," Alvin said dropping his head.

 "They're goin' ta' send off the bottle and git my fingerprints off of it! Have you ever heard of such a thing?" Leander asked.

 "Fingerprints?" Alvin repeated in a puzzled tone.

 "Well," Leander continued, "I've never heard of that before."

 "Ah, you'll be O.K.," Alvin tried to calm him. "They can't do nothin' like that. They're just tryin' ta' trick ya'. You know how they do."

 "Well, thanks for gittin' me out, anyway," Leander said.

 "I'll pay you back somehow."

 With that, Leander went over to the stable to pick up Ted. Knocking for a while, finally a young boy appeared in front of the stable door.

 "Uh, I'd like to pick up my horse," Leander told him.

 "O.K.," the young boy said and entered back through the stable door. In a few minutes, the boy returned leading Ted by the reins.

 That'll be one dollar." the boy told him.

 Leander preached in his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill and reached it toward the boy and spoke,

 "Here, boy. Don't buy nothin' to drink. It'll git ya' in jail."

 Looking at Alvin, he spoke,

 "Thanks again, Alvin. Be seein' ye'. Come on out to the house, when ye' git a chance."

 Alvin walked away, toward the hotel and turned around and spoke,

 "Everything'll be O.K., Leander. Don't worry."

 Leander climbed onto Ted and wheeled him around toward the house. On the way home, he continued to ponder the events of the night.

 "Fingerprints?" he spoke aloud. "I wonder how they do that. Boy, they'll take me to court, and oh my God!"

 His heart began to pound harder,

 "I'll go to jail! Boy, I've really done it this time."

 Continuing to think about it, he worried and prayed all the way home. When he finally reached the house, he went straight to be. Lying on his back, he thought he would fall to sleep, but, after a few minutes, he was still wide awake?

 "Oh, no. I'm not goin' ta' be able to sleep!" he thought. The earlier events began to filter back to him. His heart began to beat faster.

 "Two years! Fingerprints! Moonshine!"

 Every time the thought came to him, his heart pounded faster. His body stiffened. He rolled over and back again. Throwing his arm over his eyes, he tried to rest. Rest was not to come, only worry.

 "Oh, my God! What if they talk to Mr. Phillips?" he thought, remembering the other bottles.

 "Oh, they'll charge me with selling moonshine!"

 Latching onto that thought, his heart raced again. He grabbed hold of his chest and pressed inward, trying to slow it down.

 "I'm goi' to have a heart attack if I don't stop worrying."

 He noticed his head was pressed as if there was a rubber band being tightened around it.

 "Oh, my God! I'm sunk! My life is gone! Two years, or maybe more. A six-foot cell for years! I can't stand it for an hour! What will I do? I won't be able to stand it!"

 As the dawn began to flicker above the hill, he thought on how he would usually be yawning, and getting up to milk; but, not today. Hew was unable to enjoy the beauty of the sun bursting over the hill.

 Leander began to think aloud,

 "IF dad gets pulled into this, he'll have to sell the farm! He'll have to sell everything! I won't be able to show my face. And, to think, I didn't think I liked it. I certainly didn't appreciate it; but, knowing that I will loose it, I realize how much it really means to me."

 Leaning over the edge of the bed, another thought suddenly struck him like a lightening bolt,

 Oh, my God! That drink I gave that red-headed girl! If they find out about that, they'll charge me with that, too!"

 As this thought ate through his head, he knew that fro relief would come anytime soon.

 "And, I gave her a drink! God is my only answer!" he realized aloud.

 Reaching for the Bible beside his bed, he opened it and turned to the first page. He began to read. His body relaxed slightly. Not being able to concentrate, he stared at the pages.

 "Well, I'm goin' to jail," he thought to himself.

 "But, I'll outlive it. In five years, no matter what happens, I will be free from this burden. Everything will be back to normal. I just got to put a little time between me and this night."

 With that thought, he calmed himself and began to read. Hearing a cow give a loud bellow, he realized he would have to do the chores. He had to!

 "I'll have to tell dad. He'll find out anyway. Oh God, have mercy. Don't destroy me this way. I'll stop. I'll do better. Give me a chance to show you."

 Doing the chores that day, Leander occasionally slipped into the barn and laid down. He had lost his appetite.

 That evening, his father passed by and he spoke,

 "Paw, ye know I was picked up in town yesterday for bein' drunk."

 "I might a' known it!" he replied. "Did ye' sell the liquor? Ye never did give me the money."

 Reaching into his pocket, Leander handed him the remaining money and explained,

 "I had to get Alvin to git me out of jail, an' he paid some of it. I had to use some of it."

 "Well, just don't ask to do it again, O.K.!"

 As the days passed by, Leander found himself getting weaker and weaker. Looking at the calendar, he watched out the window to see if the sheriff would come to take him back to jail.

 As the long, painful days passed by slowly, nothing seemed to change. Although his heart did not beat as fast, his appetite would not return. He was loosing weight daily, and spending most of the time lying down.

He felt like he was getting sick. Being too worried to know whether he was sick or worried, he began to feel a catch in his side. He could not lay down or take a deep breath. A catch in his side caused him to be unable to breathe except in small gulps. The pain was nearly unbearable.

 "Well, maybe I will be spared goin' ta' jail, after all!" he thought.

 "Is this your way, Oh God?" he asked aloud in painful agony.

 Soon his temperature soared. His bed, soaked everyday with sweat, began to stink. After a few days, he went into a coughing fit. Breathing slightly caused him to cough and gasp for breath for several minutes. Feeling of his head, he felt the wet, stringy hair. Looking at his hand, he could see that his hair was falling out! In a few days, however, he finally started to feel a little better. He gained enough strength to begin facing the daily chores without too much difficulty.

 "Anyway, it has been several days and the sheriff hasn't come by yet! The red-head has probably not said nothing."

 he thought to comfort himself.

 Gaining his composure somewhat, finally, the day for the trial had arrived. The day he was waiting for, September the twenty-fifth had arrived. His heart began to pound. He would soon know what would happen to him.

 Getting up that morning, he quickly saddled Ted and rode toward town.

 "Well," he thought, "I'll be O.K. in five years. I have a lot of time. I will outlive all this. I'll get a new start!"

 Feeling punished unjustly, he felt his eyes water. Swallowing roughly, he dropped his head toward the ground. He thought again about all the possible outcomes. Having thought of it all for several days and nights, he rolled his head toward the sky. Riding along, he began to talk to himself,

 "How strange that I've spent my life wanting this and that, for nothing! I should have been more happy! Just to be free and healthy is enough. I will never be sad again! If I get out of this; or, when I outlive it, I'll be happy just to be free and healthy! I should have been going to church instead of going out and getting drunk! I'll never do it again! I know that!"

 Feeling comforted by these thoughts, he arrived in town half in shock, feeling numb, in a dream, dazed. Looking up at the pillars of the courtroom, he entered and looked around the large room. Several small groups of people were talking in a whisper. Leander walked to the front of the room and took a seat. Waiting for whatever was in store of him, he looked at the clock in the corner of the room. Ticking away, it was 8:30. Figuring that things would get underway by 9:00, he pulled out his Bible and began to read.

 "Maybe somebody will see me reading this and think that I've changed my ways," he thought. Feeling a painful ping of guilt, he closed the Bible and slipped it back into his coat pocket. hearing someone open the door behind him, he turned around and saw the sheriff anc deputy walk in. The sheriff walked down the isle and bent over toward him. He trembled and his eyes opened wide,

 "Uh," the sheriff began, "Leander, if you plead guilty to being drunk in public, we'll forget the rest."

 With a sigh of relief, Leander shook his head in agreement.

 "Thank you, Lord!" Leander said under his breath.

 In a few minutes, the judge came out of the back room behind the jury box, and the deputy called out in a loud voice,

 "All rise for the honorable Judge Ballard."

 Leander stood up, unaware of anyone else in the courtroom. Sitting back down, the sheriff said in a loud voice,

 "We will hear the first case, the State Verses Otis Wilson."

 Trying to listen to the case, he could hear the conversation only slightly. Finally, he heard the call,

 "The state verses Leander Hollandsworth."

 Moving up to face the judge, Leander noticed the sheriff step up beside him to face the judge also.

 "The state charges Leander Hollandsworth with being drunk in public." said the sheriff to the judge.

 The judge looked over his wire-rimmed glasses toward Leander and asked,

 "How do you plead, Mr. Hollandsworth?"

 "Guilty, ye honor!" Leander heard himself voice meekly.

 "The court fines you ten dollar!" the judge declared.

 "I see you have posted that for bond, so, You'll be free to go. If you come before me agina, you can expect to spend some time in jail!"

 Weak at the knees, Leander replied,

 "Thank ye', judge! I'll never drink again! You can bet on that!"

 "That's what they all say!" the judge returned. As he spoke, he turned to face the courtroom and spoke in a loud voice,

 Next case!

 Leander walked away. Grabbing the sheriff's hand, he spoke,

 "Thank ye' sheriff for giving me a break!"

 Walking out of the courtroom, he could not feel his feet hit the ground. In a state of shock, he walked out onto the street and breathed a sigh of relief. Climbing onto the saddle, he spurred Ted homeward.

 "I can't believe it! I'm O.K.! I believe I'll be O.K. Boy, Oh Boys! That was too close! he spoke aloud.

 As he rode, the pressure lifted from his forehead.

 "I'll keep my promise. You'll see!"

 A SPIRITUAL BIRTHDAY AT NINTEEN

 The sound of a cardinal seemed to be getting louder and louder. The rush of a summer breeze began to arouse Leander from a deep sleep. The light began to filter through, brighter and brighter. He began to collect identity. Monitoring his body, he felt his head throb slightly. As his eyes opened slowly, he automatically looked through the window and brown fields became visible. The sun was peeping over the mountain and the sky, turning pink, seemed to be gaining a light blue tint. A fine mist drifted toward the foot of the mountain, and slowly upward.

 Leander stretched his arms high above himself and took a deep breath. Pushing himself out of bed, he spoke aloud,

 "Another beautiful day. Guess I'd better get goin'. Got a lot to do today. Don't guess I can put it off. It's my birthday, my spiritual birthday!"

 He began to think about what he would do that day. Slipping his bibbed overhauls on, he picked up his shirt and continued to dress. He walked through the bedroom and down the steps, through the hall and into the kitchen. He focused upon his father sitting in his customary seat.

 "Paw, can I take Ted to town, today?" I'd just like to go in and visit around."

Well, I guess so. Maybe ye' can pick up a few tings for ye' mother."

 "Yeah," she remembered. "I need some cornmeal and baking powder."

 "O.K.," Leander replied. "I'll be home before dark."

 "I know you will, Leander." she replied. "I"m so glad you started goin' ta' church. I pray for the day all of the family will go!" she spoke with a smile.

 "I am too." Leander agreed.

 Leander finished eating, saddled Ted, and began the long ride into town. Enjoying the beautiful sights around him, the miles passed quickly, and soon Mr. Dalton's log house came into view.

 "Wonder if he's home?" Leander thought. "Haven't seen him in a while."

 Riding closer, he caught sight of Mr. Dalton's gray head, bent over a block of wood. AS he pulled the axe back for another swing, he turned and looked toward Leander.

 "hey there, Leander! Mornin' ta' ye'!"

 "Mornin' Mr. Dalton. How ye been doin'?"

 "Fine, Can't complain, don't reckon. Garden's did good. Cow is givin' lots a' milk. Uh, I dug about a' 'sang this past summer. Can't beat that. How’ve you been doin', Leander?"

 "The Lord's been good to me, Mr. Dalton. I've been in the belly of the whale, and teh Lord delivered me up, an' put my feet on solid ground!"

 "Well, good for you, Leander! I heard you started goin' ta church. I was glad ta hear it!"

 "Yeah, since Jesus came into my heart, I've been a changed person."

 "Care for a chew, Leander?" he asked without looking up.

 "Naw, reckon not." Leander answered in thought. "Well, I see you're still cuttin' wood."

 "Uh huh, expectin' another hard snow storm any day now."

 "Well, ye mind if I help?" Leander asked hopefully.

 "I reckon not." He returned.

 "I'd be glad to help, Mr. Dalton."

 "I reckon I can manage. I have 'bout enough, anyway." he explained.

 "Well, can I help you with anything?" Leander added.

 "I guess not, Leander." Mr. Dalton answered in a puzzled tone.

 "Well, guess I'll be on my way, then. I'll stop in an' see ye' again some time. Can I pick up anything for ye while I'm in town?"

 "I guess not. " Mr. Dalton answered as he drew the axe back.

 Mounting Ted in a single whirling movement, Leander smiled and waved to Mr. Dalton. Giving Ted a nudge, he moved forward.

 Continuing the ride to town, he thought aloud,

 "Well, I wish he would have let me help him. Guess I'll help him with something later.

I'll stop in and talk with him again, on the way back."

 Passing by an occasional house now, the town came into view. Passing by the church, he rode toward the school grounds. Riding up to the swings, he twisted from the saddle and dropped to the ground. Turning in a circle to view the town, he noticed a young boy sitting on the ground near the swings. As he walked toward him, the boy looked up and began to speak.

 "Hello. I believe I've seen you here before."

 With a distant glare, the boy turned and traced a squirrel as it scampered from an oak tree.

 "Yeah," Leander spoke, ": I remember you. You were sitting here a couple of years ago. Your name is Charlie, ain't it?"

 "Yeah." he answered slowly. "What is your name?"

 "Leander." he replied and continued. "Do you go to church, Charlie?"

 "No, I used to. I haven't been in a while, though."

 "Well, you need to start back. It'll be a blessing to ye'!"

 "Well, since my mom quit goi', I kind of got out of the habit."

 If yo started to go, maybe she would go with you!"

 "Maybe," he answered.

 "I'll be there, Sunday. Why don't you come?"

 "Well, maybe I will."

 "nice to see you again, Charlie."

 As Leander turned toward the street, he thought to himself,

 "Wonder how Mr. Music is getting along? Believe I'll go an' see him"

 Walking toward the store, a mental picture of the last visit came into consciousness. He spoke aloud,

 "May God forgive me!"

 Looking through the window, he could see Mr. Music at the counter. The bell clinged as he entered the store and walked toward him.

 "Hello, Leander." Mr. Music greeted him in a friendly voice.

 "Hello, Mr. Music." Leander returned with a slight smile.

 "What can I do for you, Leander?" Mr. Music enquired.

 "Guess I'd better pick up some cornmeal and baking powder."

 Watching Mr. Music turn and begin to search the shelves, the candy jar came into view. The mental image of him sticking his arm in as a child came into view. Shaking his head in disbelief, he heard Mr. Music speak,

 "Here ye are, Leander. Something else for ye'?"

 "Naw, reckon not. Ye' doin' all right, Mr. Music?"

 "Doin' pretty good for an old man. " he replied with a smile.

 Shaking his head in understanding. Leander picked up the bag and spoke,

 "Ye can put that on the bill, Mr. Music. Nice to see ye"

 Walking into the street, he saw the sign 'THE FANCY LOUNGE', and a pang of fear came over him.

 "Guess I'll pass on that. I'm sure glad I don't do that anymore. I guess I could have a cup of coffee, no harm in that."

 Moving across the street, as he approached, his heart increased in pace. Sitting down at the nearest table, he looked in to the street and watched as people hurried by. A mental voice came into his awareness. HE tried to block it off by stretching, but it persisted. AS the voice continued to speak, his attention shifted to a mental picture. He could see a lake, with a reflection of a long beam of light, like the moon, but, much brighter. He shifted his attention to the fluttering of his left eye. He breathed slower. His hands relaxed. His body relaxed. His pulse slowed. His heart slowed. His blood pressure dropped.

 The voice spoke softly,

 "There is nothing but your mind."

 The warmth of the sun on his skin was soothing. His left hand floated toward his head. The inner voice continued in a soft whisper,

 "You can sleep and not know you are sleeping. You can dream and not know you are dreaming. Give of yourself to others. IF the gift is judged unworthy, return the peace to yourself and shake the dust from your feet. It will be more tolerable elsewhere. Be merciful, pure in heart, forgive and make peace. Do these things unselfishly. Fear not death, for your treasure is in heaven. Love yourself, love your brethren, love your father, love your mother, love people, love beauty, love, love, love, love."

 He could now hear the whispering wind, the rustle of leaves, and a small child appear before him. He wondered who the child was. He watched the child change slowly. He recognized the child to be himself. He watched the child grow older week by, week, month by month, year by year. The child matured into his size and spoke,

 "A man's body is his own. When he gives his body, he is giving the only thing which really belongs to him. All creatures and objects are placed here by God. If you are merely giving to God, what is already God’s you are not giving anything. We must acknowledge first the goodness of God. Even though we suffer pain, it is what he has done for us. Give me strength Oh God, and I will repay you in pain. To offer to God what was not given by God, the ability to endure physical pain, is the ultimate gift of Man. If you make a vowel to give pain in a time of anxiety, in return for strength from God, yo must honor the vows, or the forces of nature will punish you in due time."

 "Sir! Sir! Excuse me, sir. I'm sorry to disturb you. But, you uh, may I help you?"

 Regaining his grip of the world about him, Leander jerked his feet upward, and leaned forward in a reflex action. Looking around, he focused upon the waitress staring into his eyes, a few feet away.

 "I say," the waitress repeated. "May I take your order?"

 "Uh, just a glass of water."

 "Is that all?" she asked in a puzzled tone.

 "Oh, I reckon that'll be all." Leander replied, and continued, "Say, you goin' ta' church, tomorrow?"

 "Well, I hadn't thought anything about it." she answered hesitantly.

 "Ye really ought to go! It'll bless your heart."

 "I'd been thinkin' I needed to start again, some time."

 "Oh, don't put it off!" he encouraged. "You'll be there! I know you will."

 "Well, " she replied slowly, "Maybe."

 "Great! I"ll see you there."

 As the house came into view, Ted picked up the pace for the remaining one hundred yards to the barn. Leander quickly removed the saddle, the blanket and the bridle and gently gave Ted a slap and watched him trot off toward the field. Leander continued to gaze at Ted, watching him slow, bend his head down and start to nibble on a clump of grass.

 Leander moved toward the house. Walking at a slow pace, he ascended the steps, and impulsively sat down in the rocking chair on the porch. Rocking back and forth, he gazed toward the mountain top in front of him. The sun was falling behind the mountain, and a cool shadow crept over the porch. The birds were singing, and he rocked back and forth listening to the 'symphony'.

 He spoke aloud,

 "Pain? I wonder if it is physical pain, or mental pain? Or, is it both? Well, do I cause the pain, or, just wait until it happens and not complain. Or, should I sacrifice? God will guide me. I will know when the time comes. I'll be ready."

 Looking toward the sky, two stars flickered near the full moon. The sky was still bright in places not covered by thin, red clouds. The night sounds echoed through the holler, off of each mountain.

 Leander felt himself raise out of the rocker and enter the house. Gliding up the steps, effortlessly, he opened the door to the bedroom. The room was warm and comfortable. Moving to the bed, he removed his shoes, and paused to listen to the rhythmic night sounds grow louder. Removing his clothes and kicking off his boots, he dropped back on the bed, and drew a deep breath.

 Looking upward, into the darkness, the night sounds grew louder and louder. The sounds seemed to fade as he lost consciousness, into a deep sleep. His awareness dropped away. The veins in his stomach relaxed, and his eyes drifted backward, and his breathe slowed. His heart slowed. He was asleep.