



The Bake Oven

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The Fathers were not the men who built it. They were the ones who took it apart. It stood at the edge of Boley for easy access to townspeople (who needed it most) and those further out. The Morgan brothers managed it, along with their wives. ^{children} They pierced turkeys and whole pigs for the spit; they turned the ribs and rubbed extra salt into the sides of beef. Those were the days of slow cooking when flames were kept so low a twenty pound turkey roasted all night and a side could take two days. Whenever meat was slaughtered, or when the taste for unsmoked game was high, ^{Boley} citizens brought it to the oven and stayed sometimes to fuss and quarrel with the Morgan family about seasonings and the proper tests for "done." They stayed to drink cool water in the shade of the eaves and gossip. There were the churches, the All Citizens Bank, the school house, five stores selling dry goods, feed and food--but the traffic to the Bake Oven was greater than all of those. Built of hand pressed bricks--pale ^{as} like the desert soil, round as a hive, the Bake Oven was surrounded by tools and tables and buckets of sprinkling water. Any child in earshot was subject to being ordered to fan flies, ^{haul} ~~more~~ more wood, clean the tables ^{or beat} and ~~tamp~~ the earth floor with a tamping block.

No family need ^{ed} more than a simple cook stove as long as the oven was alive, and it always was. Even in 1930 ^{before it was clear that} when talk about electricity remained just talk, and ^{when} gas lines and sewers were Tulsa marvels. ^{The Oven stayed alive,} Running water, although limited to the center of town, was not missed at the Bake Oven because ^{there was a} of the sweet water creek nearby.

The kitchen is bigger than the whole house in which he was born. The old house they call it still. The one in Boley that his grandfather built. The house they live in now is newer and Fairly is resplendent compared to Boley which WRACKED, DIVIDED AND CONTENTIOUS ATE ITSELF ALIVE IN 1930. That IS WHY THEY ARE HERE, THE FATHERS, TO MAKE SURE IT NEVER HAPPENS AGAIN. That nothing inside or out brings rot into the one all black town worth the name. ALL THE OTHERS FAILED FIVE THOUSAND CITIZENS BECAME TWELVE HUNDRED, THEN FIVE HUNDRED, THE EIGHTH AS COTTON FAILED OR RAILROADS LAID TRACKS ELSEWHERE. SUBSISTENCE FARMING, ONCE THE ONLY BOUNTY A LARGE FAMILY NEEDED BECAME OVER TIME AND WITH SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS JUST SCRAP FARMING AS EACH MARRIED SON GOT HIS BIT WHICH HAD TO BE BROKEN UP INTO MORE BITS FOR HIS CHILDREN UNTIL FINALLY THE OWNERS OF THE BITS AND PEICES WELCOMED AN OFFER FROM WHITE SPECULATORS SO EAGER WERE THEY TO MOVE ON SOMEWHERE AND TRY AGAIN.

FAIRLY WAS EXEMPT. THE FATHERS OF FAMILIES WHO SAW THAT THERE WAS NO HOPE FOR BOLEY TOOK THE TOWN TO PIECES AND CARRIED THE PEICES ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY MILES WEST TO A DELICIOUS AREA OF UNASSIGNED LAND.

End
water creek nearby.

the monthly
set to
a postman
bringing
mail

By 1950 Boley's proud streets were weed choked. Eighty people lived there waiting for mail from long gone children. ~~Twenty years earlier~~ ^{convinced their future} The Fathers ~~stared at their future~~ then broke up the oven. They packed it on two wagons before they took apart their own beds. Fifty families. At first light in the middle of August moved out. Fifty families headed deeper into Oklahoma, further from the inside rot of Boley. ^{the dream} ~~the town~~ ^{their dreams}

"How long," asked the children. "How long will it be?"

"Fairly soon," the parents replied. Day after day the snwer was the same. "Fairly soon. Fairly soon." And when the reached the Spavinaw River curling through gentle hills dotted with x and falcons it did seem fairly, if not too, soon.

^{Twenty year later}
~~In 20 years~~ Fairly was. ^{its own dream} ~~+++~~

But
↑

The ~~where~~ where the Bake Oven
had been, snakes slept in the sun.

[The Bake Oven]

The Fathers were not the men who built it. They were the ones who took it apart. It stood at the edge of Boley for easy access of townspeople (who needed it most) and those further out. The MOrgan brothers managed it, along with their wives and children. They pierced turkeys and whole pigs for the spit; they turned the ribs and rubbed extra salt into the sides of beef. Those were the days of slow cooking when flames were kept so low a twenty pound turkey roasted all night and a side could take two days. Whenever stock was slaughtered, or when the taste for unsmoked game was high, Boley citizens brought it to the bake oven and stayed sometimes to fuss and quarrel with the MOrgan family about seasonings and the proper tests for "done." They stayed to gossip and drink cool water in the shade of the eaves. There were the churches, and All Citizens Bank, the school house, five stores selling dry goods, feed and food--but the traffice to and from the bake oven was greater than all of those. Built of hand pressed brick--pale as the desert, round as a hive, the bake oven was surrounded by tools and tables and buckets of sprinkling water. Any child in earshot was subject to being ordered to fan flies, hual wood, clean the work tables or beat the earth floor with a tamping block.

No family needed more than a simple cook stove as long as the oven was alive, and it always was. Even in 1930 when everything else about Boley was dying; when it was clear that talk about electricity would remain ju^st talk and wh^en gas lines and sewers were Tulsa marvels, the oven stayed alive. Running water, although limited to the center of town, was not missed at the bake oven because there was a sweet

water creek nearby.

But the young and newly married men were no fools. In 1930 they satred at the shrivlled future then broke up the oven. They packed it on two wagons before they took apart their own beds. Fifty families. At first light in the middle of August fifty families moved out--headed not for California, but deeper into Oklahoma, further from the inside rot of the dream town .

"How long," asked the children. "How long will it be?"

"Fairly soon," the parents replied. Day after day the answer was the same. "Fairly soon. Fairly soon." And when they reach a Spavinaw River curling through gentle dotted with XX and falcons it did seem fairly but not too soon.

What they left behind was a dream town whose proud streets were weed choked and eighty stubborn people waiting for the monthly visit of a postman bringing mail from long gone children. Where the Bake Oven had been green snakes slept in the sun.

The kitchen is bigger than the whole house in which he was born. The Old House, they call it still, The one in Boley that his grandfather built The house they live in now is nicer and Fairly is resplendant compared to Boley which, ~~divided and contentious in 1930, ate itself~~ ^{by} alive in 1950. That is why they, The Fathers, are here in this convent. To make sure it never happens again. That nothing inside or out brings rot into the one all black town worth the name. All the others failed: Langston etc. [name several--indicate how many in total]. Five thousand citizens becoming twelve hundred, then five hundred, then eighty as cotton collapsed or railroads laid tracks elsewhere. Subsistence farming, ^{once} ~~one~~ the only bounty a large family need^{ed} became, over time and with succeeding generations, just scrap farming as each married son got his bit which had to be broken up into more ^{pieces} bits for his children until finally the owners of the bits and ^{pieces} welcomed an offer from ^a white speculators, so eager were they to ^{get out} ~~move on elsewhere~~ and try again.

Fairly was exempt. The Fathers ~~of families who~~ saw that there was no hope for Boley took the town oven apart and carried the bricks and the hearthstone one hundred and forty miles west ⁱⁿ to a ~~delicious~~ ^{the} ~~area~~ of unassigned land at the edge of the Creek Nation.

I made her laugh out loud and wouldn't have been insulted by it if I had known then how seldom she did it. It was my rhinestones that made her throw back her head like that and let her shoulders rise and fall ~~in laughter~~. Not the rhinestones I was showing her, but the ones I remembered and ^{was trying} ~~tried~~ to describe ~~to her~~. Maybe just me is old enough to love them ^{that hard} ~~so~~. When they appeared in the stores ^r on peices of black velvet I couldn't stand not looking at them. My blood tickled me every time. I knew diamonds were better things of course. Expensive and ^{little} ~~too~~ small and all. But ~~not~~ prettier than those big rhinestone clips, the finger rings, the bracelets piled up with stones of every shape, ^{the shoe buckles} ~~the shoe buckles~~ * She laughed at me, at what I said, and I took against her right then. She said she didn't care nothing for little bitsy diamonds either, but had I seen real diamonds? Raw? Unpolished? Big as pullet eggs but rough? In her country, she said, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, saphhires were everywhere and gemstones were pebbles for children to play with. I took all of it as the ignorance ⁺ ~~and~~ jealousy of an old woman bent on making out like her life, her youth was better than anybody coming along afterwards. I decided to move on; to stay a few days, rest and then move on somewhere else.

That was twenty-one years ago and I miss her every day of my life.

* And necklaces

A sleepless^s woman could rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight. And if ^{she} ~~hse~~ felt like it she could walk out the yard and on down the road. No lamp and no fear. ^A ~~No~~ crackle from the side of the road could ^{never} scare her because whatever it was that made the sound, it wasn't something creeping up on her; nothing for ⁽⁸⁰⁾ miles around thought she was prey. She could stroll as slowly as she liked, ~~be~~ thinking of food preparation, of family things, or lift her ^{eyes} ~~head~~ to ~~the~~ stars. ^{and think of nothing at all.} ~~Without a lamp or~~ ^{Lampless and without} fear she could make her way. And if a light shone from a house up the road ~~a bit~~ and the cry of a colicky baby caught her attention, she might step over to the house and call out softly to the woman inside trying to soothe the baby. The two might take turns massaging the soft stomach, rocking, or trying to get a little soda water down. When the baby quieted ^{gossiping and} they could sit together for a spell, chuckling low so as not to wake anybody else.

The woman could decide to go back to her own house then, refreshed and ready to sleep, or she might stay her direction and walk further down the main street toward the Bake Oven that The Fathers had brought from Boley brick by brick. There are three churches in Fairly. They differ on a lot of things but not everything. The Bake Oven is one of the things ^{they agree on.} ~~that makes for harmony.~~ It's almost ~~like~~ a church itself.

differ on a lot of things but not everything. The bake oven is one of the things they agree on. It's almost a church itself.

The original oven had an iron lip on which the smith had carved BEWARE THE FURROW OF HIS BROW. Or so most of the original townspeople believed. In the taking apart of the oven, and its reconstruction in the new town, the lip had broken away leaving only THE FURROW OF HIS BROW intact. Second, third generation townspeople were impressed with Arlene Dempster's correction (based on her recollection of having traced the words with her seven year old fingers the very day the oven was reassembled) that it actually was BE THE FURROW OF HIS BROW. A whole different thing. One that stirred up irreconcilable controversy mitigated by a third reading of the oven lip which confounded things much further. By 1963, there was a group insisting that the sentence read and meant: WE ARE THE FURROW OF HIS BROW. These several meanings ushered in and paralleled the differences in the three churches: The Baptist Church underscored service and obdience; the AME Zion was aggressive, militant and often accused of being as self-regarding as the Catholic remnant out in the Convent. The Prince of Peace Apostles assuming the elevated position

of the We ARE the Furrow group.