



Chapter One and Chapter Two

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PARADISE

Chapter One

They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need for hurry out here five miles from Fairly which has seventeen miles between it and any other town. Hiding ~~places~~ ^{places} are plentiful in the Convent but there is time and the day has just begun.

They are nine, over twice the number of the women they are obliged to capture or kill and they have the paraphernalia for either requirement: rope, crosses of palm leaves, handcuffs, Mace and sunglasses along with clean, handsome guns.

They have never been this deep in the Convent. Some of them have parked Chevrolets near its porch to pick up an order of honey or have gone into the kitchen for a gallon can of barbecue sauce; but none has seen the halls, the chapel, the school room, the bedrooms. Now they will. And at last they will see the cellar and expose its filth to the light that is soon to scour the Oklahoma sky. Meantime they are startled by the clothes they are wearing--suddenly aware of being ill-dressed. For in the dawn of a July day how could they have guessed the cold that is inside this place? Their t-shirts, work shirts and dashikies soak up cold like fever. Those who have worn workshoes are unnerved by the thunder of their

steps on marble floors; those in pro-keds by the silence. Then there is the grandeur. Only the two who are wearing ties seem to belong here and, one by one, each remembers that before the place was a convent, it was a gambler's folly. Bisque and rosetone marble floors segue into teak ones. Ising glass patterns early morning shadow on walls stripped of fabric and white-washed thirty years ago. The ornate bathroom fixtures which sickened the nuns were replaced with good plain spigots, but the princely tubs and toilets they could not exchange bordered on corruption. The gambler's excess that could be demolished was, particularly in the school room (once a dining room) where stilled Arapajo girls once sat and learned to forget.

Now armed men search rooms where macrame' baskets float next to Flemish candalabra; where Christ and His mother glow in niches trimmed in grape vines. Nuns chipped away all the nymphs, but ^{curves clumps} ~~some~~ ^{the marble} of their hair ~~is~~ still ^{de among} ~~entangled~~ in the grape leaves. The chill intensifies as ^{the men} ~~they~~ spread through the building, taking their time, looking, listening, alert to the female malice that hides here and the yeast and butter smell of rising dough.

[tk]

^{One of them, he looks back,}
~~He looks back, this~~ young one, forcing himself to see how the dream might go. The woman, lying

uncomfortably on the tile, waves her fingers^{at him}--or seems to. So his dream is doing okay, except for its color. He has never before dreamed in such clear color.

The leading man pauses, raising his left hand to halt the silhouettes behind him. They stand, measuring their breath, making friendly adjustments in the grip of rifles and handguns. The leading man turns and gestures the separations: you two over there toward the kitchen; two more upstairs; two others into the chapel. He saves himself, his brother and the boy^{who thinks he is dreaming} for the cellar.

They part gracefully without words or haste. Earlier, when they blew open the Convent door, the nature of their mission made them giddy. But the venom is manageable now. Shooting the first woman (the white one) has clarified it like butter: the pure oil of hatred on top, its hardness stabilized below.

Outside the mist is waist high. It will turn silver soon, even yield a rainbow or two before the sun burns it off, exposing acres of clover and maybe witch tracks as well.

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 ~~never~~ ^{small but new} and Fairly is resplendant compared to Boley which, divided and contentious in 1930, had eaten

✓ Describe Kitchen

(Kitchen)

The kitchen is bigger than the house in which he was born. The ceiling high as a barn/s. More shelves than Ace's Grocery Store. The table is twelve feet long if an inch and it's easy to tell that the women they are ^{hunting} ~~hungin~~ have been taken by surprise. At one end a full pitcher of milk stands near four bowls of Shredded Wheat. At the other vegetable chopping has been interrupted. Stock ~~s~~ ^{one of} ~~simmers~~ on the eight burners on the industrial size stove; a dozen loaves of bread swell under white cloths. A stool is over turned. There are no windows.

^{called Sargeant}
One man [^] signals the other to open the pantry ~~door~~ while he goes to the back door. It is closed but unlocked. Peering out ^{Sargeant} ~~he~~ sees an ~~early rising~~ old hen with a bloody swollen tail. Cherished, he guesses, for delivering four or five eggs a week. Soft stuttering comes from the coop beyond; ^{YOUNGER} ~~other~~ chickens pad confidently into the yard, each flat eye indifferent to anything but hunger. NO foot prints disturb the dirt around the stone steps. He closes the door and joins his partner at the pantry. Together they scan dusty mason jars and what's left of last year's canning: tomatoes, green beans, peaches. Slack, they think. August just around the corner and these women have not even washed the jars.

^{Sargeant}
~~X~~ turns the fire off under the stock pot. His mother bathed babies in a pot no bigger than that. In the Old House, that is, the one in B. that his grandfath^e~~r~~ built. The house they live in now is much bigger and better ~~than the Old House~~ and Fairly is resplendent compared to B. which divided and contentions^s,

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ate itself alive by 1950. That is why they, the New Fathers, are here in the Convent. To make sure it never happens again. ^{the} ~~Tht~~ nothing inside or out brings rot into the one all-black town worth the name.

All the others merged with white towns or, if they didn't, failed completely: Langston, Boley etc. ~~tk~~. Five thousand citizens becoming ^{twelve} ~~twelve~~ hundred, then five hundred, then eight as cotton collapsed 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 peices for his children until finally the owners of the bits and peices welcomes ^{any} offer from a white speculator, so eager were ^{they} ~~th~~ to get out and try again elsewhere. A big city, a small town--anywhere that was already built.

Fairly was the exception and the solution. World War II veterans who loved what B. had been--the idea of it--who carried that idea from Bataan to Guam, from Iwo Jima to ^{Stutgaart} ~~Stutgaart~~, took the town's oven apart and caried the ^{bricks} ~~briks~~, the hearthstone and its iron plate one hundred and forty miles west of B., far from ^{the ancient} ~~what had been~~ unassigned land at the edge of the Creek Nation. They were not the men who built

it; they were the ones who lovingly took it apart. ^{Sargeant} He remembers the

ceremony when the iron lip was ^{re assembled and re-} at last cemented into place and ~~his grandfather~~

polishing the worn letters for all to see. ^{He had off} Cleaned ^{himself} of sixty-two years

of carbon and animal fat, ^{and} the words shone almost as brightly as they ^{must have}

^{Old Fathers first erected} ~~had~~ in 1888 when the oven ~~was built~~ ^{built}. At that time, it stood at the

^{Center} edge of B. Round as a head, deep as desire. ^{Old Fathers; all} ~~And~~ the ex-slaves, who

founded B. sealed their triumphant arrival with this priority. Living

in or near their wagons, boiling meal in the open, cutting sod and branches

for temporary cabins, they did this first: put most of their strength

into constructing the huge flawlessly built oven that both nourished

them and monumentalized what they had done. When it was finished--

each pale brick perfectly pitched; the chinmey wide, lofty, the pegs

and grill secure; the draft pulling steadily from the opening in back;

the fire door hanging ^{straight}, then the iron monger did his work.

From barrel staves and busted axles, from pot handles and mails, he

fashioned in iron plate five feet by two and set it at the base of the

oven mouth. It is not clear where the words came from. Something

he ^{head} ^{invented} or something whispered to him while he slept curled

over his tools in a wagon bed. His name was MOrgan and who knew

if he could even read the half dozen or so words he forged. Words

that seemed at first to bless them; later to confound them. They built a roof to shelter the area ^{and} people gathered under it for talks, society and the comfort of hot game. Later, when the prairie became a town ^{nicelike} with ^{a road down the middle} roads and good houses, one church, a school ^a and stores, the citizens still gathered there. 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 livestock was slaughtered, or when the taste for unsmoked game was high, B. citizens brought it to the oven and stayed sometimes to fuss and quarrel with the MOrgan family about seasonsings and the proper test for "done." They stayed to gossip and drink cool water in the shade of the eaves. In 1910 there were two churches and the All Citizens Bank, four rooms in the school house, five stores selling dry goods, feed and foodstuffs--but the traffic ^{to} to and from the oven was greater than all of those. And any child in earshot was subject to being ordered to fan flies, haul wood, clean the work tables or beat the earth floor with a tamping block.

No family in B. 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 the town was dying; when it was clear as daylight
that talk of ~~elctricity~~^{electricity} would remain just talk and when gas
lines and sewers were Tulsa marvels, the oven stayed alive.

Running water was not missed at the oven because there was
a sweet water creek nearby. As a boy he swung hand over hand
from the branches of cottonwoods lining ~~the creek~~^{it} and peered
through clear water at the stones below. He remembered stories
of ~~the~~ the blue dresses and bonnets the men bought for the
women with cash from the first harvest. The spectacular arrival
of the St. Louis piano, ordered as soon as the church floor
was laid. He saw [imagined] his mother a ten year old among
the other young girls clustered quietly about the piano, sneaking
a touch, a key stroke before the deaconess slapped their hands.
Their pure sopranos at rehearsal: "He will take care of you..."
Which He did, safe to say, until He stopped.

But in 1949 Sargeant, young and newly married, was
no fool. Even before he left for the war, X ites were leaving
and those who had not ^{packed} were planning to. He stared at ~~at~~ his fast
shrivelling future and it was not hard to persuade him to join

others veterans to try to repeat what the old folks had done forty=one years ago. Lessons had been learned, after all, about how to protect a town. So, like the Old Fathers who knew what came first, they broke up the oven and ^{loaded}~~packed~~ it into two trucks before they took apart their own beds. Fifteen families. At first light in the middle of August fifteen families moved out--headed not for California, but deeper into Oklahoma, as far as they could get from the inside rot of the town their grandfathers had built.

"How long?" asked the children from the back seats of the cars. "How long will it be?"

"Fairly soon," the parents replied. ^{four}~~Day~~ after ^{hour}~~day~~ the answer was ^{the}~~ten~~ same. "Fairly soon. Fairly soon." When they saw the Spavinaw River curling through the acres their pooled discharge pay had bought, through gentle hills dotted with tk and watched by falcons, it did seem fairly, if not too ^{soon}~~soon~~.

What they left behind was a dream town whose once

proud streets were weed-choked, monitored now by eighty stubborn people wondering which one of them could get to the Oleander post office where there might be a letter from long gone grandchildren. Where the oven had been, small green snakes slept in the sun. Who could have imagined that twenty-five years later a convent would beat out the snakes and become Fairly^{ly} only enemy?

Sargeant eyes the kichen shelves. He moves to the long table and lifts the pitcher of milk. He sniffs first and then, the pistol in his right hand, he uses the left to raise the pitcher to his mouth, taking such long, measured swallows the milk is half gone by the time he smells the wintergreen.

such long, measured swallows the milk is half gone [by the time

he smells the wintergreen.

[Bedrooms]

On the floor above, Roger and Fleet walk the hall and examine each of the four bedrooms with a name card ^{taped} ~~pasted~~ on its door. They exchange knowing looks ^{that} when they learn each woman sleeps not in a bed like normal people, but in a hammock; that except for a narrow desk or end table, there is no additional furniture. NO clothes, of course, because the women always wore no-fit, dirty dresses and nothing you could call shoes. But there are strange things nailed or taped to the walls or propped in a corner: a 1963 calendar, large x's through various dates; astrology charts, a ^{whip} ~~ship~~, a high school year book and, for people ^{who} swore they were Christians--Catholics at that--not a cross of Jesus anywhere. But what [?] alarms the men most are the series of infant booties and shoes ribboned to the hanging cord of a hammock in the last bedroom they enter. Fleet tells Roger to start looking in the four additional bedrooms on the other side of the hall. He himself moves closer to the bouquet of baby shoes. Looking for ^{what?} ~~hat~~? MORE evidence? He isn't sure. Blood? A little toe, maybe, left in a white calf skin shoe? He slides the safety of his gun and joins Roger's search across the hall.

10 11

These rooms are normal. Messy--one piled with food-encrusted dishes, dirty cups and a clothes-covered bed; another sports two rocking chairs full of ^{dolls} ~~dolls~~; a third the debris of a heavy drinker--but normal at least.

Fleet's saliva is bitter and although he knows this place is diseased, he is startled by the whip of pity flicking in his chest. What, he wonders, could do this to women? ^{up} How can their plain brains think of such things: disgusting sex, deceit and the sly torture of children. Here in wide open spaces near a quiet community like Fairly, tucked away in a mansion--no one to bother or assault them, they managed to call into question the value of almost every woman he ever knew. Here, in this place of all places. Well, it was true that Fairly was having a few problems like every other place in the state, and the country too for that matter for the last five or more years. But, unique and isolated, Fairly was justifiably proud of its people. It neither had nor needed jails. No criminals had ever come from this town. And the one or two who acted ^{humiliated} ~~embarrassed~~ their families or ^{endangered} ~~the town's~~ ^{view of itself} ~~reputation~~ were taken good care of. Certainly there wasn't a ^{misbehaving} ~~wild~~ woman anywhere in Fairly and

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the reasons were clear. From the beginning, ~~when he was twelve years~~
~~old~~, women were free and protected. A sleepless woman could rise from
her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in
the moonlight. And if she felt like it she could walk out the yard and
on down the road. NO lamp and no fear. A hiss-crackle from the side
of the road would never scare her because whatever it was that made
the sound, it wasn't something creeping up on her. NOthing for sixty
miles around thought she was prey. She could stroll as slowly as she
liked, thinking of food preparation, of family things, or lift her eyes
to stars and think of nothing at all. Lampless and without fear she
could make ~~her~~ ^{Y Y} way. And if a light shone from a house up a ways
and the cry of 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 of them might take turns massaging the infant stomach,
rocking, or trying to get a little soda water down. When the baby quieted,
they could sit together for a spell, gossiping, 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 road past the three churches toward the oven. The churches she would pass differed on a lot of things over the years, but not everything. The oven is one of the things they agree on. ONce upon a time it was practically a church itself.

MTK

[Chapel]

Harper doesn't smile, although when he and Sharktooth first enter the chapel, he feels like it because it was true: they worshipped idols. Men and woman in robes and capes of various colors stood on tiny shelves cut into niches in the wall. Holding a baby, gesturing, their dull faces faking innocence. Candles had obviously burned at their feet and, just like Rev. tk said, food had probably been offered as well because there were ^{little} bowls at the doorway too.

Whatever the differences among the congregations in Fairly, they merged solidly on the necessity of this action: Do what you have ^{to} neither the convent nor the women in it can continue.

13 14

Once the convent had been a true if distant neighbor.

Five miles through tk The mansion was there long before
Fairly, and the last boarding Indian girls had already gone
when the fifteen families arrived. Only the mother superior
with her servant lived there while the Bureau or the See or
something look for a buyer. There were none, although Sharktooth
said he'd inquired about it. Even talked to the mother superior
about what kind of money they were looking for. That was twenty
years ago when all their dreams were quickly coming true.

A three mile raod had been cleared, lined on one side in the
center of town by a paved walk. Seven of the New Fathers had
farms of more that three hundred acres, and three had five
hundred. The MOrgan's application for the bank had been approved.
And the oven, perfectly re-assembled withⁱⁿ the first month of
their arrival, was still a pleas²nt place to congregate.

~~Ossie Harper's father~~ and a man named Ossie
They had organized a horse race to celebrate its

completion. From ~~their~~ half-finished houses and just seeded
farms ~~they~~ people ~~around~~ brought what they had. OUt came stored away things

and things got up on the spot: guitars and late melon, hazel
nuts, rhubarb pies and a mouth organ^Y, a washboard, roast lamb,
pepper rice, Red Spot beer and raccoon meat ^{fried} ~~fired~~ and simmered
in gravy. The women tied bright scarves over their hair; the
children made themselves hats of ^{wild} ~~will~~ poppies and river vine.
X had a two-year old; X an auburn mare, both fast and pretty
as brides. The other horses were simply company: Jessie's
TK, Miss X's ancient featherweight, all four of Nathan's plough
horses, and a half broke-in pony that grazed ^{down} ~~behind~~ by creek
but nobody claimed.

The riders quarreled so long over saddle or bare
back the mothers of nursing babies told them to mount or change
roles. When the gun went off only three horses left forward.
The rest reared or ^{tried} ~~tired~~ to cut sideways over lumber stacked
near unfinished homes. As the race got finally underway, the
women yelled from the side of the road while their children
shre^{ik}ed and danced with delight. The men argued handicaps
and placed dollar bets with abandon. The pony got to the finish

first, but since it lost its rider two furlongs out, the winner
was the auburn mare. The little girl with the most poppies
on her head ^{present the 1st place} was chosen to put the ribbon hung with Ossie's ^{purple} ~~purple~~
heart ^{The winner's} ~~over the winner's head.~~ He was twelve years old then
grinning as though he'd won the Kentucky Derby. And now he
^{Somewhere}
^{down in the cellar}
was ~~here in the chapel~~ of a convent watching out for awful
women.

When they came, one by one, it was obvious they were
not real nuns, no, but novices, they thought, or lay workers.
Nobody knew, but it wasn't important to know because all of
them in their turn, like the mother superior and the servant
who used to, still sold honey, good bread and the hottest peppers
in the world. For a pricey price you could buy the whole purple
black pepper or a relish made from it. Either took the cake
for pure burning power. The relish lasted years with proper
attention, and thought ^T many customers tried planting the ~~pepper~~
^{the pepper}
seeds, ~~it~~ [^] grew nowhere outside the convent's garden.

Strange neighbors, but harmless. More than harmless, helpful even on occasion. They took people in--lost folk or folks who needed a rest. Guests reported kindness, profound silence and very good food. But now everybody knew it was all a lie, a front, a carefully planned disguise for what was really going on. Once the emergency was plain, ^{representatives} ~~the xxxxxxxx~~ from ~~of~~ all three churches met at the oven, because they couldn't agree on which ^{if} ~~church or~~ any church should host a meeting deciding what to do about the convent.

It was a secret meeting, but the rumors had been whispered ^{then Sordance pile accumulated and} ~~all around town~~ for more than a year. ^(over) A mother was knocked down the ^{stairs} ~~stairs~~ by her cold-eyed son. Three damaged infant^s born in one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymoons. Two brothers shot each other dead on New Year's eve. Trips to tk for v.d. shots increasingly common. And what went on at the oven was not to be believed, so when nine of the Fathers decided to meet there, they ran everybody off the place with shotguns and sat in the beams of ^{their} ~~their~~ flashlights to take matters into

Outrages
~~Evidence~~ that had been
accumulating all along
~~was become sudden~~
Shaped took shape
as evidence.

their own hands The ~~concrete~~ proof they had been collecting since the spring could not be denied: the one thing that connected all these catastrophes was the convent.

~~Both~~ Harper and Sharktooth ^{both} were there ^{at the meetings} and waved ~~their~~ flashlights over the worn words on the oven's iron lip:

THE FURROW OF HIS BROW

That much was clear. What was less so were the words, or (according to some) the word, ~~that~~^t began what was originally a complete sentence, some of which had been broken off and lost either when the ~~oven~~^f was disassembled or on the ~~journey~~^{Journey} west. The oldest^t women in Fairly said that when she was a girl in B., she had traced the whole sentence with her finger, and the sentence was

BEWARE THE FURROW OF HIS BROW

For a few years there was no argument about her memory. Then in 1955, someone said the sentence was actually

BE THE FURROW OF HIS BROW

Ten years later another interpretation was insisted upon: there had never been the letter B and the W was in the

wrong place. The true sentence was

WE ARE THE FURROW OF HIS BROW

(The cellar)

The Morgan brothers were once identical. Although they are twins, now their wives are more alike they they are. One, Deek MOrgan, is tough, loud and smokes Te Amo cigars. The other MOrgan hides his face when he prays. But both have money and both are as singleminded now as they were ^{in 1942} when they enlisted together. They have known battles in Berlin where arms flew like branches in a tornado. They were born to a man who knew other battles. They built Fairly on this knowing, nurtured her from the beginning when isolation was not always protection. When lost or aimless strangers did not just drive though hardly glancing at a sleepy town with three churches within one hundred feet of each other but nothing to serve a traveler: no diner, no police, no gas station, no public phone, no movie house, no hospital. Sometimes, if they were young and drunk or old and sober, they might spot three or four colored girls walk-dawdling along the side of the road. Walking a

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a few yards, stopping as their talk required; skipping on, stopping to laugh or slap an arm in play. The men get interested in them, perhaps. Three cars, say: a '55 Buick, green with cream colored interior, license number 085 B, a '39 Chevvy, black, cracked rear window, and the '53 tk tk. The drivers slow down, put their heads out the windows and holler over the fenders. Their eyes crinkled in mischief, they drive around the girls making U turns and K's, churning up lawn in front of Ace's. Circling. The girls' eyes freeze as they back into one another. Then one by one the Fathers come out of the houses, the store, the back yards, off the scaffold of the bank, out of the barber shop. One of the passengers has opened the front of his trousers and hung himself out the window to scare the girls. The girls are scared, but a few of the Fathers look at it and, in spite of themselves, smile, reluctantly because they know that, now, this man, till his final illness, will do as much serious damage to colored folks as he can.

More men come out, and more. Their guns are not

pointed at anyone, just held slackly against thier thighs.

Twenty men, now; twenty-five. Circling the circling cars.

Seventeen miles from the nearest 0 for operator and ninety from the nearest badge.

Now Deek, the leader aa always, ~~now~~ smashes the cellar door with the butt of his rifle. The other Morgan waits a few feet back with K.D., their nephew. All three descend the steps ready and excited to know.

They are not disappointed. What they see ~~is~~ the devil's bedroom, bathroon and his nasty play pen.

tk

Track. That's all K.D. could think of. Five hundred yard dashers or even the long mile runners.

The heads of two of them are thrown back as far as their necks allow; ~~their~~ fists tight as thier arms pump and stretch for distance. One has her hairy head down, butting air and time wide open, one hand reaching for a winner's wire nowhere in her future. Their mouths are open, pulling in breath

Chapter Two

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. Not the rhinestones I was showing her, but the ones I remembered and was trying to describe. Maybe just me is old enough to love them that hard. When they first appeared in the stores on pieces of black cloth I couldn't stand not looking at them. My blood tickled me every time. I knew diamonds were better things of course. Expensive and all. But too little and not prettier than those big rhinestone clips, the finger rings, the bracelets piled up with stones of every shape, the shoe buckles, belt buckles and necklaces to make your heart jump.

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, sapphires were everywhere and gemstones were pebbles for children to play with. I took all of it as the ignorant jealousy of an old woman bent on making out like her life, her youth, was better than anybody's coming along afterwards. I decided to move on. To stay a few days, rest, and then move on to somewhere else. That was twenty-one years ago and I miss her every day

of my life.