

FANNIE
AUGUST TWELVE, 1936

FANNIE HELD THE CHICKEN by its legs and stretched out its neck on the stump. And on the stump, with a calm unconcerned eye, the bird looked up at the blue. A pink fold of skin languidly closed over the black orb once, then once again. With a short grip on the axe, Fannie brought it down as decisively as its name. A girl of sixteen, yet she knew the art of the kill, the skill of the kill. She knew the finality of the kill.

Then she tossed the headless bird into the yard to work out its brief life in a ballet of dusty leaps and spins. The water in the iron kettle beside the wooden bench was waiting and when the chicken had taken its last jump, a final tour de force, holding it by its feet, Fannie plunged it into the scalding liquid. With hard, worn hands, she pulled white feathers in large clumps and gave them to the wind to carry to the woods behind the house.

Three dogs squirmed on their stomachs and whined for the innards.

She gutted the chicken, threw the offal to the dogs, and went into the kitchen. At the sink she cut up the bird and stared absently out the window. Off to the side, in the dirt drive, the 1934 Plymouth coupe with bug-eyed headlights watched the dogs tear at their prize. Brand new and black two years before, Fannie and Florence had used some of the settlement money—their parent's death money from the logging company—to paint it red. The fenders and running board they left black but chose yellow for the wire wheels. In defiance, they painted the car red—a symbol of their gumption and independence, which they flaunted.

In that Plymouth, a girl of fourteen with the woven black hair of youth, Fannie had given up her virginity. A woman of fourteen really, she gave it up to the boy she watched saunter into the kitchen.

"Chicken butcher to the world," he said.

His mirrored image shined in the window; abstraction of refracted light and reflected beam played at being a boy. Seeing the boy, she smiled, and watching his approach, she thought of that