

A First Time for Everything

(1)

The black chicken squawk and cluck and scatter when Beebe shoves ~~open~~ <sup>sp</sup> the ~~screen~~ <sup>screen</sup> door, and it's a curious thing to him why they just stand there peckly when the pistol went off inside.

On one hand he is holding the keys to his ~~Mama's~~ blue Fairlane and in the other, the pistol that made the innocent poppy ~~could~~ <sup>little</sup> that created a ~~dim~~ <sup>big</sup> ~~hole~~ <sup>bloodstain</sup> ~~between~~ <sup>spurt</sup> her ~~forehead~~ <sup>eyes</sup>. ~~Just above the nose~~

On his way to the car parked half in, half out of the carport he looks left and sees Miss Betty ~~holding~~ <sup>under her</sup> ~~watching~~ <sup>clothesline</sup>. He eyes her with a white towel in her hands. He sticks the pistol in the waist of his blue jeans and keeps walking till he gets to the car. He gets in, surches it on,

and backs down the concrete drive to the dirt road. Of course, now that he has the car to drive to school he can't go to school, and he doesn't know where he can go or when he can come back, and he feels sad driving past the old nine brick school with <sup>some</sup> yellow buses parked bumper to tail at the side entrance, and glad that he doesn't have to go.

He has to stretch his right leg to press down on the gas pedal, speeds up and heads down the open highway through the pine woods <sup>out to</sup> Fargo. He adjusts the rearview <sup>to align to the edge of the</sup> back glass - spotting his <sup>stomach</sup> <sup>face,</sup> <sup>horn</sup> <sup>ears</sup> <sup>(eyes)</sup> <sup>behind</sup> <sup>him</sup> <sup>in</sup> the <sup>rear</sup> <sup>view</sup> <sup>mirror</sup> so that he can see the <sup>horn</sup> <sup>behind</sup> <sup>him</sup> in the back glass, turn on the radio and tunes it to <sup>his</sup> WAAC, his favorite county station. Bart's Brooks sings "Friends in Low Places". He sings along, says

out at the green wood and the blue sky where the sun  
like a white explosion shined in his eyes. The song sounds  
new in his voice, but ~~gets old~~ <sup>gets old before</sup> it's over.

With his right leg stretched, the round tin of Skoal in his  
back pocket imbeds a burning circle on his buttock. He brakes  
the car in the middle of the road -- ~~puts it in park for park~~ <sup>shifts to gear shift to P</sup> --  
and squints at the road ahead and sticks his head out the  
window to look behind because he doesn't quite trust the  
rear mirror or the face that will pop up. Foot still on  
the brake pedal, he fishes the can of Skoal from his pocket  
and takes a pinch of the damp tobacco and drops his bottom  
lip, and the sharp smell and bitter taste combined makes him  
feel calm grounded in this going nowhere.

She had it coming to her. "Pop!" he says in sad laughter  
and swallows the build up of snuff juice. He hangs his head  
out the window and vomits cereal and milk and gall.

A red green log truck blooms on the road eye ahead,  
growing bigger as the closer it gets. He shifts the  
gear stick to D and meets it. Loads of logs waving  
on the ends like limber switches.

At the next dirt road on his left, he turns the  
car onto the ramp between the wide debate and slow motion  
on into the woods where gnarshoppers click each  
side of the beaten dirt road.

In his 14 years he's been all over Sevanooche  
County -- 3000 people scattered over 300,000 acres of  
~~farmland~~ pinewoods, fields and swamps -- but he's never  
been down this road before and he's never shot  
anybody before. But like his ma always said, "There's  
a first time for everything."

"Pop!" he says, ~~and~~ this time coddly ~~the~~ better sniff juice, then spits <sup>hard</sup> out the window to keep from messing up the car.

The blue vinyl seats and dash seem too bright, seem to magnify a box of Kleenex, center seat, and ~~his~~ mama's long brown leather pocket book by the door.

He ~~stops~~ <sup>brakes</sup>, this time surty <sup>engine</sup> off ~~the~~ before he tries to put the car in park and the whole <sup>sun-blazed blue</sup> car shrieks and satters and makes his teeth grind. What if he's tore up something? Testing, he

switches the ignition on again, <sup>and leaves the</sup> ~~but keeps~~ car in drive where it apparently works best and slide the pocket book to the center of the seat

and reaches his right <sup>hand</sup> inside. He's done it before -- lots of times. <sup>Smells her perfume that leaves red lip prints</sup> <sup>in the</sup> <sup>bathtub</sup> <sup>waste</sup> <sup>bin</sup> Looking for money.

feels the familiar long brown wallet, bulging with pictures and cards and such, takes it out and takes his time flipping thru <sup>but</sup> the plastic sleeves: a picture of himself as a baby in a blue bathing -- same picture as on <sup>top</sup> TV at home. Same brown ears <sup>but</sup> that's about all round and pink. He flips to

another -- his mama and two of her friends who work with her at the telephone office in Valdosta. Red lipstick, white teeth, heads close. He's never looked at the pictures before and can't imagine why he is looking now -- but he keeps flipping, looking for the man who might be his daddy. And just as

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he suspected, no man. Which means, just as he  
suspected, that he never had a Daddy who got killed  
in Vietnam. He's just Beebe No-Last-name,  
who probably would have a first name if he had,  
been nicknamed Beebe after his first gun.

He drives, with one hand on the wheel and the other  
in the ~~cool October air~~ ~~on the next curve~~, he is shocked  
to meet a red pickup loaded with deer hunters in camouflage  
clothes. He scoots down in the seat and raises  
both feet on the brake and his whole ~~body~~ ~~shoots~~ forward.  
His head hits the wind shield hard enough to crack. ~~He~~  
~~realizes~~ Blinding lights, but his eyes are closed. When  
he opens them he sees the red pickup on his right, edging  
the ditch, and the two men on back with deer rifles staring  
mean at him.

EARL IN THE YELLOW SHIRT

by

Janice Daugharty

(Radio)  
He listens to the truck motor buzz out in his buzzy  
ears and but does not look back till he has to spit out  
the window. Dust flying, scattering over the dense woods.  
He drives on, this time keeping to the right and slow  
around curves, just in case, though he does not meet  
another truck and can not even find a ~~place~~ <sup>place</sup> that does not  
look boggy when he can turn around and pull deep enough  
into, to back out without dropping the rear wheels into  
a ditch.

He wants to go home.

Paul Harvey is preaching on the radio, which  
means it's 12 o'clock now, and Beebe is sick of  
the dipping lumps of beef and would like something salty, something  
fizzy. He wants to see somebody, though he has no idea

who. Not Roger or Eddie, his buddies at school. <sup>5</sup>  
~~Why he's not every sure he likes him but hopes they like him.~~  
Not even Linda Sellers, who he's been pretty sure he was  
in love with since school started this year. He does  
kind of wish she could see him driving though. ~~Just~~  
~~this one~~. But what he'd really like is to go home and  
watch TV, on a school day, ~~get~~ <sup>eat</sup> barbeque ribs  
chips and drinking beer. ~~The person who he~~  
~~That's who he wants to~~  
see. Gerald, Jerry Jones, Oprah Winfrey. The  
usual mixed-up audience whose faces  
+ watch to a thin line that keeps ~~the~~ him right  
track and up-to-date. Maybe even Bob Barker on  
"The Price is Right," though ~~he~~ <sup>they</sup> really ~~to~~  
music and the squeak, Beebe feels that ~~to~~  
watch that show would be taking a step back to  
those days when he'd be out of school with  
a stomach ache or ear ache ~~and~~ <sup>empty</sup> watching  
TV till his Maer got home from work.

No MTV at his home because she  
refused to pay for cable.

Driving, looking for a place to turn around,  
Beebe reaches into her pocketbook again,  
fingers lip stick & balled up Kleenex and change  
on the bottom but no long hard wallet.

He looks at the floor on the other side  
and down & see it, at the floor beneath his  
feet and down & see it, then up at the  
dash and sees a red light on with a picture  
of a gas tank.

"Shit!" he says.

Next dirt road he angles the car in, ~~plugs~~ the car in park and then R foot is surprised when it backs up, so surprised that he mashes the gas too hard and locks into the dirt with his the back end dropping down & the front popping up so that he is staring at the tree tops, the blue sky, the sun overhead.

(Daddy not in Vietnam but divorced -- divorced Becker too) (radio)

He opens the door, tells it on how to hold it to keep it from slamming on him, climbs out and surveys the long blue body ~~where the~~ and the side resting on the ~~down~~ banked dirt.

~~He has to get home.~~ He has to get home. He starts walking. He has wrecked his mama's wallet, he has wrecked the car, ~~school~~ <sup>school</sup> ~~he is hungry~~ <sup>he is hungry</sup> ~~he is letting out soon.~~

Behind him he can hear Garth Brooks singing Frenchy Saphire; <sup>again</sup> ~~but~~ feels alright, even if his legs keep shaking and his feet on the boots feel numb.

By the time he gets to the highway, the sun is hanging just above the ~~pine~~ streaking between the valley of pines. He walks <sup>toward home</sup> along the right ~~shoulder~~ <sup>edge of the gravel road,</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~gravel~~ <sup>gravel</sup> and smells the ~~asphalt~~ <sup>asphalt</sup> and thinks hungry, tired, and thinks ~~he will hitch a ride with the first car~~ <sup>he will hitch a ride with the first car</sup> ~~comes along.~~ <sup>comes along.</sup>

But when he hears an engine roaring behind him,  
he loops down the wide <sup>shoulder</sup> ditch sloping through a  
ditch of black water and ~~hides~~ <sup>hides</sup> behind squats in  
a cluster of palm trees till the engine roar  
turns to purring. (Go back & mention videos from Holiday Motel)

All that seizes him, all that makes him stand  
again and walk out and keep walking; is thinking  
about what ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ or Hannibal the Cannibal would do  
under present circumstances. But even thinking about  
them doesn't work to keep him brave fast and sure, when  
two school buses pass in yellow blur and ~~the locusts~~ <sup>go on and he</sup>  
is left with only the silent murmur of locusts in the lonesome woods.  
~~start buzzing again in the quiet of the woods.~~

It is cold and <sup>busy dusk</sup> ~~dark~~ when he gets to the ~~street~~ <sup>woods</sup>  
behind the row of houses where he lives, where he  
used to shoot squirrels on every ~~like~~ <sup>like</sup> tree with his  
beebe gun. He can hear them barking, their claws  
scatting on the bark of gum trees and bay; he can  
see the ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ lights bloom in yards and hear  
the voices of ~~the~~ people and TV and live. ~~Officer~~ <sup>Pots</sup>  
plans clay and smells of fried ham or bacon, somebody  
sniffing. He wipes his nose on the sleeve of his denim  
shirt and starts down the deer path toward his house.  
Getting closer to the light he recognizes as the one with  
the basketball hoop nailed half way up the pole and decides  
he doesn't want to see it up close and veers right through  
bean and vines toward the ~~next~~ light at Miss Betty's house.

Toward the <sup>for</sup> ~~the~~ ~~laughter~~ of ~~the~~ TV coming closer,  
 in the grassed clearing of her yard, he shields ~~the~~  
 right left side of his face with his hand to keep  
 from seeing his own <sup>hally</sup> fight and the basketball hoop  
 and maybe a cordon of yellow ribbon like the kind  
 the cops string around a murder site on TV.

At the gray siding of <sup>Miss Betty</sup> ~~the~~ back wall, Keebee  
 steps up on top of her air conditioner & lifts the  
 screen & opens the window & steps inside the  
 dark bedroom, to the shade of light from the  
 hall, smelly food and heavy voices which sound too  
 familiar to be real.

He is halfway down the narrow hall when he  
 sees ~~her~~ <sup>Miss Betty</sup> standing with her hands rolled in her blue  
 plaid skirt. He stops.

"~~Don't~~ <sup>Don't</sup> ~~call~~ <sup>call</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~law~~ <sup>law</sup>, ~~he~~ <sup>Miss Betty</sup> says. "I'll be  
 hungry."

She holds out her arms, walking toward him.

He backs toward the bedroom. She stops. He stops.

"~~I didn't~~  
 "She ain't dead, is she?" he says.

~~Miss Betty~~ <sup>Miss Betty</sup> ~~stare~~ <sup>stare</sup> with her dark hair clinging to her face,

Miss Betty doesn't speak.

"Don't call the law," he says with his fists balled,  
 nails cutting into his palms.

"I have to, honey," she says. "But I'll hold you  
 in my arms till they get here."