

2ND DRAFT

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SIMILIES—WEATHER, ATMOSPHERE, SENSES—GO DEEPR INTO VELDA

repeats
TILL
TURN
BACK
PASS

CLEANUP

*Drop from Mike (more guards)
internet
Make
words
look at
word list*

Going to Jackson

By

Janice Daugharty

old hood-heavy

She 's been told that it might actually happen this time. She's been told that before.

Velda Crandell's last living son is driving her *long-bodied old plymouth* ~~old white Ford Falcon~~, taking her to

Jackson, fifty miles south of Atlanta, and it seems a waste of gas and time. It's a fine day, a working day, Tuesday, May 6, 2003, and Willis has taken off from his job at BellSouth where he works repairing phone lines in and around Sylvester, in southwest Georgia, home of all the Crandells, what's left of them.

On a hill across a choppy green pasture, east of the Interstate, magnolias on uniform trees each side of a little white church are beginning to ~~shuck down~~ *PUFF OUT* their creamy petals, boasting blood-red hearts. The trees top-out even with the steeple, perfect balance, perfect picture. A place where good people gather on Sunday. Used to Velda bought into that, but now she knows that people are not good and fire-ants fester in the hidden dips of the pasture and magnolias fall to the ground and turn brown after only a couple of days. She has tried not to show her family that bitter side of herself, her brooding they mistake for calm. The only way to make sense of life is

to expect nothing, she figures, keep it simple, milk each day for its pleasures, even if it's just food and drink. Proof looms up before her as a billboard sign replaces the church picture with the message "Magnolia Plantation, fresh orange juice, 2 miles, exit 89."

To counter that dread feeling of somebody stepping on her grave before Donald Jacobs can be executed, she speaks to Willis. "Seems like a waste, don't it?"

"What's that, Mama?" Willis is a big man—he has high blood. How come his face is red and bloated. Him not even fifty yet and he looks like he's sixty.

"Us going to Jackson again." In the side mirror, Velda can see her Linda's faded red car. Sun glaring on the windshield prevents Velda from seeing her daughter's face. Following Linda's car are the other automobiles belonging to various members of the Crandell clan, about a dozen heading north up I-75 for Jackson. Again.

"This time he's gonna fry," says Willis. He flips the sun visor from above the windshield to his window where the sun is beginning to shine in his eyes. In the west, fields of red cattle graze seeding brown winter rye. *at home they'd left pale clouds with wind herding them across an underlit sky.* *Feathery* ~~Spongy~~ gray clouds sweep across the ~~pale~~ sky; Framed in the windshield the clouds *touch* ~~connect~~ and overlap, creating dark thunderheads.

✓ Killer storms in the mid-west and parts of the south, ~~war~~ *JAW* just over in Iraqi. Now all the TV news can do is ~~fill~~ *fill* over what was, show what-was. The burned body of a young Iraqi boy has been shown so many times that Velda sometimes feels as if she is the one wrapped in gauze with only her eyes showing like mirrors reflecting somebody else's eyes, somebody on hold, waiting for fate to make up its mind to go ahead and be done with her or give her another chance.

"That was last time he was supposed to get the chair. They're talking lethal injection now." *↓* Velda needs to set the record straight for her own ordering of mind—thirty-one years is a

long time to be doing the same thing, any thing, over and again. She's lost track of the number of appeals, the lawyers' tricks that led up to the appeals, how many times Donald Jacobs has been sentenced to death, then walked. The latest appeal by Jacob's lawyer is one she will never forget because of its rock-bottom reaching, their desperation, which gives her the most hope. A minister's prayer at the opening of Jacob's 1988 retrial in Houston County Superior Court was not recorded, Jacob's lawyer says, so he argues that it was impossible for the defense to challenge it. In the prayer the minister's divine plea that God's will be done had prejudiced the jury against Jacobs. A stay of execution should be granted.

✓ ^{They} "God's will be done," she intones. How all prayers and blessings over food end at the Crandell family reunions each spring. It means nothing; it's a figure of speech that has lost its power to move.

Willis's stout legs in creased khakis are laid out, and his left foot in a brown loafer and worn tan sock leans to one side.

What is he thinking? ~~That he~~ ^{Maybe now Willis would as soon} Donald Jacobs be led into the execution chamber, strapped down, then at the last minute, be unstrapped and led back to his holding cell on death row? He has his own problems, Willis does. His wife Brenda Gail has left him and moved to Miami, Florida, taking with her their boy and girl. Said she was sick of living in the "public eye." Well, they all are. Good luck to him if Willis can make it from South Georgia to South Florida, twelve hours on the road, on a weekend, to visit his children and still hold down his job so he can sweat out monthly child-support payments.

Justice has taken too long to be served. So long that Velda and her entire family have almost grown out of the mood for revenge.

Maybe about that hot autumn ~~day~~ ^{even day}
day after his daddy & brothers died and
the ~~State of Georgia~~ some Ga politician
looking for ~~votes~~ had ~~sent~~ a flat bed
truck with the State's ^{only} electric chair
& sported it all over Georgia ~~on the~~
schools ~~of~~ ~~deteriorating~~ ~~crime~~ ~~scared~~
~~in hopes~~ ~~of~~ ~~death~~. using the excuse
Willie to ~~scare~~ ~~you~~ ~~people~~
out of ~~committing~~ ~~crimes~~
choosing a life of
crime.

Just seeing the chair, Willie had been
primed his mind to expect ~~some~~ ~~the~~ ~~facts~~ ~~of~~ ~~that~~ ~~gang~~
next-day executions ~~of~~ ~~then~~ ~~next~~ ~~year~~, ~~then~~
then next month, ~~then~~ ~~next~~ ~~year~~, ~~then~~
soon. He ~~had~~ been a by possessed. Kept
scrap books of a true crime reader to this day.

Not only does Velda have trouble recalling the face of Donald Jacobs, she has trouble recalling the faces of her husband Ned, his brother Albert, her two sons and her daughter-in-law, all slaughtered like hogs on butcher day over a quarter of a century ago.

The pillared red brick Magnolia Plantation shows to the right of the interstate. *Free* fresh orange juice.

Suddenly it comes to Velda—she sits up straight—that she's not afraid Jacobs won't die this time, she's afraid that he will. Then, what dwelling point of equal challenge will keep her and her family going till the end of their lives?

###

Velda had been working in the school lunchroom the day it happened and she can still see the huge stew pot she was scouring in the tub-size sink when she heard. She can see her face reflected on the pot, its silly egg-stood-on-end shape, like looking in a funhouse mirror. The broadened bridge of her nose, and the nose itself spread, exaggerated as if to mock her worst features. Things all turned around. She can smell the sour lemony dish detergent in the government gallon jug that she'd had such trouble lifting with her wrenched right arm. Maybe she'd broken a bone when she had stuck her hand through the wire fence to pet one of the cows and it flung its red head and rammed her forearm into a ~~fence~~ post. No money and no time for doctors—the arm would have to heal on its own. It seemed that everything in the lunchroom was oversized and required lifting, straining with. Over the years, that fun-house face, that lemony smell and the strain of lifting have lingered with her imaginings of how it happened, a good deal of which she knows from facts of the case. The rest she's filled in, filled in and worn out the images, the words, the actions. She's not sure anymore of what is fact and what is of her own conjuring.

May 14, 1973: the two Jacobs, Donald and Ronald, their buddies Inman Hiers and Wilson Tole had escaped from a Maryland Prison. The car they had stolen ran out of gas just a ways up the dirt road from the house where Velda and her husband Ned and their two youngest children lived. The other sons and their wives lived in trailers on the homeplace, working the farm with Ned and Velda.

Willis and Linda were still in school. He was fourteen then and she was just eight, her daddy's pet baby, as he called her.

The faceless four in the stalled car that morning had gotten out, stumping around, smoking stolen cigarettes, swigging whiskey and pissing like dogs on the car tires. The sheriff had told that last bit of information on the witness stand as if it explained something vital about their characters, and for Velda it had.

She used to put filthy words in their mouths, imagining what had been said. But over the years the words, like their faces, had gotten too jarring on her sanity.

Donald Jacobs, the ringleader, the meanest, the boldest, suddenly recalled passing an old house down the road. Maybe some gas in one of the tractors under the shelter he remembered seeing south of the house.

"Don't look like people'd own nothing," said his brother, "but can't never tell."

"Ain't nothing more despiteful than a dad-bummed bunch of church-going farmers," Donald had said, according to Ronald, who later turned State's evidence to save his own hide (he served twelve years and was turned out to start over again because he'd had a bad life, meaning a tough upbringing).

If only they'd gone to the shelter and siphoned the gas from the tractor and left... But that was just one more of Velda's what-ifs in the middle of the night. It did no good, it changed nothing.

At the lane leading up to the old unpainted farmhouse, set back off the dirt road, one of them had opened the mailbox and left it open. That's what the mail carrier told. (Velda never left her mailbox open.) And told that she must have come by, dropping off their light bill and a few sale circulars, a Penny's catalogue with a woman in a short green linen skimmer on front. That very time the escaped cons had been inside, slinging pots and pans and dumping dresser drawers and overturning chairs and mattresses. Looking for money. They ate some of the biscuits Velda had baked that morning, the sidemeat she had fried. Both dishes Velda had left covered on the kitchen table for Ned and the boys and Mary to eat when they came in from hoeing the tobacco in back field. Mary, always dieting, would have to eat biscuits or starve. It seemed that Velda was always cooking, if not for her own family, for the 500 or so students at the school in Sylvester, ten miles away.

Lined up and walking, Donald Jacobs and his gang's shoe prints were dug into the soft sandy dirt of the lane when Ned and the boys and Mary came in for lunch. It was dry—Velda could remember that—and the Crandells were worried that their disturbing the dirt with their hoes would cause the hot sun to draw what little ~~bit of~~ moisture was left from the last rain and sips of nighttime dew. But if they didn't hoe, the weeds and grass would take over the tobacco. It was a gamble, Ned said, anyway you looked at it. Next tobacco crop, he and his brother Albert would buy an irrigation outfit on time. Cutting down on the odds against bringing tobacco to its maturity. Such a long way from seedlings, to ripe tobacco, to the warehouse and sale in July and August.

Mary was in front of the pickup with Ned, her father-in-law, and her husband, next to the youngest Crandell boy, was on back with his brother and uncle, when Ned drove through the opening of the ^{old wire} gate from the fields behind the house. Over the whine and ping of the old primer-gray truck's engine, they could hear the racket inside the house.

“Wonder what all that’s about,” Ned said to Mary, pulling up to the ^{side} back door and parking the pickup under the ^{dinosaur} huge live oak that shaded the north side of the house. Velda’s white hen and biddies were ^{digging potato peels from last night’s supper} pecking in the dirt next to the doorsteps, not even noticing the rumbling in the house, so used to noise were they with a family the size of Velda’s banging in and out of doors.

Ned ^{bumped open} opened the sprung truck door, and got out, leaving it open.

with the hardened heel of his hand DIGGING & PECKING AT potato tender skins from rig

The boys on back bailed off, resetting their caps and staring at the house and the knocking rumble of the men about their mischief inside. No car or truck in the sunny front lane. No sign of anybody.

“Hey!” Ned yelled. “What’s up in there?” He was a giant of a man in loose denim bib overalls, which he claimed were cooler for working. He liked them loose for the air to circulate and keep the insides of his thighs from chapping. He had sugar in his blood and was plagued with yeast between his thighs, especially during summer. It got so bad at times that Velda had to ^{bundle} wrap his bull-sized testicles in gauze, a job she loved because it always led to more. Big and tough-talking as he was, Ned could be tender with her. Sometimes he tried to make her jealous—women were always after the Crandell men. But Velda was never jealous, she was proud of the ^{good-looking} handsome man she had married, proud of the sons she had given him. Besides, she said often to Ned, who but me would be fool enough to take on this job of farmwife, nursemaid and cook?

The boys, and Mary now, just stood wondering, listening.

go back
racked
sliding
trumpeting
hauling
smashing

Like a TV ~~was muted~~
~~stalled to work in the~~
pealing
high
wedges along
along the
clare
reached
attach
cringing
trunk-size

Suddenly the racket inside stopped. The chirring of crickets sounded louder. The hen softly clucking and her biddies peeping were calming familiar sounds, like the mineral smell of the packed gray dirt of the yard, the clean smell of ~~the~~ moss draping the branches of the big live oak.

"Maybe Willis come home from school," said Albert. Then he shouted, "Willis, that you?" ~~he shouted~~

Albert had white sweat ~~under~~ ^{under his cap} ~~because~~ he rained sweat when he worked

Trying to make light of the situation, Mary's husband Benny laughed. "Wouldn't be Willis, not and us hoeing tobacco today. Scared he might have to help."

Nobody else laughed. They didn't even look at him and Benny's eyes remained fixed on the narrow unpainted back porch and the open kitchen door. The porch floor was tracked with sand and he knew his mother always swept the front and ~~back~~ ^{side} porches before heading out to work.

"Probably some younguns. Skipped school to ~~get into mischief~~ ^{cut up}," Mary said. The men were creeping toward the doorsteps leading up to the porch and she followed.

"You best come on out," Ned shouted. He hoped it was school younguns. He knew it wasn't.

They all stopped, listening. Nothing. No sound inside the house. All was so quiet they could hear the clock ~~ticking~~ ^{tick} from the living room beyond the kitchen.

weary Seth Thomas
ratchet into its
roll-over purring cycle

The oldest boy, Robbie, headed back to the truck and took a crowbar from the bed, then returned to where the others were standing. "Mary," he said, lifting the bar in a tight grip, "you get on back in the truck, hear?"

Mary turned and walked back to the truck, leaning on the front bumper with her arms crossed. Her hips in dirty worn-out blue jeans looked wider spread against the bumper. She could

see the Crandell men on the porch now, walking toward the open door of the dim kitchen. The ✓ rattle of the locusts in the oaks grew louder, deafening in the quiet. The chickens under the porch now began ~~clucking~~ ^{quacking} louder and the biddies gathered around the hen.

“Who’s there?” Ned in the doorway shouted.

A loud explosion blew him back into the boys and Albert following and they all scattered, leaping off the edges of the porch in all directions. Their faces set in expressions of fear and surprise. Too soon for sorrow over their slumped father and brother in the doorway. Another explosion, an orange flashette, and Albert went down at the west corner of the porch. More shots and now Mary could see the slender, young, brown-haired man with what looked like Ned’s deer rifle standing in the doorway. Benny dropped facedown on the humped roots of the ~~live oak, left~~ ^{live oak, left} side of the truck; Robbie lunged for Mary shocked stiff on the truck bumper. His right hand raked her left leg as he fell like somebody tripped, facedown too, eyes open and staring at his brother crumpled but crawling around the roots of the old oak. The next shot got him in the spine, ricocheting to the scabby trunk of the oak and chunks of bark rained down on Benny’s body.

Mary suddenly roused from her stupor and ran around to the rear of the pickup, screaming for help. Just help, “Help!”

“Go get her,” Donald Jacobs on the porch shouted inside. He was holding the shotgun out before him.

Mary started running, crying, toward the mailbox and the dirt road. Running with all her strength and seeing the dirt streaming under her feet. The strange line of shoe tracks she couldn’t take her eyes off of.

Halfway up the lane, two of the men tackled her from behind. The Jacobs' buddies, Inman and Wilson. They smelled of whiskey and unwashed bodies, like the septic tank seepage at her and Benny's trailer she was forever complaining about but likely never would again.

Somebody was laughing, she was crying.

"Bring her on back," Donald called from the porch. "Have us a little fun, what y'all say?" (Velda used to spice up what they said during those ventures into her imagination, but she'd never been exposed to such and figured she had it all wrong, that it was worse and she couldn't go there because she'd never been and then she wished she'd made something special for Mary's lunch. Steamed okra and tomatoes wouldn't have taken much time.)

Screaming, biting, kicking, Mary was dragged back toward the house, up the ^{porch steps} doorsteps ~~to the porch~~ and over her father-in-law's massive side-slung body. ~~He was a kind man for so large a man but he could be tough when he had to.~~ Without breath he looked shrunk. ~~She never~~ ^{she never} thought he ~~liked~~ ^{loved} her, she thought he could read her mind. She'd kept her distance till now... now stepping right over him. His work-worn hands were outstretched as if he'd been trying to shield off the bullet with them. *Over* →

Court records: Donald Jacobs and his gang took turns raping Mary Crandell on the carefully-madeup bed in the main bedroom of the house.

Maybe Mary thought at that point that they would just rape her and let her go, or take her with them as a hostage. But they dragged her out to the Crandell truck and drove her to the tobacco field and there they raped her again, then shot her like target practicing at a motion-rigged scarecrow as she ran down the long heat-shimmering rows of the clean-hoed and withering tobacco watered only with Crandell sweat.

Mary was an orphan, ^{a charity child,} raised in
a Christian boarding school. No family, &
when she married Benny it was as if
she'd married ~~this~~ whole huge ^{big} family.
Sick of them all, one Sunday at dinner,
their quarrelling ^{discouraged} & teasing,
she had set out crying up the lane,
heading for she didn't know where.

That was Mr. Ned who came
after her in the truck. He just pulled
up alongside & opened the ~~truck~~ door
for her to get in. She did because
there was nothing else to do -- besides,
she really loved Bennie.
Then Ned patted her left shoulder, speaking low,
as if to keep from spooking her.
"Cry, little gal, cry if you want to."
~~We got a bunch of it in my sorry ^{sorry} truck!~~
~~Get you at the house. ^{by} ~~starting~~ ~~burst~~!~~
But I'm taking you home where you belong?

###Linda's red car eases up in the left lane of I-75, then pulls in front of Willis and Velda in the outside lane. Immediately she switches on her right blinker to signal that she is about to exit.

"Bathroom stop," says Willis, chuckling. "Women!"

Velda laughs but doesn't like what he's said. "Them growing boys of hers after something to tide them over till they can get to Denny's for supper."

Linda swerves into the exit ramp and motors up the crescent drive to the front of the rest stop. Opens the door and gets out, heading for the breezeway of the new red brick building with ladies' and men's restroom each side. She has on white pants and a blue shirt and cheap but stylish brown sandals slapping at her heels.

Willis parks to the right of her car, and the other cars and pickups behind begin filling the empty parking slots. Sitting with their engines idling. All along the curved concrete curbing and mowed grass, Velda can see inside the cars and trucks the heads of her grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Some bobbing, some leaning, some bowed as if praying. Future Crandell men and women.

Most children she knew feared television-bred spooks, teachers, their parents and the law. The Crandell children feared the Jacobs. Donald Jacobs was their Santa Claus and Halloween spook wrapped up in one. He could bring joy and he could bring terror. If he got executed this go round, May 6, 2003, at 6 PM, their whole family would celebrate at Denny's, and the Crandells, what was left of them, could have peace, though Velda couldn't imagine it. She couldn't imagine what her family would be happy and sad about after Donald Jacobs died.

Three of the ~~other~~ women get out of their cars and walk toward the rest stop, talking to each other. *one another.*

grouping to keep company with

Velda watches them all, her family-by-marriage, her kin. Going in, coming out, getting into their automobiles. When Linda comes back, she takes the lead onto I-75.

Velda is proud of her only daughter doing that, driving like that. It's a little thing, a silly thing maybe, but she is proud of Linda for going on into the restroom without waiting for the aunts to walk with her. She never clutches at a pocketbook or crosses her arms over her chest; she is tough ^{for sure} like the Crandell men—well, all except for Willis. And Velda is proud of her taking off from work and keeping her teenage boys out of school. She's proud that Linda works, a paralegal, at that, which sounds like she makes more money than she does. Out of all the family, Linda seems least affected by the quits and starts of Jacob's appeals and attorney squabbles. Out of all of them, she has managed to keep up her life, work, home, children, without living for the death of Donald Jacobs, the last of the four murderers remaining. (The two buddies of the Jacobs brothers had died in prison. One in a knife fight, the other of cancer.)

"I wonder if she remembers," says Willis, keeping pace with Linda's red car, and rearranging his soft, bulky body to accommodate the sagged bucket seat.

² 'It is five o'clock but it looks later because the sun is hidden behind the clouds. Scalloped and overlapped forming an almost seamless hull of dense gray sky.

"She remembers." It hits Velda then that he has meant does Linda remember the way to Jackson while Velda herself had been thinking about Linda and the children.

All except for Linda, the Crandells have let pity replace pride. People, strangers and neighbors, are always trying to give them money to make up for their guilt and gladness that the Jacobs and their buddies had run out of gas near the Crandell place instead of their own houses. The Crandlells are famous, in Georgia especially—the most pitied. Grades are given to Velda's grandchildren in school ^M most teachers give the Crandell children A's, ¹ none will give less than a

B. They are shunned, the children are, for the same reason—pity. Or maybe they are shunned because their luckless taint might rub off. Next time the Jacobs gang ^{would} might pay them and their families a visit. Regardless, the succeeding crops of Crandells have ceased to earn their way in the world as in the old days.

Linda's oldest boy, Dean, for example, is wearing her down with demands for the latest brand-name clothes. A Gap outlet store has moved into the Albany ^M mall near Sylvester. Their prices aren't much higher than Wal-mart and the trendy jeans and shirts are better made. Then all the kids who have to dress like the TV rich graduated from Gap to Abercrombie & Fitch. Dean is sure if he moves up, he will become part of the in-crowd, a non-Crandell. He acts as if it is his right to be rich and not have to ^{accomplished} become but to be. Velda has pointed out to Dean that he is like a cat chasing his tail—the faster he runs the farther away his tail gets, ~~from him~~. But the truth is, he is just as well-off to keep circling with the tip of his tail ever out of reach. He is a Crandell and doomed to be pitied and shunned. The charm, the taint, is ingrained in Dean's younger brother and cousins. They take the grades given and use the pity to advantage. Velda won't live to see and doesn't want to see the outcome. One of the gifts of aging: she will be spared the results of her grown grandchildren. It comes to her like a hard wind ^{on} on her face that she won't be spared, that Willis is and has been all along a result of that very pity and compensation.

It is raining, about to storm, when the Crandells get to Jackson, and Velda thinks that it should be. Lightning gashes the bruised and swollen west sky above the all-gray compound of the prison, a series of depressing concrete and steel fortresses encased in chain-link fencing. Coils of barbwire laced through the top of the fence appear to dare the lightning and not the 130 inmates snug inside (crocheting, it's been said). Great drops of rain begin to fall and huge humming lights from on-high flood the mowed grass grounds. An American flag on a tall pole

whips in the rain-driven wind, rankling a chain that sounds to Velda like an antic dog hooked to a wire clothesline.

From a tall tower, a beacon of light circles, spotting patches of rain

Seated low in the idling car, listening to the rain rapping on the hood and the wipers slapping left and right, Velda keeps her eyes on the trunk of Linda's dusty red trunk, how the raindrops brighten the faded paint in polka dots. If she looks up she will have to see the guard checking Linda through; if she looks left she will have to see the protestors ^{parading} pacing along the south section of fence. She will have to read their signs and ^{pep} mull over their messages. She can't resist it. If for no other reason than to torch the as-yet-smoldering hate she'll need to feel when she sees Jacobs die or not-die in a matter of minutes.

"Murder is Murder," Willis reads, choking the steering wheel. "Gas or chair, is it mercy?" He always does that. Then repeats, "Hey, it ain't about punishment, you nuts, it's about ridding the world of Jacobs and his kind."

The guard at the gate, there to check each car through, wears an oblivious waxen face. No sign of recognition, but he knows them, he knows who they are. Velda can see him pointing out directions for parking to Linda with an arm crooked in the window and getting drenched, her nodding her auburn head to be polite—she knows where to park. In the lot of the smaller ^{flat} gray building, H-5, south of the hospital-like main building.

Jacobs had been put on deathwatch two days ago, meaning he was moved to a single cell away from death row. A prison staff member had been assigned to monitor his behavior. There,

Jacobs ~~had~~ ^{had} been allowed to smoke and had his own TV. *He could say all the*

The big deal of course, what the press always reports, is the last meal, which for some reason Velda has begun to think of as the Last Supper of Jesus and his apostles. Last time, Jacobs

unclear stuff unsaid in his head.

He could barter... more dead books for... more time.
Location of other... more time
He could barter... more time
unclear scribbles

had ordered a cheeseburger, fries and chocolate ice cream and ate every crumb. They said he even licked the cream from his bowl till it shined.

Execution day, today, he had been picked up by van and taken to H-5 where he will die unless there is a stay. Five hours in the 6X9 foot holding cell adjacent to the death chamber. No windows, just an aluminum cot and toilet. Before, for electrocution in the chair, his head had been shaved and his right leg had been shaved below the knee, and he had been dressed in a new striped prison uniform. All for nothing. Another dress rehearsal, and him rolling his black eyes and smirking because he knew it.

Already several other cars are parked on the wet black asphalt in front of H-5. Witnesses for the scheduled execution. When they see the procession of family cars and trucks approaching slowly along the gravel road leading from the entrance, they begin to get out, popping open brightly colored umbrellas and holding them high overhead. Some reach back inside their cars for notebooks and recording machines. Two guards in brown twill uniforms step from the doorway of H-5 and signal for the witnesses to stand aside for the family to get parked and get out and go in first.

Inside the narrow lime-green hall, the only sound is the scraping and squeaking of shoe soles on the waxed white tiles, humming quiet. The building has a feel of old government clinic about it—practical and neat, hiding the shot needles and people in white to keep from shocking little children. The smell of uncured paint reminds Velda that before the walls were beige, damp-streaked with what she imagined was spit but probably wasn't. She can't bear to think what was reported to have streaked the walls of her bedroom while the men waited their turn to rape Mary.

Her ears buzz so that when the EXIT door opens with a warning buzz at the other end of the hall, she has trouble making a distinction between the sounds. She hopes she doesn't faint;

~~They~~ Passing through the ^{clanging} rubbed iron gates of
the compound, Velda tries to recognize
at least one of the ~~stone~~ ^{stone-faced} guards posted ~~each side~~
~~along the gray~~ each side of the gray walls
~~about every 3~~ a yard or so apart.

Hands clasped behind, reverent & at
attention, their ~~radios~~ ^{hard-held} radios jabber &
beep jabber. A woman dispatcher's voice,
speaking through from the hip of ^{one of the} guards,
~~near the end~~ announces trouble in
lock down in Cell B. "Hendell requests
assistance. All units respond."

Velda's not sure that's what she
hears. But she is sure another radio-thru
voice, a man's, reports that ^{so far} all is a go
in B-5.

Another set of clang of iron doors,
and they witness ~~pass~~ ^{pass} from ~~John~~ ^{John} ~~to~~
~~the~~ ~~main~~ ~~hall~~ -- a narrow hall --

✓ End of the walk ~~that~~ Jacob's
had taken earlier ~~that~~ day.

from radio
packet
warning
silence

Willis on her right is bracing her arm. Or is he holding to it to brace himself? Through the door a prison chaplain in black enters with a black bible under one arm. He is a tall broad man with fine curly white hair and a cheery face held in check. He nods to the group walking behind the two guards, then disappears through another door on his left where the rushing sound of water layers the quiet.

too much passing KP?

Velda has heard, or read, that Jacob's last act before passing from his cell to the death chamber, across the hall, is the shower. More meaningless ritual, as far as she is concerned, but she supposes there has to be some order to dying, same as living. Still, the whole business, from trial to execution, seems a waste of decent people's time, emotion and money. The new paint is a screen hiding the truth of these shamed walls. WATCH TIME

Fifteen minutes to six and all thirty witnesses are ushered into the viewing room through a door on the left, ~~side of the hall nearest the front where they have entered~~. Four long varnished pine church-type pews reach side to side of the square room, walls mint-green too, fresh-painted. Like a window for viewing a church baptism, after ~~they~~ ^{Christian} took to baptising inside, the front wall is glassed in with a shabby wine velvet curtain drawn. Velda is glad to see that it's the same curtain as before. She is glad there is a curtain to hide what's behind, if only for a few more minutes.

All gather around Velda, ever the bereaved mother and widow. Hers is a fixed and permanent role, like a queen born into her reign. Everybody seems to know Velda and her family, though the Crandells have never seen these particular newspaper people or even the ~~warden and~~ guards before. They have their roles too. Roles ~~passed~~ ^{passed} down in the thirty-one years of passing.

Put To Velda, only the younger Crandell children look new. Dean has been ^{here} ~~her~~ before; she remembers him being here for the last execution-turned-stay. But was he old enough to

remember? All are dressed up as for Sunday school, but here at Jackson to view a killing. Eager to be off to Denny's to celebrate or not-celebrate. But really they just love to eat; it's maybe their only pleasure. Reminds Velda of the dead Crandells, but that's about the only resemblance she can detect in this generation.

She is glad ^{suddenly} for the green paint that hides the ugly ^{meared} walls from ^{the children} their tender ~~sight~~. She shouldn't have brought ~~the children~~. She can't remember why she did. Was it because it was the only vacation they'd ever known—going to Jackson? Tears leap to her tired old eyes.

✓ Thunder roars outside. No windows looking out but ^{there} a quick flash like lightening from a camera of the six loaded reporters crowding along the back wall.

"No picture-taking," the taller guard says. He has a stiff voice, all business.

Same as at a funeral, the honored widow and her children are seated up front. A couple of state officials wander in wearing dripping all-weather coats, no hats and their hair is plastered with rain.

Members of the press mumble in back. "They say he refused his last meal," one says low. "What was it, do you know?" Somebody else says, "Not a single person here for him; I find that strange, don't you?" "They're dead by now, most of them. The rest don't want to be associated." Cool as a morgue inside

Behind Velda, Dean is clearing his throat, sitting forward and rimming the neck of his white Polo shirt with a finger; before Velda, a newspaper woman is kneeling, whispering. She is young with bushy dark hair and a sharp nose. She smells of Witch Hazel, a remedy astringent Velda had forgotten but recalls in the form of Ned's Sunday shaved face. One of the guards spies her, is coming to ask her to leave. She has to talk fast, hazel eyes cutting left at the approaching guard.

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Velda hadn't heard a word she said but knows both question and answer: how does it feel to finally get to see Jacob's die? He'll get a stay.

When the curtain yanks open, they are presented with a sidelong view of Donald Jacobs lying strapped on a narrow metal gurney. The only actor on stage, draped all in white like a play patient. A large computer monitor behind the gurney flickers and flashes blue and green symbols and the ziggy red line of his black heart beats. Next to the monitor a compact metal machine exhibits three inverted syringes to be compressed one at a time and fed through a tube into his left arm, bandaged as if broken atop the white sheet: the first, sodium pentothal, inducing a mild state of euphoria and a muscle relaxer (easier for other drugs to get into one's system; the needle could pop out of the arm otherwise). The second syringe to be compressed by the machine contains pancuronium bromide, which paralyzes the muscles across the bottom of one's lungs, muscles that force breathing. Feels like one is holding his or her breath. The third syringe depressed will release potassium chloride to paralyze the heart. Both chemicals act in tandem to make one die.

This information of how it all works, lethal injection as opposed to the electric chair, had been sent to Velda in a typed formal letter from the State; "one" used as reference instead of "Jacobs," an unnecessary and distancing politeness. The alien chemical names had dazed her then. Now her reading voice is reciting the names in her head like facts from a tax reporting form she'd better get right.

But it is Donald Jacobs and not the "one" referred to in the letter who turns his shave-nicked head toward the window and the Crandell's behind it. He is all eyes and ears with his head shaved, same as before; he looks the same, hasn't aged a bit. Velda had hoped his head

wouldn't be shaved, that he would have hair like most other humans, that he would look old and haggard, or at least different. That he doesn't, brings it all back too clear, from start to end.

He appears to be holding his breath. His dark blared eyes make him look shocked, but he doesn't seem scared; the even red rickracking on the monitor is proof. Maybe he is as used to playing this part as the Crandells are of ~~watching~~ his performance, or figuring like them he'll get a stay.

Velda's eyes never leave Jacob's eyes, except to glance at the monitor and the giant old black-rimmed round clock on the wall behind the gurney that seems like an illusion of Jacob's eyes, a third eye. The long second hand sweeps round over the numerals eleven and then twelve—seven minutes till six o'clock. ~~TIME~~

Willis, seated on his mother's right, resets his imitation Rolex to synchronize with the death chamber clock (a prison guard he'd got to know on one of the trips to Jackson had sent him the watch crafted by the inmates as a money-making project). He smooths the blond hairs on his wrist, admiring the look of the Rolex, then takes his mother's hand in his, squeezing.

The warden, in brown and brass, a bullnecked man, thick across the chest, steps front and center of the window, hands clasped seriously behind. He rocks back on his heels and when his lips begin to move an oddly small voice screams from the black-box speakers in the corners of the viewing room. "If anybody would like to leave before we proceed..." He leaves it at that. He doesn't say proceed with what. Then, "The attorney general is on the phone to the Board of Pardons and Parole. Checking for any last-minute stays."

He bows his head, showing a sharp side part, a stripe of white in his flossy brown hair. Then he turns, head and shoulders only, to face Donald Jacobs whose eyes have fixed dead on Velda, or so it seems to her. Really, he's not looking at anybody, she thinks. He's just bluffing,

waiting for somebody to come tell him he has gotten another stay. He looks safe, saved, behind the glass, almost Jesus-like in white. But for those eyes like bullets seen down the barrel of a gun. Used to, she worried he might break out of prison or be released and come back to Sylvester to kill her and the rest of her family and she would have to pull up this image of him behind glass for a little peace.

Four minutes to six and the chaplain seen up the hall enters with his bible and stands next to Jacobs and mumbles a prayer—for Jacobs, not for the witnesses. Therefore, Velda feels no guilt for keeping her eyes open to see if Jacob's are closed. He only blinks, watching her. Amen.

Then Jacob's turns his head away, dismissing the chaplain. TURN—HOW MANY REPEATS *TILL*

✓ The warden watches the chaplain leave the room, then begins speaking to Jacobs *while* facing the witnesses. "Donald Jeffery Jacobs, you have been ordered by the state to die by lethal injection at 6 PM, May the 6th, two-thousand and three, for the murders of/ or participation in those of Ned Nixon Crandell, Albert Roy Crandell, Bennett Boyd Crandell, Mary Bell Hope Crandell, and Robert Dale Crandell."

✓ He faces Jacobs again. "At this time you will have two minutes to speak to the family out there."

✓ The clock on the wall shows two minute till six and the second hand is swinging round, Somebody at the back of the viewing room whispers in breathy tones, "They say he refused the usual preacher by his side at the end. Means he's scared. Has given up using religion as a defense. He knows this is it."

"Is it true what they said about him crocheting a motorcycle?" somebody else whispers.

The warden is still waiting, glancing up at the clock.

Jacobs neither nods nor speaks. His eyes remain wide as if taking in the last sight of the living world, these people, the Crandells, who he has doomed to a life of pity and advantage, fame.

"Say something," Velda says low.

"Mama," says Willis.

"May God have mercy on your soul, Donald Jacobs." The warden looks at the clock on the rear wall, the second hand swinging toward the 12 mark at the top and overlapping the long hand.

All hold their breath as the second hand swings over the 12. "It's good as done," Willis whispers in a ^{shaking} choking voice.

Then the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5...

Eyes still on his viewers, especially Velda, Jacob's body jerks ^{a mere hiccup,} then his eyelids blink, then close.

Nobody moves, nobody speaks. They watch before them the miracle of death wrought by death. They watch his heart beats spike on the monitor, then redline off the screen,

Linda, on the other side of Willis begins to cry. Dean behind Velda slumps over. "He's fainted," one of the aunts whispers as if she might wake Jacobs, because indeed he does look asleep.

Still, Velda watches the body before her. The curtains close in swinging snatches.

Willis sucks in air. "Was that it?" he says. Not *is* that it? Was that our life?

Velda stands weakly and walks to the window, pressing both hands and her nose to the cold glass. "You should have eat what they brung you," she says.

end