

THE WEST FIELD

A lonely young woman seeks solace.

Sarah waited, always watchful for Jack as he came to work the west field. It was situated across the road from her house, acre upon acre of flat farm land. For many long hours, he'd 'drive the field' set atop the old, slow Alice Chalmers tractor. The one he nicknamed 'Alee'.

Jack lived a mile down the road, around the bend and completely out of sight from both her house and the west field. On days when he showed up, she made a point to have laundry to hang on the line, or work to do in the front garden. Anything that got her outside so she might catch his eye, as he drove up and down row after row of dry, dusty earth.

Late morning was usually when he'd reached the land adjacent to the road, directly across from her house. Timing was everything, so she'd wait for just the right moment to begin her routine. Her tummy was usually aflutter with anticipation by then.

She'd start by taking a needless trip to the mailbox, where she'd put on a big show. She'd look inside, find it empty, then put two hands across to her chest, in a gesture of utter despair. Next, she'd glance down the road far then wide then back far again, making a spectacle of looking for the mail truck. He saw her act for what it was, nothing but an shout for attention. Besides, the postman never made it out this far until the sun was well into the afternoon sky. That never stopped her.

Sometimes when he saw her he'd wave, most times he'd just smile with a nonchalant tip of his hat-covered head. Always that same beat-up, straw cowboy hat. The one that was originally white and had, like him, steadily taken on a deep tan after spending long days in the fields.

She waved and smiled. This time he waved back, as he turned Alee around, then headed away from her, down another row. She watched as he wrestled with Alee's large steering wheel, his back muscles rippling under his tight white t-shirt.

Having been acknowledged, she rushed back to the house, to the refrigerator and grabbed the pitcher of lemonade she'd freshly squeezed that morning, for just this occasion. Onto the tray with two frosty glasses from the freezer. She carried the tray to the porch, setting it on the little white wicker table, the one between the two white wicker chairs. She filled a glass then checked the field. He was a wavy dot on the horizon, slowly driving up another row over.

Down the short path, past the mailbox, across the road she went, where she stood waiting. Her house dress and apron billowed slightly in the warm, gentle breeze.

To him, she looked pretty as a picture standing there, her flaxen hair pulled up off her slender neck into a ponytail. Holding that icy glass of lemonade. He pulled along side her, stopped, but left Alee running. Sarah glanced up at him, her empty hand high above her head to shade her pale blue eyes from the blinding sun.

He took the glass, but instead of his mouth, put it to his forehead and dragged the cold surface across his sweat-covered brow. It always felt so refreshing. He put the edge of the glass to his lips and didn't stop gulping until the last drop of sweet juice was gone,

and the ice cubes rested against his upper lip. Then he opened his mouth wide and dumped those in too, finishing them off with a few satisfying crunches.

“Ahhh,” he sighed, smiling, and handed her the empty glass. He rubbed his wet lips with the back of his dry hand.

“Delicious. Thank you Ma’am.” She saw his lips move, but couldn’t hear him over the tractor noise. Pointing to her ears, she shook her head and shrugged, then used the back of her hand to gently brush away a stray strand of hair that had fallen into her eyes.

Standing this close, she could smell his hard work all over him, especially when he had leaned forward and handed her the glass. She loved his essence from hard work. Her soft hand brushed his slick tight skin. Combined with his scent that slightest touch sent her heart racing, adrenaline coursing through her veins. Her cheeks flushed. He noticed.

Her lips moved, but over Alee’s ruckus he couldn’t hear a word she said. Twisting the key in the ignition, he switched off the tractor. Silence fell, except for the sound of bird song in the distance.

“What’s that Sarah?” he asked, the sun sparkling off his bright green eyes.

“The lemonade. Was it okay? Did you like it?” she asked.

“Boy, it sure hit the spot. How did you know I needed that?” he asked, knowing full well that she watched him from the house. She was so obvious sometimes it made him laugh, like the mail bit.

“Well,” she said, “the sun is getting up in that sky and this field hasn’t a lick of shade. I figured a cool drink might do you some good, that’s all.”

He’d been on that tractor since before sun up. Now it was just shy of high noon. Alee’s steel seat was no picnic on his butt. Spending hours riding the rows was also brutal on his back, but like everything else on the farm, if he didn’t do it, it didn’t get done.

“You’re right about that sun,” he said, looking up and squinting as he checked its position in the sky. “It’s a burner today.” His shirt was drenched, with large wet stains around the neck and stretching from under each arm. Off came his hat and up came his hand, holding a red hanky. He dragged it across his sweaty forehead then stuck it into his back pocket.

His hair was soaked, its long curls stuck tight against his scalp. Closing his eyes, he shook his head, like a wet dog after a bath. Those tight curls unfurled, scattering drops of sweat in all directions. One landed on her arm. Since his eyes were closed, she touched it with her finger tip and quickly brought it wet to her tongue. Gooseflesh rose on her arms.

“Woo” he said, opening his eyes, placing his hat back on its perch. She’d never seen him look so completely in his element. Deep inside she felt her tummy flutter, while down lower she felt a flutter of a different sort.

“Well, there’s more at the house, if you still thirsty,” she offered. As always.

“That’s mighty kind of you Sarah, but today I got a lot to do and the daylight’s burning.” Her heart sank. She pouted.

“Well, I think you need a break. You already done drove half the day away, but suit yourself.” She said sternly. “Sides I got my own household needs tending, anyway.” He nodded a few times, expressionless and turned Alee’s key. She cranked hard, like she’d never catch. Then she fired and rumbled to life with a sputter and a puff of black soot from her stack.

Sarah watched him turn the heavy machine and drive away, back down another row. Dispirited, she turned and crossed the empty road, past the empty mailbox and down the short path to the big empty porch. Her heart was heavy, and she was seized by a yearning that had never felt so desperate. Not once—since Willy died—had Jack turned her down when she invited him up to the porch for more.

She slumped into one of the white whicker chairs, cursing herself, embarrassed for acting a fool. In the west field she could hear Alee coming near the road again. She ignored it, cursing him now. How could he let her make such a fool of herself? As she began to gather the tray, the air fell silent. She turned.

There he was, walking across the west field—headed in her direction—his tight blue jeans a dusty brown. His thumbs were casually hooked in his pockets. His easy swagger made her heart skip a beat.

All her despair evaporated, replaced by excited trepidation. He crossed the road and strolled to the mailbox. He stopped briefly, making a big show of looking inside, then putting his hand flat against his chest—faining utter distress—as she had earlier. She smiled at him meekly as he playfully mocked her. He smiled back, closed the box, and sauntered up the short path.

Finally, he reached the base of the porch stairs. A piece of hay hung lazily from one corner of his lips. Leaning against a post, he casually tilted his hat back as he smiled that smile.

“I thought I’d take you up on a second glass, if you’re still offering.” He took off his hat and pulled his dirty, sweaty shirt over his head. His farmer’s tan did nothing to detract. He looked to her like a marble statue in work boots and blue jeans.

“Of course, silly.” she said, swallowing hard.

“Much obliged.” He licked his lips. Climbing the steps, he offered her his rough hand. She took it, stood and led him inside, leaving the pitcher and two glasses behind.

To feel his weight pressing down on her— into her—was blissful. Although younger, he was larger than Willy had been. He was also better.

Her telephone rang. Deep in the throws of passion, they ignored it and continued. The answering machine turned on. *Beep!* “Hello Sarah? It’s me, Becca. If you’re there,

pick up. Okay, sweetie – well – listen, can you get a message to Jack in the west field? Tell him I'm headed to town and I'll be back in a couple hours. Thanks, hon. Talk to you later." *Click*.

The sound of his wife's voice only spurred them on. They slammed together harder, her orgasm starting to build. The glistening gold band on his finger caught her eye, as he held her legs spread wide. "She's going to town." Sarah managed to get out in labored gasps. "So am I." he growled, his breath hot in her ear.

It always ended the same way.

Standing, Jack would flip her over to take her from behind. When he was close, he'd grab the bible she kept at her bedside and flip it open, always to the same page. Resting it on her back, he would grab her hips and start reciting aloud, always the same passage. Deuteronomy 25:5. Jack loudly pounded the words into her, reminding them both again of his sacred obligation. Sarah's legs began to shake uncontrollably as her orgasm started. With the last word, on the last thrust, he finished deep inside her.

Afterwards, he dressed in his dirty clothes, and walked from her room—as always—without a word or a glance back. Listening to his footfalls, she followed him in her mind as he strolled down the hall, descended the stairs, pushed open the squeaky screen door, let it swing closed with a slam. Then down the short path, past the mailbox, across the road to where Alee would be waiting to finish those long, hot hours riding the west field. He'd end his day a mile up down the road. At home with Becca.

Reaching to the nightstand, she picked up the bible. It still lay opened to the page with the passage Jack had read, the one he painted in yellow highlighter. Deuteronomy 25:5. That had been a few weeks after his brother had died. In her anguish, Sarah was considering selling what was now her half of the farm. Jack did his best to comfort and reassure, all the while begging her not to give up on his and her late husband's life work. He promised if she kept the farm together, he would always take care of her.

She read the highlighted passage aloud. "When brothers live together and one of them dies her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her."

The duty of a husband's brother. To her. A hallowed obligation that bound them to each other. Sarah agreed to keep the farm together if Jack swore a secret oath—to her and God—to live in accord with Deuteronomy 25:5 and perform his duty as her husband's brother.

She laid in her bed, listening to Alee rumble in the distance, already thinking of the next time Jack took that long ride working the west field. As always, she'd be there, offering to quench his thirst with a cold glass of fresh lemonade. As always, he'd be there, obliged to quench her thirst, by filling that space once filled by his brother.