LIMITATIONS

by

RUTH J. HEFLIN

B. A., Kansas State University, 1985

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1988

Approved by:

Steve Helle
Major Professor

LD
2660
.P4
ENG
1987
H44
c. 2

CONTENTS

A11208 201554

INTRODUCTION

One reason you might want to write about Kansas is because visually Kansas can sustain an observant person. Growing up here or living here by choice can be very difficult for the person with little imagination or curiosity, especially when you are isolated in the countryside, or remote from others in a small rural town.

In a small town everyone seems to know your business, which tends to make you feel remote, sometimes even makes you want to seek solitude. Being part of a large family, which is often the case in rural America, would seem to help you develop social skills, but often categorizes you, instead, causing townspeople to refer to you, if your surname is Jones, as "one of the Jones girls." And, often, in school, you're reduced to being compared with all the other Joneses before you. In such small places, like Pratt, Kansas, you can lose your individual identity.

By the time you are sixteen, you are fully aware of the world outside (or the world inside, since you've always been aware of how far out in the hinterlands your parents have dragged you). You can rebel against being trapped in such a place by doing what the other kids do--drinking, drugs, sex. You can let yourself become oblivious to the boredom by doing typical teenage stuff--slumber parties, dates, the movies, dragging First. Or you can look at what the other people are doing, observe the place you've been

reared in--see the feedlot's lights that look like a large airport at night, smell the summer heated honeysuckle growing by the small pale brick library, feel the wind as it crashes across you on your perch beside the chimney on your house which is surely the tallest thing in the world--and imagine how you're going to change things.

As you sit and observe--perhaps you're in the shade under the pillar supported library at the high school, in the student union at the community college, at the one movie theater that was once a vaudeville-type theater, or on your porch watching the traffic go by--you begin to see the people politics--the kids who come to school in baggy jeans and torn tee-shirts because their parents can't afford better, the kids who get car after car from their parents because they keep hitting that tree on the curve around the lake, too drunk to see it as they leave yet another keg party, girls just interested in cheerleading and sex--swapping names of abortionists you imagine--and going from boyfriend to boyfriend.

And when you're away from people--away from the impersonal, monotonous family, away from the politicking school, away from the passersby who call you by your last name and sex--you look into the tall buffalo grass by the side of the road, you jump as a bullsnake three feet long slithers past your foot trying to get away, you sit on the rusty old tractor seat and listen to its dead engine--now

whispers of golden wheat in the surrounding field, you look up into the solid blue rainbow that stretches over your head and feel the ever-present wind that keeps it clear of cloudy blears. This is what the truly observant can experience in Kansas.

Coming back to Pratt, Kansas after having been away to college, you still see the politicking people and the flat fertile land. But you also see that these people, most of them, have survived--gone on living without you, and, although they have grown older and a new generation drags First Street, they and the land have hardly changed. The same cycle holds them in the same motions as when you last saw them, but now there are babies and divorces.

It's not because you've gotten away from them that makes you want to write about them. It's because their persistence--both the land's and the people's--is recognized as a part of you. You imagine that you can see it because you were always the observant one, the curious one. So you adjust your position on the tractor, clip down your paper from the wind's steadfast fingers, and write down what you know, what you see, what you feel in the Kansas surrounding you. Perhaps as you write you make the elderly older, the cattle more interesting, and the land more vivid than it really is, but it's still Kansas the way you see it, and the way you have experienced it.

THE SCENT OF EARTH, SUN, AND RAIN

Chester Burke was up before the rooster. As he fed the few animals he kept near the house, the sky began to lighten and slowly the stars disappeared as if pinched out by a great hand.

Although he was thirty-six years old, on such mornings as this, Chester felt like a new born baby. The dew quenched the earth's thirst, and the breeze parted the fur on the cottontails' backs as they played leap-frog on the front lawn of the farm house. His pale blue eyes took in all of the sights of the early morning. In the growing light, Chester could see across the flat Kansas prairie to his folks' farm, faintly silhouetted against the sun, two and a quarter miles northeast of his own. He'd grown up on that farm, helping his father plow, plant and irrigate his 432 acres of wheat land. Chester had been born a year exactly after peace was declared, ending World War II. His father had come home to western Kansas from Europe, married his mother and bought thirty-two acres of land with his army compensation and settled into a family life as soon as possible.

Chester could remember when he was seven years old and his father had almost sold their farm to move to the city. The farm had had an especially bad year and his father was tired of being in debt. Even now he could visualize his

father, tired and still limping from the mortar fragment injury he had gotten during the war, cranking up the John Deere tractor and plowing all afternoon. For one last time, he'd said. It had begun to sprinkle a light soothing rain, settling the dust that the plow had raised. Chester could still hear the "Johnny Popper" as his father continued plowing the fallow field. Its gentle puffing sounds were accented occasionally by a manly belch of air. The heavy scent of dust and rain hung in the air. Even though the rain was light, Chester knew his father had to be soaked clear through, because Chester was drenched just watching his father plow as the little boy swung in his tire swing under the shade tree.

Soon the tractor was bogged down in mud and his father climbed down from the hard metal seat. He didn't come to the house, cursing like he usually did when delayed, but he stood beside the tractor, the rain pouring from the sky. Lewis Burke, Chester's father, looked up into the rain. A small break in the clouds allowed sunlight to stream to the ground forming a pyramid over his father. Slowly the rain clouds covered the hole and extinguished the sunlight. As if exhausted, Lewis sunk to his knees and rubbed his hand in the muddy soil with as much love as Chester had ever seen him touch his mother.

Chester had tried to see what his father was doing out there, alone in the rain, had tried to figure out why he

was down on the ground,but his mother had called the boy indoors lest he catch his death from pneumonia. He never knew how long his father had stayed out in the rain. The next time he saw him was at supper and his father had an unusually calm look on his face.

Now, as Chester stood in the full rays of the newly awakened sun, he doubted if the old man would ever sell the farm. It wasn't a large one, but it managed to pay its debts, which was more than Chester's had done lately.

* * * * *

Chester's gentle drawling voice quietly twanged the words to a song he could barely remember. He slid out from under the grasshopper green tractor as oil trickled from its belly into a gummy old bucket. A handsome Labrador Retriever, Bogie, snapped at the first flies of Spring as he sunned himself on the warm sand near the tractor.

Chester stopped singing and looked into the cloudless Kansas sky. Crows and seagulls played chicken high on the cool May afternoon breeze and the sun was well on its way to its rest in the west. A smile slid across Chester's face. One thousand acres of good, fertile soil stretched further than he could see in any direction. Standing here, he could see how the ancients had thought the world was flat: He could see for miles--and to be truthful, the earth, the very soil he stood on <u>was</u> the center of his universe.

Remembering the pitcher of lemonade he had made himself at lunch, Chester started for the house. Bogie scrambled to his feet and bounded for the porch steps. Opening the back screen door, Chester allowed Bogie into the house before him, bowing with his International Farm Equipment cap across his chest like a footman opening the queen's coach door. As Bogie passed through the door, Chester playfully whopped him on the behind with his cap, and with a feigned-ferocious bark, Bogie whirled and grasped the cap in his teeth, easily pulling it from Chester's hand, and bounded into the house with his prize.

Chester gave chase as Bogie's tail disappeared through the kitchen-to-parlor doorway. Puffing slightly, Chester stood in the doorway and began to chuckle softly as Bogie pretended to snooze on the only rug on the wooden floor. Chester's cap was in its usual place on the entry table.

After getting himself a glass of lemonade, Chester settled onto the sofa, putting his feet up on the small brown hassock his mother had given him, and not on the coffee table. Looking around the room, he saw reminders of his mother in nearly all of his decorations, the decorations she'd picked out and arranged for him. Only the spareness of the room reminded him of his father, and of his own life.

At the boy's ripe age of eighteen, Lewis Burke had sent his son off to a life destined to be better than the

one he himself had lived. He sent Chester to college. Lucky enough to receive a basketball scholarship to a nearby community college, Chester was able to attend school during the week and help work the farm on weekends. Basketball, luckily a winter sport, rarely interfered with his work on the farm, and even Lewis took time to attend the home games. Chester's mother, Roberta, attended the games as well, but always seemed to be a little out of place sitting stiffly in the bleachers in her gingham dress next to Lewis. Chester always waved at them from the court after he had scored his first two points, and met them directly after the game for the long ride home so he could have Sunday lunch with them. Roberta had chastised him once for spending so much time with them and not in courting girls, but Chester always squeezed her shoulders and reminded her he had plenty of time for that kind of thing after college. "Besides," he always added, "you're my one and only anyway."

But he met Danella O'Brian two weeks after basketball season had ended, and knew, almost immediately, that she was the woman he wanted to marry. She was beautiful. Her short curly black hair and smooth white skin made her look younger than she was. It wasn't until their second date that Chester learned she was 21 and a senior about to graduate. He proposed to her a week before graduation, told her he would quit school and follow her anywhere. She

had smiled, told him he was a sweet boy, and then reminded him that he had his whole life ahead of him yet. She said she cared for him, but couldn't make a commitment at this time. He'd stood in his best suit in that already hot May sun, felt her kiss his cheek, and saw her walk away.

Lewis and Roberta never knew why Chester refused to return to school the next fall, and Chester wouldn't tell them anything. His teachers assured them he had been a good student, his coach said he was a valuable player.

It was because Chester put all his effort into the farm that summer and fall that Lewis was able to harvest a bumper crop, getting top dollar for his wheat. Lewis rewarded Chester that Christmas by handing him a deed to ten acres of land just west of the family farm. In two more years, Chester had saved enough money to build a house and barns and began farming for himself.

His mother, the only woman he seemed to care to associate with now, decorated his house "to look like someone lives here," she said. People, especially his young farm hands he hired as his farm grew, teased him at first about building a "love nest," but stopped, apparently realizing they would get no response from Chester, after a couple of years of his farm solitude.

Like many farmers, Chester had big dreams and felt the need to own lots of acreage and to grow tremendous crops of wheat. He was always in debt now, it seemed. He'd take an

FmHA loan to cover his next crop, pay it off--or nearly so--after he'd harvested, and turn right back around for another loan for the next year. And, as occasionally happens, if a crop was bad, the year especially stormy or dry, he'd have to take out an even larger loan to cover his losses. Although he never voiced his need, sometimes he wished he had a helpmate to help get him through the tense times at harvest and planting, but never seemed to have time to look for one.

This year, his three young farm hands were doing a fair job in helping keep up the farm. They could plow the fields, spread fertilizer, keep irrigation systems working and feed the cattle, but couldn't really judge the growth of crops. Chester enjoyed watching the progress of the wheat. He walked the nearest fields every day and occasionally would drive past his acres upon acres of wheatland to check the rest of his crop. He felt alive watching the sweet green wheat stretch in the wind. He had a good feeling about this wheat and the days in the sun made him feel vital.

Chester wiped the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand, then reset his billed cap squarely on his head. The late June heat wavered through the air and the golden ripe wheat rustled gently, whispering secretively, in the humidly hot Kansas wind.

The summer sun blazed strongly, causing Chester to

squint as his gaze swept the wheat field with the wind. A quick whistle through his teeth brought an answering bark over the breeze. Leaving a wake behind him like a boat on the sea, Bogie swam through the wheat to greet his master. Chester opened the cab door of his Chevy pickup and Bogie jumped in and sat on the far side of the seat, his head hanging out of the window, anticipating the wind in his face and the hordes of scents that filled the air bathing his nostrils.

"Well, ole boy," Chester said fondly as he slid into the seat beside Bogie, "if the weather stays on our side, we just might have a bumper crop this year." Chester's long arm patted Bogie's back and the dog, sensing Chester's good mood, barked a single syllable reply. The truck rumbled to a start and slid easily into gear as Chester eased it onto the dirt road.

It would be five years ago this summer that Chester had gotten Bogie. Half regretting he'd said he would go, Chester went with his parents to the county fair that summer.

"You haven't been to the fair since college, Chester." His mother had brought over a basket of baked goods for him and his hands as a celebration for a good harvest just completed. The fair, his mother reminded him, was in just two weeks. "Remember how you used to love the midway carnival? After you had seen to your exhibit animals, you

would always spend hours going around and around the midway with your friends. As if you hadn't seen a dozen other carnivals just like it."

"Mom, that was a long time ago. I was only a kid then."

"And isn't there a little bit of the little boy left in you?" She put her hands on her hips and faced him squarely across his meager kitchen.

"Mom."

"Chester."

"Mom, it's just a silly fair."

"And I'm just a silly old woman, I suppose." She dusted invisible flour from the front of her gingham dress.

Smiling, Chester crossed the tile floor, which he meticulously scrubbed once a month, and put his arm, clean of wheat chaff and dirt for the first time in days, around his mother's shoulders. "Alright, I'll go."

She squeezed his waist.

"But only on one condition." He pulled away from her a little to fully see her face. "Only if you'll ride with me on the Ferris Wheel."

Roberta hated heights. "Alright." She smiled faintly. "It's a date."

Lewis watched from the ground as Roberta and Chester went up and around on the Ferris Wheel. Roberta was visibly whiter when the ride ended, but her excitement

began to burn in the men as well, and soon they were working the ten cent cranes, tossing rings, and shooting at target ducks amidst the smells of popcorn, cotton candy, and hot electrical wiring. Chester, determined to win a stuffed animal for his mother, spent nearly twenty dollars at one booth throwing darts at balloons. He was shocked, as well as disappointed, when he learned that his prize wasn't stuffed at all, but live--wriggling, whining, and diddling all over him. He'd won a puppy. Bogie.

Although his mother wouldn't let him argue with the carnie over the prize, she wouldn't accept it from Chester either, insisting he needed the dog more than she did. Chester finally accepted his predicament when his mother began speculating on the best way to season puppy for roasting. Lewis laughed at Chester's protective gesture, but both parents noted the bond that seemed to grow between the dog and man on the long pickup drive home--ten minutes into the trip and both man and beast were asleep, one sprawled across the lap of the other.

This Sunday, his parents faced Chester from his well-worn sofa, trying to relax after the elaborate lunch Chester had made for them.

"You're not serious." Chester smiled slightly before he sipped his iced tea. "You've said this before."

Lewis took Roberta's hand. Chester carefully studied them both as he struggled to understand what his father was

saying. The man had aged more rapidly than his wife. Now in his early sixties, he didn't appear quite as tall as his former basketball player son remembered him, nor did the son remember the now well-rounded stomach from his youth, and the father's hair was almost completely gray. Chester wondered if this was what he too would look like. The woman, so much smaller beside her husband, was also plump, but her auburn hair still held much of its original color.

"I know, son. But we're really serious this time." Lewis patted Roberta's hand. "Mother's already got a little house picked out for us in town. A real nice little place, just the love nest we need." Lewis pulled Roberta a little closer.

"But you can't move." Chester stood up, uncertain where to stand, in front of his chair, then moved toward a window.

"Why not?" His mother's tone seemed to indicate she knew what he'd say.

Chester knew he couldn't say it, not right out. So he searched for a better answer than "What will I do without you?" as he talked. "You've got too much stuff to move it all to town."

"We're going to have an auction after harvest," his father answered in his usually crisp style. "We'll take what we'll need in town and sell the rest."

"But now isn't the right time to sell land. Real

estate values are too low. Wait until you can get a better price." Chester sat back down.

"We've already sold the farm, Chester." His mother's voice was still the soft, deep twang he remembered from childhood--her Arkansas inheritance she'd always said. "And we managed to get top market price from a young couple for the house and the attached ten acres--they're not interested in farming, but want to raise horses instead."

"What about the rest of the land?" On the edge of his seat, Chester clutched his sweating tea glass.

Lewis pulled out a legal document and handed it across the walnut coffee table to Chester. "One hundred acres, those next to your own land, are yours. The rest was sold in parcels to other farmers."

"Sold?" Chester slid back into his chair and stared at the paper as though it were blank, or held the secret to the universe--one he couldn't believe.

"The new owners will take possession two weeks after harvest, or in less than a month." His father, finished with his tea, rose from the sofa and pretended to inspect the only painting in the room. "It's time we moved on, Chester. It's all yours now." He turned to study Chester who seemed to be staring at his mother.

"All mine," Chester repeated, and returned his gaze to the paper. Bogie, somehow aware of Chester's stirring emotions, rose from the corner and pressed his head into

his master's lap. Absent-mindedly, Chester stroked the dog's head. The thought that it was summer pressed itself into Chester's mind. It had been summer before, it would be summer again. Why couldn't it always be summer?

Chester could see the bright red combines chewing his father's wheat into chaff and kernels, regurgitating the chaff and straw behind it and spitting the wheat kernels from their long spouts into the awaiting trucks.

His father had arrived that morning to tell Chester that his harvesters would finish his wheat in less than two days. Now, Chester prayed for the weather to stay picture perfect for at least another week. He tried not to think of what he would have to do if it rained and delayed the harvest, or what would happen if an electrical storm caused his fields to burn. He constantly told himself he would do well this year, but, as with every harvest, worry played tag in his mind. Behind the worry was a fear he refused to name, he only asked himself why things ever had to change.

Chester had slept well last night. He couldn't understand it. Rain had always woken him before.

Bogie shook the water from his coat when he emerged from the wheat and planted his muddy paws on Chester's

chest.

"Get down off a me, ya damn dog." Chester growled as he pushed the dog to the ground. Bogie tucked his tail for a moment, but shook himself again and jumped into the pickup cab leaving muddy paw prints on the vinyl seat. The heated scent of the wet earth hung heavily in the hot, muggy July air.

The head harvester shook his head and spit chew juice out of the corner of his mouth, wiping the brown dribbles from his chin with a heavily callused hand. "Hell, Mr. Burke," he swore, "the damn combines'll get bogged down in all this muck. We're just gunna have ta wait til it dries out."

Chester crammed his hands in his jeans pockets, turned his eyes toward the cloud obscured heavens and slumped against the side of the pickup. "I know, Artie. I hope it dries fast." The knot in his stomach tightened.

Later that day, the soup warmed Chester as rain fell softly on the house's awnings, running in a steady stream from the drain pipe. Bogie was curled in a corner by the stove. He woke abruptly when a rain drop hit his nose. A stain was slowly spreading on the ceiling above him as more water seeped in the leak. Bogie moved to the other side of the room.

The travelling harvesters--their trailers camped outside the farm house--had grown tired of waiting for the ground to dry out, so when Artie Benson, head of the combine fleet out of Tulsa, had told them it was dry enough for them to proceed, they tackled the wheat fields like Rush miners after gold. Everyday for four days the sun shown guidingly down on the red monsters as they ate the golden wheat. The rain had put the harvesters a week behind schedule so they worked night and day in six men shifts to strip Mother Earth of her golden gown.

Behind them, the ranch hands baled straw and carefully burned stubble and began preparing the fields for next year's crop. Chester supervised every step of the operation, making sure the men were fed and had plenty of water and that no man got sick from being in the sun too long.

"Well, it took an extra week because of the rain," Artie chortled, "but we harvested a bumper crop anyway. If we could have had the wheat that had been downed in the rain, it would have been the best damned wheat crop this side of heaven!"

A tired smile softened Chester's face. His six-foot frame straightened slightly and his blue eyes beamed contentedly. "Yeah, it was a good crop alright." He clicked his pen and tore out the check for the harvester.

"Too bad about your father selling out, he was always

the kind of farmer I could enjoy working for. But at least I know I'll see you next year, Mr. Burke." The harvester stuck the check in his overalls pocket. He jovially patted Chester on the back and climbed into the cab of his wheat truck.

Slowly, the convoy of trucks, combines and trailers pulled away from the farm house. Chester tucked the checkbook in his hip pocket and stroked Bogie's head. "Yeah, next year."

There was only bare prairie now between him and his folks' house. Across the emptiness he saw a moving van back up to the front door. Chester tugged at Bogie's ear, deep in thought. Soon the heat made him perspire, a dark seam of sweat stood out on the back of his shirt. Bogie barked, dragging Chester from his daydream.

Smiling, he slapped his thigh and raced Bogie up the porch steps and into the house. After Chester had showered and changed into another set of work clothes, he mixed a large thermos of lemonade, adding lots of ice. Pulling on his cap as he whistled to Bogie, he stepped out onto the porch and looked west toward the growing evening.

"Come on, Bogie. They're going to be thirsty packing things up in this heat. We'd better go relieve them."

The pickup kicked up dust, but Bogie still stuck his head out the window, and Chester sang softly to a song he could barely remember.

LIMITATIONS

Holly Compton could never have told anyone that she was an intelligent young woman. It was just not in her character. It would have been easier for her to say what she was not. She had many limitations, or so she thought.

For instance, she knew she wasn't attractive. She was too plump, had plain brown hair, and dull brown eyes, or so her mirror seemed to say. And even though people told her she was fun to be around, she knew she wasn't a social butterfly.

But perhaps her biggest limitation was her "brightness." A brightness so obvious that one of her teachers had once said he could actually see the wheels turning in Holly's head. She was the last of six children and had been in her school district's gifted class since sixth grade. Her oldest sister, Vera--nearly thirty-five years old now with two sweet little girls of her own, a handsome husband and a good paying job--always complained about the special attention Holly got. "It's no fair that she got all the brains," Vera would say, laughing weakly. And Paul, their father, would always shake his head in wonder at Holly's grade cards. "I never got any grades like this," he'd say.

Luckily, it was only periodically that Holly had to deal with such comments at home, where she could sometimes

manage to blend in with everyone else. At school, though, it was a different matter. Everyone at Grant High knew Holly as "that gifted Compton girl." Because she had wanted to stay with her peers in some classes, she only went to the gifted classes half days. She tried hard not to be the freak geek, but ended up helping "friends" to cheat with papers and exams so that she wouldn't stick out or be left out.

She always hated academic awards time because she knew that all the eyes looking at her as she crossed the gym floor to the scholarship awards table were thinking about how unfair it was that it was her and not them. She never knew the satisfaction of having a friend she knew would always be around for her. But she at least could control and excel at something.

Often, because no one would ask her to go out to eat or just to drive around after school, and because she, in turn, never asked anyone else to join her, Holly went home. Home was on the outskirts of this small Kansas town where her parents owned a three bedroom ranch house and three acres of land. Behind the house was a small barn with an attached horse shed. In the barn were the baby calves to be bottle fed that her father had brought home from the feedlot where he worked. It was Holly's job as the only child still living with Mom and Dad to feed the calves before achool every morning and after school every evening.

Right now there were five calves, and they seemed to get along fine with Holly's horse, Jezibel.

Jezibel's registered name was Daughter of the Bright Moon Called Shandy, out of Bright Moon and sired by Nominclature Shandy. Holly called her Jezibel because she was a vexing creature that had spent most of her life fooling around and had had at least ten foals by different fathers. Holly enjoyed riding and taking care of Jezibel because the old lady still had enough spunk in her for a gallop through the park.

It was because of Holly's ease in working with animals and her love, almost a preference, for them that she took her studies in science seriously in high school. She had decided, when her fifth sister, Martha, had turned down pre-vet school to get married, that she was the one who should be the veterinarian in the family. She read Walter Farley and James Herriot books voraciously, and dreamed of being the best vet in the world--saving countless animals' lives and winning the awe and respect of their owners.

After her first year of pre-vet work at Kansas State University, Holly got a job for the summer with one of the vets in her hometown--Lyle Klazinski. She was the only help the stocky, middle-aged veterinarian had, other than his quiet, older brother, Sherwood, who only helped him to bloodtest cattle at the stockyard and who rarely came around the clinic.

Holly was the doctor's receptionist, his lab technician, his x-ray technician, and his poop scooper-upper. He taught her all about the fundamentals of veterinary work. Holly often thought he wanted to teach her other, more intimate, things as well, but his wife was always dropping into the clinic unexpectedly, so she knew he would never really push things too far. She wasn't sure she was interested in him that way anyway.

Klazinski was surprised by Holly's stomach for surgery. He generally kept the times 10 a.m. to noon and 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. open on Mondays and Wednesdays as set times to do the steady little surgeries most veterinarians practice--the spaying and neutering of dogs and cats. On Holly's first day, a Monday, the doctor had three successive spayings to do, a labrador which had just weaned her pups, a year-old terrier, and a small white poodle. As Holly helped the doctor prep the poodle for surgery--it was the smallest dog and the most difficult to operate on, Klazinski informed her--he began instructing her on the surgical equipment and its proper employment.

First, they gave the dog enough anesthesia to make it groggy enough to handle it without causing harm to it, or risking a bite to themselves. Then the dog was strapped by means of soft nylon rope spread-eagle onto its back on the surgery table. It began to whimper as the vet secured its backlegs, so he placed a small mask, attached to the gas

anesthesia tank, over its muzzle until it had once again relaxed. Holly listened to the steady, almost hypnotic, whistle of the dog's breath passing through the mask.

"How well do you shave your legs?" Dr. Klazinski asked as he began to soap up the dog's belly.

"Excuse me?" Holly, uncomfortable, moved to the opposite side of the small surgery table.

"I mean, how close can you shave without cutting?" He lifted a razor from the tray of the sterilized steel surgery items.

"I have a few scars, why?" Holly watched the small ball go up and down over the mask, listened to its steady whistle.

"Oh, I thought about letting you do this." He began shaving the dog's stomach between and over her nipples. "You have to be good enough not to cut anything off though." The doctor wasn't much taller than herself, so when he smiled--the sun wrinkled skin around his eyes crinkling up, his greying temples expanding slightly--she saw directly into his eyes. She couldn't find much humor there.

Not wanting to show her unease, Holly briefly smiled back. "Then I'd better let you handle it."

As the surgery progressed, both people remaining maskless, Klazinski told Holly the names of the instruments he was using and what he was using them for. Tying off the

fallopian tubes, Klazinski glanced up at Holly's intrigued and completely engrossed expression. "How are you doing?"

"Me? I'm just fine."

He removed his clamps. "Well, if you get a little queezy, don't be embarrassed to step out of the room for a breather. I'll understand--being your first surgery and all."

Holly smiled mischievously, putting her hands on her hips. "Oh, I'm fine, really. A little hungry perhaps, but I'm sure I'll make it to lunch."

"Hungry?"

"Yes, it's already after eleven and I haven't eaten since seven this morning. I'm famished."

Klazinski tried to study Holly's face as he closed up his little patient, and then just shook his head and laughed.

After wrapping a towel loosely around the poodle to keep it warm as it recovered, Holly brought out the Labrador, leaving the terrier--a preferable size of dog to operate on, according to Klazinski--to be operated on in the afternoon.

This time he let Holly hand him the instruments as he asked for them and was pleased at how quickly she had learned. As she arranged the instruments on the sterilizer after the surgery was finished, Klazinski watched from the doorway of the small surgery room.

"Well, are you ready to do the surgery yourself this afternoon?"

Holly continued cleaning up the surgery table, straightening the nylon straps, and sterilizing the steel slab top. "Sure, as long as you cover the malpractice suit." She looked up, smiling tentatively.

Klazinski chuckled as he turned away. "No problem, I'm insured." He paused and returned to the doorway. "Since it's your first day and you're obviously ravenous, how 'bout I take you out to lunch?"

Holly picked up the bloodied rags from the floor and tossed them in the trash. "No thanks. Mom's making me my favorites today. I shouldn't disappoint her." She splashed disinfectant over the floor, as Klazinski had shown her before.

"No, I suppose not." Digging out his keys, Klazinski headed for the back door. "Okay, then, see you at one." And he was gone.

Holly looked at her watch. It was 12:15.

She was back at the office promptly at one, but Klazinski was nowhere to be found. No appointments were scheduled until two, so Holly took the opportunity to explore the store room where shelves upon shelves from floor to ceiling were filled with medicines and boxed medical supplies. She remembered Dr. Klazinksi specifying that one of her duties was to dust these shelves

periodically. Finding a feather duster, she began at the top, with the help of a step ladder that slid along the wall attached by a runner just above the top shelf, and completed the top shelf circuit before she heard Klazinski calling her name. She had noted as she worked that everything was sectioned off according to specie: canine, feline, bovine, equine, and porcine, with odds and ends for snakes, reptiles, rodents and birds. During her periodic dusting sprees, she began to memorize the medicines and where they were located for future use. Klazinski sometimes teased her that she was practicing to be a housewife, not a vet, which Holly always either laughed off or ignored.

At three, Klazinski advised Holly as she prepped the terrier for surgery. Klazinski administered the anesthesia and Holly carefully shaved around the dog's nipples. This time, Klazinski named the muscles as he cut, and pointed out specifically what Holly should look for and do if she were to perform the spaying. He became so engrossed in his teaching, that he failed to notice the dog's irregular breathing. Holly had become so attuned to the steady whistle from the anesthesia mask that she noticed the growing length between breaths. Finally, the dog stopped breathing.

"What do we do? Is it dying?" Holly heard the panic in her voice and tried to calm herself.

Distractedly, Klazinski looked up. "Shut off the valve to the anesthesia."

Quickly, Holly moved to the head of the surgery table and began twisting the regulator valve.

"Now, push down on the dog's chest, here." Klazinski pointed with a bloody hand. "Harder. Like you were giving it CPR."

Holly thrust her hand, tentatively, and then with more force, against the dog's chest.

"Good, again."

A breath escaped through the whistle part of the mask still on the dog's face. Holly pushed again, and again.

"Okay, stop. Let's see what happens."

A short sigh tickled the whistle. Then another. Then nothing.

"Come on, dog. Breathe." Klazinski's hand left a bloody mark on the dog's tan chest. This time, it began to breath, shallowly, then longer, shakier breaths. The dog began to moan.

"Turn the anesthesia back on, just a little."

Holly stayed at the head of the table, until the doctor was sewing up the last layer of skin. Then she turned off the anesthesia and returned to the opposite side and began gathering up the instruments for sterilization.

"Ya okay?" Klazinski tied off his incision.

"Yes, I'm fine." Holly began untying the dog.

"Good. Can't have my assistant fainting on me, now can I?" He stripped off his gloves.

Holly grimaced, unhappy that he still thought her so weak. "Don't worry, I won't do that."

"That's good."

As Holly cleaned up the surgery, Klazinski wrapped the dog in a towel and took it to the little recovery room just opposite his private office, so he could keep an eye on it.

By evening, the dog was awake, and up and around. Holly then put it in a regular pen in the dog room, stroking it and talking to it as she carried it, taking care not to jar or upset it.

"You'll make a good mother someday, Holly." The doctor observed her from the doorway. "I'll check on it again later tonight. I'm sure it'll be fine now." Klazinski assured Holly as he followed her to the break room.

Holly smiled, too tired to reply, hung up her lab smock, told him goodnight, and had to brush past him in the narrow hallway as she headed for the door. She thought she felt his hand touch her back, but she let it pass.

Although Holly worked five days a week, the clinic was only open four. On the fifth day, Holly assisted the doctor, along with Sherwood his brother, out at the livestock sale barn where they blood tested breeding and dairy cattle for brucellosis. Holly liked this mostly

physical activity--even in the hot and sticky months of July and August. The sale barn and its accompanying stock yard were isolated from town by five miles of wheat and farmland. When waiting down by the end pens for the signal to run up more cattle for testing, Holly sat astride the fences, alert for the boisterous call from Klazinski or a gentle prod from his quiet sibling Sherwood, but occasionally indulging her eyes in the sight of the waving wheat: first dark green in May, then lighter green and taller in June--heading out late in the month--and turning to undulating liquid gold by early July. In August, the rising heat pulled the plowed earth's scent from its pores, seemingly to fill Holly's, but the brief cool breezes--tantalizing reminders of the winter to come--kept her skin clean and young.

When the doctor felt that her feminine young skin was looking too red, or that she was perspiring too heavily, he made her assist him, under a huge tin tent, in drawing blood from the cattle as they filtered through the long, curved cattle chute.

Holly never drew the blood herself, Klazinski and Sherwood were the ones who dirtied their hands lifting the cows tails to get at the tender, ready supply of blood just above the anus. Holly, instead, sported a long stiff sale-ring whip in one hand and an electric hotshot rod in the other. She stood on a platform next to the chute and urged

the cattle through, making sure they went one at a time so as not to jam things up. Klazinski was pleased to see she had no qualms about striking a particularly stubborn animal, and noted that she preferred the whip to the hotshot, attributing it to her feminine preference for humane treatment. Even her whip made more sound than actual flesh contact.

When Holly was in actual proximity to the cattle, Klazinski often reminded her that these cattle, mostly range-fed Hereford and dairy-barn Holstein, were not the gentle 4-H creatures she was used to handling. Even so, Holly never flinched when confronted with an obstinate cow determined to go back to the pen before it was time. But, at times, the sounds of her whip strongly accented her yells of threats to the cattle.

After they had a hundred samples, the doctor would send her inside the little lab the sale barn provided for him to spin the blood on a centrifuge so it could be tested. Some days they ran tests on over 500 samples, occasionally finding one or two that reacted, and the whole herd which the positive cows had come from had to be branded--warning prospective buyers of possible brucellosis contamination.

To prove which cows were actual carriers, Klazinski retested the whole contaminated herd, trusting Holly--but often supervising from behind her--to spin the blood, place dots of plasma on laboratory cards, add the catalyst, and

swirl the two together, looking for changes in color and clotting. Those specific cows got a "B" branded onto their cheeks--Sherwood holding the cow's head with pincers through her nose, and Klazinski operating the electric branding iron. Those days were rare, but the scent of the burning hair and flesh, seared it way into Holly's nose, a haunting odor.

Holly liked her work best when the doctor was out making house calls. She was always left in charge of the clinic--customers usually came by appointment or called ahead--so after putting the boarded dogs and the ones rehabbing from surgery out in the kennel runs and then scrubbing down their pens and refilling their dishes, she would go into the cat room, leaving the door ajar so she could hear the buzz which signalled customers incoming. There, she would talk to the cats. Generally, they just sat in the corner of their cold slab cages and stared at her with exotic eyes. Occasionally, one of the boarders which hadn't known the cruelty of some sort of surgery would come up to the bars, rubbing itself, enticing her to make it purr. Rarely did she ever take a cat out of its cage--because of the open door--but she would often reach her hand through the bars scratching around the cat's head, rubbing her hand down its back and gently pulling on its tail. Most of the cats seemed to love this.

Once, however, a cat hissed at her. It was a

beautiful teal-colored Sismese, its coat nearly the ssme bright blue as its eyes. It had been brought in because its elderly owner, a widow named Mrs. Nelson, was concerned that it wasn't eating.

"Probably just fur balls," Dr. Klazinski assured the older woman. He jerked his hand back as the cat's extended claws grazed it. "But maybe we had better keep it under observation for a while." He looked warily at the Siamese. "Holly, get a towel that we can wrap around it so it doesn't claw us. You wouldn't want to have to get a rabies shot."

"Rabies?" Mrs. Nelson's face lost its color. "You don't think Baby has rabies, do you? I mean, he never goes outside. Ever. And he's had his shots."

"No, I doubt it's rabies." He signalled for Holly to wrap the cat. "But something is wrong with it if it hasn't eaten in a week. Too much longer and it could starve itself to death."

Holly tried to gently wrap the towel around the cat as Mrs. Nelson held it, but it still hissed and growled. Its growl nearly turned into a scream as Holly carried it back to the cat room.

Busy with blood testing a special shipment of cattle at the saleyard, the doctor let Holly take care of most of the clinic's patients for a couple of days, which meant wrapping the Siamese in a towel three times a day and

smearing a gel filled with nutrients on his face. Although the doctor didn't tell her, Holly knew that because cats are naturally clean animals, the cat would ingest enough nutrients from the gel when he washed his face to keep him alive. It was necessary since he never ate his food and was growing noticeably thin. By the third day, he wasn't even cleaning the gel off.

"How's...my...Baby doing?" Mrs. Nelson asked shakily, a trait Holly had never noticed in Mrs. Nelson's previous three trips.

Holly hated to inspire too much hope in the woman, but couldn't face telling her the truth. She shuffled papers on her desk behind the counter over which Mrs. Nelson querulously peered, her loosely fleshed arms pressed against its marbled top.

"He's about the same as yesterday, Mrs. Nelson. I'm sure..."

Dr. Klazinski, abruptly, walked in, as though on cue.

"Oh, hello, Mrs. Nelson. I'm afraid we don't have anything good to report about your cat. It looks like it's even quit eating the nutrient gel we've been giving it."

"Oh, my," Mrs. Nelson's already translucent face paled. "Do you think there is any hope for him, doctor?" She gripped the edge of the counter firmly, the tips of her fingers as clear white as her face, almost exposing bone, it seemed.

"I'm not sure, Mrs. Nelson." He glanced briefly at Holly who was looking down at the appointment schedule. "Holly and I will give it an enema this afternoon. After all, it hasn't had a bowel movement since it's been here." He shrugged his shoulders. "If that doesn't help it, I'm afraid we'll have done all we can."

Mrs. Nelson's chin quivered and she put a porcelain-like hand to her lips. "Oh, dear."

Holly inhaled the odors of antiseptic and dog hair, and tried to smile.

Mrs. Nelson returned the smile faintly. "You'll call me if his condition changes, won't you?" She looked directly at Holly.

"Yes, ma'am," said Dr. Klazinski.

"No matter what happens?" Mrs. Nelson tried to pull her purse higher up on her arm.

"Yes, ma'am. We'll let you know as soon as it happens." Dr. Klazinski, as if for emphasis, but Holly suspected it was out of nervousness or awkwardness, slapped the top of the desk as he said "soon," making both Holly and Mrs. Nelson jump.

"Yes," Mrs. Nelson's voice seemed to shake even more and she cleared her throat for some control over it. "Well," she seemed to consider something, then continued, "I'll stop by tomorrow."

At about four o'clock, when Dr. Klazinski was sure no

one else was going to call for an appointment, Holly held the cat, nearly smothered by towels, over the lab sink in the back room while Dr. Klazinski gave it an enema. Holly had never heard a cat scream in pain before.

The doctor tested what little feces they could obtain from the cat for worms and other such vermin, but found nothing.

The now very emaciated cat sat moaning in the corner of its cage. Still wet and disheveled from its enema, the Siamese made no move to clean itself. It's blue eyes seemed washed out, the irises drained of their blue life and replaced with yellowing death.

"Now we wait for it to die." Dr. Klazinski poked his head into the cat room where Holly had been about to feed the other cats.

"What's wrong with with him? I don't understand how an apparently otherwise healthy cat can let himself starve to death." Holly continued to stare into the cage.

"I'm not positive, but the jaundicing of the eyes indicates some sort of liver malfunction. Probably feline peritonitis--an inflammation of the abdominal lining. Since there is no known cure for it, I couldn't tell Mrs. Nelson. She needed some kind of hope, especially since I wasn't sure at first. We'll know when we do a necropsy though."

Holly now stared at the space where the doctor's head

had been. Feline what? she thought. She remembered the day she had made an appointment for another cat. The owner had said it was pissing on all her furniture. Holly had written in her note to the doctor that a woman was bringing in a cat that was wetting all over the house. He had returned it to her desk with a red mark through "wetting" and a large red "URINATING" over the top of it. She had chalked the incident up as a learning experience, reminding herself to be more technical.

She began to feel uncertain about what she could handle. She watched the cat sink to the cement floor of its cage, and remembered Mrs. Nelson's reaction to Dr. Klazinksi's news about the cat. She wished she had the day off tomorrow, and that everything would be back to normal when she returned.

Holly held a hand over her mouth and nose as Dr. Klazinski sliced open the stomach of the dead Siamese. She had discovered the dead cat on the fourth morning and the doctor had begun the necropsy immediately, but the room still stank with a sour putrid smell worse than rotten eggs, burned flesh, or anything else Holly had encountered. Klazinski was satisfied he'd been right.

After a quick exploration of the now nearly orange

intestines, the doctor signalled for the body bag. Holly gulped fresh air as she set the bag out back by the empty corrals for Sherwood to bury.

When she went back in to the front desk, Dr. Klazinski was talking to Mrs. Nelson--he was bent over the desk and didn't once look up as Holly entered.

Mrs. Nelson cleared her throat. "Can I have...you know...his remains to bury at home?"

Dr. Klazinski stopped figuring her bill. "No, I'm sorry, ma'am. We've already disposed of them."

Holly handed Mrs. Nelson a tissue. "I'm sorry," the older woman shook her head. "I know he was just a cat."

"No need to apologize, ma'am. We know how you feel." Dr. Klazinski hesitated and looked at Holly before continuing. "I think it would be alright if we just bill Mrs. Nelson, don't you, Holly?"

The woman's head, framed in closely permed silver curls, shook vehemently. "No, that's not necessary. I'd rather pay it now and...get it over with." Mrs. Nelson cleared her throat and adjusted her purse before taking out her billfold.

"Whatever you say, Mrs. Nelson. Holly, I've got to go immunize some calves out back. Will you see to this?"

Holly nodded as she watched a tear trickle down Mrs. Nelson's wrinkled cheek, and fought back one of her own. Her resolve to be stoic haunted her. And she was glad the

doctor was outside.

Mrs. Nelson handed her the check. "Thank you for all you did," she said as more tears threatened her.

"I'm sorry I couldn't do more, Mrs. Nelson." Holly stopped, afraid to say more.

Mrs. Nelson dabbed her eyes with the tissue and tried to smile. "Perhaps you'll be able to do more, once you're a veterinarian yourself. I think women are more sensitive about..." she waved her hand toward the interior of the clinic, "these kinds of things than men are. Don't you?"

The older woman seemed to straighten somewhat and there was a fresh flush to her face.

Holly went around the counter to open the door for her.

"Yes, I think you'll make a good veterinarian." She smiled and patted Holly's shoulder.

After she was gone, Holly sat down at her desk. She cried soft sobs that brought too many tears from her eyes, making her worry that the doctor would come in and discover her. Presently, she blew her nose and began clearing off her desk.

The doctor had already gone home by the time Holly finished cleaning up and had hung her smock on its hook near the coffee room doorway. It was nearly five-thirty by the time Holly got home. She hollered in to her mother to let her know she was home as she dropped her purse on the

porch and traded her sneakers for her cowboy boots which always waited by the door, ready to go riding.

Holly pushed away hungry calves as she hurried through the corral to Jezibel's small paddock. The mare was surprisingly congenial, rubbing her large black head againat Holly'a arma and chest, seemingly ready to be out and to the park for their usual evening canter. Tying her to the hitching post under the elms by the barn, Holly vigorously brushed the coal black mare down, taking time to scratch the heavy brush down the full length of the mare's spine several times. Each time, the mare arched her back up to meet the brush, enjoying the caress.

As Holly saddled the mare, the calves crushed themselves against the corral gate bleating like goats to be fed. She took time to rub the peaks of their heads and behind their ears, keeping her fingers away from their hungry mouths--even so, ending up with a wet, tongue lashed arm.

Today, Holly let the mare take her time meandering through the town's dusty little dirt roads that led to this outer limit park. She laughed at the little dogs penned behind the chicken wire which surrounded Ned's Used Auto Yard and which sported a large red and white BEWARE OF DOGS sign as they clambered over each other trying to get at the jittery horse. Jezibel skirted as far around them as Holly would let her.

As they approached the park, Holly decided not to lope on the heavy, summer scented grass today. Instead, she reined the horse around the park and down another dirt road that led to the western side of town. Soon they had passed all of the houses and were headed into the countryside. When the sun had finally outdistanced them, Holly turned Jezibel, hidden in the dark beneath her, around and headed home.

When Holly returned to State College that fall, she informed her advisor that she wanted to change majors. That semester, she won the award for most outstanding undergraduate student in English for her essay on T.S. Eliot's Old Posaum'a Book of Practical Cats.

OBSTINACY

Jezibel flared her black nostils, and turned her head to look at Holly.

Holly Compton stopped tightening the cinch. Taking up the reins, she began to lead the mare around the outside of the fragrant hay barn.

"Now, listen here, old lady. I'm not going to stand for this." She stroked the horse's neck, speaking softly and soothingly. "The minute I try to get on, you'll let that air out you're holding in your belly and the saddle will slip sideways--and me with it." Suddenly the young woman stopped and quickly tightened the cinch. Finished, she smiled and patted the horse's shoulder. "There, now that's not so bad, is it? Of course, if you'd just cooperate the first time, I wouldn't have to get your mind off your stubbornness by walking you around."

The mare danced sideways, forcing Holly to hop along on one foot as she tried to mount. Getting a firm hold on the mare's neck--intertwining her fingers in the long black mane--and gripping the horn of the saddle, the plump young woman made three little hobbles and one big bounce as she threw herself into the saddle before the mare could move completely away. Triumphant, she forced the mare to stand still. When Jezibel finally stopped stamping her hooves and just stood placidly still, Holly gently kicked

her heels into the mare's smooth black sides. The horse jolted as though ready to gallop away, but Holly's firm hand on the reins kept the pace to a steady trot.

A few dusty blocks into town and away from her family's small farm, Holly could see the small city park and its wide open grassy fields. Holly could smell the sweetness of the grass as the mare's shod hooves crushed it, occasionally turning over chunks of sod. Holly never saw anyone in this park--not even around the run-down play equipment--at this time of day. The flies buzzed around the horse as she began to sweat. Holly liked to think the mare got worked up over being held in check in this open area, but knew it was more likely the early summer afternoon heat.

Jezibel began to chew the bit and toss her head.

After two sedate passes through the park, Holly let Jezibel lope through the third, slowing her down as they crossed the shallow ditch in the middle of the flat field--no need for broken legs. At the beginning of the fourth pass, Holly stopped and faced Jezibel back across the field.

"This is it, girl. Are you ready?" Against skin already darkened by numerous rides in the summer sun, Holly's brown eyes--like melted milk chocolate--glistened with anticipation as she patted the lathered neck of the big black mare.

Jezibel snorted and bent her head down to rub a foreleg with her long nose.

Smiling, Holly bent low over the saddle horn--low enough to be aerodynamic in the saddle, yet not impale herself on the high western horn. Jezibel, feeling the shift of weight, began to prance. Holly puckered and made a loud kissing noise, easing her hold on the reins. Needing no more encouragement, the horse bolted as from a starting gate.

Exhilarated, Holly did nothing more than hold on to the horse as well as her knees would let her. Deliberately, she avoided touching the saddle or the horse with her hands and leaned with her weight on her knees, directing the horse in her wild course across the park.

As Holly saw the approaching ditch, she curled the fingers of her right hand into the horse's mane, laughing as Jezibel lept, nearly like a cat, across the small ravine.

Toward the end of the park, the mare began to slow her pace--Holly still only guiding the horse's actions with her knees. Since these rides were almost a ritual now, the horse knew the boundaries of the park and what to do after the gallop. Jezibel paused, as though looking both ways, before trotting onto the dirt street. She had slowed to a walk by the time they reached the hay barn.

Holly's father, Paul, was sitting in the porch swing

he had put on a child's old swingset especially for Holly's mom, Emily, under the large elm in the back yard. After rubbing Jezibel down and tossing her some hay, Holly drank some cool water from the garden hose and then sprawled on the grass under the tree.

"Hey, Smartiepants, you'll get chiggers." The chains on the swing squeaked in time with the sound of Paul's foot scraping the ground.

Holly chose not to hear her father and rolled over on her back.

"You'll need an epsom salts bath tonight, or you'll itch yourself raw."

Shrugging as best she could while prone, Holly tried to dismiss the topic. "I don't care. It's worth it just to be able to relax for awhile."

"If that mare's such hard work, maybe you ought to get rid of her." There was the slight shrillness of challenge in his voice. The swing stopped squeaking.

Holly sat up. "She's not hard work. But riding in this heat wears a body out anyway." She looked out over the lawn which changed to an alfalfa field after about fifteen feet. The alfalfa was just beginning to bloom its soft violet little flowers; Holly knew her father would be cutting it for hay soon.

"Why didn't you wait until this evening then, when it would be cooler?" The squeak started again, but at a much

quicker pace than before.

"Because I want to go to the movie tonight." Holly hesitated before adding, "Mom said I could."

"Spending your money on movies instead of saving it for college, I see." His tone was crisp, formal.

"It's only a movie. Just three dollars, Dad, no big deal."

"Three dollars is three dollars."

Holly groaned inward, knowing any outward sign of disgust would set him off on yet another lecture.

"Your mother and I have raised you six girls on very little money, you know that, don't you? I've always had to work another job to make this farm pay off--and believe me, I don't make that much just driving truck at the feedlot." He paused and the squeak stopped. Holly looked over at him, but neither made any attempt to move.

"I know we can't afford to help pay for your college next year. I wish we could, I really do. I'm just glad you were smart enough to get yourself the scholarships you did, otherwise, I don't know how you could have done it."

"I know all this, Dad. I know how you feel, but..."

"No, now, let me finish. I've been thinking. You've been offered scholarships at the JuCo here, too, besides the ones at State, maybe it would be cheaper if you went here for your first two years, living at home, and then transferred to State."

"But my way is paid at State, at least for the first year anyway."

"I know, but it's an awful long way from home. What will you do if something happens and your mother and I aren't around to help you? What would you do then?"

"Dad, I'm eighteen years old. I think I can take care of myself. And you'll really only be a phone call away." Holly hugged her knees to her. "Besides, they told me at State that I could lose some credits by transferring from JuCo, and I don't want to risk that." She paused for effect. "Besides, I'll have to go there sometime, and it might as well be sooner than later--that way I'll know if I can make it or not."

Paul stood up. "I wish you'd reconsider. For your mother's sake, even."

"What do you mean? What does Mom have to do with it? I thought she wanted me to go?"

"But you're her baby."

"Dad!"

He shook his head, stood up--tall even under the huge tree--and walked toward the house. Holly dusted the grass off her jeans as she watched the screen door slam shut behind him.

Holly knew she should feel sorry for her father--he had had so many disappointments in his life. Having no sons to carry on the family name, for instance. Holly knew

it must have been straining for a man as rugged as her father to have lived with six daughters, especially when it came to running the farm. Once, he had told Holly that he was glad she was "stout." He had meant well, she knew, trying to compliment her on her unfeminine strength as she tossed bales or handled cantankerous cattle. Although each of the six young women had helped at one point or other with the farm, Holly, the only plump one, had really been the only one strong enough to help her father, or even to do an occasional chore that Paul was unable to do because of his job at the local feedlot.

What had probably tormented him worse than not having adequate help with the farm, had been the weddings. All five of Holly's sisters were married--events that had drained the family coffers considerably almost every two years since the first daughter had walked down the aisle. Her father had jokingly encouraged Holly to elope when her fifth sister, Martha, had married. Holly remembered his posing for pictures with Martha with his pants pockets turned inside out to show his financial state. It, too, had been meant to be humorous, but Holly had always wondered how seriously it had been posed for.

In the small Kansas community in which they lived, Paul Compton was a respected man. He always paid his bills, was considered a good risk at the bank, was greeted frequently when downtown, at the lumber yard, or at the

livestock sale barn by men much better off financially or socially than himself, had been a member of the PTA in his younger days, and had even been voted "Father of the Year" when Hannah, the third daughter, had been a senior in high school. At the county fair, he was always complimented on the vegetables his wife had entered, on the beef cattle his daughters had shown through 4-H--and on his pretty daughters themselves. Holly remembered sitting between her father and mother at the Fair's Saturday night Country and Western Show one summer and having her cheek pinched by a darkly tanned older man whose wife stood passively behind him, and hearing him say, "And such a well-mannered young lady, too. Just about the right age for one of my boys, right, Paul?" He hadn't waited for Paul's reply. He'd just tossled Holly's hair, shook her father's hand, and escorted his wife away.

Saturday night, three weeks before the last fair Holly would ever be able to exhibit at as a 4-Her, Holly brushed Jezibel down. She had already hitched the horse trailer to the pickup and now it was a matter of coaxing Jezibel--who didn't like the confines of the little trailer--into it for a ride to the 4-H horse arena. This would be their last official practice in Horsemanship before they had to compete.

After tying Jezibel to the end of the trailer, Holly picked up a summer fresh flake of hay and let Jezibel nuzzle it. Once the mare had a taste, Holly flung what was left of the portion deep into the trailer. As Jezibel went forward into the trailer to get the hay, Holly released the lead and flung it over the horse's back. The minute the lead landed on her back, Jezibel stopped and started to back out. Holly, although stout, couldn't keep the one ton animal from backing completely out of the trailer.

"Fine, you stubborn old lady. I'll fix you." Attaching a longer lead to the horse's halter, Holly looped it through the front window of the trailer, leaving the other lead draped across the mare's back. This time using a small bucket of oats, Holly allowed Jezibel a nibble, then poured a small amount in the front of the trailer. The mare, daintily testing the bed of the trailer with her front hooves, strained forward trying to reach the grain without getting in. Unsuccessful, first one back hoof, then the other, went in. Holding the long lead tight, Holly prevented the horse from backing out as she quickly pushed the trailer gate shut, bumping the mare's buttocks gently with the gate until she stepped far enough into the trailer for the latches to catch. With a sigh of relief, and already slightly tired, Holly tied the mare securely in her small stall. Before driving off with her capture, Holly remembered to take along enticements for the return

trip, one large flake of alfalfa hay, and a small bucket of oats.

Whether it was the nervousness of the owners which had made the horses excited, or the fidgetiness of the horses which had made the owners excitable, Holly couldn't tell. But as she pulled up next to the arena, the air, heavy with the scent of warm, musky horses, resounded with neighs. Everywhere Holly looked, horses and humans moved--walking, prancing, dancing--and shouted. As Holly unlatched the trailer, she felt it vibrate from Jezibel's frenzied whinnies. As soon as the gate was free, Jezibel's weight against it swung it open. Already untied, Jezibel quickly backed out, with Holly barely grabbing one of the leads in time.

"Whoa, girl, calm down. What's all this hubbub about? You've seen all these horses before."

Jezibel pawed the ground, kicking up clumps of turf.

"Okay, okay. Settle down. I sure hope you don't act this way at the fair." Holly stepped close to the mare, intending to brush her down again, but the mare--tied to the trailer--continued to dance from one side to the other trying to see all the activity about her, neighing shrilly.

"God, you'd think you were in heat or something."

"Maybe she is. You know how women are."

Holly grimaced at the male rider as his calm gelding walked by. She didn't know his name--he belonged to a

different 4-H group, but she knew he was a few years younger than herself, and that he was a good rider--one who had just recently come into her age category in competition.

Thinking about his insinuating remark instead of what she was doing, Holly didn't dodge in time to miss being stepped on by her excited mare. Even wearing cowboy boots, Holly felt the weight of Jezibel, all on her right foot.

"Shit!" Holly hobbled backward, leaning against the trailer. After deep breathing for a few minutes, the pain began to subside, and Holly heard the first call for horses mounted and to the arena.

Holly decided to forget about brushing Jezibel down--it would be the mare's own darn fault if she got balls of hair under her saddle--and quickly threw on the saddle and blanket, cinching them on loosely. Making a noose out of one end of the lead, Holly slid Jezibel's halter off and slipped on the bridle. After quickly walking the mare around, partially hoping to calm them both down, Holly cinched the saddle tight and mounted before Jezibel could begin prancing again. Leaning far over in the saddle, Holly snatched up her riding crop from the back of the truck and trotted Jezibel up to the arena gate.

Once inside the arena, Holly felt better, calmer, more in control. She loped Jezibel just to the inside of the slower ring of riders to tire her out some before they

began the actual practice. Presently, the county 4-H horsemanship leader, Betty Hathaway, signalled to the announcer in the P.A. booth to have the riders walk their horses. This was done with a series of hand signals that the riders knew now almost as well as the announcer, but couldn't always see because they were concentrating on their riding.

Although Jezibel tossed her head a couple of times, she finally slowed to a walk, but Holly still passed other horses, little girls and boys just starting horsemanship on ponies or older, more reliable horses. She even passed the smart aleck young man who she had seen earlier, as he forced his horse to walk at a funeral pace. Holly had seen other riders at competitions do this and the judges always seemed to think it was a good display of control and horsemanship because those riders who could keep their horses to minimal speeds in each of the paces--walking, trotting, loping, and galloping--always seemed to win. Holly knew she would never be able to control Jezibel that much.

Finally, after nearly two hours of the entire group practicing together--a good way to spot your competition--Betty Hathaway let the younger competitors unsaddle their horses and practice for the halter competition outside of the arena. The rest, about twelve horses and their riders, who were all over fourteen years old, continued circling

the arena. Betty occasionally stopped a horse to offer constructive criticism, until all the riders had been helped.

When Jezibel was stopped, the mare continued to dance nervously.

"You're riding her mouth pretty hard, Holly. Ease up on the reins a little and she might cooperate better." Betty patted the mare's sweaty black neck.

"But, if I do that, she'll take off and do whatever she wants to do." Holly wiped her own brow, wishing she'd worn her cowboy hat to shade her from the brilliant sun.

"Well, you've just got to keep reminding her that you're there and that she can't get away with that." Betty squinted up at Holly. "I hate to encourage you to use your riding crop though."

"What do I do then?" Holly pulled on the reins trying to get Jezibel to stand still.

"Try sawing the reins. You know," Betty used hand motions to help explain. "Pull back, release, pull back, release. Eventually she should get the idea that you're still in command, but you won't be making her mouth sore--and eventually hard--either."

Holly grimaced. "Okay, I'll try."

"Good. Why don't you try it out on a lope and then slow her down to a walk, and see what happens."

As she touched her heels to the mare's sides, she

eased up on the reins and Jezibel bolted. Trying the sawing suggestion, Holly eventually had Jezibel into a steady lope, but no matter how hard she tried, Holly couldn't get her to slow down to a walk, even though the mare's sides were dripping foamy sweat.

After Betty called Holly over, the older woman grasped the horse's reins close to the horse's head. "Well, what's happening out there?"

"She's not responding. She won't slow down." Holly raised her arm to wipe her forehead. Suddenly--spooked by the raised arm, by another running horse, or just her own flightiness--Jezibel bolted, tearing the reins from Betty's grip. Holly, thrown off balance, tried to regain control, but began to slip from the saddle. Jezibel careened past other horses as she headed for the arena gate. Attendants, seeing the horse tear down toward them, quickly closed the gate. Jezibel bucked, nearly throwing herself into it. As she reared up, Holly slid from the saddle.

In a state of panic, Holly refused to let go of the reins as the mare reared again. Holly felt the leather reins burn her left hand. In contrast, she felt the cool weight of the handle of the riding crop in her right. Raising it, she brought the stiff little whip down sharply across the mare's nose. Jezibel stood as though stunned, then began to back away. Realizing what she'd done, Holly tossed the crop away. Working her way up the reins, Holly

spoke softly and slowly, trying to calm the seemingly crazed horse. Finally, Jezibel stood trembling as Holly began to pat her nose, her head, scratch her forelock, and rub her hand down the big black neck. When the horse's breathing had slowed and she again responded to the command of the bit in her mouth, Holly lead her from the arena.

Almost everyone had left by the time Holly had calmed the mare and tried to make amends with her. Jezibel had been walked, brushed, walked some more, fed some hay, brushed, fed some grain, watered, walked, until Holly couldn't think of anything else she could do to show the horse she still loved her.

Betty had tried to reassure Holly that the mare's anxiety had probably been because she was in heat and all the other horses had excited her. She had even stayed to help Holly load the mare for the return trip home, which had luckily been uneventful.

Exhausted, Holly gave Jezibel more hay after she put her in her pen and then sat in the pickup a few minutes to collect her thoughts before trying to park the trailer--her father always kept it parked between the barn and the tractor for safe keeping.

At first, Holly didn't seem to be concentrating on her parking job, because the trailer kept threatening to turn into either the tractor or the barn as she backed it up. Frustrated, Holly, pulled the trailer up several feet and

tried again. This time it actually swung into the barn, chipping some paint off the side of the trailer.

Cussing, Holly looked up to see her father watching her from the back of the house. Great, she thought, he probably thinks I don't even know how to drive, let alone park this thing.

She pulled forward and tried again. Her father walked toward the pickup as she nearly clipped the tractor.

"Here, let me do that." Her father opened the cab door.

"No, I'd really like to try to do it on my own." Holly pulled the door shut, and put the pickup in Drive.

"Turn your wheels to the left. No, not your steering wheel, your tires. Now straighten out a bit. Now to the right a little. To the right, to the right."

Holly heard a crunch as the trailer bit into the side of the barn again.

"Okay, smartie, it's time to let me do it." Her father was at the door again.

"I'd really like to do it myself."

"No, come on, enough of this fooling around."

"But, Dad, I'd ..."

"Out of the cab, Holly." He grasped her arm.

"No, I'd really like..."

"Don't back talk me, young lady. Out of the cab." He pulled while Holly clung to the steering wheel.

"No!"

"Yes!" Holly felt a blow to her chin. Stunned she looked incredulously at her father. He reached for her again, but she kicked him in the stomach. He fell back a step, but easily punched her again. This time Holly's eyes filled with tears and he pulled her blindly from the cab. "That will teach you, Miss KnowItAll."

Quickly, he slipped into the cab, straightened out the trailer, parked it and slammed the cab door as he got out. Without a word, he unhitched the trailer and then pulled the pickup around to the side of the house next to the family car, finally disappearing down the outside basement door.

It took Holly several minutes before she was able to stop crying. Anger at herself for her tears rivalled the anger she felt toward her father.

Holly's mother, Emily, found her sitting on a bale of hay near the horse trailer behind the barn, rubbing her jaw.

"Are you okay, Holly?" Emily sat beside her on the bale.

In no mood to talk to anyone, Holly shrugged off her mother's hand. "I hate him."

"No, you don't. Don't say things like that." Emily smoothed out her dress and clasped her hands in her lap.

"Yes, I do. And I mean it. I don't want to see or

talk to him ever again." Holly's back straightened and she wiped her face with her hands. "I can't wait to go away to college."

Holly's mother, a small, plump woman in her late fifties, leaned back against the fading red barn wall. Her breathing was shallow and quick, but she didn't say anything. Holly looked at her, wondering, for the first time, what her mother was thinking. She saw a tired, strained face and large, half-lidded eyes which appeared moist, but shed no tears.

Holly leaned back against the wall, close to her mother. She held her hand out, palm up, in front of Emily.

"I don't mean to make things difficult for you, Mom." Holly rubbed the back of the hand that clasped hers. "He just makes me so mad sometimes."

Emily squeezed Holly's hand. "Is your jaw okay?"

"Why? How did you know? Is it bruised or something?" Holly gently felt her jaw bone, opening and closing her mouth to test it out.

Emily turned Holly's face toward her and inspected it.

"No, it's not bruised."

"Then how did you know he'd hit me?"

Emily smiled weakly. "He came upstairs and told me. He's very upset, Holly."

"Well, so am I." She stood up, putting her hands in her jeans pockets.

Rising, Emily slowly walked toward the west side of the barn near the horse pen. "It really tears me up to see you two fight like this."

Holly shrugged.

"You know what he told me, Holly?"

"I can imagine." Holly tried to chew on a piece of hay.

"I don't think you can. As a matter of fact, I was quite surprised myself."

Holly turned to face her mother.

"He said, 'She makes me feel stupid. I don't think she thinks I know anything.'"

"I don't believe that."

"It's true." Emily took both of Holly's hands in hers. "Think about it, Holly. Out of all our children, all our precious girls, you're the smartest, the most self-sufficient..., maybe even the strongest. He feels inadequate next to you."

Holly grimaced. "He's not inadequate."

"But he thinks you don't think he knows as much as you do, or that you don't need him. None of us have ever been as adept as you with our intellect--you've gotten yourself college scholarships! He barely passed high school."

"But that doesn't mean anything."

"To him it does. He's lived his life barely getting by. Now you've come along and shown him up in everything."

Emily paused and looked down at her feet. "And to top it all off, you're only a girl."

"Come on, Mom. Are you saying Dad's sexist? I mean, he always said he married you to have someone to cook for him, but I thought he was kidding."

"He was, partly. But there is often more seriousness behind his jokes than most people realize."

"I don't know what I'm supposed to think."

Emily stood beside Holly watching Jezibel in the corral. "He might be jealous of you, Holly, but he's still your father. Won't you try to make up with him--for my sake?"

Holly groaned, disgusted that her mother would ask her to do such a thing, but knew she would do it anyway.

Her father was sitting in the living room. The TV set was off and only the reading lamp near his chair was on.

Holly sat on the sofa, away from Paul. She studied her hands for a moment and then forced herself to speak.

"I'm sorry, Dad. I should have let you park the trailer when you said."

"It's okay. I shouldn't have blown my top and hit you." His words were curt and choppy.

"I, uh, had just wanted to prove to myself that I could park it. I mean, you had always parked it before, but..."

He interrupted. "You scraped the paint on the

trailer."

"I know, I'm sorry."

"Alright. As long as you understand you were wrong."

Holly stiffened and framed a retort in her head, but saw her mother through the doorway and thought better of it.

"I know you're a better driver, Dad. You've had a lot more experience at it than I have."

"Yes, I have. I've driven some sort of vehicle all my life, from hay wagons in the thirties to feed trucks and an occasional semi now." There was a strength to his tone of voice that Holly took as pride.

She sat up as straight as possible, she knew her father avoided seeing the anger in her eyes and in her manner. She wanted to simply get this over with now. "And I'm still learning."

"Yes, but someday you'll be able to back a trailer. Once you have more experience."

Doubting she'd ever have the chance to get the experience, Holly tried to smile as she stood up and walked toward the door.

Paul Compton picked up the remote and turned on the TV.

Holly's mother patted her arm as she passed into the living room with a bowl of chocolates.

Holly felt the anger rise again from her stomach. It

stiffened her, made her walk straighter. From the living room, she went straight through the dining room and across the porch. She made herself start breathing again as she slowly pushed open the screen door and stepped out into the night. As she stood on the back steps, she looked around the familiar yard.

The trees near the barn seemed to drip starlight as their leaves and branches scraped the sky. The barn stood like a dam holding the flow of stars back. She could see the silhouettes of the calves as they capered in the corral. Holly breathed in the cool, cautious summer breeze of Kansas. She didn't want to leave this place.

Crossing the yard, she climbed over the wooden corral fence, snagging her jeans on a splintered board. The calves scattered at first, then regrouped and followed her to the gate which separated the horse pen and the corral. The mare, her sleek coat shining in the starlight, snuffled, testing the air to determine who the presence was. The black mass crowded up to Holly as the young woman straddled the gate.

"You forgive quickly, don't you girl?" Holly petted Jezibel's neck, scratched her forelock, and stroked her silky nose. "I wish I could take you to college with me."

The mare, hearing a sound from the nearby alfalfa field, turned away, again testing the air for scents. Her ears thrust forward, her neck arched, she walked to the far

fence intent on the dry rustling of the newly mown sweet grass, waiting to be baled, opposite the pen.

Holly looked across the field. To the left of it was town--partially lit up for the night; to the right was dark, but open, country. Without looking, she knew the house behind her in detail. She also knew this would never be home again.

CRITICAL APPARATUS

My reverence for literature, specifically fiction, has increased with my working knowledge of the art--both in being able to analyze and understand other writers' works and in being able to formulate and build on ideas of my own.

Perhaps because reading is so predominantly a visual pastime, I've always enjoyed stories with an abundance of description--especially of particular places, such as Faulkner's view of the South and Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio.

Sherwood Anderson has been one of the strongest influences in my writing. His characters, who on the surface seem simple, common folk, become as close to flesh and blood through Anderson's descriptions--making each unique even though many, if not all, of them share similar problems--as any characters I've ever discovered while reading. My first story of this report, "Scent of Earth, Sun, and Rain," is my attempt at using such sensory description to depict a specific character.

Similarly, the second and third stories, "Limitations" and "Obstinacy," like the stories in Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, use descriptive detail to describe the people, events, and place where one central character, Holly Compton, lives. While the characters and the milieu--the

feel and sense of the place--are modelled after Anderson's, William Faulkner's Southern fiction has had its influences on my work as well.

By reading such authors as Anderson and Faulkner, I realized what my stories were missing and learned what could make them more readable and effective pieces of fiction.

When I set out to write "Scent of Earth, Sun, and Rain," my main goal was simply to depict a farmer facing what almost every farmer in America faces (from time to time, at least): the threat of bankruptcy. Having worked for the United States Department of Agriculture's Farmer's Home Administration for three years, I have an understanding of how some farmers borrow themselves into severe debt. Mixing this working knowledge with my love of the land, I created Chester Burke and his sensibilities toward farm life, and also tried to incorporate the family sense of such an enterprise.

Chester's family is his dog, Bogie, and his parents, who live on a farm more modest and of a size more realistic to manage than Chester's. Chester is a dreamer. His world is filled primarily with his senses of sight,

> In the growing light, Chester could see across the flat Kansas prairie to his folks' farm, faintly silhouetted against the sun, two and a quarter miles northeast of his own (4),

of scent,

> The heated scent of the wet earth hung heavily in the hot, muggy July air (16),

and of sound,

> Chester could still hear the "Johnny Popper" as his father continued plowing the fallow field. Its gentle puffing sounds were accented occasionally by a manly belch of air (5).

At the age of thirty-six, Chester occasionally "wished he had a helpmate to help get him through the tense times at harvest and planting, but never seemed to have time to look for one" (9-10).

Because of the fact that Chester has never married, the idea of the family farm, the passing down of the land from one generation to the next, has been threatened. Chester feels insecure about the farm's future, but also feels committed to the life he has chosen on the farm--he has no time to spare from Mother Earth to give to finding a mother for a son to whom to pass on the farm. So, when Chester's father gives Chester only part of the original farm to include in the many acres Chester already owns, Chester realizes the import of his father's words "It's all yours now"--Chester knows that without a son to whom to pass on the farm, the farm <u>is</u> all his--even though only 100 acres of the inheritable farm was given to him, almost more as a gesture than real inheritance.

Chester is nearly a combination of David Hardy in "Godliness" and Seth Richmond in "The Thinker" from Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio. David, like Chester, is sensitive to the farm life around him:

> In the morning when he awoke and lay still in bed, the sounds that came in to him through the windows filled him with delight....Eliza Stoughton the half-witted girl was poked in the ribs by a farm hand and giggled noisily, in some distant field a cow bawled and was answered by the cattle in the stables, and one of the farm hands spoke sharply to the horse he was grooming by the stable door (Anderson, 82-3).

While both David and Seth are fairly solitary characters, Seth is the one we see struggle, like Chester, with his ideas about women. He, too, is sensitive, and it's through this sensitivity that we can visualize his reluctance to pursue women.

> Seth imagined himself lying on a summer evening buried deep among the weeds beneath the tree. Beside him, in the scene built in his fancy, lay Helen White, her hand lying in his hand. A peculiar reluctance kept him from kissing her lips, but he felt he might have done that if he wished. Instead, he lay perfectly still, looking at her and listening to the army of bees that sang the

sustained masterful song of labor above his head (Anderson, 140).

Although I didn't consciously build Chester's character from Anderson's portrayal of David and Seth, Anderson has shown me, in the intricacies and similarities of his characters in Winesburg, Ohio, how each character's problems or his/her embraced "truth" becomes personal and deeply affects the character in an individual way, even though it may be the same or similar problem faced by many other people.

To me, Chester's character is now fairly well drawn. The most important aspect of the story, as it stands, however, is its sensually descriptive milieu. Hence its sensual title. It depicts western Kansas, specifically Chester's fictional farm, but also gives a small taste of Kansas' many community colleges, and of its annual summer fairs--all of which, in one way or another, rotate around harvest.

Faulkner creates a sense of milieu in his stories about the South. Like "Scent of Earth, Sun, and Rain," "A Rose for Emily" is steeped in sensory detail about the town and especially about Miss Emily Grierson's house:

Scent--"It smelled of dust and disuse--a close, dank smell" (Faulkner, 10).

Sight--"...they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose

sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father" (Faulkner, 10).

Sound--"Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain [about her waist]" (Faulkner, 11).

Because of these sorts of details, I could always visualize what was happening in Faulkner's stories, and feel, as a reader, that I was actually there experiencing those things. It is this kind of see-ability and believability that I, too, try to achieve in my stories.

In studying the art of playwriting and fiction, I was taught a basic plot formula for plays by Norman Fedder and, similarly, for short stories by Ben Nyberg. It simply allows that a specific character's life has been going along line A of action for some time, but something, element B, comes along, grows, or just happens to change that course, and the character then moves off on line C (Nyberg, 11). "Scent of Earth, Sun, and Rain" has no real element B. Even so, the story accomplishes what I had set out to do--to depict a farmer facing the elements he deals with every day by utilizing sensory detail.

"Limitations" has a much stronger deflection for its protagonist, Holly Burke. An intelligent young woman, Holly seems to have mastered almost everything in her life,

except her emotions. And, having chosen veterinary science as her career, she finds herself faced with the dilemma of either learning to also control her emotions to keep them from interfering with her functions as a vet, or deciding to keep this sensibility, this sympathy for animals and nature and to cultivate it in other ways.

The story begins with the following disclaimer:

> Holly Compton could never have told anyone that she was an intelligent young woman. It was just not in her character. It would have been easier for her to say what she was not. She had many limitations, or so she thought (20),

But what the reader should really learn from the story about Holly is that her only real limitation is that she limits herself by deciding what she will allow herself to do. In this story, for instance, Holly at first fancies the idea of an affair with the veterinarian she works for, Lyle Klazinski, but when possible opportunities arise, she lets them slip away. She struggles more strongly with the view the doctor takes of her--young, feminine, and weak--and, almost passionately, tries to prove she's just the opposite: she learns quickly, trying to overcome the inexperience of her youth; she staunchly absorbs the messiness of surgery; and she roughly handles the cattle at the sale barn.

The language in "Limitations" is imagistic, with

greater detail being given to Holly's surroundings, than the language in "Scent." The details have become much more specific, as well. In "Scent," one gets a feel of the farm land which makes up the large part of Kansas. In "Limitations," the milieu is still Kansas:

> ...the waving wheat: first dark green in May, then lighter green and taller in June--heading out late in the month--and turning to undulating liquid gold by early July. In August, the rising heat pulled the plowed earth's scent from its pores, seemingly to fill Holly's, but the brief cool breezes--tantalizing reminders of the winter to come--kept her skin clean and young (29).

But specifically Holly's hometown, her high school, her family, and, mostly, the vet clinic where she works are described.

If "Scent of Earth, Sun, and Rain" is an examination of Chester's love of the land, "Limitations" is an examination of the combination of Holly's intellect and her love of animals nearly leading her into a career which would eventually be emotionally crippling to her. Unlike many of Holly's contemporary female adolescents, Holly's concerns aren't really with her sexuality, or with her "budding" womanhood, but with her future life--her career, her ability to cope, her ability to succeed gracefully at whatever she does.

She is still, however, very young. The main section of the story takes place between her freshman and sophomore years in college. She had no real friends in high school, so when she returns home for the summer, her main interest is her job as veterinary assistant.

Her solitary life serves not only to focus the reader's attention on Holly's actions--showing her adolescent self-absorption, but also to focus Holly's attention on the choice she must make. Like George Willard in Sherwood Anderson's "An Awakening," Holly wants to be considered as more than an adolescent--as she suspects the doctor and others might consider her to be--and tries to prove herself in an adult, male world. Also like George, she goes into the job as veterinary assistant knowing she'll be judged by what she says and does--George knows what he would like to say to his friends in the pool room, but says what they want to hear, what they are comfortable hearing, instead. Both characters feel they are accomplishing what they've set out to do or prove, while actually being led along by their adult antagonists, until they are overwhelmed by the circumstances--in George's case another man takes his woman; and in Holly's case the emotional dealing with a client threatens to reveal one of her "limitations." Although both had held romantic notions of themselves, they are both brought down to reality: George is seen creeping "down the hillside his heart...sick within him" (Anderson,

189); and Holly reverts to her introspective and intellectual pursuits where she knows she can be in control and win recognition.

Although most of my emphasis in my stories is to create a clear, aesthetically pleasing setting and interesting actions and reactions among my characters, as well as strongly believable characterizations, one thing I've worked hardest at achieving is believable dialog. Like many beginning fiction writers, I used to try to avoid dialog not only because it was difficult to make people sound like flesh and blood and not cartoon characters with balloons of words over their heads, but also because I had often found dialog boring to read with all of the "he saids" and "she askeds," which seemed a mandatory functioning part of dialog.

Playwriting, which has the opposite problem--sticking stage directions in amongst ongoing speech, helped to show me a solution to my phobia about dialog: first, by forcing me to write almost nothing <u>but</u> dialog, and second by showing me I didn't need the "saids" and "asks" as often as most authors used them--it was as if I could simply lift away the parentheses surrounding the stage directions and incorporate the directions into the paragraphs with the dialog:

(From "Limitations")

"How well do you shave your legs?" Dr. Klazinski

asked as he began to soap up the dog's belly.

"Excuse me?" Holly, uncomfortable, moved to the opposite side of the small surgery table.

"I mean, how close can you shave without cutting?" He lifted a razor from the tray of the sterilized steel surgery items.

"I have a few scars, why?" Holly watched the small ball go up and down over the mask, listened to its steady whistle (23-4).

I discovered by doing this, removing the unnecessary words describing statement, that I could make the actions of my characters imply the tone with which they spoke.

I have also tried to invoke such things as dialect and level of education into dialog as well, but found both more difficult--more cumbersome--to have to deal with consistently throughout a story, so far. Acquiring the ability to do this, like Faulkner and Anderson, is one of the aspirations I have for my future fiction.

One other thing I do try, on occasion, to do with dialog, is to let the spoken words clue the reader into the character's actions. An example is when Holly and her father are discussing Holly's plans for college in "Obstinacy."

Paul stood up. "I wish you'd reconsider. For your mother's sake, even."

"What do you mean? What does Mom have to do

with it? I thought she wanted me to go?"

"But you're her baby."

"Dad!" (46)

In this passage, we can almost assume what actions are occurring--I see Holly sitting up, confused about what her father is saying and trying to do, and her father assuming a somewhat defeated or pleading stance, ending with a gesture by Holly showing her indignation over such manipulation.

In "Obstinacy" I have not only stronger dialog than in previous stories, but I also have a very tightly knit plot which involves a direct parallel between Holly's relationship, one of love and caring, with her horse, Jezibel, and her relationship with her father, one of tenseness and frustration.

Both relationships involve domination and control: Holly is in control, most of the time, of her horse, but cannot dominate Jezibel, she must instead work <u>with</u> the horse to get Jezibel to respond; Holly's father Paul also tries to dominate and control Holly with harshness and manipulation, such as by trying to invoke guilt.

Although I'm not wanting direct parallels to be drawn between the characters--Holly and Jezibel or Holly and her father--I do want the relationships paralleled. Between Holly and Jezibel is a ritual of affection; Jezibel tests Holly, but Holly only lets the mare get away with so much.

> The mare danced sideways, forcing Holly to hop along on one foot as she tried to mount. Getting a firm hold on the mare's neck, intertwining her fingers in the long black mane, and gripping the horn of the saddle, the plump young woman made three little hobbles and one big bounce as she threw herself into the saddle before the mare could move completely away (41).

Holly even tries to work the excited mare during horsemanship practice without having to resort to her riding crop. But because Holly is tired, frustrated, and has a leather burn on her hand, she strikes the horse when the horse is most out of control, and regrets the force she had to use--and has to work fervently "to show the horse she still loved her."

Paul's relationship with Holly, however, is one basically built on misunderstandings: Holly thinks she should feel sorry for her father since little seems to have gone right for him in his life, and Paul thinks Holly believes she is superior to him--further diminishing his self assurance and his control, his influence over her. Instead of trying to work with Holly, giving her good advice or direction, Paul tries to take over, tries to prove to Holly that he knows more than she does. First, he tries to convince Holly logically that she would be better off attending the community college instead of going

off to State. When that doesn't work, he tries fear--what would you do without us to protect you, and then guilt--think about how your mother will feel when you're gone.

Their relationship, like the one between Holly and Jezibel, takes a critical turn when Holly is trying to park the horse trailer, and her father loses patience with her mistakes. Here is a chance for him to assert his superiority, but Holly, as obstinate as her horse, wants to learn to park the trailer herself and refuses to relinquish control of the pickup. Just as Holly struck out at Jezibel when the mare was out of control, Paul strikes Holly to try to regain his control.

But, unlike Holly, Paul is not remorseful and doesn't try to make it up to Holly as soon as he's realized what's happened. Instead, he continues his manipulations and tells Holly's mother, Emily, what has transpired. Emily was used by Paul earlier in the story as a means to manipulate Holly through guilt--"For your mother's sake..." (46)--and functions here as nearly the same again. Emily, far from feeling anxious over the physical fight, is sympathetic to the father--embracing his concerns over Holly's--somehow feeling him justified in his actions. She relates to Holly that Paul "'feels inadequate next to'" her, and manages, somewhat reluctantly on Holly's part, to convince Holly to apologize to her father for her actions.

When Holly performs the apology, her father is still

cold, distant, and refuses to really take any of the blame. Holly, instead of being reconciled with her father, is further distanced from him, and the story ends with her having lost the sense of home because she is no longer even a little comfortable under her father's roof or his rule.

Although my stories all contain something out of my real life, they often contain parts of an invented life, either of my invention or influenced by someone else's. The idea of control and manipulation, as in "Obstinacy," came strongly to me through William Faulkner's works. Not only do his characters manipulate each other, such as in "Dry September" when John McLendon convinces those in the barber shop to help him deal with supposed rapist Will Mayes, but Faulkner, as author, carefully directs the reader even while leaving the reader to make certain decisions on her own.

Faulkner tantalizes his readers with sensory descriptions in "Dry September." "The bloody September twilight" in the first sentence of the story foreshadows the night's events, and he keeps reminding us of the harvest moon that causes this "bloody" effect throughout the story. This moon which, like the rumor of the rape, is "a rumor...twice-waxed" on the eastern horizon (39).

Along with the moon, the heat of the "Dry September" is constantly reinforced, like McLendon's attacks on the "niggerlovers" to stir them into action. The heat, the

moon, and the strong bigotry of the people are all felt strongly by the reader as we begin to sympathize with the barber, Hawkshaw (a recurrent Faulkner character), in his attempts to stop the men from killing the negro, Will Mayes, who supposedly raped Miss Minnie Cooper--one of the town's neglected spinsters.

"Dry September" is essentially a depiction of a southern town, Jefferson, and focuses on the people more than the actual setting to bring across the actual flavor of the town. The men gather at the barber shop on this Saturday evening like they've done for years. Even men from out of town come here, not only for a shave and haircut, but for news of the town. The barbers themselves, however, participate less in the action of the night, opting to stay behind while the others run off to find Will Mayes. Hawkshaw seems to be the only man there with any real conscience, and makes an attempt to stop what he knows will be murder.

Between the barber shop and the search for Will Mayes, Faulkner gives us a chance to see the supposed victim, Minnie Cooper, who is unmarried still at the age of "thirty-eight or thirty-nine" and lives "with her invalid mother and a thin, sallow, unflagging aunt" (43). Faulkner helps us to sense her despair over her spinsterhood, leading us to believe Hawkshaw is right when he says "them ladies that get old without getting married dont have

notions that a man cant--" (40). Even Hawkshaw leaves us hanging, but we begin to believe the rape was made up out of Minnie's desperation, especially when we see later that she notices "even the young men lounging in the doorway tipp[ing] their hats and follow[ing] with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs" (51), and seems to enjoy the new attention.

Faulkner doesn't let us see the murder of Will Mayes. We ride with the reluctant Hawkshaw to the ice plant, a cool place in all this heat, where Will works. But as the vigilantes drive the negro out to the "weed- and vine-choked vats without bottom" (49), Hawkshaw jumps from the car, unable to see its final destination. And we, like Hawkshaw, witness its return down the dustily dead road, less one passenger--and we assume the worst for Will Mayes.

Faulkner never tells us for certain that Minnie was raped, or that Will was murdered. He even tantalizes us later as we watch Minnie go to the movies when we overhear men in front of the hotel saying that Will is all right, he's just gone "on a little trip" (51). But Faulkner gives the reader enough sensory details--the bloody moon, the dead heat, Minnie's desperation, the bigotry of the townspeople--to make us believe that Will was killed, an innocent man.

Because I admire Faulkner's craft, and because I enjoy

his vast array of sensory details about the South in a given story, I attempt in many of my stories, but especially in the three stories of this report, to do as much justice to my depiction of the Midwest, specifically Kansas, as Faulkner did to the South. I try to show readers the authentic Midwest, especially Kansas, from details about wheat harvest and a county fair in "Scent of Earth, Sun, and Rain," to descriptions of blood-testing cattle in "Limitations," and of events like a 4-H county horse show and of a small town with dirt streets in "Obstinacy."

Like Faulkner and Anderson, I often find that I can help a reader form an understanding of a character and her situation through implied traits, showing the reader the character and letting her make her own judgements rather than directly telling the reader what the character is like. For instance, Holly's youth and innocence are shown by her awkward ignorance--she hobbles along beside the horse to moun; Jezibel steps on Holly's foot because she isn't paying attention to the mare's actions; her inexperience doesn't allow her to be able to handle the mare in heat; and she can't seem to park a trailer. By the last scene in the story, however, she finally has command of her actions and "walk[s] straighter" (60)--knowing exactly where she's going and determined to get there.

To me, this detail about Holly--her reactions toward

the people, animals and events in her life--makes her a much stronger, and more believable character than Chester Burke. It's because of all that I seem to be able to draw from Holly's character and put into stories, that I have planned a series of stories, in the mode of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, revolving around, but not necessarily always centering on one character, Holly Compton.

I would like this series to be my first short story collection. Although I have tried my hand at novel writing, I'm still not giving my characters enough complexity to make such a long work about them interesting. I hope to learn, by writing this series of stories, what constitutes a truly complex character, and what it takes to sustain a longer plot.

It's because of this strong sense of the direction I am taking in my writing that I am concentrating my efforts on my Holly Compton/Kansas milieu stories, and I feel, for the first time in my writing career, that I have a genuinely worthy purpose to my writing. Now that I know what I can do, what I feel I must do, my only limitations are those I impose on myself.

Works Cited

Anderson, Sherwood. Winesburg, Ohio. New York: Viking Press, 1964.

Faulkner, William. These Thirteen. London: Chatto & Windus, 1958.

Nyberg, Benjamin. One Great Way to Write Short Stories. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digeat Books, 1988.

LIMITATIONS

by

RUTH J. HEFLIN

B.A., Kansas Stete University, 1985

AN ABSTRACT OF A REPORT

submitted in partiel fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Oepertment of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhettan, Kansas

1988

ABSTRACT

A short introduction speculates in second person point of view on why someone would choose to write about Kansas.

"Scent of Earth, Sun, and Rain" is a story that reveals the life of a farmer and his solitary existence on his Kansas farm.

"Limitations" is a story about a Kansas farm girl who has romantic notions about becoming a veterinarian, and depicts her summer working with a local vet which ends with her realization that she can't handle the emotional side of the science.

"Obstinacy" is a sequel to "Limitations," although it doesn't follow it chronologically. This story is set on the farm where Holly grew up and parallels her relationship with the animals on the farm, to those with her family.

The Critical Apparatus examines how each story shows, in turn, my development in increasing the complexity of my plots, refining the subtlety and nuances of dialog and creating depth in my characters and believability in their development, as well as my appreciation for detailed descriptions. In this section, I also explain by whom I have been influenced by in terms of my appreciation for description (William Faulkner), my understanding of character and plot development (Sherwood Anderson), along with the use of stories with recurring characters and scenes.