

The dumpy kid picked himself up slowly from the ground, only to be tripped again by one of the older boys.

"Who told YOU that you can get up, Gussett?"

The boy called Gussett located his wire-framed glasses a few inches from where they landed after the last trip and fall and slowly attached them back to his face. Above him, seven boys and two girls all corralled around him, watching the slightly obese child slowly lift himself up.

A siren wailed off in the distance and if on cue, all of the kids scattered away from the victim. A long-legged female was running toward the boy, her skirt tossed and turned as she made her way up the field to where the beat-down was taking place. Behind her, a police car had its siren and light bar on.

"You...okay...Henry..." the female spoke in panted breaths as she finally reached the young boy, now totally on his feet and looking around for his things. The gang did a good job -- they tossed his books in one direction, his satchel bag in another and after the second boy slapped him, his glasses flew from his body and were unreachable until the beating stopped.

"Yeah," Henry spoke, wiping the dried tears from his eyes as he adjusted the glasses on his face.

Henry finally sighed, a heavy sigh which told his mother this has happened before and he was expecting the words to come out of her mouth. He beat her to the punch this time.

"We're not leaving, Mom. If I have to get beaten like this every day, we're not leaving."

Henry's mother embraced her child, rubbing her son's hair and wiping the dirt and grass from his shirt in the process.

"I'm tired too, son. But you can't get hurt like this forever. We don't know how long this will last..."

"I don't care. I made friends here. I'm not leaving."

"Friends?" Henry's mother pulled back and looked into Henry's face. "Friends did THIS to you? No son, these are not friends..." She moved away from her son and proceeded

to pick up the various books and paper roaming on the grassy knoll near the front of the school building.

"I need some names here, people. Who called in the report?"

Henry looked at his mother. His mother shot back a stare at her son, and then toward the officer. "Nobody. None of us."

"Look lady, someone called in saying that a fat kid was getting his life beaten out of him and to come over quick and break up the fight. Looks like a fight went on here, son... what's the story, eh?"

The officer moved closer to Henry and whispered, "we're not gonna do anything about it...I just need to know what happened so I can make my report, okay?"

Henry looked away for a few seconds. He saw a bird on the ground a little further away from where the fight started. Fists were flying and it appeared that the bird was in the way of the carnage. He then turned to the police officer and said, "No fight here, officer. Maybe your radio had it wrong. I just came out here and someone took my stuff and tossed it. I'm trying to get it all back...that's all that happened."

"Oh well, have it your way!" The officer pulled the combination microphone/speaker from his upper left chest holder, spoke into it about a 10-27 and a 10-14 and a 10-22 and listened as the dispatcher repeated the commands and then said "10-4".

"Ma'm", the officer spoke before returning to his car, "Next time, just let him get beaten. Then call us!" Henry's mother gave a slight smile and then looked at her son.

The police car pulled off, and Henry ran to where the bird rested. It was not moving, and appeared to be dead. Henry looked around, then closed his eyes and touched the bird. "I wish it would be well," Henry said to himself.

Opening his eyes, he looked down on the bird and said, "You'll be okay. Rest up a bit and then get up. Be careful next time about flying fists and satchels!"

As Henry walked back toward his mother, the bird tossed its wing, flipped itself over and flew away.

"Someone's gonna catch you doing that, Henry Owen. Then we'll be in trouble again. You want to stay here with your "friends" -- then you'd got to let some things go..."

"Besides son," Shelia Owen looked at her son while handing him the various papers and books she collected, "We don't know how long this will go on..."

"I know, Mom...but it's not like..." Henry spoke, pushing the things his mom gave him into his satchel, then closing the hasp.

"...It's not like, oh, never mind."

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"What was the talk about you not wanting to leave?" Shelia sat in her corner chair, crocheting another pair of wool slippers while listening to the radio.

"I don't," Henry replied, sitting across the room at the dining room table. "I made friends."

"The ones who beat you to an inch of your life? Son, I told you -- those aren't friends."

"The girl who called the police for one. And there's a man who's been sitting around near the school..."

Sheila put her knitting in her lap and sat up in the chair.

"What did I tell you about talking with strangers? Son, you're gonna get us both hurt! Who was this man? I told you that I'm tired of living in the rear view mirrors of this RV!"

"His name is Brule Davis. Former Navy Seal or something. Had a lot of war stories, none which I really believe but they're fun to listen to. He works over at the church across the street. He doesn't know what I can do. You know ever since I got baptized..."

"Gus. Listen. We both got baptized on the same day, in the same water, and in the same little old church. Minister said the same words over both of our heads -- read it from his tiny little Bible! I'm not touching things and bringing them to life. I'm not pushing semi trucks with my hands...son, I'm just a single mom with a son who can do some amazing things IF he gets his homework and chores done!"

Gussett Henry Owen was baptized in a small church alongside his mother two weeks after the death of his father, her husband Clive. Clive and Shelia ran off together eleven years ago to get away from the rural lives they were more or less forced to otherwise lead in central Nebraska. Clive, barely nineteen, was trained to become a fourth-

generation Cowboy. His wife Shelia, was being trained to be nothing - she left school after becoming pregnant with Gussett Henry, named for a great-great grandfather who was more con-man and trickster than gambler back in the earlier days of the West.

The one amazing event which created Gussett -- they had sex but Shelia's hymen was never broken by Clive -- or any other man before. Clive's tiny microscopic semen found their way past the partially broken barrier to her eggs and Sheila was pregnant for the first and only time.

Gussett was born in Our Lady of the Manger Hospital on the day before Christmas. On Christmas Day, newspapers and television stations in the Omaha area all announced a "once in a trillion" event: the birth of a child by a virgin. It took some careful, polite explaining to do to the various audiences -- although there was a "talking head" on one of the television stations saying "it's not as big of deal as everyone's making it out to be; the woman was pregnant as a result of sexual activity with her husband, they created a child -- next story PLEASE!"

Gussett was born via C-Section at the hospital's expense. Shelia and her new son remained in the hospital for a month afterward as first medical and then divinity experts all came to Omaha to see for themselves -- photographing, measuring and examining - - and then to relay to the world that once again, this true miracle of birth occurred. Fame took off.

For the first seven years of their lives, they were celebrities. Stacks of magazine covers; stories about their lives before and now; and tapes of interviews on network television. The Christian Broadcasting Network even wanted to do one of those "reality shows" featuring them but Shelia turned it down with the phrase "If this happened to Mary and Joseph, would you be comfortable seeing how Jesus grew up? No!"

Actually, she said "Hell no!" but CBN never broadcasted that part.

The Owens was not a religious bunch. Clive spent evenings like all cowboys looking for jobs -- drinking, carousing, and otherwise being a guy. He spent parts of days taking care of his son while Shelia, never one for having a civil tongue, looked for work or were working tending tables, or calculating and bagging sales, or any number of other low-end jobs. They saved all of the "celebrity money", bought a RV with expandable sides, and went out to eat dinner at a steakhouse once a week. The rest of the time it was food from the Hy-Vee, nothing fancy and no beer or whiskey in the house.

When Gussett -- who was used to being called "Henry" by his father; "Gussett" or "Gus"

was used as a warning or alert "name" -- turned eight, the family moved away, first to a small town called Twin Junction and later to another town called Farris, both in South Dakota. After Henry melted all of the crayons with his hands into a colorful ball, they were railed out of Farris and thus started their nomadic life on the road. They settled in Shakopee, Minnesota, on the banks of the Minnesota River in one of those "Friendly Frank" recreational vehicle trailer parks. Clive took a job at the nearby horse track.

Clive came home drunk frequently but he was a quiet drunk -- even to the last day of his life. He came home that evening, kissed his son and told him like he told him every day since he knew he was going to be a daddy, speaking to his son through the belly button of his wife, "You're special. Make the world a better place and never forget I love you!"

He then went to his room, found his wife waiting as usual, and embraced and kissed her, telling her that "you really don't deserve this ol' cowboy" before they would drift off in each other's arms.

Clive did not wake that following morning. A Dakota County medical examiner pronounced him dead and after Henry left for school that morning, they removed Clive's body and as he wanted, was cremated with his ashes buried back in the little town in Nebraska where they both came from.

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"You thinking about Dad again, aren't you?" Henry peered over from the top of his Science book to look at his mother.

"I can't help it. When you're in love with someone, the memories don't fade.."

"Yeah," Henry said, looking back at the book and then back at his mother.

"You think that Dad would have approved us getting baptized?"

"I think," Shelia said, getting out of her chair and leaving the yarn and needles in the seat, "I think that your Daddy would have been the FIRST one in the dunkin' tank if there was beer afterwards!" She giggled at the thought.

"All of the kids who say that they were baptized all said that nothing happened to them. Keven said that he was just dunked in the pool and came out and it was just like taking a dunk in the pool. Was our water different?"

Shelia pulled out a chair opposite from her son and sat in it.

"We've been through this so many times. Pastor Rick came over and talked with the both of us. Some guy from the Seminary came over and talked with us...the act is symbolic. It symbolizes your renewal as a child of God..."

"I know...I know...I know...but so how come all of this stuff with me?"

"I don't know, Henry."

"Well, Brule Davis..."

"Mr. Davis, son. When you become an adult, you can call other adults by their first name, 'kay?'"

"Sorry mom...Mr. Davis...he said that people who are "special" get sent away to some place somewhere..."

"I thought you told me you didn't tell him about what you can do..." Sheila said.

"I didn't. I'm careful about that. Anyway...he was talking some special place...and they examine their brains, take blood and all of that stuff....so they can 'see what makes them special'. Makes sense to me."

"I think you...and this Mr. Davis character -- been watching too much television."

"We don't have a TV in here. Dad wouldn't let us, remember?"

"Yeah," Shelia held back a yawn with her left fist while motioning with her right hand toward the papers in front of her son. "Good thing too...we'd never get anything done except watch TV. Let's see how far you've gotten...."

Gussett handed over the papers to his mother. She looked each page over, handed one back to him and said, "I was distracting you here...you need to redo this."

"How do you know this stuff, Mom?"

"Kiddo, I put myself through five years of college to say this -- because I'm your mother, and I know you can do better!" She smiled as she explained.

"Finish up, and I'll let you out to do your thing. Back home at midnight, right?"

Henry looked up at his mother, nodded up and down, and then went back to his schoolwork.

Shelia got up and scooted the seat under the table and then walked over to the bay window over the sink and looked out. It was a clear, crisp night and the moon illuminated the camping trailer park where they lived.

"Looks like a full moon and bright stars. You'll definitely need a jacket. There's gonna be a lot of cold people out there tonight." She turned and walked past her only child.

"And werewolves..." Henry added.