

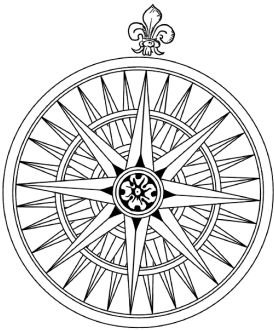
A GREAT KINGDOM

SOUTHERN KINGDOM

x Meeting the
army of the
Southern Kingdom

Five x
Armed
Men

North



Glennor's
Farm



Wolf x
Attack

John's
House



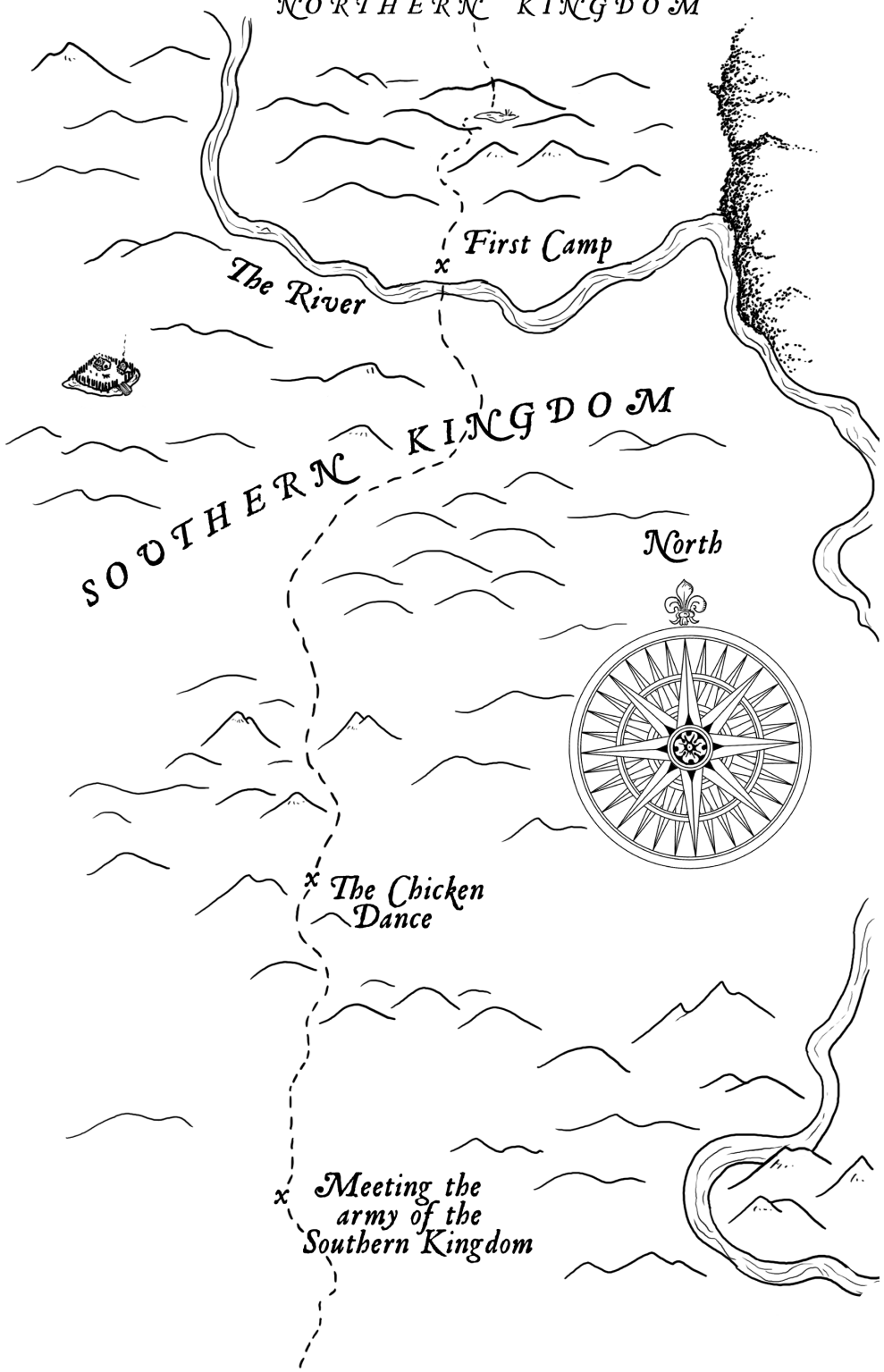
Randy's
Farm



Village



NORTHERN KINGDOM



The River

First Camp

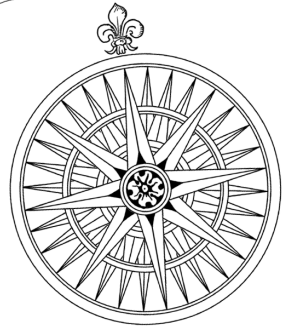
SOUTHERN KINGDOM

North

The Chicken Dance

Meeting the army of the Southern Kingdom

North



Endless Grasslands

x Bear Found

x Bear Attack

White Flats

Rooster Valley

Lava Flow

Castle Wall



Spring

NORTHERN KINGDOM

The Island

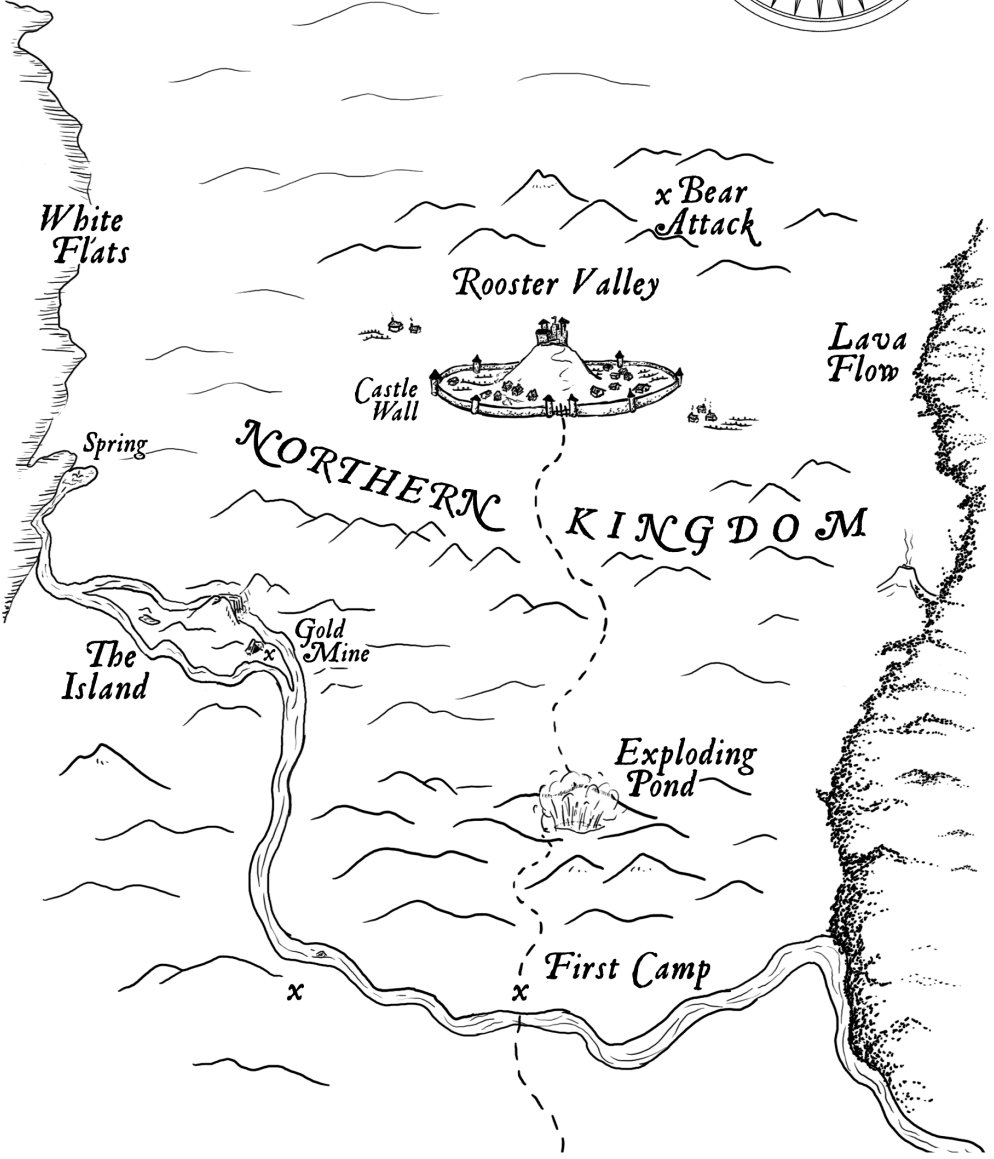
Gold Mine

Exploding Pond

First Camp

x

x



A GREAT KINGDOM

A Novel by

WILLIAM WALTHER

ROSEBURG, OREGON

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Book Two of the Star Valley Saga

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A GREAT KINGDOM

CHAPTER ONE

THE KNOCK

THE silent night ended when there was a knock at the door. It was a loud knock and very demanding. The raps came in quick succession, and the meaning of the rapid, loud pounding could not be mistaken. This was an urgent message being hammered at their door. It screamed, “Wake up and open the door! Now!—Right now!”

John did not hear it. He had been working hard—harvesting wheat, then planting more. The weather was always warm, and John planted and harvested every moon-cycle. Missing a cycle could mean being hungry for a long time.

His little dwelling was just a short distance outside of the village. His home was on the side of a little rocky hill.

He had not been given a choice in where to

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build. This rock-strewn patch of ground was half of his inheritance. It was hard to grow enough food between the boulders to feed his family, yet he managed.

John was a very sound sleeper, only waking to the sound of his rooster. The little feathered bird was John's best friend. If he was working in the field, the rooster would always be by his side, and if the red and brown cocky bird cackled or crowed, John would be at the bird's side.

Their bond had become solid a few sun-cycles earlier when John was moving some heavy rocks off a section of his land. He was using the large stones to build a wall to keep his sole milk cow contained, while at the same time clearing some ground to plant more vegetables.

He had been rolling an especially large boulder, and was tuckered out after only moving it a few yards. He decided to sit on the nearly immovable object to eat his lunch. He thought to himself that instead of using it for the wall, maybe he should just roll it down the hill and be done with it.

John's wife, Priscilla, had made him a radish sandwich with lots of butter. John was pleased that he had grown and harvested the wheat to make the bread, turned the cream from his twice daily milkings into the butter, and actually grown the

THE KNOCK

radishes in this soil. He was proud of his wife, who worked without even a complaint. He knew she could have a list longer than his arm, yet she only smiled and worked harder on the problems that kept appearing.

While sitting on the boulder, John heard a noise behind him. It was a deep-in-the-throat growl. Here John sat, without any weapons, except his shovel, which he had left next to the hole his boulder had been dug out of. It was a good ten feet behind him. The growl had to be coming from the same place his shovel was. He would not have the time or speed to get it.

John knew the growl came from a wolf. A few neighbors had lost some sheep, but he had not worried about meeting the wolf. It had never appeared in daylight before.

John's mind was racing. How would his wife be able to support their seven children? How could he survive this attack? He knew the wolf would be upon him and at his throat within seconds.

John turned as rapidly as he could, just in time to see the wolf in mid-air coming right at him. He could see the shovel back where he thought it was. He could never reach it in time. Instinctively, John put his arms up to soften the full force of the attack. What a surprise it was to see his rooster,

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the little pest that followed him relentlessly, hit the wolf square in the face.

The rooster's two-and-a-half inch spurs started ripping into the wolf's eyes and nose. The wolf tried to shake his new enemy off, but to no avail! He tried pawing it off with his front paws, also to no avail. He tried rolling over and over on the ground. The rooster let go just long enough to enjoy the ride, and then latched on again.

Finally, the wolf had had enough. Half blind and bleeding from a hundred slashes, and as many pecks, the wolf ran and stumbled up and over the hill in the direction he had come from.

John just stood there in total disbelief. No one would believe his story, and especially what happened next. The rooster strutted around cackling for a few minutes, then went over and picked up John's lunch box by his beak and dropped it at John's feet, as if to say, 'You can now finish your lunch.'

From that moment on, the two were inseparable. The slightest sound from either brought the other's total attention into focus to meet their needs.

Priscilla, on the other hand, was a light sleeper. Her seven children had trained her well. A cough here, a whimper there, or even the sound of bare feet sneaking across the room to get into the

THE KNOCK

honey-jar would wake her.

The loud rapid knock on their door woke her immediately. She looked over at her husband, still fast asleep.

“John! John! Wake up! Someone’s at our door!” Still, he would not wake, so she pushed him—once, twice, three times. Still, John lay silent and asleep.

The rooster sitting next to the window was listening to and watching the whole scenario play out. He did not like his John, his soul-mate, to be pushed, even by one of the flock, by the one he tolerated because John accepted her. Instead of attacking her, as he wanted to do, he just cackled his displeasure at her.

That woke John up immediately. It was a lot of information to wake up to. The rooster’s cackle, his wife pushing him, and the loud repetitious pounding at their front door.

Who could it be? It was really late. No one came to their run-down little shack this time of night.

“John, go to the door. Take a club with you. Don’t fall over! Be careful of your bad foot.”

It was a good idea. “Take a club—right. Where did I put that club?”

“It’s by the front door. I told you it should be kept by the bed.”

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John did not like the idea of going to the door without a weapon, but at least he would have one when he opened the door—if he opened it.

The cottage—or shack, to be more accurate—was not very special or fancy. It had one main room used as a kitchen, living room, food drying area, and John and Priscilla's bedroom.

John had built three little rooms off the back of the house. They were not really rooms, more like lean-tos. Each had an opening with a cloth cover into the main room. John had built them as needed. One lean-to had his four sons sleeping in it. Tim was the oldest, then Sigmund and Simon, the twins. The youngest son was Allen.

The second lean-to had his three daughters sleeping in it. His eldest was Liz, then came Beth and the youngest was Rose.

The third lean-to had a gate as well as the cloth covering the door. It also had a gate or door opening out the back. This lean-to was used for their pigs, two horses, and a cow. It was built after the wolf attack. John was not going to lose his cow, even if he had to sleep in the same room with her. She had been his wife's calf before they were married.

By this time all seven children were peeking out from behind their cloth doorways and the animals

THE KNOCK

were making sounds of uneasiness.

“Who is it?” John’s voice was a pitch too high. He brought it down to a more manly, in-control voice, “Who is it? What do you want?”

“Let me in, John. It’s me, your mother. Let me in. It’s urgent.”

Mother! She never visits. This must be really urgent. John always took his family to see her. John’s father had died when he and his twin brother were almost twenty sun-cycles old. He had died from what people called the shaking fever.

John’s brother, being born first, inherited the beautiful six-room fancy cottage and the large farm, a farm on the valley floor, with the most fertile soil. It was probably for the best, as John, unlike his brother Randy, was born with a birth defect. He had a half-inch depression running all the way around his leg, just above the ankle. Below this scar his foot was mostly useless—even a couple of toes had been cut off. He had lived with it his whole life, and it was now just a part of who he was.

Being born second, John had been given this farm, up on a rocky hill, a mile from town. When he moved to his inheritance, all that was there was a corner rock wall. He used that corner as the foundation of his shack.

It had taken him three sun-cycles to finish

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building his one-room shack. He built it large enough to hold two working adults so it would be ready for when he married—or in case he ever would marry, that is. Finding a woman who would marry a cripple who had only a rock-strewn pasture would be a miracle, unless she was less attractive than he was, with even less to her name than he had. It was a chilling thought—a poor ugly man marrying a poorer ugly woman—although, even that would be okay. He liked people for who they were, not what they looked like. It was finding someone who would marry him that was the problem.

He had only seen himself as a reflection in pools of water, and then, only rarely. He did not realize that he was a fairly good-looking young man. His foot may have been bad, but his body was strong and muscular. He was bright and was a hard worker.

The next sun-cycle after building his one room house he longed for his own milk cow. To have milk, curds & whey, cheese and butter would make his life sweeter.

John had heard of a family in the next village who wanted to sell a new calf. He had been given his land and ten gold coins to start his life. He had not yet spent any of the money. He had collected

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wild seeds to grow his food, even mending his clothes so as not to buy new ones. He could afford a cow, if it was cheap enough. He hoped that he wouldn't have to spend all his coins.

It took John seven days of walking to reach the village. He found some beautiful flowers and some wild vegetables he didn't have. He harvested a few seeds and decided that even if the calf's price was too high and he didn't buy it, the trip would be a successful one. He had no idea that this adventure would end up changing his life in a big way.

The people in town seemed friendly enough. People always thought he needed help. They believed he was crippled in his ability to take care of himself and even in his thinking.

When they found out that he was looking for the family selling the cow, they could hardly wait to tell him the directions. The directions were never to the farm he was looking for, but always to another person in the town. After about a dozen times, he got the idea that the townsfolk were making sure he met everyone, although he couldn't understand why this would be the case, and he wondered if he was just being paranoid. Every person they sent him to ended their conversation with the same sentence—"Be sure to say 'Hi' to May." Then they would chuckle to

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themselves, or if there was a group, they would all break out laughing.

Finally, John came to the little farm he was looking for. That is, after being told the wrong directions a dozen times. It was a small but nice farm. He could see three young people, all near to his age. The young man was feeding some chickens, and the two young girls were tending a garden.

John hoped he could have a good visit with the young man. It would be nice to talk to someone his own age.

As luck would have it, the young man noticed him first. He dropped the feed sack and approached John.

“Hi! I’m Glennor. Have you come about our calf?”

John held out his hand and stated confidently, “Yes, I have,” just to show this young man that he was not stupid. “I’m John. Is she still available? Do I talk to you?”

“No, not me—my dad. Come into the house and I’ll introduce you. I noticed that you are limping. Did a horse step on your foot?”

“No. It’s a birth defect—always had it, always will.”

Glennor, to John’s surprise, didn’t seem taken

THE KNOCK

aback by his foot. He didn't even slow down his walk. All he said was "Bummer!"

Glennor's father wasn't in the house. He was sitting in a rocking chair on a porch behind the house. John was thinking how nice it would be to have a front and a back porch.

"Father, this is John. He wants to haggle for our calf. Oh! And, he limps—a bum foot from birth." At this, Glennor and his father laughed together.

John was not pleased by the little jab at his foot. He wondered if they were just cruel, or simply ignorant.

Glennor noticed John's uneasiness. "Sorry about my way of introducing you, John. It's a private little joke. We meant no disrespect. My father here is almost totally blind. That, in itself, is a big handicap."

"I understand. Thank you for your apology. May I ask the price of your calf, and why you are selling her?"

The father seemed to be in deep thought, finally answering, "Those are good questions." He turned to his son and asked, "Is this man your age?"

"Yes, Dad."

"Is he strong?"

"Yes, Dad."

"Is he ugly or fat?"

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“No, Dad.”

“I know he is slow to anger.”

“Yes, Dad. He seems to be a pleasant fellow.”

The father turned in the direction of John.
“Do you have a house or a place to keep her?”

“Yes, I do. I have a little place with some land, and much grass grows between the boulders.”

“I don’t care about the grass. I want to know if you would beat her.”

“No! I never hurt anything that isn’t trying to hurt me.”

“Good! Very good! I approve. But I cannot sell you the calf. She belongs to my daughter. Go and ask her how much the calf will cost. My son will stay here for a while. We have a few plans to make.”

“Which of your daughters does the calf belong to?”

“They will tell you. You have a fifty-fifty chance of getting the right daughter first. If you miss, then you have a hundred percent chance to get it right on the second try.”

John could not argue with the father’s reasoning, so off to the garden in front of the house he went. The two young girls saw John coming and giggled to themselves, but kept on working.

John approached the first girl. She was very

THE KNOCK

beautiful.

“Hi! My name is John. Your father sent me to ask how much your calf is, and if I might be able to buy her.”

“My name is Kathy, Kathy-Ann. I am pleased to meet you. However, I do not own the calf. It is not mine to sell. I am spoken for. The richest man in the whole village has asked for my hand in marriage. I have given him my lamb for a dowry.”

This dumbfounded John. He only asked about the calf, not her life story, or who she was going to marry.

“My sister owns the calf. Talk to her.”

John walked over to where the other girl was. He was still shaking his head as if trying to get cobwebs out of his thoughts. He decided he would start the conversation the same way and see what would happen. Maybe the whole family was a little touched in the head.

“Hi! My name is John. Your father has sent me to see how much your calf is, and if I might be able to buy her.”

“My name is May.” When May looked up, John was spellbound. Here before him was the most beautiful, knock-down gorgeous young woman he had ever seen. How could she not be married? It was no wonder the village folks wanted him to say

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“Hi” to her. They knew he would be tongue tied, as he was now.

John could not utter another word. Instead, he just held out his right hand as he would to greet someone.

May turned a little red in the face, and held her deformed right hand out to take John’s hand. It was then John noticed that her right hand was the same as his foot, and it did not matter to him—he just kept holding it.

It wasn’t because of her extreme beauty that the village people were laughing. It was the fact that they were both deformed. It was cruel. Yet, he had seen it many times before. He had come to expect it. To John, her bad hand meant nothing. She was as beautiful with or without a hand. For that matter, she could have been missing both hands altogether and it would not have mattered to John.

John finally let her hand go and got his voice back. “How much do you want for your calf?”

“It is not for sale!”

John hesitated for a while. “I was told you had a calf for sale. Your sister, your brother, and even your father, have all said so.”

“They are wrong. It was for sale before you came. Now, it is not.”

“Have I offended you somehow? Is it because I

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did not notice your right hand before I offered my right hand, and so embarrassed you?”

“My calf is not for sale because of three things. First, because you did not notice my hand, and when you did, I could tell it was not important to you. Second, I can see you have a bad foot, and it is not important to me. Third, I have a very good feeling about you. I do not know why, only that I do. I have made up my mind about you.”

John was confused again. “If you will not sell me your calf, then how can you say you have good feelings about me?”

May repeated her words. “I will not sell you my calf! If you go to my father, I will give you my calf. It is my dowry for my hand in marriage.”

John had felt the same way, but dared not even entertain the idea. Now, this beautiful young woman had said yes before he even asked! Could he be so very lucky? He could! He was.

May and John walked back to the house and John asked the father if he could marry May.

The father looked towards the sound of his daughter.

“Do you, my youngest daughter, want to marry this man named John?”

“Yes, Father, I do.”

“Then,” he turned in John’s direction, “you

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have my permission to marry my daughter, Priscilla May." He took Priscilla's and John's hands in his and added, "Even though my eyes are almost gone, I see things clearer than I ever have. Your marriage will be blessed and from you will come a great kingdom and a great people."

The townsfolk were invited to the evening wedding. They had talked amongst themselves and felt guilty about laughing at John and Priscilla May, so they got together and brought a horse and wagon as a gift. When it was presented to the young couple, everyone laughed, as did John and Priscilla, for the wagon had three good wheels and one skid, yet it worked just fine.

On the way back to John's little home, after putting the calf in the back of the wagon on some hay, they began talking together. They talked about John's place and their new life together. They even talked about her father's promise that from them would come a great kingdom, and how they had better have a lot of kids to up their chances.

CHAPTER TWO

ESCAPE

THE knocking by John's mother continued even louder and more urgently, if that were possible.

"Please let me in!"

John opened the front door and his mother rushed in, slamming the door behind her, then bolting the latch.

"Quick! Get dressed and pack a few belongings—essential things only. Quick! Do what I say! Do it!—Do it now!"

She was in such a panic and her voice was so shrill and strong that it put fear into the children and into the livestock.

The kids, all seven of them, were now screaming. "We don't want to go! Mom, Dad, what's wrong? Are we going to die? Is there a monster?"

The animals, sensing the fear in the humans,

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were kicking at the two gates and the walls.

John's wife stayed in bed with the covers up over her chin and her eyes wide with fear. It was the worst kind of fear—fear of the unknown.

John was now in a world he did not understand. His animals were going crazy. His children were in a panic, demanding reassurance. His wife, always level headed and in control, was frozen in bed. His mother was screaming nonsense. He couldn't handle all of it at one time. He needed to have everyone calm down so he could try to understand the source of this nightmare. Maybe he was dreaming? No. This was real.

“Mother! Look at me. Calm down. We are not going anywhere unless you tell us the problem. The sooner you can relax or at least explain, the quicker we can make our decision.”

“I'm sorry, my son. I have done you a great injustice. Your father made me do it. I'm sorry!”

John had been twenty sun-cycles old when his father died, and it had been perhaps twenty more sun-cycles since then, but he remembered many things about his dad. For some reason there had been a distance between them. John had always believed that this distance was out of shame for having fathered a cripple. Although John didn't know it, he was right that his father was ashamed,

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