The Shadow Knows

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By now, the shooting is old news, and Rush Springs, Oklahoma, has had its five minutes of notoriety. The story has been all over national magazines and newspapers and featured on prime-time television news—how, on a hot blistering day last July, Lonnie Dutton's two elder children, Herman, fifteen, and Druie, twelve, took a .243 deer rifle into the living-room of the trailer house where they lived, set the barrel of the gun against their sleeping daddy's head, just below his right ear, and blew him away, right there on the couch, a can of beer on the table beside him. How they killed him together, Herman steadying the gun while Druie pulled the trigger. How they had decided to do it—"kill Daddy"—that afternoon, when their sister, Alesha, who is ten, came out of the house crying and told them that their daddy had molested her. How the two boys were working in the field next to the trailer house that day—105 degrees and they'd been sent to chop and hoe—and decided that while they'd been putting up with their daddy's cruel mistreatment for years, this was different.

By mid-afternoon, all hush-hush to keep it secret from Alesha and their baby brother, Jake, eight, Herman and Druie Dutton had figured out what they had to do: their daddy had always told them that, if they ever discovered anyone fooling with their sister, they should pick up the .243 and shoot the son of a bitch in either the head, just below the ear, or the heart. Their daddy then poked the side of his head, to show where the bullet should go, then slapped the left side of his chest, to show them the heart, and then poked both boys in the side of the head repeatedly and hard, and then slapped their chests. He wanted to be sure they understood. Herman and Druie were good children; they did what they could to keep their daddy calm, including stealing, calling their mother names, biting her and throwing darts at her. And so they waited until they were sure that their daddy was good and asleep, so that he wouldn't draw out the nine-millimeter from underneath his overalls bib and shoot them first. Then they went inside the trailer house and killed him with the .243, which had been stolen from somebody in Lawton, Oklahoma, some eight years earlier.

In October, three months after the shooting, the Oklahoma sun still beats down like emergency floodlights. People in Grady County are used to it. The ones I've met are friendly, plain and very white, with flat, twangy accents. The women grow their hair long and leave it; the men drive pick-ups. The economy is down the tubes, politics what you would expect. On the turnpike between Oklahoma City and Chickasha, I pass a billboard saying SOCIALISM IS WRONG.

In Grady County, a woman on her own gets company fast. While driving, I watch as car after car pulls alongside, slows down, revs up; the drivers look over, I go on. It's a world in which bars are windowless and dark, their parking lots filled with pick-ups and the occasional Ranchero. My first night in Rush Springs, I stepped outside my motel to go for a short run. It was early evening, the sun was low, but there was plenty of light. A pick-up came by, slowed down; there were three men inside, raising cans to their lips. A couple of minutes later, a woman and a young girl in a brand-new, extended-cab pick-up stopped, and the woman asked where I lived and if I had seen the three men who were parked at the top of the road, waiting for me. She offered to take me back to the motel.

Eighteen miles south of Chickasha, at a yellow blinking caution light, I turn right off US 81, away from downtown Rush Springs. The telephone book gives "N of city" and "SW of city" as addresses. The house I am heading towards, the home of Luther Dutton, the dead man's father, is on a road with no name, "W of city."

When I spoke to Luther Dutton on the phone, he said he had no problem talking to me or anybody else. He wanted the story told right, and for that to happen, "There's only one way." Just so long as it wasn't for a book. He didn't go for the book stuff. "We're the only ones who know," he assured me. And he told me how to get to his house.

Southwest Oklahoma is farming country, watermelons and peanuts mostly—Rush Springs calls itself Watermelon Capital of the World. There are cattle, some sheep, some goats. The rolling countryside lies between mountains to the east and dry plains not that far to the west; and it is lush, green and wet, with heavy-headed oak and pecan trees and thick, webby undergrowth.

Scrub oaks line the road to the Dutton house. Mustang grapevines grow over the tops of the stunted trees like a shroud. Beyond them, all you can see is more scrub, denser brush. Just before the Dutton

mailbox, there is a beat-up locked gate with a rusted sign hanging on it saying PRIVATE PROPERTY. Over the gate, five huge, dark, withering catfish heads swing in the breeze.

Luther Dutton's new mailbox is shaped like a barn. It is festooned with blue bows. There are bows on the fence and across the top of the gate.

The red clay road leading to the house slants down a little in a tunnel of overhanging trees, then curves to the right. The landscape opens up and there is a big house with a wide front porch set on a cleared, very pretty rise in the land. There is a refrigerator on the porch and a couple of nonfunctioning cars out front, but it isn't trashy. The trees are big, and the grass a deep green. Lonnie Dutton and his children lived on this same piece of land, back in the scrub oaks and underbrush, with nothing but a rutted cowpath for a way in or out. Nobody lives in the trailerhouse now.

It is six o'clock on a Friday evening. The season's first crop of peanuts has come in. The governor of Oklahoma is under investigation for illegal campaign funding. At seven o'clock that night, the unbeaten Rush Springs Redskins will take on the Hinton Comets in a Homecoming football game.

When I ring the doorbell, Luther Dutton answers. He is wearing jeans and a saggy white T-shirt. He has a kind of potato face, lumpy and uneven, a droopy lower lip and a bulbous nose. His hair is grey and thinning, uncombed. He is in his sixties, but he looks a good ten years older.

He invites me in, and we go through to a large room, kitchen, dining-room and living-room all in one. The room is clean and plain with fake wood paneling. There are little pictures on the wall including a child's "I-Love-You-Daddy" drawing which Luther says one of the kids made for Lonnie. A flyer is tacked on the refrigerator, announcing the town meeting in support of Herman and Druie held three months earlier, at which blue bows were sold to help pay legal expenses. The house is easy to keep and serviceable, with built-ins and new appliances.

We sit at a round table. Luther spits tobacco into a styrofoam cup, staring off in the general direction of the opposite wall and meeting my eyes only when it suits him.

He introduces me to his wife, Nancy. In rural areas, middle-aged women tend to fall into one of two categories: the chunk and the rail. The chunk puts on weight and acquires a bosom, hips, dimples, a double chin, a rolling gait; she has a girlish look and loves her food. The rail shrinks, her skin clings to her bones, her behind flattens, her neck turns into a column of folds. The rail usually chain-smokes,

preferring cigarettes to food. A rail still in the ball game may cover up the damage with ice-blue eyeshadow and frosted pink lipstick; her hair will be dyed: black, yellow or red.

Nancy Dutton is a rail and has not been in the ball game for years. She could be eighty; it turns out she's sixty-one. In her thirties, she was institutionalized for mental and emotional problems and had shock treatments for more than a year; her daughter, Linda Munn, says that's why Nancy has a hard time remembering and sometimes seems so . . . flat. She sits on a barstool next to the breakfast bar, smoking steadily, and lets Luther do most of the talking.

Lonnie Dutton lived on his father's property for nine years. Records list him as an unemployed roofer, but no one can remember him ever doing a day's work for wages. He lived on the dole, getting food stamps and money from government programs and making his kids steal. When social services people came out for a home study, Lonnie pretended to live in Luther's house, and Luther and Nancy covered for him. The electricity in his trailer was illegally tapped from his father's line. His water supply came from his father's well. He would neither allow his parents to enter his trailerhouse, nor leave his own children with them when he went out. Wherever Lonnie Dutton went, his children went too. When he went to bars, they stayed in the truck until he was ready to go, no matter the temperature or the hour. If Lonnie came out drunk at two or three in the morning, fifteen-year-old Herman drove home.

Lonnie graduated from high school in Sterling, Oklahoma, one of only three boys in a class of thirty, and so he was elected Class Favorite, Most Handsome and Best Dancer, the other two boys being pretty squirrelly-looking. He had two elder sisters, Linda, now forty-three, and Dina, who is forty-one. Lonnie died four days short of his fortieth birthday. Nancy says his kids were planning a surprise party for him, and that Druie had asked her to make a cake with candles.

"He was a hard-working boy," Luther says of his son. "All his life he worked hard. He had a deformed heart you know . . . He raised registered hogs."

Luther makes statements like this, statements that clearly—to him—have some kind of resonance. And then he will pause, waiting for a response, I can't tell to what. After a beat, he goes on.

"Won nearly every prize in the county."

And he describes his son, the hard-working all-American farm boy, and Nancy tells me about Lonnie's deformed heart with the oversized valve and his high blood pressure.

As for school, "He didn't do no good. But he was a damned fine carpenter."

Luther Dutton backtracks, rethinks his story, checks himself. Nancy Dutton adds details, corrects small errors and contributes to Luther's main thrust, which is to let the world know that nobody understands what it has been like for him all these years, nobody. He is cagey, deft, sly, and thinks he can put one over on anybody. Luther and Nancy rarely use their son's name, but when they say "he," I always know who they mean.

Yes, Luther will admit, he did thrash his son with a belt from time to time, but that's what people did in those days, striped their sons' backsides. He was trying to straighten him out, that was all; of course it didn't do any good.

I go over some of the stories I have heard: how Lonnie made his wife, Marie, stand against the wall, then told his kids to throw darts at her; how he poured jalapeno pepper juice in her eyes; how he chased Herman with a two-by-four and kicked him between the legs with a steel-toed boot; how he used to shoot at the chicken coop while Herman and Druie were inside; and how he played William Tell with Druie by making him stand against a wall, then shooting bullets in a circle around his head. I ask him, have any of these stories been exaggerated?

Luther thinks a long time. When he shakes his head and says simply no, there is no knowing what his attitude is. When cornered, he has a mantra which goes: "I loved my son. I love my grandkids. My grandkids killed my son. And I have mixed emotions about that." At first, I thought by mixed emotions he meant he was confused, then later on I decided he meant exactly what he said.

Luther has been interviewed a lot. He often asks and answers his own questions.

"Were those children abused? I'd have to say, yes. Those children were belittled, berated, beat on, abused, called everything in the book. But you know, I never heard those boys use a cuss word."

Nancy shakes her head.

"They killed their daddy, yes. But they never used foul language."

And he waits a beat or two and then restates his theme: "Nobody knows what it was like, being a prisoner in your own home for years, nobody. But he was my son and I loved him. When you love somebody, you love them. Don't make no difference what they do."

Luther pulls up his shirtsleeve. "He cut me. Here." Traces a scar on his bicep. "Here." Touches his arm close to the wrist. "He shot me

once—just birdshot, but I would have gone after him with my gun if my wife hadn't stopped me."

Luther says Lonnie never should have got married, and that on his wedding night he said he'd rather go coon hunting. "He hated women. He used to say, there's only one good woman in the world and that's her"—nods in Nancy's direction—"and all the rest are whores and liars." Thinking about why Lonnie believed this, Luther goes to the sink, paces, starts to say something, then stops, mentions family secrets, things he can't talk about. "But I'll tell you this," he finally says. "He was jilted and that's all I'll say. It was when he was a senior. He was always a man to hold a grudge, and that did it." As for his sisters, he probably hated them most of all. "But then," Luther says darkly, "he knew the things they did."

And so, at twenty-two, Lonnie married Rosemarie Standford, even though he didn't want to—"It was her wanted to," Nancy declares—and Luther says he would be the first to take the stand and say that, yes, Lonnie abused her and beat her up so bad you couldn't tell who she was. But as for the question of whether he molested Alesha, Luther Dutton says that's hard for him to know. "I'll tell you this, Lonnie hated a pervert. He had no use for homos. He hated a queer. And I ask myself, would he molest his own child? I have a hard time with that, you see. I have mixed emotions about that. But to answer your question, I'd have to say I don't think he ever did. Or not that I ever knew of."

At one point, Luther leaves the room and comes back in carrying a three-foot length of hard rubber tubing and a pistol in a holster. He puts them on the table.

"Now, ma'am," he says, " I don't meant to disrespect you, but you know what that is." He nods at the tube. "It's a tube from a pump to air up your tires." He pauses. "That's what he used to beat them with." He takes the pistol out of the holster. "Ma'am. I don't mean to disrespect you." The gun is an automatic. He takes the clip out. "This was his gun. He was left-handed. A left-handed man." He puts the nine-millimeter back in the holster. "He wore it here." He lays his hand across his heart. "In the bib of his overalls. Always."

Marie left Lonnie in 1989 and went to Texas to live with her mother. She took her children with her. A few months later, Lonnie went down there and made it up with Marie, saying he would change, they'd all move and make a life in Texas. Then things happened. Lonnie beat Marie up, Marie's mother called the police and Lonnie was thrown in jail. When he got out two weeks later, he went back home to Okla-

homa. Soon afterwards, Herman and Druie asked to go back to liv with their dad. This was before he started beating up on them, an anyway they didn't really trust their mother, especially after Lonni had drilled certain facts into their heads and made them call her pi and whore dog. Lonnie filed a custody suit, which he won. Mos people believe Luther helped his son pay for a good lawyer. Mari didn't have one.

Oklahoma has a law stating that, if a parent is absent from a chil for twelve consecutive months and provides no support, then the par ent's rights can be terminated without notice. As Marie Dutton ha not seen her children in at least three years, she is no longer legall considered their parent. And one day recently, when the boys were i court, they were given the chance to see Marie. They refused. Drui eventually gave in and talked to her, but Herman stood firm.

Luther Dutton says he called the social services on "this very phone— so many times," and he gets out old telephone bills showing the call to a Chickasha number. As for the police, Luther says, "The polic are thirty-five miles away. You know what happens. Time they ge here . . . And it's complicated. I mean, if you file charges, you have to stop and think, what's going to happen to the kids? We'd get into i over those kids. I'd see Herman with his head swollen up, Druie with a black eye, and we'd get into it. He'd tell me to mind my own damned business, those kids were his and he'd do what he damned pleased, and nobody better try to come between him and his kids. So . . ."

He shows me Lonnie's photograph album. There are diamond-shaped cuts in many of the snapshots, where Lonnie gouged out the face and body of Marie. One picture is of Lonnie on his wedding night, standing by a dog-pen, holding his arm over the coon hounds' heads to get them to jump up. He is trim, of medium build, a fairly good-looking young man. His smile is rascally, but not mean. In later photos, he is big and burly and will not look at the camera. In most of them, he is wearing a shapeless hat with a big brim, and you can see the gun holster sticking out of his overalls bib. I hold the pictures up in Nancy's direction. I would not have known, I say, that these were of the same person. She nods.

In one picture, it is Christmas, and Lonnie's four children and Nancy are lined up inside Luther and Nancy's house. Nancy is in the middle, looking pathetic in a droopy dress. The four children all hold rifles on their shoulders, like soldiers. Herman stands at one end, chin tucked in like a Marine, shoulders severely squared.

"See there," Luther points at the right side of Herman's head. "You can see how swollen up it is. And look at his mouth."

Herman's head looks soft and melonish on one side, and his mouth is twisted and off-centre. Druie has a black eye.

"That's the gun they shot him with." Luther taps the photo. "Right there." He points to the gun Herman has on his shoulder. "That's the .243."

Linda Munn, Lonnie's elder sister, has not lived in Rush Springs for ten years. But she has come back to Oklahoma to testify to her brother's brutality; there are pictures of her in the middle of the main street of Rush Springs, holding up a sign saying BRING OUR ANGELS HOME.

When I spoke to her later, her first words were, "You didn't believe everything Daddy said, did you? That's what scares me. That people will go out there and take everything he says at face value."

Linda Munn says her daddy beat up on her as far back as she can remember, once so badly she had blood streaks from the back of her neck to her ankles, and on Lonnie too—one time in the barn, so brutally that everybody went and hid so they couldn't hear. She also says that Lonnie didn't have a deformed heart or high blood pressure. "That's bull poop. He was lazy. If those little boys are going to have to tell the truth about what went on, then we should too. That place he says Lonnie cut him? My brother didn't cut Daddy there. He did that himself, welding. I told him I knew that, but he just said, 'Well, *they* don't.' "

When Linda Munn was fourteen, she got pregnant, got married and came home to her parent's house to live with her new husband. Those were bad years. Nancy was in hospital getting shock treatments, and Luther was beating up on all the kids.

Linda says that no girl was ever going to be good enough for Lonnie in her mother's eyes. "If she didn't use the recipes my mom used or clean house the way my mom did, she was ridiculed. Marie never had a chance."

Linda Munn says that she is prepared to believe just about anything that's said about her brother, and wonders about his sexual problems. She says he wouldn't let Marie change Alesha's diapers if anybody else was in the room, in case some man saw the baby's genitals and started getting ideas. When his daughter was a toddler, he used to introduce her as "my nigger" and "my little slut." Once, when Alesha was about four, she fell off the porch and cracked her head. Linda's son Wayne picked her up and held her on his lap to see if she was

badly hurt, and Lonnie came running up, waving his pistol, and told Wayne to take that child off his lap; he knew what Wayne was thinking—Linda says, because Lonnie was having those thoughts himself. And there is the story about Lonnie beating up Marie to make her have sex with another man, then when she wouldn't, pouring alcohol down her throat until she did, then beating her up worse afterwards because she did it, and everybody blaming Marie because she didn't after all *have* to do it. Linda says she remembers her brother bragging that there was one thing he could say about Marie: she took an ass whipping better than any man he knew.

There are other houses on the road with no name, "W of city." Karen Caveny and her family live in a trailerhouse on the front part of their land, where they are building a home and share a fence line with the Dutton place. The living-room of the trailer is warm and comfortable, the walls covered with family portraits. Karen Caveny is a pleasant-faced woman in her mid-forties, smart and plain-spoken as a stop sign. She has a lot to say about what she heard out there. From 1984, when Lonnie moved his trailer on to his father's land and settled down with his pregnant wife and their three kids, she and her family never felt safe.

"Lonnie liked to shoot. My kids have dodged his bullets; we have bullet holes in the side of our house. When Lonnie and Marie first moved in, they had six white dogs. Those dogs were chasing livestock, and I sent my daughter Jodi to tell Herman to tell his daddy he had to do something about them. Next day, Herman told Jodi, "Daddy says you don't have to worry about those dogs any more. He stepped out on the front porch and shot them all."

Karen Caveny caught Lonnie Dutton peering in her windows at least twice, and one time he stalked a neighbor who complained about goats in her yard, following her car in his pick-up and parking alongside it while she went to church.

"What you have to understand about Lonnie is, he liked intimidating people. And when you're doing the kinds of things he was doing and enjoying them, then I'd have to say that was evil."

"Marie?" Karen Caveny's eyes fill. "Just after they moved in, we were in the house, the television was on, the washing machine was going, it was night, and on top of all that noise I heard screams. I thought it was one of the animals, but when I went outside, I knew it was a person. It went on for forty-five minutes. She was screaming his name out loud, begging him to stop."

Karen Caveny eventually went back inside and turned up the television so she couldn't hear any more. At a quarter to six the next morning, there was a knock at the door and there stood Marie, holding Druie by the hand with Alesha on her hip. She was pregnant with Jake. "That child was so big she was waddling. Her face was out to here, her eyes were black, and there wasn't a part of the whites of her eyes that was white; they were completely red. The blood vessels had all burst, I guess. Her mouth was busted and one ear was torn. She had black-and-blue marks all over her. She needed a ride into town, and so we took them and put her and the children on a bus to Texas. Next thing I knew she was back. She came to us lots of times. Nancy would call me and I'd lie: Oh, I haven't seen Marie, haven't seen her in a long time. Marie would hide the children, lay them down under some bushes and wait for the right car to come along and she'd get up and put them in the car and get a ride where she needed to go."

Karen Caveny says that she called the social services "between thirty and fifty times" but that "nobody came." She made the reports anonymously because for a long time she and her family were Lonnie Dutton's only neighbors. "He would know it was me turning him in. I had children of my own to think of. If he was doing the things he was doing to his own children, what would he do to mine?"

Lonnie liked to set off fires on other people's land, and one time a dozen or so people who lived in the area got together and called the sheriff. Nobody came out until eventually someone from another county told a friend, who was a special investigator from yet another county, about what was going on, and that person roused some members of the Grady County Sheriff's Department. And when they arrived, Karen Caveny told them the whole story, about the screams and about Lonnie being a peeping Tom. "They told us there was nothing they could do unless we caught him red-handed and held on to him until somebody came. Now can't you just see me saying, 'Lonnie, will you wait right there while I call the sheriff?' " And while this was not said outright, the message Karen Caveny got from the Sheriff's Department was: be your own vigilante; do what you have to do.

People who live outside the city limits don't always live there from necessity or because they are farmers. They live there because they get a kick out of having their own way, by God; and living where they don't see, by God, anybody else; and having, by God, beaten the system. The Cavenys never thought of moving because of, " Oh, the pioneer spirit. You don't let people run you off your property. You just don't."

On 12 July, some time between four and five in the afternoon, Karen Caveny heard there had been a shooting on the Dutton place,

and she was not surprised. But she thought Lonnie had shot his dad. Why? "Because Lonnie was just that crazy and his dad was just that scared." When she heard what had really happened, she says it was the last thing she would have imagined. "I had a mental picture of those two little boys—you know, they're small; they look more like ten and twelve than twelve and fifteen—and I could see them holding that gun and praying to God that Lonnie wouldn't wake up before they pulled the trigger and I felt terrible for them. I wish they hadn't had to go through that. Nobody deserves to live the way they lived. They didn't just haul off and shoot their dad. He was a demon. He was living hell."

There are constant and hurtful questions in Grady County these days: who saw the bruises or heard the screams; who called the social services or the child-abuse toll-free number to make reports; who was responsible for the fact that, while there were a lot of people who thought that Lonnie Dutton was a man in need of a good killing, his kids were the only ones up to doing it?

Employees of the Department of Human Services can't talk about individual cases. The Sheriff's Department will only say that, if a child won't talk, there's nothing they can do. A math teacher at Herman's school once took the boy aside and asked him about the bruises and abrasions on his face. Herman made up some tale about the limb of a tree hitting him and, even when the teacher said he didn't believe him, held fast to his story. And people in Rush Springs want to make it clear, they didn't know what was going on, they didn't even know Lonnie Dutton, he never came into town.

Everybody thinks something had to go wrong for those children to have fallen through the cracks of the system, but nobody knows exactly what. And I find myself wondering if *anything* could have been done to stop Lonnie Dutton's bullying, short of his children rising up and shooting him. The Dutton family was isolated and secretive. Nobody much knew where the trailer was, and Lonnie had installed motion detectors in his yard, connected to lights. He slept on the couch, surrounded by guns. If the lights came on in the night, he started shooting. It didn't matter what was out there. He didn't wait, he didn't aim. He just shot.

As I leave "W of city," the sky is blood-red along the horizon. I keep thinking about Herman. Herman was the caretaker child, the one in charge; it was up to him to keep things on an even keel, take the hits for his brothers and sister, lie when anyone asked about his bruises,

run round at lunch-time to make sure the other kids were OK. Herman never quit trying to be the good child and please his dad. When Lonnie took them all shoplifting, Herman knew he would beat up on whoever didn't steal enough and so he cut back on his take. Last year, after Herman had failed to do a chore exactly right, Lonnie went after him with a two-by-four and knocked him out cold in the back yard; there is a declivity in Herman's skull now, big enough to lay your finger in.

Herman is the smallest boy in his class—I have seen his school group picture. He is in the front row, sparky-looking, perfectly proportioned, wiry. He is standing at an angle to the camera, one hand loosely curled on his thigh. His blond hair is in big waves, dramatically dipped to one side, and he is wearing a bright western shirt, a black belt, tight jeans and cowboy boots. He may be tiny, but his body is taking an adult shape, and he has a great sense of style.

That July afternoon, Herman told Druie he would be the one to shoot their daddy, but when they got in there, he couldn't do it. At fifteen, Herman was old enough to know the consequences, legal and otherwise. So the younger, more concrete-thinking Druie took the gun, but he couldn't do it either, although he said that if Herman could steady the rifle, he thought he could pull the trigger. Lonnie wore a droopy moustache, sometimes a forked beard and had had his head shaved to give him a meaner look. I imagine the two boys standing beside him, passing the rifle between them, keeping a careful eye on the bald head, the moustache, the chin, the bulked-up body of their two-hundred plus pound dad in his overalls, the nine-millimeter automatic in a holster beneath the bib.

And so Herman aimed the .243 and put his finger on the trigger again, and just as he was about to lower the barrel once more, Druie pushed the trigger back. The bullet made a neat three-quarter-inch entry hole, then exploded inside Lonnie Dutton's skull. It did not exit. There was a lot of blood. Lonnie died instantly.

Herman and Druie ran out the front door. Alesha and Jake were playing in the back yard, Herman had made sure of that because he didn't mean for them to see; but Alesha heard the noise and ran in the back door, saw her daddy lying dead on the couch and started screaming.

Herman herded his brothers and sister together, and all four children ran down the rutted cow path to their daddy's pick-up, bawling. They were heading down to the main road, going God knows where, when their cousin, Linda Munn's son Wayne, who until a week before had been a Rush Springs policeman, drove in. Herman told him, "I think Daddy's dead." Wayne was not surprised; people had been ex-

pecting a shooting out there for years; they just didn't know who would end up dead. But he thought it would be Luther or one of the kids, not Lonnie.

The first police officer on the scene was Guy Huggins, the deputy Sheriff. He said that the trailerhouse was swept up and fairly clean, and that there were no illegal drugs on the premises. Later on, he went to pick up Herman and Druie at a relative's house, and all four kids were still bawling. Herman said that he was the one who shot his dad; then, when Huggins got the boys to the Sheriff's annex in Chickasha, where they were questioned separately, Druie said that Herman held the gun but that he pulled the trigger. Both boys knew what they had done and said they loved their daddy. When was the funeral? Could they go?

It is dark now. In Rush Springs, the Homecoming game is in progress. The scoreboard lights say ten minutes left in the second quarter, the Redskins leading by two. I park on the highway. The stadium lights up the pitch-black night. Everybody's there: men with their feet up on a fence rail, smoking; women selling tickets, talking to their daughters. Let loose in the warm night air, kids run around like wild things.

At half-time, I drive into the parking lot and buy a ticket. The band—mostly white children in red and black uniforms—has marched out and plays "Ebb Tide." Convertibles circle the field, as Homecoming maids perched atop the back seats smile and wave. They have a lot of hair, fizzed up, fanned out, shiny with goo. Their cars stop at the fifty-yard line, where each maid is escorted through a flower-decked arbour. The queen and king are crowned, flashbulbs pop.

The Dutton compound is only five miles off, but it's a long way from there to here. As the band and the Homecoming court leave the field, and the Redskins roll back on, I think about the boys, what might have been happening to them, right now, this minute, if they hadn't killed their father.

All four Dutton children have been made wards of the court, a ruling that Marie Dutton is still fighting. Alesha and Jake have been put into the temporary care of a relative. Herman and Druie were sent to the Oklahoma Juvenile Diagnostic and Evaluation Center, which recommended that a court trial be avoided. If Herman and Druie stay out of trouble until April 1996, their records will be clear.

Nobody knows when the four children will be together again. The court has ruled that any member of the Dutton family seeking custody must first agree to therapy.

Back on US 81, heading north, I wonder what secrets are buried with Lonnie Dutton and what Luther Dutton was making up. I wonder

how all four kids will turn out. I think about Herman. Herman has his own room now, his own things. I wonder what his nights are like, what he thinks about, what kind of plans he is making.

Later that night I wake up screaming. A rat is at me, biting and biting me, and I cannot move.