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THE COUNCIL OF PECANS

Heat waves shimmer above the grasses, the air heavy and white and ringing with the buzz of cicadas. They've been shoeless all summer long, but even so the dry September stubble of 1895 pricks their feet as they trot across the sunburned prairie, lifting their heels like grass dancers. Just young willow whips in faded dungarees and nothing else, their ribs showing beneath narrow brown chests as they run. They veer off toward the shady grove where the grass is soft and cool underfoot, flopping in the tall grass with the loose-limbed abandon of boys. They rest for a few moments in the shade and then spring to their feet, palming grasshoppers for bait.

The fishing poles are right where they left them, leaning up against an old cottonwood. They hook the grasshoppers through the back and throw out a line while the silt of the creek bottom oozes up cool between their toes. But the water hardly moves in the paltry channel left by drought. Nothing's biting but a few mosquitoes. After a bit, the prospect of a fish dinner seem as thin as their bellies, beneath faded denim pants held up with twine. Looks like nothing but biscuits and redeye gravy for supper tonight. Again. They hate to go home empty-handed and disappoint Mama, but even a dry biscuit fills the belly.

The land here, along the Canadian River, smack in the middle of Indian Territory, is a rolling savanna of grass with groves of trees in the bottomlands. Much of it has never been plow broke, as no one has a plow. The boys follow the stream from grove to grove back up toward the home place on the allotment, hoping for a deep pool somewhere, finding nothing. Until one boy stubs his toe on something hard and round hidden in the long grass.

There's one and then another, and then another—so many he can hardly walk. He takes up a hard green ball from the ground and whips it through the trees at his brother like a fastball as he yells, *"Piganek!* Let's bring 'em home!" The nuts have just begun to ripen and fall and blanket the grass. The boys fill their pockets in no time and then pile up a great heap more. Pecans are good eating but hard to carry, like trying to carry a bushel of tennis balls: the more you pick up, the more end up on the ground. They hate to go home emptyhanded, and Mama would be glad for these—but you can't carry more than a handful ...

The heat eases a little as the sun sinks low and evening air settles in the bottomland, cool enough for them to run home for supper. Mama hollers for them and the boys come running, their skinny legs pumping and their underpants flashing white in the fading light. It looks like they're each To return to a bookmark, click on the first icon and click on "Bookmarks." Then select the page you want to return to. You can place multiple bookmarks in one book.

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