

Spring

FLARE



The Flagler
Review

Bracketville, Texas, 1964

Kimberly Parish Davis



It was the first time I'd gotten to go hunting. Usually I stayed with one of my grandmothers, but I guess *this* deer lease was kid-friendly because of the beat-up little travel trailer. That's all there was to the place, a travel trailer and a campfire in a pasture of dry grass as tall as me. Scrubby live oak, juniper, and mesquite—tall trees in my four-year-old eyes—edged up to the campsite on two sides and provided homes for white-tailed deer, turkey, and quail. Peggy's husband Nickie owned the land.

I loved the way a twig shoved into the hot embers of the campfire would catch light. That magic occupied hours of my day until Daddy showed me how to clean quail. He pulled off their little heads then made a slit with his pocket knife and pulled the skin off, feathers and all—like when I raised my hands over my head for some grownup to pull my shirt off. Daddy made me try pulling the skin off one of the little dead birds, but I couldn't do it right, so I just watched him do it. I was with Daddy while

Mommy and Peggy took a turn hunting. Peggy's husband, Nickie, and her mama were there somewhere too.

Mommy and Peggy sure had a good time hunting that afternoon. They didn't see any deer or quail, probably because they couldn't quit talking, Daddy said, but they did shoot an armadillo. That made them laugh all night. They told the story over and over about Mommy grabbing the armadillo's tail as it ran into a hole. "Bad idea," she said. "Have you ever tried to pull one of those suckers out of its hole? They're strong!" Meanwhile, Peggy shot the poor thing in the butt with a .410.

There was a lot of laughing in the trailer that night. We must have eaten the quail me and Daddy cleaned, but what I remember most is watching Peggy's mama, who was a nurse, pierce Peggy and then Mommy's ears with a giant needle. Trouble was, nobody had any earrings to put in the holes. I don't know why they didn't think of that before they started. They ended up using straw from a broom to keep the holes open till they could get home and buy earrings. Years later, Mommy's earrings still didn't sit quite right.

Mommy tried to get me to go to bed, but I couldn't sleep. They were laughing too much. Peggy said, "You sure are a good girl. You want some Coca-Cola?" She was pouring fresh drinks.

"Tell Miss Peggy thank you, baby," Mommy said. She lit a cigarette that filled the whole trailer with mentholated smoke. I liked watching it swirl and swoosh out the door when Peggy opened the door to take some drinks outside to the men.

When she came back in, Peggy asked Mommy, "Y'all trying for another one?"

Mommy rolled her eyes my way. "Little pitchers have big ears." I knew they were talking about babies. Mommy sounded like she might cry. I didn't connect the dots then—I was barely four, but she had been in the hospital that summer because my baby sister came too early and died. Mommy took a big sip of her drink. "What about you?" she asked.

Peggy rummaged around in her purse and pulled out a crumpled piece of paper with messy writing on it and slapped it on the table. "I'm through! Lookie what I got!"

"Pills? You got 'em already?"

"Not yet."

"What's Nickie say?"

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"I haven't told him."

"You haven't *told* him?"

"Why should I? We can practice for a while longer—wait for a good crop to pay the hospital bills."

Mommy got real quiet, then started crying. Peggy's mama patted her back and handed her a Kleenex.

"Oh, hell. I'm sorry. I didn't even think," Peggy said.

"The doctor told me to quit trying. He offered to tie my tubes, but Bobby wants a boy."

Peggy's mama said, "Why would a doctor say that, honey? At your age?"

"Three strikes and you're out, I guess. They come earlier and earlier. Cervical incompetence they call it."

Peggy's mama nodded. "I read about a technique called a purse-string suture."

"Tried that this last time." Mommy took a long drink of her grown-up Coke and lit another cigarette. "I'm lucky to have my good girl right here." She ran her fingers through my hair.

Everybody looked at me, and Peggy's mama smiled.

"You were a preemie too, weren't you, baby?"

Mommy said, "Thank God she was hungry."

In the morning, Mommy and Peggy were still sleeping and Peggy's mama had already gone out, so I got my rubber boots on all by myself and poured my very own milk like a big girl. Then I went outside and gathered sticks to shove into the embers of the campfire. That's what I was doing when Daddy got up. He and Nickie had slept outside on air mattresses. He said, "Hey sugar, where's your mama?"

"Sleeping."

"Let's go wake her up. We got to get packed."

Inside the trailer, Nickie was standing beside the table looking at that piece of paper Peggy showed us. His face was red.

Daddy looked over his shoulder, then hollered for Mommy, "Time to go, Babe."

Nickie just stood there staring at that piece of paper.

Nobody said much while Mommy packed our stuff. Everybody hugged and we got in the Jeep. Peggy's mama walked up to say goodbye and hug Mommy, so we all heard Nickie yell, "What in the *hell*, Peggy?"

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Peggy's mama said, "Y'all go on. It's a long way to Houston. I had a good time last night."

