

When he saw their wagon stirring dust at the prairie's edge, Jack knew they were coming for him. No one came that far out of town, and Jack was a boy to whom special things happened.

If he'd known what the visitors would bring, he'd have sprinted into the yellowing corn stalks or jumped on the family's stringy horse to gallop into the territories. But back then misfortune was as foreign to Jack as the sea. So he only stood there, swaying in the shade of the sod house, eager for whatever came.

The black marble he'd been levitating in elaborate loops, like the tip of a giant's pen, collapsed to the dirt yard, forgotten. Hot wind ruffled Jack's hair as he breathed the scent of chicken feed and manure. "People coming!"

The woven blanket covering the door swept aside. Ma shuffled out, wiping grime from her face with a soiled apron. Paw followed, squinting in the sunlight as he thumbed up his suspenders. "The town stagecoach?" His Scottish brogue was tinged with wonder and fear.

The chickens squawked and fluttered away from the elegant wagon as it charged toward the house. At the last moment, the driver yanked the reins. The horses stopped, snorting and stomping the ground, as the door sprang open and a gentleman hopped down. He beamed at Jack and his parents before offering his hand to an elegant lady with coiffed red hair who emerged behind him. She knocked his hand away.

Paw stepped forward. "May I help you?"

The man dusted his impeccable brown suit, though it showed no wear. "You must be Horace Driver. We've been hunting for you." He pumped Paw's hand. "Name's William Butler, hailing from The Topeka Herald. Here to see if the stories of your boy are true." He turned his radiant smile to Jack, his lush mustache twitching as he lowered his voice. "That must be you."

He was lying. Jack could always tell.