***Sounder***

***Chapter 5***

***Synopsis:***

The trip to the jail is suddenly over. When the boy is outside, he remembers that he was looking forward to seeing his father and bringing him the cake. He remembers his resolve not to "grieve" his father. The boy wonders what he is going to say to his mother; he does not want to tell her what the guard did to her cake. He is afraid she will think that he has grieved his father when he tells her not to send him back. When he gets home, his mother asks if he got there all right and whether it is warm in jail. He asks her whether Sounder has come home, and, when she says no, he starts to get the lantern to go looking. His mother tells him to eat first, and he finally tells her that his father directed him not to visit anymore. She does not say anything. That night he dreams that someone has come to teach him to read.

The next morning he awakens to the sound of his mother singing. The boy thinks he hears a faint whine and goes running to the door. Sounder, skinny and only using three legs, is there standing on the porch. He looks roughed up, has no ear or eye on one side of his head, and his shoulder is scarred and scabbed. The boy thinks Sounder is looking for his father. Eventually the boy gets used to the way Sounder looks but notices that Sounder refuses to bark. One night a few months later his mother receives word that his father's case has gone to court and that his father has been transferred to hard labor. She does not know where he will be working, except that it is not outside of the state. She also does not know when he will be coming home.

***Summary:***

On his way home from seeing his father, the boy decides not to tell his mother about the cake and regrets forgetting to ask his father where Sounder first came to him. He does not know where his father will be sent to work or when he will come home, and the boy worries about all of it. The boy tells his mother a few details about his visit to the jail before he asks if Sounder came home today. He did not. The boy calls for the dog before he eats his dinner, and he also tells his mother that father does not want him to come visit again. Father will send word with the visiting preacher when he is coming home. Mother begins to pick walnuts and hum, but soon she is again singing her mournful song. That night the boy dreams that someone offers to teach him how to read and he sees his father’s hands chained to the prison bars. In the morning the boy hears his mother in the kitchen and then imagines he hears a slight whine from the front porch. He hears it again, as does his mother who stops singing in order to listen more closely. Sounder is on the porch, standing on three legs and looking like a skeleton. His wounds are “reddish brown and hairless,” but he wags his tail at the boy. Sounder has only one whole ear, three good legs, and one eye; nevertheless, the dog lifts his one good ear and whines for his master. The sight makes the boy sick and he wants to cry, but he reaches out and touches Sounder on the good side of his head. The dog’s tail wags harder and he licks the boy’s hand. Sounder’s shoulder is too damaged for him to go too far, and now he never ventures any farther than the distance between the porch and the spot in the road where he was shot. Wherever he is, Sounder always has his one eye facing in the direction his master was last seen. Soon the boy grows accustomed to Sounder’s disfigurement but wonders why the dog no longer barks. Nothing seems to be wrong with Sounder’s throat or neck, but his only noise now is a whine. Sometimes mother feeds Sounder and looks at her husband’s unused hunting gear hanging on the wall. Everything seems far away to the boy now, and the uncertainties make each day seem longer. The boy wants to go check on his father, but mother makes him wait. She asks the people in the big houses to read from their newspapers to her. Father has been convicted and sent to a work camp, but he will get time off for hard work and good behavior. The boy is certain his father will send word about where he is and when he will be home.