Their mother was an engaged listener. Their father was not. So when any of the Hooper progeny came up with some new idea of what it was they were going to do with themselves, they bounced it off of her. It wasn’t because they wanted her advice; they never listened to it. And it wasn’t because they wanted her approval; more the opposite, in fact. They’d come to take a mischievous sort of entertainment from her disapproval, and this she supplied in abundance.

Mosey approved of working at an hourly rate. She approved of purchases made at deep discount, even when it meant buying bulk quantities at an impractical scale. She approved of suffering privations in the interest of thrift. She did not approve of any of the following: distilling moonshine whiskey, spreading the gospel in the deepest and darkest corners of the earth, counterfeiting designer tomatoes, harnessing the mystical power of the earth through the art of witchcraft, reenacting civil war battles, hiking the Appalachian Trail, penning quasi-literal southern gothic fables, outlaw taxidermy, building a praline redemption device. These Mosey denounced each after the other as unproductive dalliances that would come to naught but blindness, abductions, lawsuits, rejection, blisters, damnation, amputations, avalanches, cease and desist orders, and the ruination all concerned.

She was often right. And when she was, the adult child whose idea had gone bad was no longer entertained by her reaction, but his or her siblings were. They found themselves strangely vindicated by the shortcomings of the others. They were not a cohesive lot, these six of Mosey and Horace P. Hooper. They rarely assembled and when they did, they squabbled.

Only once in the storied history of this family did the siblings all come together behind a single venture, and it was in this purpose that on a spring morning a tractor trailer turned off a hilly Tennessee side road and onto the driveway to Clover Creek farm. The side road was curvy and narrow. It was not meant for commercial traffic. Less so the driveway. A wooded area separated the farmhouse from the road, and the truck brushed aside low hanging branches of sweet gum and sassafras trees as it passed. It soon came to an open field and topped a hill. The farmhouse came into view – dormered and picturesque amid towering oaks. The hill continued to climb to the driver’s left, and growing on it was a three-acre orchard of hazelnut trees, now nearly 15 feet in height, planted 10 years by Horace P. Hooper.

On the farmhouse’s gabled porch, his oldest son, Buford, looked up from his coffee. The truck rumbled on its eighteen wheels down the remainder of the driveway and came to a stop where the driveway ended and a concrete parking pad began. After the pad, the driveway continued as a gravel lane into a field an disappeared into the woods. The field would have made an excellent place for the tractor trailer to turn around, but it could not continue past the low-hanging utility lines that served the farmhouse.

Buford rose to enter the farmhouse, and as he did so, there emerged from it a man in a civil war confederate captain’s uniform, a blind woman led by a very large pig on a leash – Buford’s brother, Beau, and sister, Blind Marnie.

“Why in the name of Shiloh and Appomattox is that here?” said Beau, pronouncing ‘here’ as ‘heya’ in the Clark Gable affect he had assumed many years ago when he was awarded his captainship in the 17th Tennessee Exhibitionary Regiment. It was at that time that he started wearing his civil war uniform in his day-to-day life, keeping his brass buttons brightly polished and the ends of his rich black mustache waxed to fine curled points with patchouli scented oil. Captain Beauregard Hooper was the only man ever awarded a purple heart in civil war reenactment and sleeve of his fine coat, gold-braided in Austrian knots, now hung empty to his right side. Canon demonstration gone awry. The reenactment society’s insurance company paid a handsome settlement to the traumatized student’s of Mrs. Walters’ sixth-grade class Lake View Middle School, and as for then-corporal Beauregard himself, the promotion and medal were compensation enough.

“The warehouse isn’t ready,” answered Buford, brushing past him on his way into the farmhouse.

“The warehouse isn’t ready!” Beau repeated to Marnie.

“I can hear,” she said. “I don’t know why I went along with this.” She turned and went inside.

Buford stood outside the tractor trailer with a kitchen chair and a broom. The window slid down.

The driver lifted the brim on the ball cap that covered his head of course red hair. He regarded Buford flatly.

“26,000 jars of chocolate peanut butter,” he said.

“It’s hazelnut spread,” said Buford. “Just unload it over there.”

The driver chewed his gum at Buford.

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Bufford sped down the gravel lane that continued past the concrete parking slab and into the woods in a 1940s era Jeep willys cj-2a. In the woods, it dropped a bit, curved left and crossed the bridge over trout-stocked Clover Creek, which here gathered into a deep calm pool. Here, the gravel ended and the lane devolved into worn paths. Left after the were more woods, some pasture, the wetlands the Hoopers called the Silas Marsh, and some crop field leased to a neighboring farmer and this year under corn. Buford turned right, climbed a gentle slope where some black cows paid him little interest. He came at last to the fence line where Clover Creek Farm fronted a lonely stretch of Highway 132. The family had allowed the woods to reclaim the last fifty feet or so prior to the fence and this area had now gone to eastern red cedar and yellow pine and blackberry briers – all but a swath of about 80 feet which Buford’s brother, Cletus, moonshiner, amateur taxidermist, and aspiring artist, had cleared some years ago.

Buford found him there this morning working on his piece de resistance, his magnum opus. A thirty-foot knotty head fish. He was removing some forming boards from its magnificent tubercle-adorned head when Buford approached. “Cletus, listen. There’s this truck and I need help unloading it …”

Cletus did not turn around.

“I wish I could, brother. But I wore my blue flip-flops today.”

Cletus demonstrated the truth in his words. He lifted a foot and made to slap his heel a cheap rubber bath sandal, and blue it was.

Buford knew he would have these on. He knew that Cletus could innately recognize a sun rising on a day that would see him asked when the sun was rising on a day when he might be asked to exert himself physically or inconvenienced in some way, and his faviroite excuse to refuse was inappropriate footware. It was desperation the brought Buford here.

These Appalacian Mountains! The oldest in North America. Rich in coal. There’s a vein of magic running throught them, too. Some older families. It had left Buford untouched, and Blind Marnie most of all.

“Come on, Cletus! You voted for this thing with the hazelnut spread. Now this is a big job and it’s going to take all of us!”

A voice came from behind Buford: “Didn’t Dad have something that could help?”

It was Blind Marnie. *How had she gotten here so fast?*

Bufford stiffened. He put both hands to his head, just as Horace P. Hooper used to do when an idea that had been eluding him came suddenly and obviously into view.

“Of course he did!” cried Buford. “Of course he did!”

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The trucker sat in the shade of his trailer, rear doors swung open. He pecked at his phone. Buford emerged from the woods in the jeep. Attached to it now was a front-end loader fitted with a fork lift. The trucker looked up with interest. Buford came to a stop in front of him.

“I’ll get a ramp and get you unloaded,” he said.

Bufford unloaded the pallets directly into the field. No inside storage. The mansard barn, large enough, had been converted to storage after Horace’s death and was now filled past capacity with useless items which Mosey had deemed too valuable to throw away.

The driver sat under a hemlock tree and watched Buford work.

*A front end loader on a jeep. I’ve never seen anything like it.*

A one-armed man in a confederate uniform approached. With him, a man in denim overalls over a tie-died shirt. Concrete was drying on his blue flip-flops. They carried a cooler and lawn chairs.

“Won’t you join us for a quiet repast?” asked Beauregard.

“Yeah,” said Cletus. “Repast with us.”

The trucker eased himself up from the root he was sitting on and settled into the chair he was offered. He declined the beer and admired the jeep.

“You don’t see many of those old Willyses around anymore. And I’ve never seen one with a front-end loader.”

“An invention of our father’s,” said Bau.

“No. They had loaders for the farm-model Willyses. But that one there Dad made has some extra pivot joints to make it more maneuverable in tight spaces – like your trailer there. And it had a quick bind system to make it easy to put on and take off.”

“Was your dad Horace P. Hooper? The Bean Bammock guy?” asked the trucker.

The boys smiled at each other.

Horace P. Hooper had been a poor mountain boy whose mother was widowed young and landless. He had movie star good looks, or at least his children judged it so from family photos depicting a rakish smile and a full head of sandy brown hair that none of them had ever beheld on the living man. Mosey denied that she ever thought him handsome. She said it was his tenacity that won her over.

Mosey readily acknowledged her own movie star beauty. She was the last of nine children, buoyant and gregarious, the darling of her father. She blossomed into a captivating beauty, bright-eyed and dimpled with wavy dark hair that she wore mid-length except for a period in her mid teens when she bobbed it short and created a scandal throughout the entirety of Clayhill County.

By the time she was sixteen, she had lost both parents within a six month period. He to a heart attack. She to leukemia. Married a year later, she lost her first baby after two weeks. The bounce in her step was gone for good and so to the rakishness in Horace’s smile.

Mosey spent much of her adulthood pregnant. Horrace threw himself into his work. He conceived remarkable implements to deliver state-of-the art agricultural automation that would be affordable and could be pulled and powered by small tractors: a one-in-all grape picker strainer and press. A PTO shaft driven wet-dry vac that could be configured to pull fruit ranging in size from blueberry to grapefruit, wire tensioner and fencepost pounder.

He left his job at the national laboratory at age forty and put their savings into prototyping fold-up bean harvester.

He loaded his bean bagger into a pickup truck and drove nearly 600 miles to the Chicago Agricultural Exposition with his shaft-driven harvester and an 9 foot tall bag of lima beans. The words “Bean Bagger” were embroidered on the bag.

He attended his booth, crisp in his suit and tie, his name tag, his broad smile, and watched stranger after stranger fail to notice he was there. Finally someone stopped, asked a few questions.

“Come back tomorrow with something simpler,” the stranger said. “Make it telegenic.”

He returned the next day with just the sack, only now, the beans in it were of expanded polystyrene, and it was sewn and grommeted on each end and suspended between support structures. He found a Hispanic woman to stitch the letters ‘mmock’ onto a large piece of denim and this he safety-pinned over the last four letters of the word “Bagger”

“The Bean Bammock!” he proclaimed.

He was in production by the end of that fiscal year.

“Loose yourself in scrunchity soft comfort!” TV announcers said. And people did.

More about the bean bammock fad.

Horace and Mosey were rich, but they did not live that way. They required little for themselves, understood wealth to be uncertain to last, They kept to the ways of the Scotch-settled mountains, they continued to value thrift and self-reliance. required little for themselves. The home and farm Mosey inherited were all they ever needed and more than most had. Mosey clipped coupons and Horace did the repairs around the house. They were sparing in what they gave the children. Modest allowances.

These were the values they attempted to pass to their children, and here they failed.

The kept to the values of thrift and self-reliance they grew up with in these Scotch-settled Mountains.

They

They varied wildly in aptitude and disposition, but they had in common a degree of industriousness and an unwavering belief that their financial wellbeing was preordained as a matter of birthright. Unshackled as they were from any concern over their own subsistence, they felt free to devote themselves instead to whatever pursuit happened to engage their interests. Horace and Mosey gave them just enough to get by and encouraged them to make at least some effort at their own support. And this they were willing to do, some of them, particularly if they could find an activity that gratified some aggrandized notion of themselves – outlaws, crusaders, world changers and artists.

Horace did his best to understand his children, but it was all he could do to even hear them. His ears, it seemed, were failing him. His grown children, frustrated at having to constantly repeat the basic points of conversations, convinced him to visit an audiologist. He sat in the waiting room ruefully contemplating the years of operating farm equipment and evaluating affairs on his factory floor without ear protection. He hoped his impairment wasn’t too far advanced. What the doctor told him horrified him. He could hear just fine. He just didn’t.

“It didn’t work out the way I wanted it to,” said Bearegard, Mosey’s third, who was learning now to eat with his left arm. “But I am content in knowing that I stood with my confederate brothers.”

“I’d give you every minute of contentment I ever had to save you an arm,” said Mosey. “You’d get about 10 of them. They’re scarce when you’re raising seven young’uns.”

“I’ll take those 10 minutes!” called Buford.

“If you’ll get that still off the farm,” she answered.

“Marnie, help Cletus cut his pork chop.”

She did not.

Deacon Dan reached for a serving bowl and spooned a portion of what was in it onto his plate. Deacon Dan kept Jesus in his heart and a firearm at his side. He spoke with God and only to God.

“Lord, the way this family carries on,” he said.

“What about you dad?” asked Buford. “You got any contentment to pitch in? If we have to get by on Mosey’s, that’ll only come to a little over a minute for each of us.”

Horace silently consulted the green beans and cornbread on his plate. None expected that he had heard. They were surprised.

“More than 10 minutes,” he answered. “But not enough for you to all get by on. Worry, now, that I have to spare!. I’ll share some of that with you right now?

Speeches were rare from their father. When they came, they received attention. When the soft ring of silverware laid on the table subsided, he continued.

“I worry about what’s going to become of you all after I’m gone from this world. Me and your mom have tried to impress upon you something in the nature of wealth. It’s not permanent. It can be gone in a minute. None of you have ever know scarcity or want, but your mom and I have. We’ve had to get by on what the hills yield up and they don’t yield up much.

Something you should be able to count on, always, is each other. I’m gonna put my faith in the hills.”

“What does that mean?” asked Marnie.

“It means I’m gonna plant an orchard.”

“An orchard,” Buford asked. “An Orchard of what? Why?”

“I’ll tell you when it’s grown,” said Horace.

Horace P. Hooper was not a contented man. He was a worried man. So he did something he thought would

The next day, 90 tons of pulverized lime arrived on the farm, hauled by how many trucks. Horace spread it over three acres on the hillside

Describe the planting of the trees and the death of Horace P. Hooper.

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Ramblin’ Dan the Truck Drivin’ Man sat in hemlock shade and watched the pallets accumulate in the field at the foot of the hill. Buford had gotten the hang of the curious loader device attached to the jeep and the work was going swiftly. Fourteen pallets now lay neatly arranged before the orchard and Buford was now on his way with number fifteen.

“You mean, you kids of Horace P. Hooper have been considering all these years since his death why he planted that orchard and what you come up with is chocolate peanut butter?”

“What else could it be?” asked Cletus.

“And that dog, Bandigo, how do you suppose he fits into all this?”

“I was the one figured that out,” said Cletus. “Bandigo was a hint, you see? Bandigo’s from Italy, and guess where the most popular brand of chocolate hazelnut spread is from?”

“Nutella?,” asked Ramblin’ Dan. “I don’t know.”

“Italy!” prounounced Cletus. “Don’t you see the connection?”

“No,” said Ramblin’ Dan.

“I don’t either,” said Beau. “But we’re going to try Bandigo as a marketing device. A mascot. Animals have been effective in in moving products in the past and some of Dad’s has used them to sell products before. A film crew is coming later today.”

Buford rolled the last pallet of hazelnut spread off the truck and set it down with the others, twenty-six pallets in all, some 1,200 jars to a pallet boxed and protected from the elements only by a few layers of sloppily applied shrink wrap. Some had been set down on a gopher mound or a tree root or other obstruction and leaned slightly one way or another. But they made an impressive display in terms of girth. Unevenly spaced and somewhat disorderly. But they made an impressive display if only from industrial scale.

Ramblin Dan regarded it.

“You got all that out of what? One harvest of a three acre orchard?”

Cletus chuckled.

“Heck no. None of it come from Dad’s orchard. It’s out of a General Mills plant in Washington State. Rebranded Choco Haze Me Crazy, which is Nut Nut Noose if you buy it at Mighty Mart and Nature Fare and Hazelnut Crème if you buy it at Earth Market.

Beau leapt from his chair.

“Cletus! Er … What Cletus means is …”

“Oh, hell Beau, he already knows. He’s the one picked it up.”

Beau deflated within his uniform.

“We tried to use our own hazelnuts,” said Buford. “We really did try. But the cost was absolutely prohibitive. The way agriculture works these days …”

“Don’t worry ‘bout it,” said Dan, cutting him off. “I’m not one to run my mouth.”