There was an inventor who lived on a farm. He had seven grown children who lived independent, productive lives and they all got along swell. One day, because he asked them to, they all came to the farm to help him plant an orchard of hazelnut trees. It was hard work, and exacting. The trees had to be planted at just the right level. But nobody got mad at anyone else and they sang Bavarian folk songs in harmony. Their dog, Sherpa, laid in the shade and watched them work. He sniffed at the air with great interes.

And when the trees were planted the inventor’s children asked him why he wanted hazelnuts, but he wouldn’t tell them, no matter how much they pressed.

“Your father will tell you when he’s ready,” said the farmer’s wife, whom people called Mosey. “He has his ways, and they’ve worked out very well for this family.”

And that was true. Horace P. Hooper was a moderately wealthy man and he and his family were more than comfortable. But that’s not what Mosey actually said.

It’s also not true that that his children sang Bavarian folk songs. They didn’t know any, and they didn’t know how to sing in harmony. Furthermore, the seven people who helped Horace plant that orchard up on that hillside that day weren’t even his children. They were grown-up versions of the Von Trapp family singers from that beloved family musical which Horace had watched on TV with his seven real kids when they were younger, and if you think that children imagine for themselves TV parents, and parents don’t imagine for themselves TV children, then just you go out and have some real ones.

The inventors actual children still lived on the farm. They rarely assembled and when they did they squabbled. They had in common a degree of industriousness and an unwavering belief that their financial wellbeing was preordained as a matter of birthright, and, unshackled as they were from any concern over their own subsistence, they were free devote themselves instead to matters of personal fulfulment, artistic expression, or the advancement of some cause, and to make, at best, only only cursory efforts at their own support, and this only so long as such activity validated the aggrandized notion they had of themselves.

As the Hooper progeny conceived enterprises and endeavors they presented them to Mosey solely for the entertainment value of her disapproval. This she supplied in abundance. Mosey approved of working at a steady job at an hourly rate. She approved of buying below wholesale. She approved of suffering privations in the interest of thrift. She did not approve of all this. This distilling of moonshine whiskey, this spreading of the gospel unto the four corners, this counterfeiting of designer tomatoes, this harnessing of the mystical power of the earth, this reenacting of civil war battles, this hiking of the Appalachian Trail, this penning of quasi-literate southern gothic fables, this construction of a 30-foot concrete knotty-head fish, this building of a praline redemption device, and these Mosey denounced each after the other as unproductive dalliances that would come to naught but rejection, blindness, lawsuits, blisters, damnation, amputations, avalanches, cease and desist orders, abductions and ruination.

When she was right, and that was often, she made sure the subject was at the forefront of conversation at the next family gatherings, leaving whoever’s turn it was to squirm in their seat at the family table and defend themselves as best they could, to the enjoyment of those siblings whose turn it was not.

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

“I’d give you every minute of contentment I ever had if it would save you an arm. You’d get about 10 of ‘em. They’re scarce when you spend your life raising nine youngins.”

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

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

“Harm’s been done already,” said Blind Marnie.

“Let’s let Mosey keep her contentment and get our own. We’ll all fly to Texas and book a tour of the Alamo. Maybe someone will get lucky and fall on a bayonet,” said Tennyson Jack, wisest and comliest of all Moseys children and her favorite by far.

“Hush, Jack,” Mosey told me.

“Stand with our Tennessee brothers.”

“Ouincy, help Cletus cut his pork chop.”

She did not. “Why did you make porkchops?”

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 and 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 greenbeans and cornbread on his plate.

“More than 10 minutes,” he said.

Horace P. Hooper was not a contented man, but he did not go to the Alamo. He planted an orchard. He planted it by himself with a Farmall crop-row tractor while Sherpa the dog watched and sniffed.

“This,” he said. “Will help sustain you after I’m gone.”

“Hazelnuts aren’t worth the bother of getting the shells off,” said Mosey. “You should have put out some raspberries. The kids could’ve picked them for pies.”

The years passed. Sherpa grew old and died. The trees grew. And finally the time came. Horace P. Hooper looked out at his Orchard and said, “It’s ready.”

“Finally,” said Blind Marnie. “Now maybe you’ll tell us what we’re going to do with all those hazelnuts.”

“Tomorrow,” he said. “When Bandigo gets here.”

“Bandigo?” asked Buford.

“He’s coming from Italy.”

Then Horace P. Hooper died. O

Only Esmerelda, the new dog, had any idea what was happening. The wind told her. Dried lilies, billowing down and … something metallic. She lifted her nose, tilted her head just so, and sniffed. Silver. That was death coming for Horace P. Hooper and Esmerelda could see it.

Dogs can see with noses, you know. Or, more likely, you don’t. You probably think of a dog’s nose as being very much like your own only better. But that’s about as true of a dog’s nose as it is of an elephant’s. That’s like thinking of a diamond as improved coal. A dog’s nose is an instrument of magic. It gives the air shape. Turns it into what you and I might think of as images.

Not all dogs are equal in their ability to see what the wind wants to show them. It takes natural ability, and it takes instruction from other dogs. They help each other see what’s in the air, the same way someone might help you see that an image of a frog is also an image of a horse once someone tells you the frog’s eye is the horse’s nostril.

“Smell the mistletoe and the cinnamon and the stress on Buford because he hasn’t wrapped anything yet,” Sherpa instructed Esmerelda.

Esmerelda breathed deep.

“That’s the antlers. And the peanut butter balls and Wes’s excitement, that’s a great big sack.”

“I can see them!” cried Esmerelda. “The strange drover and his livestock on the roof!”

“I told you,” said Sherpa. “Every winter solstice there’s a child in the house.”

The images in the air always captivate the dogs whether they make sense to them or not. They sat for hours and watched a procession of rare museum antiquities issue from the farmhouse, travel a few feet into the yard on the shoulders of workers too small to be seen, and disappear into the earth – vases, armless statues, garlanded busts all made of bacon grease. It was the visual representation of the scent of morning breakfast and the joy of fire ants who had gotten into the kitchen.

The Hooper young would not have picked raspberries. There would not have been pies. And parents don’t imagine for themselves TV children, at least Horace P. Hooper didn’t. He never wished for different children, just wanted his own to be okay. And, too often, he knew, he allowed the worry he carried in his heart to hijack the love that was in it before it could find a place in his eyes.

And it was that … that germ of

When death came for Horace P. Hooper, it was as a great white swan. Silver were its eyes and they shined like dusk on a faraway river. Horace P. Hooper saw the swan, too, and he rose to greet it.

Esmerelda did want the man to go with the silver-eyed swan. She loved the man. For all his harshness, for all his cares and worries, which too often he allowed to hijack the love in his heart before it could find a place in his eyes. It was too bad people, Esmerelda thought, that people can’t smell love they way dogs can. If they could, his children would have understood him better. She did not want Horace P. Hooper to go with the silver-eyed swan, but since he would, she thought that she might go, too.

The family sadly recounted that moment on the porch.

“He just rose up from his chair and gazed off into the distance – up toward the orchard. We looked too, but there was nothin’ there. Then he spoke the last word he ever spoke on this earth, and it was to that dog there. ‘Stay,’ he said. And he just fell over. I’ll never forget the sound of him landing on that floor. I still hear it sometimes. Mosey heard it from in the house. Dropped the phone and come runnin’ out. Wasn’t time for anyone to even try to catch ‘im.”

Horace P. Hooper left behind a wife who, as it turned, really had loved him. He left nine grieving children, 14 patents and the mystery of the hazelnut orchard. The nuts it produced were of no value as a crop. Horace P. Hooper’s heirs applied themselves The hazelnut butter Quincy tried did well enough at local farmers markets, but hardly well enough to be a windfall for the family. Efforts at a family brand of pralines did not secure the family wealth but, indeed, hastened its depletion.

The next day a crate arrived. Mosey signed for it but lost the paperwork. They knew it had come from Italy. They knew the name of the puppy inside was Bandigo. They knew nothing else. The puppy, which they judged to be a sort of poodle, exited the crate with an air of hesitiation. Esmerelda carefully scrutinized his anus for indications of duplicity or ill intent, and finding none, took young Bandigo under her tutelage.

Yes, that Horace P. Hooper. Surely you have owned a bean-bammock? Swayed in scrunchity soft bliss just as you witnessed actors doing during programming breaks? Or strode into a business meeting confident in your socks and immaculate in your complexion thanks to your Horace P. Hooper combination ozone generator and power blackhead extractor.

He worked out of the barn at Clover Creek, which he had converted to a workshop and laboratory. There, he conceived clever devices and then he conceived the problems for which those devices would become a solution. TV announcers decried pillows that go lopsided at night, asymmetrical shoelace knots, the appalling lack of clearance between standard, towel bars and germ-laden bathroom walls, workouts that develop muscle mass but neglect corresponding motor skills.

Real doctors displayed x-rays of misaligned vertebrae. Real scientists displayed charts that enumerated the jumping distance of bacteria. Real educators discussed important developmental and social milestones and the consequences of falling behind. Sexually appealing young women giggled suggestively over the subject of finesse.

And those images! A sleepless man wrenches at his pillow in frustration. Sallow and sickly, a housewife emerges from the shower and grabs at a suspect towel, scraping her knuckles on the germ-infested wall. A child sadly trudges to class while his peers laugh and point at his imprecisely-knotted footware. A muscular young man helps an attractive but now agitated young woman with her coat and in-artfully pins her arm in the sleeve.

But the announcer promises vitality and popularity for all through gadgetry. Better sleep, improved health, more leisure time, happier kids for 12 easy payments provided you call the number at the bottom of your screen as a matter of the utmost urgency.

And call they did, and Horace P. Hooper made a tidy fortune of the hover bar. The Incredible Mr. Adjusto. The virtual reality competition sheep sheering simulator and self-leveling nano pillow with adjustable bite and kick action.

But, you ask, he fulfilled, this wealthy man with a hobby farm?

He was not. So he planted a Hazelnut Orchard.

“This will be lasting,” he told his wife and children. “Not like the gadget fads I sell people on TV. This will have value long after I’m gone. It will sustain you all for years to come.”

“We’re going to live off hazelnuts?” asked Clair, his wife.

Horace smiled. The years passed. The trees grew. And the time finally came.

“They’re ready,” he announced.

He hired scientist actors to enumerate the health risks of lopsided pillows. He hired sexually appealing actors to share their revulsion for untidy

g pillows that go lopsided in the night, the appalling lack of clearance between traditional, non-hovering towel bars and the bathroom wall,

“He says he’s not,” said Buford.

“You know he is,” replied Heather. “I’m not hiding the backs to all the remotes. Are you?”

“Well, I don’t know what to do about it except put rubber bands around them. That helps keep the batteries in.”

“It’s not about batteries, baby. It’s about you. You let Wes get away with anything and he knows it.”

“I think they go missing sometimes even when Wes is at his Mom’s I’m not sure though. I could start some sort of remote control back inventory and maybe keep a spreadsheet. But it’s simpler just to get rubber bands.”

“You don’t need an inventory. It’s none of them. There’s not a remote in this house of any kind that has a back on it!”

Blind Marnie, seated at the kitchen table with Mosie, had worked out that her curse had gone wrong and yet somehow very right. She marveled at the amount of harm the least little curse could inflict on a blended family.

She threw back her head and let out a long triumphant witch’s cackle.

“What’s is it?” asked Mosie.

“Oh, nothing. Just thought of something funny.”

“The point is,” continued Heather. “You can’t always believe what kids tell you, especially when they’re denying something that’s going to get them in trouble. Unfortunately, that’s especially true of Wes.”

“My Buford was always a pretty honest young’n,” said Mosie.

“That’s because he was taught that by his parents,” said Heather.

Buford did not react, but the dogs could smell the pain that was in him.

Wesley Hooper lives on a farm with his dad. An outcast among his peers at school, Wes is a lonely and troubled 11-year-old with few social interactions, other than with neighboring cousins who tolerate him to the extent required for uneventful family family gatherings, and the animals who live on the farm.

Wes converses frequently with the animals and spends most of his time engaged in their affairs.

His Dad, Buford, cannot speak with the animals and rarely speaks to Wes. When he does, an argument usually ensues and ends with Wes grounded and occasionally spanked and Buford on the porch swing brooding at a pewter flask.

Nanna warned Wes the day he left her house in town and went to live on the farm.

“Don’t be fooled if your dad tries to be charming. He’s a trifling ne’er-do-well. An abusive drunk. Your mother had no idea what she was getting into when she married that man! Only did because of his dad. Famous inventor, and all.”

Horace T. Hooper had achieved wealth and notoriety as the creator and purveyor of consumer products famously marketed on television. Of course, you remember the bean-bammock. The mind-of-it’s-own ball, the universal crevice tool and blackhead extractor.

And call they did. Horace P. Hooper knew where the voids were and was always ready with just the thing to fill it.

But later in years he sought fullfillment. He was tired of being on the forefront of fads. He wanted something sustainable, fulfilling.

Buford’s brother, Baldy Hooper, dreams of his college-age son being a field goal kicker for his beloved Nashvanooga State Biting Possums. But his son can’t kick. He blames this on a curse by Blind Marnie.

Also living on the farm is a reclusive hermet. He is in possession of a football launching device the siblings suspect was created by their father. He sends footballs flying high into the air. The farm occupants collect and store them. The hermet comes by on occasion to retrieve them.

“I know what you’re afraid of,” says Mosey. You’re afraid you’ll lose him.”

There’s probably a bean-bammock in your attic right now. Go upstairs and look. Horace P. Hooper’s other contrivances were hit and miss. Consumers found his extendable towel bar to be only a marginal improvement over conventional towel bars, despite the real scientists and their charts cataloging the leaping distance of dangerous bacteria.

“Stride into your next business meeting confident in your socks and bright in your complexion!”

But 12 easy payments weren’t easy enough for the portable ozone generator and power blackhead extractor.

Horace and Mosey were pragmatic people born of poverty. He did not go hard after losing ventures and invested wisely and found sold at the right time, found buyers when needed and needed and

Was he content, this hobby farmer inventor entrepreneur who fad and chased the spa-quality home pedicure system? He was not. But he didn’t go to the alamo. He planted an hazelnut orchard.

“This,” he said. “

Horace just smiled. The years passed, the trees grew, and Horace P. Hooper never answered a single question about the orchard and its purpose.

Then they day came. Horace P. Hooper looked upon the hazelnut trees growing on the hillside tasseled in their spring catkins and announced, “They’re ready.”