• *A Place Called Home* •

A LONG TIME AGO, before heaven and earth, there was the greatest mystery of all. The mystery had no place to dwell; it was without a home. Then, from the energy of the sorrow of its longing, the mystery created a place to live. Out of the darkness came light.

It took unnumbered years before all the energy in the longing could come together to make the land. Elements and particles took shape, and in a rush of mighty winds that swept the sky, stars and planets began to take form. Gas and dust and rocks crashed together to make spheres. One sphere, to be called Earth, took its place in orbit around a sun in the far corner of a brilliant galaxy. On a spiraling arm of the Milky Way, human beings found their time and place in the universe.

But before they could appear, the crust of the earth and the atmosphere that encircled the earth had to form, and change, and become something new. From deep in the planet, fire issued forth and made mountains. Volcanoes and earthquakes filled the days and nights with sound and movement and fire. As lightning flashed over the rich waters, microscopic organisms began to appear. Blades of green sprang from the moist soil around the shores. Insects and tiny water creatures began to swim. Life eventually teemed along the tidal flats and marshes, and animals with feathers and wings took to the air. More complex animals came into being. In time came the animal that walked upright on two hind legs.

On a northern portion of the earth, tilted away from the sun, wondrous things were happening. The beds of great oceans were becoming land. In the valleys, new bodies of water were forming. The land's surface continued to shift and to reshape itself. Sheets of ice slowly moved southward, cutting and dredging. A final glacier edged its way to the southern borders of the place that would come to be known as Wisconsin. As this last glacier receded, the land was left in the form that exists today: Deposits of rock and sand and soil make the rolling hills of southern Wisconsin. Moraines rise along the far horizon. Kettles brimming with water nestle in the woods of farmland. Rivers and creeks wind through the fertile prairie.

A part of this land in southern Wisconsin lay in Walworth County. In this county was the township of Sugar Creek, and within this township was a farm, five miles north of the little town of Delavan. A shallow valley left by the glacier ran through the middle of the farm. Muskrats built their houses on the fringes of ponds that lay at the foot of gently sloping hills. Red-winged blackbirds returned each spring to the marshes, and cowslips sprang up among

the bogs. Red-tailed hawks soared all summer long above the giant oak trees. In winter, snow covered the ground, and all was still except for an occasional field mouse making its way from one hole to another.

There were people on this land long before the white settlers came. The earliest inhabitants—"Indians" they were to be called—lived in a sacred union with earth, air, and water. To them, human life was an integral part of the natural world. To them, the land was host to all that is. Birth was a coming out of the land; death was a fulfillment of the promises of the universe. Nature itself was the great mystery, the source of everything.

The settlers that came to Walworth County displaced the tribes that once had been on the land: the Chippewa, the Ottawa, and the Potawatomi. The Indians were forced from their native land, and most of those who survived moved to areas west of the Mississippi. The farm with its marshes, ponds, and woodlands was settled in the 1860s by immigrants from Ireland. Their name was Quinney. On the homestead a new generation was born. The son who stayed on the land had children, and one of his sons farmed the place after him. That farmer in turn had two sons who grew up on the farm. Eventually the sons left home, the elder leaving Wisconsin to teach and to lecture and to wander much of his adult life from one place to another.

One day the son who left Wisconsin began to wonder about the old place he had left thirty years before. Like many others before him, he found himself asking questions about his own beginnings. His life was half over; now it seemed to be turning back on itself. The road he was taking was toward a place called home.

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On a summer day in 1980, as he drove toward the airport in a gentle rain, the hazy gray skyline of Providence, Rhode Island, receded in the rear-view mirror. His wife and his younger daughter were with him. They would drive back to their house in the city as soon as he removed his suitcase from the back of the car. As he left the interstate highway and drove through the entrance of the airport, he wondered again about the wisdom of making this trip back to the farm.

It had been ten years since he had made the trip to the farm to attend his father's funeral. He had received word one evening in early winter that his father had died that afternoon while walking from the tractor to the tool shed. He had taken the first flight from New York. A cousin had met him at the Milwaukee airport, and they had driven in a snowstorm the sixty miles west to the farm. He remembered his mother standing in a daze, halfway between the house and the barn, as they entered the driveway. Since that time, he had missed his father. Tears still came to his eyes when he thought of him.

His mother had continued to live on the farm after his father's death. From her kitchen window she could look down the road and over the hill to the county highway. The houses of widowed farm women dotted the horizon. His mother's land now was rented out to another farmer's son, who had expanded his acreage to keep his farm going. She had made new friends after her husband's death, had volunteered to work in a rest home in town, and had adjusted in a way to being a farmer's widow whose sons had left the farm. Occasionally, the younger son, a banker in northern Wisconsin, would drive down to the farm to check on her and to help with the few remaining chores. She dreaded the day when she would be too old to live out in the country. Who would care for her? Where would she live? Why had her children never been encouraged to stay on the farm?

The years since the older son had left the farm had been filled with travel. After his college years, and after he had married and begun his own family, he flew to one place or another

as part of his expanding professional life. There were the lectures he was asked to present in his chosen field. Each year he attended professional meetings either to present papers on contemporary social problems or to chair sessions that he had organized for the meetings. He had flown numerous times for job interviews in universities located in towns and cities throughout the country. There were sabbaticals and occasional trips to Europe. And all his travels seemed to take him farther away from the farm in Wisconsin.

The jet engines roared and the plane raced down the runway, climbing steeply as it swung out over the bay. Turning westward, it rose above the clouds and headed for Chicago. The stewardess placed a tray of soft scrambled eggs, melted cheese, and sausages in front of him. He picked at his food, trying to avoid too large a dose of cholesterol. While growing up on the farm, he had consumed enough animal fat to last a lifetime.

In many ways his adult life could be regarded as successful. He had been fortunate in his marriage. His children had given him great joy. His career as a university professor and research scholar had on most counts been rewarding. His ideas and theories, propounded in articles and books, were judged by his colleagues to be original and stimulating. His recently published book, *Providence*, was a philosophical treatise on the need to bring spiritual concerns into intellectual inquiry for the purpose of reconstructing the social and moral order. There had never been any question of the seriousness of his pursuits or the moral commitment of his writings and actions. Yet, from his own perspective, something seemed to be missing, both in his work and in his life. Questions were arising that did not fit into the confines of a conventional academic career: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where is one's home in this world? More and more, his questions were taking him back to his boyhood.

The plane's silver wings with their powerful engines continued to cut through the morning clouds. The checkerboard of midwestern fields was plainly visible at thirty thousand feet. Soon the eastern shores of Lake Michigan would come into view, and the plane would begin its descent. Below, he could see some of the tallest buildings in the world. The plane lowered over the Chicago suburbs. The landing gear came down. The wheels touched and raced along the runway of O'Hare International Airport. The farm was ninety miles to the north.

He was in time to catch the morning bus that would take him to Delavan. Men and women attired for the day's work hurried to meet their flights. Others waited for paneled buses to take them in one direction or another from the airport. He went directly to the rotunda where the small blue bus was waiting. Jet and auto fumes filled the air around the buses. He caught his breath—partly from excitement—as he took his seat.

The bus made its way into traffic and was soon on Interstate 90. Next it would turn off the interstate and take one of the smaller highways through the farm country of northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. The territory was familiar to him. He had traveled these roads many times while he was growing up. On winter nights he and Terry and Lee had driven to high school basketball games to write stories for the school newspaper. He had gone with girlfriends to Chicago to attend musicals and movies in majestic theaters along State Street. Once he and his brother had driven to Chicago to see the wonders of Maxwell Street. With his father and several farm neighbors, he used to go to see the Cubs play baseball at Wrigley Field. He had driven these roads back and forth from Evanston on cold winter days while attending Northwestern University, the same roads that his father's aunt and sister had traveled every weekend for years while they were working as seamstresses and

maids in the houses of the rich in a fashionable section of Chicago.

He decided to walk the five miles from Delavan. Nearly a hundred years earlier, his great-grandmother Bridget had walked the distance both ways every Sunday to attend Mass at the Catholic church in town. He and his brother would sometimes ride their bicycles to high school and back. And on warm spring days they would sometimes walk to school. The walk from town gave him more time to think.

He turned off the blacktop of County Trunk O onto the gravel road that led to the farm. The sun was setting in the late summer sky. Several small houses had been constructed on subdivided tracts cut out from a neighbor's field. All that remained of the old Dutcher place was the pump at the well and a dilapidated sheep shed; the post-and-beam barn had been pulled down the year before. The place of the original homestead was at the bottom of the hill. The lilac bushes marked the location of the foundation of the old house. Now the family farm was in view.

In name, he was not the same person returning to his home. He had gone away from the place with one name; he was coming back with another. He had been given an old-fashioned name, one that did not lend itself to a nickname. Early in his professional career—after leaving the farm, after attending college and graduate school—he had changed his name to something that sounded less like the sound of the country. But whenever he returned to Delavan and the farm, he was called by the name that his parents had given him.

He walked into the driveway and headed straight to the door of the back porch. The Chinese elms, planted by his father and mother all around the yard in the early years of their marriage, enclosed the lawn and the house. Hesitantly, he knocked at the back door and waited. After what seemed a long time, he heard footsteps behind the door. His mother cracked open the door. "Earl," she said, peering out, "what brings you here?"

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The earliest memory in Earl's life was of his father's father coming across the field from the homestead to help with the morning chores. It was to be the last year of John Quinney's life. He would die in 1939 when Earl was five years old. Earl's dad said, "Here comes the old man."

Neighbors talked in hushed tones when either Earl or his younger brother, Ralph, would ask about their grandfather Quinney. Few details remain of the old man's seventy-nine years of life in Sugar Creek Township. As well as a farmer, he had been a trader of work horses. He bought them when they were young and trained them to be suitable for working the fields. He was a large and strong man, and people said he could "break a horse with one arm." Ma once told the boys that he had been kind to his grandchildren.

John Quinney had married Hattie Reynolds of nearby Rock County shortly before the turn of the century. Hattie died a few years later of consumption, leaving John with two daughters, Marjorie and Nellie, and a son, Floyd. A year after her mother's death, little Nellie died at the age of eighteen months after choking on a raw green pea. John Quinney never remarried. Floyd would tell his own sons what the old man had always told him: "I could never find another woman who would be as good to my children as Hattie was."

Ireland's potato famine of the 1840s had brought John's parents to this country from County Kilkenny. John Quinney's father, whose name was also John, sailed from Ireland to New York in 1849, three years after Bridget O'Keefe had immigrated to the United States from the same townland in County Kilkenny. Both John and Bridget settled in Yonkers, married, and there Bridget gave birth to two of their five chil-

dren. Not long afterward, the lure of farmland and a new life in Wisconsin must have inspired them to move by steamboat up the Hudson, through the Erie Canal, across the Great Lakes to Milwaukee, and finally to the village of Millard in Walworth County, sixty miles west of Lake Michigan. There they rented a farm until they earned enough by 1868 to purchase the thirty acres for the homestead. The site is still called "the old place."

Bridget lived forty years past the death of her husband, John. She is pictured in a family album, sitting among the lilac bushes in front of the white frame house, smoking her Irish clay pipe. Earl's father would tell his sons stories about how she and the other Irish farm women would gather on Monday mornings to wash and rinse the week's clothes along the sandbar that jutted out from the muskrat pond across the field.

John and Bridget's daughter Kate, who worked as a dressmaker and seamstress, lived all her life at the old place. Their son Tom left the homestead for South Dakota when he was young and settled on a small farm eight miles south of Alexandria. Their son Bill also made his way to South Dakota, where he secured a homestead after the government opened the land for settlement west of the Missouri. When Bill died, his obituary notice, mailed back to Wisconsin, stated that he was "possessed of a friendly disposition" and that he was "well liked by all who knew him." Earl's father always gave the impression that Bill was not a hard worker and that his nature was perhaps too easygoing.

John and Bridget's youngest child, daughter Mary, lived her entire life within fifteen miles of her birthplace. She married Henry Reynolds, and they farmed on the edge of Lake Como. A photograph shows them with farm neighbors and relatives gathered beneath a huge oak tree for the wedding of their daughter. Mary and Henry's son Howard, at the auctioning of the Reynolds farm in the 1940s, an event that marked an end to Howard's lifetime of farming, gave Earl a bay riding horse named Lady. The prettiest horse ever found on a farm in Earl's opinion, Lady had been trained to neckrein and to run that smoothest of gaits, the single-foot.

Yellowing photographs also show Earl's aunt Marjorie standing in long dresses in the yard at the old place. For most of her short life, Marjorie worked with her aunt Kate, tending the homes of the rich in Chicago. In the summertime, Marjorie worked in the houses and cottages of the same wealthy families who vacationed around Delavan Lake. Only years later, after Marjorie's death at age forty, did Earl's father reveal that she had owned and operated a tavern a few miles southwest of Delavan during the last years of her life. Wherever Earl lived after he left the farm, he kept a framed picture of Marjorie on top of his bookcase.

While Earl was growing up, his father's age was easy to remember. Being born at the dawn of the twentieth century—in the year 1900—his father was always the age of the new year. His birthday came in March as the Wisconsin winter was beginning to show signs of breaking. He farmed all his life on the old place, adding a few acres each year to increase the size of the farm. He also had worked for a short period during his teen years and early twenties as a weaver in the Delavan knitting mills. There he had learned a knitter's knot, one so small and tight that it could pass through a machine's needle. Years later, with great pride, he taught the knitter's knot to his sons.

As a young man, Earl heard from the neighbors tales of his father's youth and good times. His father, who had owned one of the first Model Ts in Sugar Creek, grew weary of the sporting life and settled into farming after a near-fatal skid on an Indian motorcycle on a gravel road. After the harvest in the fall of 1924, he and his good friend Mervin Kittleson set out in the Ford

for California. They worked along the way to pay their expenses, finally hooking up with a California Power and Light Company crew to build towers for high-power electricity. The two were home for the spring planting. The images of their trip remain stored in the veneer music cabinet on the front porch of the farmhouse. After the Second World War, Earl's father occasionally talked about selling out and opening a hamburger shop in town: something that would put him in Delavan and in contact with other people.

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Earl's mother, Alice Marie, grew up on a farm north of Millard in a remote, sparsely settled farming area. The only child of William Holloway and Lorena Taylor, she had a lonely early life. In an old photograph she stands alone on a snow-covered hill beside the South Side Heart Prairie School. Her mother died of Bright's disease when Alice Marie was thirteen years old. She and her father remained on the farm for several years before moving to a house in Millard. From there she would go to the high school in Elkhorn. Eventually she attended the State Normal School in Whitewater and then taught the eight grades in the Bay Hill School, a rural school near Williams Bay. It was during these school-teaching years that she met and married Floyd Quinney.

Her family was English on both sides. Her maternal great-grandfather, George Taylor, was a cabinetmaker and carpenter who designed and built several handsome Greek Revival farmhouses that still stand in LaGrange Township, Walworth County, where the family prospered as farmers. On her father's side, the Holloways had been small tenant farmers on a lord's estate in Devon; they too had settled on a farm in Walworth County and, as her grandfather James Holloway's obituary put it in 1911, "by diligence and hard labor made it a fine place."

They were country people, all of them, and their roots went deep into the Walworth County soil. Alice Marie's aunt Lizzie, who lived to be ninety-eight, spent nearly all her adult life on the farm across the field to the west of the Quinney place. Looking across the field toward evening, Earl would watch the sun set over his aunt Lizzie's farm. Before he was three, he had found a way through the fence and across the field to her house where he spent many afternoons throughout his boyhood.

"Will," as Earl's grandfather W. V. B. Holloway was known, was regarded early in his life as one of the most progressive of Sugar Creek's younger farmers. The children and grandchildren of his contemporaries remember him as the township clerk, an elective position he held for fifty-six years. He was a loyal Republican all his life. Earl could remember his grandfather arguing with Julius Johnson, one of Sugar Creek's few Democrats, late into the night, long after the fact, about Roosevelt's New Deal.

Later in his life, Will would sit at his desk in his house working on township business. In a photograph published by the *Elkhorn Enterprise* to accompany an article commemorating his many years of clerking for Sugar Creek, he is shown sitting at his desk, a plat map of the county stretched out in front of him. Around his hand is a rubber band he used to hold up the sleeve of his dress shirt. His green visor, worn to shield the light from the lamp, rests on the desk. A wooden telephone, with two bells on top and a pencil on a string dangling from the voicepiece, hangs on the wall behind him.

Earl and his brother spent many Saturday nights with Grandpa Will and his wife, Mabel, in their house. The evening always ended with a bowl of popcorn, which, as his grandfather said, was "good for a weekly cleaning out of the insides." Each evening, Grandpa Will walked to the corner store in Millard to pick up the news-