

The Blue Farmhouse

As Sarah washed breakfast dishes, she stood at the kitchen sink. While the morning sun streamed through the window, she gazed out at the scorched ground outside. In her eyes, the dusty, dry prairie reflected the meagre income she and her husband earned from their 1,000-acre farm. Not for the first time, she wondered where it would all end.

Just that morning, her husband Jed had sounded off about prohibition and how it had affected ranchers and farmers alike in Oklahoma's panhandle. Their local paper, the Beaver County Capital, had carried the headline, "Scarface linked to local racketeers in Greensburg, Kansas", and Jed had predicted that if it went on much longer, Al Capone and the mob would hold paper on all the land in the mid-West. It sounded like he meant it when he said, "If I caught one of those mobsters anywhere on our land, I'd give him a bellyful of buckshot."

Sarah worried about her husband. He was a good man. He worked the farm hard, from morning to night. He had been a responsible father to their two sons - both now gone to seek their fortunes in the big cities. But his temper had landed him in jail more than once when blood had rushed to his head, and he had let his fists do the talking.

She remembered how angry he had been when he was forced to take out a loan from the bank at exorbitant interest rates. This was just to buy seed for this year's wheat crop. And she hadn't liked how he had talked about the bank manager. She shook her head as if to wipe the memory from her mind.

At that moment, a movement in the field outside caught her eye, and she saw her husband emerge from the trees to the south and stride angrily across the yard in the direction of their blue-painted farmhouse. His fists were clenched, and he had a look on his face that made Sarah's stomach lurch. She heard the door to the living room crash open and felt the whole house shake as Jed slammed it shut. He then paced rapidly through the dining room to the foot of the stairs, where the Winchester model 12 lay in its wall rack. By the time Sarah had dried her hands and walked to the kitchen doorway, Jed had already opened the shotgun's pump-action and was loading shells into the magazine tube from an open box on the table beneath the rack.

"Oh, Jedediah," she said reproachfully, "You're not planning to do anything hasty, are you?" She felt her distress mounting as her husband simply shook his head and continued to load the shells. In her imagination, she could see him storming into town and accusing Mr Anderson the bank manager of being in cahoots with the Mafia. "Please think twice before you do anything that would land us both in trouble," she pleaded. "You know what you promised me after the last time you were in jail."

Jed turned the gun right way up, holding it by the barrel, and turned to face Sarah. Seeing her worried face, his expression softened. "Don't be daft, wife," he said, smiling reassuringly. "I've just seen that big jackrabbit that's been destroying our wheat. I thought the varmint might make a tasty stew for dinner."

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