



Memories of the Farm

by

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First Draft

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FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

Freshly harvested fields line both sides of this narrow dirt road which stretches straight ahead for miles.

The distinct CLOP CLOP sound of horseshoes in a steady rhythm. A repeated pattern. The slight SQUEAK of wheels.

SUPER: WALSH COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA. SEPTEMBER, 1941.

Two healthy-and-hefty black draft horses, Doc and Don, teamed to a wagon headed eastward as the sun falls behind them, lighting the way ahead in hues of purple and pink.

Holding the reins is LYLE (10, hazel-green eyes, scrawny) next to his dad, SIVERT (a hard 60, wrinkles chiseled into his hands and face), who stares ahead in silence. Beaten.

Closes his eyes and lowers his head a moment. Inhales. Then a song from his lips:

SIVERT

"On a hill far away  
stood an old rugged cross.  
The emblem of suffering and shame"

Lyle looks over at his father, a pleasant disruption. The song in rhythm with the horseshoes.

SIVERT (cont'd)

"And I love that old cross  
where the dearest and best,  
For a world of lost  
sinners was slain"

Sivert looks over and winks, as Lyle joins in the harmony.

LYLE/SIVERT

"So I'll cherish the old rugged cross  
(Sivert: rugged cross)  
Till my trophies at last I lay down"

SIVERT

"I will cling to the old rugged cross  
And exchange it some day for a crown"

With those last words, Sivert tussles Lyle's hair and looks across the empty fields. And his empty wagon. Jaw clenched.

Sets his eyes back on the road ahead, growing dark as the sun sets lower behind them. Almost home.

EXT. FARM - LATER

Sivert takes the reins as they pull up a driveway, past a simple two-story box house with a covered porch, and stops aside a large barn, across from several other structures.

Sivert unhitches the horses from the wagon, and hands Lyle their leads.

SIVERT

Get Doc and Don set, then wash up.

LYLE

Yes, Papa.

Lyle CLICKS through his teeth and the two horses follow obediently, as he leads them around the side of the barn.

Sivert pushes the wagon into the barn and closes the door behind him. Wipes his brow and looks across at the kerosene lamp burning outside the front door.

The light home.

Sivert crosses the yard from the barn to the house, stopping at the water pump outside the front door, as Lyle runs up beside him.

LYLE (cont'd)

Can I pump it?

SIVERT

Go ahead.

Lyle grabs the handle and yanks it up with all his might, then forces it down. A GURGLE and GASP from the spigot, as he repeats the motion, until a flow of water falls into a waiting bucket below.

Sivert takes a handful of water and wipes his face good, then his hands, as Lyle hurries and does the same as the water trickles slower out of the spout.

Lyle barely wipes his hands clean on a nearby used cloth before heading to the front door and rushing inside--

INT. FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

--where HILDA (54, fire-red hair, stout, strong) stirs a pot on the olive-green 1932 Kalamazoo wood-fired cook stove.

HILDA

Wipe your shoes! You all washed up?

LYLE

Yes, Mama.

HILDA

Dinner's ready. Go get your sister.

Lyle pivots one step toward the nearby stairs and yells.

LYLE

DONNA! DINNER!

HILDA

For Pete's sake, Lyle, hush! I coulda done that. Help me set the table.

Sivert brings the kerosene lamp inside and closes the door, puts the lamp on the table and sits down as Lyle sets bowls, spoons, and cups for four.

Hilda crosses the room with pot in hand, kisses Sivert as she pours stew into each of the bowls, while the POUNDING of footsteps down the stairs echoes from the next room.

DONNA (14, short blond hair, striking blue eyes, just on the other side of tomboy stage) storms into the room and kisses her dad on the cheek before elbowing Lyle out of the way.

DONNA

Welcome home, Papa.  
(to Lyle)  
You too, Cuckoo.

Lyle scoots beside her and elbows her right back.

SIVERT

Cut it out, you two!

Hilda finishes filling the bowls and returns the pot to the stove top, and brings over a plate of flattened lefse potato bread and butter, then sits next to Sivert.

They all bow their heads.

SIVERT (cont'd)

Bless this food and all who prepared it, in Your name we pray. Amen.

HILDA/DONNA/LYLE

Amen.

Lyle reaches out and grabs a piece of lefse first, knocking Donna's hand out of the way doing so.

DONNA

Hey!

SIVERT

Behave or you'll go to bed hungry!

Lyle backs down and dips his bread into the stew before taking a bite, as Donna hands her father the lefse plate.

DONNA

Here you go, Papa.

HILDA

Everything go alright in town? Prices better than last year?

SIVERT

Not enough to cover the weak harvest.

Lyle looks over at his dad, who eats hunkered over his bowl.

Hilda registers his mood, looks over at the children while she eats. They look at her, concerned. She winks at them.

HILDA

We got food on the table and a roof over our heads. As long as we work hard, God will bless us.

Sivert takes another spoonful, speaks without looking up.

SIVERT

Can't work no harder.

They eat in silence for a few moments while Lyle gobbles up the last of his stew, wiping the bowl with the lefse bread.

LYLE

May I listen to the radio, Papa?  
Please?

Lyle and Donna look over at him, anxious.

SIVERT

Clear the table and keep it down.

LYLE

Thank you!

DONNA

Thank you, Papa!

Lyle takes his bowl and brings it to the kitchen basin, as Donna follows close behind, then both leave into the--

## LIVING ROOM

--toward the upright wooden Zenith radio in the corner. Lyle attaches the wire from the power cord to a car battery terminal sitting on the floor.

With the turn of the knob, it CRACKLES to life, as NEWS of the day streams into the room.

NEWS REPORTER

--Empire Eland was torpedoed and sunk  
in the Atlantic by a German U-Boat--

Lyle reaches to change the channel and Donna stops him.

DONNA

Wait a minute.

LYLE

But Lone Ranger's on--

DONNA

--shh.

NEWS REPORTER

--as Hitler continues his advance  
into Leningrad with no end in sight.  
Meanwhile fallout continues from  
Lindburgh's comments in Des Moines  
pointed at the Roosevelt Administ--

LYLE

Come on!

Donna frowns but relents as Lyle turns the knob, changing the channel until he hears the end notes of the William Tell Overture, then sits back down, ready for adventure, staring at the radio speakers.

## FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The muted sound of the Lone Ranger in the other room, Hilda takes Sivert's bowl and sets it in the basin, then returns from the kitchen with a kettle of hot coffee.

Pours two cups then sits across from him.

HILDA

How bad is it?

Sivert *slurps* from his enamel cup, looks up.

SIVERT  
 Still behind with the bank, but they  
 extended the loans. We'll need a  
 record harvest next year.

HILDA  
 We can sell the car.

SIVERT  
 Might have to. We'll see.

She pats his hand. Grips it hard.

HILDA  
 I got what I need right here.

He looks across the table at the love of his life, squeezes  
 her hand. Forces a smirk.

SIVERT  
 After all these years. All this work.  
 I wanted more for us.

She pats his hand, gets up and crosses the room to the  
 kitchen, opens the oven warmer door and pulls out a simple  
 sheet cake with the number '10' written on it.

HILDA  
 What more do we really need?

She looks over her shoulder into the living room as Donna  
 and Lyle stare at the radio, enthralled, gasping at the  
 adventure streaming into the room.

HILDA (cont'd)  
 Come on, you'll see.  
 (to Lyle)  
 Happy Birthday, to you.

At the sound of Hilda's singing, a spark in Sivert's eyes as  
 he joins her at the--

LIVING ROOM

--and sings along.

SIVERT  
 Happy Birthday, to you.

Donna joins in, as Lyle forgets all about the Lone Ranger,  
 surrounded by his family, in song.

And cake!

INT. DONNA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Lyle and Donna sit across from each other on the floor with homemade playing cards fashioned from potato sack labels, a small oil lamp lighting the area, a half-eaten piece of cake on a napkin between them.

LYLE  
Got any eights?

DONNA  
Go fish.

Donna pulls a label from the deck as Lyle takes a bite of the cake and offers it to her.

DONNA (cont'd)  
It's your birthday. You have it.

LYLE  
I know, but we share everything.

Donna takes it from him. Lyle giggles as she does.

LYLE (cont'd)  
Now I can say you take the cake.

Donna chuckles at the very bad joke and talks through a full mouth, shooting crumbs at him as she does.

DONNA  
Har har. Give me your fours.

Lyle grimaces. Hands her a card.

LYLE  
Nuts.

Donna takes it with smug satisfaction. Lays down her pair.

LYLE (cont'd)  
What's with that boat sinking? The one you wanted to listen to?

DONNA  
There's a war in Europe.

LYLE  
Where's that?

DONNA  
You need to pay better attention in Geography class. And history.



Lyle takes another bite of cake and waves her off.

LYLE

Yeah, yeah and math, I know. I don't need any of that stuff.

DONNA

Yes you do, Cuckoo!

LYLE

Do not. I'm going to be a farmer just like Papa. We're going to have the best farm east of Adams. You'll see.

DONNA

You can't even finish your chores. I'll believe it when I see it.

LYLE

Yeah, well give me your tens.

Donna smirks and hands over a card.

DONNA

Good one. Well, if anyone can do it, Papa can. He'll figure it out.

LYLE

We'll figure it out.

Lyle smiles and takes a big bite of cake, filling his mouth.

DONNA

Give me your twos.

LYLE

Ahhh, nutshhh.

Cake crumbs shoot out of his mouth as he hands over the card. Donna takes it, and places her last pair down.

DONNA

Ha! Old Maid. My prize!

She takes the last of cake from his hands and stuffs it in her mouth laughing.

LYLE

Hey!

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAYBREAK

Lyle rubs his eyes as he enters. Hilda hands him a slice of fresh bread with jam, while Donna stokes the wood stove.

HILDA  
Fetch me some milk and eggs and help  
Papa with the wagon.

LYLE  
Mama, the chicken coop is gonna make  
me stink at school.

HILDA  
Haven't bathed in a month, the coop  
will be an improvement. Hurry on.

Donna chuckles as Hilda shoos him out the door. He stuffs the bread in his mouth and grimaces.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He crosses the yard to the chicken coop, stops outside as he finishes his breakfast.

Looks over at his dad in the barn, then back at the coop.

LYLE  
Stupid chickens.

He grabs a basket outside the coop, unclasps the door, and steps in as chickens SQUAWK all about.

EXT. BARN - LATER

Sun a little further up on the horizon, blue sky peeking behind white clouds overhead.

Lyle sits on a stool next to a milking cow, massaging its udder and squirting milk into a pail at a constant rhythm. Hums a tune in perfect pitch as he does.

PAPA (O.S.)  
Finish up in there and come help.

LYLE  
Coming!

A few more squirts to finish his song, as he picks up the quarter-filled pail and heads to the house.

INT. BARN - LATER

Lyle pounds cotter pins in place on the wooden rake fixture, while Sivert sets the harrow spikes in place.

SIVERT

Get to the north field after school. I'll have most of the field turned by then and you can ride the rake to get it leveled.

LYLE

Thought we plowed after winter, Papa.

SIVERT

Yeah, well this way we'll get a jump on early planting in the spring. Need our best crop ever, boy.

LYLE

And we'll get it! You and me!

Sivert looks at him, chuckles at that youthful ignorance.

SIVERT

So, right after. No goofin' around. I'll finish up here. You get goin'.

LYLE

Okay, bye Papa!

Sivert gets back to setting the spikes as Lyle runs off.

EXT. FARM ROAD - LATER

Donna turns from their driveway and heads up the main road, with Lyle trailing behind, swinging his lunch pail around.

DONNA

We're going to be late again and I have to take roll call.

LYLE

Who cares.

DONNA

I'll mark you tardy.

LYLE

I'll throw a tardy party. Invitation says don't be late. Har har...

Lyle laughs at his bad joke, as Donna hurries ahead.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - LATER

Donna stands in front of the one-room class of kids holding a notebook as MRS JOHNSON (40's, glasses, ruffled hair) sits at her desk up front, grading a paper.

DONNA  
Ole Frovarp.

OLE  
Present.

DONNA  
Jon Madland.

JOHN  
Present.

DONNA  
Lyle Orstad.

Silence.

Mrs Johnson looks toward the class as the front door opens wide and Lyle bounds inside. Door SLAMS behind him.

Everyone turns to see him standing there.

LYLE  
Here!

Mrs Johnson shakes her head and points to his seat. Sternly.

Lyle plops down at his desk as Donna finishes up.

Ole (12) leans over to him. Winces while nudging his desk partner, Jon (12).

OLE  
Ewww gross, you stink, Lyle.

JON  
Smells like chicken poop.

OLE  
Poop pile, Lyle.

Lyle slinks down in his seat, embarrassed as a book SLAMS on the front desk. Mrs Johnson stands and takes control.

The class goes silent.

MRS JOHNSON

That will be enough of that! Donna, please lead grades one through four with the story lesson at the back.

DONNA

Yes, Mrs Johnson.

MRS JOHNSON

Ole, you seem ready to contribute. Why don't you come up front and show us your multiplication tables on the chalkboard. Come on, let's go.

Donna leads the younger kids toward the back corner of the schoolhouse, while the older kids shuffle to the front.

Jon pushes Ole as he heads to the board, while Lyle, smaller than the others, stays toward the back.

MRS JOHNSON (cont'd)

Start with sixes.

Lyle slinks down into a desk, and looks over at Donna who catches his glance. Nods to him for encouragement.

He looks back up front as Ole finishes up his row of numbers on the chalkboard.

MRS JOHNSON (cont'd)

Very good. Lyle, come up and continue with sevens.

Lyle gets up and heads toward the front, passing Ole on the way, who nudges Lyle and knocks him off-balance.

MRS JOHNSON (cont'd)

Ole, you stop that this instant.

OLE

Sorry Mrs Johnson, I slipped.

The other kids chuckle as Ole sits next to Jon, while Lyle gets up to the board and takes the chalk.

Looks at the line of numbers and starts with the seven. Then pauses. Adds a thirteen to the next line.

MRS JOHNSON

Try again.

Lyle erases the number, corrects it to fourteen, then starts counting in his head, mumbling as he does. Writes down the next. And the next. Slow, but sure. Finishes the line.

Mrs Johnson leans in, recoils at the stench of chicken and body odor. Forces a smile.

MRS JOHNSON (cont'd)  
Very good. Go sit.

Lyle leaves the front as she tickles her nose to help rid the smell and opens the nearby window.

Donna looks from her book over to Lyle, nods. *Good job.*

Then over to Ole. Her eyes *narrow.*

MRS JOHNSON (cont'd)  
Jon, come and continue with eights.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - LATER

Sivert works the plow, guiding the workhorse across the field while his younger brother, MELVIN (56, fit, chiseled jaw) leads the other team next to him.

MELVIN  
How'd you fare with harvest?

SIVERT  
Always barely enough to get by, never enough to get ahead.

MELVIN  
That's the truth.

They straighten the line, soil turning over behind them in sync, breaking up the ground evenly at a solid pace.

Skilled at their work.

MELVIN (cont'd)  
I hear there's good work out west.  
Steady pay, building ships.

SIVERT  
Ships? Where? Watch your line!

Melvin corrects his path.

MELVIN  
In Everett. Elmer told me about it.

SIVERT  
You know ships like you know farming.  
Which isn't saying much. Nor does he.

Sivert guides the plow along at a faster pace as Melvin follows suit, correcting his line behind him.

SIVERT (cont'd)  
No matter, we got another field to finish so keep up.

Melvin snickers. Keeps his line. Steadies his pace.

MELVIN  
Hurry all you want.

The two lead their plows side by side along the length of the field, mid-afternoon sun beating down overhead.

EXT. POTATO FIELD - DAY

At the back edge of the forty-acre property, a well-tended field lies bare against a rolling stream and an oak tree with a tire swing, as Lyle sways in it with Donna behind.

LYLE  
Just a little bit more, come on!

DONNA  
Isn't Papa waiting for you?

LYLE  
He said to come after school, and we're coming after school. If we happen to pass the tire swing on the way there, what's a few pushes?

DONNA  
I guess.

Donna pushes him again, spinning him around.

Lyle leans his head back and laughs as he spins.

Donna looks toward the river, melancholy.

DONNA (cont'd)  
I always feel a little sad when winter comes. I miss times like this.

Lyle slides out of the tire and stumbles around, pretending to be dizzier than he actually is, making Donna laugh.

LYLE  
That's why we gotta do it when we can! Okay, your turn.

Donna slips into the tire and Lyle heaves her with all his might, spinning her around as he does, as the sound of their laughter blends in with the stream rolling by.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - LATER

Sivert and Melvin sit under the shade of a lone tree in the corner of the field, sharing water from their canteen, as Lyle approaches with Donna across the road.

LYLE  
Uncle Melvin! Hey there!

Melvin jokingly points at spots across the field.

MELVIN  
No, hay there! Hay there! Hay there!

Sivert shakes his head at the terrible joke. Then points over to Doc.

SIVERT  
Uff Da! I got the rake all set up.  
You ready to ride?

LYLE  
Sure am, Papa!

SIVERT  
Then let's go.

Sivert gets up, as does Melvin.

Donna turns and waves them off.

DONNA  
See you at home, Papa.  
(to Melvin)  
Say hi to Aunt Hattie! Thank her for  
the peaches!

MELVIN  
Will do. Any time.

Lyle races to the back of the rake and steps up. Takes the reins from his Dad, who walks next to Doc, leading him.

SIVERT  
Now lean back a bit.

Doc walks forward at a slow and steady pace as the plowrake sweeps the newly raised ground, flattening the peaks and evening the field.