

NO OWLS ANSWERED

By Glenn G. Coats

Lowell Halloran has the luck. It is not the luck that you need to pick a racehorse or the luck you need to win a hand of poker. Lowell's luck is not that easy to see. You have to step back and see his luck from a distance. You have to look at Lowell's life year after year to know that he has the luck.

His children grew up strong and honest. A tornado brushed his yard and never took a single shingle. Lowell's cows and horses died of old age. He was seldom sick. Now, Lowell takes his grandson Charlie fishing and tells him stories about the family. People who know Lowell Halloran say that he is a lucky man.



Lowell has twenty-five cows now. He used to have fifty. The sheep are gone from the pasture and he keeps rabbits just for Charlie to play with. Lowell plows more snow than



pastures and he likes it that way. He worked hard while his kids were growing up. Now it feels good to cut back.

It feels good to cut back with Charlie. the woods when they aren't even looking for



They find box turtles in any. Lowell and Charlie

find four leaf clovers in the lawn and they have fifteen tally marks scratched on the barn. Each mark stands for a shooting star. Charlie knows his grandfather has the luck.

The house is quiet now with the children gone, though most have found homes less than ten miles away. Lowell doesn't have to get up early anymore but he still does. Lowell and his wife Jane step out the door before light. They pick out planets on the horizon. They smell wood smoke from a neighbor's stove and they are thankful for quiet mornings.

Jane prepares dinner with the television on. The voices keep her company. After supper, Lowell rests on the couch. He pulls a blanket up over his shoulders and sleeps

for about an hour. It is a habit now and Jane turns the television down so Lowell can get some rest.

It was during one of those couch rests that Jane shook Lowell awake. It was a shake with an urgency to it and he popped right up. "Charlie is missing," Jane cried. "Sara just called and she's worried. The boy never came home for dinner. Sara and Mattie have been out looking and calling. It's getting dark and they still can't find him. They asked if you could look for Charlie."

"He was probably out poking around in the woods and forgot the time," Lowell said. "No need to worry. Tell Sara and Mattie that I'll find him." Lowell put on a warm flannel shirt and put a cap on his head. He grabbed a flashlight and moved quickly out the door.



Charlie liked to see that one big carp in the pond. That carp would move in from the deeper water and just seemed to rest on the green plants that grew beneath the clear shallow edge. Charlie brought his pad once and sketched that fish. Lowell decided to try there first.

The pond was empty except for a heron. There was no sign of Charlie. The heron spooked to flight as Lowell entered the clearing from the woods. It was dark by then with just a skinny moon in the sky. Lowell stood still for a moment. He heard a dog



bark and remembered. Two weeks ago he had climbed the mountain behind the Parsons' place with Charlie. They had wanted to hear the

horned owls that Mrs. Parsons said lived up there. They called the owls and no owls answered back. Lowell looked north, up at the mountain. The temperature was dropping. Charlie would be cold if he was up there. Lowell started walking.



Lowell's head was filled to the brim with worry. He wanted to be everywhere at once but couldn't. Instead, he walked the narrow path up the mountain. His feet slipped on stones covered with leaves. He tripped over raised tree roots. Lowell forgot to be careful.

"Char-lie, Char-lie," Lowell called again and again. No owls answered. No birds flapped great wings in the black night. No boy echoed back.

Lowell walked from forest to field. He followed the high tension wires. Beneath him, all the farm houses were glowing. Lowell knew that by now most of his neighbors would be out searching for Charlie. Off in the distance he could see flashlights moving in a line like a caterpillar, twisting and turning around trees.



"Char-lie, Char-lie," he cried until his throat hurt. Lowell ignored the cold, the ache in his legs and back. Lowell wandered until it was almost dawn then he started for home. "Someone must have found him by now," Lowell said out loud.

Jane stood with her back against the wood stove. Her face was sad and tired. Lowell knew that no one had found Charlie. "It's almost light," she said. "We're running out of time. Charlie must be hungry."

Lowell shook his tired head. "Time!" he mumbled. "I know where Charlie is. I'll bring him home." The door slapped behind him.



Two brothers from Sweden once lived beyond Orashins' saw mill, past the pond, past the field of tomatoes. They repaired clocks and watches. Lowell knew them when he was a boy working at the mill. Their house burned one night long ago and they never rebuilt. Lowell had told Charlie the story. "If you dig in the ruins, you can still find old clocks and pieces of jewelry," Lowell had told Charlie. Charlie's eyes were wide that day. The story had left Charlie with an itch and he wanted to learn more.



It was a clear morning. No mist. Lowell no longer felt tired as he hurried past the fields of spent tomatoes. His eyes were bright and they sparkled with luck. He did not call out as he came closer and closer to the ruins of the homestead.



Charlie was busy digging when he heard Lowell's footsteps. His hands, clothes, and face were covered with dirt. He had set up four clocks along a line of old bricks.

Charlie smiled at his grandfather.



“Listen to this,” Charlie said. “I can make them work.” Charlie set those alarms off all at the same time. It was the sweetest sound that Lowell Halloran had ever heard.